

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Volodymyr Zelensky's political career seems to be rapidly heading towards its failure

- Letters and debate
- Forging Communist Unity
- Donald Trump 2.0
- Aukus and global hegemony

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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**GOOD CODING
BAD POLITICS**



deepseek

LETTERS



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

Agreements

I want to thank the comrades at the *Weekly Worker*, and in particular Mike Macnair, for their sustained engagement with *Prometheus's* 'What is the party?' series, but I also thought it might be worth responding directly to a few of the points raised in comrade Macnair's recent article, 'What sort of partyism?' (January 9), where he addresses my own contribution to the series.

On the issue of "separate" versus "independent" organisation, comrade Macnair has me bang to rights. This was a sloppy and imprecise use of the terminology on my part. The point I was intending to make was more precisely about organisational *independence*, not organisational separation - the argument was intended to apply equally to external revolutionary 'third-party' organisations and to organisations functioning as affiliates or internal factions to other non-revolutionary organisations.

On the issue of the term, 'anti-capitalist', this was something I went back and forth over, with early drafts of the essay inconsistently flipping between terms like 'socialist', 'communist', 'Marxist' and 'revolutionary', as well as 'anti-capitalist'. I settled on 'anti-capitalist' as the most legible and self-explanatory term, which would make the argument easily accessible to the relevant audiences as widely as possible. This was specifically just in consideration of the essay itself, its audience, its argument - it was not intended to reflect any wider judgement on the relative political or rhetorical merits of the different terms.

More broadly, I agree with comrade Macnair about the importance of grasping the nettle of the words, 'communism' and 'socialism' (and 'Marxism' too!), but these are all terms that can be quite ambiguous and come with different baggage to different people, and I thought my essay was long enough already, without having to add an extended digression about exactly how I was defining those terms. The term, 'anti-capitalist', by contrast, has the virtue of being almost completely self-explanatory to any relevant audience: ie, to anyone on the left who wishes to overthrow capitalism. True, there can conceivably be reactionary anti-capitalisms, but these are generally marginal in Britain, and presumably non-existent amongst the likely readership of *Prometheus*, so I didn't regard that as a relevant concern.

Additionally, I was trying to make the argument for the necessity of the party basically from first principles. There are plenty of comrades who are sceptical of identifying with labels such as 'Marxist' or 'socialist', perhaps identifying more with terms like 'anarchist', precisely *because* of their scepticism about the idea of the party. Even if it might only be a minority of those people who are open to these arguments, I didn't want to foreclose their engagement by using terminology which excludes them from the start. Perhaps a relevant difference here is that comrade Macnair is used to writing in the *Weekly Worker* for an audience mainly of seasoned Marxists. By contrast, I started writing my essay as a response to the 'Party Time' events at Pelican House, so had in mind a generally younger audience with perhaps more varied ideological self-conceptions and more uneven levels of political development.

On the issue of parties as broad fronts with the aim to immediately

form a government, I think that comrade Macnair is misunderstanding my argument - or perhaps conflating together two separate issues. My argument on this point is not a general one, but specifically that, under Britain's 'first past the post' electoral system, electoral parties *usually* need to function as broad fronts. This is not just the case if they wish to form a government - even to break through as a minor oppositional party with a handful of MPs is usually extremely difficult. The 2024 UK general election took place in conditions of probably unprecedented political weakness for the two major parties, and saw unprecedented breakthrough successes for left-of-Labour, independent and third-party candidates - yet that still amounted only to four Green and five independent MPs out of 650. And those were candidates and parties running broad campaigns.

Macnair cites Corbyn's Labour Party and the Green Party as significant minority opposition parties, as if they are counter-examples - I don't disagree about their importance as opposition parties, but nevertheless they are both examples of what I mean by political parties that operate as broad fronts. Whether an electoral party is politically broad or narrow, and whether it prioritises acting as an opposition or aiming to immediately form a government, are two separate questions. Yes, there is a relation between them - because, the more priority you put on forming a government immediately, the more intense the pressure to maintain as broad a coalition as possible, but that pressure still exists, albeit less intensely, for oppositional parties.

I'm not arguing that communists in Britain can't or shouldn't ever run parliamentary campaigns completely independent of coalition agreements with broader progressive forces, but the reality of Britain's electoral system is that electing even a single MP is usually prohibitively difficult when the left's vote is split.

On comrade Macnair's characterisation of my argument as implying a "mass strikist" conception of the party reflecting orthodoxies of the new left, I'm afraid I don't really recognise the characterisation or follow the argument. Perhaps this reflects my own historical or theoretical ignorance, but it feels to me that there's some leap in the argument here. This relates to the content of my previous letter (November 28 2024), and I would certainly be interested to hear comrade Macnair spelling out his attitude here in a little more depth.

I don't see that there's any contradiction between the conception of the party as "the institution which coordinates strategy" versus "a political voice for the working class in high politics". We don't wish for a political voice for the working class in high politics merely as an end in itself or for the fun of it - it's because we view it as strategically necessary to advance our longer-term goals of overthrowing the class rule of the bourgeoisie and beginning the socialist transition! And achieving those goals will also require communists to engage in other activities besides just providing a voice in high politics and, if we want to succeed and to get the most out of those activities, we will need a coordinated strategy for them - and if the party isn't the institution to coordinate that, then what is?

Further, I think the relationship between high politics and coordination of strategy goes in both directions - and apologies here: I'm now somewhat thinking aloud. The voice in high politics is a condensation and a reflection of the experiences, activities, interests, needs, etc of the wider movement and the wider class,

and it has the effect of informing and galvanising the wider activities of the movement and of the class. I think there's a fundamental point here - the fact that the institution responsible for coordinating strategy and the institution responsible for acting as a voice in high politics are one and the same is not coincidental. In this context, the essence of what we mean by politics and by strategy is that they are both generalised and generalising. And we have no other *general* institution.

The Comintern used to talk of the party as providing the "general staff" of the revolutionary struggle, and probably that overly militarised attitude was part of their ultimate downfall, but certainly the party is the great *generalist*!

And, yes, comrade Macnair is correct to say that my practical proposals have "an indeterminate character", but the article was long enough already, and that section was only intended as a starting point. And I should say, of course, that I agree with Macnair's closing remarks about the importance of open debate amongst communists.

Incidentally, I think Macnair is wrong to characterise *The World Transformed* as "one of the standard top-table-dominated setups designed to be turned on and off at the convenience of the 'official left' leaders" - it was actually a much more complicated and contradictory (and perhaps incoherent) project than that, but perhaps a reflection on my experience on the steering group of that organisation during the Corbyn years is an article for another time!

I think comrade Macnair's comments about Momentum's failures also are inexact. As an analysis of Corbynism's failures more broadly, Macnair's general argument here is not wrong, but my comments in the article were more specifically about Momentum as an organisation (and especially what happened with the changes to its constitution in 2017), not about the Labour Party itself. Again, I won't get into the details here, because this probably merits its own article.

Archie Woodrow

RS21 North London

Platypus RIP

Two weeks ago, Mike Macnair criticised Platypus in this paper for producing "premature obituaries" of the left ('Anti-partyism' *partyism* January 16). Last week, Paul Demarty's article, 'Do the evolution' (January 23), appeared under the banner, "Platypus is dead". The irony is not lost. Unfortunately, this obituary was not only premature, but full of clichés and distortions.

Demarty claims Platypus founder Chris Cutrone wrote to *Workers Vanguard*, "commending the US occupation of Iraq". Cutrone's exchanges can be found in *WV* No847 (2005) and No874 (2006). In a further 2007 letter, written in response to the Spartacist Youth Club's pamphlet denouncing Platypus, Cutrone wrote: "I have never in any form suggested, let alone said, because I do not believe that the US invasion and occupation of Iraq was good and supportable". He reiterated the same points in a letter to the *Weekly Worker* (May 30 2013), concluding: "Only a deliberate distortion of the facts can characterise our project otherwise." So, the original sin turns out to be a lie.

Demarty wants to take Cutrone publishing an article in *Compact* as a moment to "check in on Platypus", but he doesn't consider looking at the latest issues of *The Platypus Review* or the panels hosted by Platypus chapters around the world. Nor does he refer to the report from the 2023 Platypus International Convention published in this paper by Mike Macnair ('History

and anti-history', April 20 2023). Is this a good use of the talents of that "bright-eyed CPGBer" interested in "the texture of that [Marxist] history"? It reflects an unhealthy view of organisations - one focused on the pronouncements of the founder rather than the activity of the members - which says more about the sad reality of the 'left' than about Platypus.

Demarty tries to fit Platypus into the ready-made *Weekly Worker* critiques of the British 'far-left' groupings, with their boomer gurus removed from their revolving-door activists. Hence clichés like "Under the hood, there was something else going on - the 'Platypus synthesis'." He has forgotten the insights of his 2013 blog post, describing Platypus as "mostly harmless", in which he noted: "There is no hidden agenda with Platypus, really - all the 'scandalous' stuff is on their website - but the *idea* of one is compelling for real reasons" (filbendemarty.wordpress.com/2013/06/13/mostly-harmless). Those "real reasons" boil down to one thing: avoidance of the questions posed by Platypus.

Behind the unexamined trope of the "well-trodden path" of *Partisan Review*, *Telos*, *Spiked*, etc - a CPGBer should know the political pitfalls of 'just so' stories about renegades - there lies the more daunting problem: the fate of Marxism. It's no secret that those attempting to overcome the impasse in the first quarter of the 21st century have only chased themselves into increasingly narrow corners. What is the way out?

Platypus asks these questions: What is the legacy of Trotskyism? What is the concept of the left? Where do we stand in relation to the bourgeois revolution? And, yes, what is the alternative to the left's hysterical reaction to the election of Donald Trump? To paraphrase Trotsky, fools will consider this "cheerleading".

It is telling that this premature obituary appeared just after Trump's second inauguration - it wasn't the only drive-by attempt on Platypus in recent weeks - as the left realises it is unprepared for the bad new days to come, with little to cash out from the adventures of the last two decades. "Civilisation on the brink," announced the *Weekly Worker* leader hysterically, in the same issue that it declared "Platypus is dead". An interesting pairing, but wishful thinking on both counts.

Platypus continues to host the conversation that otherwise would not happen, not least because leftists and Marxists - even those apparently closely aligned - still cancel each other for supposedly beyond-the-pale statements. Not adhering to such taboos, which anyway change with the political weather, Platypus takes the left seriously - often more seriously than it takes itself.

Speaking on a Platypus panel in 2013 with *Jacobin* founder Bhaskar Sunkara and member Benjamin Blumberg (available on the Platypus Affiliated Society YouTube channel as 'Conversations on the left: what is to be done?'), Paul Demarty explained the CPGB-PCC attempt to analogise building a new Communist Party to the founding of the original CPGB in 1920. He observed that the uniting groups back then had around 5,000 members - not dissimilar to the number of 'committed' Marxists scattered across Britain today. Far from finding this bit of "policeman's materialism" comforting, Demarty commented: "We're back, in a sense, where we started, which tells you something about the 20th century."

"Tells you something" - but what? For example, can we really take for granted slogans crafted for cold war anti-imperialism? Must one be "out

to bat for Richard Nixon" to question their purchase at this late stage - 35 years after the destruction of the Soviet Union? But it seems we are back where we started - much further back - which tells you something about the 21st century: 'The left is dead! Long live the left!'

Efraim Nashe

Platypus Affiliated Society

Communist allies?

Vietnam and China have deemed each other strategic allies and the amount of top leadership interaction between the two tells its own story. So I don't know where Chris Cutrone got his "Vietnam now depends for security on a military and economic alliance with the US against threats from its ancient neighbour and enemy, China" from (Letters, January 23). Possibly from plain ignorance.

Vietnam is open for business and has also developed a close friendship with Russia. Time and time again it is stated on Voice of Vietnam radio station how vital its relationship is with the two countries - especially China, given the tremendous economic relationship they have with each other. Vietnam also does have a very large trade turnover with the US. It is opening up to all regions of the world, including Europe and Africa.

Vietnam and China are both communist states and seek friendship as neighbours, as communist parties and on all other fronts. Whatever pressure is applied by the Americans, using their high trade turnover as leverage, is absorbed and processed with their determination to maintain paramount friendship with all nations, distant and close. Vietnam has minor disputes with China and other countries in the South China Sea, but it is a rare occasion when anything related to minor disputes is reported in their media - unlike with the Philippines, which is being used as a battle ram against China. The China-Vietnam relationship is very positive and is managed in an orderly and friendly fashion.

As to what China is or isn't, it must be recalled that the original seed funding came from the USSR. Without this delivery of machinery, experts and money China would be decades behind where it is now. All countries sell their labour, but not all countries save the profits of that labour to reinvest in their own industrial enterprises, as China did. They were in no position to bargain over wages in the early years, but now they are assuming the nature of a medium-waged country, which is facilitating the domestic boom and has made their economy no longer reliant on Europe-US. Their most important trading relationships are now in Asia, but they have expanded trade with all non-western regions of the world.

