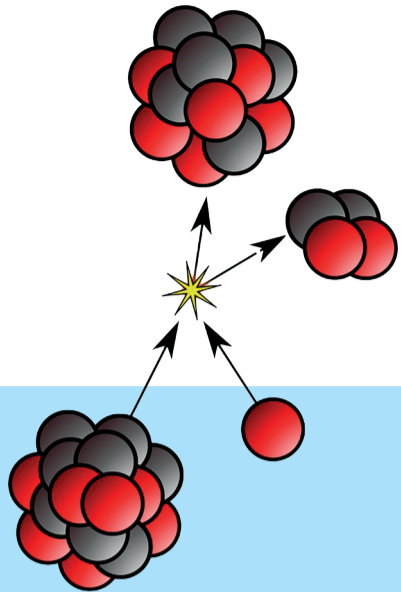


A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**CPGB-TAS-Prometheus tripartite
talks + second-round talks
= Forging Communist Unity**

- Letters and debate
- Trump's Greenland grab
- Mike Macnair's polemic
- Jean-Marie Le Pen

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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LETTERS



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

Hamas to blame

Moshé Machover at least earns points for being honest. "I don't remember the situation being so dire," he says in last week's issue about the debacle in the Middle East ('Redrawing the map' January 9). And he's right. Hamas is suing for peace, Hezbollah has been decapitated, Assad has fallen, Syria is being recolonised, and the Islamist regime in Iran is hanging by a thread. Although the Houthis, the most backward and primitive of the lot, are still fighting on, the 'axis of resistance' stands exposed as a paper tiger. It is the worst anti-Zionist defeat since 1967.

But what's missing from Machover's analysis is discussion of the CPGB's role in the disaster. Presumably, this is not a topic he's eager to address, since the party's role has been a disgrace.

Machover got the ball rolling a day after the atrocious October 7 assault by declaring at an Online Communist Forum that "we side with Hamas". When I spoke up to say that we should side with the Palestinian masses rather than neo-fascist Islamists acting in their name, he flew into a rage. A few days later, he offered the astonishing view that the "most probable" Israeli response would be a "land incursion into the Gaza Strip with a view to destroying as much as possible, killing as many Palestinians as possible, and then withdrawing and declaring that revenge has been exacted" ('Oppression breeds resistance' October 12 2023). This was like saying that the US would respond to Pearl Harbor with a token raid or two and leave it at that. A week later, the *Weekly Worker* specifically rejected joint working class action in Israel-Palestine as a way out of the impasse. The reason: "Israel is a colonial-settler state ... it is closely allied with the US global hegemon and the Israeli working class constitutes a labour aristocracy" ('What you need to know about Hamas' October 19 2023). The Leninist strategy of uniting the proletariat against nationalist oppression thus went out the window.

A week after that, Machover offered the specious view that "Most people ... do not understand the causality, the root cause [of Hamas's atrocities], which is the Israeli occupation itself." It goes without saying that the Israeli occupation is a crime against humanity. But for years the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is a part, has been wreaking havoc throughout the region, from Algeria to Egypt, Syria and Yemen. Is the Israeli occupation the root cause of those atrocities too? In the same issue of the *Weekly Worker*, Jack Conrad offered the view that it is not the CPGB's job to "run a health check on the resistance", since (according to a report by James Harvey) "The best support we can give the Palestinian resistance is to fight against our own government." Thousands of people were dying, yet Conrad's advice was to hold our tongue about the catastrophe in Gaza that Hamas was helping to unfold.

The missteps went on and on. Yassamine Mather described October 7 as "an act of desperation - a revolt born of hopelessness and despair" ('A potent cause' November 2 2023) - an odd way of describing an operation whose express purpose was to compound such hopelessness and despair by

turning Palestinians into "a nation of martyrs", as a senior Hamas official named Ghazi Hamad helpfully explained on Beirut TV. In the same issue, Eddie Ford praised Hamas's "militarily stunning" operation and predicted that the Israel Defence Forces "will have to fight inch by inch ... underground - a grim prospect, which explains why, in this case, the weak might just overcome the strong" ('Digging to resist'). Needless to say, bunker-buster bombs would obviate the need of having to go underground at all. Jack Conrad conceded that October 7 was "an act of terrorism", but added: "So what? The word does not scare us. Far from it" ('ABCs of Muslim Brothers' November 23 2023). This was very brave, even though it was not Jack who would have to face the consequences, but ordinary Palestinians.

"Israel's provocations on other fronts" will go nowhere, Machover added, due to "the same obstacle as in the past: US reluctance to be dragged into a new major regional war". He went on: "But without US direct involvement Israel alone would be too vulnerable to retaliation by Iran and, even more so, by Hezbollah. On top of this, Israel is undergoing an unprecedented internal crisis that could cause it to implode under the pressure of a difficult war" ('Gambling on all-out war' September 5 2024). As everyone knows, it was not Israel that was imploding, but Hezbollah. "Hezbollah fighters thrive in martyrdom," added Mather, "and the assassination of the group's leader has unleashed unprecedented anger among the organisation's rank and file, who will continue to fight in south Lebanon" ('Itching for war on four fronts' October 3 2024). So Hezbollah would go on fighting despite all those booby-trapped pagers? Er, not quite.

Not that the CPGB was alone in this regard: other groups were worse. But Machover and co should not be allowed to wriggle off the hook. They made excuses for Hamas's crimes, they failed to explore its role in a critical fashion and they consistently underestimated Israeli military capabilities. They sadly note that disaster has occurred, yet they show no interest in figuring out why. Any socialist party worth its salt would have immediately warned Palestinian workers of the horrors that Hamas was bringing down upon their heads, yet the CPGB failed to sound the alarm.

If the party still had a spark of Marxism left in its tired old bones, it would call a conference to try to work out how the episode had gone so wrong. But the chances of that happening, in my opinion, are nil.

Daniel Lazare
New York

United front

There is a strange conclusion to Yassamine Mather's article, 'Mounting dangers and fears' (January 9), which also fails to clearly call for Nato imperialism to take its hands off Iran.

It reads: "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."

Is this suggesting that Iran should

not seek Russian and Chinese support to resist an attack by the USA/Israel? Or that Iran should leave Brics and not challenge the world domination of the dollar? Surely the positive support from Iran to the Palestinian resistance is something to be critically supported by communists - likewise any support from Russia and China to those fighting US hyper-imperialism in west Asia.

As the declining American empire promotes aggressive war to maintain its domination of the planet, communists must call for the victory of those fighting imperialism. We need an anti-imperialist united front that brings together the working class of the imperialist centres with the masses of the imperialist-oppressed global south. That is the way forward to a socialist world. The fight against imperialism is key to any working class advance both in the imperialist heartland and in the global south.

In struggle the masses will learn that they can't trust any pro-capitalist force to pursue that struggle to a victorious conclusion.

Sandy McBurney
Glasgow

Disappeared

I read a piece online recently; it was from *Middle East Eye* but I got it via *Jewish Voice for Labour* (January 3). It was by Jonathan Cook, who's written a lot of good stuff, and it was entitled 'Another expert report finds Israel is committing genocide. The west yawns.'

He looks at reactions to the events of Palestine/Israel/Gaza from the mainstream media and towards the end he identifies some of these reactions. First, Israel was merely reacting to "terrorism" and was defending itself. When this became a little hard to support, they moved on to the terribly difficult attempts to reach a "ceasefire" - with both sides at fault in falling short.

More recently, as he says, "the media have largely lost interest. If there is no way to 'both-sides' the genocide, then it must be disappeared." I had this in mind for a few days, it was clearly true. But I thought I'd check. So, I looked in *The Guardian* from January 6 to January 11, plus *The Observer* of January 12.

On January 6, there were two stories, one of them about the Palestinian Authority raiding Palestinians on the West Bank (that's OK then), the other being a warning from a UN official about the impact of the withdrawal of cooperation by Israel. These took about one and a half pages, around half being pictures. They were on pages 26 and 27, so not so hot news.

On January 7, there was a story about "truce hopes" - a step back to the second line as above but, three quarters of a page - half being a picture - and on page 27. On January 9, good lord: it's on page 17. But don't worry: it's just a single column about the argument between the Met police and the organisers of the pro-Palestine march on January 18.

On January 8, 10, and 11 - nothing, nothing, nothing. But, on January 12 there's a single paragraph in a column about Biden's "legacy". I may have missed another paragraph or something buried in a review or letter, but I don't think so. So, 'disappeared'.

But the carnage goes on, and it is thoroughly reported in the left online press. Just a few recent headlines: "The children of Gaza are freezing to death." "We're still breathing and we don't want to die." "Israeli soldiers

force Palestinians south - without their belongings." "Indiscriminate killing as 'There are no civilians in Gaza' ..." "Israeli attacks on fertility clinics destroy dreams."

Horror on horror, but these are just headlines; there are loads of stories, with interviews, desperate phone calls, eyewitness reporting, photographs, tragedy after tragedy and crime after crime. But not in the mainstream media. There is still room for Ukraine, and even Sudan, but not Gaza or, for that matter, the West Bank and Jerusalem. The owners and editors, sometimes despite the complaints of their journalists, have 'no room'.

They must thank the lord for Donald Trump, Elon Musk and the Los Angeles wildfires. The death toll of the latter has nearly reached that of a day in Gaza. But. Palestinians? Disappeared.

Jim Nelson
email

Key allies?

We are at a boiling point of history. As far as I'm concerned, the western capitalist states are fighting a rearguard action to stop their position from worsening on the world stage. They do still have considerable resources, but are dragging down their home populations to maintain their wealth and privileges.

It is making for much political instability, which worsens their position on the world stage. They are faced with both internal and external resistance, as there are no benefits to be had for our home population or the rest of the world in throwing in their lot with self-serving gangsters. We can't change the world until we've dealt with the biggest enemies of the world first and as the main priority.

This gives us common currency with China, Russia and Iran, etc, and in that context we must applaud their resistance, even if it is forced upon them. Anything that weakens these western capitalist states from the external front strengthens our resistance at home. And anything that weakens them at home strengthens those external allies. Unlike the US, EU and UK regimes we can cut deals with the growing powers and take the first steps towards building a peaceful and harmonious world.

We cannot make the progression to a world communist state as long as the world is living on the edge of annihilation. Peace first, which must mean dealing with the biggest gangsters in the world, the monsters who rule key European states and the US. We can't do that alone: we need allied assistance and above all else this means Russia and China. Together we can crush the axis powers. Then we can begin a sensible conversation about the world with all nations, big and small, included.

The CPGB-PCC is, along with many other socialist/communist parties in Britain, doing the theoretical spade work for the future world to come. That's why the tens of thousands of discussions within this framework are vital and must be considered highly important. We are the working class and the future is ours.

Elijah Traven
Hull

Symptom

I watched the *Inside story* debate on Al Jazeera. Three 'experts', Mouin Rabban, Dan Smith and Ravi Agrawal, were debating the current state of the world and the problems facing us.

They mentioned world leaders being able to do nothing about

climate change; the increase in global conflicts and military spending; the failure of the international community and the world order; America and Israel acting with impunity; an institution like the United Nations being ineffective and difficult to reform; war being profitable, with more spending on war rather than peace; neoliberalism developing into something more extreme, money being a driving factor.

By the time the presenter mentioned the elephant in the room, they'd convinced me he was going to say 'capitalism'. But, no, it was a symptom of capitalism: military spending.

Roger Day
Gravesend

Ombudsman

The poverty of thought (I use the word 'poverty' as an excessively polite euphemism) of Moshé Machover should concern your thoughtful readers more than his opponents.

Of the abducted Israelis he writes: "Some of them are soldiers, prisoners of war really." Really? If the mafia capture policemen or soldiers, are they "prisoners of war"? Or Isis, Hezbollah, the IRA, Boko Haram or the brothers Kray, or devotees of the Hannibal Lecter Fine Dining Society? So that is OK - no further elaboration needed - or permitted?! And "some" are soldiers? Indeed, some are, but (non-Machover reality not to be mentioned) most are not. And if these groups do *not* treat their captives according to the accepted rules for POWs, that is OK - no further analysis required? Really? You mean it?

Machover's observations on the Al-Ahli hospital incident illustrate the classic failure of leftwing thought conventions constricting situational analysis. The multiple pieces of evidence provided by Israel (photos of the impact site in the car park, video of matched timing and direction of the missile fall, a recorded phone conversation between Islamic Jihad operatives, false casualty reports from Gaza) are not referred to, but quickly dismissed as "lies".

Such thought processes and constrained approved language are so deeply embedded as to make discussion, not to mention historical analysis, quite impossible.

A Thought Ombudsman (advisory duties only) is sorely needed.

John Davidson
email

In the open

It is fantastic that the CPGB, Talking about Socialism and *Prometheus* are now in an active process that will hopefully lead to the fusion of all three groups. Having helped to initiate the discussion between the groups, it is worthwhile explaining why Why Marx? is not part of this fusion process - though the organisers are very supportive of it.

After *Prometheus* published its call for contributions on the question of 'What kind of party?', the organisers of Why Marx? approached them with a view to launching a joint education and discussion series on 'How to build a Communist Party?' We proposed a short initial programme of discussion around issues like 'What is democratic centralism?', 'Why do we argue for a min-max programme?' and 'What is the non-ideological party?'

Prometheus quickly replied positively, but suggested that such a programme might be too ambitious for them and that instead we should study the reader produced by our

comrades in the Marxist Unity Group in the USA. We were a bit hesitant about that, not because it's a bad document - it contains many good original texts, including by Mike Macnair and Karl Marx (always a nice combination). But we thought a more structured, focused programme on party and programme would be preferable.

Having argued our case, one of *Prometheus's* main representatives in our meetings was quite insistent that *Prometheus* had decided that it wants to study the MUG reader, so we agreed to the proposal, so as not to prevent our two groups working together - on the proviso that we could adapt the programme once the discussion became more serious. After all, it is not a matter of principle what kind of material you study. We thought the key thing was to get the ball rolling.

