

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Putting faith in the 'axis of resistance' was always woefully misplaced, argues Moshé Machover

- Letters and debate
- Turkey and Syria
- Iran and Syria
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WHAT ON EARTH IS HE UP TO?



LETTERS



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

CPGB-ML

The CPGB-ML is not the CPGB-PCC.

The mystery *du jour* is why the CPGB-ML has any followers at all. I happened to run into their Youtube video promoting their soon-to-be available print publication, *Trotsky(ism), a tool of imperialism*. The title may be all I need to know to form some final conclusions. The disgusting cover of the book follows in the tradition of the Stalinist anti-Semitic campaign begun in the 1940s. A fitting anti-Semitic trope on the cover would be: "Get out all 'rootless cosmopolitans'!"

They tout 'Leninism', which is admirable, but this all gets cancelled out by their attempts to destroy all memory or positive memory of the legacy of Leon Trotsky. This seems to be a major part of their *raison d'être* - to try to destroy 'Trotskyism'. This zero-sum game is sectarianism at its finest. It's not beneath them to falsify, distort and obfuscate in this process. (They've been criticized for their support of the terrorist attack in New York on 9/11, among other criticisms.)

If the CP/ML have a great respect for Lenin, as they claim, they would validate his decision to work hand in glove with Leon Trotsky after October 1917. It's not rocket science to realize that Trotsky proved to be an indispensable revolutionary. His life was cut short by a low-level Stalinist flunky in 1940 under Stalin's orders. If nothing else, this act of virulent treachery places Stalin in league with all other infamous traitors to socialism, but this murderous act does not get so much as a mention by CPGB-ML that I can see. They would undoubtedly applaud Trotsky's murder.

I'm becoming a big fan of socialist historian Doug Greene, who I'm looking to as one who can help defend against the persistent Stalinist 'anti-scholarship' that CPGB-ML represents. He writes to me in an email that he is "familiar with the CPGB-ML and their politics. I will tell you that I have written a lengthy essay on neo-Stalinist conspiracism (Grover Furr, Bill Bland, Ludo Martens, and Domenico Losurdo) and am trying to find a publisher for it. It may take a while, but keep an eye out."

A comment on the CP/ML Youtube channel (@ProTV) was printed thus: "Trotsky has never yet held a firm opinion on any important question of Marxism - Lenin". My reply to this was, "This was probably before Trotsky became a Bolshevik. My guess". To which @ProTV replied, "He wasn't a Bolshevik for very long. And even when he was, he played a very negative role for much of the time" (the 'comrade' is delusional). Someone else said, "Stalin later banned Reed's text, probably because it only mentioned him once, yet heaped praise on Trotsky." @ProTV said, "I'm not sure that's true. Was widely available". Fact: John Reed's book was banned by Stalin in 1924. There was a glowing foreword to the book - by Lenin. All of this wouldn't, of course, sit well with the CPGB-ML.

Lawrence Parker wrote in *Weekly Worker* ('No word on Uncle Joe' November 20 2008): "Even among the ideologically tortured ranks of the various 'Marxist-Leninist' and Maoist groupings that have existed down the years, [Harpal]

Brar's [head honcho of CPGB-ML - GG] various organisations stand out by 'virtue' of their extreme cult wackiness and unwillingness to have any of their Stalinist sycophancy questioned, let alone scientifically tested."

Parker's statement is, in my view, still relevant in describing the essence of the CPGB-ML.

GG

USA

Wealth and profits

You know, the thing about emphasising how bad Assad was and downplaying the terrorism of the terrorist regime now ruling Syria, is that it doesn't get to the heart of the matter. It is also, for those who've been around the block already a few times, blatant propaganda - an attempt to legitimise whatever comes after Assad, no matter how horrendous. It's the "at least we got rid of Assad" lament.

But it's more than that. To make the coup acceptable to the public, it'll mean emphasising the "positives" of the new regime and downplaying the negatives, to the point where atrocities will be ignored and covered up. They'll be attributed to other groups. They'll be reported on the middle pages of mainstream newspapers, with the words "allegedly" sustained throughout. But for sure they'll be tweaked in some way to underplay what's happening. Those even trying to highlight the atrocities will be targeted by the British authorities, or vilified with the use of throw away pejorative terms against them.

Most Middle Eastern states are dictatorships, for one thing. If they're not dictatorships, the ruling party has overwhelming control over the media and the support of powerful groups behind the scenes. Let's be clear, any state in the world that can't, or doesn't defend itself, will be ousted. This is the established order in the world. So all surviving states must possess repressive state machinery to intimidate usually neighbouring states that have ideas and to punish internal dissent so that the attacks don't come from within.

It's ironic that the west can pour scorn on the Assad regime when the west has been attempting to overthrow Syria for decades, but at least in a concerted effort since 2011. Damned if you do, damned if you don't type of situation. It's either just let other countries, usually Nato and its proxies, walk all over you, or defend yourself and be vilified in the western media for having Abu Ghraib-style, and Guantanamo Bay detention camp-style facilities, for example.

The west has its dissidents: Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden, Julian Assange ... The west doesn't care how bad conditions become in Syria, or the land that was once Syria, as long as international capital and finance are in control, with wealth and profits flowing into western coffers.

Louis Shawcross

email

Caribbean

There seem to be places in the world where very little is reported, unless there is a royal visit, a volcanic eruption or a hurricane. But the Caribbean remains volatile, and at the moment Trinidad and Tobago are involved in a major political eruption which seems to be being ignored. I know TT is a small country, but comrades should know what is happening there and their struggle should be supported.

For several months now the major

unions on the islands have been protesting the government trying to bring in neo-liberal strictures, including not recognising unions' right to negotiate. The government started by stating publicly what workers pay increases would be - bypassing completely the negotiating procedures which have previously been used. The unions see themselves as having been surgically sliced out of the system.

The result was strikes and demonstrations - not just of the lowest paid, but also, for example, airline workers and the middle classes. The demonstrations have become raucous, although not violent. Someone even has a sense of humour - a calypso was written about the strikes and sung in front of the house of the governor. He was not amused.

At the same time, the number of murders, in both T and T, have risen to new heights - more murders in one year than in all previous years put together. Some of them are clearly premeditated and probably political - people have been murdered coming out of jail when only they and the police knew the time.

A 'contempt of court' charge has been taken out against the leaders of the strikes, which means they may be arrested at any time.

Recently the government passed a state of emergency. We are told that there is not a curfew - yet - but clearly there are behind the scenes manoeuvres to break the strikes and destroy, or at least neutralise, the union force.

Recently Caribbean Labour Solidarity (a London based group with a committee which meets on Zoom with members from various different islands, including from TT - but nothing to do with our Labour Party) carried out a picket of the TT high commission in London and are supporting the workers as best they can.

I cannot guarantee that any of this will be in the London newspapers, or on the radio or TV. I am not a wide aficionado of social media, but in the little I see, nothing has been discussed there either. It seems a shame to me that left groups do not seem to be interested in a major struggle going on in a country which may be small, but is part of the Commonwealth, and where the struggle may have consequences for other island nations in the Caribbean.

Laura Cord

email

Suicide

Gaby Rubin offers a thoughtful reply (letters, December 12) to my own article opposing the legalisation of assisted suicide ('Slope really is slippery', November 28).

I will concede the terminological points. If euthanasia is to include the classic case of administering probably fatal cases of painkillers to those in the last throes of terminal illness, then I have no objection, and indeed I believe that doctors ought to be protected in practice from frivolous lawsuits on this point, as in practice they presently are, so far as I am aware.

Onto other matters: Gaby mentions the case of her step-grandmother, who took her own life in the face of "the pain preceding her impending death". Yet, as she herself says, this was not a case of assisted suicide. The state of play in Britain, after the Suicide Act 1961, is that suicide is no longer a crime (before then, we had the bizarre and dystopian situation where those who survived a suicide attempt

might be prosecuted for attempted murder). It is, however, criminal for physicians and others to assist suicide.

The question at issue with assisted suicide is the contrary case - that is, should it be part of a physician's job to treat a patient by inducing death on request of the patient? Should my 'right' to end my life entail my right to *get someone else* to end my life? At this point, whatever our thoughts, it is no longer a matter of some purely individual right, like the right to marry someone of my own sex or get a tattoo. Its denial is not purely a restriction on *me*, but on the field of action of a whole apparatus of the state.

In the article, I drew the comparison with the working day. Communists disfavour the right of workers to work 14-hour days, even if they really need to, even if they need the overtime to pay the rent this month, because it is indissociable from the right of the capitalists to *demand* workers put in excessive hours, which we oppose. My argument is that assisted suicide intrinsically grants the state the right to kill the ill; and that this will tend towards unpleasant, eugenic outcomes, which is clearly happening in countries where it has been legalised.

On which point: Gaby worries that my reference to how this plays out in other countries confuses the issue. She notes that Britain abolished the death penalty before many other countries, and argues that this should not factor into the reasoning of, say, the USA on the same issue. This strikes me as odd: after all, if the abolition of hanging in this country had led to an enormous spike in violent crime, then it seems to me that it would be perfectly legitimate for the American right to cite it as an argument against. On the contrary, it didn't - and it is therefore perfectly legitimate for American opponents of the death penalty to cite that fact themselves.

I talked a lot about Canada, a country with a fairly similar political complexion to Britain, and how assisted suicide has played out there. If one thinks that it has played out badly, then that ought to worry us here. Does Gaby think it has? If not: why not?

Paul Demarty

Plymouth

Mason associates

Former member of Workers Power, former BBC *Newsnight* presenter, former Corbynite and former would be Labour MP - has now got his entry card into the military establishment. Paul Mason has been appointed the new Aneurin Bevan Associate Fellow in Defence and Resilience by the Council on Geostrategy.

This 'think tank' was founded in March 2021 and is funded by the UK government, along with a long list of NGOs, foundations and companies which together make up the military industrial complex: AT&T; Babcock; BAE Systems; Boeing Defence; BP Shipping; Carnival UK; Centre for Underwater Acoustic Analysis; Genesis Initiative; Heinrich-Boell Foundation; Highgate Ltd; L3Harris Technologies; Leonardo UK; Lockheed Martin UK; Northrop Grumman; QinetiQ; Raytheon; Rolls-Royce; Royal Navy; etc, etc.

Mason has, of course, consistently promoted the military industrial complex in recent years, most notably by siding with Nato and its proxy war in Ukraine.

Mason, along with his fellow social-imperialist chums - Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Anticapitalist Resistance, Labour Representation Committee - marched in London in 2022 chanting "Arm, arm, arm Ukraine".

Like the lot of them, he still claims to be of the left. According to a Council on Geostrategy press release, Mason commented about his appointment: "As we face rising threats from the Putin-Xi-Kamenei axis of failure, I'm proud to bring a distinct Bevanite focus to independent thinking on UK national defence."

Aneurin Bevan is widely credited with being the founder of the NHS but resigned from Clement Attlee's Labour in protest over prescription charges for dental and vision care. He went onto lead the Labour left till his death in 1960. He is still loved and admired in that quarter. That cannot be said of Paul Mason.

His CoG appointment is undoubtedly a reward for the author of numerous books, including *Live working or die fighting* ("Brilliant" - Ken Loach) and *How to stop fascism* ("Excellent" - Alex Callinicos), for providing the anti-Russia, anti-China war drive with a leftist veneer.

As with Donald Trump, he too is an advocate of an enormous hike in military spending - up from around 2% to a whopping 5% of GDP. Mason's latest article for the CoG's *Britain's World* is revealingly titled: 'Lessons from the 1930s: rearm according to the threat, not the fiscal rules'.

I don't know what the AWL, ACR, LRC and other organisational and individual affiliates of Chris Ford's ghastly Ukraine Solidarity Campaign make of that. But the likes of John McDonnell really ought to be standing up in parliament backing the two-child cap in the name defending poor little Ukraine.

Why not? Mason was appointed as an advisor by McDonnell when he was shadow chancellor back in 2016. At the time, Mason produced a video in which he argued that "Labour should vote to keep Trident" while strengthening Britain's conventional forces against the "rapidly evolving threats" of "terrorism" and "a newly aggressive and unpredictable Russia". He urged the hapless Corbyn to support Nato and adopt a policy of specifically threatening nuclear war against Russia: "Instead of the cold war policy of keeping Russia guessing about how the nuclear deterrent will be used, we need to communicate a clear set of conditions for using it."

In an accompanying article, he called for a "new Nato strategic concept", including support for an enhanced "ballistic missile defence" system positioned in the east European and Baltic states bordering Russia, and "new, permanent non-aggressive deployments to Nato forces in Europe".

You cannot, as they say, have guns *and* butter. Mason might lie about everything else now, but at least he does have the virtue of being honest about the cost of preparing for war against Russia and China. It means ever more savage rounds of austerity.

Then there is what remains of Workers Power. Haven't they gone over to social imperialism too? How long it will take them to catch up with their old comrade and spiritual leader is another matter.

Fred Woodworker

Brighton

SYRIA

Hitting the jackpot?

Esen Uslu takes down Erdoğan's fantasy that, after successfully backing HTS, he can determine the future of the region

Since the Assad regime crumbled and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS) seemed to be running the show, first a whisper, then a loud thunder has risen: Turkey is the main beneficiary of the process. According to Trump, "Turkey did an unfriendly takeover without a lot of lives being lost".¹ In the international press there are many assessments that Turkey became the main force to be reckoned with in regards to the future of Syria.