There is a reason for US aggression against China: 'Trade, baby, trade!' But, unlike the US and EU, their military spending is overwhelmingly defensive in nature and matches the growing threat from the US - a threat that doesn't exist conversely. China's ever closer relationship with Russia is not deemed a military alliance, unlike Russia's relationship with North Korea, for example, but this hardly matters, since to all intents and purposes that is exactly what it is. With Europe cracking up under US-China tensions and the most stupid war ever on European territory against the foremost nuclear power, Russia, with both the US and European economies drained by the super-profit motive and taking up a far lower share of the world economy than they had decades ago, the future is decidedly not on their side.

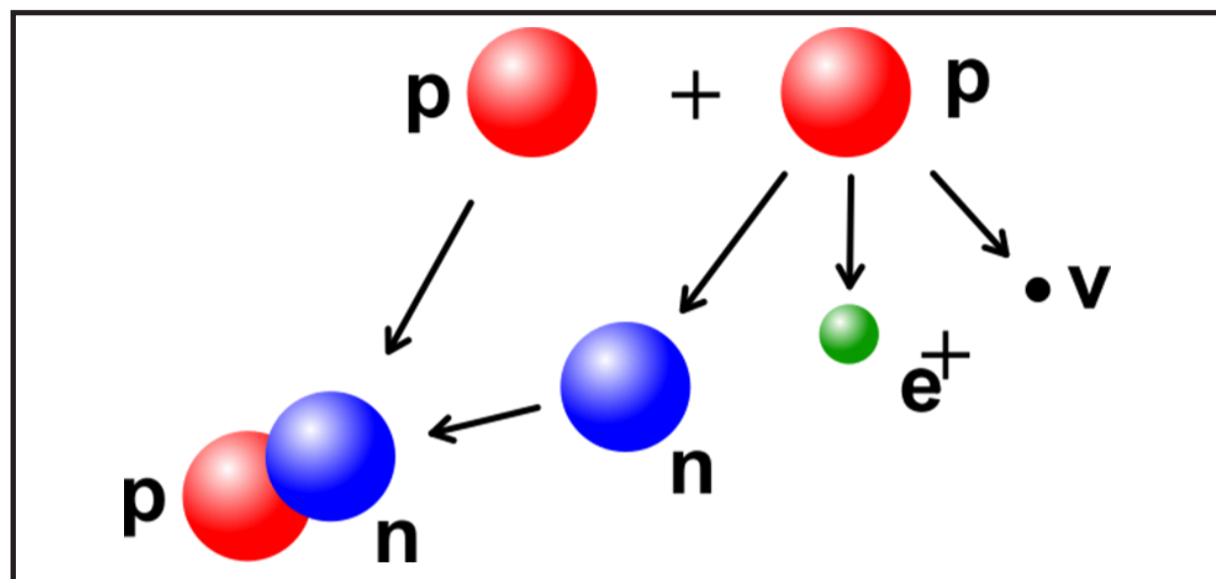
Elijah Traven

Hull

FUSION

Third-round progress

Preliminary stages have been completed, but it is important, at this point, to challenge those who only talk the talk. Jack Conrad reports



Fusion also involves splits

Negotiations between the CPGB, Talking About Socialism and the *Prometheus* editorial board have seen further positive steps. Our third Zoom meeting on Saturday January 25 was good-natured and constructive.

I represented the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee, Nick Wrack and Ed Potts TAS. Cat Rylance spoke as a member of the *Prometheus* EB. It should be added that comrade Potts is also a member of the *Prometheus* EB. So, in a sense, he wore two hats.

No RS21 comrade from the *Prometheus* EB was available on this occasion - more than a pity. These meetings are important and are being keenly followed by many good comrades on the left. The struggle to overcome the closely connected dual curse of sectism and broad-frontism could, if we are successful, be taken to a *higher stage* with Forging Communist Unity.

In this context, I told comrades that our fusion process has been a definite factor in the recent upturn of applications to join the CPGB. That, in and of itself, is a positive development for all three organisations. Not that we operate an open-door policy ... we want *serious* recruits.

Behind

At our last meeting the CPGB and TAS comrades confirmed that they were fully on board with FCU. The *Prometheus* EB is, however, markedly uneven. So we started our third round of talks with a report from comrade Rylance.

She referred us to the *Prometheus* EB statement giving what can only be described as a *cautious* welcome to FCU. Comrade Rylance described opinions on the EB as ranging from the enthusiastic to the sceptical.

There were too, perhaps, fears amongst the EB's RS21 members that their work in the ranks of RS21 and progressing FCU would, at some stage, prove to be incompatible.

During the discussion that followed, I made the point that with us, in the CPGB, such a worry, while understandable, is entirely misplaced. We are committed to comrades continuing with their membership of existing left organisations. Comrades ought to maintain contacts, bonds ... and their open political struggles.

In the case of RS21 the goal should be to win the entire organisation to fully embracing Forging Communist Unity. Of course, there could well be those

on the right who are unwilling to countenance communist unity. Maybe, instead, they prefer broad-frontism and pursuing unity with the trade union bureaucracy. If that is the case, they will, probably, resort either to purging the left or splitting from the left. We shall see.

The suggestion had already been made that we ought to meet with all members of the *Prometheus* EB. That way hesitations, even hostility, can, if there is sincerity and good will, be overcome in pursuit of what is, after all, *our common objective*. In the 'Politics of Prometheus', the EB emphasises its commitment to the "necessity of the party". The "party", they say, "represents the single-most important institution of the socialist movement".¹ Exactly. And now, comrades, it is time to turn those fine words into political practice. Those who only talk the talk will soon find themselves exposed.

We decided to put forward comrades Wrack and Conrad to meet the EB. The following email was sent on January 29:

Dear comrades,
As you know, comrades representing the CPGB, *Prometheus* and Talking About Socialism ... from a Marxist point of view (TAS) met on Saturday January 25 2025 as part of the ongoing discussions now called 'Forging Communist Unity' to discuss how to progress the process towards a possible fusion of the groups involved.

It was reported that there is not unanimity among the *Prometheus* editorial board about how, if at all, *Prometheus* should engage with the discussions.

It is understandable that comrades may have reservations, hesitations and concerns about the process - how it will evolve and what will emerge from the process. The discussions are still only at a very early stage. We recognise that comrades will have questions and even criticisms of the other participating groups that generate caution.

In order to try to answer any questions and to try to assuage any concerns about any aspect of the FCU process, it was thought that we should propose to you that Jack Conrad of the CPGB and Nick Wrack of TAS meet you collectively to discuss any aspects of the process that comrades may want to raise. You will already have heard, at least in part, the views of Cat Rylance and Ed

Potts, who would be involved as members of the *Prometheus* EB.

We encourage all comrades to voice their concerns, doubts and criticisms, whether in respect of the participating groups or of anything else and would welcome a frank exchange of views about what can be achieved.

To that end we propose an in-person meeting at a venue of your choosing (London or elsewhere) in the near future, at which the *Prometheus* EB comrades could ask any questions and raise any issues that they wish. If an in-person meeting, which we would prefer, is not possible, then a Zoom meeting could be an alternative.

We look forward to your response.

Why Marx?

Why Marx? and its proposed series of seminars, centred on communist unity, was raised too.

I explained that the CPGB's PCC had issues with initial drafts. We certainly opposed any suggestion that Why Marx? should serve as the "public face" of FCU.

It should also be pointed out that the comrades taking the effective lead in Why Marx? are CPGB members. However, we have decided to treat it as a freelance project and not exercise direct control. Instead we have relied on persuasion.

This has, after much effort, born fruit. I could, therefore, assure comrades that the latest draft list of sessions is a considerable improvement. When possible, PCC members will, therefore, contribute to sessions as lead speakers.

The TAS comrades said that without the active support of the PCC they too had kept their distance from Why Marx? That position will now be reconsidered. Good.

I suggested that we should invite another member of the CPGB's PCC to participate in our talks. This was agreed.

We shall now move on to the real business. That is the first of the six points proposed by TAS: "What should a partyist organisation's fundamental principles and programmatic commitments be?"²

My fourth-round dispatch will follow in due course ●

Notes

1. prometheusjournal.org/2021/12/19/the-politics-of-prometheus.
2. For all six points see 'Second-round progress' *Weekly Worker* January 16 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1521/second-round-progress.

ACTION

Oppose Tommy Robinson, stop the far right

Saturday February 1, 11.30am: Demonstration. Assemble St James's Street (off Piccadilly), London SW1. 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/1882825959625326623.

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.

Nato and the war in Ukraine

Monday February 3, 7pm: Webinar. Donald Trump claims he can end the war: what might a US-imposed political settlement look like? Speaker: Andrew Murray (Stop the War). Registration free. Organised by London Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: cnduk.org/events/nato-and-the-war-in-ukraine-london-cnd-webinar.

Don't freeze pensioners out

Tuesday February 4, 11.30am: Protest outside the Senedd, Pierhead Street, Cardiff CF10. Followed at 12 noon by speeches in the Norwegian Church Arts Centre, Harbour Drive, Cardiff CF10. Demand the Welsh government provides support for pensioners hit by the cut to the winter fuel payment. Organised by Unite and the National Pensioners Convention Wales: actionnetwork.org/events/winter-fuel-rally-wales.

Perspectives on human origins

Tuesday February 4, 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: 'Notes from the forest - Storytelling with the Penan of Borneo'. Speaker: Paulina Michnowska. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/2640256589697729.

Cuba and Palestine: onwards together

Tuesday February 4, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Celebrating solidarity between Cuba and Palestine. Speakers include Aleida Guevara March (Cuban paediatrician), Ben Jamal (Palestine Solidarity Campaign) and Bernard Regan (Cuba Solidarity Campaign). Tickets £5. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/cuba-and-palestine-onwards-together.

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.

Why we're fighting for a mass Communist Party

Thursday February 6, 6.30pm: Online discussion in the series, 'Building a communist Party'. Speakers: Jack Conrad (CPGB), Cat Rylance (*Prometheus* editorial board, personal capacity) and Talking About Socialism (invited). Registration free. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

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.

Can a woman be a sexton? Olive v Ingram, 1739

Thursday February 6, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc.

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.

Affordable homes for Peckham

Saturday February 8, 3pm: Protest, Peckham Square, London SE15. Oppose the Aylesham Centre development for 877 new Berkeley homes where just 12% are designated as 'affordable'. Stop overdevelopment: homes for people, not for profit. Organised by Aylesham Community Action: www.ayleshamcommunityaction.co.uk/ourcampaign.

Defend Chris Nineham - drop the charges

Thursday February 13, 12.30pm: Protest outside Westminster Magistrates Court, 181 Marylebone Road, London NW1. The arrests of leaders of the Palestine coalition are a direct attack on the right to free assembly. Defend the right to protest and demand the repeal of the Public Order Act. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/defend-the-right-to-protest.

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.

DEEPSEEK

Coding good, politics bad

Stock market prices tumbled with the news that the People's Republic is rivalling western tech barons. And it is not just hype, says Yassamine Mather

On January 27 global investors offloaded tech stocks amid a panic that DeepSeek and other such advances in Chinese artificial intelligence could challenge the dominance of industry leaders like Nvidia. This sell-off erased a staggering \$593 billion from the chipmaker's market value, marking the largest single-day loss for any company on Wall Street.

Although Nvidia, a key producer of graphics processing units (GPUs) essential for AI development, was the hardest hit, other major players such as OpenAI, Google, Anthropic, and Microsoft (which owns a significant stake in OpenAI) also saw significant losses, contributing to a total of \$1 trillion wiped from the Nasdaq stock market index. The downward trend continued in Asian markets on January 28.

Nvidia was particularly affected, because it is one of the primary US companies producing GPUs - specialised hardware originally designed to accelerate image and video rendering for computer graphics. Unlike central processing units (CPUs), which are optimised for general-purpose computing, GPUs are built to handle highly parallelised operations, such as processing millions of pixels simultaneously. They consist of thousands of smaller, more efficient cores, capable of performing numerous calculations at once, making them ideal for tasks involving large datasets and complex mathematical computations. This architecture makes GPUs indispensable for machine learning and deep learning, which are critical components of AI. Training AI models require the processing of vast amounts of data, often in matrix or tensor form, and GPUs excel at handling these calculations in parallel, speeding up the process compared to CPUs.

Modern deep learning frameworks like TensorFlow, PyTorch and JAX are optimised to use GPUs for best performance. So what are these highly valued technical processes?

Tensorflow: Imagine you have a big box of Lego bricks, and you want to build something like a robot or a car. But instead of following a specific instruction manual, you want the Lego bricks to learn how to build the best model on their own. TensorFlow is like a super-smart helper that organises the Lego bricks and tries different combinations to figure out the best way to build what you want. It does this by experimenting - it makes mistakes, and learns from those mistakes to improve over time. In the AI/GPU world, TensorFlow helps computers learn from data (like pictures, sounds or numbers) to solve problems, recognise patterns or make predictions - just like your Lego helper learns to build the best robot!