We then agreed to invite other groups to co-sponsor the joint series, specifically Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century, Talking About Socialism and the CPGB, all of whom agreed to participate in a first organising meeting on December 14. The plan was to try and bring them on board as co-organisers of such a joint series and then approach other groups and individuals to participate.

Within minutes of the start of that first meeting, however, it transpired that the reps of TAS and the CPGB wanted to go beyond a joint discussion series. Both proposed to work towards concrete unity of the groups involved. This came as a genuine surprise, at least to the organisers of Why Marx? - a happy surprise. All groups quickly agreed to ditch plans to study the MUG reader, as well as plans to contact other groups. Instead, the meeting agreed to focus on how such unity between the groups present could be achieved (with the exception of RS21, which played more of an observer role).

Then TAS's letter of January 4 moved the process up another gear, by concretely proposing a process of fusion between the organisations. It became clear to the organisers of Why Marx? that we could not be part of such a fusion process, because our organising group is made up of people from very diverse political groups (some of whom are, for example, involved in the attempts to launch a Collective party).

Why Marx? initially proposed that there could be a series of regular, public events organised by all the groups participating in the fusion process, but it became clear that (a) *Prometheus* was still discussing its attitude to a process of fusion, and (b) that TAS and CPGB were not in favour of such a series being organised by the groups themselves.

Why Marx? took that on board, but decided that we will continue with the plans we have been pursuing since November 2024 - ie, to launch a discussion series on the important question of 'How to build a Communist Party'. Of course, we want to invite speakers from the participating groups as and when, but also others who have important and interesting views on these questions.

We want to discuss, for example, what we can learn from the past (good and bad); what are some of the key political concepts involved and how we can make sure we are building a democratic, transparent and principled Communist Party. It is great, for example, that Lawrence Parker has agreed to give three introductions on the history of the process of launching the original CPGB in 1920.

We think such a discussion and education series could also positively influence the fusion process. For a start, there is an ongoing discussion within *Prometheus* and the prospect of communist fusion remains

controversial. This is even more the case in RS21, which sent a representative to the first organising meeting, but not the second one on January 11. While there is a growing trend within RS21 that has a partyist perspective, that does not go for the majority of members. There are also certain 'hesitations' about the CPGB and not few comrades within RS21 will labour under the assumption that it is a sect.

Both RS21 and *Prometheus* are politically in flux, in other words, and in the process of discussing and arguing about their perspective. They have not been won over for the need to build a Communist Party, let alone fusing with the CPGB and TAS.

In this situation, we believe that a series of well-publicised, interesting and democratic discussion and education meetings, running alongside the fusion process, could play a very useful role in bringing some of their members on board.

We should stress that this is not an alternative to the fusion process, or an attempt to delay or derail it. It is also not a proposal to be the 'public face' of Forging Communist Unity. In fact, the series would have very little to do with the actual fusion process. It would accompany it and might well increase the general interest in it, helping it to become successful.

Tina Becker
email

Occam's razor

I found Sky Atlantic's recent series, *Lockerbie: the search for the truth* (based on the book by Dr Jim Swire, whose daughter was among the 270 victims of the Lockerbie disaster), oddly unbalanced, focusing on just one person's theory of what really happened - and, despite that, also unconvincing.

Of course, the bombing of Pan Am plane 103 in December 1988 was a terrible act of (potentially state) terrorism. As was the American shooting down of Iran Air Flight 255, killing 290 people a few months earlier. Readers may recall that two Libyans, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi and Lamin Khalifah Fhimah, were, years later, put on trial by a Scottish court - al-Megrahi found guilty, Fhimah not guilty. An alleged third conspirator, Abu Agila Masud, is due to go on trial in the United States in May 2025.

The alternative theory put forward by Swire and the Sky series was that Iran commissioned the attack on Pan Am 103 to take revenge for the downing of the Iranian plane by the USS Vincennes in July 1988. Further, it effectively 'contracted out' the task to its ally, Syria, who in turn looked to the armed group, the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), a breakaway from the more mainstream PFLP.

Certainly, all the initial investigations appeared to point to the Iran/PFLP-GC connection, and subsequent Wikileaks data of secret intelligence cables, including intercepts of PFLP-GC communications, appeared to corroborate this line of inquiry for US intelligence officials.

Part of the alternative theory includes the raid by West German police on a PFLP-GC cell in Frankfurt just two months before Lockerbie, and the discovery of bomb-making and associated equipment, not dissimilar to that used on Pan Am 103. However, the fact of the cell's breakup could indicate the opposite.

The sole claim for the Swire thesis that Libya was innocent was that a tiny fragment of a detonator timer found in the wreckage could not have been part of a batch previously sold to Libya, as its coating had a slightly different composition.

Whether this tiny fragment did or did not have different characteristics is clearly not capable of being verified by independent witnesses - only by intelligence spooks and forensic scientists, who owe their living and loyalty to the secret states. But if a fragment had been falsely laid in the wreckage, (as is Swire's claim), does that automatically prove the innocence of the two Libyan intelligence operatives? US intelligence may have had nefarious motives in ensuring Libya got the blame (rather than, say, Syria, Iran or an armed Palestinian group), but that doesn't automatically prove Libya was not responsible.

We know that 'democratic' capitalist states and law enforcement agencies are themselves not beyond adding 'evidence' to 'prove' individuals are definitely guilty, who might otherwise be acquitted through a lack of formal evidence.

Since the fall of Gaddafi a number of former Libyan top officials have confirmed Libyan intelligence did carry out the attack on Pan Am 103, including Moussa Koussa, Gaddafi's top intelligence chief and 'right hand' at the time in question. There may be an argument that there is some motive for them to blacken the former Libyan regime, but by doing so they implicate their own roles in the bombing.

Libya itself formally admitted responsibility for the actions of its officials in the Lockerbie bombing in 2003: ie, well before the fall of Gaddafi. Libya and the Libyan leader clearly had their own motives for seeking revenge on the US over a number of military clashes and bombings in the 1980s, which included the death of Gaddafi's adopted daughter, Hana.

Gaddafi presumably did not think either of the two intelligence operatives put up for public trial would be found guilty; by putting them up, he obtained significant concessions from the west, including from the then Blair government. After al-Megrahi's conviction, the Libyan regime subsequently showed exceptional keenness to obtain his release and return to Libya - even threatening the Blair government with the cancellation of a multimillionaire oil contract, should al-Megrahi die in prison. On his return to Tripoli in 2009, he was feted as something of a state hero. Gaddafi clearly needed to shore up his base in the intelligence-security forces apparatus.

It is in the nature of the murky world of intelligence operatives and actual terrorists that it is often not possible to establish all the facts with 100% certainty. This opens the door to some quite outlandish conspiracy theories. In cases like these, we often have to go on the balance of probabilities and where the majority of evidence is taking us. Applying the principle of Occam's razor, that the likeliest true explanation is that which is simplest and most straightforward, can also be useful.

It seems to me the composite journalist character in the series, *Murray Guthrie*, probably got it about right when he said to Swire in the final episode that, in 'his' view, initially Iran and Syria did try to commission the PFLP-GC to do the bombing. But, after its cell was broken up by West German police, the job was subsequently contracted out to Libya, which had its own reasons for revenge on America and its own capability for enacting it. This theory accords with the great majority of the known facts and evidence, explains the initial PFLP-GC connection, the sudden switch in the investigation to Libyan intelligence, and the testimony from former Libyan high officials.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

ACTION

End the genocide, stop arming Israel

Saturday January 18, 12 noon: National demonstration. Note new assembly point: Whitehall, London SW1. End Gaza genocide, hands off Lebanon, don't attack Iran, stop arming Israel. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Your rights, the law and empowerment

Sunday January 19, 11am to 4pm: Activist training event, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1. Includes sessions on Palestine, unions and the climate emergency. Organised by Unite Community Leicester: facebook.com/groups/800990073338617/permalink/8453190541451827.

Protest the inauguration

Monday January 20, 5pm: Protest outside parliament, College Green, Westminster, London SW1. Stand united against Trump's 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. Changed venue: Drawing Room, Marquis Cornwallis, Marchmont 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.

Perspectives on human origins

Tuesday January 21, 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: 'Neanderthals, *homo sapiens* and the human revolution'. Speaker: Camilla Power. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/980771790558722.

International armoured vehicles fair protest

Wednesday January 22, 8am: Protest outside Gate B, Farnborough Exhibition Centre, Trenchard Way, Farnborough GU14. This arms fair promotes companies complicit in the war crimes and genocide in Gaza, the West Bank and conflicts around the world. Organised by North Hampshire Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Lewisham council: stop investing in genocide

Wednesday January 22, 6.30pm: Protest outside Lewisham Town Hall, 1 Catford Road, London SE6. End the Lewisham Local Government Pension Scheme's investments in companies that enable Israel's slaughter of Palestinians. Organised by Lewisham Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Politics and architecture

Thursday January 23, 6.30pm: Communist culture club online discussion, introduced by Malcolm Millais. Registration free. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

US spy drones out of Fairford

Saturday January 25, 1pm: Demonstration. Assemble outside RAF Fairford, Horcott Road, Fairford GL7. Stop the flights of US Global Hawk and Reaper spy drones, used for secret US military intelligence missions. Organised by Drone Wars UK and CND: cnduk.org/events/us-spy-drones-out-of-fairford-demonstration.

How to invigorate and democratise unions

Saturday January 25, 2pm: Online public meeting. Speakers include Andrea Egan (candidate for Unison general secretary) and Luke Dukinfield (Unite rep). Registration free. Followed by AGM. Organised by Troublemakers At Work: www.facebook.com/events/2365056793845415.

What are gods?

Thursday January 30, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Speaker: Ian Wright. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc.

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.

The struggle for a four-day week

Tuesday February 4, 7pm: Online public meeting. Learn about the four-day working week campaign. Speakers include Ben Davies, Unite rep at Shelter, and Alex Read, PCS rep at DEFRA. Organised by Troublemakers At Work and Tipping Point UK: troublemakersat.work/event/the-struggle-for-the-4-day-working-week.

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.

CLIMATE

Decade of disaster

Last year was the hottest ever recorded and deadly heat looks like our future, writes **Eddie Ford** - even if we overcome capitalism

We now know that 2024 was officially the hottest year on record and the first in which average global temperatures exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial times (roughly speaking, before 1850) - with much worse to come. Data from the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) shows that the average temperature last year was 1.6°C - a jump of 0.1°C from 2023.

Of course, as pointed out often by this publication and very many others, technically this does not mean that the 2017 Paris Accords target has been breached, as it is measured over a decade - not a single year. But the direction of travel is ominously clear. Every year in the past decade has been one of the 10 hottest and the C3S statistics also reveals that a record 44% of the planet was affected by strong to extreme heat stress on July 10 2024, and that the hottest day in recorded history struck on July 22.

The World Meteorological Organisation came to the same conclusion last week in a comprehensive report incorporating the findings of several regional climate monitoring institutes in Britain, China, the EU and the US, with four of the six international datasets crunched by the organisation indicating a higher than 1.5°C global average increase for the whole of last year (two did not).¹ The WMO further found that climate change added 41 days of "dangerous heat" in 2024, harming human health and ecosystems and, according to the World Weather Attribution - a body dedicated to studying extreme weather - climate change last year also "intensified" 26 of the 29 events that killed at least 3,700 people and displaced millions.

As *Weekly Worker* readers know, every added fraction of a degree in temperature brings more serious harm to people and ecosystems - and as every year seems warmer than the previous one, we are confronted with the frightening possibility that 2024 could turn out to be one of the *coolest* years of the century. No wonder that in his New Year's message UN secretary general, António Guterres, described this as "climate breakdown in real time" that humanity must somehow tackle to avoid complete disaster. He stressed that there is no time to lose, given the general picture of record-breaking rainfall, catastrophic flooding, scorching heat waves with temperatures exceeding 50°C and now the apocalyptic wildfires still burning in Los Angeles with untold consequences environmentally and economically.

Los Angeles

By the way, this is not simply due to global warming. Los Angeles has for long been a catastrophe waiting to happen. Back in 1998 Mike Davis published his *Ecology of fear*. Comrade Davis was, of course, a leading figure in the International Socialist Organisation, the now exploded Cliffite group in the US. Anyway, his book shows that uncontrolled expansion of "firebelt suburbs", a "notoriously inefficient water system" and a volatile environment made the city particularly vulnerable.² There were, for example, 13 firestorms in Malibu alone between 1930 and 1996. He wryly quotes the *Los Angeles Times* of 1934: "No place on earth offers greater security to life and greater freedom from natural disasters than



Hot, hot, hot

southern California." Davis also pours freezing cold water - pun intended - on the latest technological fix of his day: the CL-415 'Super-Scooper' amphibious aircraft capable of skimming the surface of lakes and loading up 14,000 gallons of water per fire drop. We have seen them in operation this month. To state the obvious, they have not solved the problem.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate residents of another US city, Phoenix, Arizona, have had to endure 113 consecutive days with a temperature hovering at or above 37.78°C. Indeed, the year 2024 in the US was marked by 24 weather/climate disasters, including tropical cyclones and two storms, causing billions of dollars in damages and at least 418 deaths.

Things are the same but different in the UK. The Met Office has recently released statistics showing that the country is heading outside of the "envelope of historical weather observations" - 2024 was provisionally the fourth warmest year on record for the UK going back to 1884, equalling the previous record set in 2023.³ With a mean temperature of 9.78°C (that is, 0.64°C above the 1991-2020 average), it follows 2022, 2023 and 2014 as the fourth warmest year for the UK. All top 10 warmest years have occurred since 2000, with five in the most recent decade 2015-24, with last year having the warmest May on record, second warmest February and fifth warmest December - 19.9°C was recorded on January 28 at Sutherland in Scotland (!), a UK record for that month. Last year was also another relatively wet year, with 1,242mm recorded, 107% of average rainfall, the UK getting its 8th wettest year, although not as wet as 2023 (ranked the fourth wettest).

