

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Mike Macnair discusses Clausewitz and war being policy ... and business too

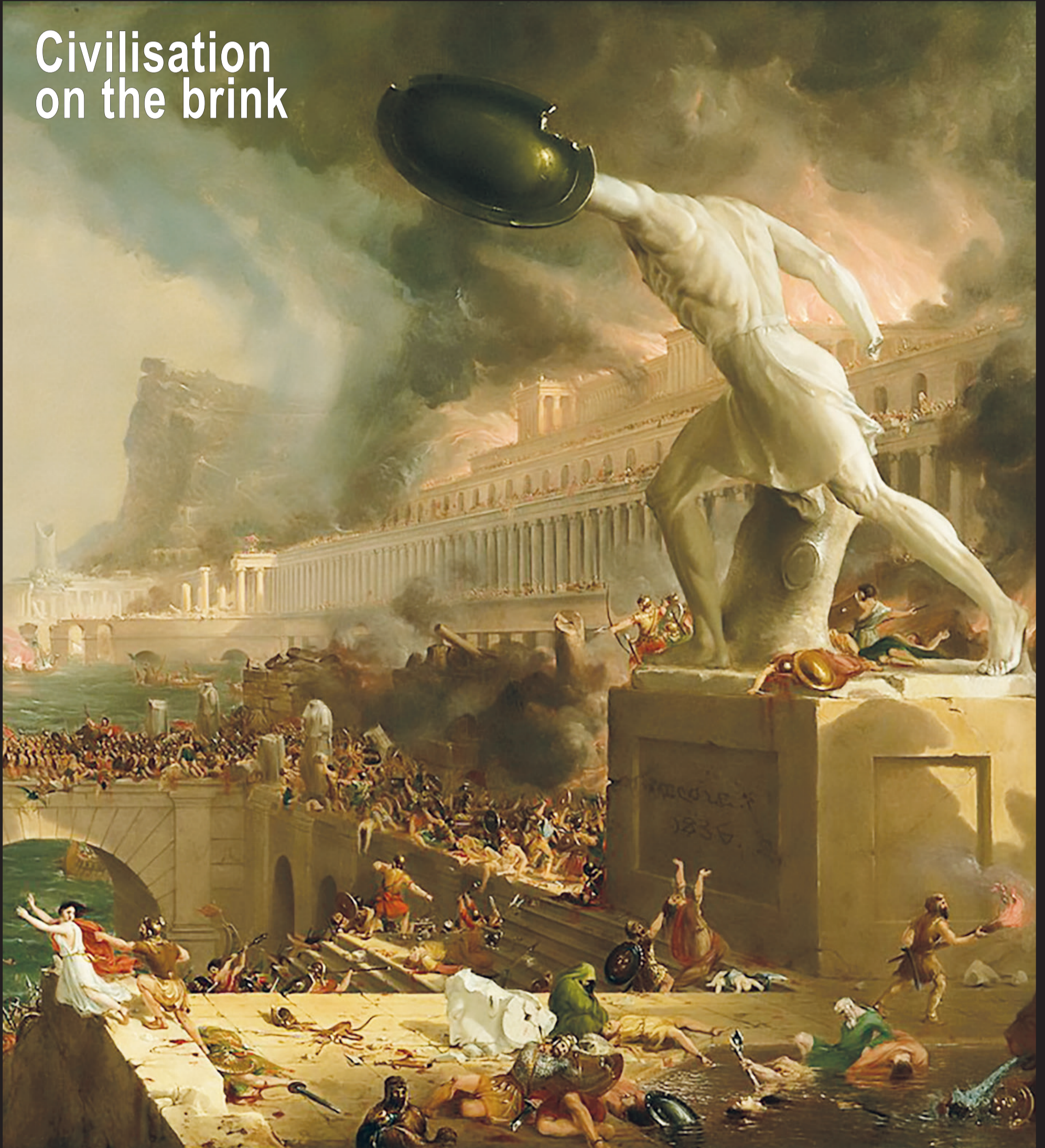
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Civilisation on the brink



LETTERS



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

Colonialist

I do not intend to address the several falsehoods and distortions in Daniel Lazare's letter ('Hamas to blame', January 16). It would be a waste of time, so long as he persists in refusing to accept that the conflict in Palestine/Israel is a colonial one, and that a democratic resolution of this conflict must involve decolonisation.

His studious avoidance of this fact is made worse by his use of what by present-day standards is colonialist language, describing Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis as "backward and primitive".

Moshé Machover
London

Blame CPGB?

There is a letter in the January 16 *Weekly Worker* titled 'Hamas to blame', written by Daniel Lazare. Comrades may remember that he used to write useful articles in this paper, especially on US politics.

In this letter, however, he has several digs at Moshé Machover and the CPGB - now, it seems, a favourite pastime of his. After a long account of the crystal-ball failures since October 7 2023, he calls for a conference, at which the CPGB leadership can hang their heads in shame and account to the working class how they allowed the Israelis to murder several thousand Palestinians.

He claims: "Any socialist party worth its salt would have immediately warned Palestinian workers of the horrors that Hamas was bringing down upon their heads". So the main fault was the failure to identify how useless Hamas was and how murderous the Israeli government could be, especially given the unstinting support of the US.

So the Palestinians shouldn't fight back - they're too weak. They follow in a long tradition: Algeria, Kenya, South Africa, Vietnam, the Comanches in the US, slave revolts that led to mass slaughter; the peasants' revolt or the Kett rebellion in England. They should live in peaceful resignation until a saviour arrives - that worked for the Cherokees?

I get the impression from this, and other communications from Lazare, that the real criminals are Hamas. They are not communists (true), they are not ideologically pure. Perhaps if they were just democratic centralists that would be OK? But then who in the tradition of rebellion against the ruling class - a long, long tradition - has had the necessary purity of thought, the necessary communist organisation or any other qualities that Lazare thinks necessary?

Given the dire shortage of these qualities, whose side should we be on? I think victims, despite shortcomings, deserve more support than mass murderers.

Jim Nelson
email

Renegade Lazare

The renegade, Daniel Lazare, includes outlandish attacks against a wide swathe of people in his letter last week: the steadfast 'Axis of Resistance', *Weekly Worker* analysts, the CPGB, and others. None of it is justified, in my opinion.

There's nothing about the regional anti-colonial movements that Lazare has any respect for. The Houthis are "backward and primitive". The Axis of Resistance is a "paper tiger" and Hezbollah is "imploding". Moreover, the CPGB is a "disgrace" (I'm reminded of Trump): the CPGB is to blame for everything. Conrad, Mather and Machover are specifically singled out for scorn for their positions regarding Palestine. Frankly, I've found the CP/*Weekly Worker* to be exceptionally good on the Palestine question, but coherent, Marxist analysis about Palestine is above Lazare's pay grade.

Lazare's rantings seem to be those of a rightist ideologue. He hardly says a thing about the Zionist terror machine, which is constantly on autopilot ("It goes without saying ...", etc.). As far as I'm aware, he's said nothing about the Jewish organisations in the United States - his neck of the woods - most of whom have kept their mouths shut in the public sphere, while the genocide was knowingly ongoing.

His statement, "The Leninist strategy of uniting the proletariat against nationalist oppression thus went out the window", is added to his claim that the *Weekly Worker* "specifically rejected joint working

class action in Israel-Palestine as a way out of the impasse". Firstly, this mischaracterises the *Weekly Worker*. And, furthermore, it has been hard, if not impossible, for any organised Palestinian working class organisation to function under a barrage of bombs. And the vast majority of Israelis are, by all accounts, captive to the racist national chauvinism of Zionism, and that includes the Israeli working class. What's crucially important is the growing Palestinian resistance movement, which needs our unconditional support for its self-defence: this is a socialist imperative.

To be a dialectical materialist is to see things as they are, not the way Daniel Lazare wishes them to be. Lenin understood the relationship of forces in a deep and broad way and didn't see the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements as static phenomena, frozen in time. He looked at each individual situation, based on the material conditions and class divisions at play.

According to Bipan Chandra's account, Lenin saw the national liberation movement as an "anti-imperialist united front" (B Chandra *Lenin on national liberation movements* 1971). In any case, Lenin said that the "class interests of the militant proletariat" are primary over demands for national independence (1903 article by Lenin in *Iskra* on the national question).

However, "Insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in favour, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression. But, insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation stands for its own bourgeois nationalism, we stand against. We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation" (VI Lenin *The right of nations to self-determination* chapter 4, 1914).

The struggle for national self-determination in Palestine will ultimately be resolved if it is subordinated to a socialist class struggle, but not with Lazarean rote formulas superimposed on the Palestinian street.

There's presently a ceasefire; the unbroken Palestinian people endure, their leadership remains, and thousands of Palestinian prisoners will probably be released. This is a historic victory which comes at a high cost and unimaginable suffering. The current battle has been won, within a continuing, long and just resistance to colonial occupation; the battle for worldwide political consciousness about the plight of the Palestinians has also been won. But the dismantling of the US/Zionist colony cannot happen soon enough.

GG
USA

Term limits

I want to say from the outset that it is wonderful to see the CPGB, Talking About Socialism and Prometheus (and perhaps at some stage a faction of Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century) engaged in fusion talks. It has lifted my spirits, and the approach being taken so far seems to be correct. I can only imagine what an actual, healthy fusion would do to lift spirits, hopefully across a wider part of the left than our immediate circles.

Anyway, I have two disagreements with Mike Macnair in his article last week, titled 'Anti-partyist partyism'. The first and most important is with the claim that Jack Conrad's long, 44-year tenure is "a reflection of our weakness; not the cause of it". If this is merely trying to say that it

isn't the sole cause of weakness, and that it reflects an existing, separate weakness (isolation?), then I agree.

If it is saying that this (and others') long tenure is exclusively explained by the organisation's weakness, and that because it is a reflection of a weakness it cannot *also* be a cause of weakness, I disagree. I think it would be better to say that this long tenure is a reflection *and* a cause of weakness.

Long tenures have all kinds of inherent problems, which have nothing at all to do with the personal traits of the individuals involved - though, of course, particular cases cause particular problems. It is why I support term limits for every elected position, though go back and forth on whether one should advocate them for a very small organisation like the CPGB. I leave to one side specific details like consecutive versus lifetime limits, length of required sitting-out time, and so on.

With mandatory regular elections it's true that members can choose to impose a term limit on an elected comrade, if they thought it was appropriate, but this misses some pernicious and likely effects long tenures have, which make members choosing to vote in such a way increasingly unlikely, the longer someone is in a role. To name just what comes to mind: information-hoarding, skill-hoarding, cliques and other buttressing social networks both in and outside the organisation, and increasing conservatism in members' willingness and ability to critically engage with the leadership and other senior bureaucratic elements. Needless to say, all of this has its own knock-on effects. None of this (hoarding, social networks, member conservatism) needs to be deliberately created: it is a natural outcome. The 'us versus them' dynamic between the bureaucracy and 'the members' or 'the general public' is also typical, though probably unlikely to become especially significant in an organisation as small as the CPGB.

Mandatory term limits prevent the build-up of these structural defects, and regularly prove and reprove to the membership that changing one's leadership is not the end of the world. And if you want someone outside the current leadership to attend some important event (as spokesperson, or whatever), it is easy enough to just elect delegate(s) rather than defaulting to sending whoever is amongst the most formally senior in the organisation. If I were a member, I would probably vote to send Jack Conrad as a delegate to these fusion talks, even if his time on the PCC had expired last year.

The second more minor disagreement is with what seems to be an equivocation on the word 'hardness'. I only skim-read the recent articles on Lawrence Parker's blog and I don't want to pretend to be able to speak for him, but I took him to be bemoaning (in general, but also suggesting some of this applies to specific individuals past and present) mainly bravado and arrogance - perhaps also browbeating, escalating disagreement, etc - in the perceived style of historical figures. Sure, we should aspire to be 'hard' in the sense of resilience, determination, self-discipline, and refuse to be afraid to offend, as long as we are expressing our views honestly and without malice. We should also aspire for resilience as a collective capacity, which will mean sometimes using softer gloves with people. And I totally agree that speaking sharply can be appropriate when we feel the need to jolt someone out of their complacency or routinism, but I would emphasise *can be*.

With that said, I do think it's

correct to criticise an excessive focus on 'hardness' as if it were a major source of a lot of the left's problems.

Scott Evans
Glasgow

US apologist

Paul Demarty's article, 'Rise of lifeboat imperialism', cites my essay published in *Compact* magazine (January 9) on the prospects of US expansion into Greenland, disputing my assertion that the US has treated its opponents as "slave states" (repetitions of the fight against the Confederacy in the Civil War).

Demarty raises Cambodia as a disproving counterexample. But the US did not simply "carpet-bomb Cambodia", but targeted Vietnamese communist forces operating there during a larger war. The Cambodian government was not the opponent of the US, nor, of course, were the people of Cambodia - or of Vietnam: certainly: they were not the enemies of the people of America. The US did not demand "unconditional surrender" of them, but a negotiated settlement. That says something.

Even so, the US war in south-east Asia was a crime, and one that was opposed by many people and for many good reasons - including vociferously and notably by the original 'containment' cold war strategist himself, George F Kennan. Still, the communists committed many crimes of their own against the people of Vietnam, Laos and, needless to say, Cambodia.