Pytorch: Imagine you want to teach a computer to recognise cats in photos. You would give it thousands of cat pictures, and PyTorch provides the tools to help the computer analyse those images, recognise patterns and improve over time - just as we get better at recognising faces, the more we see them. It is also used for teaching computers to



One leap after another: artificial intelligence

understand human language (like chatbots), making predictions like forecasting the weather or stock prices.

All of these tools rely on compiling libraries - in other words, pre-written code, such as CUDA (Nvidia's parallel computing platform) and cuDNN (Nvidia's deep neural network library) to accelerate computations.

In AI GPUs are essential, because they are highly scalable and allow the training of massive models like GPT and DALL·E simultaneously. While they consume substantial power, they are often more energy-efficient than CPUs for AI workloads because of their ability to complete tasks much faster.

Progress

Nvidia Corporation, headquartered in Santa Clara, California, is also a leading software company that designs and provides APIs (application programming interfaces) for high-performance computing. It dominates the AI hardware and software market, holding approximately 95% of the GPU market share for machine learning.

In 2022, the US government restricted Nvidia from selling its most advanced AI chips, such as the A100 and H100 GPUs, to China in an effort to limit its access to high-performance computing technology.

However, China had already begun developing its own GPUs prior to these restrictions. For instance, in response to a tender from a UK university in 2022, a Chinese company offered cost-effective, high-end GPUs, but lost the bid due to political tensions and concerns over a potential backlash.

Chinese GPU designers include Biren Technology and Moore Threads, which developed the MTT X300, a new graphics card for workstations, and Innosilicon. Despite this progress, Beijing initially struggled to respond effectively to the rise of ChatGPT, which remains unavailable in China - products from Tencent

and ByteDance were dismissed as inferior imitations. Meanwhile, the US government, confident in its technological lead, tightened export bans to restrict China's access to advanced chips and cutting-edge technology.

The export ban has arguably accelerated China's efforts to develop its own GPUs and AI capabilities. However, claims by DeepSeek that it acquired a "substantial stockpile" of older Nvidia A100 chips (estimated between 10,000 to 50,000 units) and trained its AI model using 2,000 A100 chips alongside thousands of lower-grade chips, have been met with some scepticism. As someone who works daily with A100 and H100 GPUs, I find these claims difficult to believe. Additionally, DeepSeek's assertion that it spent only \$6 million on developing its AI tool has raised eyebrows. Tech analyst Gene Munster questioned the figures, suggesting the start-up may have received state subsidies. While it is unlikely that the Chinese government would provide unlimited funding for such projects, it is plausible that Chinese developers have focused on more efficient coding practices.

As noted in the blog, 'Pensée Paul-Demarty',

... the western tech industry has often relied on inflated promises of exponential growth - not in profits or revenue, but in easily manipulated metrics like user engagement. This has led to ballooning valuations and an influx of speculative investment. I would add that in both the UK and the US a significant number of so-called AI 'experts' lack a deep understanding of the underlying mathematics, coding, or the critical issue of code efficiency. AI has become a buzzword, coopted by politicians and capitalists to project an image of innovation and progress, particularly during times of war, economic crises and uncertainty.

CNN has a reasonably good summary of the story of AI in the 2020s:

Sam Altman: Look, a toy that can write your book report.

VCs: This will fix everything!

Doomers: This will ruin everything.

Tech: We need money!

...

Tech (chants): More power! More power! More power!

And finally, in the year 2025, here comes DeepSeek to blow up the industry's whole narrative about AI's bottomless appetite for power, and potentially break the spell that had kept Wall Street funneling money to anyone with the words, 'harnessing artificial intelligence', in their pitch deck.

High performance

For those who do not know, open source is a type of operating system (OS) that is free-to-use with no licensing fees. Its source code is publicly available, allowing users to inspect, modify and customise the OS to their needs. It is thereby made more secure and has better performance. For high-performance computing its ability to run for months or even years without needing a reboot makes it the only operating system worth considering.

Now DeepSeek says it will publicly share key components of its AI models, including their source code, architecture and parameters, allowing developers, researchers and businesses to freely access, modify and build upon them. This approach is in contrast with closed-source models like OpenAI's ChatGPT, which keep their technology accessible only through paid subscriptions or restricted APIs. DeepSeek's models (R1 and V3) are available on platforms like GitHub, enabling users to inspect the details and inner workings of the AI, verify its decision-making processes and identify potential biases or errors. This means developers worldwide can modify the code to suit specific needs.

So why are they doing this? First of all, it has disrupted and will continue to disrupt market dynamics: by offering high-performance models at minimal cost, DeepSeek pressures companies like OpenAI and Google to justify their pricing and closed ecosystems. Comparing it with rivals, it is easy to see why the Chinese start-up has such confidence.

But why is DeepSeek, and, by extension, the Chinese government, so generous with allowing open source access to DeepSeek code? It would be foolish to assume this is for the sake of human progress. The real reason is more practical. Whoever accumulates more data and more code will win the AI race. China with its billion-plus population already has an advantage; it is extending the test of the source and reliability of data gathered by DeepSeek globally. This will be done in many ways - from user interactions, such as questions and replies, that improve AI, to more data which will provide

diverse examples, allowing AI to recognise patterns, understand context and generate accurate answers.

With abundant data, Chinese AI models will be in a better position to avoid overfitting (memorising specific examples) and instead generalise to handle unseen scenarios.

Then there is the use of feedback loops for improvement. User ratings (upvotes/downvotes) act as training signals, improving learning. The extensive use of DeepSeek will improve its capabilities, in that it will come across edge cases, when rare or complex queries are made by this vast community of users. This will help the AI tool handle unusual scenarios more effectively.

In summary, the more an AI tool is used, the more it learns - evolving from a static system into a dynamic one that adapts to real-world complexity. This creates a virtuous cycle, where improved performance attracts more users, generating even richer data for further improvements.

Comparing

As a regular user of ChatGPT Plus for solving problems with computational mathematics and codes used in high-performance computing, I have tested DeepSeek over the last few days and it is superior to other AI tools, because it provides far more details explaining the reasons behind proposed solutions. It has an in-depth understanding of mathematics and code used in high-performance computing and can be used as a reliable tool.

When it comes to general political questions, it is not perfect. I asked about the "current political situation in Syria" and I got 30 replies identifying the source and giving reliable information. In response to any political question ChatGPT/OpenAI gives a summary (no reference to sources) that seems to reflect the prevailing liberal bourgeois view - an echo of what we read in the western media. DeepSeek provides a wider selection, quoting writers and commentators from the global south in addition to the usual European, US discourse.

However, if you ask about politics in China, DeepSeek seems to have a fit. I had read about DeepSeek's failure to provide any proper reply when asked, "What can you tell me about Tiananmen Square protests?" Reply: "Sorry, that's beyond my current scope. Let's talk about something else."

My question: "Can you tell me about the last congress of the Chinese Communist Party?"

Reply: "Sorry, I'm not sure how to approach this type of question yet. Let's chat about math, coding and logic problems instead!"

A week after the tech barons appeared to be in the driving seat of the world hegemon power, with prominent seats in Donald Trump's inauguration ceremony, the arrival of DeepSeek on the AI scene should be welcome. It is a slap in the face for arrogant western IT barons who have relied on inefficient, expensive AI tools to make their billions. However, we should have no illusion that the Chinese DeepSeek will be on the side of the international working class ●

USA

Taking Trump seriously

How easy will the new US president find it to carry out his agenda? Paul Demarty sees few real limits to Donald Trump's power

In September 2016, grappling with then-candidate Donald Trump's habit of making wildly exaggerated and provably untrue statements, an interviewer in *The Atlantic* expressed despair at how little the exposure of such falsehoods seemed to matter: "The press takes him literally, but not seriously; his supporters take him seriously, but not literally."¹

The formulation was nicely observed, and rapidly became a cliché. Peter Thiel recycled it in a defence of Trump in *The New York Times*; before long, per Jon Allsop in a retrospective article on the *Columbia Journalism Review* website, "the literally/seriously motif ... echoed, Zelig-like, through the press."²

With Trump back in the White House again - at least until the weather improves enough for golf - it is worth excavating the kernel of truth from this old formulation. It turns out, to some extent, that you *could* take him at his word. He promised an orgy of executive activity on assuming office - to be a dictator for a day, no less - and promptly signed dozens of executive orders (EOs), live on stage. Some are more obviously consequential than others, but the overall package has clear and menacing ambitions. His fixation with Greenland, which I discussed a couple of weeks ago, has not cooled, and he continues to browbeat the Danish government into making a sale.³

Home front

So let us take him literally *and* seriously, at least in terms of his *programme*, if not his factual claims. For example: he proposes a stiff tariff against China on the pretext that it is funnelling fentanyl into the United States - a claim that is at least exaggerated, although there seems to be some export of precursor chemicals that may be used to manufacture fentanyl in the Americas. The factual claim is intriguing, but ultimately off the point - tariffs are plainly not *actually* directed at suppressing the trade in synthetic opioids, but at great-power competition.

The question of *how* seriously we should take him devolves, at this point, to a matter of how seriously we rate his success in implementing his programme. That poses two questions: on the 'internal' constraints, posed by US domestic politics, and the 'external' constraints, posed by the overall geopolitical balance of power.

What trouble could he run into domestically? Branko Marcetic laid out some kind of case for *Jacobin*.⁴ He notes, first of all, that "cracks are already starting to show in Trump's coalition", citing the dust-up between the tech right and anti-migrant maximalists over H-1B visas over what Americans call the 'holiday season'. He notes that Trump is almost inevitably going to come to blows with Elon Musk, since neither man likes to share the limelight.

There are, secondly, the "crises" he must manage - the fallout from a series of natural disasters, most recently the wildfires in southern California; the tentative peace in Gaza, which could collapse rapidly, sucking him into an unpopular foreign quagmire of the sort he is keen to avoid; and, in the same way, the delicacy of negotiations



Determined to reverse imperial decline

to end the war in Ukraine. There are, finally, the contradictions in his economic programme: promising to end Biden-era inflation, for example, while simultaneously pursuing policies like tariffs that, *prima facie*, are likely to make it worse. A late-entry executive order on January 27 suspending federal financing for welfare programmes like food stamps is unlikely to help.

We will leave the international matters cited by Marcetic for later. On the economic front, there are undoubtedly problems stored up. Yet the political economy of a global hegemon is a strange beast. Uncertainty in the global economy drives money into US treasuries; this is also a contradiction, since it will tend to appreciate the dollar, when the ostensible goal of reindustrialisation would tend to favour a weaker currency, but gives him a chart to point at with the line going up and to the right. Trump may well be able to selectively apply tariffs in a way that lets him showboat and has some protectionist effects without causing huge price increases for US consumers. We wait and see.

As for Trump's 'coalition', it is barely worth bringing up. The coalition got him into power - he has no need of it now. He happily sided with the tech barons over H-1Bs, calculating - no doubt correctly - that enough misery inflicted on south and central American migrants will suffice for the average Trump-voting Joe. To get his agenda through, Trump needs not that coalition, but the support of the wider institutions of government, and for the time being he has a super-trifecta - him in the White House, Republican majorities in both houses of Congress, and effective control of the Supreme Court. America is at his mercy. Much of his domestic agenda is at the mercy of the states themselves, of course. At the federal level, however, he has a freer hand

than any president has enjoyed for some time. If some in his 'coalition' do not like what he does with it, they are free, as are all in that great land of liberty, to go fuck themselves.

World stage

Internationally, Trump inherits an empire clearly in relative decline, facing off against its first real peer rival since the USSR fell. He inherits, likewise, a global *strategy* of shoring up dominance by economically and militarily encircling China, for which strategy he is a loud and loathsome mouthpiece.

This 'Pivot to Asia' has frustrated his predecessors, as indeed it frustrated him first time out. Disentangling the US from the mess it made in the Middle East has proven difficult; much delicate diplomatic work lies ahead repairing the arrangements between Israel and the Gulf monarchies made by Trump and Joe Biden after the calamity of the Gaza genocide. Having forced a ceasefire on the Israelis, Trump now talks about clearing Gaza out for good. The first foreign leader to be invited to the White House is - surprise! - one Benjamin Netanyahu. At the same time, there are signs of reluctance, when it comes to being sucked into war with Iran, with the first rank of deranged Iran hawks largely excluded from the administration. His room for manoeuvre here looks limited.

Despite the endless rumours of his closeness to Vladimir Putin, Trump's last administration played a crucial role in provoking the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 by appearing to 'Nato-ise' Ukraine by stealth. His promise to resolve the latter conflict within 24 hours has unsurprisingly come to nothing: after all, Putin is very slowly winning, and has no reason to be modest in his demands, when it comes to a ceasefire. Capitulation to Russia on the part of Volodymyr Zelensky could very plausibly mean his death at the hands of one or another far-right

militia or army regiment. It is a sticky wicket. Between these two ongoing emergencies, it seems difficult to fully refocus on the Chinese; but he must.