Showing where things are going, the UK last year was no stranger to severe weather events, such as Storm Henk in January, Storm Lilian in August, and Storm Darragh in December - leading to widespread flooding, fallen trees, power outages, transport disruption and, tragically, fatalities.

Now, when it comes to global warming and record temperatures, we are obviously not talking about prehistoric times. We all know about

the Neoproterozoic, the Cretaceous, the Jurassic, the Mesozoic Era and all the rest of it - it was a lot hotter back then! But the point is that the planet has been slowly warming up since about 1850, and from around 1970 the pace of change has increased markedly - a phenomenon, as we have just seen above, that most scientists expect to carry on, whatever various countries decide to do or not do.

Will not stop

So, even if they shut down the entire car industry tomorrow and go over to 100% renewables, global warming will not stop. We are dealing with something like our favourite metaphor, the oil tanker - it cannot be quickly turned around, as heat continues to generate momentum in terms of global warming and the ice caps will keep melting throughout the 21st century.

The critical question confronting us now is not how to stop the planet warming up, but how much that warming can be limited, especially given that average temperatures will continue to rise more and more. You could console yourself with the thought that last year's temperatures were a freak occurrence because of the undeniable El Niño effect that is adding to global warming, and other contributing factors, such as a fall in pollution from shipping and in low-level clouds, both of which reflect sunlight. But the general expectation, shared by scientists and non-scientists alike, is that it will get warmer and warmer, and sadly the *lowest conceivable increase* above preindustrial times is now 1.9°C. Yet in terms of estimates, that can go up to something like 3.8°C by the end of the 21st century - a truly frightening prospect.

Of course, we do not know for sure that this will happen, because it is all about the decisions made by human beings and governments, and about what sort of society we have - one based on production for the sake of production, or a different logic. Yes, things could be limited to 1.9°C or we could shoot towards 4.0°C. But, if the worst outcome happened, then not only would the polar ice caps continue to melt: we would also get

a calamitous rise in sea levels, adding further to the heating effect and the possible inundation of a whole series of cities like Jakarta, Alexandria, Shanghai, Amsterdam, Houston, St Louis, etc. etc.

Inevitably, that would go hand in hand with the complete disruption of traditional agricultural patterns and practices, spelling disaster for millions of people. What if the wheat belt in North America disappeared, given that it is the breadbasket of much of the world? Or, if the most pessimistic estimates of global warming turn out to be correct, you could see a country like Britain becoming more like Labrador, as it is level with approximately mid-Canadian latitudes - meaning more foul weather, at least from our point of view: wetter, windier and danker. Indeed, one of the paradoxical effects of global warming on a country like Britain, famous for its mild climate, is that it could get a lot *colder* - especially if the Gulf Stream slowed down, or even collapsed entirely due to melting glaciers. It would no longer act as a heat transferor by taking warm waters from the Caribbean across the Atlantic to western Europe. By the same token, increased global warming could lead to untold millions of climate refugees.

This is not to say that we are talking about the end of the world, like in a Hollywood movie - the world has gone through many dramatic temperature shifts. But the threat to *existing civilisation* is real in terms of the mass movement of people leading to military conflict, wars and general societal collapses.

Socialism

For what it is worth, this paper has speculated for a while about the possibility of the capitalist state - looking at its own interests in terms of survival and taking draconian measures to limit CO₂ and methane emissions - severely restricting air travel, shipping, cars, and so on. But so far we have seen nothing apart from greenwashing exercises - one Cop conference after the other with plenty of fine resolutions, but very little in the way of action. Even when countries or leaders vote to limit the output of CO₂, there is an enormous gap between what they say and what they actually do - which is also true when it comes

to supplying finance to the so-called underdeveloped world that often takes the form of crippling loans or onerous conditions.

Needless to say, Donald Trump's second term can only make things worse - his administration is full of 'climate sceptics', putting it politely, or raving nutjobs, if you want to be less polite. Then we have Trump himself with his "drill, baby, drill" rhetoric.

Perhaps this is not immediately obvious, but the climate movement seems to have dramatically declined. It is not because people are no longer concerned with the climate. What needs to be done is broadly known. But in terms of demonstrations, pickets, high-profile stunts blocking motorways, blowing up pipelines, disrupting cultural events - none of this has worked. In fact, all we need to do is look at Britain and the vicious measures that have been taken against climate protestors in terms of legislation, but also prison sentences, which appear to have had a dampening effect on militancy. Ripert Read, a co-founder and former spokesperson of Extinction Rebellion, has completely surrendered, writing in the pages of *The Guardian* that "decarbonisation at the scale and speed we imagined isn't a feasible goal within our existing political and economic frameworks".⁴

More radical

Yes, true enough on one level, but that should spur you on to be even more radical - not less - and confront the capitalist system as a whole as responsible for runaway global warming and environmental destruction. In other words, moving beyond the politics of protest to the politics needed for coming to power. We are never going to convince the Trumps of the world, the Keir Starmers and Kemi Badenochs, the Macrons and Le Pens, which means we need to transition beyond capitalism, as socialism is the only rational answer. A big ask, but the only way forward.

Disastrously though, Read draws the opposite conclusion, thinking smaller because it is "time to stop fantasising about a decarbonised utopia and start acting on the resilience-building strategies that can protect our communities and steward a path through the rising tide of trouble that is coming our way" - which, for him, means working "at a local level by rewilding, saving water and fighting floods". Anti-capitalism and internationalism do not get a mention.

It goes without saying that communists are not opposed to any of those individual aims: quite the opposite. For instance, we have always advocated rewilding. But if these goals are not allied to a political strategy and programme to overcome capitalism, then they are doomed to failure - sticking our fingers in the dam, as disaster overwhelms us ●

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WILDFIRES

Atmospheric blow-dryer

Danny Hammill argues that the LA wildfires have been made hellishly worse by urban sprawl, budget cuts and, most of all, global warming

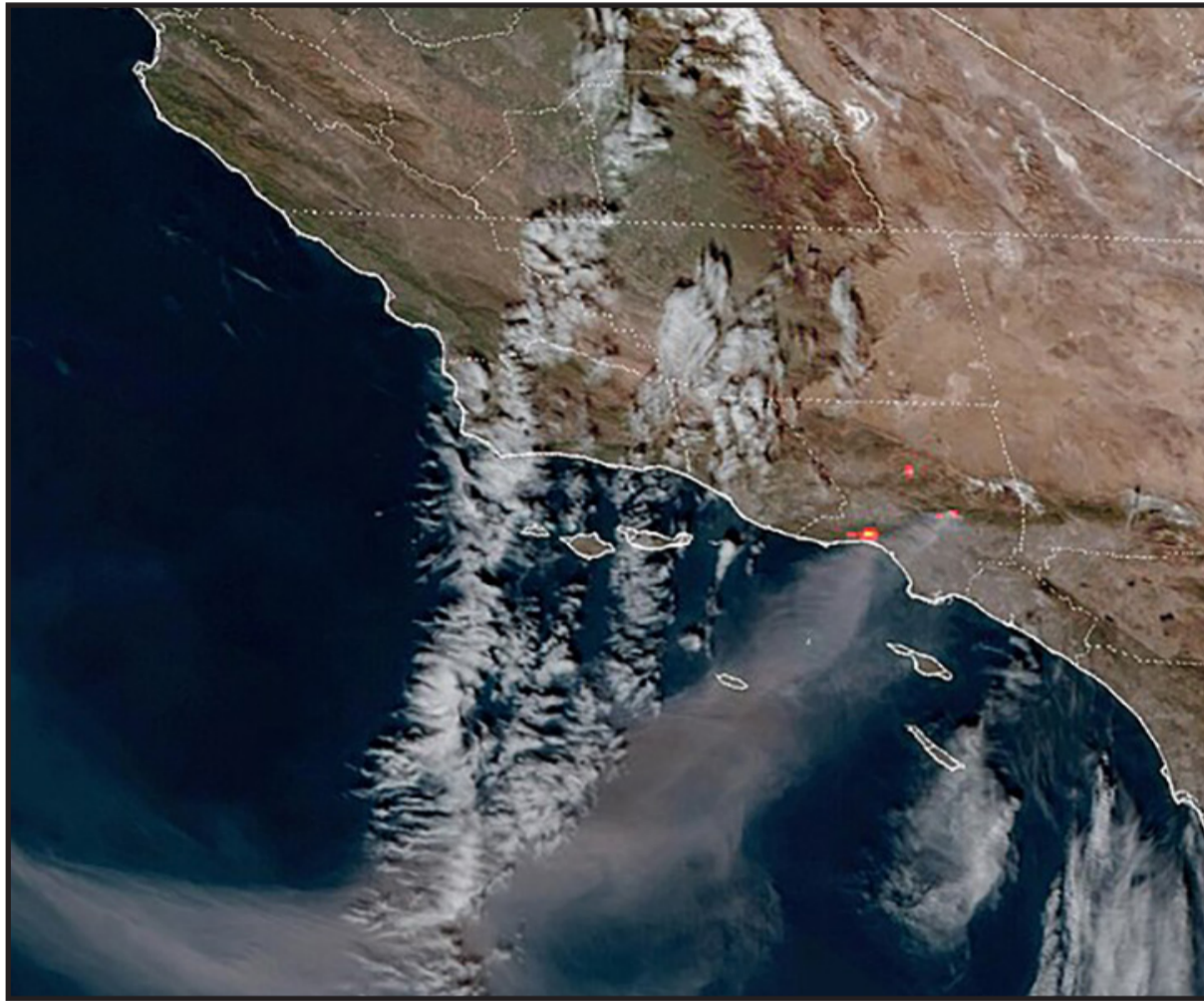
Los Angeles and parts of Ventura county to the north are experiencing yet another “particularly dangerous situation” (or PDS), due to the Santa Ana winds, which have gusts of up to 75mph or more.¹ This particular designation is meant to signal “the extreme of extremes” and was first used in the 1980s to alert people to tornado outbreaks in the Midwest, and some meteorologists want to expand PDS warnings to include disasters such as ice storms, floods, hurricanes, and now wildfires. Revealing the severity of the crisis, this is the fourth time in recent months that LA has faced PDS warnings, all of which resulted in major wildfires.

Southern California’s winds typically flow onshore from the Pacific, carrying moist air onto land, but the Santa Ana winds are currents that move in the opposite direction and typically occur from September through May. These very dry winds help to explain the catastrophic nature of the fires in regions that have been without significant rain for many months. They act as an “atmospheric blow-dryer” for vegetation. In a connected phenomenon, *embers* have helped spread the fires. Whilst you might think otherwise from looking at the endless apocalyptic images coming from California that instantly conjure up memories of Hollywood disaster movies, in fact most homes destroyed by the wildfires are not overcome by a racing wall of flames, but burn after being ignited by airborne embers - *firebrands* - that range in size from tiny specks to larger chunks and can travel for miles. A single ember that falls on the ground can burn out within minutes; but it might smoulder and a sudden wind gust has the potential to cause a lot of destruction by reigniting it. It is often the neighbourhoods that are closer to the wildlands that get inundated with embers, the winds allowing them to burn harder and release more energy - becoming a more potent ignition source. Firebrands can gather between the slats of wood fences, for example, or in shrubbery, and start new fires as they accumulate and the winds change direction.

Evacuations

Firefighting crews not only from California but also nine other states are rushing to the area as part of the response - we shall see whether that is sufficient. As of January 14, over 84,000 people had been warned they might be ordered to evacuate because of fire risk, while another 88,000 remained under current evacuation orders. So far, though unfortunately the number is almost bound to increase, 25 people have died from the fires and more than 12,000 structures have been destroyed.

Some estimates put the damage at about \$250 billion, making it the costliest fire in American history, and it could also become the costliest ever in terms of insured losses of possibly up to \$20 billion. Alas, this is very likely to spell another disaster, as it may also lead to higher homeowners’ insurance costs, if they can get insurance at all. Though space considerations preclude a detailed discussion here of the insurance nightmare facing many Americans, thousands of policy holders in Pacific Palisades in July were dropped by their insurers, State Farm. Remember, the Palisades is an area associated with the wealthy elite, such as A-list celebrities, actors,



California 2025 satellite image: burn, burn, burn

directors, etc.²

While the authorities do not know yet what sparked the deadly fires - some suggesting arson, without seeming to have any real evidence - there is a hunt for someone to blame, especially from the right. Donald Trump, of course, has blamed the Democrats - whether at the state or federal level - for the “mismanagement” of water, without telling us what he would have done differently. The Independent Institute, a far-right libertarian group based in California, blames the state government there for not having a purely privatised fire service that apparently would have been more careful with the availability and expenditure of water - a ludicrous notion, when quite the opposite is true.

Grotesquely, far-right ‘influencers’ and the likes of Elon Musk - who unfortunately has an opinion on everything these days - have used the wildfires as an opportunity to continue their attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion policies (DEI). The billionaire circulated screenshots on X of the Los Angeles Fire Department’s four-year-old ‘racial equity action plan,’ writing that “they prioritised DEI over saving lives and homes” - though it remained unexplained how this was the case, but it was a classic exercise in dog-whistle politics. Kristin Crowley, the city’s fire chief, is the first woman and openly gay person in that role - meaning that she and the city fire department immediately became targets in the rightwing media. Charlie Kirk, founder of the Trump-aligned non-profit organisation, Turning Point USA, ranted on his podcast about how the wildfires show what happens “when you focus your government on diversity, equity, inclusion, LGBTQ pet projects, and you are captured by environmentalists” - it means you are too “worried about abstractions” to

“do the basic stuff”.