It's long past time for us to remember this history differently, and no longer somehow as still a live issue, when it is not. The cold war is over, for over a generation now. After suffering millions of deaths and the permanent poisoning of its territory to last through the generations as an effect of its war, Vietnam now depends for security on a military and economic alliance with the US against threats from its ancient neighbour and enemy, China.

There was a broad Anti-Imperialist League that was formed to oppose the US governing, let alone fighting a horrific counterinsurgency, in the Philippines after the Spanish-American war, on entirely liberal and democratic grounds, and in the name of American freedom. As Mark Twain indelibly wrote, "Shall we give those poor things a rest?" But Aguinardo, the great Filipino nationalist, admitted that their historic choice was not actually independence, but *dependence* on either Japan or the US.

Socialists in the US have a responsibility, but not for a historical moral balance sheet of US government actions, but for the future course of society and politics - a long-term task for which we only have the barest rudiments of resources with which to begin building today.

As Jefferson said, the world belongs to the living - not the dead, who have no claim on us. As Fanon said, we bear no guilt and owe no reparations for crimes committed before we were born.

We must, as Thaddeus Stevens said, transform the heritage of slavery (and worse) to free the world - and thus honour the sacrifices that have brought us to the place and opportunity we inhabit now, and only now. We must wake from what Marx called the "traditions of dead generations weighing like a nightmare on the brains of the living" and heed the "poetry of the future." It's long past time.

There will be a future for capitalism. Will there be for socialism?

Chris Cutrone
email

Returned to prison

In a hearing at the Old Bailey, London, on January 17, nine of the 'Filton 18' political prisoners entered 'not guilty'

Fighting fund

'Best of the lot'

Good news! With over a week left to reach the *Weekly Worker* £2,250 fighting fund target for January, we are just £578 short of what we need, thanks to the £698 that came our way over the last seven days. In other words, our running total now stands at £1,672, with nine days still to go.

The donations we received have certainly boosted my confidence that we can get there - not least the excellent *three-figure* contributions from SK and PM. Then there were the other bank transfers/standing orders from MM (£75), TR (£40), MA and GB (£25 each), DR (£20) and GD (£15), plus the very handy £50 PayPal donation from KS.

It always pleases me when our donors express their gratitude, as did MA ("Thanks for your work") and comrade HJ, who has just begun a subscription. When it comes to all the left papers, she

wrote, "The *Weekly Worker* is easily the best of the lot." Thanks to both of you.

But now we need to finish the job and make sure we not only reach that £2,250 target, but go soaring past it! I can't stress enough how our costs have shot up over the last 12 months, so we could really do with eating more into the overall deficit since this time last year.

Please play your part by writing us a cheque, donating via PayPal or making a bank transfer (see below). After last week's contributions I'm pretty confident we can get there, so please help us make sure we do! ●

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

pleas on all charges put before them, while supporters amassed in solidarity outside the court.

The first nine activists were called to court to plea to charges after an action in August 2024 at the Filton, Bristol site of Israel's largest weapons company, Elbit Systems. All 18 face charges of aggravated burglary, criminal damage, with some of the 18 additionally facing charges of violent disorder. Six activists were arrested for action that saw them breach the site using a modified van, before dismantling weapons of genocide inside, including 'quadcopter' drone models. Twelve further people were later arrested and remanded to prison for their alleged involvement. Police have justified their continued detention by alleging that their actions have a "terrorism connection".

The rest of the 18 are expected to enter not guilty pleas later this year. A spokesperson for Palestine Action said: "We refuse to bow to this continued police intimidation and harassment. It is Elbit, Israel's largest weapons company, that is the guilty party: those resisting the UK's complicity in genocide are not."

The activists were returned to prison by the judge and are currently awaiting appeal hearings for bail, which have thus far been rejected. Of the 18, 10 have spent over five months in prison since August, with an additional eight detained since November.

At the January 17 hearing, the judge confirmed that their case shall be seen with the 18 split across three trial dates - the first taking place in November 2025, the second in May 2026, while the final date is currently unknown. An additional date is yet to be set in March of this year, when the defence will seek to challenge and

dismiss the application of a "terror connection" in this case.

Amnesty International has stated that the Filton case demonstrates "terrorism powers being misused" to "circumvent normal legal protections, such as justifying holding people in excessively-lengthy pre-charge detention". The Filton 18 political prisoners have been subjected to arbitrary and repressive treatment while inside prison - including the withholding of phone calls and mail, prohibitions on communicating with other prisoners, and denials of religious practices and medical privacy.

Palestine Action
email

Defining China

Understandably, the question of China came up a number of times during the course of our Winter Communist University. It is, after all, a hugely important country and a hugely complex one too.

I thought that Marcus Strom adopted the right sort of approach in his Aukus talk: basically: 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread' (from Alexander Pope's *Essay on criticism*, 1711).

Instead of bestowing some trite label such as 'state capitalism', with the idea that modern China conforms to the profoundly wrong theoretical model advanced by Tony Cliff in his *State capitalism in Russia* (1974), he displayed angelic caution.

Note, Tony Cliff recognised that the law of value did not operate in the Soviet Union. Indeed, he judged that accumulation was not internally driven by profit, but driven by external international competition (part right, part wrong).

Either way, the idea that today's China in anyway mirrors what Tony

Cliff had to say about the Soviet Union is hard to credit.

Of course, the undoubted success of the 'socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics' must be scientifically explained by Marxists. Those who don't recognise that can hardly be called Marxists.

China tells us much about our current era of the failed transition from a visibly decaying capitalism to the objectively required socialist world. It tells us much less, however, about China's road to socialism and the brilliance of leaders such as Mao, Deng and Xi (worshipped nowadays in the pages of the *Morning Star* by the likes of Andrew Murray, Robert Griffiths and Kenny Coyle).

Despite China's spectacular economic rise since 1978, a few sobering facts are worth bearing in mind. Throughout the existence of the people's republic, the masses - ie, workers and peasants - belying the state title, have remained politically disempowered. Therefore, they could be supplied, in huge numbers, to domestic and foreign capitalists as a low paid, largely rightless and highly regimented labour force.

Ending the agricultural communes - and, alongside that, the 'iron rice bowl' social security system - were vital in that respect too. However, China's economic 'miracle' fundamentally relied on the US regarding the country as a strategic asset against the Soviet Union - the Mao-Nixon meeting in 1972 setting the stage.

In 1980 the US granted Most Favoured Nation status (since rescinded). The widespread belief was of 'convergence' and China retreating from the Maoist target-allocation system and adopting a 'mixed market model'. Entry into the World Trade Organisation in December 2001 certainly seemed, not least to western experts, to be a prelude for US, European and Japanese transnationals taking over the commanding heights of the Chinese economy. Something, however, repeatedly blocked by the authorities in Beijing and thus eventually leading to the US-China cold war.

The world's second largest economy, is, as a result, an extraordinarily strange hybrid. China has wage labour, stock markets, unemployment, some real competition when it comes to final goods and services, a vastly overblown speculative real-estate sector, hundreds of billionaires, agriculture is effectively privatised, Chinese transnationals traverse the world, not least through the Belt and Road Initiative, and together domestic and foreign capitalist firms account for some 60% of GDP.

And yet, according to article 15 of the protocol under which China joined the WTO, it is a "non-market economy". The Communist Party of China regime - the result of a rural-based, party-army, revolution - exercises very considerable power over all areas of society - not just through nationalised industry and finance, but, crucially, the state machine itself. Meanwhile, of course, capitalists are welcomed into the ranks of the Communist Party and the regime itself is in good part subordinate to the needs of capital accumulation, not least because that is what China's rise has relied upon.

No, what really matters is not bestowing trite labels. Trite because serious study is rarely if ever put in, eg, Chinese proto-socialism, deformed Chinese workers' state, bureaucratic collectivist pre-socialism, bureaucratic state capitalism, party-state capitalism, venture state capitalism, authoritarian capitalism.

No, Marxists are obliged to specifically locate complex internal contradictions, social laws and trends that ought to be expected in the global transitional period between capitalism and socialism.

Jack Conrad
London

ACTION

No far-right Ukip march in Southampton

Saturday January 25, 12 noon: Counter-protest. Assemble Bargate, Southampton SO14. Stop the new Ukip leader and convicted thug, Nick Tenconi, from leading an anti-immigration march calling for mass deportations.
Organised by Southampton Stand Up To Racism:
www.facebook.com/events/8891009487675069.

Free Palestine: defend the right to protest

Saturday January 25, 1.30pm: Emergency public meeting, The Atrium, 124 Cheshire Street, London E2. In the face of attacks from the state, hear how to resist and ramp up campaigning for freedom in Palestine. Registration free. Organised by Stop the War Coalition:
www.stopwar.org.uk/events/free-palestine-defend-the-right-to-protest

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:
enduk.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.

Perspectives on human origins

Tuesday January 28, 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: 'Hunting Lessons: how forager kids learn(ed) to hunt'. Speaker: Annemieke Milks.
Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:
www.facebook.com/events/2035838516847664.

Trade unions taking action for Palestine

Wednesday January 29, 6pm: Webinar. Hear from a range of Palestinian and British trade unionists and solidarity activists. Discuss building for the workplace day of action on February 13. Registration free. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:
palestinecampaign.org/events.

Trump returns - more war?

Thursday January 30, 6pm: Public meeting, SET Woolwich, Riverside House, Beresford Street, Woolwich, London SE18. How can the anti-war movement respond during Trump's second term? Organised by Greenwich Stop the War Coalition:
www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

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.

Fighting for a new party - what role for Tusc?

Sunday February 2, 11am to 1.30pm: Online conference. What sort of working class political alternative is needed to confront the Tory-lite Labour government? Also discuss preparations for the May local elections. Free event - no need to register in advance.
Organised by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition:
www.tusc.org.uk.

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. Followed by discussion. Registration free.
Organised by Troublemakers At Work and Tipping Point UK:
troublemakersat.work/event/the-struggle-for-the-4-day-working-week.

Sadler's Wells: drop Barclays

Thursday February 6, 7pm: Protest outside the opening of Sadler's Wells East, Stratford Walk, Olympic Park, London E20. Demand Sadler's Wells ends ties with Barclays, which is bankrolling Israel's war crimes against Palestinians. Organised by Culture Workers Against Genocide and Palestine Solidarity Campaign:
palestinecampaign.org/events/sadlers-wells-drop-barclays.

Marxist unity: building a mass communist party

Saturday February 8, 10am to 4pm: Day school, Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford M5. Debates and workshops on strategy, revolutionary organisation and pathways to Marxist Unity. Tickets free in advance.
Organised by Prometheus journal and Talking About Socialism:
www.facebook.com/prometheusjournal.

Workplace day of action

Thursday February 13: Nationwide actions in support of Palestinian trade unionists. Build solidarity with Palestine at work and across the trade union movement.
Organised by Stop the War Coalition:
www.stopwar.org.uk/events/workplace-day-of-action.

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.

Celebrating
KEVIN BEAN
TERRY HARRISON
Friday 24th Jan, 6pm at the CASA
29 Hope St, Liverpool L1 9BP

Both much-missed veterans of the workers' movement: Kevin was a leading member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and working class educator, organising and running many sessions for Why Marx?. Terry was a founding member of the Militant Tendency. Both were latterly prominent members of the Merseyside Pensioners Association. With music and speeches from Mike Macnair, Yassamine Mather, Audrey White, Phil Maxwell and more.

CLIMATE

Civilisation on the brink

Actuaries issue a stark warning. Between 2070 and 2090 the global economy faces a 50% loss due to ecological shocks. Eddie Ford argues that this has profound consequences for the sort of socialism we envisage

Donald Trump has now signed his promised executive order, giving notice that the US intends to exit yet again from the Paris agreement “rip-off” - joining Iran, Libya and Yemen as the only countries outside the global agreement.

Withdrawal had a limited impact the first time round, because the decision did not take effect until November 2020, due to United Nations regulations, but this time it could take as little as a year, as the new administration will not be bound by the accord’s initial three-year commitment. At the same time, he revoked a non-binding executive order from the Biden era aimed at making half of all new vehicles sold by 2030 electric. Trump has also pledged to reverse the last administration’s efforts to grow the ‘clean’ energy sector, calling it “the green new scam.”

So US billionaires, corporations and fund managers are being urged to speed up their robbery of nature, their reckless squandering of natural resources, their pollution of the air, water and soil.

The US is already producing record amounts of oil. Under the ‘green’ Joe Biden, the country became, once again, the world’s biggest oil and gas producer. Last year saw a record 758 drilling licences issued. Presumably, Trump’s aim is to overtake China and, once again, become the world’s biggest emitter of CO₂ and other such greenhouse gases.

Terrifying

Meanwhile, last week, the distinctly non-radical Institute and Faculty of Actuaries - 32,000 members worldwide - issued a terrifyingly comprehensive report. Actuaries are, of course, strategic thinkers, who use their considerable analytical, mathematical and statistical skills to help measure the probability and risk of future events. Their business is insurance and reinsurance and they are being increasingly employed by governments.