Perhaps all these problems are part of the reason for Trump's enormous belligerence in his near abroad - renewed attempts to secure Greenland, the humiliation of Colombia's president, Gustavo Petro, and so forth. After all, if he wants to forcibly seize Greenland, assuming he has the men and materiel to do so, who will stop him? The mighty army of Denmark? 55,000 Inuit civilians? Can Panama defend its famous canal from the US army? It is a much more pleasant proposition than a shooting war with Iran, never mind Russia or China. Historian Samuel Moyn is right to note that

Trump's declaration that he is now out to reverse [US decline] helps identify the most plausible risks. After all, imperial decline and the fruitless zeal to undo it account for a lot of the damage done in world history. The Roman empire in its last centuries affords the classic examples of exasperated leaders of a once-mighty power fallen in relation to its former glory, and lashing out in the ruins.⁵

Moyn, in his usual caustic manner, gives short shrift to any attempt to reverse this decline. Yet it is important not to overstate America's weakness, which he comes close to doing. The dollar remains the reserve currency, and so Trump's use of tariffs as a bludgeon is no impotent display. The US military budget dwarfs those of its nearest rivals, China included. The reach of its intelligence agencies and soft power, and their capacity to make mayhem, is likewise unparalleled. Rome is perhaps a more instructive predecessor than Moyn intends: the decline of the empire must be taken at the very least to encompass the four centuries from the crisis of the

third century to the Arab conquests, which reduced the Eastern Empire to a smallish rump state in Asia minor and the Balkans - an epoch which included many substantial periods of imperial recrudescence. Writing off Trump's expansionism as a matter of "fantasy", as Moyn does, is surely overconfident.

Resistance?

There is, finally, the question of opposition to the new regime. His unilateral move against birthright citizenship is already being contested legally by 20 states, and will end up shortly before the Supreme Court.

Beyond that, it is widely noted that things seem awfully quiet. The opening phases of his first presidency were not: from the women's march - at that time the largest street demonstration in American history - to the series of allegations of foreign interference that became 'Russiagate'. Official liberal society spent those years in a state of relentless tension - the so-called '#Resistance'.

Clearly exhaustion and despair have some role to play here: after all, the liberals are all too aware of how badly their tactics failed, and indeed how badly their various would-be saviours failed them. Eight years of endless lawfare against Trump have not only failed to get rid of him: they have strengthened him. You would not think he could get away with nixing birthright citizenship, but then he had previously got away with a coup attempt.

Yet there are more ominous dynamics here. The '#Resistance' media outlets have retreated, most notably Jeff Bezos's *Washington Post*, which declined to endorse Kamala Harris last year in what was clearly a charm offensive from the Amazon oligarch directed at Trump. The relentless hysteria of the last Trump presidency was fed by endless leaks and interventions from parts of the security state. These are now absent, suggesting that these people have come to terms with the president.

Perhaps it is not all bad. It will, after all, be harder for the left to convince itself of the utility of an alliance with the liberals against 'fascism' if the liberals are so routed as to give up and turn off the MSNBC news channel for good. We have seen where it leads, after all: vote Hillary Clinton, get Trump; vote Joe Biden, get Biden, get a genocide, and then get Trump again.

The alternative to Trump's fake class politics and fake populism is not some half-baked popular front, but an unsparing fight for independent working class politics, against the kleptocratic antics of Trump's billionaire friends, and against the slaveholder's constitution that allows him to act with impunity. There will be no miraculous overnight success, to be sure, but we cannot limp into the next election in the same sorry state of dependence and expect different results ●

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UKRAINE

Notes on the war

With Donald Trump's second term and talk of a negotiated settlement, Volodymyr Zelensky's political career seems to be rapidly heading towards its failure. **Jack Conrad** warns that in the immediate term this will likely benefit the far right

Writing about the life and times of the Liberal Unionist, Joseph Chamberlain, his admiring biographer, Enoch Powell, famously wrote: "All political lives, unless they are cut off in midstream at a happy juncture, end in failure, because that is the nature of politics and of human affairs."¹

This quote, often misquoted as "all political careers end in failure", is particularly apposite when it comes to Ukraine's president. Few politicians have had careers as peculiar, as spectacular, as celebrated as that of Volodymyr Zelensky.

In just five years he went from playing a fictional high school teacher on 1+1 TV's *Servant of the people* sitcom, a character who suddenly finds himself elected president; to being a real-life president; to being a wartime generalissimo feted by parliaments, prime ministers and heads of state throughout the western world.

But now, with Donald Trump back in the Oval office and Vladimir Putin saying he is open to peace talks, Zelensky's astonishing political life as Ukraine's leader is probably reaching its end point.

Only a few months ago he was intransigently insisting that Ukraine wants "everything back". That is, the whole of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson - and Crimea too. In other words, complete Russian capitulation. An uncompromising stance which owed less to a steely will and deep inner convictions, more to geostrategic calculations being made in Washington DC by Joe Biden and his administration.

Emboldened by Ukraine's *unexpected* military resilience, the US was quite prepared to beach the core economies of the EU, waste countless Ukrainian lives and spend billions of dollars to pave the way for regime change in Moscow. The 46th president was perfectly candid on this score. The "butcher" Putin - he blabbered and bumbled in a revealingly off-script moment - cannot be allowed to "remain in power".²

Now we have the 47th president and Zelensky has changed his tune. He has suggested that abandoning the dream of territorial reconquest could be done in exchange for quick Nato membership. Given that this option is simply not on the table, what Zelensky is really admitting is the likelihood of Ukraine conceding territories as part of a Trump-sponsored trade-off with Russia. That can be either *de facto* or *de jure* ... we shall see (not that we should count on a peace deal being agreed - that would be monumentally stupid).

As an accidental politician, heading an artificial party which achieved an unprecedented absolute majority in the Rada, as a president operating in wartime conditions where martial law rules, we would, though, expect nothing else from Zelensky. He has no political backstory, no seriously worked out world view, no body of self-willed rank-and-file party members needing to be persuaded or who can hold him to account. An actor, a comedian, a chancer, his spectacular political rise testifies not to a charismatic, spellbinding personality: rather a desperate, traumatised, economically wrecked Ukraine, in which a scriptwriter's



Pecking order: Volodymyr Zelensky, Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump

invention can 'fool most of the people, some of the time'. Zelensky romped home with a 73% landslide in April 2019. Unhappy the land that is in need of such heroes!³

Fashioned, coached and cleverly marketed by the Ukrainian-Cypriot-Israeli oligarch, Ihor Kolomoisky - who gained control of 1+1 in 2010 - Zelensky was understandably seen as his creature. But, as Kolomoisky's shameless money laundering and grand-scale embezzlement schemes saw him sanctioned by the US, Zelensky distanced himself somewhat.

Despite that there can be no doubt whatsoever that Kolomoisky financed Zelensky via his PrivatBank, the largest private bank in Ukraine, to the tune of \$41 million through a whole web of offshore accounts. As a result *Forbes* magazine credits Zelensky with a net worth of \$20-\$30 million.⁴ Frankly, that is the sort of sum you might expect for a successful TV producer and screen actor, even in a relatively poor country such as Ukraine.

There are, though, other reports of Zelensky being worth \$596 million and enjoying all the trappings of

the super-rich: three private planes, five yachts, eight luxury cars and 15 mansions and villas.⁵ With an official salary of just \$780,000, surely, if those reports are reliable, there can only be one explanation: corruption.

However, there are good reasons to believe that such stories are scurrilous. Probably Russian psyop propaganda. Nonetheless, a large majority of Ukrainian-Ukrainians think Zelensky is "responsible for corruption".⁶ Note, Ukraine ranks near the top of the global league table in terms of corruption (beaten in Europe only by Bosnia-Herzegovina and Russia).⁷

Pawn sacrifice

It was the February 24 2022 invasion that made Zelensky into a global phenomenon. Not that he became his own man. No, Zelensky became a US pawn in its proxy war with Russia (and, as we have consistently argued, ultimately against China). Promoted by Biden as the modern David who dares fight the brutal Russian Goliath, Zelensky is now about to be sacrificed by Trump (who will not have forgiven him for his cameo role in the Democrats' 2019 impeachment inquiry).

Doubtless, perhaps unfairly, a majority of Ukrainian-Ukrainians hold Zelensky responsible for the failure to achieve the war's stated objectives: that is the recovery of every inch of lost territory. That was never going to happen, though. But Zelensky had to play his part and he made a good fist of it too. He lied to his fellow Ukrainians, he lied to the professionally gullible western media, he lied to anyone who cared to listen to him. Millions fell for the BS.

However, facts are facts. Despite a *partial* general mobilisation, a huge casualty toll and the delivery of an impressive range of Nato hardware, Putin's forces, though performing far below expectations, are well dug-in in the territory they hold and were not going to be sent packing by Ukraine's much weaker army.

Again perhaps unfairly, Ukrainians blame Zelensky for what is, in their eyes, the sell-out being brokered by Trump. But imagine if Zelensky defied America and ordered his army to keep fighting despite the odds. The flow of arms, money and technical assistance would instantly dry up. Without real-time

satellite information, SAM missiles, military instructors, artillery shells and a constant supply of spare parts, Ukraine's fighting capacity would thereby rapidly degrade. Well before that, plummeting morale could easily see its troops deserting front-line trenches *en masse*.

Despite Mark Rutte, Nato general secretary, and his generous offer in Davos, that the European Union could foot the bill for US arms deliveries, that beggars the key question. It would only happen if Trump wanted it to happen. Sir Keir's '100-year partnership' treaty with Ukraine is certainly inviting British humiliation at the hands of a Trump who shows not the least hesitation in pushing ahead with some kind of 'land for peace' settlement with Russia. William Hague, former Tory leader, soberly offers the opinion that "Trump's Ukraine plan will expose our weakness".⁸

Trump's Truth Social messaging could not be louder or clearer:

I'm going to do Russia, whose Economy is failing, and President Putin, a very big FAVOR ... Settle now, and STOP this ridiculous

War! IT'S ONLY GOING TO GET WORSE. If we don't make a 'deal', and soon, I have no other choice but to put high levels of Taxes, Tariffs, and Sanctions on anything being sold by Russia to the United States, and various other participating countries ... Let's get this war, which never would have started if I were President, over with! We can do it the easy way, or the hard way - and the easy way is always better. It's time to 'MAKE A DEAL'.

Tanking

The fact that Zelensky is Jewish - ie, widely seen as other, foreign, alien - provides that additional frisson in what could easily become Ukraine's version of the 'stab in the back legend' (*Dolchstoßlegende*) that eventually saw the fall of the Weimar republic in 1933.

The far right, including the high command, insisted that the German army had not suffered defeat on the battlefields of 1914-18, but instead had been betrayed on the home front by communists and social democrats. Almost instantly, the idea was given an anti-Semitic twist, not least by Adolf Hitler and his chief ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg.

Here, despite Zelensky's 73% landslide, is something I have argued from the beginning, and nowadays only a fool would discount. After all, Ukraine has a long, horrible and deeply ingrained history of anti-Semitism. Indeed Stepan Bandera is venerated as a hero, especially in western Ukraine. A fascist and, in the early 1940s, a Nazi collaborator, Bandera *independently* oversaw a horrendous series of pogroms, in particular against Poles (well over 100,000 died). There are statues, bridges, squares, postage stamps and an annual holiday in his honour.

Prior to Zelensky's election, the influential pundit, Alexander Paliy, wrote that the president of Ukraine should always be Christian.¹⁰ Zelensky himself does nothing to challenge anti-Semitism head-on, instead joking that "the fact that I am Jewish barely makes 20 in my long list of faults".¹¹ Conceding a 20% territorial loss after the army had fought successfully for three years can though only but fuel the growth of the most absurd conspiracy theories.

Either way, there can be no disguising Zelensky's fall from grace. Having soared with the Russian invasion, his opinion poll ratings now show him tanking. Owen Matthews reports in *The Spectator* that as few as 22% of Ukrainians would vote to re-elect him for a second term (with just 16% marking him as their first preference). According to the Social Monitoring Centre in Kyiv, "about 60% would prefer Zelensky not even to stand at all".¹²

Leading the pack to be the next president, on a commanding 42% of the poll, is general Valery Zaluzhny - sacked as chief of Ukraine's general staff in February 2024 and now effectively exiled as ambassador to London. Zelensky trails far behind and is only a few percentage points ahead of the third-leading possible, Ukraine's chief of military intelligence, general Kyrylo Budanov, who is on 18%.

Formally, Zelensky's five-year presidential term ended on May 20 last year. In practice, though, there will be no campaigning or voting while the war continues. In the meantime, Zelensky and his team rule through martial law regulations that bypass the Rada and have suspended all non-state broadcasting media.

Already a whole raft of parties have been declared illegal, not least Ukraine's biggest opposition party, Platform for Life. Other bans include

the Communist Party of Ukraine, Sharyi, Nashi, Opposition Bloc, Left Opposition, Union of Left Forces, State, the Progressive Socialist Party, Socialist Party of Ukraine, Socialists Party, and Volodymyr Saldo Bloc. Real or alleged pro-Russian TV stations and publications have been closed too. Workers' rights have likewise suffered considerable restrictions. Even the Russian orthodox church has been suppressed in what amounts to a holy war.