Inevitably, there has been a furious debate about whether there have been cuts or not to the LAFD budget in 2024-25, and the general performance of Karen Brass, the Democratic mayor of LA since 2022. The governor of California, Gavin Newsom, has ordered an investigation into the city’s Department of Water and Power over the loss of water pressure and there is an online petition demanding Bass’s immediate resignation that has gathered support from a wide spectrum of political opinion.³ Elon Musk, of course, called the mayor “utterly incompetent” on X, but her defenders say that this year’s much smaller budget compared to the previous year should not be described as a “cut” because the LAFD got a budgetary boost to deal with particular expenses the year before. The LAFD was clearly understaffed and not for nothing did Kristin Crowley warn, in a letter published on December 4, that these cuts had “severely limited the department’s capacity to prepare for, train for and respond to large-scale emergencies, including wildfires”.

Meanwhile, the rightwing *New York Post* said the LA fire department had suffered cuts in their budget because too much was being spent on homeless services - an extraordinarily insensitive statement, given that so many residents had just become homeless overnight themselves - though the more moderate *The Intercept* said budget cuts were actually linked to extra funding for the police. Take your pick, because at the end of the day that money is fungible. At the same time, the middle classes in Los Angeles are beginning to blame the ultra-rich who have been disregarding the controls on water use through using sprinklers to keep their lawns green and making sure that their magnificent high-status swimming pools are still usable, and so on and so forth, with the result that there is not enough water available in the

reservoirs for fighting the fires. You can understand their grievances.

There are other factors at play, of course, like the role played by private energy monopolies, such as California’s Pacific Gas and Electric, and the state government’s failure to regulate it properly. Then there is the crazy level of house-building in the area that has been totally *unplanned*: dry brush, steep hillsides, high winds and packed timber buildings all combined amounts to a disaster waiting to happen. Environmental activists have warned for decades about the obvious risks of living in hillside neighbourhoods like Pacific Palisades - which has been largely incinerated and might never be rebuilt, especially if it is impossible to get insurance.

Unusually dry

But there can be no doubt that the LA fires were made hellishly worse by global warming. Hence we have had an unusually dry December and January in California, hugely increasing fire risk. Equally, there is a shortage of water, which to a considerable extent can be attributed to the drying out across the western United States as a result of the melting of the snowpack on the Rockies. In the same way, there are problems with water supplies in continental Europe as a result of retreating glaciers and all the rest of it. Donald Trump, of course, wants to “drill, baby, drill” and it is likely that various forms of sanctions and protectionism will be directed against anybody who wants to do climate mitigation activities of one sort or another.

Not exactly in a hurry, it appears, the president-elect has been engaged in talks about a visit to survey the damage in LA, which is almost enemy territory. Thus he has wittily called the Californian governor “Gavin Newsom” and bizarrely claimed that he “refused to sign the water

restoration declaration put before him” - a declaration that does not exist - because “he wanted to protect an essentially useless fish called the smelt”.⁴ This small fish (*hypomesus transpacificus*), once abundant a few decades ago, has almost disappeared in the 2010s due to massive water pumping in the fight against drought. Hardly a concern for climate deniers like Trump, who wants to continue supplying water to farmers regardless of the environmental consequences.

Joe Biden said last week that he prays the Trump administration continues the focus on the federal response to the deadly wildfires. But he could be disappointed, seeing how the House Speaker, Mike Johnson, believes that there should be “conditions” on disaster aid sent to California, as state and local leaders “were derelict in their duty”. He has not spelled out what those conditions are, but has admitted there have been conversations about tying a debt ceiling raise to the aid.

Positive

On a more positive note, it is encouraging that the wildfires have prompted people to rediscover the writings of Mike Davis, especially his brilliant 1998 work, *Ecology of fear*. But we should not forget his equally great works like *City of quartz: excavating the future in Los Angeles* or *Dead cities, and other tales*. He was a prominent figure in the now defunct International Socialist Organisation, the Clifite group in the US that voted to dissolve itself in 2019.

What we should particularly remember about *Ecology of fear* is Davis’s passionate argument for a far greater degree of planned housing in LA to minimise the dangers posed by the “lethal combination of homeowners and brush” that appeared in a chapter provocatively entitled, “The case for letting Malibu burn”. Discussing the Kinneloa Fire five years earlier,⁵ the comrade stated that “the conflagrations of 1993 came down grimly familiar pathways” with “no shortage of omens” - the fires driven by a combination of extremely dry and flammable vegetation, strong Santa Ana winds, and rugged topography. Sound familiar? Twenty years later, Davis wrote that too much new housing in California had been built “profitably but insanely, in high-fire-risk areas” - areas that fire experts call “the wildland-urban interface”.

Another great writer frequently mentioned in this context is Joan Didion and her 1968 essay about the Santa Ana winds that appeared in the highly recommended collection *Slouching towards Bethlehem*.⁶ She writes about LA weather being “the weather of catastrophe, of apocalypse” and “the violence and the unpredictability of the Santa Ana affect the entire quality of life in Los Angeles, accentuate its impermanence, its unreliability”. The winds “show us how close to the edge we are” ●

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MAGA

Rise of lifeboat imperialism

What's the big deal about Greenland? Paul Demarty examines Donald Trump's promised new wave of American continental colonial expansion

Before he has even returned to the White House, Donald Trump has already made waves with a newfound zeal for colonial expansion.

On his shopping list is Greenland, the vast arctic territory off the north-west of North America, currently under the sovereignty of Denmark, and the Panama canal, which connects the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. It is Greenland which has grabbed the headlines, given its huge territory and relative novelty as an American colonial target (the Panama canal was, of course, largely a US creation in the first place, Theodore Roosevelt having secured the 'independence' of Panama from Colombia as a US semi-colony for the purpose).

"For purposes of national security and freedom throughout the world, the United States of America feels that the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity," Trump told his followers on Truth Social, the far-right Twitter clone he still uses as his primary internet megaphone. His most stupid son, Don junior, was later spotted on a fact-finding mission on the huge island, promising to "Make Greenland Great Again". Trump senior, when pressed by journalists, refused to rule out the use of force in taking it (and the canal). Further excitement came when, in the course of a spat with Justin Trudeau, he suggested making Canada the 51st state of the union.

Long history

This all appeared to contemporary pundits probably more absurd than it should have done. They are simply not used to American politicians talking openly about colonial ambitions, since it has fallen out of fashion since World War II. US imperialism has since always come cloaked in the victim's supposed desire for 'freedom', which is to be selflessly sated from on high by the indispensable nation. An oddly decadent version of this idea can be found in Chris Cutrone's defence of the would-be Greenland purchase in *Compact*, which he justifies merely on the basis that America is the only truly revolutionary nation, the only one that truly believes in freedom, such that "all of America's opponents ... have been and remain slave states". (Needless to say, there is no room in such a windy historicist hermeneutic for the carpet-bombing of Cambodia.)¹

Conversely, Timothy Snyder - a Yale historian who has achieved some notoriety as an anti-Trump ranting over the last decade - argued on Twitter:

The way Trump [is] talking now about Greenland, Mexico, Panama and Canada plagiarises Putin in 2013, before the first invasion of Ukraine. All this stuff about borders not mattering, people secretly wanting to be ruled by us, the unreality of their countries - not very American, not even MAGA, but very Kremlin.²

Along with the rest of the 'resistance historians', who have fed the delusions of paranoid liberals by way of fatuous analogies and shameless presentism over this last period, Snyder has made a habit of making himself ridiculous. Even against such a background,



Trump's plan to make America even greater

however, this absurdity stands out. The United States was formed, after all, out of 13 colonies, which became 13 states with the revolution of 1776. There are, of course, 50 of them today. Two are obvious colonial possessions, not even being connected to the others by land (Alaska, purchased from Russia in 1867, as we suppose Trump intends to purchase Greenland from Denmark; and Hawaii, 2,000 miles into the Pacific, annexed after a great deal of skulduggery in 1898 and incorporated as a state in 1959).

The achievement of the present borders of the continental US in any case entailed a series of wars of conquest against indigenous populations, including the wholesale abrogation of various treaties and genocidal population transfers. It entailed a predatory war against Mexico in the 1840s, which secured territory from Texas to present-day California (though Mexico retained the isthmus of Baja California). There were other purchases, notably that of Louisiana from France.

That is to say nothing of the failed attempts - the 'filibusters' who tried to break Cuba from the rump Spanish empire repeatedly in the 1850s, the failed invasion of Canada during the war of 1812 (in all fairness, started by the British), the later plan to carve out a land corridor to Alaska through what is now British Columbia... the list goes on. It was possible in the mid-19th century for much of this to be blamed on the slave power in the south, whose inability to increase productivity produced an

especially virulent expansionism in land. Thus when, in 1860, the senator and eternal compromiser, John J Crittenden, made a last-ditch attempt to save the union by extending the line of demarcation between slave and free states to the Pacific for all time, the Republicans rightly rejected it as in effect "a perpetual covenant of war against every people, tribe and state owning a foot of land between here and Tierra del Fuego".³

Yet it turned out the problem was about more than slavery. Some of the worst atrocities against the native peoples were yet to come. In any case, beyond the United States themselves, there are a handful of colonial possessions, including Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. For a long time, there was also the Philippines, still today a major source of low-cost migrant labour.

What, then, is the use of Greenland - its importance to national security? (We can forget freedom throughout the world for now.) There is, first of all, its rich deposits of raw materials, including oil, various metals, precious stones and rare earth minerals. The latter are maybe the most strategically compelling, since oil - despite its continuing importance - is to be found in greater quantities elsewhere. The rare earths are of increasing importance to novel industries (most obviously the batteries necessary for modern electric vehicles, electronic devices and so forth). China has a strong hand in this trade - disturbingly, from a US point of view - with ample supplies of its own and

favourable relations with other producers via its 'belt and road' initiative. Seizing a vast source of these valuable minerals would be a strategic boon for the US.

Cooked

Many of the other attractions come down, ultimately, to global warming, for all Trump affects not to take it seriously. There is the mere matter that Greenland is so large. As the atmosphere warms, the ice sheet that covers more than three quarters of its territory will shrink, increasing the potentially habitable territory - just as the danger arises that substantial parts of the existing USA may be made uninhabitable by the same changes. The existing population, largely Inuit, is so small as to be an irrelevance from the point of view of colonisation of this very old-fashioned sort.

There is, finally, a strategic angle too. Greenland is not the only thing that is melting. Shrinking ice sheets are opening sea routes in the Arctic. The Russian government is already investing in making trade easier off its own vast Arctic coast, creating new fleets of icebreakers and the like. China recently declared itself to be, in some sense, an Arctic power, suggesting it has its own designs in this respect. Acquiring Greenland has obvious strategic benefit in the new wave of great power competition.

All this frenetic activity on the part of the world's security states somewhat belies the official optimism expressed at the various Cop climate conferences and the like, that we are in the midst of something called the 'green

transition', and that, if everyone does their bit, we will prevent catastrophe. But it is clear from the actions of the great powers that in their view, or at least in the view of factions of their state cores, that we are - as the kids say today - already cooked.

Of those great powers, only China can be said to have made any real effort towards a 'green transition' (from an exceptionally dirty starting point), and its success in cornering the market for renewable energy infrastructure has had the effect not of shaming the US into catching up, but provoking it into more and more extravagant acts of economic sabotage. For all the talk of green infrastructure, it was plain that the Biden administration's policy was that it was better for the roll-out of renewables to be stalled completely than for China to be the main beneficiary.

Trump, as ever, represents not some huge strategic revolution, but America's loss of belief in its own comforting lies. Greenland must be had at any cost, so we can get one over on the Chinese. As its ice sheet melts, it will be covered with those great achievements of American freedom - lithium mines, vulgar suburban housing, branches of Chuck-E-Cheese - to serve as a place of retreat, as California burns, Florida returns to the sea and temperatures in the south-west exceed the limits of human habitability; and it will be an unsinkable naval base to control what new trade goes on in the far north.

In the early 1970s, Garrett Hardin, the ecological thinker most famous for the tragedy of the commons thought experiment, offered another, which has become known as 'lifeboat ethics'. Imagine the countries of the world as lifeboats cast off a sinking ship. Some - the rich countries - are relatively well appointed and have limited spare capacity. Others - the poor countries - are overcrowded and in poor repair. Frequently people are cast away, and try to find a berth elsewhere. But, if the 'rich' lifeboats try to take on too many drowning souls, they too will be endangered. Thus, in utilitarian terms, the rich countries may be justified in hoarding their resources and putting up hard borders.

Putting to one side the problems with Hardin's Malthusianism, what seems to be going on with the Greenland business - at least if Trump is serious, and there is no real reason to doubt it - is a kind of lifeboat imperialism. It is as if the sailors of one of the 'rich' lifeboats piratically boarded another so as to have more room, or a back-up plan if a leak is sprung. Since the capitalist world order has shown itself utterly incapable of the kind of coordinated action needed to actually face ecological disaster, the only remaining option is a new scramble among the great powers to ensure that the worst consequences are faced by others.

As Thucydides had it, the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must ●

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Where the Tories left off

The 'elective reform plan' clearly indicates that NHS privatisation and general deterioration will continue under this current iteration of government, writes James Linney

On January 6 Sir Keir Starmer headed to a surgical hub in Epsom to unveil Labour's 'elective reform plan' - the party's proposals for reducing the colossal National Health Service waiting times for non-emergency 'elective care' medical treatment.

There are currently 7.5 million cases on waiting lists, representing 6.28 million individual patients awaiting treatment; 3.1 million of these people have been waiting more than 18 weeks, with significant numbers (234,900) over a year.¹ Labour has pledged that by the end of this financial year 65% of patients will not have to wait more than 18 weeks for treatment and that by the end of this parliament 92% will be meeting this target - a target that has not been met since 2015.

The reform plan, we were told by Starmer at the conference, included opening more diagnostic centres; increasing the use of specialist consultant advice and guidance access for general practitioners to avoid patients having hospital appointments; expanding the use of the NHS App, so patients can check how long waiting lists are or pick alternative hospitals for their care; the use of AI in healthcare provision; and extending the use of private hospitals to provide elective care and operations.