Anyway, its report, *Planetary solvency - finding our balance with nature* shows the danger of the climate crisis reaching an economic tipping point with catastrophic implications, and should be read by everyone.¹

In fact, one journal writing about the report, *The Energy Mix*, issued a trigger warning about how “this story includes details on the impacts of climate change that may be difficult for some readers” and, for those “feeling overwhelmed by this crisis situation”, supplied a list of resources about “how to cope with fears and feelings” brought about by the scope and pace of the climate crisis.² Perhaps this might act as a corrective to those head-in-the-sand ostriches who think the CPGB is morbidly gloomy or pessimistic about the dangers represented by the capitalist-driven climate crisis.

Actuaries are not known to be flighty, prone to wild guesses, or anything like that. By instinct and professional training they are about cool calculation and carefully looking after the bottom line for their clients.

Anyhow, the IFoA report starts by reminding us “we are part of the Earth system, which we depend on” - providing us with “essentials such as food, water, energy and raw materials” and these ecosystem services *are not substitutable*, as “they cannot be replaced by technology



Easter Island: a vanished civilisation

when they are gone”, whatever Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg might think. In other words, nature is “the foundation that underpins our society and economy” - one “gifted by billions of years of evolution and finely tuned processes”.

But the stability of this foundation, and the Earth system as a whole, is under threat - the report goes on to talk about “unprecedented fires, floods, heatwaves, storms and droughts” that “if unchecked” could become catastrophic, including “loss of capacity to grow major staple crops, multi-metre sea-level rise, altered climate patterns and a further acceleration of global warming”. Therefore, the IFoA says, “we risk triggering tipping points such as Greenland ice sheet melt, coral reef loss, Amazon forest dieback, and major ocean current disruption” - all of which risk “causing a domino effect or cascade of accelerating and unmanageable damage”. If multiple tipping points are triggered, “there may be a point of no return, after which it may be impossible to stabilise the climate”.

From this grim, but sober, assessment, unless you believe in technological quackery or divine salvation, the IFoA draws its central finding - that unmitigated climate change and nature-driven risks have been “hugely underestimated”, as the impacts from global warming are “materialising at lower temperatures than estimated” - meaning that the severity and frequency of extreme events are “unprecedented and beyond model projections”. The Paris agreement goals, for example, were “not informed by realistic risk

assessment”, as “they implicitly accept high risk of crossing tipping points”, because there is a “time lag” between emissions and the warming that is experienced, meaning that unless emissions are reduced, far more warming is in the pipeline.

Externalities

This is especially the case, as our planet “may be more sensitive to greenhouse gases than we thought”, meaning that net-zero-carbon budgets may now be *negative* for the 1.5°C goal. Confronted by this unfolding situation, global risk management practices are totally inadequate, as they too willingly “accepted much higher levels of risk than is broadly understood” - mainly for the reason that policymakers “often prioritise the economy with their information flows focused on this”. But this is a tragic mistake, as our “dominant economic model doesn’t recognise a dependence on the Earth system”, viewing climate and nature risks as *externalities*.

It goes without saying, or at least it should, that this is a chronically urgent matter for human security - if not for the continued existence of our human civilisation - if it is not dealt with in some way or other, then mass mortality, involuntary mass migration, severe economic contraction and conflict become more likely. Major “societal upheaval could spread from vulnerable regions through our globalised socioeconomic systems”, driving responses such as food or water hoarding, acting as “feedback loops” to worsen social, economic, and political challenges.

Given that existing climate change risk assessment methodologies understate economic impact, as they often exclude many of the most severe risks that are expected, they fail to recognise that there is a “risk of ruin”. Using the exact words of the report, existing risk assessment methodologies are *precisely wrong, rather than being roughly right*.

Believing estimates that put the damage from global warming as low as 2% of global economic production for a 3°C rise in global average surface temperature is delusional. This supposedly blinds political leaders and others to the real risks of their policies - assuming they care at all. Doubtless Donald Trump does not care, not least with his “drill, baby, drill.”

But that would be to miss the fundamental point. It is not about personality. Capitalism, as a system, is based on constant expansion. Capital subordinates its personifications to the endless search for more and more profit. Everything that gets in the way of expansion is to be overcome: trade unions, human physical and mental limits, nature and its carrying capacity. As the IFoA says, the degradation of nature’s gifts, such as forests and soils, or the acidification and pollution of the ocean, act as a risk-multiplier on the impacts of climate change and vice versa.

Existing risk management techniques, the IFoA points out, typically focus on single risks in isolation and thus are “missing network effects and interconnections” - not fully understanding the “compounding

risks”. Fiddling while Rome burns. Unless immediate action by political leaders is taken to decarbonise and restore nature, building up *resilience* to worsening and inevitable climate impacts by respecting the Earth’s carrying limits, the report concludes that we are in imminent danger of “planetary insolvency” - the plausible worst-case hit has the global economy facing a 50% loss in GDP between 2070 and 2090 from climate shocks.

That would amount to civilisational collapse. Yes, most of us will not be around then, but our grandchildren will be - so we owe it to them to do something about the climate crisis, if they are to see some sort of future worth having. Well, hopefully they will still be alive, because at 3°C or more by 2050, the IFoA thinks that with the “breakdown of several critical ecosystem services and Earth systems”, there could be more than *four billion deaths* and a “high level of extinction of higher-order life” on the planet - insects like cockroaches will carry on having a good time - inevitably accompanied by “significant socio-political fragmentation worldwide”, leading to generalised state failure.

Nostradamus

A more cheerful scenario at 2°C or more by 2050 has two billion deaths and a 25% loss in world GDP, with a “partial tipping cascade” and ocean circulation severely impacted, as heat and water stress drive the forced mass migration of billions, with catastrophic mortality from disease, malnutrition and conflict.

As for the most optimistic outcome, that has a mere \$1 trillion in annual losses and 80 million deaths, with the “occasional” global food crisis and widespread water crises - but there is no chance of that happening, as it assumes that global warming is kept below 1.5°C by 2050 with limited overshoot. We must stress that these are not cast-iron predictions, or the IFoA playing the role of a climate Nostradamus, but a range of plausible or realistic possibilities, given the very real facts on the ground right now.

Either way, the IFoA report should act as a clarion call. The working class has to be organised into mass communist parties and readied for power internationally. Protest politics have already met their limits. National roads are self-defeating. Sects, broad-left fronts and alliances worse than useless.

However, even if we could establish a World Union of Socialist States, say by 2050 - surely a best possible scenario - the Earth we shall be inheriting will be much impoverished. We can confidently look forward to rich, genuinely human relationships, flourishing arts and great advances in the sciences.

That said, some socialist measures might well be subject to delay, modification or rethink. Certainly it will be the task of many generations to restore the natural conditions, which we humans, being part of nature, depend upon for our existence ●

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PALESTINE

Arithmetic of genocide

While the official numbers killed in Gaza is certainly an underestimate, the state, aided by the BBC, tries to muddy the waters, writes **Ian Spencer**

The attempt to normalise mass murder has been a constant feature of the genocide in Gaza. For good reason, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign was due to protest in front of the BBC in London on January 18 because its coverage of the slaughter has been so muted, especially when one compares it with recent coverage of wildfires in Los Angeles.

The Metropolitan police banned the demonstration from going near the BBC, using the pretext of the proximity of a synagogue, which was not even on the route and even though thousands of Jews were on the march, protesting against the slaughter and defiantly asserting that Israel does not speak for them.

A good illustration of the BBC's perspective is its coverage of the police disruption of the protest: "In total there were 65 arrests for breach of conditions [of the demonstration] - five for public order offences, two for obstructing police, one for support for a proscribed organisation, one for inciting racial hatred, one for common assault, one for assault on an emergency worker and one for sexual assault."¹

The scene is thereby set for the portrayal of an entirely peaceful protest, forced into a static containment in Whitehall, being portrayed as an aggressive mob. The BBC account goes on to say that, in a statement, the Campaign Against Antisemitism said the marches posed a "threat" to synagogues and that "It is shameful that the Met has refused to act on that threat until this rally, adding that police should finally limit these marches to static protests, as we have been urging for a year."

Synagogue

That is a year in which hundreds of thousands of people have peacefully marched and never once caused any disruption to a single synagogue or worshipper. Marches in which thousands of Jewish people have condemned Israel's genocide in Gaza for what it is - Jewish protestors, including the orthodox, who regard the Zionist state as blasphemous, as well as murderous.

The call to suppress, curtail and limit the solidarity demonstrations has been a rightwing refrain since they began. Whether it is Suella Braverman describing them as "hate marches" or commander Adam Slonecki, who led police operations on January 18 and was quoted by the BBC as saying that it was "deeply disappointing to see a deliberate effort, involving organisers of the demonstration, to breach the conditions and attempt to march out of Whitehall".

Well, that is one view. Here is another, of an eyewitness to events:

No-one "broke through" a police line. Two lines of police stood aside and even drove their vehicles away from blocking the road. They clearly wanted the marchers to proceed. After Trafalgar Square a third line of police and their vehicles did not move aside and Chris Nineham, chief steward, then attempted to affect the laying of flowers in front of the police. The police wanted the marchers to go through their first two lines, so that they could represent them as an unruly rabble set upon breaking through their lines.²



BBC would rather worry about other things

This view is also supported by MPs Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, who were subsequently interviewed about the events by police, under caution. In a post on X, Corbyn and McDonnell disputed that a group had "forced its way through" police lines. Corbyn called for the release of bodycam footage and added:

I was part of a delegation of speakers, who wished to peacefully carry and lay flowers in memory of children in Gaza who had been killed. This was facilitated by police. We did not force our way through. When we reached Trafalgar Square, we informed police that we would go no further, lay down the flowers and disperse.³

Provocation has been a constant feature of the demonstrations. This has included miniscule Zionist counter-demonstrations. Gideon Falter, chief executive of the Campaign Against Antisemitism, tried to fabricate an 'incident', in which he posed as an innocent Jewish man trying to cross the road during a Palestine solidarity demonstration, while being filmed by his minders.

On January 18 the police used a heavy-handed form of 'kettling' of peaceful marchers protesting against the slaughter of children.⁴ But all the PSC/Stop the War Coalition demonstrations have been a model of disciplined and peaceful protest that has never once risen to the bait of the genocide apologists.

Death toll

All this took place against the background of the ceasefire between Hamas and the Israel Defence Forces, which was agreed days before the demonstration. It has naturally been welcomed by the PSC, but the question is for how long will it last? The far right, which Netanyahu relies

on in part for his grasp on power, has made it clear that they want the killing to begin again as soon as the Israeli hostages are released.⁵

Hamas has already released some hostages, many of whom look better nourished than the population of Gaza. But, while Israel has released some of its thousands of Palestinian hostages, it has simultaneously detained more in the West Bank.⁶

It is also notable that BBC journalists have been protesting about the way the Gaza genocide has been covered.⁷ Behind all of this is a dispute about the manner in which the grisly arithmetic of genocide is calculated. It seems increasingly clear that the estimates of the Gaza ministry of health (MoH), often attacked as an exaggeration by Zionist apologists, are, if anything an underestimate.

Up to June 30 last year, the 'official' figure by the MoH for those killed since the IDF assault on Gaza was 37,877. But a peer-reviewed study in *The Lancet* shows their best estimate is 64,260, or about 2.9% of Gaza's pre-war population, which means that the health ministry has underreported deaths by 41%. The authors of the article, Zeina Jamaluddine, Hanan Abukmail, Sarah Aly, Oona Campbell and Francesco Checchi, are from highly respected academic and medical institutions: The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Nagasaki University, Japan, Cambridge University, and Yale University, USA.⁸

The authors assume that, if the underreporting of 41% continued from July to October 2024, when the MoH recorded deaths reached 41,909, it is plausible that "the true figure now exceeds 70,000". Of course, we must add that since October the killings have continued unabated for another three months. Indeed, it would seem that IDF attacks on Gaza increased during ceasefire negotiations, with

62 Palestinians being killed in the 24-hour period up to the January 15.

The confidence interval of 95% means that the deaths could be between 55,298 and possibly as high as 78,525. It is important to note that this is by violent death from IDF action alone. It takes no account of all those who have died because of malnutrition, disease and the consequence of the almost total destruction of medical and public health infrastructure.

In July 2024, *The Lancet* also published an estimate of all deaths, which suggested that up to 186,000 may have been killed by August 2024. This would represent 7.9% of the population of the Gaza Strip. Rasha Khatib, Martin McKee and Salim Yusuf arrived at their figures by extrapolating from the ratios of traumatic to non-traumatic deaths from other comparable conflicts. The short, but important, research report was published as a letter to the prestigious medical journal. The authors of this study were also from highly reputable academic institutions; Birzeit University, Palestine, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and McMaster University, Canada.⁹

Predictably, this figure was attacked by Zionist apologists, who suggested that the methodology of extrapolating from death ratios is not substantiated and said: "We must depoliticise our dialogue in academic medicine and come together as rational experts evaluating and presenting data that are substantiated in the most objective manner possible."¹⁰

Whataboutery

The strategy is clear. Under the guise of a spurious appeal to objectivity the aim is to undermine the evidence and then present an argument appealing to whataboutery and the equivalence of Israeli and Palestinian deaths. Ironically, they did so with reference to only two journalist accounts of the death toll and another study from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which did not support their view.