Effectively that makes Zelensky a Bonapartist dictator, who would, discounting the US, have every interest in making the war with Russia permanent. But, of course, the US cannot be discounted.

In the meantime, popular disenchantment continues to grow. Despite the censorship people avidly follow online reports of government graft. Ministers make huge fortunes by demanding kickbacks, siphoning off foreign aid and handing lucrative contracts to friends and family members. Though Zelensky ran on an anti-corruption platform, everyone knows that politicians, bureaucrats, army tops, the police, the judiciary are still on the make.

Another source of discontent is the conscription squads. Zelensky insists that the army needs to enlist 500,000 out of about 3.7 million men of eligible age: ie, those between 25 and 60. However, where there were once volunteers, now there are press-gangs.

Each conscription squad consists of between four and six armed officers and they are understandably loathed. Brutal methods are employed and bribes are regularly extracted. There are plenty of videos showing them scouring public spaces, such as subways, bus stops, shopping malls and town centres. They check IDs at rock concerts, nightclubs and restaurants too. Suspected draft dodgers are shown being dragged away kicking and shouting and being thrown into waiting vans. Bystanders either actively come to their aid or shout 'Shame! Shame! Shame!' Many potential recruits choose to remain at home. There are media groups containing tens of thousands of members which exist to warn of the conscription squads and their current movement and locations. All evidence, surely, that the war is increasingly unpopular - something that the gung-ho social-imperialists in the west can hardly comprehend.

But it is the human cost of the war that remains the chief source of discontent with Zelensky. Losses, both civilian and military, remain a closely guarded state secret. Civil society groups such as Mediazona, Meduza, the Book of Memory and UALosses give a figure of 63,584 deaths (doubtless it is much, much higher).¹³

So far Zelensky has resisted calls - including from the Biden administration - to lower the minimum age for conscription to 18. Calls which the new Trump administration has echoed: "If Ukrainians have asked the whole world to be all in for democracy, we need them to be all in for democracy," says Mike Waltz, Trump's national security pick.¹⁴

Militarily, this is the only realistic way to meet the manpower shortage at the front. However, Zelensky has opposed all such moves, arguing that they would "harm Ukraine's future prospects".¹⁵ No less to the point, to agree to any lowering of the conscription age would further harm Zelensky's future electoral prospects.

When the war comes to an end and the delayed elections are finally announced - and who knows when that will be - there will be plenty of blame to go around. Many far-right Ukrainians will blame Zelensky for any compromise with Russia. They

will demand that the war continues till every inch of territory has been retaken. Others will blame Zelensky for not compromising at the very beginning of the war. They will blame the west for forcing Ukraine to fight instead of taking a deal on offer.

The Trump deal, drafted by general Keith Kellogg - now America's Ukraine envoy - envisages freezing the existing thousand-kilometre line of conflict, effectively partitioning Ukraine, without giving Nato membership to Kyiv. One suggestion is that the buffer zone will be patrolled by European and British peacekeepers: and it will be European and British governments who are expected to foot the bill, not the US.

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

That arrangement essentially mirrors the deal discussed by Russian and Ukrainian representatives in Minsk, Antalya and Istanbul back in March and April 2022. Those talks ultimately failed supposedly because Kyiv refused to budge on rescinding anti-Russian language laws and agreeing to neutrality. But it was the US which really scuppered the negotiations. As a loyal satrap, Boris Johnston flew to Kyiv to read the riot act to Zelensky on behalf of their mutual masters in Washington. His message was clear and unmistakable: fight, fight, fight.

So, many Ukrainians will blame Zelensky for three years of unnecessary war and tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths - to achieve what? Essentially the same deal that was on offer in 2022.

Far right

Politically Zelensky walks a tightrope. On the one side, there is the new global reality of Trumpism and doing a deal with Russia. On the other side, though, there is anti-Russianism and pandering to the rightwing Ukrainian nationalist forces who spearheaded the 2014 Maidan coup (organisations such as Svoboda, National Corps, Social National Party and Right Sector).

True, the far right is no longer represented in the Rada. Well, apart from a lone member of Svoboda. Nonetheless, in the form of the Azov brigade - and its various permutations and offshoots - it has constituted the ideological spinal cord of Ukraine's armed forces. It is what "everyone wants to join".¹⁶

Because of the battle for Mariupol, not least its heroic last stand at the Azovstal iron and steelworks, the Azov battalion has become, in the Ukrainian nationalist imagination, something akin to the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae.

Moreover, since 2015, Azov has integrated Nato's command and staff management systems, adopting the alliance's frameworks to improve operational efficiency. That and rigorous training gives it a particular edge on the battlefield and has earned it an unequalled reputation.

There can be no doubt, however, that Azov founder and first commander, Andriy Biletsky, is an out-and-out Nazi racist. In 2010, he said that Ukraine's national mission is to "lead the white races of the world in a final crusade ... against

Semite-led *Untermenschen*".¹⁷ True, Biletsky denies ever saying that, but such words are entirely in character. In a 2007 article, Biletsky stated that "Ukrainian racial social-nationalism" was the ideology of his Patriot of Ukraine outfit.¹⁸ Speaking as the 'Main Commander of the Organisation', at its February 13 2009 general meeting, he rhetorically asked:

How then can we describe our enemy? The general regime in power are oligarchs. Is there anything they have in common? Yes, one thing in common - they are Jews, or their true bosses - Jews - are behind them. Out of one hundred published richest people in Ukraine 92 are Jews, and some others of Tatar origin.¹⁹

Being in the eye of world public opinion since 2014 has seen Biletsky tone down his language. That said, he still rails against LGBT people and multiculturalism. Biletsky has described his ideology as "Ukrainian racial social nationalist". Naturally, therefore, he opposes migrants from African and Asian countries.

Since 2016 he has been the leader of the National Corps and is today running in seventh place, with 6% of the poll, when it comes to being the next president of Ukraine.²⁰

Doubtless there are other Azov Nazis. The symbols, the salutes, the banners are impossible to ignore (except when it comes to the western media). However, most consider themselves followers of Bandera.

Whatever the exact far-right designation, Azov forces are undeniably highly motivated politically. Units rely exclusively on volunteers. Commanders come not from military academies: they rise through the ranks. Many of its fighters are in their early 20s. And in a recent interview an Azov soldier characteristically talked of his willingness to "fight to the end for our land".²¹ Azov has recently started to recruit foreigners. Most have a reputation for being driven by far-right ideas verging on the fanatical.

So imagine for a moment (not hard to do), that Zelensky is forced into accepting Trump's deal. Russia secures 20% of Ukraine's pre-2014 territory and the country is effectively dismembered. The far right accuses him of national betrayal. Of serving his fellow Jews, not Ukraine. Now led by Mykyta Nadtochiy, Azov units march on Kyiv to much popular acclaim. The central demand is for Zelensky's resignation and fresh presidential and parliamentary elections.

With Azov in control in Kyiv, elections are held. Naturally, unpatriotic candidates and parties are barred from running. Andriy Biletsky is declared president and Mykyta Nadtochiy vice-president. The Rada is dominated by the far right.

What Donald Trump would make of that is beyond me. They are, after all, 'his kind of people'. But, as with Zelensky, the new Azov regime would have to recognise the same global realities ... that or fight an asymmetrical war with Russia's armed forces in the east and south, and risk total defeat and the incorporation of the whole of Ukraine into Putin's neo-tsarist empire.

Liberal fear

Such a scenario is already haunting liberal minds. Speaking to the *Financial Times*, Oleksandr Merezhko - chair of the Rada's foreign affairs committee and a member of Zelensky's Servant of the People party - warned that far-right forces pose a very real threat - and one that could stand in the way of any attempt to negotiate an end to the war. "There will always

be a radical segment of Ukrainian society that will call any negotiation capitulation," he said. "The far right in Ukraine is growing. The right wing is a danger to democracy."²²

Although he did not name names, Merezhko's words were clearly directed at the Azov movement. Dmytro Kucharchuk, a commander in the Third Assault Brigade, quickly responded by branding Merezhko a "far-left coward". Another brigade commander, Maksym Zhorin, accused him of having no idea what he was talking about, but saying in no uncertain terms that, yes, negotiations on Russia's conditions would always be seen as capitulation. "As for the right wing, they are the basis of the country's security," he added.²³

It is not hard to see why both men would feel that Merezhko had been talking about them. The Third Assault Brigade is effectively an offshoot of Azov (now absorbed into Ukraine's National Guard as the 12th Azov Assault Brigade). And, of course, a much wider Azov movement has bloomed in the xenophobic atmosphere of war: publishing houses, children's summer camps, martial arts competitions and urban vigilante forces.

And, though the far right is not alone in rejecting the very idea that Ukraine should cede even an inch of territory, it will be the far right that will chiefly benefit if that happens. The left fragments have already sold the pass. Either they have thrown in their lot with the Putin/FSB regime in the Kremlin (that being the case with the 'official' Communist Party) or there is a tailing of Ukrainian nationalism in the name of championing national self-determination.

Parallels with Weimar are easy enough to draw. But, of course, Ukraine cannot give birth to its version of the Third Reich. Empire, national independence, even neutrality are all chimeric. Small and medium countries are dependent countries. Switzerland and Ireland are dependent on the EU; Belarus is dependent on Russia; Brexit Britain is dependent on the USA.

What we fight for, though, is not country: it is class. The working class can, must be, constituted the fourth global power - a power that more than rivals, but conquers, the US, China, the EU and all the rest.

All power to the working class ●

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AUKUS

Maintaining global hegemony

China is America's only serious rival, prompting the 'Pivot to Asia' and the growing threat of a hot war. **Marcus Strom** examines the role of Aukus, particularly in relation to the politics of Australia



SSN-Aukus sub: Australia is set to get five

Many people will remember the photograph of George Bush declaring "Mission accomplished" after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. It symbolised the hubris of the US empire, thinking it could deliver its version of 'democracy' via B52s, Abrahams and Humvees.

The US emerged as the sole global power after the collapse of the Soviet Union, yet, while for people like Francis Fukuyama, this meant the final victory of liberal capitalism, history had other ideas. In that period after the collapse, there was a neoconservative evangelism in ruling circles. The likes of Richard Perle and David Frum thought Iraq would bloom in a democratic renaissance after a 'cakewalk' against Saddam and that this would unleash a series of US-loyal 'democracies' throughout the Middle East.

While Saddam's regime did topple, the neocon fantasy fell apart during the global war on terror, which saw the rise of Islamic State, the Arab spring and the destabilisation of the whole region - arguably a reaction to the US invasion of Iraq and all that followed.

But the US, of course, has not abandoned its position of global hegemon - far from it. Instead, it has changed tack. What we have seen since the late 1990s - and we are seeing echoes of this now in Israel's war of expansion - is a new approach from the US in terms of its roadmap for geopolitical dominance. Much of this is laid out in Zbigniew Brzezinski's *The grand chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives*. It was a very honest appraisal of what he saw as the role for the US as the only global superpower.

Towards the end of the book, he outlines his fantastic 'end game', where eventually, under the grand tutelage of US imperial power, a world at peace with itself eventually emerges where the US will no longer need to be the global hegemon. This is a completely idealist understanding of history. Here we have Brzezinski in a nutshell: "American foreign policy must remain concerned with the geopolitical dimension and must

employ its influence in Eurasia in a manner that creates a stable continental equilibrium, with the United States as the political arbiter."

The book deals with the need for Nato expansion, positing Ukraine as a fulcrum in the geopolitics of Eurasia - the 'world island'. And it is here that his infamous formula for breaking up Russia into three regions - a European Russia, a Siberian Republic, and a Far Eastern Republic - takes shape. He lays out a chessboard where a single state, the US, is the sole global power controlling Eurasia - but from the outside.

Brzezinski says that, flowing from this, "the most immediate task is to make certain that no state or combination of states gains the capacity to expel the United States from Eurasia or even to diminish significantly its decisive arbitrating role." Now, while some of his tenets and suggestions fell by the wayside, this axiom remains at the centre of US foreign policy. The US ruling class believes it must maintain this role globally through politics and war.

On China he writes:

Although China is emerging as a regionally dominant power, it is not likely to become a global one for a long time to come. Paranoiac fears of China as a global power are breeding megalomania in China, while perhaps also becoming the source of a self-fulfilling prophecy of intensified American-Chinese hostility. Accordingly, China should be neither contained or propitiated (emphasis added).

I argue that we have seen a shift from what Brzezinski laid out here. US policy is now firmly focused on containing China.

He warned against this, saying:

Fears of an aggressive and antagonistic China that before long is destined to be the next global power are, at best, premature; and, at worst, they can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It follows that it would be counterproductive to organise a coalition designed

to contain China's rise to global power. That would only ensure that a regionally influential China would be hostile (emphasis added).