Of course, Turkey's neo-Ottomanists do have such fantasies, and the Erdoğan regime, bolstered with the firm support of the unimaginative army and security top brass, has been ready to jump in. The head of the National Intelligence Agency (MIT) was seen driving together with HTS leader Al-Jolani (Ahmad al-Sharaa) in Damascus. Hakan Fidan was the first foreign affairs minister to visit the business-suited Al-Jolani. A large group from Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Department (AFAD) was sent to search hidden cells in the Sednaya prison.² A delegation from Turkey's energy ministry was sent to Damascus to assess Syria's needs, and the condition of its infrastructure.³

Erdoğan's media corps is pumping the success of his far-sighted calculations and the possible lucrative contracts to be won in the reconstruction of Syria. That and the never-ending story about how Syrian refugees are rushing to return home.

These are smoke and mirrors games, hiding the chaos that is still Syria. Turkey, like many other countries, was caught by surprise by the outcome of the HTS offensive. Initially it was designed to cut the M5 and M4 roads. Before the offensive started, Turkey was desperately seeking assistance from Russia and Iran to bring Assad to the negotiating table in order to reduce tensions in Syria, not least given Israel's war in Gaza and Lebanon.

But the Assad regime suddenly crumbled. Turkey's main aim had been to take on the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish resistance movement west of the Euphrates. However, when HTS met with quick success in Aleppo, Hama and Homs, it continued marching towards the south. In a coordinated action with the Southern Operation Room, Damascus was grabbed.

HTS and Al-Jolani then sought a kind of accommodation with the SDF, and a tacit agreement was reached where SDF was to withdraw from Manbij to the east of the Euphrates, and further armed conflict was avoided. This agreement was kept, in general - except a brief fight in Deir az-Zor city on the banks of the Euphrates. SDF withdrew from the city.

Though Turkish armed forces are keen to take Kobane and other SDF controlled areas, they have been blocked by US involvement and support from European countries such as France and Germany. The long-awaited meeting of SDF commander Mazloom Abdi with Al-Jolani took place at Al-Dumayr air base under US auspices.

The base is about 40 km east of Damascus and Abdi and his team arrived in a US helicopter on December 30. In what was a preliminary meeting, the SDF offered integration into the new Syrian army as an independent corps ... and Kurdish areas getting a fair share from the national resources, such as oil and natural gas. Before



Erdoğan: high risk

the meeting the SDF also offered to placate Turkey through the creation of an arms-free zone in the Kobane area. The new Syrian flag has been accepted and hoisted in SDF controlled areas. If an agreement is reached, internal customs and tariffs will be abolished.

These proposals won brownie points for SDF in the international arena for the time being. However, everybody is waiting for the start of the Trump administration. Jolani reiterates his position: the future of north eastern Syria is a Syrian problem. It should be settled by Syrians without foreign interference.

But internal divisions have not gone away. The Druze majority of Suwayda province have refused to accept the centrally appointed governor and police chief. Indeed they forced the security forces, sent from the centre without consultation, to pack up and leave. They demand autonomy or a federal solution. The Druze do not regard the present set-up as a state, and until a constitutional state is established, they refuse to disarm their local militia.

The Alawis in Homs were terrorised by HTS under the pretext of pursuing the criminals of the previous regime. While Alawi nerves were jingling, the HTS held a meeting with about 50 Alawi religious and civic leaders in Tartus. One of the demands raised by Alawis was to reactivate their local militia to secure their communities. Practically, what they were demanding was what the Druze were actually doing. They also demanded an end to the witch-hunt being carried out under the pretext of pursuing the former regime's criminals, and an amnesty for those who were coerced into joining Assad's forces.

The HTS and Jolani, as well as Turkey, are desperate to maintain the good graces of their international backers. They know that if they fail in the mission to keep them happy, a sanctions regime and isolation may follow and the powder keg may go off, bringing about a prolonged blood-bath.

The success of Erdoğan's game will depend on gaining and maintaining the international legitimacy of the new Damascus regime. Otherwise, the massive loser of the process will be Turkey. And such an outcome would be regarded

as a substantial loss, and may mean terminal failure for his government.

HTS has not got the manpower to run the whole of Syria, so Jolani needs to form alliances with others. Hence he is seeking to bring all al Qaida associated militia forces into his fold. Many of his generals and colonels have arrest warrants hanging over them in the international arena. The backbone of his new army will be formed by jihadist militias, including the foreign fighters.

He has appointed the same type of people to the governorships. He has entrusted the Intelligence Agency (Mukhabarat) to a former al Qaida and Isis fighter. The first act of the appointed education minister was to reshape the curriculum to the Salafi understanding of Islam. A video of the newly appointed minister of justice executing a woman prisoner for adultery is circulating on social media.

Western governments, in the public arena, initially provided conditional support to Jolani's HTS. Their demands included respecting the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, bringing various strands of opposition into the future government, and maintaining a struggle against terrorism. However, as events progressed, nobody seems to mind the breaching of such conditions before bestowing full recognition on the regime. Things are, of course, highly unstable.

All the stuff about Turkey actually hides the real winner in Syria: Israel. It has managed to install a regime that is unable and unwilling to act against its interests, despite its Islamist rhetoric about the Palestinian people. It has also weakened Iranian connections to Shia forces in the region, including Hezbollah. To ensure that the HTS regime in the near future will be incapable of any military action against Israel, it bombed Syria's military assets and infrastructure to smithereens. It has air supremacy over all HTS controlled areas. Moreover, it now occupies a large swathe of territory giving it control over important water resources.

The biblical concept of a 'Promised Land' has been extended to cover the Damascus area and any failure of HTS may bring about further incursions into Syria. The Israeli regime, as well as Turkey, seem to be considering such an eventuality seriously. Before the HTS offensive, Erdoğan said that war between Israel and Turkey was a possibility. At the time it was considered a speech for the domestic audience.

Now an Israeli commission under the leadership of former national security advisor general Jacob Nagel has issued its report. Only a portion of the report was made public: the commission warns that "Turkey's ambitions to restore its Ottoman-era influence could lead to heightened tensions with Israel, possibly escalating into conflict."⁴ Be warned ●

Notes

1. Politico, December 16 2024: www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-says-turkey-orchestrated-bashar-assad-overthrow-in-syria.
2. Anatolian Agency, December 17 2024: www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkiyes-disaster-agency-continues-to-search-for-detainees-in-syrias-notorious-sednaya-prison/3426637.
3. Daily Sabah December 29 2024: www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/turkiyes-energy-ministry-sends-delegation-to-damascus.
4. Jerusalem Post January 6 2025: www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-836362.

ACTION

Censoring Palestine

Screenings of the new documentary from Platform Films. *Censoring Palestine* explores dawn raids on journalists, and protesters being jailed using false accusations of terrorism.

Friday January 10, 7pm: Theatr Seilo, 35 Cae Berllan, Caernarfon LL55. Special guest: Sarah Wilkinson. Admission £7.50 (£5). gwylarall.com/leoliad/theatr-seilo/eng.

Friday January 10, 7.30pm: Community Camp4Palestine, opposite the US embassy, Nine Elms Pavilion, London SW8. Admission free. www.facebook.com/platformfilmsuk.

Saturday January 11, 7pm: The Old Print Works, 498-506 Moseley Road, Balsall Heath B12. Tickets £5 or pay what you can. paikaar.org/?page_id=2&event=279.

Wednesday January 22, 6.40pm: Genesis Cinema, 93-95 Mile End Road, London E14. Tickets £11. genesis.admit-one.co.uk/tickets/?perfCode=1558.

Boycott Barclays - stop arming Israel

Saturday January 11: Day of Action outside Barclays Bank branches nationwide. Barclays provides financial services worth over £6 billion to arms companies. Demand Barclays ends its complicity in Israel's genocide.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/boycott-barclays-day-of-action.

Perspectives on human origins

Tuesday January 14, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'When Eve laughed: the origins of language'.

Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/1612883699330006.

Citizen Marx

Tuesday January 14, 7pm: Book launch, Pelican House, 144 Cambridge Heath Road, London E1. Bruno Leipold introduces his new book, *Citizen Marx: republicanism and the formation of Karl Marx's social and political thought*, in discussion with Barnaby Raine. Registration free. Organised by Prometheus journal: eventbrite.co.uk/e/citizen-marx-book-launch-tickets-1098666905289.

Introducing Marx and Marxism

Tuesday January 14, 7pm: Online session for those wanting to know more about Marxism. Registration free.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/490.

US spy drones out of Fairford

Wednesday January 15, 7pm: Online public meeting. Oppose flights of US Global Hawk and Reaper spy drones from RAF Fairford military base in Gloucestershire. These drones will use the base for secretive US surveillance missions. Registration free.

Organised by Drone Wars UK and CND: cnduk.org/events/us-spy-drones-out-of-fairford-online-event.

Beyond the law: Guantanamo and its survivors

Thursday January 16, 6.30pm: Online discussion, introduced by Deepa Driver. Registration free. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

General strike 1926

Thursday January 16, 7pm: Online lecture. Speaker John Foster was privileged to take part in the 1966 recordings of general strike veterans and to hear their memories at first hand. Registration free. Organised by General Federation of Trade Unions and Marx Memorial Library: www.facebook.com/events/822897429911441.

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.

Protest the inauguration

Monday January 20, 5pm: Protest outside parliament, College Green, Westminster, London SW1. Stand united against his reactionary agenda, stand up for people, planet and Palestine.

Organised by Stand Up to Racism: x.com/AntiRacismDay/status/1869785549961343051.

Raising the red flag

Monday January 20, 5.30pm: Seminar, Pollard Seminar Room, N301, Third Floor, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1. Author Tony Collins introduces his new book: *Raising the red flag: Marxism, labourism, and the roots of British communism, 1884-1921*, followed by debate and discussion. Free advance registration required.

Organised by London Socialist Historians Group: history.ac.uk/events/raising-red-flag-rethinking-roots-british-communism.

Camden council: stop funding genocide

Monday January 20, 6pm: Protest outside Camden Town Hall, 5 Judd Street, London WC1. Demand the council divests its pension fund from companies complicit in genocide and Israeli occupation.

Organised by Camden Friends of Palestine: www.facebook.com/events/905960931685511.

Oppose Tommy Robinson, stop the far right

Saturday February 1: Demonstration in London - time and venue to be announced. Robinson's supporters are demonstrating to demand his release and whip up hate and Islamophobia.

Organised by Stand Up to Racism: x.com/AntiRacismDay/status/1870090057413017619.

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.

MIDDLE EAST



Israel is still bombing

Redrawing the map

Putting faith in the 'axis of resistance' and Netanyahu's legal troubles was always woefully misplaced. The Zionist state is backed to the hilt by the global hegemon. **Moshé Machover** spoke to the January 5 CPGB members' aggregate

I don't have a message of optimism - at least in the short term. I don't remember the situation being so dire. In fact, we are now in the very midst of a major transformation in the region. The Middle East is being reconfigured, largely in the interests of the US-Israel alliance.

I will survey the developments so far, in turn going from the focus in Gaza, then through Lebanon, Syria, the Houthis and Iran. And I'll say a few words about each of these fronts in the region, which must be regarded as an integrated, interlinked series of fronts. You cannot understand any of these fronts in isolation. They are all, in an obvious way, dialectically connected.

So, first of all, Gaza. I think it is becoming clear that the real goal of Israel's war on Gaza is not the officially declared aims, namely, the eradication of Hamas and the freeing of the abducted Israelis. (Some of them are soldiers, prisoners of war really.) But it is becoming clear - and this much is clear to a big section of the Israeli public itself - that the government is not interested in freeing the hostages. There are continual demonstrations in Israel protesting against the indifference of the Netanyahu government. This indifference includes not only his more extreme right-wing partners, but he himself is not really interested in freeing the hostages or in eradicating Hamas.

The latter is a useful excuse, because it requires an endless war. I mean, how far does 'eradication' go? Nor is it the case that the Netanyahu government is continuing the war

simply because of Netanyahu's personal interest, to avoid him being held responsible for the failure of Israel in the attack of October 7, or his ongoing criminal cases in the Israeli courts. These, of course, add a personal interest for Netanyahu, but the real aim of the war is ethnic cleansing, and the means to achieve it is genocidal.

I think this is becoming clear. There are obvious indications. Look what happens to hospitals, for example. The excuse given for each attack on a hospital is that this particular hospital is a site of a Hamas command centre. There has never been any convincing evidence of this, and international agencies such as the Unrwa, the World Health Organisation and Médecines Sans Frontières keep saying: Where is the evidence?

It is certainly the case that, quite probably, there are individual Hamas people present in these hospitals, for the simple reason that Hamas was the government, is still the government, of the Gaza strip. So, for example, to be the director of a hospital, you needed the approval of the government - in this case of the health ministry. This is clear. Okay, so this is an excuse. But what excuse is there for trashing the hospital itself?

Systematically, Israel has been trashing one hospital after another, attacking, evacuating the medical staff and the patients, and then leaving the hospital itself in ruins and its equipment destroyed. What is the reason for this, if not to achieve a situation where there is no possibility

of survival of the population in that part of the world. It started with the Al-Ahali hospital. I wonder if comrades remember this episode? It occurred on October 17 2023. A missile fell in the grounds of the hospital and killed many people who were sheltering there. And there was a big hoo-ha. Israeli *hasbara* (public explanation), seconded by its American ally, alleged that it was hit by a misfired missile from Gaza itself. "We didn't do it. It's not the Israelis. It's a misfired or misdirected missile fired from inside Gaza by Islamic Jihad or somebody else."