The most recent study in *The Lancet* suggests that Khatib *et al* are a lot closer to the truth than any estimate put forward by the IDF, which has consistently underestimated deaths way below the Gaza MoH. Jamaluddine *et al* used capture-recapture analysis, drawing on and triangulating data from three sources. These were MoH hospital lists, an MoH survey and social media obituaries. The capture-recapture methodology has been used to successfully calculate death rates in other conflicts.

Compiling accurate data has understandably been hindered by the IDF destruction of hospitals and other public health infrastructure, which led the authors to use their innovative methods. Even so, there are grounds to think that this may lead to underestimation. Missing persons, possibly buried under the rubble, were not included. Estimates of those buried exceed 10,000.

The trauma-only deaths calculated show that 59.1% of those killed were women, children and the elderly. This is highly indicative of the indiscriminate nature of the killing, given that these groups are less likely to be combatants. It was a mortality pattern that was a feature of the Rwandan genocide. By contrast,

a mortality pattern featuring men of military age would be strongly suggestive of direct combat fatalities.

Incidentally, the BBC reported the findings in *The Lancet*, but also included a quote from the Israeli embassy, which predictably said that "any information that derived from Gaza cannot be trusted" and was likely to favour Hamas.¹¹

Trump

Since the ceasefire in Gaza, the killing of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank has continued, often by settlers, acting unchecked by the IDF. On January 22, 10 were killed and dozens wounded in the Jenin refugee camp, as the IDF prevented ambulances from reaching them.¹²

This comes at the same time as one of the first acts of Donald Trump, after his inauguration, was to lift the very limited sanctions against West Bank settlers by the Biden regime. Trump also reinstated sanctions against the International Criminal Court, which had indicted Netanyahu and his former defence minister for "crimes against humanity and war crimes". A powerful signal, if one were needed, that the Trump administration will have only a tenuous relationship to the 'rule of law' and that Israel will be allowed to do as it pleases.

Trump has also lifted restriction of the use of 'bunker buster' bombs, the export of which was one of the very few restrictions on Israel by 'Genocide Joe'.¹³ Trump has also expressed his lack of confidence that the ceasefire will hold - although, of course, he has the power to make it hold, if he chooses. But then, he is a real-estate capitalist and his appraisal of the real-estate potential of a future Gaza is instructive: "Gaza is interesting. It's a phenomenal location. On the sea. Best weather, you know, everything's good ... some fantastic things could be done with Gaza."¹⁴

However, according to Trump, Gaza has "got to be rebuilt in a different way". It is hard to avoid the conclusion that such a "different way" will be without Palestinians. The grim reality of capitalism means that the arithmetic of genocide will be coupled with the arithmetic of real-estate values ●

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CULTURE

Saved by the collective

Gavin and Stacey finally came to an end with a feature-length festive finale over Christmas. The sitcom attracted more viewers than Charles Windsor. **Mike Belbin** discusses a phenomenon

Full cast

Over the Christmas period there was a cultural struggle on British TV - or, as the industry professionals call it, a ratings war.

One programme towered above all others with a recorded audience count of 12.3 million viewers, plus a further six million over the following week on 'catch-up'. This was the finale of the BBC comedy drama series, *Gavin and Stacey*, attracting over five million more people than King Charles's "message" to the UK and Commonwealth. *G and S* was also very much acclaimed on social media.

But if something was so popular, can we expect it to share our values, promoting a 'politics' - in the broadest terms, of course - that we can recognise and support? Please note that this article will discuss the ending of the final episode. If you have not seen this, you can access it via BBC iPlayer.

First made

Gavin and Stacey was first made in May 2007 by Baby Cow productions for BBC Cymru/Wales and aired on BBC Three. It was written by actors James Corden and Ruth Jones, who both worked on the ITV drama series *Fat friends*. Corden got the initial idea from a mate, also called Gavin, who met his wife following a phone call, after which the couple arranged to meet. The drama was originally offered as a short play *It's my day*, but the BBC instead asked for a full series.

It ran for three seasons from 2007 to 2010, with Corden and Jones declining to produce any more. However, the show's popularity had grown from the beginning and the writers and production company came up with a special for Christmas Day 2019.

By then both Corden and Jones had gone on to other projects, working on their own chat shows (Corden in the US). Though there were rumours of a further special in 2024, these were denied. However, as a safe popular attraction, these days of sequels and remakes, and a hanging story line, meant there was always a possibility of the show reappearing.

Gavin and Stacey is in fact the tale of two couples, along with their families and friends (one group in Barry Island, south Wales, the other in Billericay, Essex). To begin, Stacey West (Joanna Page) and

Gavin Shipman (Mathew Horne) had six months of an ever-closer relationship conducted over the phone, often from the offices where they worked. Stacey, along with her friend, trucker and arcade supervisor Vanessa (or 'Nessa'), played by Ruth Jones, travels from Barry to finally meet Gavin in Leicester Square, London. Gavin also brings his mate, a casual painter and decorator, Smithy (James Corden). The couples spend the night together and, while Gavin and Stacey hit it off right away, Nessa and Smithy, after the sex, do not seem to want to see each other ever again.

However, the families of Gavin and Stacey become involved with each other, including Stacey's Uncle Bryn (Rob Brydon) and Nessa's ex, 'Dave Coaches' (Steffan Rhodri), who drives his own minibus on tours to London. Each series builds up our knowledge of the characters, who all have their ups and downs within the connected group. (This is a 'family' series, though not all of the characters are related by marriage or blood.)

The two couples themselves are a contrast. Gavin and Stacey have their rows, but it is obvious from the start they are passionately attached. Romantics may worry about their relationship, yet would probably have more doubt about any tie continuing between Nessa and Smithy. But then this may be the suspense. Can Nessa-Smithy survive with any degree of credibility? They just do not like each other (apart from the sex).

I have heard Nessa described as an obnoxious character, while, about Smithy, Gavin's mum (played by Alison Steadman) observes that he is "not everyone's idea of a catch". However, neither of the two are cruel or snobbish, though mostly firm about what they dislike. The funniest characters are in fact Pam and Smithy, who are always chasing obsessions, while not quite sure about them. Pam pretends to be a vegetarian and Catholic, while Smithy is temporarily thrown by the sex that Nessa offers him that first night. Around them, other members of the group mostly prefer to get along with life as it is, often making the right choices or sometimes remembering their livelier past, like Nessa.

When Nessa becomes pregnant by yet another one-off with Smithy, they

do both attempt to go their separate ways. Nessa partners up with Dave Coaches for a time and, at the start of this finale, Smithy is about to wed Sonia, his new link-up from London. Sonia (Laura Aikman) is effectively the outsider; she has to ask about the allusions and rituals of the group. We can empathise with this, but it is her attitude to her fiancé which may strike us as unsympathetic. She wants him to lose weight and does not seem to like his son much, nor his friends. The group, on the other hand, notice that Smithy is different when he is around her: he even sounds different. This can be thought of as progress, as 'aspiration' - consenting to be shaped by someone with your own best interest at heart. But it is Smithy, of course, who has to decide whether this is so.

Our values

The question of Nessa and Smithy is still hanging. In the Christmas special of 2019, Jones and Corden wrote an end to what they then presumed was the last episode, where Nessa confesses to loving Smithy and proposes with a ring. Smithy does not answer. Did Jones and Corden intend to take 2019's proposal as a comment on romances that do not happen?

In 2024, however, Smithy is about to 'go along with' the marriage to Sonia. Various characters, like Pam and Stacey, raise the issue: is he compatible with Sonia? Meanwhile Nessa is setting off to leave the country on a boat. The person who most resists all these complaints is Gavin who believes Smithy is a grown man (they are all pretty mature by now) and so must make his own decisions. Of course, as the congregation assembles (with Anna Maxwell Martin as the 'celebrant' presiding over the ceremony), viewers may indeed be expecting the 'interruption' that often happens in such dramas. And it does occur - it is Gavin who finally gets up the courage to ask whether his mate really wants to go through with it. He is not bullying, but he is not fulfilling anybody's idea of his easy-going nature.

Like the 1917 Russian Revolution or the Irish Rising of 1916, he is lighting a single spark. The celebrant wants confirmation of this and asks those assembled who do not believe these two should marry today to stand. One by one a majority of the group stand up (like so many rebels

in the movie, *Spartacus*, but silent) - not to force Smithy into a decision, but to let him know he should answer the question for himself.

The bride, Sonia, has other ideas. She wants the ceremony to continue regardless, like coronations and royal openings of parliament. She tells Smithy that by marrying her they can finally get "this lot" out of their lives. "You said yourself," she continues, "you were punching above your weight". Smithy replies, "No, I don't. You say that." The tide is turned and Smithy declares that he does not think she loves him, nor does he love her. But there was someone he did and does. He hurries away, followed by Gavin and the group - they may just be able to catch Nessa at Southampton. To accomplish this they decide they must take Dave's bus, now under the workers' control, which means they can "take the bus lanes".

When they reach Nessa, she still gets on the boat - it is a small tugboat. She refuses Smithy's offer; she had previously asked him once and he rejected her. Firm as usual, whatever others think. Can Smithy's entreaties persuade her? For finally he knows what he wants.

The next scene is them getting married elsewhere. It looks like a simple civil ceremony this time and both Smithy and Nessa are obviously glad to go along with it. The presiding official takes them all the way through and tells them they can conclude with the expected kiss. Both Nessa and Smithy say they won't, because they never have before - that's not what they do. Like so many others in our world, they choose their own ceremony, their own kind of relationship.

Is this such a big thing then? Even though it was the top-rated programme during the holiday, it may be just a bit of entertainment - a romantic comedy, family values, happy ending. Something to chuckle at rather than inspire. Why should anyone take it as more?

Over these 17 years there are issues that the series has not touched and tensions within the class it has not gone anywhere near. But what are the values that come out on top? Is it the gospel of individual improvement - become an entrepreneur, become Elon Musk? Or is it the need for solidarity and an opposition to going along with things as they are? The point of analysing popular culture

is not just to point out how it too may be 'turning right' (as it has been doing from at least the 1980s), but to observe the possibilities of any actual work. Like CLR James did in his 1950 *Notes on American civilisation* on how Hollywood films then (the period of 'film noir' and James Stewart movies) sided with democracy against capitalism. If we do not notice what can be supported we may end up condemning the 'masses' without nuance (behaving like Theodor Adorno, who only approved of Samuel Beckett).

In *Gavin and Stacey*, the values that are promoted are the ones of comradeship, honesty and courage. At the climax of the first wedding Smithy was not bullied into rejecting his new 'aspirational' partner, but is asked to think again - by not only Gavin, courageous at last, but by the group that the bride demands he painfully reject. They then all take some form of public transport to ask the other person involved, Nessa. If *Gavin and Stacey* communicates anything, it is that you must not neglect any of your needs: that is, those not defined by our 'get ahead at all costs', 'look good even if it hurts' economy.

Affinity group

Smithy seems about to deny his need for companionship - both of a particular individual (yes, mainly sexual) and his affinity group (not just his own family or male mates). He does not really love Sonia, because she demands he reject these for something 'better'.

Art like this may not convert anyone: you will not vote differently because you sat down to this, but if you have enjoyed the series, or even just this finale, and you agree with the values that win out, then it has reinforced one attitude in the battle of ideas. It is not gospel or a party programme, just as Bernard Shaw's plays do not tell you how to build a socialist society or a welfare state. But the emphasis on choosing your own desires with the assistance of collective help and supportive action (what the caring group stands up for) obviously has a wide popular appeal.

At some point, we have to be interested in what most people think, such as, say, whether the working class would prefer to sacrifice the NHS to increased military spending. Fiction too can assist the struggle to define what sort of values our world needs ●

CU

Questions of war and peace

Once again it has become common to talk about genocide and the danger of nuclear war. How should we respond? Paul Cooper reports on last weekend's Winter Communist University

Set against the horrors unleashed in Palestine and Ukraine, it was more than appropriate that this year's Winter Communist University focused on the theme of 'War and peace'. A range of excellent introductions and discussion was lapped up by 70 registrations, with many hundreds more watching livestreams on YouTube, Facebook and TikTok. We estimate that this will grow into thousands and can refer comrades to uploaded content on our YouTube channel. Do not forget to like and share, comrades!

Taking place over the weekend of January 17-19, the CU was opened by Mike Macnair, who began deliberations on the Friday evening by exploring war as the continuation of politics/policy by other means. Tracing the origin of this maxim, Mike explored the unfinished work of Carl Von Clausewitz (1780-1831), who originally identified war as "nothing but the continuation of state policy by other means".

From this work stems the notion of state functions as both the prioritisation of change and 'business as usual' at various points. However, both amount to the same fundamental priority - not least the pursuit of the priorities of the ruling class. Intriguingly Von Clausewitz identifies war as the fundamental intercourse of the human race. Chillingly war - likened to trade, as opposed to the arts - was "conflict of great interest, settled by bloodshed". Today we call this international relations and comrade Macnair provided US president George Bush junior's Iraq War II as the continuation of unfinished business left over from his father, George Bush senior. The 'American Century' aimed to spread its version of 'democracy' through first bombing Iraq in the 'shock and awe' operation and then putting 200,000 boots on the ground.