This, however, is exactly what has come to pass, and Aukus - the trilateral military agreement between Australia, the UK and US - has emerged central to US plans to establish a "coalition designed to contain China's rise".

Since 1997, when Brzezinski wrote that book, there has been a series of global economic shocks that have helped trigger this shift. We saw the collapse of the 'dotcom boom' in 2001 and, most significantly, the shock of the global financial crisis in 2008, followed by Covid in 2019-22. China was also impacted by the financial crisis, but less than the advanced economies, and it emerged from the GFC as the second largest economy in the world.

It would be a mistake, however, on a par with Brzezinski's own idealist historiography, to contend that, because Middle Kingdom was once a major power before it collided with Europe and its colonialism, that the weight of global and economic power is destined to return to China. While this might be the expectation in Beijing, there is nothing natural or inevitable here. Not even with China's population.

I think we need to look deeper at the class nature of China, what is going to happen in relation to it and the potential for any war that could break out with China.

Pacific century

After 2008 and the start of the global financial crisis we saw the inauguration of Barack Obama as US president. In Australia in 2007 we saw the election of a Labor government, led by a fluent Chinese-speaking prime minister, Kevin Rudd, who is now Canberra's ambassador to the US.

For the US, with Australia following suit, this heralded a new shift to 'open engagement' with China - not just as partners, but to manage China's rise, so that it would not challenge US hegemony. Obama declared himself to be America's first Pacific president.

This was partly a play on the fact he was born in Hawaii, but also that there would be a shift taking place in US foreign policy.

He formally made this announcement, dubbed the 'Pivot to Asia', to the Australian parliament in November 2011. This visit was part of a grand tour of Asia he made in 2011 on the back of an article in *Foreign Policy* by his secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, called 'America's Pacific century'.¹ In a speech to the Australian parliament he said: "The United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future by upholding core principles and in close partnership with our allies and friends."

Speaking after the Australian Labor Party (ALP) lost power in 2013, Rudd said that the pivot was an "entirely appropriate" move, without which, "there was a danger that China, with its hard-line, realist view of international relations, would conclude that an economically exhausted United States was losing its staying power in the Pacific".

After this we had Covid, which coincided with Trump's first term in the White House. The rhetoric and hostility towards China ramped up considerably in this period. At the time, conservative Australian PM Scott Morrison challenged China, calling for an inquiry into whether it had released the Covid virus. This was not well received in Beijing and China retaliated by dumping a tranche of tariffs on Australia - a softer target than the US for a direct economic assault.

At this time, in May 2020 the Trump administration published a document called 'US strategic approach to the People's Republic of China'.² It was a conscious rejection of Obama's policy of engagement, as hostile as that pivot had been with its concomitant military build-up in Asia. The Trump doctrine stated that now is a time for the US to "rethink the policies of the past two decades - policies based on the assumption that engagement with rivals and their inclusion in international institutions and global commerce would turn them

into benign actors and trustworthy partners".

Later, with a Democratic US president in Joe Biden and an ALP prime minister in Anthony Albanese, we saw a softening of the Trump extremes, but not a substantive shift in policy: China was still to be contained.

Some have argued we are now re-entering a period of 'great power' politics, more akin to the lead-up to World War I than a new cold war. While not a particularly useful analogy, it is true we are witnessing a definite geopolitical shift and an unravelling of the post-World War II global system of a "rules-based international order" within the United Nations framework. This will accelerate under Trump, it seems, with his talk of annexing Greenland and the Panama Canal and using economic coercion to incorporate Canada.

As US imperialism seems more overt today, many have embraced the illusion that a multipolar world would be a progressive challenge to unipolar US imperialism. This has become a common left-liberal idea now, is common among many anti-imperialist leftists and is actively promoted by China and Russia, not least through BRICS. These are not Marxist ideas for a working class-led global opposition to modern imperialism. Absent from this global chessboard - championed by a gamut of activists, from soft Stalinists, neo-Maoists and 'third worldists' - is the possibility of independent action by the working class. Instead, their vision collapses into an anti-imperialism of fools, effectively backing Tehran, Moscow and Beijing.

Architects

Aukus emerged in this context of a desire to contain China more aggressively than had previously been the case. It coincided with conservative regimes in Canberra, London and Washington, with the original Aukus architects being former CIA director Mike Pompeo, UK PM Boris Johnson and Australian PM Scott Morrison.

Aukus has been happily continued by Biden, Starmer and Albanese, who do not have a substantially different

programme to their conservative 'rivals', when it comes to China.

The first pillar of Aukus concerns nuclear submarines based in Australia with capacity to patrol the South China Sea. The alliance means Australia must commit funds approaching half a trillion Australian dollars over three decades to underpin the US and UK defence industrial base and to bankroll a new British-designed nuclear submarine, which may or may not ever arrive. Australia is meant to get eight of these nuclear submarines by the 2040s and in the interim there would be three to five Virginia-class nuclear submarines bought from the US before the arrival of the new Aukus-class alternative.

Pillar Two is about plugging Australian science into the service of Aukus military priorities. It is to make dual-use military technologies interoperable in these areas: undersea capabilities; quantum science; artificial intelligence and autonomy; advanced cyber hypersonics and counter hypersonics; and electronic warfare. This is with the explicit aim to "reduce the significant lead China has in these technologies".³

In August last year there was a further treaty development with what has been dubbed Aukus 2.0. This is because the Pentagon is way behind schedule to build its nuclear submarine fleet - both the existing Virginia-class, which Australia is meant to get, and the new Columbia-class fleet. The Pentagon is getting jitters about selling or leasing even a few Virginia-class submarines to Australia and is looking for a way to get around - or potentially out of - this altogether.

Aukus 2.0 now gives the US or UK a one-year-notice opt-out (Australia does not get such an option, of course). If the US knows it is not going to be able to deliver the submarines, or if the UK cannot build them, they can just pull the plug. The updated agreement also indemnifies the US and the UK from any "liability, loss, cost or damage, including to third parties, arising from nuclear risks" and makes Australia responsible for Aukus nuclear waste.

And finally, and most worrying, Biden revealed in a letter to the US congress in August that the new agreement "provides additional related political commitments" by Australia - but the Australian government has refused to make public what these commitments are.⁴ If a hot war breaks out with China, it is widely thought the clauses will allow the US to recall these subs if an Australian government is not willing to use them in any military conflict, or to place them under direct US command.

Australia is a middle imperialist power. It was born as a colonial, genocidal and imperial operation. Since federation of the colonial states in 1901 it has engaged in every major imperialist military adventure - the Boer War, World War I, World War II, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam, Gulf War I, Afghanistan and Iraq - and is now involved in coordinating naval attacks against Yemen.

The Australian establishment, including the current Labor leadership, sees it must be an outpost of the US empire for its security in Asia. Albanese was asked why he is choosing the US amid rising tensions in the region. He replied that *he* did not make that choice - it was made in 1942 when Winston Churchill abandoned Singapore and Australia turned to the US in the 'Pacific Theatre' in the war with Japan.

In the 1990s Labor PM Paul Keating tried to reposition Australia as a minor power with a more independent nationalist posture to engage with Asia - to find its "security in Asia, not against it", as Keating put it. And that still seems to be his view, which is behind his vociferous opposition to Aukus. But Albanese

has outlined his own view of the world as one where countries are either in a democratic sphere or an authoritarian sphere - goodies and baddies - and it's as simple as that. Elements of the liberal commentariat challenge this, supporting Keating's call to axe Aukus, deploy a cheaper, but larger, non-nuclear submarine fleet and seek integration with Asia. This position has an echo on the left, which does not have its own programme for working class power or for a working class foreign and defence policy, beyond some sort of liberal anti-Americanism.

Since the election of a Labor government nearly three years ago, Australia has modified, but not fundamentally changed, its contain China orientation in cahoots with the US. There has been a softening of rhetoric and China has dropped many of its tariffs. However, Australia has responded with an increase in soft power diplomacy to exclude China from small Pacific nations as much as possible. Australia is active in Fiji, Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Nauru, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and all around the Pacific to try to make sure there are security arrangements in place that exclude China.

First islands

Obama and Biden's Asia guru, the now former US deputy secretary of state, Kurt Campbell, has described the Aukus agreement as getting Australia "off the fence" and locking "them in now for the next 40 years" to any military engagement with China. The ALP government has not publicly committed to following the US into a war with China over Taiwan, but the Liberal Party opposition leader Peter Dutton has previously said that it would be "inconceivable" that Australia would not support the US should it choose to take military action to oppose a Chinese takeover of Taiwan.

No matter what is being said publicly, the US clearly expects any Aukus submarines will form part of a US military engagement with China over Taiwan. But it is vital to remember that Aukus is about much more than submarines: it is about ensuring that cutting-edge scientific research is subordinated to military outcomes; it is about ensuring the US has access to Australian naval and air bases; and it is fundamentally about shifting Australia to accept being a forward-operations base for projecting American power in Asia. In those terms, it is mission accomplished.

We now have a situation with US bombers flying through Tindal airbase in Australia's Northern Territory, including for recent raids on Yemen, an increase in US marines stationed in Darwin, the Stirling naval base in Western Australia with a rotation of US nuclear submarines. Australia has committed to buying and making US- and Australian-designed hypersonic missiles. Next will be the announcement of an east coast nuclear submarine base for Aukus.

All of this is about containing China within what is known as the 'first island chain', which runs from the south of Japan, through Okinawa, Taiwan and the Philippines to Borneo. Since the 1970s the US has wanted to make sure that China could not operate its navy freely outside that chain, but obviously China is now contesting that with some gusto.

Clearly China has its own strategic aims. It wants to establish itself as the main regional power in east and perhaps central Asia; it wants to absorb Taiwan - peacefully if it can, but it is prepared to use force; it wants to control its sea lanes without intimidation or interference by the US and its allies, particularly in the South China Sea, which is contested by Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia.

China also wants to continue its economic rise through building strategic economic and trade relations independent of the US and the dollar through Brics. It is looking for the erosion of the US dollar dominance; it obviously wants to avoid internal political and economic collapse or unmanageable divisions.

China is using what is known as the 'Belt and Road Initiative' - a string of unilateral agreements with countries in the Middle East, in Africa, Asia and Latin America for infrastructure development to tie development to Chinese interests. Whether that is a form of imperialism and export of capital is up for debate.

Brzezinski outlines his view of China's self-image and its "fall from greatness". He says Beijing sees "the last 150 years of China's humiliation an aberration... It must be erased, and its perpetrators deserve due punishment. These perpetrators, in varying degrees, have primarily been four: Great Britain, Japan, Russia and America."

Brzezinski quotes a Chinese foreign ministry analyst writing in 1995: "The US strategic aim is to seek [global] hegemony and it cannot tolerate the appearance of any big power on the European and Asian continents that will constitute a threat to its leading position." Brzezinski believes, therefore, that Beijing's long-term goal is "to dilute American regional power to the point that a diminished America will come to need a regionally dominant China as its ally and eventually even a globally powerful China as its partner".

Of late there seems to be a bit of an obsession with 2027 in US intelligence and defence circles. It has been reported in *Defense News* and elsewhere that CIA director Bill Burns in 2023 said that, according to their intelligence, "President Xi has instructed the PLA and the Chinese military leadership to be ready by 2027 to invade Taiwan. But that doesn't mean that he's decided to invade in 2027 or any other year as well."⁵

And there was a leaked memo in 2023 from the head of the air mobility command of the US airforce, general Mike Minihan, who wrote: "I hope I'm wrong, but my gut tells me we will fight [China] in 2025." Whether this was a deliberate or accidental leak or whether he really believes that is anyone's guess, but there is clearly a ratcheting-up of militarism in terms of engagement with China.

Direct confrontation

As the weaker power, China seems to want to avoid a direct confrontation with the US, but it is preparing for it. The US is preparing for a *regional* military conflict with China too. Increasingly its war planners talk of this being inevitable. There is a danger that if people start planning for war, that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The cold war was an exception, given the threat of nuclear annihilation, but in this conflict between China and the US there is potentially a first-mover advantage for the US, because the longer it waits, the more prepared and better armed China will be.

We, however, need to remember that war is a continuation of policy by other means. War is not inevitable - especially if the working class were able to get organised - nonetheless it is on the horizon. In September the US chief of naval operations released a new navigation plan for 'America's war-fighting navy'.⁶ It states that its "North Star" means "readiness for sustained high-end joint and combined combat by 2027" and the plan drives towards two strategic ends: "Readiness for the possibility of war with China by 2027"; and "Enhancing the navy's long-term advantage".

There were some in Australia and elsewhere who hoped Donald

Trump's isolationism could derail Aukus, but that was never my expectation. I have always thought that Trump would think this is a fantastic model - as Paul Keating, the former Australian prime minister, pointed out about Aukus after the signing ceremony with Rishi Sunak, Joe Biden and Anthony Albanese: "Only one is paying - our bloke, Albo!"