Those lies

This was gaslighting. I remember giving a talk at the time - in this forum, I think, or in a related forum organised by *Weekly Worker*. I detailed why it is very unlikely that the Israeli public explanation holds water. It is one of those *hasbara* lies. It reminds me of a similar case relating to another war: the bombing under the Baltic of the Nord stream gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, which was sabotaged. The excuse given by the Americans - repeated, by the way, by our local social imperialists - was that Russia itself may have done it. Which is highly unlikely and completely illogical. But people were told this lie, and a lot of people found it convenient to believe it.

Okay, so what do we have in Gaza? The northern half of the strip is being vacated, ethnically cleansed. Any possibility of human survival is being removed, and the population is pushed south, to the southern part of

the Gaza Strip, towards the so-called Philadelphi Corridor. What will happen next?

As it's New Year, I think I will risk some speculation. We can see in the present situation a huge number of people, perhaps a million, concentrated in the southern part of Gaza in conditions which are dire, worse in many respects than people suffered in concentration camps during World War II, in terms of facilities, in terms of basic needs for survival. What can happen to them? Perhaps a worrying clue is Israel's, and specifically Benjamin Netanyahu's, insistence that in any deal with Hamas - which they are endlessly negotiating about - one of the sticking points is that Israel will retain control of the Philadelphi Corridor. Perhaps comrades are not aware what the whole thing is about, where the Philadelphi Corridor is, and why Israel is so insistent on keeping control of it after any ceasefire is arranged between it and Hamas.

Where is the Philadelphi Corridor? Well, it is a narrow strip of land along the border between the Gaza strip and the Sinai desert. It's on the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing. If you look at the map, it's at the very southern end of the Gaza strip. The Gaza strip has a sea border, and on two sides it is surrounded by Israeli territory, but on its southern tip it borders the Egyptian Sinai desert.

My speculation is that one of the options for Israel, completing its project of ethnic cleansing, is that - at a certain point, when life in the Gaza strip has become completely

unbearable, more unbearable than it is now - it will open the Rafah crossing. For this, it needs to control the land on the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing. It will allow the desperate Palestinians to just flood through it into the Sinai desert. Of course Egypt is not going to like it. But Israel will say: if you want to shoot them, if you want to kill them, go ahead. We don't mind. Of course, this is guesswork, but I think it is an informed guess. This is one way in which Israel could get rid of a major part, if not the whole, of the Palestinian population of Gaza.

At the same time there are definite plans by the messianic Zionist camp, which is part of the present Israeli government - with the support not only of religious Zionism, the extreme messianic parties in the coalition, but with a lot of support in Likud, the main coalition partner, headed by Netanyahu himself - for colonising, or rather recolonising, the Gaza strip on a much larger scale than it was colonised before 2005, when Israel withdrew its settlements from Gaza. So that is on the cards.

There are definite plans. People are already buying real estate options along the Gaza shore. Let me add that, of all the seacoast of the Mediterranean, Gaza used to be considered one of the most beautiful and most suitable places for a seaside holiday. I mean it. This has been the case since before the Zionist colonisation of Palestine. Gaza was known during the time of the British mandate as having a wonderful seashore - an idyllic part of the Mediterranean. So this is the dream

of the settlers, combining material incentives with biblical justification for recolonising the Gaza strip.

Going over to Lebanon, I must admit that Israel has been able to overcome and defeat Hezbollah much more easily than I had imagined. It was always an assumption, not only of mine, but generally accepted, that Hezbollah was a very robust organisation which had a huge number of missiles that it could use in response to any major Israeli attack. But this proved to be no longer the case, due to the very impressive achievements of Israeli intelligence. They managed not only to assassinate the leadership of Hezbollah - which is not as damaging as you might think, because when you assassinate one general, they are replaced by another - that is the lesson of history. But what was more important was the massive killing, murder, of thousands of Hezbollah operatives, which disabled the organisation to an extent that had not been predicted.

Israel is likely to stay in the territory which it now occupies 'temporarily', according to its agreement with Hezbollah. This is the land between the Israel-Lebanon border and the Litani River, which runs parallel to the border, from east to west, to the Mediterranean, at a distance of about 30 kilometres from the border. In the past there have been several indications that Israel covets this piece of land, and there are clear calls from sections of the present government for its colonisation.

Again, there is a combination of material motives with biblical messianic ones. The material motive is water. The Litani is a major resource of water, which is very important in that part of the world. In the past Israel has shown great interest in controlling and using its water. This is combined with messianic justification: it is part of the Promised Land. If you look at the borders of the promise that Yahweh made to Abraham, one version of it includes that part of Lebanon and beyond.

Again, this is a prediction that Israel will stay, will keep its presence between its present border and the Litani beyond the time agreed in its accord with Hezbollah. This merely says that as the Lebanese army takes possession of this part of the land

then Israel will withdraw. I don't think Israel is going to withdraw. Then if people internationally will ask: haven't you agreed to withdraw? They will say: 'make us!'. All that is needed is backing from the US, which is more or less guaranteed.

Collapse

Okay, going on to Syria. The collapse of the Assad regime happened in a way which is classical of revolutions: things drag on and on, a regime becomes weaker and weaker, is undermined, and then suddenly it collapses. This is an illustration of a dialectical process, where things proceed first of all in a gradual manner. For years the Assad regime was undermined, and then it tumbled down. It collapsed, of course, because it was weakened by what happened on the other fronts which I've already referred to. Again, I'm going to make some predictions that are part speculation, but I think there are sufficient grounds to believe them.

The collapse of the Assad regime is the only good thing that results from this change. The Assad regime was so dire in its treatment of any opposition, or any suspected opposition, that it is no wonder the Syrian people rejoice at its end. But don't rejoice too quickly, because of what is going to happen. I don't think Syria will replicate what happened in Iraq after the 2003 invasion. It will happen in a completely different way.

First, at the moment there is no massive western invasion. There is an invasion by Israel, once again using the situation to grab a slice of Syrian territory. That goes without saying. Don't forget that Israel was already in possession of an annexed part of Syrian territory - the part of the Golan heights which Israel took in the 1967 Six Day War, and which has been formally annexed. It was ethnically cleansed so as to make its incorporation viable from a Zionist point of view: that is to say, land with as few Arab inhabitants as possible. Only the Druze population was allowed to remain. Why the Druze? I'll come to that in a moment. But keep in mind that the Muslim Syrians, which were the majority population of the Golan Heights, were ethnically cleansed, while the Druze were allowed to remain. They

are an Arab religious minority which is a distant split from Shia Islam.

What is going to happen now? First of all, who is behind the overthrow of the Assad regime, and who is going to benefit? The answer to these two questions is not necessarily the same. It is at least clear that the force that liberated Damascus from the Assad regime, the HTS, was backed by Turkey. Whether other regional actors were also behind it is a moot question. I wouldn't be surprised if they were, but at least at the moment the regime in Damascus - and I stress in Damascus because it doesn't by any means control the whole of Syria - is backed by Turkey.

There are now three major actors occupying parts of Syria. There is the regime in Damascus, which is, at least for the present, backed by Turkey. There is Israel, which jumped on the opportunity to occupy another bit of territory beyond the Golan Heights. And there is, on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River, between the Euphrates and the border of Syria, a big bloc of territory controlled by Kurdish forces which are officially backed by the US. Okay, it is complicated. To simplify the picture, there are three main forces present on Syrian territory which will contend with each other and maybe destroy the whole country. I mean it. It is very unlikely that Syria will return to being an integrated country, mainly because Israel would strive to prevent it.

Strategically, Israel has a traditional policy formulated long ago, when Ben-Gurion was prime minister of Israel, of supporting minorities in the Arab world in order to promote the disintegration of Arab countries, and also to prevent unification of the Arab east. Part of this strategy was to prevent unification by giving support to minority communities on a religious or ethnic basis - for example, some Christian minorities in Lebanon; the Druze, who were allowed to remain in the Golan Heights after annexation; and the Kurds.

Kurdish tragedy

Israeli involvement with the Kurds goes back to the 1960s. The leader of the Iraq-based Kurds, mullah Mustafa Barzani, visited Israel in the 70s several times, and Israel has been giving secret and unadvertised military support to the Kurds, simply because this promoted disintegration of both Syria and Iraq, and prevented unification. In this Israeli strategy there is a potential for friction with Turkey.

Turkish interest is not to promote the Kurds in Syria. It is exactly the opposite, because the Kurdish forces in Syria are allied with the Kurdish minority in Turkey itself. One of the reasons for Turkey's strategic interest in Syria is precisely in order to undermine the Kurdish minority in Turkey. So there is a potential for friction between Turkey and Israel. But that is only part of it, because it is not only about what is going to happen to the Kurds. It is also about who is going to control Syria.

Things may lead to the partitioning of Syria between Israel and Turkey, but in such an arrangement there are always conflicting interests. The drive to extend one's control over more parts of Syria would always be there. I'm not trying to say, and I don't believe, that Turkey is going to replace Iran as the *bête noir* of Israel in the Middle East, as the competitor for, let us say, regional hegemony. I don't think it is going to lead to this scale of antagonism; but friction is, I think, almost inevitable.

Before I go on to Iran, I want to mention the Houthis. I think that calling them 'the Houthis' is a misnomer. Actually, the Houthis

are the government of Yemen. The force that is to some extent allied with Iran and is confronting Israel is not a sort of ragtag rebel army just in control of parts of Yemen. It is actually in control of the capital, Sanaa, and of most of the country itself. It is only Saudi Arabia and its western allies who regard the Houthis not as the government of Yemen. They are, though, the *de facto* government.

So Israel has a conflict with the government of Yemen. Surprisingly, it is this rival of Israel, this antagonist of Israel, that has kept its cool and has so far maintained its military activity against Israel and its western allies, on about the same level.

Their tactics are quite simple. Apart from what they are doing in the Red Sea, where they are able to harass shipping, they also lob missiles into Israel - not many, and not very successfully, but the psychological effect is far beyond the military importance. Some of the missiles they lob manage to reach parts of Israel. By modern standards of missiles, they cause not huge damage, but some damage. They may kill or injure a few people. A big proportion of the missiles are intercepted, and at worst the fragments come showering down. This cannot be prevented. But what happens every time? It's not a shower of missiles. It's perhaps one per night. But every time a missile is lobbed the siren alarms go off in Israel.

The public in a big part of Israel, and especially in the centre, are called to go into shelters. This has a disproportionate psychological effect. Every night, or almost every

night, you hear the sirens going off, and you're advised to seek shelter. So, with very little effort, the *de facto* government of Yemen manages to do quite a lot to undermine Israeli morale.

Iran weakened

Finally, coming to Iran, I don't want to enlarge on this. Yassamine Mather knows far more about this than I do, but I will just say a few words. Iran has obviously been dramatically weakened by recent events, especially by the loss of, or the downgrading of, Hezbollah. Of course Hezbollah still exists, but in nothing like the military strength it once had. Syria, which was an ally of the Iranian regime, has been lost.

But, I think, beyond this there are signs of weakening of the Iranian regime from within. Not only its 'axis of resistance', which it carefully built up over many years, and which served a sort of outer defence militarily, and is now gone. On the inside the regime is weakening. What is significant is the discontent.

Recent demonstrations are no longer just of women and youth, no longer just of moderate opposition with politically liberal tendencies, but the Bazaaris, in Tehran and other cities. That is a class that was the mainstay of the ayatollahs even before they came to power.

Comrade Mather will correct me if I'm wrong. The fragility of the Iranian regime may well lead to its collapse. A collapse that can happen very quickly. It's one of those cases, as with Syria, where things superficially appear to be stable for a long time, and then suddenly move within a few days ●

Fighting fund

Keep up the good work

Here's hoping our readers had a good New Year break and we wish you all the very best for 2025! And there's good news to begin with - the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund for December broke through our £2,250 monthly target, exceeding it by exactly £100!

Let me start by highlighting the three-figure contributions we received from PM, SK, TT and JC. Brilliant! Other really generous donations came our way from MM (£75), PB and JC (£70 each), AG (£50), TR (£40), HF (£33), GB and JT (£25), OG (£24), GS, GR, AB and MW (£20 each), SS £16, SA (£12), JL, IS, JD and MD (£10), and (£6) and AR (£5).

All the above came by way of standing order/bank transfer, while a number of other comrades chipped in using PayPal. Thanks to PM, KS and DB (£50 each), PS (£30), plus DT, GS and ID, who each came up with a tenner. All in all, a total of £2,350 was received last month.

Not bad at all! But can things continue in this vein in 2025? Well, the first week of January hasn't been too bad at all. Thanks go to AC (£100!), LC (£50), FK (£39), BO (£35), MM, TG, DV, HN and CG (£30), RG and GD (£25), DL, II, MT, SJ and JD (£20), MD (£18), BG (£15), RM (£13), MM (£11), AN, CP, DI, YM, IS and SM (£10), plus JS and DO, who each contributed £6. All the above came via bank transfer or SO, while comrade MH used PayPal to contribute his £10 and PE her £7.

All that comes to £671 - not too bad after just a week. But please play your part in helping us cross the line and make sure we reach that essential target once again! Go to the link below to see how you can do that ●

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

January 17-19

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

IRAN

Mounting dangers and fears

The 'axis of resistance' has come apart. Israel is brimming with confidence and is just itching to attack. **Yassamine Mather** looks over the wreckage and criticises the failures of the Iranian left

We are still a couple of weeks away from Trump's presidency and it isn't clear whether he will initiate new negotiations with Iran's Islamic Republic or allow the Zionist regime to launch an attack on Iran's nuclear plants. We don't know what he really thinks of 'regime change' from above and how he will proceed.