Citing examples from Babylon and Rome, comrade Macnair located ancient and pre-feudal war as having different priorities, primarily as a means of slave-taking. War in the modern era has surprisingly been viewed as generally more bloody, when contrasted to this past model. The feudal war was identified around land capture and looting, not to mention the medieval equivalent of package holidays in the form of pilgrimage and the procurement of holy sites (pilgrims were noted as being a cash cow for the church).

In more modern times, capitalist warfare can be identified as segmented into three elements. Enclosure, from Britain to the colonies, drove peasants from the land, leading to internal/external migration, feeding a new working class, thanks to emerging factory production. Beyond enclosure, competition seeking monopoly has sought control over fractions of trade, leading to conflict between imperial powers. Finally war as an economic stimulus from the production and sale of arms - the contemporary war in Ukraine was provided as an example (for the USA, not the EU).

Fundamentally, war is a product of class society and can only be ended by ending class society.

Ceasefire

Saturday morning's double-header saw Moshé Machover and Yassamine Mather explore the contemporary question of 'Israel's war-mongering and how to respond'. Comrade



Storming of Winter Palace (1920 re-enactment)

Machover identified the latest ceasefire as being fundamentally the same as the Biden plan of May 2024, with Netanyahu clearly falling short of any Damascene conversion towards an equitable settlement. An edited version of his opening is included in this edition of the paper.

Yassamine Mather identified the next stage of the peace plan as being scheduled for six weeks time, with no clear idea of any probable outcome being evident. The ceasefire cannot be seen as peace, but a break within 100 years of conflict. Yassamine echoed Moshé in identifying the importance of this issue as a litmus test for the left. Those soft on Israel join US imperialism. In terms of allies, she took apart both Russia and Iran, both seeking to further their own strategic interests, as opposed to championing liberation.

In terms of Egypt, clearly blowback was an ongoing concern for Biden administration strategists. The Sisi military-bureaucratic capitalist regime is weak and the Muslim Brotherhood still organises and has deep social roots. As for the so-called 'Axis of Resistance', it has proved itself to be a paper tiger. Then there is the Trump administration. For all his talk of bringing peace, we should not forget that he supports an expanded Israel and the Zionist colonial project.

Militia

On Saturday afternoon, Jack Conrad explored the issue of the people's/workers' militia question. He noted this as a demand that is mocked and scoffed at by most of what passes for the 'left' today. He recounted arguments within successive broad lefts: Socialist Alliance, Respect, Left Unity and Labour Left Alliance. He cited Dave Kellaway, a member of Anticapitalist Resistance's editorial board, and his plans for the next broad left party (Transform, Collective or whatever).

While he does not want to censor anyone (oh, no), Kellaway is determined to find ways to ensure that calls for a people's militia are marginalised, silenced. There is also Robert Griffiths, general secretary of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party

raise the call for a *workers'* militia when they get really, really excited (almost invariably mistakenly). They imagine the workers' militia is superior to the people's militia!

Comrade Conrad cited the situation in Russia during 1917. With the police swept away with the fall of tsarism, workers formed the Red Guards to keep order and defend the gains of the revolution. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were in full support. They saw the Red Guards as a step in the direction towards the people's militia.

Aukus and China

It was late at night for Marcus Strom, who gave a talk, direct from Australia, on Aukus (the trilateral 'security partnership' between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States) and the coming war with China. It was noted that the US policy has recently changed from engagement to strangulation. This must be considered as part of the attempt to reverse US decline.

While US imperialism remains the global hegemon, there is the possibility of a China, Russia and Iran bloc (envisaged as the worst possible scenario by Zbigniew Brzezinski in his *The grand chessboard* (1997)). Other than this bloc, the US faces no serious challenge. Not Brics, not the EU, not the pink wave in Latin America.

As relating to Australia, comrade Strom argued that policy had hardened from the time of aperevious prime minister, Kevin Rudd (a fluent Chinese speaker). Australia has thrown in its lot with America (the choice that was really made back in 1942 with the humiliating British surrender of Singapore).

Meanwhile the US strategic approach to the People's Republic of China has hardened noticeably from May 2020 with a return to World War I-type dynamics, as opposed to cold war. Despite this he argued that it would be wrong to necessarily see the same outcome emerge, there being an absence of multiple rival imperial projects. Crucially there is the absence of anything like a serious working class threat. Once a global power in its own right, today the working class exists more as an idea (when it comes to taking power).

Aukus policy itself has pledged Australia to find half a trillion dollars over the coming three decades. The US/UK is indemnified from loss, should problems arise within this process, which will additionally facilitate yet more strategically placed US bases. China itself wants to avoid direct confrontation with the US, but is preparing for one, should this become inevitable, and some of its war planners say conflict is inevitable (nuclear war requires the other side to think that you are mad enough to unleash mutually assured destruction).

With regard to the left, it is at a very low ebb. There is no *serious* partyist project in Australia. Comrade Strom also discussed the social nature of China. It would be foolish to defend it as a deformed workers' state, because it is not a workers' state. China needs to be analysed in all its contradictory complexity.

Non-agreement

The final CU session saw Lars T Lih explore the theme of 'The Bolsheviks in 1917: "revolutionary defeatism" or "non-agreement

defencism"?' Lars started his talk noting that the Bolsheviks adopted this slogan to distinguish themselves not only from the social-imperialist 'left', but from those tempted to conciliate the social-imperialist 'left' (including a certain "left Kautskyite L Trotsky"). Revolutionary defeatism meant more than militant opposition to World War I. It meant a commitment to fight for revolution even at the risk of the defeat of one's 'own' country!

However, the Bolsheviks dropped the 'revolutionary defeatism' slogan at the beginning of 1917 and this phrase was never applied subsequently. This leads us to consider what replaced it.

The Bolsheviks wanted to defend the popular revolution against both the advancing German threat and the danger of internal counterrevolution. That meant opposing anything that encouraged soldiers to desert and head off back to their villages - acts of individual indiscipline, weakening the morale of those at the front. The Bolsheviks certainly opposed sabotaging the war effort. The Provisional government was doing just that through its sheer incompetence and refusal to conclude a just peace (by breaking with Anglo-French imperialism and publishing the secret treaties and committing to no annexations, etc).

But the Bolsheviks also wanted to advance the revolution to the point where power passed into the hands of the people, the *narod* (ie, all 'power to the soviets'). For them, that could not realistically be done through an agreement with bourgeois society (and therefore the self-appointed Provisional government). That was the position of the right wing of the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary parties ... which soon, after October 1917, landed many of them in the camp of white counterrevolution and the far right.

The tactical shift in the Bolshevik manner of presentation had already occurred before Lenin's return to Russia from Switzerland. Far from Lenin objecting, apart from this or that minor detail, the Bolsheviks were solidly united behind what Lars calls 'non-agreement defencism'. Once they had won back their majority, this would signal the beginning of the end of the bourgeois Provisional government (even if headed by a pro-war socialist: ie Alexander Kerensky).

Looking back at the debates over the approach to the war, Lenin in the spring of 1918 insisted on the central fact that "The main thing was the soviets had come over from agreementising to us". All Bolsheviks agreed on that.

The Second Congress of the Soviets, meeting in Petrograd October 1917, voted to approve the Bolshevik-led overthrow of the Provisional government that happened just a few days before, and agreed, *by a solid majority*, to the new soviet government proposed by the Bolsheviks. Headed by Lenin, it was later added to with the appointment of non-agreementist Left SR commissars ●

A playlist of all five sessions of Communist University Winter 2025 is available at youtube.com/@CommunistPartyofGreatBritain/playlists.

THEORY

War, politics, economics

Starting with Carl von Clausewitz and a critical examination of what he actually said. Mike Macnair looks at pre-capitalist and capitalist times and the relationship between war and business



Bayeux tapestry: 1066 and all that

Let's begin with a discussion of Carl von Clausewitz's famous tag that "war is the continuation of politics by other means" or "the continuation of policy by other means" (either "politics" or "policy", because the German word Clausewitz used, *Politik*, can be translated into English as either).

Why begin with Clausewitz? In the first place, Lenin read Clausewitz in 1915 and deployed the famous tag (in both forms) in published arguments about World War I.¹ Trotsky too deployed Clausewitz, not only in his military writings, but also (this tag) in relation to other wars.²

More generally, Clausewitz's tag - whichever way we read it - has things to say to us that allow us to escape from moralistic judgments either of identifying the 'aggressor' (futile, given that truth is notoriously war's first casualty) or of 'siding with the oppressed' (often equally misleading, given that 'oppressed' nations not infrequently serve as proxies in great-power conflicts).

Here I will start with what Clausewitz actually said in the several passages, and in that context a small part of the academic discussions of what it might have meant and how useful or not it might be; and then move on from one aspect of Clausewitz's discussion - his idea of politics as an extension of business - to speculate about war as an economic phenomenon.

Other means

Clausewitz died in 1831, and his book *Vom Kriege* (*On war*) was published posthumously in 1832. He left, shortly before his death, a note indicating that he did not think this was a finished work: it was notes from which a finished work could be produced.³ This note, generally dated July 10 1827, includes one of the versions of the famous tag: "... der Krieg nichts ist als die fortgesetzte Staatspolitik mit anderen Mitteln" ("War is nothing but the continuation of state policy by other means").⁴

A different form appears in

chapter one, section 24:

Der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln. So sehen wir also, daß der Krieg nicht bloß ein politischer Akt, sondern ein wahres politisches Instrument ist, eine Fortsetzung des politischen Verkehrs, ein Durchführen desselben mit anderen Mitteln.

(War is a mere continuation of policy by other means. We see, therefore, that war is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means. All beyond this which is strictly peculiar to war relates merely to the peculiar nature of the means which it uses.)

Chapter 1 is generally accepted to be a part of the text Clausewitz thought he had finalised. Here *Politik* rather than *Staatspolitik*. And *ein politischer Akt*, and *ein wahres politisches Instrument ...*, *eine Fortsetzung des politischen Verkehrs*: "a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce". This must be 'politics' rather than 'policy'. The translator has given 'commerce' for *Verkehr*: it is more common to translate this as 'intercourse', but we will see later overtones that might imply preferring 'commerce'.

Section 26 of the same chapter is different:

... bei der einen Art Krieg die Politik ganz zu verschwinden scheint, während sie bei der anderen Art sehr bestimmt hervortritt, so kann man doch behaupten, daß die eine so politisch sei wie die andere; denn betrachtet man die Politik wie die Intelligenz des personifizierten Staates, so muß unter allen Konstellationen, die ihr Kalkül aufzufassen hat, doch auch diejenige begriffen sein können, wo die Natur aller Verhältnisse einen Krieg der ersten Art bedingt.

(... in one kind of war the political element seems almost to disappear, whilst in another kind it occupies a very prominent place, we may still affirm that the one is as political as the other; for if we regard the state policy as the intelligence of the personified state, then amongst all the constellations in the political sky which it has to compute, those must be included which arise when the nature of its relations imposes the necessity of a great war.)

Die Politik here must be translated as 'policy' - the translator has added 'state' to emphasise the point: only 'policy' rather than 'politics' could plausibly be called "the intelligence of the personified state".

In short. *Vom Kriege* was not a fully revised text. In a series of usages of the tag, whether Clausewitz is appropriately translated as referring to 'policy' or 'politics' varies with context and is not entirely clear.

There is an enormous academic literature on the tag. For example, military historians Michael Howard and Peter Paret produced in 1976 a translation of *On war*, which is constructed on the basis that *Politik* is policy. Hew Strachan in 2022 offered a critique of this reasoning, on the basis that the systematised translation of *Politik* as 'policy' reflected the ideas of US and British military thinkers in the cold war period about the proper relations of the army and the civil power.⁵ Conversely, several authors have argued for *Politik* as primarily translatable as 'politics', with various implications - chiefly upgrading the significance of civil war and other non-state forms of war to the theory of war as such.⁶

Of particular interest to us, I think, is David Keen's 1998 *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*, and some of Keen's later work on wars and artificial crisis as modes of exploitation - not in the technical Marxist sense, but in a sense more analogous to straightforward theft and robbery. The idea is that it is

actually more useful to think of war as about economics and economic interests than to think of it as about policy as "the intelligence of the personified state".⁷

Another bit of Clausewitz adds something to the issue. In book 2, chapter three, we find:

Der Krieg ist ein Akt des menschlichen Verkehrs. Wir sagen also, der Krieg gehört nicht in das Gebiet der Künste und Wissenschaften, sondern in das Gebiet des gesellschaftlichen Lebens. Er ist ein Konflikt großer Interessen, der sich blutig löst, und nur darin ist er von den anderen verschieden. Besser als mit irgendeiner Kunst ließe er sich mit dem Handel vergleichen, der auch ein Konflikt menschlicher Interessen und Tätigkeiten ist, und viel näher steht ihm die Politik, die ihrerseits wieder als eine Art Handel in größerem Maßstabe angesehen werden kann.