Let us look at each one of these measures in turn, because, on the face of it, primarily focusing on bringing down waiting times and even the measures being forwarded in this plan sound fairly reasonable. Starting with the opening of more diagnostic centres - not a new idea, as has been pointed out by opposition MPs - this is basically a 'copy and paste' Tory policy, but, even so, more easy access to scans and other investigations for GPs without having to wait for hospital consultant appointments is not a terrible idea. The problem is that this is not really going to impact the overall workload in any meaningful way.

GPs already have direct access to most X-rays and scans, without having to wait too long to get them. More invasive or specialist investigation might be restricted to specialist consultants, but this is for a good reason: GPs are not specialists, and the problem with carrying out specialist diagnostics is that GPs still rely on hospital specialist teams to interpret the results and treat the patients, so they are still going to need hospital appointments.

Getting GPs to directly access more specialist tests shares the same problem with the second proposal of Starmer's reform plan - ie, allowing GPs to access hospital consultant advice and guidance without the need of a formal appointment. This will mean 800,000 fewer hospital appointments, we are told, but in reality this is not actually reducing work: just transferring it from secondary (hospital) care to primary (GP) care.

As everyone knows, GP surgeries are currently in just as much of a crisis as hospitals. Proportionally, primary care has had its funding squeezed even more than other areas of the NHS - this, along with the severe staffing deficits and increasing demand for appointments, has left many GP staff burnt out and surgeries having to close down, and many more on the brink. The most recent GP contract proposal is only



Wes Streeting (left): relying on profiteers

going to make the situation more dire and has forced GPs to vote to take industrial action, which started back in June 2024; we will likely see GPs vote in favour of renewing this collective action in the coming months.

Privatisation

Moving on to Labour's proposal to use more private companies to provide elective care, such as operations, this should not come as any surprise - Labour has been promising to do this ever since Starmer became leader. Courting the private health industry has been one way he has been able to signal to the capitalist class in general that his leadership, and the subsequent purge of Labour's leftwing membership, means a final end to Jeremy Corbyn's 'threat'.

Thus we are told that Starmer wants to make private health access to the NHS "broader" and more "comprehensive". He frames this as a necessary and practical way of giving "working people" more choice and reduced waiting times and tells us he is not going to let anything as ridiculous as "ideology" get in his way. This contempt for ideology is another manifestation of Starmer's one real obsession - his continuing crusade against the left. Of course, he and his health minister, Wes Streeting, are hardly setting aside ideology: they are simply choosing an *alternative* ideology - one where they do not just continue the Tory privatisation of the NHS, but actually supercharge it.

When Wes Streeting was challenged about this increase in private healthcare, he responded: "I'm entirely pragmatic about this ... The independent healthcare sector isn't going anywhere, and it can help us out of the hole we're in. We would be mad not to."

He went on to reassure us that the private health sector is going to have to "pull its weight". Clearly he knows that private health has only one objective here: profit

accumulation. So we cannot put his ridiculous statement down to stupidity or naivety - this can only be wilful deceit. Both Streeting and Starmer rarely talk about their reforms without reminding us how dedicated they are to the NHS, and how they will ensure it remains free at the point of use. It is indeed unlikely that Labour would introduce NHS charges, but clearly, expanding of the transfer of public funding directly to private health companies is just another way of privatising the NHS, and it is the "working people" (working class) who will continue paying for this, while their health deteriorates.

Even in the short term, the private sector's 'help' in reducing waiting lists, which might help Starmer claim he has met his targets (although even this is unlikely), is clearly harmful to the NHS and its patients. As the Centre for Health and the Public Interest, which tracks NHS privatisation, has said, "Put simply, private hospitals are unable to deliver any operations without using NHS consultant surgeons or anaesthetists ... Letting NHS consultants do the easy work in the private sector starves the NHS of both staff and income."

In the reform plan announcement Starmer claimed the proposed increased use of private health will save the NHS as much as a million extra appointments a year. This would mean a 20% increase in private health's NHS appointment provision (which already sees them provide about five million outpatient appointments, diagnostic tests and operations a year) and represents an extra £2.5 billion a year in government funding for private care providers.² As Dr Tony O'Sullivan, co-chair of Keep Our NHS Public, has said, these reform proposals are simply "feeding the parasite [which] undermines the health of the NHS host".³

Regarding artificial intelligence, we have recently heard that Sir Keir wants Britain to become a 'world

leader' in AI technology, and he plans on this becoming a major player in the NHS - providing technology that "works for the patient". He was very light on any details, but we must be highly suspicious. This new technology will likely be another avenue through which private companies (this time big tech) get NHS funding, whilst not working 'for' patients but mining their data to sell it on to the highest paying interested party.

One thing very evident at the tightly managed, media-friendly event on January 6, which took place at a calm surgical hub, surrounded by hand-picked staff and media pundits: it was far removed from the reality of the NHS emergency rooms and packed wards up and down the country. On the one hand, Starmer promised us an NHS using AI to give patients personalised, high-tech healthcare at the touch of a button. On the other, in emergency departments up and down the country suffering and dying people are stacked up in corridors or strewn across waiting room floors for hours or even days, like victims of some kind of war.

The current winter season is leaving hospitals up and down the country on the brink of collapse, with more than 20 hospital trusts declaring 'critical incidents' in the past week due to the extreme pressure. A critical incident indicates that care is beyond the capacity of a particular hospital service and thus it will be unable to function normally. Usually this means having to discharge patients earlier than planned, cancel elective operations or divert patients to other hospitals. Such incidents have been normalised over the past decade. Normalised too are the astronomical accident and emergency waiting times, which are now often routinely above 12 hours. Recently the Royal Liverpool University Hospital reported waiting times of up to 50 hours. It has been estimated that A&E waiting times are associated with 14,000 excess

deaths a year.⁴

Ambulance response times are just as harmful. As *The Guardian* reported, "Paramedics in England are unable to respond to 100,000 urgent 999 calls every month because they are stuck outside hospitals waiting to hand over patients, endangering thousands of lives."⁵

Continuation

With these truly horrifying statistics in mind, let us remind ourselves that Labour's October budget failed to include any additional support to mitigate this winter's crisis. Additionally we heard last week that Labour now intends to delay its promise to try to help rescue adult social care until the completion of an independent commission in 2028 - by which time there might not be much left to reform.

Social care is in an even worse state than the NHS. Those too frail or sick to look after themselves have been getting sub-standard care for years, while care staff are woefully underpaid, overworked and not given the training they need. This commonly leads to people being neglected and vulnerable to deterioration. Those with social care needs often spend long periods in hospital, because of the lack of adequate care provision available in the community - all of which severely exacerbates the shortage of NHS beds.

In the media we have heard much about the 'quademic' - a term used to highlight relatively high levels of four circulating winter infections: influenza, respiratory syncytial virus, covid and norovirus. It has also been a year of high levels of flu: there were on average about 5,400 patients in hospital each day last week as a result. Although this clearly is a bad year for winter viruses, the numbers are not particularly unusual or unexpected. Flu infections vary each year and a bad year like this one happens fairly often - if, say, infections start earlier in the season or the flu vaccine has a slightly lower effectiveness against this season's strain.

But let me be clear: the current crisis is not due to the 'quademic' or the recent bad weather - these are predictable, fairly normal seasonal variations and should not bring our health service to its knees. The problem lies with the state of the NHS - the continued and unrelenting defunding, which has taken place over the past 15 years, the lack of investment in replacing and expanding staff and the transfer of NHS resources to private health companies. None of these problems are touched on in Labour's 'elective reform plan', but sadly there is plenty here to suggest that the NHS will continue to be treated no better under the current iteration of government than it was under the last ●

Notes

1. www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/nhs-backlog-data-analysis.
2. www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jan/06/private-sector-cutting-nhs-waiting-lists-england-keir-starmer.
3. www.independent.co.uk/voices/keir-starmer-pfi-nhs-privatisation-wes-streetering-jeremy-corbbyn-b2675678.html.
4. eachother.org.uk/nhs-waiting-times-likely-to-be-causing-14000-related-excess-deaths-a-year.
5. www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/12/ambulance-crews-stuck-at-ae-miss-thousands-of-999-calls-a-day-in-england.

POLEMIC

Anti-partyist partyism

Mike Macnair continues his series of articles on the 'party question' by turning to the negative critique and unsupported spin of Lawrence Parker

This is the fourth part of my discussion of some of the interventions in the discussion on the left 'party question' since September. It is addressed to Lawrence Parker's arguments. Though more extensive in ostensible scope, these are actually addressed primarily to arguing for the liquidation of the existing organised group of CPGB members that publishes this paper. (We use the name CPGB, but recognise that we are not a party. As we say in *What we fight for*, "There exists no real Communist Party today", or in "About us", "There is no proto-party, and the main task facing the working class movement is to construct one in the here and now.")

There are notoriously '57 varieties' of far-left groups. But there are at least 5,700 varieties of far-left groups of *one member*, otherwise called 'independent lefts'. Both phenomena are driven by one principle: anti-factionalism, unwillingness of minorities to work as a minority faction in the hope that splitting will lead them to success in fresh fields and pastures new, and unwillingness of majorities to put up with the allegedly time-wasting 'talking to ourselves' of minorities.

The 'independents' take the view - essentially for the same reason: unwillingness to be in a minority - that the existing organisations are worse than no organisation at all. As a result, when the 'independents' attempt to unite against 'the sects', they produce 'Heath Robinson' constitutions designed to protect individual rights and to protect themselves against the evil 'Leninist sects', and, as a result, caricatures of the Labour Party.

Comrade Parker offers a purely negative critique of the far-left groups, including - and especially - the CPGB/*Weekly Worker*. But, in reality, negative critique contains an implicit positive. It has become transparent that the purely negative critique offered by Platypus contains the implicit positive of US-patriotism.¹ Comrade Parker's purely negative critique of the groups analogously contains the implicit positive of the ideology of 'left independent'-ism. The struggle to remain in the realm of negative critique leads him into falsification of the character of CPGB as a group (supposedly "North Korean"!).

I begin with the question of the press, posed by comrade Woodrow's letter of November 28 in response to my November 21 article, 'What sort of party?', my response in my article 'What sort of partyism?' (December 5), and comrade Parker's letter replying to that point (December 12). From there I move on to comrade Parker's direct contribution to the *Prometheus* discussion, 'The Communist Party: yesterday and tomorrow';² and from there in turn to comrade Parker's elaborated arguments in a series of posts on his blog: both directly against the CPGB/*Weekly Worker* and around the idea that 'little Lenins' is a culture flaw fatal both to the old pre-1991 CPGB and to the modern far left.

Press

In my original November 21 article, I argued that the fundamental task of a party is not to coordinate strike, etc, struggles, but to offer a *political voice* for the working class that can attempt



'Morning Star's CPB: premature obituary

to break the capitalists' monopoly of political voices and choices at the level of 'high politics'. I argued that this task had three elements: offering a general programme; a party media, especially a regular press; and electoral work. I said:

The second element is publishing an alternative to the capitalists' advertising-funded media, and especially the national press, which drowns out oppositional speech by the amplification of the proprietor's and his editor's voices and thereby helps enforce the choice between the 'party of order' and the 'party of liberty'. This point is important.

It is quite widely believed that various forms of pure online publication can do the job of a party press. But, in reality, this sort of publication, because it is not fully regular, cannot be agenda-setting in the way that the Murdoch and Harmsworth press are agenda-setting on the right. On the left, the *Morning Star*, in spite of the numerical weakness of the Communist Party of Britain, continues to be agenda-setting (as is very visible in the history of Corbynism, but also in the character of the Socialist Workers Party's 'united front' operations).

The absence of advertising subsidy requires party backing; the *Morning Star* partly substitutes backing from China, etc in the form of public library subscriptions; the weeklies (*Socialist Worker*, *The*

Socialist, Communist, Solidarity, Weekly Worker ...) can only operate with considerable efforts to raise party funds.

Comrade Woodrow responded:

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

Macnair says the issue is that, unlike print media, online media "is not fully regular", but this isn't strictly true. The practicalities of print production obviously force you into a rhythm of periodic releases of larger bundles of content, and that can certainly help with agenda-setting, but it doesn't have to be regular. *Salvage* and *Notes From Below* are both print publications that are not "fully regular", operating with a more or less flexible schedule, depending on capacity, priorities, etc. Conversely, there is nothing to stop the editors of a purely online publication from operating

a newspaper-style schedule if they thought that was appropriate (albeit there may be countervailing incentives, encouraging them to run a different schedule).

I replied:

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

Comrade Parker's December 12 letter responds quite violently, accusing me of fetishising the print form - and, as *Marxism Today* types (and other opponents of the maintenance of a party press) accused their opponents, of failing to understand how the capitalist media really works. He alleges that: "The whole idea that comrade Macnair appears to be

promoting - that we can rely on something that merely replicates the current singular production set-up of the *Weekly Worker* (lord, save us) to set agendas in the future - is a virulent sect fantasy." He does not answer at all my points about the continued dominance of agenda-setting by the regular capitalist press on the right and by the *Morning Star* on the left.

I am not particularly committed to the print form.³ Nor would a press that ran on less of a shoestring than the *Weekly Worker* display its "current singular production set-up". But my original point was that purely online publication forms "not fully regular" could not play the agenda-setting role. The agenda-setting role arises because the publications in question are regular; frequent; persistent over years; and edited to spin the stories they publish in favour of the publication's political line.

Producing a regular daily, which could be agenda-setting, would take just as much in the way of journalistic, editing and tech resources if it published online as producing a regular print daily. It would thus also still be seriously expensive. The same is true for a weekly (digital or print), or, indeed, for a monthly. This is reflected in the fact that left groups who have thought that online publication could be *more* speedily responsive to the news have found in practice that it is less so. The lack of regularity means that the resources are not committed to produce regularity. These resources may, at need, be redeployed for instant response.