However, there is no doubt that the 'axis of resistance' led by Iran is facing a major crisis. The assassination of several senior Hezbollah leaders and the carpet bombing of their military bases have weakened the organisation's defensive and offensive capabilities.

Within Hezbollah, there are increasing calls for redefining the movement's strategic objectives, and there is a push to recalibrate its image by emphasising a stronger Lebanese identity. This shift would involve moving away from traditional slogans and taking into account the complex domestic situation in Lebanon. Such a transformation would also require a revamped political and media presence prioritising Lebanese domestic issues over broader regional agendas, aiming to establish symbolic and practical distance from external entanglements.

According to a Lebanese source quoted on Amwaz.media, this emerging rhetoric will focus on pragmatism, ensuring domestic interests take precedence over expansive regional ambitions. While many uncertainties remain, one thing is clear: the notion of a 'Unity of Fronts' has come apart and definitively been laid to rest.

The overthrow of the Syrian dictator and the coming to power of a jihadi group that show signs of wanting friendship with Israel have added to Iran's problems.

As I have written before, there is now sufficient evidence to show that Assad was not a reliable ally of the Islamic Republic. Despite the crucial support he gained to stay in power, he failed to show decisive support for Hezbollah (and therefore Iran) in their hour of need. All this explains the Islamic Republic's reluctance to help him in December 2024, as spelt out in a number of speeches by ayatollah Ali Khamenei in recent weeks.¹

US-Israel attack?

The main question for 2025 is whether the defeats of 2024, the weakness of Hezbollah and the loss of its ally in Syria have paved the way for a military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Richard Nephew, a Senior Research Scholar at Columbia University, tells us that for two decades, Washington hawks have advocated military action against Iran's nuclear programme. However, these calls have consistently been rejected in favour of sanctions and diplomacy. Initially, the case against strikes was clear: Iran's nuclear capabilities were underdeveloped, the international community was unified in demanding transparency from Tehran, and sanctions effectively pressured Iran into negotiations.

According to Nephew, today, however, the situation is more complex. Iran's nuclear programme is now advanced, and Tehran faces greater vulnerabilities, with its regional alliances weakened and its deterrents eroded, particularly after Israeli attacks in 2024. Meanwhile,



Distant times: supreme leader ayatollah Ali Khamenei meeting Bashar al-Assad

the international consensus has fractured, as countries like China, India, and Russia routinely circumvent sanctions. Some argue that strengthened ties between Iran and Russia complicate efforts to isolate Tehran, and there is no doubt that such an attack, which will inevitably need US direct military support, will pose significant risks including destabilising the Middle East. US military advisers warn of high costs and uncertain outcomes.

While the US and Israel may have the capability to destroy Iran's main nuclear facilities, there is no assurance of eliminating all nuclear material or equipment, as some could be hidden in deeply buried or secret locations. Tehran might pre-emptively or swiftly respond to strikes by relocating highly enriched uranium to undisclosed sites, retaining the capacity to produce multiple nuclear weapons rapidly. Military strikes on Iran are unlikely to lead swiftly to diplomacy; and regime change, if it occurs, offers no guarantee of a better outcome. A collapsed Islamic Republic could be replaced by an even more wayward regime or result in chaos, which many Iranians fear, as seen in Iraq, Libya and Syria. While few would mourn the fall of the ayatollahs, the risks of instability are significant.

The next round of nuclear talks between Iran and the three European powers - France, the UK and Germany - is scheduled for January 13 in Geneva, according to Iran's deputy foreign minister, Kazem Gharib Abadi. The last discussions were in November, the first such engagement after the US presidential election. They followed Tehran's frustration over a Europe-backed resolution that criticised Iran for insufficient cooperation with the United Nations nuclear watchdog.

In response to the resolution, Tehran notified the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of its intention to install additional uranium-enriching centrifuges at its facilities. In December 2024, the three European powers accused Iran of amassing high-enriched uranium without providing "any credible civilian justification". They also signalled the potential reinstatement

of sanctions to deter Iran from further advancing its nuclear programme.

The state-run news channel, Islamic Republic of Iran News Network (IRINN), reports that in response to the threats of war the country's air defence forces launched the initial phase of the "Air Defence Drills of Power 1403" on January 7 with the aim of protecting the Natanz nuclear facility. The operation is led by brigadier general Qader Rahimzadeh.

Khatam-al Anbiya oversees joint air defence operations for Iran's regular army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC). According to IRINN, the drills are designed to simulate defending Natanz - also known as the Shahid Ahmadi Roshan nuclear enrichment facility - against a range of aerial threats in challenging electronic warfare conditions.

Trump

Iran's oil exports surged during the Biden administration as the US and its allies claimed they would revive a nuclear agreement with Tehran, building on the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which had been abandoned during Trump's first presidency. Under Donald Trump, Iranian oil production fell sharply, dropping from 3.8 million barrels per day (mb/d) in early 2018 to under 2 mb/d by late 2020. By contrast, production has rebounded to 3.2 mb/d during Biden's tenure. China, Iran's largest oil customer, now sources 13% of its crude imports from Iran.

This is likely to shift significantly when Trump takes office. At the Republican National Convention in July 2024, Trump vowed to slash Iran's oil exports once again, citing his earlier success through economic pressure. He proposed imposing tariffs of 100% or more on goods from nations buying Iranian oil, with a particular focus on China. According to analysts from Standard Chartered, Iranian oil could become a pivotal factor in Trump's broader trade strategy toward China. This and the threat of new sanctions have had a dramatic effect on the country's currency. The yuan falling to a 16-month low.

Meanwhile, Iranian cleric Hojjat ol-Eslam Kazem Seddiqi expressed scepticism about the interim Syrian authorities' prospects, describing the country's future as "uncertain". Speaking during Friday prayers in Tehran on December 27, Seddiqi highlighted the complex situation in Syria, where various groups with conflicting goals are vying for control. He indirectly criticised Turkey for its role in the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad, accusing a 'neighbouring country', doubtless a reference to Turkey, of collaborating with Israel to train and arm militants in Idlib.

January 3 was the second anniversary of the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, Iran's military commander in the war against Islamic State. President Masoud Pezeshkian marked the occasion with a sharp criticism of the west, accusing the US, Israel, and Europe of hypocrisy over human rights. Speaking in Tehran, he praised Soleimani's dedication to defending the oppressed and promoting unity among Islamic nations. Pezeshkian urged adherence to supreme leader ayatollah Ali Khamenei's policies to prevent internal divisions and vowed that Iran would stand firm against its enemies.

Separately, Ali Larijani, an aide to Khamenei, criticised Syria's new leadership, particularly Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), for their silence over Israeli occupation of Syrian territory and perceived alignment with US and Turkish interests. He warned that this approach might alienate Syrian society and emphasised that any future Iranian engagement with the new rulers in Damascus would depend on their actions.

The current increased external threats have created a certain rapprochement between some factions of Iran's Islamic Republic. Some conservatives have supported Pezeshkian's 'social reforms', including postponement of the contentious 'hijab enforcement law'. This would have imposed harsh penalties on women and girls violating the veiling requirements. The country's Supreme National Security Council announced in December 2024 that it has requested the process of implementing the

law be halted so that a new bill with amendments can be submitted to the majles. In late December the state media announced that a ban on WhatsApp and Google Play would be lifted. This was seen as a first step to scale back internet restrictions - one of Pezeshkian's election promises. The fact that he is getting approval for minor social reforms is an indication of the kind of realignments that occur every time the very existence of the Islamic Republic is threatened.

Left blocs

Reading and listening to some of the podcasts from the Iranian left, I can find the following three main blocs:

1. Supporters of regime change from above: They openly support regime change from above. They might not carry the Israeli flag, as ex-empress Farah Pahlavi did last week, but they would welcome an Israeli-US military attack.

2. Then we have the shy supporters of regime change, pro-western groups - some call them the 'Nato left'. Those who celebrated the fall of Assad but failed to write about the Israeli occupation of parts of Syria and the coming to power of gentrified Jihadis. Those who have always tried to justify acceptance of US military support by Syrian Kurdish 'left /feminist' groups and who, secretly or openly, hope they will benefit from similar generosity when it comes to Iran. Of course, as we know, the US is likely to sell out the Kurds in a deal with the supporters of the current government in Damascus - Turkey, UAE and Qatar.

3. Supporters of the survival of the regime who bank on the reformist factions. They promote Pezeshkian and Zarif as saviours of the country, and encourage the regime to negotiate with the west. They keep telling the regime to compromise, to delay or stop nuclear developments. In the last few weeks they kept telling their putative allies within the regime to accept the European proposals regarding nuclear negotiations so as to avoid military attacks once Trump takes office. Their opponents remind them that precedence shows the US will see any such move as a sign of weakness and will only speed up a US-Israeli air war. These groups and individuals, some of 'official communist' background, advocate rapprochement with China and Russia. Inevitably they have to justify Russia's capitalist oligarchy and China's 'socialism with capitalist characteristics'. What a betrayal of all the aspirations of young Iranians!

However, there remains a sizable group of individuals and smaller groups of the left, inside and outside Iran, who have taken a principled position, opposing unconditionally all US-Israeli operations in the Middle East, while reminding everyone that a corrupt religious capitalist dictatorship, Iran's Islamic Republic, would become an even worse hell for the majority of its population once it was fully allied to Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping.

The struggle for the overthrow of this regime must continue. However, anyone considering shortcuts in terms of US-Israeli military intervention will only lengthen the life of the Islamic Republic ●

Notes

1. www.bbc.com/persian/articles/c4gimzvevd2o.

COMMUNIST FUSION

It's good to do more than talk

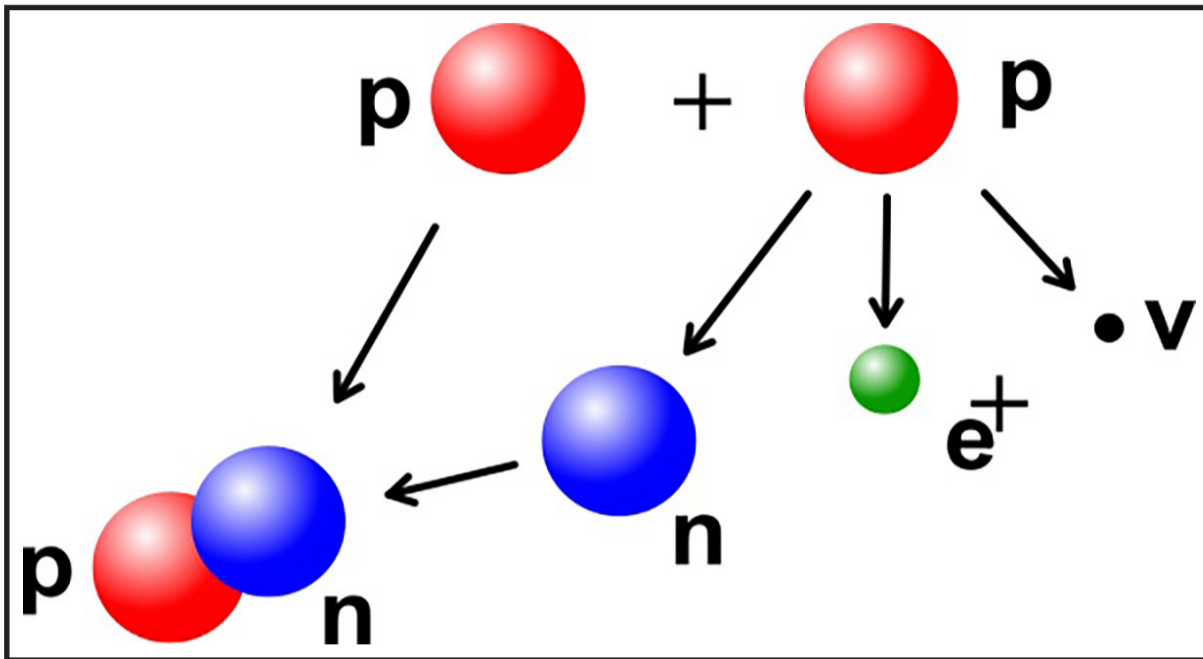
We need to unite, not when it comes to the long term, but in the here and now and in a disciplined, principled, programmatically anchored organisation. Jack Conrad reports on some recent meetings and developments

Our CPGB members' aggregate on January 5 had two items on the agenda. Israel-Palestine and the situation in the Middle East was introduced by Moshé Machover (see pages 4-5). The other item concerned communist unity. I reported back on the first meeting, on December 14, between the CPGB, RS21, Talking About Socialism, Why Marx? and the *Prometheus* editorial board. I also dealt with our past experiences, explained our hopes and expectations, and suggested the general approach that we should take.

In terms of origins our December 14 meeting can be traced back to the *Prometheus* online journal and its call for contributions from a wide range of individuals and organisations on the party question (Mike Macnair and Why Marx? submitted articles). But our actual December 14 meeting and its agenda was very much the initiative of CPGB members Tina Becker and Ian Spencer operating under the Why Marx? banner.

Basically, what they proposed was an extended series of public seminars around the party question based on the induction material used by the Marxist Unity Group (a faction in the Democratic Socialists of America which has much in common with the CPGB).

Pleasingly, this was rejected by Nick Wrack of TAS. We need to be both more serious and more ambitious, he argued. Others, including myself, concurred. As it turned out the only comrade who



Fusion: more than the sum of its parts

did not want to be more serious and more ambitious, well not yet anyway, was the official RS21 representative (but members of RS21 on the *Prometheus* editorial board, thankfully, take a different position).