(War is part of the intercourse of the human race. We say, therefore, war belongs not to the province of arts and sciences, but to the province of social life. It is a conflict of great interests which is settled by bloodshed, and only in that it is different from others. It would be better, instead of comparing it with any art, to liken it to trade, which is also a conflict of human interests and activities; and it is still more like state policy, which again, on its part, may be looked upon as a kind of trade on a great scale.)

Verkehr again, here translated as 'intercourse' rather than 'commerce', and *gesellschaftlichen Lebens* ('social life'). We can sometimes translate *Gesellschaft* as 'economy', as the later German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936), contrasted it to *Gemeinschaft*. *Handel*, translated here as 'trade', perhaps might be better as 'business'. There is an interesting idea in this passage that business or trade is inherently conflictual. This is clearly

correct in the sense that contracting parties have conflicting interests, and for that matter, businesses are in competition with one with another.

Then Clausewitz goes on to argue that *Politik* (the translator has added 'state') "may be seen as a kind of trade" or better, "a business skill", on a "great scale. This again, has to be 'policy' rather than 'politics'. What is this policy that is business on a large scale? The answer is that it is within the framework of mercantilism or 'cameralism', the conception of the relation of the state and economy that was taught in German universities all through the 18th century, and right down to the middle and to some extent to the later 19th century.⁸ Each of the states is in competition with each other to attract businesses, which will then produce increased tax revenues.

Economic

I move back to the passage from book two, chapter three, quoted above: war as business conflict of interests and competition, carried to the scale of the state. What follows is highly speculative.

I want to be careful about this. I do not want to say that all wars are motivated by economics. No doubt some wars are. At other times the immediate motivations may be purely ideological. For example, it is fairly clear that why the United States invaded Iraq was a combination of George W Bush's unfinished business, or rather his father's unfinished business from 1991, plus a bunch of neocons coming up with the fantasy that the US was going to create a bastion of democracy in the Middle East by reconstructing Iraq along the lines of the reconstruction of Germany after World War II (but without a Marshall Plan) ...

It is more useful, in my view, to think about wars as having economic effects. Those may well be more determinative about what the practical significance of wars is than the ideological motivations. As I said, grand-scale speculation. So I look now in extreme outline at the

economic effects of war in classical antiquity, in European feudalism and in capitalism.

In classical antiquity, war had the effect of large-scale slave-taking. Two patterns can be seen. The Mesopotamian states, and the Iranian states that succeeded them, took prisoner the whole population of a city, or large groups of people, and deported them into fairly distant areas, to set up new cities under state control. Thus, for example, the 597 BCE Babylonian captivity of the Jews by the neo-Babylonian empire. In 55 BCE, the Romans suffered a catastrophic military defeat at Carrhae (modern Harran, in south-eastern Turkey), and the prisoners of war were deported by the victorious Parthians to Merv (modern Mary, Turkmenistan). In 256 CE the Sasanian king, Shapur I, took the Roman city of Antioch (Antakya, Turkey) and deported the prisoners to set up Gundeshapur, in modern Khuzestan, Iran. For a final example, in 540 CE the Sasanian king, Khosrow I, took Antioch and other Roman cities and deported the prisoners to create 'Wēh Antīōk Khosrow' ('Khosrow's new better Antioch'), a new town near Ctesiphon on the Tigris (in modern Iraq).⁹

The other pattern is the Greeks and Romans; we have more detailed information about the Romans. The *Institutes* of Justinian gives a clear statement of a much older rule: "Things again which we capture from the enemy at once become ours by the law of nations, so that by this rule even free men become our slaves, though, if they escape from our power and return to their own people, they recover their previous condition."¹⁰

The jurist, Pomponius, writing in the mid-100s CE - commenting on a book by Quintus Mucius Scaevola, writing in around 100 BCE - says:

if we have neither friendship nor *hospitium* with a particular people, nor a treaty made for the purpose of friendship, they are not precisely enemies, but that which passes from us into their hands becomes their property, and a freeman of ours who is captured by them becomes their slave, and similarly if anything of theirs passes into our hands ...¹¹

I think this is quite important for understanding the Roman state. Private-enterprise slave-raiding across the border with anybody who has not got a peace treaty with the Romans will generate slaves, and in fact we know that the Romans raided Ireland for slaves and, conversely, the Irish raided Roman Britain for slaves. Carl Harper's 2011 book, *Slavery in the late Roman world, AD 275-425* draws on the extensive evidence of the slave trade, slave prices, and so on, to show the persistence of slavery in the later Roman empire. This private quality concerns not only slave-taking, but also slave ownership, which extended a long way down the social scale.

So the Mesopotamian and later Iranian states took whole groups of prisoners of war or city populations, and set them up as state-controlled cities. The Romans in contrast (and the Greeks as well) took individuals and then sold them off to be privately owned slaves distributed among the general population. The economic effect here is straightforward. The society acquires skilled labour by capture. (It was skilled workers mainly held in slavery. The unskilled labour for the harvest season, and so on, was mainly hired.)

In European feudalism, we can see war functioning economically in two ways, one of which is taking land and the other simple looting of movables. Both aristocracy and

peasantry are land-hungry. Either primogeniture, as in England and a number of other places, means the eldest son gets the lot, and the younger ones have to go out and make a fortune; or, alternatively, equal inheritance means the land is divided and subdivided and sub-subdivided, so that the holdings of every individual child are small, and there is a powerful aspiration to get more. The church has an equivalent, which is hunger for pilgrims, because pilgrims produce income like the modern tourist industry. Part of the crusades involved getting control of the pilgrimage/tourist trade to Jerusalem.

Robert Bartlett's 1993 book, *The making of Europe: conquest, colonization and cultural change, 950-1350*, displays the process. For example, the English expand into eastern Wales, southern Scotland and Ireland. In Germany in the *Drang nach Osten* (drive to the east) Germany expands eastwards, but also you get German towns all across eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, the other sort of feudal warfare is raiding: 'chevauchées', mounted plundering expeditions, and very famously carried out throughout the Hundred Years War in the 1300s by the English in France, but starting much earlier.¹² Richard W Kaeuper's 1988 *War, justice and public order: England and France in the later Middle Ages* makes the point that the state, both in England and France, had a choice between 'war-state', which is taking your barons and knights off on expeditions to loot neighbouring countries; or, on the other hand, 'law-state', attempting to subject them to legal rules and control their behaviour at home. I have given English and French examples because it is easier to do so, but one can see the same dynamic elsewhere.

Capitalist war

The normality of capitalist war is obscured to us because there is a delusional idea that comes originally from Immanuel Kant's 1795 book, *Perpetual peace*, that the interest of business is peace. This resurfaces in the left as a result of Max Beer (in the 1890s) seeing the British Liberal Party in the mid-19th century as being anti-war and anti-imperialist, which was quite deeply misleading. Karl Kautsky picked up on Beer's argument, and therefore declared that industrial capitalism was anti-war and anti-imperialist, and from this argument the left got the mistaken idea that war and imperialism is a feature of the decline of capitalism, rather than a normal feature of capitalism.¹³

There is an enormous literature about imperialism and an important literature about 'geopolitical economy' that is more directly relevant to present concerns. But to engage with this would mean a whole other article. I just use my own long series on 'Imperialism and the state' from 2022 as a rough way of framing the issue.¹⁴ And here I suggest thinking of war as enclosure; war as competition seeking monopoly; and war as economic stimulus.

We start with one of the classic books about enclosure, Robert Allen's 1992 *Enclosure and the yeoman, the agricultural development of the south Midlands 1450-1850*. What Allen shows is that the argument of enclosure advocates, that enclosure was necessary for efficient agricultural development, turns out to have been untrue. A lot of the agricultural improvement, at least in the area that Allen studied, took place through the operations of yeoman farmers. The enclosures, rather, arose because the 18th century saw a centralisation of agricultural finance in the hands of the landed gentry, so that the gentry became

the finance capitalist superstructure of a capitalist tenant-farmer class. Enclosure, then, is the expropriation of the small farmer in favour of the creation of large, capitalist farms, and this process also has the effect of creating a proletariat by driving the workers off the land. This last point is familiar Marx, though the reasoning is somewhat different.

Enclosure's role in creating a proletariat is also visible in colonial contexts. Chapter six of William Clare Roberts's 2018 *Marxist inferno: the political theory of 'Capital'* explores the explicit discussion of the political economy in connection with the settlement of south Australia. Similar forms of expropriation through legal creation of 'property rights' out of prior pre-capitalist social superiorities can be seen in several other parts of the colonial world.¹⁵

A much more recent example of the indirect effects of wars - and proxy-war operations - as a form of 'enclosure' can be seen Immanuel Ness's 2023 book, *Migration as economic imperialism*. The point is that, in spite of all the talk about controlling immigration, the reality is that the imperialist countries are inflicting death and destruction on 'third world' countries, both through International Monetary Fund 'structural adjustment' programmes and through direct interventions and proxy-war operations and, as a result of doing that, expropriating from the possibilities of work and business in their own countries the more skilled and advanced sections of the working classes and the middle classes from these countries, thereby driving migration to the imperialist countries. This is actually, in a sense, a return to the slave-taking of the classical antiquity in that what is involved is the direct appropriation of labour being dragged or pushed out of the countries that are devastated by war, and as a result pulled into the imperialist countries, where they could be used to make up for 'skill gaps', and so on.

I do not think this leads to the conclusion that leftists should favour immigration controls, because, of course, the effect, as we have seen, is not in fact to reduce migration, but simply to increase the power of capital over migrant labour.¹⁶ The general point - that wars and proxy wars, by driving migration, increase the supply of labour available to capital - is fundamental.

Competition

Secondly, there is war as competition between capitalists seeking monopoly. We can start on this with the Venetian-Genoese wars, which ran between the mid-13th and late 14th centuries as direct wars, but continued in effect with Venetian-Spanish conflicts in the 16th century after Genoa became a client of Spain. It is clear enough that the outcome of the wars entailed control of segments of trade.¹⁷ Similarly, the Anglo-Dutch wars of 1652-54, 1665-67, 1672-74, and 1780-84 very transparently resulted in economic consequences (tending over the whole series to strengthen British control, in spite of episodic defeats), irrespective of their substantial ideological aspects.¹⁸ It is 18th century versions of this sort of war that Clausewitz sees as "state policy, which again, on its part, may be looked upon as a kind of trade on a great scale".

Moving into the 20th century, it is at least arguable that a major element of the background to World War I is British aggressive encirclement of Germany. Certainly the result of the war was elimination of German colonial possessions and the dismemberment of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires (predicted by the ex-leftist, Parvus, when he advised the Turkish government to join the

'central powers', Germany and Austria, in order to escape the yoke of Anglo-French control of Turkish finances, etc.)¹⁹

Coming up to the more recent, consider equally the effects of the American invasion of Iraq: serious damage to French and German commercial interests, because the prior partial lifting of sanctions had resulted in French and German contracts with the Iraqi regime. Consider equally the 2014 'Euromaidan' coup, and its consequences down to and including the ongoing war in Ukraine. French and German interests, and European interests more generally, are savagely affected by cutting out Russian gas supplies. Equally, to the extent that sanctions actually operate, US capital will replace Russian sales of armaments, aerospace and nuclear power equipment, so that there is a straightforward US protectionist effect of this war, beginning already in 2014. These are just a few examples and there are many others.

That war can function as a form of capitalist competition seeking monopoly is familiar from standard Marxist work on imperialism - from the discussion in the Second International and the work of Bukharin and Lenin. My point is that this is not a novelty of the "highest stage", but endemic to capitalist states as such.

Stimulus

Finally, there is war as stimulus. I discussed this in the last part of the series, 'Imperialism and the state'. The point is that if we think of the world as a closed economy - which Marxist economic theorists generally posit - then war production does not produce a sustained stimulus, because taxes have to rise to pay for the arms or for the debt incurred to buy them.

But positing a closed economy is mistaken, because what we actually live in is a world of multiple states. And, if the result of war production is that arms production is carried on in the United States and paid for by other capitalist states (either directly or through events like the 1971 US dollar float or the 1985 Plaza Accord, allowing the US inflation-away of its debts), then the stimulus effect of the increase in production in armaments takes effect in the US and boosts its economy. But the depressive effect of the taxes to pay for the arms takes place somewhere else. For example, the US economy has been substantially stimulated by the Ukraine war, while European economies have been substantially depressed.

We need to think about all this as affecting not just the big wars like Ukraine, but also a lot of the small wars. I referred earlier to David Keen's 1998 *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*. Keen has written more extensively on the economics of wars and disasters as beneficial for particular capitalist groups at the expense of other groups. He has a 2024 book out with Ruben Andersson, *Wreckonomics*, which attempts to generalise the theory beyond wars to the 'war on drugs' and so on. I think *Wreckonomics* is a little bit of an overgeneralisation.

Nonetheless, it is worthwhile thinking about the stimulative effects of war for the world hegemon state. The US does not only draw in migrants by promoting war elsewhere: by creating instability and insecurity elsewhere in the world, the US draws money into its financial system, which helps keep its economy afloat, in spite of the fact that the US runs an enormous state deficit. The same, of course, is true of the UK on a much smaller scale: that is, it is enabled to run a serious deficit in both visible and invisible trade partly because US wars and proxy wars attract hot money to the UK as a safe parking place.