Aukus planning started under Trump and it suits his transactional approach to international relations. The new secretary of state, Marco Rubio, recently said that Aukus could be a blueprint for other partnerships to take on China. Trump basically sees himself as running a protection racket, which to some extent he is, and he has started demanding Nato countries start spending 5% of their gross domestic product on defence - a call which has been embraced by social-imperialists like Paul Mason.

Trump is already talking about bringing in tariffs on China, which could act as an accelerant on all this, arcing up what had already started under Biden with Aukus, with the Inflation Reduction Act, with the Chips and Science Act. America feels vulnerable particularly on semiconductors and is trying to bring a lot of that capacity back on shore. Biden last year trumpeted a deal, where Samsung is to build a \$17 billion chip factory in Texas.⁷ Trump will continue with this approach, to try to use economic coercion to force industry to relocate to the US.

The formal position on Taiwan of all interested parties seems to be the same: it is part of China under a 'one-China policy'. This has been the policy of the US since Nixon, it is the policy of the EU and the UK, it is the policy of Beijing and it is the policy of Taipei, within its constitution of the Republic of China.

Australia signed a joint communiqué with the People's Republic in 1972 that is still cited as the basis of its diplomatic attitude towards China. It recognised Beijing as China's sole legal government and acknowledged the position of that government that Taiwan was a province of China. As for Marxists, we favour the voluntary unity of peoples, not forced unification. So we are certainly not banner-wavers for Xi Jinping to invade Taiwan.

The fate of Hong Kong is held up in Washington and London as a warning to Taiwan. Hong Kong's ability to be a second system within one country is gradually eroding. The British imperialists have latterly announced that democracy for Hong Kong would be a good idea, although they did not think so when Britain ruled there. We must see through a lot of that imperialist smoke and bluster about rights for Hong Kong and Taiwan. But I do not think it should blind us to the fact that we are for the voluntary unity of peoples. We do not support the People's Liberation Army just marching into Taipei. But, should a hot war break out between the US and China, with the UK and Australia backing Uncle Sam, we would want to see the defeat of our own ruling class.

The US and China are clearly preparing for conflict - and any military conflict would be a continuation of the politics of the US, seeking to guarantee its global hegemonic position and to stem the rise of any significant regional power. The US will not tolerate an unchecked rise of China: it wants to prevent China even establishing itself as a dominant *regional* power. That is the basis for this conflict.

Hybrid

This position is independent of our analysis of the class nature of the Chinese state. We can and must be united with anti-militarists with different views on this question, but

who also oppose our own capitalist powers' military build-up.

Our understanding is that in the period of capitalist decline and the transition to world socialism, all manner of hybrid projects will emerge. China is no doubt one of these, but it clearly is not just a rerun of the USSR. And Marxists are not doctrinaire Trotskyites. For them, you need only go to something the Old Man wrote in the 1930s and you have your answer. But politics does not work like that: China is far more complex and interesting.

It seems inconceivable that in a country of rapid change with nearly one and a half billion people, things will remain politically stable and homogenous. China is clearly some form of state bureaucracy that emerged from a nationalist revolution that expelled Japanese and western imperialism. In the post-Mao era, its bureaucracy uses both private enterprise and state models for economic development. Or, as Deng Xiaoping said: "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice." The Chinese Communist Party wants this economic flexibility, while maintaining strict political control.

Clearly, the working class is not in power. That is an important starting point for Marxists. But, whether China is a deformed socialist state, bureaucratic state-capitalist or authoritarian capitalist or an imperialist power I do not know - and labels scarcely matter. It is the content of our understanding that is vital.

For us in Britain, Australia or the United States these questions are important but do not determine our attitude to Aukus. We oppose our own imperialism and we are for solidarity with those in Asia fighting for working class independence.

I thought it was interesting what Brzezinski said on China and its ideology and I will end here:

The proclaimed communism of that dictatorship is progressively less a matter of ideological commitment and more a matter of bureaucratic vested interest. The Chinese political elite remains organised as a self-contained, rigid, disciplined and monopolistically intolerant hierarchy, still ritualistically proclaiming its fidelity to a dogma that is said to justify its power, but that the same elite is no longer implementing socially.

At some point, these two dimensions of life will collide head on, unless Chinese politics begin to adapt gradually to the social imperatives of China's economics.

Clearly, something must give in China. The future is not fixed in the past ●

This is an edited version of the opening given by Marcus Strom to the 2025 Winter Communist University. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=qz5uOd70BG0

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REVIEW

Truth is a malleable thing

Erik Kahn *Canned goods* Southwark Playhouse (ends February 8)

Photo: Mark Senior

Hitler's false-flag operation

Something might be in the air. I first got a sense of it with the revival of CP Taylor's *Good* in 2022, which depicts Germany's slide into Nazism. Then came Dominique Morisseau's howl for workers' solidarity in *Skeleton crew*, followed by the angry and young season at London's Almeida Theatre, which included Arnold Wesker's *Roots* and a rehearsed reading of John Arden's anti-war *Serjeant Musgrave's dance*. Even Shakespeare's explorations of republicanism, populism and the violent realities of war were dusted down and given an airing in a *Julius Caesar* for the WhatsApp and TikTok generation (Southwark Playhouse) and *Coriolanus* at the National Theatre.

Pan through all that and you arrive at Erik Kahn's *Canned goods*, which has made its UK premiere at Southwark Playhouse.¹ It tells the story of one of Heinrich Himmler's 'red flag' operations - the staging of a Polish attack on a German radio station in the Poland-Germany border town of Gleiwitz. 'Operation Konserve' (hence the play's title) was a strategy to manufacture fake acts of aggression by Polish soldiers against the Germans in order to placate the British with the claim that a Nazi attack on Poland was a deserved retaliation and so keep them off Hitler's back.

The 'fake news' scenario is all too familiar, as is the bending of truth to fit an agenda by omitting facts and emphasising others, whether by individuals or the media. The BBC, which makes a guest appearance at the end of the play, when a newscaster gives a radio report of the Polish soldiers' incursion, currently stands accused by some employees of downplaying aspects of Israel's war on Gaza.² It denies the allegation, of course, and is considering suing Owen Jones over his claims of bias. Nevertheless, it would not take many minutes to find examples of misleading information in the news, and Khan's play plants on people responsibility for questioning misinformation and holding governments to account.

Canned goods revolves around questions, inquisitions and self-

reflections. It is a 90-minute performance, played 'in the round' with action and dialogue at times leaking into the audience, thereby making us complicit in the operation, which we are made uncomfortably aware of by the play's form as a 'play within a play'. Not only are we watching *Canned goods* performed by actors: we are also watching Alfred Naujocks - an SS major under orders from Himmler to select 'the right men for the job' - concoct his own charade, as he picks his pieces, preps them and positions them just as he needs for the Gleiwitz affray.

This is a performance, Gleiwitz was a performance, and what else is too? So do not be fooled and question what you see, the audience is continually reminded.

Canned goods begins the day before the Gleiwitz attack on August 31 1939, telling the story through three men, who, unknown to them, are pawns in Himmler's game of strategy. In the 'Everyman' joke trope of 'There was an Englishman, Irishman, Scotsman ...', here we have the Jewish philosopher (prophet of doom), the Catholic farmer (with childlike innocence and bewilderment) and the chipper ('I'm anything you want me to be') thief.

These are three very different men, but, as major Naujocks says, also alike in "being special" and bound together by their shared "destiny with the Third Reich".

On the surface they are stereotypes, but, as each one voices their inner struggle with impending death, they reveal some complexity and flaws that come with being human. Birnbaum, the Jewish professor, has a shameful secret; Kruger, the thief, tells of the roots of his chauvinism, and Honiok, the devout farmer is, Saint Francis of Assisi-like, concerned about the welfare of his animals - possibly more than he has been about the disappearances of his fellow countrymen and women.

Perhaps Kahn also meant them to represent different characteristics of a single person, and the journey of reactions they might travel through in the face of a state machine that is so much bigger than themselves:

questioning and fighting against developments they see happening around them, collaborating in the hope of staying alive, and finally resigning to fate.

The state gaslighting begins before the play has even started. As people arrive, find their seats and make themselves comfortable, major Naujocks stalks the room, making eye contact, smiling, asking how they are, how is the drink and how are the crisps. This is a dress rehearsal of what is to come, of what will be done by the smiling devil before us.

The action begins with farmer Honiok's imprisonment. He has no idea why he has been detained in the middle of the night. He says he is "not political, but can't help asking questions about what's been happening". Naujocks enters the cell to question him, feigning a friendly manner and leading Honiok to believe this is all a big mistake.

"But why am I here? Why am I special?" asks Honiok. Naujocks answers in riddles, but the reality will dawn on the farmer over the coming hours: because he lives alone and no-one will miss him or report the fact that he has disappeared. As Naujocks's game of illusion develops, he returns many times to sit in the centre of the room, circled by the prisoners, circled by the audience. Naujock holds court, dictating the rules of his game and manipulating the protagonists. On each visit to the men (they share a cell, but are kept separate from other prisoners) he starts a game of 'question and answer'. Each of the prisoners is allowed to ask something, but the major's answers are examples of clever obfuscation.

In the final question-time session, Naujocks grows tired and irritable of the game and for a few seconds the mask of friendly jollity slips. But he collects himself to allow one last question from the thief, Kruger. There is a long pause, while the other two prisoners - and the audience - silently implore him to ask the one that really matters. But Kruger falters (he has previously admitted to being "not as clever" as Birnbaum and Honiok) and desperately spurts out, "Will I die?"

Naujock walks out in disgust, not even attempting an answer. Birnbaum does it instead: of course you will; you are human and that is inevitable.

From then the action picks up and the final pieces are put into place for the fake radio station attack. But that is not the end of the questioning. Naujock addresses the audience and we squirm under his glare after letting such atrocities happen under our watch.

If one of the functions of art is to bring awareness, open our minds and stimulate intellectual exploration, then *Canned goods* has that potential - to spur a change in attitude to the theatre

of war and its coverage in the media. I detect a preference for dramas that demand we look deeper into the 'facts' we are daily presented with, and our role as a social collective. The problem is, it could be they are just preaching to the converted.

Nevertheless, it is a timely reminder: question everything ●

Pat Taylor

Notes

1. For more details, see southwarkplayhouse.co.uk/productions/canned-goods.
2. See, for example, novaramedia.com/2025/01/09/bbc-exec-downplayed-israel-plausible-genocide-ruling-to-dismayed-colleagues.

Fighting fund**Breath of fresh air**

This week there's a mixture of good and bad news, when it comes to our finances. The good news is that we're on the edge of making our £2,250 fighting fund target for January - more of that below.

But the bad news is that we will have no option but to raise our subscription prices very soon. As regular readers will know, our printing costs have soared and the postage price is expected to shoot up yet again in April. Once we have the new rates from Royal Mail, we'll be better placed to announce the new sub charges. Of course, the current rate of just £5 per month that UK subscribers pay is way below what it costs to produce and mail out each copy of the *Weekly Worker*, so I'm sure that overwhelmingly our readers will be more than happy to up their subs.

In the meantime, the money received via our fighting fund helps fill the gap. And over the last week £530 came our way, taking our running total up to £2,202 - with, as I write, two days still to go. Thanks in particular

to comrades JC and TT for their *three-figure* contributions. Other bank transfers/standing orders came from AG (£50), JT and TW (£25 each), AB (£20), DD (£18), SS (£16), IS and JD (£10) and TT (£6).

PayPal donations came from DB (£50) and JH (£30), who wrote in an accompanying message that the *Weekly Worker* is "a breath of fresh air". He admires our "great culture of debate and high-quality articles" and urges us: "Keep it up!" We'll do our best, comrade!

But, as I've been saying, we need those extra donations to see us home. At the moment another £48 will do the job for January, but I won't complain if we go shooting past that £2,250 target. Please make a bank transfer or PayPal donation as soon as you read this (details below)! ●

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

MEMORIAL

Two colourful educators

Celebrating the lives of Kevin Bean and Terry Harrison. Billy Clarke reports from the memorial held at Liverpool's Casa bar

Funerals and memorial services are always fascinating, revealing occasions. Whether you did not know the person at all, knew them a little, or thought you knew them inside-out, there is always more to learn about their life and idiosyncrasies.

This was especially true for the January 24 joint celebration of the lives of the recently deceased Terry Harrison and Kevin Bean - both activists in the Merseyside Pensioners' Association, which organised the event. These two comrades had, as Kevin's partner, Pauline Hadaway, put it, a "shared love of sharing knowledge". Sadly, many friends from Ireland and elsewhere could not be in attendance at the famous Casa Bar in Hope Street due to Storm Éowyn, but there were still around 100 present, with a great variety of contributions.

Terry Harrison, who played a significant part in the Militant Tendency, was best remembered as an educator who, according to Felicity Dowling of 'Liverpool 47' fame, was able to teach working class kids to degree level and beyond. But his worldview was massively shaped by his first job, on the shipyards. Terry started there, enthusiastically and nervously, at the age of 15, and was gutted that he had to wait till he was 16 to apply to be a boilermaker's apprentice. Audrey White read out Terry's account of his first day on the job, and spoke of that excitement changing over time, as the reality of work gradually dawned on him.