Comrade Parker says that "A huge chunk of that work [of a communist party of thousands] will need to be done through a rich diversity of online publications, whether older comrades like it or not. Let a thousand digital flowers bloom." Certainly. But that is not an argument against having a central press/media that attempts to engage at the level of the capitalist press. *Counterposing* the "thousand digital flowers" to this task is precisely to abandon the field to the capitalist press (and, more immediately, to the *Morning Star*).

Yesterday

I drew an analogy above between comrade Parker's method of negative immanent critique and that of Platypus - as containing an implicit positive. There is a second analogous result of this method: as I observed of Platypus two years ago, it tends to produce premature obituaries of existing political trends.⁴ In 'The Communist Party: yesterday and tomorrow' this problem is at work already in the assessment of the old CPGB, in the sense that he reproduces the standard Trotskyist rejection of the old CPGB as being a "sect" - as comrade Parker puts it, "a non-sect in process of becoming a part-sect" - already in decline in this way in the 1930s.

But this is to imagine, on the one hand, that the mere fact of regroupment implies not being a sect (which would lead us to believe that the Atlanticists for Workers' Liberalism or Anti-Capitalist Resistance are not sects; but in both cases regroupment leads not to *Aufhebung* of the original group, but to its reassertion as politically *narrower*); and, on the other hand, that control by central bureaucracy implies being a sect (which would lead to the conclusion that the Labour Party, or the Communist Party of China, are sects).

The real question is whether the

old CPGB was a *party*, meaning, a real part of the workers' vanguard that was understood by the broad vanguard in general as pursuing an independent political project, and not merely a fractional sub-group. And this the old CPGB clearly was throughout its life. It took its character as a party from the 1914-20 split in socialism and the authority of the Russian Revolution: it lost it when it abandoned this link, finally in 1991. In between it started out with around 5,000 members, rising to a peak of 12,000 in 1926 and falling back to a low of 2,500 in 1930; but then it grew steadily through the 1930s, reaching 20,000 by 1940 and 56,000 by 1942, falling to 42,000 in 1946; down to 33,000 in February 1956 and 25,500 in February 1957. From this point the membership rose in the late 1960s to early 1970s, to reach just over 30,000 in 1973, before declining precipitously in the late 1970s and 1980s to 7,600 in 1989 and then 4,700 at dissolution in 1992.⁵

The old CPGB was thus a minority party - perhaps analogous to the Liberals in their 'telephone box' phase, or the nationalists before their rise. Equally, comrade Parker argues:

In what became a default setting, pretty much until its liquidation in 1991, the CPGB instead sought to step around the advanced political workers clustered around the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party and so on in order to appeal to the more immediate demands of the proletariat (or at least those immediate demands that communists imagined workers should make).

This is a very curious characterisation of the considerable influence of the old CPGB on the Labour left and in particular of the 'British road' and 'Alternative economic strategy' in the Labour Party of the 1970s.

Comrade Parker's account of the history of the old CPGB is grounded on his own expertise in the inner life of the party and its factions. But the effect is *spun* in the direction of the idea that the history is *entirely* an internal dialectic. Thus

... by the 1970s, a patchwork of left factions and local groupings had started to develop alternative structures and lines of command. This, and the complete failure of the *BRS* strategy, pushed the CPGB into overt crisis and the leadership faction into the arms of a small Eurocommunist circle, which took over parts of the bureaucracy, started to expel the left and liquidate any remaining party élan.

The CPGB can thus be seen as the negation of the process of communist unity that birthed it ...

This understates radically the "élan" of the *Marxism Today* group, which conveyed real dynamism and made inroads in the academy, in the Labour 'soft left', and in the 'social movements' (the last at the expense of the far left). The problem was that, as a guy who left the CPGB in the late 1970s, characterising it as reformist, and joined the Labour Party, said at the time, "If I'm going to be in a reformist party it might as well be a big one" - *Marxism Today* issued in Blairism.

The underlying driver of the 1980s collapse was neither the factions nor the "complete failure of the *BRS* strategy", which could only be properly said to have "completely failed" when its foundations in the gradual extension of the "socialist camp" failed in 1989-91. It was, rather, the influence of Eurocommunism as an *international* trend, driving the "broad democratic alliance" conception rightwards to take distance from the Soviet regime both by making clearer rule-of-law constitutionalist commitments, and by deepening

methodological nationalism. Comrade Parker's account of a CPGB driven by its own *internal* logic to destruction internalises this methodological nationalism.

Pretenders

The second half of comrade Parker's article has the subhead, "The pretenders". It consists of *Private Eye*-style sardonic capsule sketches of a series of currently existing groups, all taken to be in different ways hopeless.⁶ The only (limited) hope comrade Parker sees is in the Woods-Sewell Revolutionary Communist Party': "Children who try on their parents' clothes look ridiculous, as has the RCP at times when it has garlanded itself with majestic 'Communist Party' garb. But even as they look ridiculous, projecting yourself into the future and seeing something else in the looking glass has human potential."

This thin positive reflects comrade Parker's general sympathy for voluntarist stunts (also seen in his approval of the Young Communist League's 'left period' a few years ago⁷). On the other hand, his characterisation of the RCP as "wearing new 'Communist Party' robes to catch a small tide of activists tuned into Leninism" almost certainly misses the point, which is that Socialist Appeal picked up students not by virtue of "Leninism", but by offering students a *Marxist* alternative to the discourse of 'intersectionality' dominant among left academics and also among the bulk of the far left.

This failure to see a dynamic at work is also reflected in comrade Parker's characterisation of the revival of Maoism - not just in Britain, but elsewhere - seen here in the recently increased visibility of the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist). Comrade Parker sees this *only* as "run by the Brar family dynasty on strictly North Korean lines" (it is not clear what comrade Parker knows about CPGB(ML)'s internal life to justify this conclusion), and as having "a set of abhorrent social attitudes: its transphobia is essentially the homophobia of founder members in the Maoist movement of the 1960s, transplanted into the modern era".

A few years ago Maoism looked nearly dead, but it has to some limited extent revived. If we ask why, the answer is plainly enough the renewed salience of imperialism in early 21st century politics: Maoism was always the tendency that took Lenin's diagnosis of imperialism and the relevant theses of the early congresses of Comintern and ran with them. Moreover, in spite of the evolution of the People's Republic of China towards capitalism (and imperialism), the 2008 global crash and the USA's turn, under Obama,⁸ to an anti-China policy, has led the Chinese leadership to stress socialist credentials. Meanwhile, neoliberal cuts in state welfare have issued in the necessary 'other' of liberalism: the revival of the politics of nation and family, with the result that George Galloway's "nationalist Workers Party of Britain, which left our erstwhile revolutionaries fronting rightist law-and-order campaigns,"⁹ did better than most left groups in the 2024 general election. Comrade Parker's diagnosis thus offers a premature obituary.

In the case of the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain it is necessary to observe that we in this paper were *also* guilty of premature obituaries of the CPB: in the early 2000s, it appeared that this organisation was failing to reproduce itself generationaly (we in CPGB were then briefly recruiting among students). Plainly no longer true: having fallen to a low of 772 around 2015 (probably reflecting flight into the Labour left) CPB membership climbed to 1,300 in 2023.

We failed to recognise that

'official' communism still has wide political support in the workers' movement, which in Britain has the effect of boosting the *Morning Star* and therefore lending support to the CPB from outside. Comrade Parker's method of analysing *only* the internal dynamics leads, again, to a premature obituary:

The CPB, like the RCP, is very much a disaster waiting to happen, given its members have been enthusiastically sold the idea of massive growth and it has some newer cadres who seem to care about the faction in a way that the elderly membership never did in the 1990s. Always a problem when someone cares about you.

Comrade Parker actually offers no evidence to support this judgement, other than his previous premature obituary of the *British road to socialism*, which he claims "had strategic goals that were a dead letter as early as 1950".

Comrade Parker's premature obituaries would clear the way for a wholly new partyism (as Platypus's premature obituaries of the left were supposed to clear the way for a new *theoretical* beginning of the left). But at least one of the zombies still needs, in comrade Parker's view, to be killed off. This is the CPGB, because it is in his view a sect - and a personal cult round Jack Conrad - which pretends to be partyist.

Mean talk

Comrade Parker's argument against the CPGB consists essentially in the idea that, because Jack Conrad has been in the central leadership for 44 years, the organisation is *ipso facto* a sect. The argument occupies about a third of his article for *Prometheus*. It is then elaborated at considerable length in four blog posts.¹⁰

Comrade Parker admits that (as I have also argued in the past¹¹) it is problematic for the left to do without long-service volunteers at all: "Most comrades on the left have to rely on wage labour under capitalism to survive. Full-time work on the far left is not viewed positively by prospective bourgeois employers. Factions have to rely upon a small caste of bureaucrats to ensure the most basic of tasks are conducted." But his argument actually is for *merely* doing without. This is linked to his position on the press, that "a thousand digital flowers" will do the job.

It is clearly not a strength of the CPGB that comrade Conrad has been in the leadership for 44 years. But it is a *reflection* of our weakness; not the cause of it. Comrade Parker engages in dishonest journalistic spin to exaggerate comrade Conrad's control. He gives me poisonous compliments as being "better" than comrade Conrad because I am less sharp in polemic. He wholly disregards comrade Yasmine Mather's political contribution. He pretends that Paul Demarty and other contributors to the *Weekly Worker* are mere puppets for Conrad.

There is a load of unsupported spin, so that, for example, he says that "despite formal freedoms inside the CPGB-PCC, people who fall out with the comrade, personally or politically, are marginalised or pushed out. Conrad abuses a recommended list for the leadership to ensure it remains a body with which he is entirely comfortable." One might expect that the footnote would provide evidence for the proposition; in fact, it merely says that "I am not against recommended lists in principle."

He argues that the CPGB periodically tries to "bypass far-left rivals". His evidence for this proposition is overt strike support work in 1992-93, a period immediately after the liquidation of the old official CPGB (so that what could be

recovered from the liquidation was not clear), and a period in which comrade Parker has previously *celebrated* the early CPGB-PCC's voluntarist "élan".¹² The second is:

Similarly, during the Corbyn era in the Labour Party, the CPGB-PCC ran its own cloistered and sectarian front, Labour Party Marxists (formally in existence since late 2011, but you could not join unless you were a CPGB-PCC member; even close sympathisers were excluded). Other Marxists inside the Labour Party were bypassed, as the faction attempted to take a short cut to the Corbynistas. Again, the CPGB-PCC got precious close to zero from this venture, bar an internal conflict that rumbles on to this day.

Labour Party Marxists was certainly a front: an attempt, not at any sort of regroupment, but to create a "semi-legal" form of publication and organisation within the Labour Party. Any left group attempting to operate in the Labour Party is obliged to use such a tactic. The "internal conflict" was about participation in attempts to construct a new Labour *broad* left project, along with the long-time broad-frontists of *Labour Briefing*, by CPGBers engaging in diplomatic silence on aspects of communist programme unacceptable to *Briefing*-ites. It should be said that the CPGB was only concerned to get the right to *put our positions to the vote* in the broad front - not planning to split if they were voted on and lost. The other side of the debate in the CPGB on this issue *also* got zero. In reality, the far left *in general* got zero from the Corbyn movement: Socialist Appeal (now RCP) grew very modestly outside Labour.

This is a really fundamental point, because in his three blog posts, comrade Parker argues that the basic problem with the CPGB's "culture" is an inappropriate commitment to "hardness", which, he claims, derives from a false (official CPGB) image of Lenin that produces "brittle Bolshevism".

The Corbyn movement was a large mass movement, into paying for membership of the Labour Party in order to vote for Corbyn. But, on the one hand, the Corbynista leaders themselves were committed to Labour as a broad party with unity with the right (who were determined to knife the Corbynistas) and promoted the idea of a new, 'kinder', 'grass roots' politics as the 'branding' for this project. The existing Labour far left were committed to broad-frontism towards the Corbyn leadership.¹³ The ex-far leftists who went into the party did so with similar agendas of broad-frontism towards the left leaders, which the SWP, CPB, Socialist Party in England and Wales and so on have been promoting without actually joining Labour.

The newly radicalising forces *also* expected a new, 'kinder', 'grassroots' politics - that was what Corbyn had offered them. They did not expect a hard, prolonged fight with the Labour right, involving not just clicktivism, but regular in-person attendance at very tedious meetings, and standing up to abuse and bullying by the Labour right and the capitalist press. The result was that very many of them just dropped out, and the right retained control not just of the apparatus, but of many constituencies.