We return finally to Clausewitz. War is a continuation of politics with other means (violence) added, but politics is a continuation of economics with state coercion added; and war can be seen to have profound economic effects, even where its overt motivations are superficial ideologies ●

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Mike Macnair spoke at Winter Communist University on January 17, this is an edited version. His talk can be found at youtube.com/watch?v=pfpsT5cUOZY

Notes

1. DE Davis and WSG Kohn, 'Lenin's "Notebook on Clausewitz"' *Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual*, (1977) pp188-229; 'The collapse of the Second International' (1915), chapter 3: www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/csi/iii.htm; 'War and revolution' speech, www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/may/14.htm.
2. Military writings: B Pearce (ed) *How the revolution armed* (five volumes) London 1979-81: eg, vol 1, pp211, 412; also 'Learn to think' (1938): www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/05/think.htm.
3. This is debated, though, P Donker, 'The genesis of Clausewitz's *On war* reconsidered' *British Journal for Military History* vol 2 (2016), pp101-17.
4. Here and in following quotes, German texts from clausewitzstudies.org/readings/VomKriege1832/VKwholetext.htm; English translations from clausewitzstudies.org/readings/OnWar1873/TOC.htm.
5. C von Clausewitz *On war* Princeton NJ 1989; H Strachan, 'Michael Howard and Clausewitz' *Journal of Strategic Studies* vol 45 (2022), pp143-60.
6. Eg, I Roxborough, 'Clausewitz and the sociology of war' *British Journal of Sociology* vol 45 (1994), pp619-36; A Schu, 'What is war?' *Revue française de science politique (English edition)* vol 67 (2017), pp1-18; G Dimitriu, 'Clausewitz and the politics of war: a contemporary theory' *Journal of Strategic Studies* vol 43 (2020), pp645-85.
7. *Adelphi papers* vol 38 (1998); for some of Keen's more recent work see, for example, *Useful enemies* New Haven 2012.
8. On the 17th-18th century, see, for instance, the review of recent work by PR Rössner: 'Heckscher reloaded? Mercantilism, the state and Europe's transition to industrialisation, 1600-1900' *Historical Journal* vol 58 (2015), pp663-83; later 19th century: E Grimmer-Scholem *The rise of historical economics and social reform in Germany, 1864-1894* Oxford 2003.
9. For general reference with more examples, see S Shahbazi, E Kettenhofen, JR Perry, 'Deportations' *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VII/3, pp297-312: www.iranicaonline.org/articles/deportations.
10. *Institutes* (534 CE) book 2. title 1. section 17.
11. Justinian *Digest* (promulgated 529 CE) book 49. title 15. section 5.2, Pomponius, *Commentary on Quintus Mucius [Q Mucius Scaevola pontifex, The Civil Law]* book 37.
12. Hundred years' war: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chevauchée; earlier: 'Anonymous of Bethune' (1220s), cited by John Gillingham in JS Loengard (ed) *Magna Carta and the England of King John* Woodbridge 2010, p30 (on war in Flanders in the 1200s-1210s).
13. See B Lewis and M Zurowski (trans) *Karl Kautsky on colonialism* London 2013 and my introduction there.
14. *Weekly Worker* supplements, March-April 2022: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1387/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-i \(March 17\); \[weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1388/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-ii \\(March 24\\); \\[weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1390/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-iii \\\(April 7\\\); \\\[weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1391/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-iv \\\\(April 14\\\\).\\\]\\\(http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1391/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-iv\\\)\\]\\(http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1390/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-iii\\)\]\(http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1388/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-ii\)](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1387/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-i)
15. Eg, R Nichols *Settling the frontier: land, law and society in the Peshawar valley, 1500-1900* Oxford 2001; L Kamel, 'Whose land? Land tenure in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Palestine' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* vol 41 (2014), pp230-42; B Bhandar *Colonial lives of property: law, land and racial regimes of ownership* Durham NC 2018.
16. See on this point my 2006 Yürüköglü memorial lecture, 'Fortress the west': t-k-p.net/yurukoglu/lectures/fortress_the_west.pdf.
17. There is a convenient summary at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venetian-Genoese_Wars.
18. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Dutch_Wars.
19. See, for example, S McMeekin *The Berlin-Baghdad express: the Ottoman Empire and Germany's bid for world power, 1898-1918* London 2011; C Clark *The sleepwalkers: how Europe went to war in 1914* London 2013 (on Anglo-French and Russian sponsorship of Serbian nationalist terrorism); the contemporary ex-leftist authors are discussed in M Macnair, 'Die Glocke or the inversion of theory: from anti-imperialism to pro-Germanism' *Critique* vol 42 (2014), pp353-75.

MIDDLE EAST



Today's touchstone

After the ceasefire

Our solution can only be feasible if it is regional and socialist. Nothing else works strategically. **Moshé Machover** looks at the prospects following the ceasefire deal and in light of the new Trump administration

I would like to comment on the current situation in the Middle East, including the ceasefire plan, and make some projections for the future. It is very difficult to make any certain prediction, because we are in the middle of a process that may go in different directions. But let me just start with the change that has occurred, with Benjamin Netanyahu suddenly subscribing to a deal that was on the table since May or June last year.

In fact, what the Israeli cabinet agreed to on January 17 is essentially the same as the Biden plan of May last year, which was officially submitted to the various negotiating parties in June. So what has changed? According to the best-informed Israeli sources, such as the more serious journalists of *Ha'aretz*, it is what they call the 'Trump factor' - perhaps surprisingly, because Israel, and especially Netanyahu, seem to expect an even more permissive attitude from the incoming US administration.

The Biden administration granted whatever Netanyahu asked for, applied no real pressure - it offered

only hypocritical 'expressions of concern'. But Trump, even before he got into office, adopted a much more robust attitude. He sent his emissary, Steve Witkoff, to meet Netanyahu. Witkoff is not a diplomat but a real-estate dealer just like Trump himself. He is Jewish, by the way. He told Netanyahu he would like to meet him the next day. He was informed that the next day was a Saturday, and Netanyahu does not do business on the Shabbat, but Witkoff responded with something like 'Fuck Shabbat!' and, when he read the riot act, Netanyahu complied, Shabbat or no Shabbat.

Next, he did what he always does - engage in duplicity. The ceasefire plan, with its various stages, leaves a lot of room for interpretation. It is Netanyahu's method - used throughout his very long political career - to tell one lot of people one thing and another lot another thing: he tries to satisfy both the devil and the deep blue sea by giving them slightly different versions. It has been said that, if you want

to make a deal with Netanyahu, don't go to him on your own. Just make sure that there is a witness ...

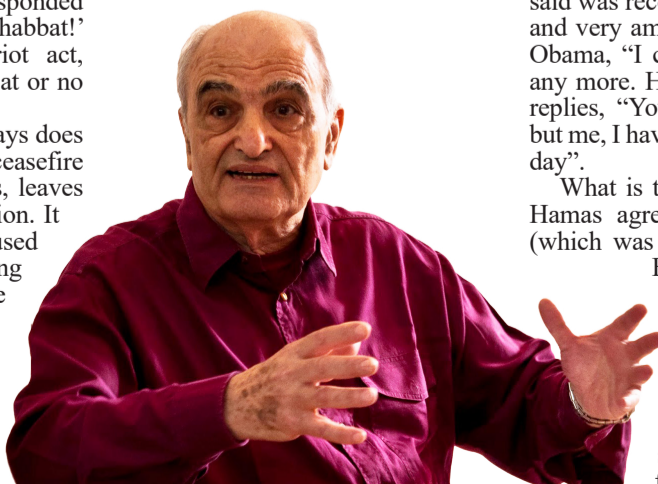
There was a famous episode which you can still find online, which dates from the Obama years. It was in 2011, during a G20 summit meeting in which Nicolas Sarkozy, then president of France, sat next to Obama. When they chatted, they did not realise that the microphones had not been switched off, so what they said was recorded (and is still online and very amusing). Sarkozy says to Obama, "I can't stand [Netanyahu] any more. He's a liar." And Obama replies, "You may be sick of him, but me, I have to deal with him every day".

What is the essence of the deal? Hamas agreed to it on this basis (which was clear to the mediators, Egypt, Qatar, and so on): it should lead to the end of the current war. The endpoint should be the cessation of hostilities, full stop: that is to say, Israel should withdraw even from the Philadelphi

Corridor, whose importance I explained in a recent talk to the Online Communist Forum, and it is in my recent article in the *Weekly Worker*.¹ On the other hand, for the extremist fanatics, the messianic section of Netanyahu's coalition, such as Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, the aim is to resume the war, leave Israel in control and recolonise the Gaza Strip - they have made this very clear. And Netanyahu himself would also like to get on with ethnic cleansing.

So he is now in a quandary. How to proceed? The way he had managed so far was to blame Hamas with some fictitious excuses, alleging that it has now posed new conditions. In fact, it was he who put forward new conditions every time the proposed agreement was brought up. What is going to happen now is anybody's guess. It is a question of how strong the pressure from the new American administration is going to be, because Trump may be interested in stopping this war and going on to a new phase. (I will explain later what seems to be his plan for rearranging

Moshé Machover:
the Israel lobby does not
control the United States



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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the Middle East). The question also is to what extent even Trump, with his more brutal and more, let us say, robust attitude, is going to be able - or even wish - to overcome the obstacles that have been put within the American political system to pressuring Israel.

Dog and tail

I would like to explain something that should be obvious, but is not generally understood. There is the question whether the Israeli tail is wagging the American dog. There seem to be quite a lot of people who believe that Israel actually decides American policy, when it comes to Palestine. This includes such eminent bourgeois 'political scientists' as John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, who have published a book - *The Israel lobby and US foreign policy* - in which they elaborate the thesis that US policy on Palestine is dictated by the pro-Israel lobby, which, by the way, includes much wider circles than the Jewish Zionists in America (eg, the much more numerous evangelist Zionists). They claim that this pressure determines American policy and makes it take steps that are against the US national interest.

But first of all, it is not a clear-cut question what the US national interest is. 'National interest' is just a euphemism for the interests of the ruling class, which is not united on all questions of policy. Otherwise, we would not have had the differences on various issues between Trump and Biden or, more traditionally, between Democrats and Republicans. They both do not represent the American working class, of course, but the American ruling class. However, they do not agree necessarily on what the 'national interest' is supposed to be.

Secondly, even those like Mearsheimer, whom I regard as well informed about the details of American policy, have not put forward a convincing account of what precisely are those essential US interests that are overruled by the pro-Israel lobby. What would American policymakers do if they were not subjected to the dictates of the pro-Israel lobby? It is true that the traditional, almost limitless, support for Israeli actions arouses hostility to the United States among the Arab masses. But the US has not been particularly worried about this. It relies on the Arab regimes to suppress the hostility of the Arab masses, including their instinctive and well-known support for Palestinian rights; and they have, on the whole, been quite successful so far.

It is true that on some issues sections of the American political class would support something that Israel has so far refused: the so-called 'two-state solution', which in effect is not about a sovereign Palestinian state, but a protectorate dominated by Israel, the US and the Arab regimes directly or indirectly. This is the plan Israel has so far rejected. The US is not genuine in describing it as a 'solution', but is certainly interested in promoting it, and I think Trump in his own way is going to be interested in it even more.

But there is also another factor that should be taken into consideration. The American ruling class has helped to build up the power of the Israel lobby: it has fostered it in order to manage internal public opinion. It is useful for the policymakers in the White House and Pentagon to rely on the lobby to manage public opinion, as well as the voting of the members of Congress and the Senate.

Here comes into play a phenomenon which is well-known to

dog breeders: if you train a Rottweiler to be an attack dog, it can sometimes be very difficult to control. This phenomenon, I think, is in evidence in the behaviour of the pro-Israel lobby in the US, and the difficulty of the ruling class in always being able to control it. There is no evidence that the ruling class is too worried about this lobby, but on occasions it is a little bit inconvenient, and the establishment finds it somewhat difficult to manage things.

We should not be swayed by those in the media who portray Trump as an idiot or simpleton who does not know what he wants, I think he is more intelligent (and more scheming) than he is given credit for. It is also becoming clear - and it was visible in his previous term as president - that he prefers a 'businessman attitude' to international politics rather than that of the military. In other words, he would prefer global economic war to military conflict involving the US, which is to be a means of last resort.

What is becoming clear is the difference in his strategy towards the Middle East, compared to that of the Biden administration. Instead of promoting military alliances, he is very keen to sponsor an economic approach. This was signalled by the Abraham accords that he managed to pull off towards the end of his last term, which lured the Gulf Emirates and Bahrain into an economic pact with Israel. This has partly worked as designed.

But there is a big absence in this alliance and that is Saudi Arabia - by far the richest and economically most powerful Arab state. So far, Saudi Arabia has demurred, and has made it clear that it is not going to join without some kind of apparent settlement of the Palestinian issue - it is too sensitive to internal dissent. Will it go along with a pact with Israel without some kind of resolution (or apparent resolution) of the Palestinian issue?

The point is, if you are pursuing a strategy which is based primarily on military confrontation, then the primary member of this kind of alliance is going to be Israel, which is militarily by far the strongest in the region. But if your strategy is based on economic warfare, then Saudi Arabia is quite obviously a key element. Israel's utility to the US in the Middle East is primarily its military capacity - its role as an American 'attack dog' in the region; while Saudi Arabia is obviously essential if the strategy is going to be based on economic confrontation.