My own view is that what is needed are immediate moves towards fusion talks. Not immediate fusion, of course, but a process with that aim in mind. That means drawing clear lines of demarcation and thereby excluding time wasters, fly-by-nights and odd-ball groups and individuals.

We should not, therefore, issue a general invitation. There can

doubtless be a public, educational, aspect to any fusion process, but the key question always has to be the unity of definite groups around a definite programme.

We finished our unexpectedly positive December 14 meeting agreeing to the suggestion that comrades should consult with their respective organisations and report back to our next meeting on January 11.

I can say that the Provisional Central Committee is entirely in favour of fusion talks and is looking forward to negotiating details. So too was the January 5 aggregate of CPGB members.

After all, we are committed, as an organisation, to militantly engaging with the existing left and bringing about principled unity through a series of splits and fusions. I not only reported on the positive spirit of the December 14 meeting,

I also offered my thoughts on the three organisations involved and their leading personalities. Past disagreements and misunderstandings should not be allowed to constitute a barrier to unity. We are all on a journey.

Comrades had two documents before them. The first, which we received the day prior to the

aggregate, came from the TAS steering group (see below). The other was authored by comrade Becker and still very much inhabited the frame of public seminars and, indeed, verged on conciliating phantoms.

The aggregate saw an extensive discussion which included some useful corrections of false misconceptions, and ended with a definite understanding: we should push fusion talks forward using both open and private, bilateral, channels.

Obviously, we still await to hear what the *Prometheus* editorial board has to say ... RS21 too. It should, however, be pointed out that the aggregate was attended by a number of invitees, including a member of the *Prometheus* editorial board.

It is, of course, incumbent on us to undeviatingly defend our political tradition, programme and insistence on frank and open polemics. When it comes to this present juncture, numbers are, therefore, entirely secondary. Nonetheless, the beginning of serious fusion talks would be a very welcome development. If successful, and there is every reason to be optimistic, it would send out a vitally important message to the rest of the left.

There has to be a break with the dual curse of sectism and broad frontism. Unity around firm principle, unity around a clear communist programme, unity around building a mass Communist Party - that is exactly what is needed ●

Forging communist unity

A proposal from the TAS steering group issued on January 4 2025

Talking About Socialism presents the following document in response to the discussion held on December 14 between representatives of TAS, the CPGB-PCC, Why Marx?, *Prometheus* and RS21, which was convened to discuss the possibility of joint work.

TAS welcomed both the initial proposal for common work, and even more so the contributions that were made during the discussion. These in our view showed a serious attitude to working together with other communists in a comradely and collaborative way. Set against the backdrop of a deeply divided and mistrustful left, the significance of communists talking to each other about collaboration cannot be understated. People in the future looking back on that meeting may come to view it as a significant positive first step in a new drive towards unity among communists.

It was clear in the discussion that there was substantial agreement among the participating organisations (with the exception of RS21, who engaged in a positive way but were up front about not having a settled position as a whole). In broad terms there was agreement on the need for a new mass communist party, united on the basis of communist politics rather than any lesser programme, and which rejects and breaks with the 'sect' model. That is clearly what is required to enable our class to fulfil its strategic objective of coming to power.

All of us would be members of the same future mass communist party. Although this should go without saying, it bears repeating because it is generally not said among members of the various competing Marxist organisations which currently exist.

We think that the question of unity cannot wait until we are on the threshold of building a mass party of millions, or even an organisation of thousands. It needs to be addressed, albeit in different ways, at every stage of our activity as communists.

As a preliminary but essential step towards the future mass communist party we all wish to see, we say that all of those who share our objective could and should be members of the same partyist organisation which organises and propagandises around that objective. In other words, those who are currently involved with TAS, the CPGB-PCC, Why Marx? and *Prometheus* could fuse into a single organisation.

The advantages of unity, if achieved on a viable and principled basis, are obvious: pooling of resources and effort instead of needless duplication; setting an example to wider layers that overcoming division is possible; and the potential to create an organisation that is greater than the sum of its constituent parts, as was achieved on a larger scale with the formation of the CPGB in 1920.

Creating such an organisation will not be as simple as merely

declaring it, if it is to be viable and durable. There are reasons why we are not yet in the same organisation; we must acknowledge and confront these issues in order to meaningfully transcend them. A broad agreement on the need to fight for a mass communist party does not necessarily imply agreement on specifics, although it may be that through discussion we do in fact identify much deeper agreement on various specific issues.

Bringing into being a united partyist organisation through a process of regroupment would need to be the result of a process of serious discussion aimed at working out in broad terms what the organisation will look like and what it will do. We would need to confront issues of fundamental principle on which there may be disagreements, try to eliminate those disagreements if possible and try to find alternative paths to unity if not. In other words, we would need to work together to identify and remove any real barriers to unity which currently exist.

This process of discussion with unity as its goal should encompass at least the following (non-exhaustive) list of issues:

1. What should a partyist organisation's fundamental principles and programmatic commitments be?
2. What is the best structure for a partyist organisation, especially at our current stage of dozens of members? Should this change

when we group together hundreds, or thousands?

3. What kind of democracy should the organisation adopt? How can we ensure that its democratic functioning outweighs trends towards bureaucratisation, etc?
4. Who is included and excluded from membership? What principles and processes govern this?
5. How should a partyist organisation at our current stage approach the question of those who claim agreement with our goal of a united communist party, but who hold positions which may undermine that commitment in practice? (We might take as an example comrades who consider themselves revolutionary communists, but advocate support for the Ukrainian war effort on the grounds of the right of nations to self-determination.)
6. How should any new organisation engage in the wider movement, for example how would it relate to broader formations? What obligations should there be on its members in such situations?

Inevitably there may be particular issues which we have left out which comrades may wish to add to the agenda at the outset; other issues may present themselves during the discussion.

Addressing the problems of building a partyist organisation (and a party) in a flexible but concrete way is in our view preferable to the original proposal of discussions around the Marxist

Unity Group reader. In addition to the practical purpose of working through the problems of forging unity among our participant organisations, we hope the discussions would also have significant educational and explanatory value for those who we hope to win to our ideas and draw into our project.

If successful this programme of discussion, suitably amended to address the concerns of all involved, would bring us to a point where collectively we could draft a positive statement as to what kind of organisation is required by our present situation - and with the benefit of that statement we could then take practical steps to bring a fused organisation into being.

Even if the aim of a united organisation cannot be achieved immediately, direct and open engagement with these discussions may well lay the basis for more productive collaboration between partyists in the future. That would still be a meaningful step forward from where we are now.

We recognise that as well as the substantive disagreements on the issues outlined above, comrades may disagree with our proposal and how we have proposed to approach it. We welcome frank disagreement, where it arises, in the interests of moving us forward. We will engage with equal comradely frankness. We look forward to your thoughts and your response ●

POLEMIC

What sort of partyism?

Archie Woodrow is quite good on identifying the left's problems, less good when it comes to giving answers. **Mike Macnair** continues his series of articles on the 'party discussion'

In the December 5 issue I looked at the ideas of Socialist Alternative, Alliance for Workers' Liberty (more accurately called Atlanticists for Workers' Loyalty) and Dave Kellaway for Anticapitalist Resistance. In the December 12 issue I explored the November 25 intervention of a group of RS21 members (Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st century); and the December 4 contribution on the Prometheus website of Joe Todd. In this third article I will address Archie Woodrow's November 22 contribution.¹ I give this a full article because comrade Woodrow's arguments have more substance to them.

The pattern in the contributions discussed in my December 5 and December 12 articles was largely that comrades saw the 'party discussion' as arising from the immediate political conjuncture - the 2024 general election result - and a ground to pursue their existing political ideas: SocAlt's version of a new Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, just without the Socialist Party of England and Wales leadership; the AWL's repeat version of the broad frontism broad enough to include Atlanticists, which they have been arguing since their Atlanticist turn in the 1980s; ACR's latest iteration of broad-frontism, only this time with speech controls to prevent far left interventions; the RS21 comrades' case for a version of Tony Cliff's (episodic) anti-parliamentarism; and Joe Todd's new version of Momentum.

In contrast, comrade Woodrow's contribution is built on critique of the general situation of the far left. This is an important strength. The contribution is weaker on positive proposals that could overcome the problems he finds in the far left. The problem is that an *incomplete* break with 'New Left' conceptions leads to indeterminate proposals on what to do.

Types

Comrade Woodrow's contribution to Prometheus on the party question is headlined 'There are parties and then there are parties'. This headline reflects the first part of his article, which argues that there are three kinds of parties, the first being the most general or abstract sense of 'party' as any form of collective political action, the second an electoral party, and the third a party in the 'Leninist' conception. His second part argues for the organisation of 'anti-capitalists' as such, independent of, or separate from, the social-democrats. His third part addresses the disunity of the existing far left and its negative effects, and attributes it to commitment to the early Comintern's party model. His fourth offers a series of fairly tentative proposals for overcoming the problem.

It will, I think, be most useful to start with the parts of the argument that I think are stronger before coming back to the parts I think are weaker. I will begin with the most concrete - the weaknesses of the current far left - before moving to the more abstract argument for the need for 'anti-capitalist' organisation independent of the social-democrats, then to the most abstract element, the different kinds of parties, before returning to comrade Woodrow's proposals for action.



We have a world to win

Comrade Woodrow begins by listing fourteen left groups (an incomplete list) and commenting that "This is obviously too many groups. Clearly this doesn't work." He proceeds to argue correctly that the groups do "punch well above their weight" because of membership commitment to activism and to raising resources; but also that fragmentation makes it harder to *understand* the world, and, in addition, makes it hard for the wider public to take the far left seriously. I agree (perhaps unsurprisingly, because comrade Woodrow cites me on these points). I would add two points.

First, the question of unity is more significant for organisations that seek to connect to the workers' movement than - for example - religious groups. This is precisely because the working class as a class needs collective action, and hence needs unity in action in spite of diversity of opinions.² Hence the point that splits have to be not merely justifiable in principle, but also *comprehensible to the broad workers' vanguard* - the large layer of activists of trade unions, coops, workers' parties and so on.

Second, *because* the groups of the left seek to "face outwards" rather than "talking among ourselves", they are unwilling to function as minorities in the outward-facing initiatives of other groups. Consequently they split broad fronts and set up counter-initiatives that intentionally undermine the other groups' initiatives. This practice has been visible repeatedly in the politics of the British and French far left (I haven't done the research to check other countries' experience).³

Comrade Woodrow again cites me for the *explanation* of the problem: that is, that comrades cling

to the conception of the party from the early Comintern. This is true but incomplete. The major argument in favour of the groups' organisational form is their present-day relative success, which comrade Woodrow recognises - that the organised groups "punch above their weight". It is only by posing questions about what would be needed for *mass* working class politics that broke with Labourism that we can see that the disunity of the existing groups is a problem.

But also, the *phenomenon* of bureaucratic-centralist sectarianism of the modern type actually precedes the Comintern's party conception. It was already characteristic, before World War I, of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania led by Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches and others, and of the De Leonist (from Daniel De Leon) Socialist Labour Parties in the USA and Britain.⁴

This sort of sectarianism - that of the modern far left - is radically different from the sectarianism of the 'utopian socialist' groups of Marx's time. It does not *counterpose itself* to the mass movement (trade unions and strikes, campaigns, and so on) as the old utopian sects did.

Instead, it *endeavours to control the political initiative within the mass movement*, with a view to leading this movement step by step towards the insurrectionary general strike. But the result of this endeavour to control the initiative is both bureaucratic centralism within the organisation, which is obliged by its strategy to micromanage tactics, and sectarianism *not* towards the mass movement as such, but towards other left groups. The sectarianism towards other groups produces, indirectly, not being taken seriously by the mass movement.

Calling the practice 'Leninist' is an ideology of it; and it does have a significant basis in the resolutions of the second and third congresses of Comintern. But we could strip out the 'Cominternist' ideology and still produce the same result, by way of the inherent imperatives of the mass strike strategy.

Anti-capitalist

Comrade Woodrow's second part argues that 'anti-capitalists' need to organise as such, and as more than a loose network. Much of this argument is sound. (OK, "I would say that, wouldn't I", since comrade Woodrow again cites some of my own arguments with approval.) A loose network cannot effectively discipline bureaucrats; common action with social democrats won't work because "A social-democratic organisation will prefer canvassing swing voters over organising the working class; it will not be interested in prioritising radical anti-capitalist propaganda and education; it will run scared of making important political arguments (eg, over solidarity with Palestine or with migrants and refugees) if it thinks those would generate negative headlines and lose votes."

The central line of divide is not so much "reform or revolution" as loyalty or disloyalty towards the state. Here, as well as citing me, comrade Woodrow makes valuable use of Ed Rooksby's arguments,⁵ though he does not use the arguments of several authors who have pointed to the importance of electoral work to the Bolsheviks, including during 1917.⁶ I stress this last point, that much of Bolshevik activity in 1917 consisted of election campaigning, since the common far left version of the history tends to marginalise it.

There are two weaknesses in

the argument, one minor and one major. The minor weakness is that in discussing "reform and revolution" comrade Woodrow notes that "the Leninist tradition within Marxism usually emphasises the need for revolutionaries ... to have *separate* organisations from reformists", but observes: "Those anti-capitalists who understand the state as a principal enemy therefore need *independent* organisation which makes that hostility to the state a core part of [their] politics." (emphasis added in both quotes).