The question of "hardness", then, is not a matter of illusions of Bolshevism. It is needed in *present-day politics* because we need to recognise that we are a minority - and a minority which the ruling regime seeks to silence. It seeks to silence us by overt censorship (like that currently being applied to Palestine

activists). But not just that. It seeks to silence us by drowning out dissenting voices by subsidy (which we can only begin to combat by *organising* to publish, which requires resources and actual organisation). And it also seeks to silence us by demands for civility. I have made this point before in argument with comrade Parker and others; and in 2016 against the Labour right's complaints of 'bullying' by the left.¹⁴

All this means that we need *obstinacy* in defending minority positions, and "hardness" in doing so against the pressure to be more accommodating to majority views. Comrade Parker's elaborate polemic against "brittle Bolshevism" attempts to negate the organised far left's efforts to take differences seriously. It would leave us merely with the dominant broad-leftism and speech controls in the name of "safe spaces", "intersectionality" and "civility". The result of this policy is visible from the outcome of the Corbyn movement ●

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Notes

1. I do not say 'social-patriotism' because there now does not seem to be any 'social' element in it.
2. prometheusjournal.org/2024/11/29/the-communist-party-yesterday-and-tomorrow.
3. Except insofar as the present very visible drift towards censorship may in the not too distant future have the result that full illegality of the far left entirely closes off our access to online publication and forces us to print somewhere overseas and smuggle stuff in. Since this is not something any of the current groups are capable of, it has to be left on one side as an issue.
4. 'History and anti-history', April 20 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1439/history-and-anti-history (a bit hard to follow due to heavy editorial cutting, but the point should be clear enough). See also my contribution to the Trotsky panel at Platypus's 2021 convention (not transcribed): www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSGlQxkYJCA, at 15:12 - 27 of the video.
5. A Thorpe, 'The membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1945' *Historical Journal* Vol 43 (2000), pp777-800, table at p781; hatfulofhistory.wordpress.com/2013/02/03/the-cp-gbs-1957-special-congress; H Carter and G Silkstone-Carter, 'Research note: regional membership figures for the Communist Party of Great Britain, from 1945 to 1989' (2008); www.researchgate.net/publication/316636668_Regional_Membership_Figures_for_the_Communist_Party_of_Great_Britain_from_1945_to_1989; Wikipedia, 'Communist Party of Great Britain'.
6. The list is incomplete, depending on criteria. If it is based on size, the CPGB should be excluded. If on name, at least the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) should be included. If on open willingness to avow communism, as opposed to requiring self-naming as 'party', the Revolutionary Communist Group, the Communist Leagues (both the Maoist and Barnesite variants), and the International Communist League (the Spartacists) should be included.
7. Various articles at communistpartyofgreatbritainhistory.wordpress.com/category/cpb-morning-star-ycl/page/5.
8. On the conciliatory policy of the GW Bush administration towards China, see foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/04/the-untold-story-of-how-george-w-bush-lost-china.
9. As, in a sense, the Independent Working Class Association already did in the late 1990s to early 2000s, reflecting the social dynamics already discussed by the 'left realist' criminologists in the 1980s.
10. communistpartyofgreatbritainhistory.wordpress.com/2024/11/28/poor-substitute-further-histories-british-partyism; communistpartyofgreatbritainhistory.wordpress.com/2024/12/22/patrick-stewart-little-lenins;
11. communistpartyofgreatbritainhistory.wordpress.com/2024/12/31/devil-quote-scripture-own-purpose; communistpartyofgreatbritainhistory.wordpress.com/2025/01/11/building-rcp-living-marxism-1980s.
12. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1248/full-timers-and-cadre.
13. communistpartyofgreatbritainhistory.wordpress.com/2024/05/28/agit-prop-election-campaigns-1992-93.
14. This was true even of Socialist Appeal, with its campaign to restore the Lassallean 1918 'clause four' of Labour's rules.
15. 'Upfront, sharp and personal' November 30 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1469/upfront-sharp-and-personalmj; 'Attempt to outlaw justified anger', October 20 2016: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1127/attempt-to-outlaw-justified-anger.

FUSION

Second-round progress

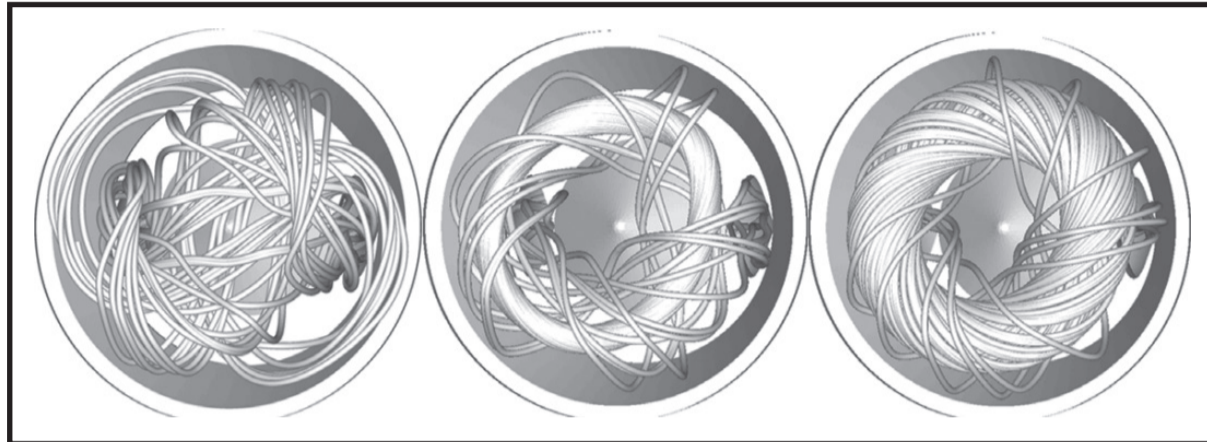
Old gripes, past differences and silly diversions should not be allowed to get in our way. Communists are determined to unite - not when it comes to a perfect future, but in the here and now. **Jack Conrad reports**

Our January 11 meeting between the CPGB, Talking About Socialism and the *Prometheus* editorial board saw further progress. As agreed, we began with report-backs.

On behalf of the Provisional Central Committee I referred to my recent *Weekly Worker* article.¹ The CPGB's leadership, members and circle of supporters are behind our fusion talks. As a much respected friend of CPGB emailed me, "Welcome good news. Much needed. My full support!" There are, I assured comrades, many other such figures in our movement urging us on.

Ed Potts and Nick Wrack spoke for TAS. Again as can be seen from the last edition of the *Weekly Worker*, its steering committee is marching in close step with us.² The comrades were just about to discuss their unity statement with their supporters (that has now happened with positive results). TAS is also changing one of its defining aims: from "building support for socialist/communist ideas and for the construction of a mass socialist/communist party." Now it will unambiguously aim for a Communist Party. Excellent.

We also had two comrades from the *Prometheus* editorial board attending: Cat Rylance and



Fusion process has different stages

Alex Higgins. Basically its EB is yet to arrive at a united position. Comrade Rylance made her own position quite clear though: fully committed. However, there are hesitators. I suggested that comrade Wrack and myself meet with the comrades... hopefully that would overcome doubts and help take things forward.

Comrade Higgins told us about developments in RS21 (Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century). Not only has the organisation been broken from affiliation to the social-imperialist Ukraine Solidarity Campaign and won round to a much more

healthy position on Nato's proxy war: RS21 is now committed to upholding an "explicit communist horizon" and a definite pro-party faction appears to be in formation. The comrade also outlined the differences in RS21, when it comes to unity. There are those looking at our fusion process with keen interest. However, some hanker after yet another broad-left formation, perhaps along with Anticapitalist Resistance - a right-moving Mandeliste organisation and a USC affiliate.

Note, there was an official representative of RS21 at our first meeting. Not this time, though. Nonetheless, the future looks full of potential on that front.

We also had a report-back from the Labour Left Alliance/Why Marx? LLA/Why Marx? is not a membership organisation: it is a political mishmash and cannot, therefore, really participate. Quite right.

Nonetheless, the comrades tabled for the second time an altogether misconceived series of Zoom talks as our 'public face'. First time round, this included following the induction syllabus of the Marxist Unity Group in the US (I am sure that is tip-top, but utterly unsuited for our purposes). The latest Zoom series now being floated begins with three talks on the formation of the CPGB in 1920 given by Lawrence Parker, a strangely embittered former CPGB member. Other proposed speakers include Alan Gibson of the Bolshevik Tendency, one of the Spartacist micro-fragments and a dyed-in-the-wool Oehlerite.

Worse, there is an attempt to set us up against comrade Wrack - and not only over the Socialist Alliance, Respect and Left Unity. Frankly, we are not interested in raking over past differences. What matters is fusion. Bruised egos, trivial grievances, long-gone disputes are now utterly irrelevant. Trying to bring them to the fore at this particularly promising moment is, to put it mildly, irresponsible. We shall do our best to bring about a radical rethink.

To proceed we need serious negotiations - much of it, necessarily, has to be in private, some bilateral. The various stages, doubtless, can and should be openly reported however, and that needs to be done in a responsible manner. Other comrades agreed... LLA/Why Marx? withdrew their proposals (which should never have been tabled in the first place). Why Marx? should certainly not present itself as our 'public face'.

On behalf of the CPGB I argued that at some point in our process we

must, without rushing things, reach what might be called a qualitative stage. In order to continue further we shall require a definite pledge from all participants. They will accept the results of a fusion conference as binding.

That was the case with the 2nd Congress of the RSDLP, the real foundation congress of revolutionary social democracy in Russia. It was the case too with the CPGB's 1st congress in 1920.

At a rather silly level that would have meant all CPGB members committing themselves to the cause of teetotalism, as advocated by Bob Stewart (leader of the Socialist Prohibition Fellowship and a future CPGB acting general secretary). Rightly, the motion never made it to the congress floor. Nonetheless, there is a serious point being made here. Delegates had two strategically vital issues before them: contesting parliamentary elections and affiliating to the Labour Party. Both had been hotly debated in the pages of *The Call*, *The Socialist*, *Workers' Dreadnought*, etc. Lenin himself intervened, most famously in 'Left-wing' communism (printed in English and French in July 1920).

When it came to the vote on parliament, there was a clear 186:19 card majority. However, despite Lenin, the vote on affiliation was surprisingly narrow, 100:85 cards. What matters, though, for our present purposes, is that the sizable minority had already committed itself to abiding by majority votes. That they did... and with some considerable success, when it came to building a real communist influence in the ranks of the Labour Party.

Incidentally, that also helped sort the wheat from the chaff: Sylvia Pankhurst, in many ways a heroic figure, was expelled by her own group, the misnamed Communist Party (British Section of the Third International), which went on to fuse with the already fused British Socialist Party and the Communist Unity Group in the CPGB. A short while later, going at a slightly slower pace, the Left Wing Group of the Independent Labour Party came on board.

It is not, it should be stressed, that we imagine that together we are on the cusp of something like the 1st congress of the CPGB... or for that matter the 2nd congress of the RSDLP. We are much, much smaller, have no serious roots in the working class and international conditions are far from auspicious. Indeed, we operate in an extended period of reaction. Conditions are Arctic.

Nonetheless, with solid political

foundations, we might be about to take a significant, albeit modest, step forward... from here things could considerably accelerate (but, given objective conditions, that should not be immediately expected).

Encouragingly, the TAS comrades agreed with the binding principle being applied when, together, we think it appropriate. So did comrade Rylance. That bodes well.

Naturally, we are open to other groups joining our fusion process. At the moment, though, there is nothing remotely serious on our radar. The key, therefore, is bringing about CPGB, TAS and *Prometheus* unity. Opening our discussions - and negotiations - to the unaffiliated, the lost, the many sincere individuals looking for a home, would, at this juncture, be a total disaster. Let us first get our house to the design stage.

It was comrade Wrack who proposed giving us a new name: Forging Communist Unity. No problem. We readily took up the TAS six points, which, taken together, can help us towards agreeing a blueprint:

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?

Comrade Wrack suggested we arrange two face-to-face meetings between leading committees/groups/boards. Yes, we need to get to know and trust each other on a personal level ●

Notes

1. J Conrad, 'It's good to do more than talk' *Weekly Worker* January 9: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1520/its-good-to-do-more-than-talk.
2. TAS Steering Committee, 'Forging communist unity' *Weekly Worker* January 9: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1520/forging-communist-unity.

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

OBITUARY

Baleful influence continues

His death has been celebrated by the left. Paul Russell looks at the life, politics and family feuds of Jean-Marie Le Pen

Jean-Marie Le Pen's death, aged 96, on January 7, had the French media buzzing with commentary, speculation and analysis, even though he had long retired from his lengthy political career. Born in Brittany in 1928, Le Pen studied at Paris law faculty and obtained his degree in 1948. He later completed an MA in political science, his thesis being 'Anarchist tendencies in France since 1945'. Not yet a member of any political party, he gravitated to the rightwing Action Française, a nationalist and royalist organisation, founded in 1899.

During his military service Le Pen was posted to Indochina as a parachutist in 1953. He was there, in Vietnam, after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu - a defeat which brought down the Paris government. On his return to France, he was elected to the national assembly - at 27 he was one of its youngest members, but soon rejoined his old military unit in Algeria, which was attempting to crush the National Liberation Front.

Legal battles

This military episode resulted in years of acrimony and legal battles between Le Pen and the French media over accusations that he had personally been responsible for torture during the interrogation of NLF suspects. At first he admitted his participation, justifying it on the grounds that it was the sole means of extracting information on the whereabouts of bombs set to explode in civilian areas. But later, with his political fortunes on the rise, he denied the accusations and sued various historians and newspapers. Invariably, Le Pen would lose in the high court or on appeal. In one of the more prominent trials, when he sued *Le Monde*, the daily newspaper dramatically presented as evidence a Hitler Youth dagger which carried his name. The dagger had been left, forgotten, in one of the torture chambers. Only in 2018, when his memoirs were published, did he finally admit to carrying out torture



Book signing: 2018

- "because it was necessary".

Following Algerian independence, he re-entered politics and represented various small rightwing parties in the national assembly. Finally, in 1972 he co-founded the National Front with former Waffen-SS members Pierre Bousquet and Léon Gaultier, neo-Nazi sympathisers such as François Duprat and those nostalgic for French Algeria, such as Roger Holeindre, a member of the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète, which had plotted to topple president Charles de Gaulle in a military coup. From small beginnings, the party grew in popularity, focussing on immigration and 'national renewal'. From 1983 until 2014, Le Pen was also elected to the European parliament, winning countless re-elections.

The National Front was first and foremost a nationalist party, claiming to be the true home of patriots. Its neoliberal policies of eliminating taxes and drastically reducing the size of the state, while severely curtailing the right to strike, were allied to an ultraconservative social programme to forbid homosexual marriage and abortion. From being an admirer of Ronald Reagan, after the fall of the Berlin Wall Le Pen turned against America and blamed an American Zionist plot to invade Iraq for the first Gulf War. In 1987, Le Pen called those affected by AIDS "lepers", while at a public meeting in 2014 he told his audience that what he termed

the "demographic problem" in Africa could be resolved in three months by Ebola.