I may be wrong, but it seems to me that potentially there could be a certain shift in US policy towards not only Israel, but the whole of the Middle East. Events will reveal whether my speculation is correct or not.

Uncertain

It also seems to me very uncertain whether the ceasefire will hold, or whether the Israeli government, with Netanyahu and his messianic allies, will manage to sabotage it - get a few hostages back and then resume the genocide in Gaza. And do not expect Trump to stop it.

But I think it is clear that Palestine is becoming the global issue of our time. The main issues that have defined progressive opinion have often changed in living memory. In the 1960s and early 70s, it was Vietnam that divided global public opinion into progressive and reactionary camps. Vietnam was an issue at the top of the agenda of people who think about international questions. In a later period, it was South Africa. This was, if you like, the touchstone that divided progressives from reactionaries, to put it very crudely.

Now it is the Palestine issue that is becoming the touchstone of world public opinion and concern about international issues. We on the radical, revolutionary left must make sure that we take the right attitude towards this. First of all, it would be wrong to confine our political work to opposition to Israel and Zionist colonisation. I think it is essential to include this *as part* of our opposition to the US and imperialism in general - that is to say, it is not *just* about Palestine. We must avoid the dangerous tendency to regard the key question as opposition to the Israeli Zionist regime alone. Yes, it is about this, but it is a mistake to disconnect it from its global links.

Secondly, we have to deal with the slogans that will continue to be put forward, and the ideological and political struggle that is facing us. One idea that will still be pushed is the two-state illusion. It is not just being proposed - in a purely deceptive way - by the United States and its camp followers. (If you ask Sir Keir Starmer, he will repeat the same mantra: 'two-state solution'.) Please note that this is also the position of Jeremy Corbyn, the Communist Party of Britain and the *Morning Star*. It is also the position of the Israeli Communist Party, which is not Zionist and in some ways has taken a very creditable position on the conflict. Its publications and the position it puts forward in the Knesset are under tremendous attack. Yet its formula is still the 'two-state solution'. This has to be debunked. It must be explained why, even if it could be implemented, it would not be a resolution to the conflict, but *another* form of subjugation of the Palestinian people to Zionist colonisation.

An alternative that will also be put forward is the 'one-state solution'. A real resolution of the conflict must be based on equal individual rights for all inhabitants of the area of Israel/Palestine, and equal national rights for the Palestinian Arab nationality and the Israeli Jewish nationality (or, as it should be termed, the Hebrew nationality, as distinct from the mythical worldwide 'Jewish nation'). Also, the Palestinian refugees must have the right to return to their homeland.

Now, some versions of this should not be attacked in the same way as the two-state illusion. True, even the best versions are not feasible if they fall short of the necessary socialist transformation - not only of Israel and Palestine, but the whole region. The current versions of the one-state solution are utopian, in that they do not confront the need to overthrow the Zionist state, which is only possible as part of a *regional* socialist transformation. However, even the utopian versions fulfil a positive role, in that they *expose* the Zionist regime for opposing justice; so we should not treat those who put them forward as political enemies ●

This article is based on the talk Moshé Machover gave to Winter Communist University 2025: youtube.com/watch?v=vTgP7pK0dyo

Notes

1. 'Redrawing the map', January 9: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1520/redrawing-the-map.

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weekly worker

Platypus is dead

Do the evolution

Going from left to right is a well-trodden path. Paul Demarty traces the development of the 'last Marxist' from Spartacism to Trump cheerleader

Donald Trump's plans for the annexation of Greenland have some eccentric cheerleaders in the United States - none more so than Chris Cutrone.

While most cheerleaders look hungrily at the vast territory and natural resources, and fear - rightly or wrongly - being beaten to the punch in a new scramble for the arctic, for Cutrone, it seemed to mean much more. In extending its territory over this rough land, home to slightly fewer people than Taunton, the United States would be renewing its vitality as a revolutionary nation - perhaps, indeed, the only one. Cutrone likes to style himself as "the last Marxist", and indeed has done so for close to two decades at this point. He certainly seems to be a true believer in manifest destiny.

Perhaps some readers will be surprised to find out that this man styles himself as a Marxist. It will depend, perhaps, on a few factors - above all, how familiar they are with a whole ecosystem that for a time was called the 'post-left'. Perhaps we thought the whole matter had resolved itself when many leading lights of this 'not quite' movement (including Cutrone) turned improbably Trumpite during and after 2016. Cutrone's strange Greenland article is perhaps a good moment to check in on Platypus, which deliberately named itself after a quirk of evolution, to make note of any chance mutations that may have taken place.

What was Platypus beforehand? That is in part, necessarily, a matter of the biography of its 'guru'. As a young man, Cutrone floated for a time in the orbit of the Spartacist League - it is not clear to me if he was ever a member *per se*. The Sparts were a robustly polemical outfit, committed to what they considered orthodox Trotskyism. It is less their conception of orthodox Trotskyism than their particular, angular style that he has carried with him.

The Sparts faced outward primarily to rival left organisations, whom they considered various species of vacillators, traitors and poseurs. Their political method consisted of taking the sharpest possible line on an issue of momentary politics, posing that position to their rivals, and denouncing their inevitable vacillation, treachery, etc. As an example - it was not enough, for the Sparts, to merely fight against US backing for the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The US left had to organise international brigades to fight them, guns in hand. Squeamishness about such voluntarism would not go unpunished.

By the mid-2000s, Cutrone had certainly broken with the Sparts' model of anti-imperialism. He contributed a couple of letters to their *Workers Vanguard* paper commending the US occupation of

Iraq (these letters seem, sadly, to have disappeared from the internet since I read them in the early 2010s).

At around this time, he came under the influence of Moishe Postone, a quasi-Marxist academic whose great achievements are an essay on anti-Semitism that has become the great holy text of today's 'left' Zionists, arguing that the left is prone to anti-Semitism because the Jew is identified with the abstract power of capital; and an interpretation of Marxist political economy which reconstructs Marxism as a description of an endlessly self-perpetuating mechanism that wholly subsumes labour, thus making redundant the Marxist commitment to the proletariat as the agent of what Postone and his followers insist on calling "emancipatory politics".

Origins

Platypus was formed in 2006 (out of a seminar run by Postone at the University of Chicago) by Cutrone and others who thought it was necessary to do something other than run a seminar at the University of Chicago. To do what? The Platypus template was formed early, and has remained strangely unvarying ever since. They organise almost entirely on campuses. They do panels: they invite a few people of often wildly varying political and institutional backgrounds, ask them a few questions in slightly stilted academes, and run what looks for all the world like a moderated session at an academic conference.

Under the hood, there was something else going on - the 'Platypus synthesis', which one ideally encountered at their other form of activity, the reading group, which ran through a distinctive series of set texts, basically from Kant to the Sparts, via Hegel, Benjamin Constant, Lenin and Trotsky, Lukács, Adorno and Horkheimer, and Postone. To compress things inevitably past the point of caricature, the Platypus synthesis is an idea of the left that sees it as whatever pushes things forward (best exemplified, in the reading group syllabus, by Leszek Kolakowski's piece, 'The concept of the left', written not long before he abandoned the left altogether).

To push things forward is always to push towards freedom, and the Platypus conception of freedom is unabashedly an inheritor of classical liberalism's novel conception of freedom, and the emergence of capital as a revolutionary force; but capital gives way to capitalism with the transition from absolute to relative surplus value and the consequent emergence of mass unemployment as a periodic phenomenon that separates people from that freedom. Socialism is primarily to be addressed to that problem, and thereby conceived as a fulfilment of the promises of modernity, rather than a revolutionary struggle against it.



Not so strange

The contemporary left, however, is incapable of undertaking such a project. It merely slaps back, ineffectively, at the forces arrayed against it. In its pure defensiveness, it gives up the promise of liberal modernity, of real freedom. For the same reason, it has illusions in reactionary anti-capitalism (Islamism, Ba'athism...). Therefore, 'the left is dead' - but it might be reconstructed along lines informed by the Platypus critique - and so 'Long live the left!'

Given this outlook, and the Postone inheritance, it was not surprising that, when Platypus did spread out of the US, it found a ready audience in Germany, principally in the circles of the *Antideutsche*. The implied comfort with the imperial adventures of the American state, the disdain for conventional leftwing causes, very much including the Palestinian struggle, made it a good fit.

It was not until 2016, however, that Platypus would start turning towards open political arguments, occasioned partly by the success of the Bernie Sanders campaign, but fundamentally by the rise of Trump and the hysterical reaction from the liberals. Under those circumstances, Cutrone wrote a short essay under the title, 'Why not Trump?'¹ As the opening salvo in Cutrone's career as an open post-left contrarian, it was not quite as unreasonable as the title makes it sound, mostly being a (sometimes well observed) critique of the various idiocies and hypocrisies of liberal anti-Trumpism. The odd conclusion follows not entirely from that premise, but the prevent one that the left is dead - if the liberals are mad, and the left is dead, what option is left other than Trump?

This might have been thought to entail a final break with the left, as was to follow over the years with other contrarian left celebrities, mostly through spending too much time on the internet. Yet it was in these years that Platypus's newly 'politicised' outlook gave rise to various side projects which seemed more conventionally political. There was a 'campaign for a socialist party', which was some kind of intervention in the Bernie-or-bust milieu, without any noticeable success. There was the foundation of *Sublation* magazine, later to become a wider media operation called Sublation Media, along with Douglas Lain, a long-time leftwing eccentric.

There is a contradiction here between the old-line Platypus 'the left is dead' routine and the novel initiatives in, apparently, doing plain, old-fashioned sectarian leftism. (Reluctance to get involved in Adolph Reed's quixotic Labor Party was one part of the Platypus origin story.) Among later Cutrone assertions was "the millennial left is dead", as he told his readers in 2017², but was he not a year or two later dipping his toe into the waters of this 'millennial left'? (Endless recourse to the superficial demographic categories of the marketing industry is one of the defects of Platypus historiography, but they are hardly alone in that respect.)

Amnesia

It could look, if one were uncharitable, a little like excusing defeat in advance - like a football manager going through the team's injury list in the pre-match presser. Yet it is not clear that these side initiatives really matter all that much to Cutrone. He remains more interested in the movement of those great celestial spheres, freedom and authoritarianism. In this drama, mere political actors are reduced either to spectators or wholly absorbed (if they are part of the 'Platypus synthesis') into these alien forces.

Attending the Platypus reading group in London many years ago, I found it astonishingly difficult to get their members really to care about the *politics* of the disputes in the early 20th century socialist movement - the nitty-gritty of who disagreed with whom, when, and about what. The texture of that history, so important to a bright-eyed CPGBer like me, was more or less treated as an irritating distraction, as Catholics sometimes find those historians who are impertinent enough to conclude that most of the 'martyrs' of the reign of Julian the Apostate simply never existed.

Cutrone himself, in fact, makes the point - and its absurdity - abundantly clear in his letter to this week's *Weekly Worker*. I objected to his article last week that his historical schema of the unique role of the US had no room for "the

carpet-bombing of Cambodia". He objects in turn that the US "targeted Vietnamese communist forces", and did not demand an unconditional surrender of the Cambodians, which "says something". (Any old American can sing the praises of Lincoln or Jefferson, but it takes a true patriot to go out to bat for Richard Nixon.)

"Says something" - but what? Of course no surrender was demanded; after all, this was not officially a war, and the ghastliness of what the US inflicted on that ill-starred nation was meticulously concealed even from the American population, if in the end unsuccessfully. (And if that is the difference, what about all the people of whom such a surrender has been demanded?)

How, in the end, can this stuff be reconciled with the wider providential history of America offered? Simply by effacing it - either with an absurdly aseptic reading of actions taken by the US government that would cost countless lives and devastate Cambodia, or simply with an open advocacy of Reaganite morning-in-America amnesia. "Socialists in the US", he informs us, "have a responsibility, but not for a historical moral balance sheet of US government actions, but for the future course of society and politics". Problem solved!

Where is this all going? The obvious answer is - to the plain old right. The British milieu associated with *Spiked* went from ultra-leftist swagger to libertarian accelerationism and, finally, to Orbánite conservatism. At an earlier time, the American journal *Telos* abandoned its Frankfurt School-inflected Marxism for neo-conservatism. The modern American conservative movement, indeed, was to a considerable extent populated by ex-communists, and the early days of neo-conservatism by ex-Trotskyists. It is a well-worn path.

This may in fact be more difficult for Platypus, since their project is so entirely oriented around the idea of freedom in its classical, negative sense, and the various strands of conservatism must in the end return to some positive, reified idea of the good life, which has been lost precisely in the ravages of modernity. Breaks of this sort, however, need not be dramatic: merely the open avowal, at last, of premises long present, but not yet thematised.

We wait and see - but, if that is the trajectory, it will not be anything like the evolutionary surprise offered by the egg-laying mammal of eastern Australia ●

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Notes

1. platypus1917.org/2016/09/06/why-not-trump.
2. platypus1917.org/2017/10/01/millennial-left-dead.