"Separate" and "independent" are different concepts. To give a couple of examples, the British Socialist Party in 1916-18 was not separate from the Labour Party (it was affiliated to it) but was independent of it, with its own press and organisation. On the other hand, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain is organisationally separate from the Labour Party, but politically dependent on it through their *Britain's road to socialism* strategy and, more immediately, through dependence of the *Morning Star* on support from trade union officials and Labour 'official lefts'. Similarly, SPEW, by committing itself to the project of creating a *new* Labour Party through Tusc, would make itself (if the project had any serious success) politically dependent on the 'official' (Labourite) lefts.

It was not, in fact, 'Leninists' in general who argued for *organisational separation* from reformists as a matter of principle. Lenin personally argued in 1920 for the new CPGB to affiliate to the Labour Party. It is, rather, a *Cliffite* doctrine from the late 1960s, when the International Socialists (today's Socialist Workers' Party) abandoned their earlier entry in the Labour Party. The doctrine of *organisational separation* is maintained by the SWP to this day.

The major problem is definitional: 'anti-capitalist'. This form of self-identification incorporates all the vices of broad frontism and the 'transitional method'.

Communists, of course, whether openly self-identified or calling themselves 'socialists' to avoid avowing the name 'communist', are indeed anti-capitalist. But so are rigorous Salafists, neo-Thomist Catholic integralists and Protestant 'dominion theology' advocates. The difference is that these latter are reactionary anti-capitalists. In reality, of course, if reactionary anti-capitalists actually obtain political power, they will wind up creating forms of state/crony capitalism, like the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is because the actual restoration of a pre-capitalist economy would require megadeaths; and the attempt in any country would, before it got far, destroy the military capability of the state, which is the basis of political independence (as in the Khmer Rouge's attempt to abolish the cities in Cambodia in 1975-78). This, however, does not alter the fact that the reactionary anti-capitalists *are* anti-capitalists, and the left needs to be clear that their anti-capitalism is something different from ours.

The case *for* capitalism is essentially that, in spite of involving radical inequalities, it allows approximate coordination of human beings' productive activities, and generates sufficient growth (in the output of goods and services) to lead to majority acquiescence to capitalism.

From the 19th century to the mid-20th, this argument was heavily based on comparing capitalism with pre-capitalist societies. Since 1991 it has been mainly based on the failure of the Soviet model, defeated in the “seventy years’ war” 1918-1989.⁷

The consequence is that the left unavoidably needs to grasp the nettle of the word ‘communism’ - and for that matter the word ‘socialism’, which has *also* become a must-avoid for people committed to ‘transitional method’. Hence the empty name of the group ‘Anticapitalist Resistance’. We need to grasp the nettle of the failure of the Soviet bloc itself - *not* by trying to take moral distance from it, either by characterising it as ‘state capitalism’ or by setting up personality cults of Lenin and Trotsky to counter the personality cult of Stalin and imagining that pre-1923 decisions had no causal relation to the 1930s terror or to the final defeat.

We need to make concrete proposals about alternatives to market and private property forms of decision making. About political democracy - as an alternative both to the plutocratic-oligarchical ‘mixed constitution’ that gets misnamed ‘bourgeois democracy’ and to the bureaucratic managerialism of the labour movement in general, including the far left. And we need to defend *planning in kind* - planning of labour and material inputs for material outcomes (like housing, health and education services, and limits on carbon emissions and plastics and other pollution). But as soon as we take seriously planning in kind, it becomes apparent that this requires political power on a *continental scale*.

Three kinds

Back to comrade Woodrow’s first part, the three kinds of parties. The first kind is merely any sort of collective political actor, including, for example, a trade union.⁸ The second kind is an electoral party, and

... successful electoral parties will usually need to become extremely broad coalitions containing multiple different political projects, sometimes projects whose aims and methods violently contradict with one another.

Under the [first past the post] electoral system in Britain, anti-capitalists who think it’s useful to engage with electoral politics will likely need to be involved in electoral coalitions that involve a wide range of people with differing political outlooks. Any specifically anti-capitalist political organisation that engages effectively with electoral politics is likely to be some kind of ‘party-within-a-party’, rather than being a freestanding electoral party by itself.

Comrade Woodrow’s third kind of party also needs extensive quotation for clarity:

For Leninists, the answer to the question of how the left exercises agency collectively is not merely through *a* party, or through *some* parties, but through *the* party’. The idea is that, for a revolution to succeed, there must be one singular organisation, uniting all revolutionary forces, and coordinating the revolutionary struggle across all aspects of society.

Participation in state elections might be one front of that struggle, but the Comintern’s line was that, “[Communism] denies the possibility of taking

over parliament in the long run; it sets itself the aim of destroying parliamentarism. Therefore there can only be a question of utilising the bourgeois state institutions for the purpose of their destruction.”⁹

So, although such a party might sometimes contest elections as a tactic, this kind of party was supposed to be very different from an electoralist one. It would only engage in state elections in so far as that engagement could be used to support the wider revolutionary mass struggle. In this conception, struggles in parliament, in workplaces, in communities are all just different fronts of the same class war - and the party is the institution which coordinates the strategy that can tie these fronts together.

The distinction reappears towards the end of comrade Woodrow’s article:

After anti-capitalists have regrouped together in a unified political organisation, they might conclude that they need to intervene in electoral politics - either by running candidates of their own as a communist electoral party; or by engaging in entryism into existing electoral parties like Labour or the Greens; or by forming an electoral alliance with other groups. Anti-capitalist regroupment would, in that case, precede electoral regroupment.

On the other hand, the process of electoral regroupment for the wider left might be a precondition to anti-capitalist regroupment.

This analysis supposes that an *electoral party has* to be a ‘broad-front’ party. In effect, that such a party *has* to aim immediately to form a *government*. It thus denies the significance to mainstream politics of minority opposition parties - like the Labour Party and the continental parties of the Second International before 1914; or like (from a different angle) the Liberal Democrats, the Greens or the successive Brexiteer or British nationalist projects (Ukip, Brexit Party, Reform) in recent politics.

Consider also Corbynum: its initial appearance as an *opposition* down to and including the 2017 election called forth significant rhetorical and judicial concessions to the working class. But the Corbyn leadership’s efforts to preserve the Labour Party as an “extremely broad coalition containing multiple different political projects” by opposing efforts of the grassroots left against the rightwing, and to try to trigger a general election by parliamentary manoeuvres with the ‘Tory remainers’, set up the conditions for the radical defeat of the project in 2019.

I have emphasised here the immediate practical usefulness of a minority opposition party in extracting concessions without seeking to form a government - and how seeking to win a government leads to defeat. I have chosen this emphasis because comrade Woodrow’s distinction between meanings of ‘party’ actually *contains* within the definitions the argument that it is unavoidably necessary to choose between the politics of the coalitionist ‘revisionist’ right wing of the pre-1914 Socialdemocratic Party of Germany (SPD) on the one hand (the “electoral coalitions”), and those of the mass-strikist leftwing of that party (Luxemburg, Pannekoek, and so on) on the other (“the institution which coordinates the strategy”). The line of the SPD and Second International

centre, which was also, in fact, that of Bolshevism before 1918, is, according to this view untenable.

This argument is orthodox among the ‘New Left’-influenced far left. It was actively promoted by Cold War period historians of the workers’ movement who started out in the British and US intelligence apparatus at the end of World War II - Peter Nettl, Carl Schorske, and so on. They promoted this approach because coalitionism is safe for capitalist rule (as has been shown consistently in the role of ‘Labour’ governments and socialist participation in coalition government since then); and mass strikism is also safe for capitalist rule because it automatically generates a politically ineffective left.¹⁰

As to *why* mass strikism automatically generates a politically ineffective left, I have already given the answer: it is the *imperative* of conceiving the party, not as a political voice for the working class in high politics, but as “the institution which coordinates the strategy that can tie these fronts together”, which drives both bureaucratic-centralism and, with it, the proliferation of competing groups, none of which can really be taken seriously.

Proposals

It should now be apparent that comrade Woodrow’s ideas - as discussed so far - represent a substantial step forward relative to the standard far left combination of ‘build our group’ plus ‘advocate for broad fronts’ using ‘popular front’ or ‘transitional method’ approaches (in either case pretending to be left Labourites, or the political equivalent of left Labourites in other countries). But his ideas do not represent a *clear* break with this method. As a result, his proposals for ‘What is to be done?’ have an indeterminate character.

He begins with the entirely correct point that we need more discussion. He argues for more of the London ‘Pelican House’ ‘Party time’ discussions, but notes that:

The terms of the discussion need to be set much more clearly - half the room will be talking about social-democratic electoral formations, while the other half are trying to discuss anti-capitalist regroupment, so people talk past one another and go round in circles.

He says, clearly correctly, that there needs to be more discussion in writing - Prometheus’s own call being a step forward.

He goes on to suggest regroupment “from above”, meaning formal discussions between the organised groups; and “from below”, meaning left unity initiatives and discussions in the localities; and “from above again”, meaning repurposing ‘The World Transformed’ - which was, of course, one of the standard top-table-dominated setups designed to be turned on and off at the convenience of the ‘official left’ leaders.

But he accepts that all these ideas may not work, because the organised groups have something to lose. Comrade Woodrow poses this as just the *leaderships* of the groups having something to lose; but his observation, earlier, that the groups do “punch well above their weight” because of membership commitment to activism and to raising resources, means that it is not just the leaders, but the cadre (the longer-serving local and sectoral activists) who have something to lose. Witness the

consequences in demoralisation of the 2019 dissolution of the US International Socialist Organisation - and numerous other cases of demoralisation following group failures.

Comrade Woodrow then suggests that “It may be that we will need people to be swept up in events. Some upsurge in activity, some new mass popular campaign, some crisis for the government that calls the left into action together. Such a moment not only forces the left to work together, to talk to each other, to coordinate with one another, but it puts the prospects of tangible victories within sight.” This is a common belief of the far left. But, regrettably, the experience of the last sixty years - not just in the UK - proves its falsity. In general, a rising tide of class struggle “lifts all boats”, with the consequence that all the groups have increased confidence in their own specific projects and are *less* inclined to unify with others. Unifications are, in fact, more likely in the wake of defeats.

At this point he returns to the different kinds of party, and the point that I quoted above - his view that either an initial anti-capitalist regroupment would be forced to enter into a broad-front electoral tactic, or that a broad front electoral regroupment might be a precondition for an anti-capitalist regroupment. Been there, done that - in the Socialist Alliance, Respect, and Left Unity. Didn’t work.

He suggests that Momentum might have been an example of such a process, but failed because “its leadership shut down its internal democracy and watered down its politics”. He attributes this to fear of expulsion from Labour as a “party within a party”.

But, in reality, what was involved was the Corbyn leadership’s fear of a new split in the style of the 1981 Social Democratic Party leading to a Labour election defeat (some of Corbyn’s opponents did in fact attempt a split in 2019, without success, as ‘The Independent Group’, later renamed ‘Change UK’). The Corbyn leadership clung to unity with the right in the hope of getting into government - and the broad frontist part of the Labour far left (*Briefing*, and so on) clung to unity with the official lefts, and thus gave the Corbyn leadership veto over what the far left did.

He concludes that an electoral regroupment “seems possible, urgent, and likely”. He says, rightly, that “The anti-capitalist left needs to have a bit more patience and to focus on getting its own house in order and getting reorganised so that we’re in position to have an impact as a relevant political actor.” Then, “our” concerns (those of *Prometheus’s* readership) should be:

about how it relates to the question of anti-capitalist regroupment. This means that questions of internal democracy, freedom of organisation and of propaganda, freedom to form internal factions are the key questions we need to be concerned with. Whether we’re thinking about joining the Greens, or affiliating to Tusc, or creating some new electoral organisation, or whatever the proposed alternatives may be, the question that really matters is will we have the freedom within that coalition to be organised *as anti-capitalists* and to be organised in *anti-capitalist organisations*.

This is an important partial truth. It is an important truth because

there can be no unity that is more than ephemeral without willingness to be in a minority, and willingness on the part of majorities to put up with the ‘timewasting’ ‘talking to each other’ of minorities.

It is a partial truth because the core of the problem is not the unwillingness of the ‘official’ lefts to accept factions and public dissent. Rather, the ‘official’ lefts design their operations to be sufficiently undemocratic that open dissent does not matter - and then if they lose votes, make coups and splits, as the Labour right does.¹¹ The problem is that unity of the far left, of the communists (or as comrade Woodrow puts it, ‘anti-capitalists’) depends on acceptance of open debate.