In France, to deny the Holocaust or other World War II crimes is against the law and on dozens of occasions Le Pen found himself condemned, fined and given suspended prison sentences. One such occasion occurred in 1969, when the text on the back cover of a record of Nazi songs entitled *The Third Reich: voices and songs of the German revolution*, published by Le Pen's company, Serp, stated: "The rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist Party was characterised by a powerful mass movement, ultimately popular and democratic, since it triumphed following regular electoral consultations, circumstances generally forgotten."

In January 2005, Le Pen declared in the revisionist weekly *Rivarol* that "the German occupation was not particularly inhumane, even if there were blunders - inevitable in a country of 550,000 km²" - and that "if the Germans had multiplied mass executions in all corners, as the *Vulgate* affirms, there would have been no need for concentration camps for political deportees." A final example shows the range of Le Pen's racist vitriol: in an address given in Nice he stated: "You have a problem, it seems, with a few hundred Roma who have an itch-inducing and, let's say, malodorous presence in the city."

Over to Marine

The high watermark was reached in 2002, when Le Pen faced off Jacques Chirac in the second round of the presidential elections. The losing socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin, called on his followers to vote for Chirac in that second round - the first of many such instances of 'tactical voting' to defeat the National Front - and Le Pen was soundly beaten.

By 2012, he had renounced further attempts at the presidency and was succeeded by his daughter, Marine Le Pen, who changed the name of the party to *Rassemblement bleu Marine*, a title which lasted until 2017. She struggled to get candidates into the national assembly, though her niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen - granddaughter of Jean-Marie - was elected as the youngest ever member. Though Jean-Marie originally saw Marine as his successor, he began to sabotage her publicly declared aim of 'detoxifying' the party. Jean-Marie reaffirmed an earlier statement, made in a broadcast interview, that the gas chambers were merely a "historical detail". Pressed by Marine and the party to accept that Marshal Pétain was a traitor to France, he refused.

Marine announced a disciplinary process against her father and called on him to retire from politics. Jean-Marie had been made honorary president of the National Front, but

this post was rescinded. He cried foul and told the media that he hoped his daughter failed in her bid to become president. The party's executive rescinded his membership - a measure passed by a majority, though Marion voted in his favour. He took legal action and, several court sessions later, was partially vindicated by having his honorary presidency restored, though Marine denied him access to executive meetings.

The first volume of Jean-Marie Le Pen's memoirs was published by a small company in 2018, as the more established publishing houses withdrew from the bidding, under threats from some of their authors to leave them if they published more of his works. In his memoirs, he assesses his daughter Marine in this way: "She has certain qualities for politics: guts, drive, repartee. But she has no self-confidence. That explains her mistakes. Her dictatorial side... She cannot stand contradiction... I was the only opposition in her new FN: that is why she fired me." He also criticised his daughter for the party's "opening to the left" and its "desperate search for de-demonisation at a time when the devil is becoming popular". In contrast, he described his granddaughter, Marion Maréchal, as an "exceptionally brilliant woman".

Zemmour

In last summer's general election, called suddenly by president Emmanuel Macron, Marion Maréchal formed an electoral pact with Eric Zemmour, a radio and television polemicist on the extreme right, who would stand against what was the National Front, now renamed National Rally. Eric Zemmour chose 'Reconquest' as the name of his new party, explaining that it was a reference to the Christian reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Muslims living there until the 15th century. Marion Maréchal, disdaining her aunt Marine, became a vocal Zemmour supporter. *Le Monde* published an article claiming that Zemmour and Jean-Marie Le Pen had lunch in January 2020 with Ursula Painvin, daughter of Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Third Reich's minister of foreign affairs, hanged in 1946 after the Nuremberg trials. The newspaper noted that Ursula Painvin "encourages Eric Zemmour" with her "most admiring and friendly thoughts". But, as is the case with such neo-fascist alliances, after Zemmour and his party were comprehensively trounced at the elections, with not a single successful candidate, Marion Maréchal publicly broke with Zemmour and has since made reconciliatory gestures to her aunt.

Jean-Marie Le Pen's death was celebrated across French cities by leftwing activists and militants, to the point that the rightwing current affairs weekly, *Le Point*, wrote: "These disgraceful celebrations are an echo of the [French Revolutionary] Terror." Even in death, there is no doubt that his baleful influence continues across the political right ●

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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Fighting fund

Help needed!

After lots of success in recent months, I'm afraid to say that the first *Weekly Worker* fighting fund of 2025 is not looking too good. After an unusually low batch of weekly donations, the running total for January stands at just £974 towards our monthly target of £2,250 with half the month already gone.

But, of course, we are, as always, very grateful to those who contributed this week - thank you, comrades PB (£70), OG (£24), SA (£12), PM and CC (£10 each), all of whom donated via standing order or bank transfer. Then we had four donations via PayPal from RL and PM (£50 each), MZ (£10) and JV (£7). On top of that comrade Hassan handed his usual banknote (this time for a fiver) to one of our team, while comrade TT stated that the £55 worth of expenses he paid this week in getting some of our IT facilities up and running again should also be taken as a donation. Thanks very much, comrade!

But now we want to get back into our stride over the next seven days with the receipt of rather more than the £303 that came our way this week. True, the third week of the month is usually the time when a few substantial donations come our way, but I've learned not to count on anything!

That's why I'm appealing here and now to all our readers and supporters to help us out if you can. Please make a contribution via bank transfer, PayPal or, yes, by sending us a cheque - if you do that quickly, we'll be sure to receive it before the end of the month!

Please go to our website (details below) to find out how you can play your part. With your help, we will get there! ●

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

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Turmoil and divisions

Far from HTS bringing stability, things continue to fragment. Yassamine Mather looks at the continued hold of rebel groups and the frustrations of neighbouring Arab states

Following the fall of Bashar al-Assad, the western media seems no longer interested in Syria. It is assumed all is well, but the reality is somewhat different.

The country remains divided ... but more so. The Israelis have advanced well into Syrian territory and do not seem to have any intention of leaving. Thousands of Syrians now live under occupation in areas partially under Zionist control, fuelling widespread anxiety in the local communities about the duration of their stay. Initially, the Zionist state claimed Israeli troops would temporarily occupy only buffer zones. That is no longer the case and there are reports of local protests. Israeli forces have detained several residents and fired upon demonstrators.

As for the Kurdish area, it will only survive until the Americans decide they no longer need the Kurds. This week, Syrian Kurdish media reported intense clashes between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Turkish backed Syrian National Army near the strategic Tishreen Dam and Qaraqosh Bridge. Both are located near Manbij, a town in Aleppo province. There were also reports of the burial ceremony of 39 SDF troops, 30 of whom had died in the fighting around the Tishreen dam during December and January.

Criticism

Iranian and Turkish supporters of the SDF get very upset when we criticise its total dependence on US aid and military support. Apparently this stems from our Fars chauvinism. As I wrote in 2019 about the SDF's political wing, the YPG:

The YPG [People's Protection Units] is closely associated with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a Stalinist organisation based in Turkey, which used to define itself as Marxist-Leninist, with the aim of overthrowing the Turkish state. But in more recent times it has moderated its position and calls for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state headed by itself ... In early 2015, when it became clear that Syrian Kurds were seeking US air support, we warned that this was a slippery slope that would lead to the organisation becoming a tool of the United States.¹

We are told that facing attacks by Islamic State and Syria, they have no choice but to rely on US support. I am afraid that will lose them support among revolutionary forces in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, as well as the rest of the region. There is no short cut to defeating all the region's reactionary forces - Islamic State, Saudi Arabia, Iran's Islamic Republic, the new regime in Damascus, etc - nor to building a viable force to oppose imperialist interventions. In reality, the SDF's actions in accepting US aid have played into the hands of our enemies.

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham might be



'Russia's man in the south': Ahmad Oudeh (circled)

in control in Damascus, but is facing mounting challenges. The attempt of its members to appear as 'modern jihadists' is not going well with former allies of the Islamic State. The refusal of its leader, Ahmad al-Sharaa, to shake the hand of the German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, which was far from endearing them to fundamentalists, has created additional controversy. Why was Baerbock not wearing a headscarf? Why wasn't she wearing 'modest' clothes? ...

According to the website *Syrian Observer*, the strategic rebranding of the HTS Islamist militants has caused many problems:

The incident with Germany's foreign minister highlights the limits of Ahmad al-Sharaa's evolution. His refusal to shake hands with a woman is emblematic of a broader ambiguity in his ideological shift. While he has taken steps to distance himself from his Jihadist past, his actions and rhetoric suggest that these changes are more superficial than substantive.

Hard-line Islamists have also condemned the arrest of a "veteran mujahid", Abu Sufyan al-Jablawi, purportedly on accusations of being a "fanatic terrorist", in Syria's Latakia province. Al-Jablawi is not, in fact, a notable jihadist figure. Still, reports of his arrest in the city of Jableh, on January 12, provoked outrage amongst hard-line Islamists critical of the new HTS-led government.

Meanwhile, some claimed al-Jablawi was detained for walking through Jableh whilst bearing a white 'tawhid' flag, which is often associated with jihadists. Several hard-line jihadists were among outspoken HTS

opponents who voiced their opposition to the arrest. "Al-Jablawi is one of the best mujahidin who did not hesitate or give in during the years of revolution," wrote Tariq Abd al-Halim.

Abu Yahya al-Shami dismissed the allegations of "extremism" as "fabricated charges", posting a video purportedly showing al-Jablawi riding a horse, while carrying the same white flag. He also accused the current interim authorities of fabricating a plot by Islamic State to bomb the iconic Sayyida Zainab mosque near Damascus. According to al-Shami, the plot, which was reportedly foiled on January 11, was a deliberate ploy to appear as the protectors of a minority religious sect. The authorities in Damascus claimed they had thwarted an attempt by IS fighters to target the shrine, which had previously been attacked by IS and other armed groups, but remains a significant site of worship for Shia Muslims.

A source within the Damascus regime's intelligence agency claimed that security forces had successfully prevented the planned bombing and several jihadists were arrested. The interior ministry released photos of four men identified as members of an Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant cell, reportedly apprehended in rural areas near the capital. Additional images displayed confiscated items, including two rifles, three explosive devices and several hand grenades.

Secular Syrians are also expressing concern about the appointment of at least six non-Syrian jihadists, especially in military posts and in the ministry of defence. Sayfiddin Tajibayev, a member of the militant Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad who fought alongside the Tahrir al-Sham against the government of Bashar al-Assad, has been appointed head of the Syrian Ministry of Defence's

operational headquarters. In Tajikistan, he is on a wanted list, accused of "involvement in terrorist acts" and "participation in foreign wars". Before going to Syria, Tajibayev was a member of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), a parliamentary party designated a terrorist organisation by Tajikistan's Rahmon regime in 2015 and duly banned.

Other non-Syrians awarded posts in the senior military ranks include an Albanian, an Egyptian and a Jordanian, all of whom received the rank of colonel. Additionally, a Jordanian, a Turk and a member of the Turkistani minority in China were granted the rank of brigadier general.

Ahmad Oudeh

This week we also heard once more about Ahmad Oudeh, once dubbed "Russia's man in the south". A controversial figure, accused of involvement in smuggling drugs and fuel, as well as betraying rebels to the regime, Oudeh has, to say the least, a complex history. According to the Arabic Service of the BBC, he fought both IS and Assad's forces, though he served until recently as commander of the Eighth Brigade of the Syrian Army's 5th Corps.

As opposition fighters his faction in Dara'a initially received funding from the US-led Military Operations Center and later the United Arab Emirates, but had shifted to Russian largess by 2017.

Oudeh's brigade drew attention to itself in 2022 during operations against IS, including involvement with the death of its leader, Abu al-Hasan al-Qurashi. On December 8, amidst warnings of regime collapse, Oudeh and his brigade took parts of Damascus amidst opposition advances. This marked a final break

with the agreements with Assad he had entered into under Russian sponsorship. True, his forces soon retreated, citing limited resources. Nonetheless, Oudeh clearly has ongoing ambitions.

Southern Syria remains unstable, with intermittent armed clashes. Along with rumours that the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are "dissatisfied" with the HST regime this raises the possibility about Ahmad Oudeh's potential role as a 'national unifier'. He does after all enjoy regional support. This adds another layer of complexity to Syria's future political landscape.

Iran and Syria

Meanwhile, in Iran the media is keen to report increased violence and instability in Syria, with specific events like the burning of a Christmas tree in a Christian-majority town.

When it comes to an opinion on HTS, different Iranian media outlets associated with different political factions express different views. Conservative publications emphasise HTS's "terrorist" nature and accuse the group of forced displacement of Syrians, while more 'moderate' media outlets suggest HTS might be adapting its strategies, insisting that HTS is not the equivalent of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

On the whole, while Iran is eager to resume diplomatic operations in Syria, security concerns and political uncertainties dominate its approach. The conflicting statements from Iranian officials suggest internal differences on how to handle relations with Syria's interim authorities.

It was inevitable that the Iranian government, itself constantly under fire for failing to deal adequately with natural disasters, would do its utmost to publicise the failures of US authorities in dealing with wildfires in Los Angeles. A polite response came from government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani, who conveyed solidarity in a video, attributing the disaster to climate change and emphasising collective global responsibility.

But other officials linked the disaster to US actions abroad, particularly in Gaza and Ukraine. Vice-president Mohammad Javad Zarif drew parallels between the devastation in California and Gaza, highlighting global solidarity. Hard-line media mocked the official US response, framing the fires as "divine retribution" for supporting Israel and Ukraine. Headlines like "God's baton" and "Superpower still burning" ridiculed US capabilities, while claims of government mismanagement, resource misallocation and symbolic links between Los Angeles and Gaza dominated coverage.

Conservative papers cited the disaster as proof of their thesis of American decline - which, incidentally, has nothing at all to do with any Marxist thesis on decline! ●

Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1271/no-short-cut-to-liberation.