Yes, we need to pursue *communist* regroupment, not a broad front coalition with the ‘official’ lefts. Pursuing *that* goal needs a culture of open debate *among communists* ●

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Notes

1. prometheusjournal.org/2024/11/22/there-are-parties-and-then-there-are-parties.
2. *Revolutionary strategy* London 2008 pp35-36, 108-109.
3. Some examples in ‘Fetishising revolutionary crisis’, *Weekly Worker* Sept 26 2024, weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1508/fetishising-revolutionary-crisis, subhead ‘Initiative’.
4. On the SDKPIL, references in ‘Her life and her legacy’ weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/927/her-life-and-her-legacy. On De Leonism, convenient short reference at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Leonism.
5. edrooksby.wordpress.com/2019/04/10/the-bolsheviks-did-not-smash-the-old-state; and edrooksby.wordpress.com/2018/08/15/the-myth-of-reformism.
6. D Jenness, *Lenin as election campaign manager* New York 1971; A Nimitz, *Lenin’s electoral strategy from 1907 to the October revolution of 1917* London 2014; Lars T Lih, jacobin.com/2019/06/karl-kautsky-vladimir-lenin-russian-revolution. WG Rosenberg, ‘The Russian municipal Duma elections of 1917: a preliminary computation of returns’ *Soviet Studies*, vol 21, (1969), pp131-163, already indicated indirectly the level of Bolshevik involvement in *local* election campaigning in May-October 1917.
7. ‘Seventy years’ war’ is the tag of far-right SF writer and commentator Jerry Pournelle (1933-2017), but one which is more accurate in describing British and US policy towards the Soviet regime than more ‘mainstream’ narratives. For the prompt beginning of the war after October 1917 see, eg, D Foglesong, *America’s secret war against Bolshevism* Chapel Hill NC 1995.
8. I think comrade Woodrow’s abstract ‘first kind’ of party is over-general. Medieval Europe displayed episodic political conflict between the church, the monarchy, and the lay aristocracy; but these were social institutions, not political parties. The same is true of trade unions as political actors. In contrast, Guelphs and Ghibellines in the late medieval Italian city-states were probably at least proto-parties, and Whigs and Tories from their origins around 1680 were parties in the same sense as the British Tories and the US Democrats and Republicans today. The emergence of political parties as such in *capitalist* political order is both an institutional structure of capitalist class rule, and one which entails a contradiction which the working class can and must exploit, separate from trade union organisation and even if trade union organisation is fully illegal and/or very weak. More in ‘Programme: lessons of Erfurt’ *Weekly Worker* September 5 2013, weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/976/programme-lessons-of-erfurt; and, at a more abstract level, ‘Negations of democratic centralism’ May 30 2019, weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1253/negations-of-democratic-centralism.
9. The internal quotation is from www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch08a.htm, from Bukharin’s ‘Theses on the Communist Parties and parliamentarism’, accepted by the Second Congress of Comintern (1920), thesis 1.6. Lenin’s intervention in the discussion (same web reference) is, in fact, inconsistent with the main body of comrade Woodrow’s argument quoted.
10. The same point in ‘Containing our movement in “safe” forms’ *Weekly Worker* September 12 2019, weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1266/containing-our-movement-in-safe-forms.
11. Both visible in Momentum. See, eg, M Macnair, ‘Referendarii dolosi’ *Weekly Worker* December 22 2016 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1136/referendarii-dolosi); C Roberts, ‘Reduced to a corpse’ January 12 2017 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1137/reduced-to-a-corpse).

MUSK

Rockets and resentment

What on earth is he up to? **Paul Demarty** investigates the life and times of a half-mad billionaire



Viewing the wreckage of one of his rocket launches

Elon Musk has been having a strange couple of weeks.

What should have been a victory march to the office of the memeified government department created specially for him and fellow capitalist eccentric, Vivek Ramaswamy, has been somewhat marred by a great controversy the two unwittingly sparked over high-skilled immigration. Suddenly, all the nice friendly racists Musk has cheerfully promoted over the past year or two by manipulating the X - formerly Twitter - algorithm began to shellac him and his friends continuously for weeks. It's a rough old time for a man so obviously and pathetically dependent on the approval of others.

Meanwhile, he has turned his attention - and his chequebook - to Europe. He seems eager to back *Alternativ für Deutschland* (AfD), the German far-right outfit already running high in the polls, as that country approaches fresh Bundestag elections. He had also mooted throwing financial muscle behind Nigel Farage's Reform party in this country, but suddenly seems to have cooled his attitude to Farage, who is unwilling to join him in designating Tommy Robinson a political prisoner. Musk now claims that Reform needs a new leader.

All of this is of a piece with his recent public statements - almost all on his social media fiefdom - that have grown increasingly indistinguishable from those of any other far-right ranter (barring the H1B fracas). He is suddenly obsessed - as the right is once more - with grooming gangs, accusing Jess Phillips and Keir Starmer of being "rape genocide apologists" and so on (an accusation clearly

only intelligible in the light of 'white genocide' conspiracy theories).

The pace of Musk's radicalisation has been remarkable. Given his current profile, as a screwloose frothing racist, it is sobering to remember that, for most of his career in the public eye he has barely shown any political interests at all - at least, beyond those that directly fill his pockets. He bought Twitter, but the casual and pervasive insanity of that platform seems to have eaten away at his mind in a couple of short years. Previously, he was little more than a technocratic neoliberal with certain techno-utopian leanings. Now he cheerfully chats back and forth with white nationalist anonymous posters, or 'anons' (at least he did until the visa disputes split him from them).

Degeneration

The story of this man's degeneration is, unsurprisingly, linked with the degeneration of the surrounding political culture, which had to degenerate to a certain point for him to become famous in the first place, and then again, further, to drag him into the abyss of racist idiocy. He is remarkable only for insisting that none of the rest of us miss his 'evolution'.

Musk is hardly a self-made man. We are reminded of Bertell Ollman's parable of capital accumulation:

A young reporter asked a leading capitalist how he made his fortune. "It was really quite simple", the capitalist answered. "I bought an apple for 5 cents, spent the evening polishing it, and sold it the next day for 10 cents. With this I bought two apples, spent the evening polishing them, and sold them for 20. And so it went until

I amassed 80. It was at this point that my wife's father died and left us a million dollars".

Elon was born to a bourgeois family in apartheid South Africa, with links to the liberal Progressive Party - effectively a loyal opposition to the ruling National Party. His father Errol made a great deal of his money as a dealer of emeralds from various mines in the country. His childhood seems not to have been terrifically happy. His parents divorced early in his life, and he lived with his father, with whom he had a tempestuous relationship. He struggled socially at a series of miserable-sounding schools, as kids on the autistic spectrum usually did in those days. But he also grew up at a time when computer education meant learning to code, to hack, to tinker: activities for which he showed an early and considerable aptitude.

As a young adult, he moved first to Canada (his mother was Canadian, making the immigration process easier), and then to Silicon Valley, in the first florid days of the dot-com bubble. He made a fair packet of money selling his first start-up to the PC manufacturer Compaq, and then created something he called X.com ("com" having become *de rigueur* for the branding of ambitious start-ups by then), an attempt to create a sprawling platform for various banking and financial purposes. It was hopelessly unfocused, but appeared at the same time as Peter Thiel's PayPal, with which it merged. Thiel later offloaded Musk in a boardroom coup - he was always the weak link in the so-called 'PayPal mafia' that looms large in the Valley to this day - but in the process, Musk became extremely rich indeed.

Finance was never really Musk's obsession, however. He had been weaned on golden-age science fiction; payments would never have the same appeal as the things we know him for today (revolutionary automobiles, rockets, satellites, eccentric infrastructural conjectures). By 2001, he was already numbered among those who took the colonisation of Mars as a serious goal, and after failing to purchase ICBMs from Russia (strange to think that this was once a plausible business opportunity...), he decided to make his own damn rockets for the purpose, founding SpaceX. A few years later, he became an investor in a young electric car company called Tesla, and rapidly set himself up as the chairman and CEO.

This is, more or less, the Musk I first encountered, when I was making my first steps into a software engineering career early in the next decade. I can say, without claiming any particular foresight, that I always found him a slightly ridiculous figure. From a general Marxist outlook, it is increasingly hard to take any CEO's self-image seriously, when capital is today so extensively socialised by the operation of great institutional investors. There is always something of the shabbily performative about them: middle managers dressed up as Roman emperors for the office Christmas party; and never more so than in those days in the wake of the great crash, when the role of such institutions and above all the capitalist state was more obvious than ever.

Elon, however, was perfectly poised for the general culture of the tech industry at the time. A long period where the prevailing ideological trend was essentially

right-wing libertarianism was about to hit its first major challenge, when American corporate culture as a whole got its 'social justice' makeover. The direct agents of this change were those layers of society commonly called today the 'professional managerial class' (I leave aside theoretical difficulties with the term here), paradigmatically the watchmen and women of the human resources department.

Hive mind

At this time, however, the tech hive mind divided as well. There is a certain disastrous failure scenario in networked software systems called 'split-brain', when one half of the system completely loses contact with the other. Something like that happened to the great, networked, 'wetware' (ie, human) system of tech culture. One half stuck with the old libertarianism; the other half adopted what were increasingly the prevailing values of the broader professional class. Discussions, in the break room and especially on the key forums like Hacker News, Twitter and the relevant parts of Reddit, became tense.

One could imagine Musk 'breaking bad' under these conditions; but he was actually in a fairly good position to ride it out. After all, by now, his main business interest was in electric cars; he was a protagonist in the green transition, after a fashion, a matter about which the 'social justice warriors' cared a great deal. He was also a larger-than-life John Galt character, to satisfy the older cadre of libertarians, among whom one increasingly found the army of Elon superfans. With no countervailing pressure, a cult of personality could grow around him.

What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question—ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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He achieved his celebrity then.

It was fuelled by every SpaceX rocket launch, every new Tesla, every promise to build a 'hyperloop' (a spectacularly idiotic attempt to split the difference between private car operation and mass transit, that has led nowhere at vast, wasteful expense). Musk put himself front and centre of all these flashy launches. In a way, he was right to do so. Despite his awkwardness as a social actor, one could never doubt his enthusiasm - he sunk so much of his own money into hopeless boondoggles, be it hyperloops or Mars colonies. He was across all the details, and no wonder - it really was (and remains) his dream, far more than the infinite riches he had acquired from his glancing blow at PayPal.

Sometimes it could trip him up. When a young football team was stranded in a flooding cave complex in Thailand in 2018, Musk loudly set up a quixotic rescue effort via mini-submarine, with the Thai authorities attempting to ward him off; the rescue was in the end carried off by British and Australian divers, one of whom became so incensed by Musk's interference that he told Musk to "stick his submarine where it hurts". Musk bizarrely retorted by accusing this man of paedophilia, leading to court cases and an apology; but also the first real indication since his fame that he was capable of extremely strange behaviour under provocation.

From there, it perhaps seemed to mount up - the serial and strangely asexual marriages, which nonetheless produced children with names so strange that Michael Jackson might have thought it a bit much; the semi-competent mememongering; the enthusiasm for various idiotic cryptocurrencies; the endless, endless Twitter posting, some of which brought him to the brink of official investigations for share price manipulation.

By now, his fans were a small army, but they could never be enough. So it was throughout the culture: it was no longer enough for the 'Bey-hive' that Beyoncé should be popular, or for the Swifties that Taylor Swift should be popular, or for the Marvel fanboys that every successive movie should make a

billion dollars. The fact that *anyone at all* demurred from this enthusiasm remained a stain on their enjoyment, and had to be fought with the tenacity of a medieval crusade. So it was with Elon himself: everyone who *didn't* buy into his preferred self-image became the enemy - the Saladin of his own crusade.

Twitter

This seems to have driven him to his hostile takeover of Twitter, which - after tech stocks tanked following the Russian invasion of Ukraine - became a strange hostile takeover in reverse, with Twitter's investors holding him in the courts to a stock price which was by now ludicrously inflated. Having taken over, there followed a massacre of jobs at the firm, with something like 80% of employees being nudged on to pastures new. (It is believed that most of those remaining were on precisely the kind of H1B contracts, which effectively indentured workers to their employers, that got him and Ramaswamy into such hot water last week.)

Elon promised a new dawn of free speech on the platform, which in reality panned out as a restoration of the accounts of various banned right-wingers who had fallen foul of the 'social justice'-tinged *ancien régime*. He rolled out a subscription plan which effectively boosted these voices at the expense of the previous ultra-liberal power-posters. The place is still fun, to be fair, but its main channels are undoubtedly now sluices of bizarre racist poison. Over the course of his ownership of the platform, Musk has achieved his final form - a credulous chauvinist ranter, whose science-fictional fantasies - charming or infuriating according to taste - are drowned out by pure *ressentiment*.

You could write this off as a cautionary tale about a single individual, and it would not be wholly stupid to do so - *Citizen Kane*, but with space travel instead of opera. *Citizen Kane*, after all, is a communist fellow-traveller's merciless autopsy of the capitalist mind of his own day, not the less human for it. Capitalists must find their place within the system as much as workers, and while their lives are infinitely more comfortable

and rewarded, they are not terribly *freer*. This was put acutely by Max Horkheimer in the late 1920s. Someone might

ask an acquaintance for a job in his firm ... But his acquaintance knits his brow and says that that is objectively impossible. Business is bad, he says, and he's even been obliged to let many employees go. The man should not be angry with him, for it is not within his power, his freedom doesn't extend that far. The businessman is subject to laws which neither he nor anyone else nor any power with such a mandate created with purpose and deliberation ... Boom, bust, inflation, wars and even the qualities of things and human beings the present society demands are a function of such laws, of the anonymous social reality, just as the rotation of the earth expresses the laws of dead nature. No single individual can do anything about them.¹

In Horkheimer's sketch, the capitalist acquaintance acquiesces, stoically, to the reality of his situation. But it might go the other way - an endless raging against the obstacles endlessly ranged against him. Thus the increasing irrationality of Musk, his absorption into far-right conspiracy theories that would embarrass a Tommy Robinson-style football hooligan.

Yet we are not, in the end, only talking about him. He is, after all, part of a 'mafia', whose long-time *capo di tutti capi* is Thiel, a hardened far-right ideologue. Thiel, unlike Musk, is a man with some facility for the humanities, which he picked up from the eccentric French Catholic philosopher René Girard at Stanford University. His worldview is often caricatured as libertarian, but there have always been more than markets at work in his mind - he sees society as ineluctably stratified between an elect elite and an inert mass, but prone to mass outbursts of revenge powered by Girard's mimetic desire. This crew also includes David Sacks, not any kind of serious intellectual but a prominent online provocateur.

The broader Silicon Valley and tech elite has tacked in their direction recently, having previously been unambiguously a funding bulwark of the Democratic Party. Marc Andreessen, a top-tier venture capitalist, became a prominent convert to the Donald Trump camp; other, smaller fry have followed. Those who were always Republican on the QT while 'social justice' was ascendant are more open about it now; those who truly have their eye only on their percentage (Mark Zuckerberg or Jeff Bezos, for example) are mending fences with the right. Musk may *seem* like a uniquely aberrant case, but his madness seems to have a rationality shared by his 'saner' colleagues.

Dependency

This rationality is rooted in precisely the thing that Musk's heroic, Edisonian self-image cannot really grasp. These tech businesses are fundamentally dependent on the state. This dependency is expressed in many ways, but we could mention with respect to Musk that one cannot simply launch satellites into space on a whim; SpaceX, once we get beyond all the guff about colonising Mars, is a standard issue military-industrial contractor. Tesla's healthy bottom line, meanwhile, is in large part thanks to the subsidy of carbon credits - Tesla makes an electric vehicle, and thus gets a certain amount of carbon credits, which can then be sold to (say) Ford so the latter can offset the production of giant gas-guzzling killdozers.

A useful point of comparison would be Bezos. His fortune is in the same ballpark as Musk's; he, too, has a thing about outer space. Where they differ is their outward affect - Bezos is not a self-promoter in the same way, and it is hard to imagine him having a public meltdown. Yet his business, too, is dependent on government contracts (for Amazon Web Services and other things), and on government indulgence (when he aggressively union-busts). And so Bezos's one major political intervention in recent years was to prevent his *Washington Post* from endorsing Kamala Harris. He wants to be inside the tent; and why wouldn't he? There's a lot of money at stake ... So he makes nice, and doesn't let his pride get the best of him. The unfreedom of social constraints described by Horkheimer is a small price to pay for going to outer space in a rocket more than usually shaped like a giant penis.

The Twitter purchase is likely to have been financially disastrous for Musk, but the worst consequence was to grant him a strange playground for social experiments in which he would be relentlessly exposed to feedback from his test subjects. This seems to have pushed him over the edge. In Britain, we find him currently inescapable, as he has succeeded in reviving the grooming gangs scandal - a quite genuinely dismal catalogue of failures on the part of the British state, of course, about which nothing meaningful has been done. He seems to believe he can cause the downfall of the Starmer government by setting himself up as a far-right sugar daddy; I have my doubts, and as I write it does not look like he will be successful in offloading Farage from the Reform leadership, but these are strange people, so who knows?

Perhaps more important is the question: how long will *Trump* put up with this? In the H1B controversy, Trump backed Musk and Ramaswamy, and thus more or less silenced their critics. The time will come soon, however, when he is back in power and trying to impose those deals he likes so much on other countries. A half-mad tech billionaire frothing away about regime change on Twitter at 5am will, sooner or later, prove a liability.

There is not much the rest of us can do except watch. After all, our politics is laughably vulnerable to the corrupting influence of rich men with time on their hands. That is - in the tech cliché - a feature, not a bug. It's how the system works, and it cannot very easily be fixed without the unacceptable risk of political parties emerging, whether of right or left, that are not preemptively subordinated to British state interests and, by extension, the interests of the US. Even if Musk's attempts to suborn our politics are ultimately doomed, he can do a lot of damage along the way ●

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Notes

1. *Dawn and decline*, translator Michael Shaw, Continuum 1978, p50.

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weekly worker

Karie Murphy runs a tight ship

New year, new left party?

Collective is pursuing Corbynism without Corbyn - it all looks very unpromising and very undemocratic ... especially if the SWP tries to jump on board, says **Carla Roberts**

Having become an official supporter of Collective many months ago (paying £2 a month for the privilege), I received my first ever communication on January 2. "Welcome to 2025 - the year we will make a class-based, mass political party on the left a reality!", the unsigned email breathlessly states. Further down, this is somewhat qualified: "be assured that we are *closer than ever* to bringing about the class-based, mass left-wing party we so urgently need". The current favourite party name is 'Fightback', I am told - even less political than the dire 'Collective'.

It all depends what you mean by 'mass party', of course. Socialists should quite rightly *aim* to build a mass party in order to win over the majority of the working class. Revolution has to be the conscious desire of the majority, otherwise it is a *putsch*, and one that will all too soon turn the aim of socialism into its opposite, as the history of the 20th century has shown far too many times.

But there is little chance of a *real* mass party being launched anytime soon. The left is in disarray in the aftermath of the defeat of the Corbyn movement. Here is the full list of organisations participating in Fightback/Collective, according to the email: "Aspire, Assemble and Just Stop Oil, Campaign For A Mass Workers Party, For The Many, Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL), Reliance, Social Justice Party, Socialist Party and Tusc, The Muslim Vote, Transform, TWT and others."

SPEW

The most serious of the groups is probably the Socialist Party in England and Wales, and that is saying something. Perhaps they are looking for a way to put its Tusc front out of its misery.

Collective claims internally that it has 4,000 people paying £2 to be a "member", writes the blog *Left Lane*¹ - though this figure seems to be on the 'optimistic' side, if not a total exaggeration.

Not that relatively small numbers are a problem *per se*. It all depends on what you are doing with them and what programme you are fighting for. I suspect that the author of the email actually means that Collective will soon launch as a *broad* party - rather than a *mass* party. Politically broad and therefore amorphous, no doubt - and certainly not a party that aims for revolution or, judging by the email and the bits of info leaking out, even socialism.

Take for example the discussion paper produced by the 'Collective working group on campaigns and elections'. It says any election campaign should first "define principles". Quite right - until you read what "principles" they have in mind: "Anchor the campaign on local concerns like affordable housing, transport, and jobs, rooted in class and community politics". That is it,



Not going to be leader of the pack

in terms of politics. The rest of the four-page document is inane PR waffle about the need to "listen and learn", "communicate effectively" and "celebrate wins together".

There is certainly a lot of political overlap between the participating organisations. They all agree that the programme required has to be a version of Jeremy Corbyn's tame Labour manifesto *For the many, not the few*. With much common sense and 'the things we all agree on', but very little in terms of actual answers and ideas on how we can get to a truly different society. So, clearly, no need to go into any of that in particular detail.

As Pamela Fitzpatrick recently explained, "Corbyn's policies were pretty mild - and very popular."² Well that's because they were put forward by the leader of the Labour Party, who might have been able to actually implement some of them. There is no chance Collective will ever get as close to office as Corbyn did.

Fitzpatrick, a former Labour Party councillor in Harrow, is one of the two directors of 'Justice Collective Ltd'. Funnily enough, they still haven't got around to removing Justin Schlosberg as the second director, even though he resigned from Collective on November 5 with an untypically frank open letter.³

He should really be replaced with Karie Murphy, former right-hand woman of Corbyn when he was Labour leader. She is by all accounts the person in charge and makes pretty much all the decisions. For example, she decides who is allowed to participate in the real-life organising meetings - and repeatedly reprimanded a participant in the November 9 gathering, because her organisation (the Campaign for a Mass Workers Party) had previously sent a different representative. "It was very humiliating", I am told.

Also involved is Murphy's partner Len McCluskey, former Unite general secretary, whose participation is somewhat covering the 'trade union base', it seems. "Collective has co-ordinated and communicated with leadership of the non-aligned trade unions", the February 2 email states. In other words, *none* of them are on board.

Proceedings so far have been less than promising. Tightly controlled by Murphy in particular, we hear that the two in-person meetings (a third one takes place on January 25) have spent much time on pointless report backs, general waffle and very little in terms of actual decision-making.

Rizz level

Much time and effort has been spent on convincing Jeremy Corbyn to come on board as leader. After all, a Corbynite party does look a lot better if it has Corbyn in it! Despite his many shortcomings, Corbyn still has some level of *rizz*, as young people say. Murphy and Fitzpatrick have gone through every trick in the book. When Corbyn attended the first in-person meeting on September 15, the news was immediately leaked to *The Guardian*, which breathlessly proclaimed Corbyn to be the leader of the party, which was set to launch imminently.⁴ The man was less than pleased about this and made sure that he was *not* present at the second meeting on September 9 in Birmingham, though he dialled in via Zoom for a bit.

Still, the mainstream press continues to keep a close eye on Corbyn and do what they do best: make up stuff. On December 10, the *Spectator* proclaimed that "the Gaza 5" (ie, Corbyn and the four independent Muslim MPs who have formed the 'Independent Alliance' in parliament) are "about to register as a political party".

The Times on December 12 first poured cold water on the story, pointing out that "their [the five minus Corbyn] politics and voting records are already more than complicated. If their presence has been noted in the Commons it has been for votes against VAT on private school fees and, in one case this week, a defence of cousin marriage".⁵

Corbyn himself went on *BBC Newsnight* on December 17 to clarify: "We are an independent alliance, we're happily and effectively working together on a number of issues. We *do not* intend to become a party. We've only just got to know each other. I do think it is important that there is an alternative political voice in Britain. I think that will come from the very large number of independent councillors

and independent groups around the country that are campaigning against the two-child benefit cap, the winter fuel allowance, issues such as housing and the Waspi women."⁶

In other words, Corbyn is happy to be *associated* with the new organisation, but he will not be leading it, that much is clear. Perhaps he is just tired (the man is 75, after all). Perhaps he really does find the local 'assembly' he set up in North Islington super exciting. Or maybe, just maybe, he remains unconvinced that the Labour Party is "dead", as so many of his former supporters are keen to exclaim. He will remember long periods when the left in Labour was as good as finished - only to spring back to life as, for example, when he was elected leader of the party in 2015.

A pure accident, we should remember, caused by the self-declared "morons", like Margaret Beckett, who lent Corbyn their vote to get him onto the ballot paper. Fitzpatrick is wrong to state, as she did on the *Crispin Flintoff Show*, that, "It was not Jeremy who created that mass movement. That movement was there and that's why Jeremy became the leader. The movement pushed him into that leadership position. He was a reluctant leader and we shouldn't be criticising him, but we need to analyse what happened and learn from our mistakes."

A lot of contradictions in that short paragraph. Yes, hundreds of thousands of people joined the Labour Party and Momentum - but there was no coherent mass movement to speak of. There was a mass *sentiment* that wanted to see some form of 'change'. But Corbyn and his allies did nothing with that. They did not educate, lead, let alone organise those who hoped to be organised. Momentum jumped fully on board the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign. It was also transformed into an undemocratic voting machine - by Jon Lansman, but with the full backing of Corbyn. How can you possibly learn from mistakes if you do not criticise them and, crucially, those who have committed them?

Fitzpatrick is, of course, trying to tweak history to fit her own purpose - ie, having unsuccessfully tried to get Corbyn to lead Collective, she now pretends that, actually, we do not really need Corbyn to set up a Corbynite party. She tried to assure the online audience:

"that movement has not gone away - it has grown. I can see it all over the UK. People are ready for something new. No doubt Jeremy will be involved, but he will not lead a new party. We have to move on from that. We have got to have a democratic party that is grassroots and not based on one particular person. There were lots of groups formed after the election, the left did come together, but the reason it failed is because it was all top down. It has

to be from the bottom up, that's the main lesson learned really.

We daresay that if Corbyn had said 'yes', she, Murphy and McCluskey would have happily based Collective on that "particular person" and would be less concerned about the 'bottom up' bit. There is, after all, nothing wrong with the leaderships of various organisations getting together to discuss how to build a united party with a coherent programme, a solid structure and a democratic constitution - ie, top down. The problem arises when this party is undemocratic and members cannot form factions or overturn the leadership, for example. Or when the programme is based on washed-up reformism rather than fighting for what is actually needed. Which looks exactly where Collective is going.

Callinicos

The *possible* inclusion of the Socialist Workers Party is unlikely to change this general trajectory, though it could breathe slightly more life into the project - if this is indeed what Alex Callinicos has in mind with his article in this week's *Socialist Worker*. "The conditions are developing for the formation of a powerful radical left alternative to Labour", he writes, and that, "the Labour monolith is showing signs of crumbling. Jeremy Corbyn and the pro-Palestine independents enjoyed remarkable successes in the general election."

This powerful alternative "is badly needed to prevent the far right dominating the challenge to a fumbling Starmer government. An effective radical left alternative couldn't simply contest elections. It would have to get stuck into struggles in workplaces and neighbourhoods and in the Palestine solidarity movement. To make sure this happens, revolutionary socialists are needed to help initiate and build this alternative."

This does sound like the SWP wants to jump onto the Collective ship. However, that is news to many of the groups involved in the project. Which is of course not saying much, considering that it is so tightly controlled. Perhaps Callinicos is preparing the troops for such a move. Perhaps it is his way of signalling to Karie Murphy that they would like to be approached, thank you very much.

But the chances are that there will be no such invitation. Surely the last thing Murphy wants is an SWP, still tainted with the Martin Smith rape scandal, on board ●

Notes

1. theleftlane2024.substack.com/p/what-is-socialism-and-why-do-we-want.
2. www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3ogBToZqKl.
3. jschlosberg.substack.com.
4. www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/sep/15/jeremy-corbyn-addresses-meeting-new-leftwing-party-collective.
5. www.thetimes.com/article/3090eea4-8d2d-464b-a621-afc5825ca218.
6. www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m002618f/newsnight-backlash-to-starmers-waspi-decision.