Kevin Bean was a historian specialising in Irish political history, a member of the Labour Party from his teenage years until his expulsion in 2020, and a member of the CPGB and its Provisional Central Committee. Former university students of Kevin's were in attendance, as well as many family members, friends and comrades who learnt from him through conversations, his books, his articles in the *Weekly Worker*, and his online education sessions for Why Marx? and Labour Left Alliance.

Hazuan Hashim and Phil Maxwell of The Art of Resistance filming team showed "the director's cut" of previously unseen footage of Kevin helping Audrey White to accost Keir



Stan Keable with Kevin

Starmar when he visited Liverpool in 2022 - the famous short clip has been shared thousands of times and viewed "over seven million times".¹ They also introduced clips from their film *Anatomy of a witch-hunt*, which chronicles the Labour right's campaign against the 'Wavertree Four', who were expelled from Labour for writing a critical article about their MP, Paula Barker, taking her to task over her attack on leftwingers in the constituency as 'anti-Semites'.

Kevin, who was secretary of his Constituency Labour Party at the time, in effect narrates the film. "He was a dream to work with," recalled Phil Maxwell. "We just sat him down in the studio, he brought a bottle of beer and off he went. He was clear, sharp and spoke in a single

take." The brilliant film shows how dedicated Kevin was to the cause of Palestine and to freedom of speech.

The official reason given for Kevin's expulsion from Labour was not 'anti-Semitism' (by which the Labour right means anti-Zionism), but that he was a card-carrying communist. Much to the amusement of many of us present, Kevin defended himself in the film, saying, "I am a Marxist and a socialist, but I have never been a member of the Communist Party." As Tina Becker, compering part of the event, said later: "I've got a shocking announcement to make: yes, he fucking was." Of course, communists have no problem lying about their membership of this or that organisation. It is our political principles that we are loyal to. (A humorous placard, designed by comrade Maxwell, showed Kevin's mock-up membership card of the KGB!)

Mike Macnair reflected on working with Kevin on the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB, and Yasmine Mather talked about his ambitious - perhaps impossibly ambitious - aim of transforming the *Critique* journal into something more accessible for the masses.

His long-time friend and comrade, Siobhán O'Dwyer, reminded us that Kevin was "realistic" about the dangers of nationalism, but always committed to a united Ireland, and had been involved in Irish politics since the 1980s. She praised his success in earning the trust of dissident republicans, done in order to improve his own understanding and to further his research.

Siobhán also took great pride in having introduced Kevin to his partner, Pauline Hadaway. Pauline spoke about the countless hours spent in conversation with Kevin, and what an honour it was that these conversations would go on to inform one of his books, *The new politics of Sinn Féin* (2007). She also said that Kevin would never shy away from

disagreement, but seemed to be able to disagree without ever making an enemy.

Comrade Becker reminded the audience that, indeed, a certain Baroness Claire Fox was present at Kevin's funeral: "I was tapped on the shoulder a few times that day, with comrades asking, 'What the fuck is she doing here?'" The answer is: Kevin was friends with Fox, as he was with people from all walks of life. Always interested in people, their stories, their views and their backgrounds. Many comrades remembered how he spoke to them for hours about this or that, either on the phone, in Zoom meetings or on the picket line. "He did go on a bit sometimes", comrade O'Dwyer said, to much laughter in the room, remembering how he spoke to her "for three hours straight, when I had just put my baby down and all I wanted to do was go to sleep".

David Whyte knew Kevin primarily as a fellow trade unionist in the University and College Union. Kevin taught his comrades in the union about casualisation and how to respond to it: "If they treat us like dockers then we need to fight back like dockers." He also stated that Kevin was "rubbish at selling the *Weekly Worker*", was an incorrigible gossip, had strong opinions on English tailoring, but was someone who "wanted to win an argument the proper way". Though David described Kevin as "imposing revolutionary discipline" on the picket lines, he primarily remembered him for his gentleness. On one occasion, Kevin reprimanded him with "What are you? Some kind of Presbyterian?", for his rude manner with university staff who were ignoring the picket. "And I have to admit, Kevin's way of calmly talking to people was nine out of 10 times more successful than my shouting."

I was very privileged to be able to briefly talk about mine and Kevin's common interest in the Irish language and went on to play a traditional Irish tune called the 'Liverpool hornpipe' on the tenor banjo, followed by 'Kevin Bean's jig', which I had written after his death. A friend of Kevin's, Jenny Payne, treated us to a moving, unaccompanied performance of 'The ballad of James Larkin' - a song about the Dublin lockout of 1913 and its legacy.

I will remember the memorial as a hopeful and invigorating evening to celebrate two colourful and interesting fellow socialists. Their full lives were reflected by the beautiful political banners and flags adorning the walls and the many different relationships that those present had with Terry and Kevin.

We can continue to celebrate and learn from Kevin by visiting the Kevin Bean Library at www.kevinbeanlibrary.com

Notes

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdP8ki9RM0k.

Sign up to CPGB news

bit.ly/CPGBbulletin

Online Communist Forum



Sunday February 2 5pm
Yasmine Mather reports on DeepSeek, Jack Conrad reports on the politics of the week

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

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

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

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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Elite don't
give a damn
about us

Sex, drugs and Davos

In the bars and bedrooms, government tops, business executives and other members of the global elite reveal what they actually think about climate change, writes **Eddie Ford**

Last week the World Economic Forum had its annual conference in Davos of the great and not so good, such as Volodymyr Zelensky and Donald Trump (virtually). We are told that this merry-go-round of the global elite is about "improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic and other leaders of society" and brings together for five days about 3,000 paying members and "selected" participants - like investors, economists, journalists and celebrities. Like will.i.am of Black Eyed Peas fame who won the 2016 Crystal Award for artists who embody the "spirit of Davos", Sting (if anybody remembers him), actor Michelle Yeoh of *Crouching tiger, hidden dragon* and, er, Queen Máxima of the Netherlands.¹

As you can imagine, though it is slightly shrouded in mystery like everything else, the conference does not come cheap. Unless you are one of the lucky guests, you have to be an actual member of the WEF, which costs about £52,000 a year, and a basic ticket to get into events is around £20,000, plus obviously the extremely high costs for accommodation, food and transportation in the exclusive Swiss Alps resort. They can afford it, of course: hence the talk of 'Davos Man' - and we are talking mainly about *men* - a tribe of globe-trotting, wealthy, global citizens who live in an almost separate universe to you and me.

Boom trade

Yet there is one aspect of Davos that barely got a mention in the respectable mainstream press. However, for that we have to thank (not something this writer often does) undercover reporters from the *Daily Mail* - for revealing details about economics of another sort: the boom in escort services, or high-class call girls, to use a euphemism, who were in great demand.²

Or, if you prefer the language of the *Mail*, "cocaine-fuelled parties" and the "secret depravity" of the Davos global elite, which involves "more sex parties than ever, NDAs (non-disclosure agreements) for prostitutes, transsexual women" and the "most commonly-requested sex act revealed" - which is anal, by the way. Now, "cocaine-fuelled" frolics are hardly new, when it comes to gatherings of the wealthy and entitled - just go to a Tory Party conference, for instance. Nor are call girls and prostitution. After all, to one extent or another, these are features of any gathering of powerful men, whether in politics or business - something similar must happen at climate Cop meetings. One of the creepiest guys this writer ever met was a British United Nations official employed to do something 'worthy' in southern Africa, who openly talked, if not boasted, about his extensive use of prostitutes - probably the only reason why he went.

But the nature of the escort services



Otto Dix 'Three prostitutes on the street' (1925)

offered at Davos gives us a valuable glimpse into the ruling class at work and play, and their world outlook in general - though, of course, the likes of the *Mail* love to linger on the prurient details. As reported by Andreas Berger, spokesperson for the Titt4tat escort agency, it was a record year when it came to the number of bookings for "commercial intimacy" - with around 300 women and trans women getting booked in Davos and the surrounding area, compared to about 170 women in the previous year. What was noticeably different this year, according to Berger, was that a lot of these women in and around Davos had to sign NDAs, showing that these powerful clients are going to increasing lengths to keep their sexual activities secret - while all the agencies report a rise in the demand for trans women and those wanting to live out certain BDSM fetishes or fantasies.

Susann from the Swiss Escort Avantgarde agency said the escorts employed by her offer a "particular skill set" to appeal to clients, saying that her agency "operates in the high-class segment, which also reflects our typical customer base". That is, very wealthy individuals, who jet around the world as a matter of routine, and therefore expect a certain amount of sophistication. The call girls are usually educated to a relatively high level and are bilingual at the very least, with English, unsurprisingly, the most in-demand language, followed by German or French. They wear normal clothes - say a purple suit and a black coat - to make it look like they are actually part of the conference scene,

Typically, the clients pay for several hours of 'company' with the women. Titt4tat's Andreas tells us that that the average booking duration at the WEF is four hours, which, combined with the average hourly rate and the 300 bookings on Titt4tat's books during the first three days of the WEF, would amount to about 300,000 Swiss francs (£270,000). But, once you include the other providers and agencies, an income of nearly £1 million in total is generated at Davos.

Untouchable

Far more interesting than the sexual kinks of various delegates to Davos, which at the end of the day are fairly standard, is what the prostitutes are reporting about the views of their clients, as it reveals *what they actually think*.³ This is something that they normally keep guarded, in fealty to the standard niceties, especially when their inhibitions are lowered by the copious use of various drugs like alcohol and cocaine. As Susann from Avantgarde remarks about her clients, "these types of people consider themselves untouchable, which they often realistically are".

This is particularly revealing in the context of the climate crisis, which, of course, the delegates were talking about all the time inside and outside the meeting rooms - especially those hours that they have paid for in the bedrooms. In fact, the *Mail* quotes Salomé Balthus (or Hanna Lakomy) - founder of the Hetaera Berlin escort service or feminist collective - saying that global warming is "the elephant in the room", the newspaper describing

her as a high-end escort from Berlin, while Wikipedia lists her as a "prostitute, entrepreneur, columnist and writer".⁴

Anyhow, mentioning that "there's obviously also some very intelligent people" at Davos, she makes some fascinating comments about how her super-rich clients could be divided into two groups, when it comes to global warming. One half is in despair, knowing that, even though they are among the most powerful men on the planet, they cannot do anything about it - so they might as well "enjoy a few more nice years on earth" following the mantra, "After us, the deluge". Or, as the *Mail* summarises with admirable brevity, the wealthy know the world is doomed, "so may as well go out with a bang". For her part, Balthus thinks this group is "very cynical and somehow deeply sad" - which seems accurate enough, though they would doubtlessly regard themselves more as realists than cynics.

As for the other half, calling them "dumber" and the uber wealthy, they think that global warming will only affect the poor or "not-white race" in the global south - so they will be alright, Jack, as they live in the north and can easily move from one mansion to another. So party on, as our cities will never be drowned by rising sea levels! This bunch is "celebrating future mass deaths", she remarks, and not just at Davos, it goes without saying - but this ethos happens to be more "concentrated" during Davos.

But, seeing that we live in a democracy of sorts, no matter how regrettable that might be, "you have

to sell it", which requires that you "lie to people" - telling them that we never thought "it would get this bad", when we knew all along, but did not give a damn. She recalls an obnoxious guy from this grouping at the bar shouting, "Tax the rich!" as a joke with every new shot, as they "feel untouchable" - just as Susann said about her clients. Balthus also said that client meetings are often about "the passion of erotica and the passion of power", although the latter so much more "that it can even erase the former" - maybe scorching the myth that power is an aphrodisiac.

Lies, lies, lies

Reading these accounts of Davos, it is impossible not to be reminded of parliamentarians in Britain and in other western countries. Why the political establishment did everything they could to prevent the press from reporting on its proceedings and conversely why the left has considered it important to disclose what they are saying about us. Prior to universal suffrage MPs and members of the ruling class used to tell the truth to each other and what they thought about the great unwashed: the wage slaves who laboured in their factories, mills and mines, the maids and footmen who served them in their town houses and country estates, the young men recruited as cannon-fodder in endless colonial wars.

But, as the suffrage expanded, the political class got increasingly used to lying. Honesty became an even rarer commodity - selection relied on how skilled you were at dissembling. In fact, parliament was far more of a *decision-making body* prior to universal suffrage.⁵ As a consequence, back then, when parliament overly represented the possessing classes, they could be quite frank about their class interests and openly contemptuous of democracy. Unlike now, when honeyed phrases and empty cant are the order of the day, and directly calling a fellow MP a liar is castigated as "unparliamentary language" that can see you booted out of the house.

Some people on the left still angrily say that Sir Keir Starmer lied to them, when he said he was going to carry out Jeremy Corbyn's programme. *Of course, he did* - and more fool you if you ever believed him ●

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Notes

- politico.eu/article/davos-desirables-celebrities-world-economic-forum-altman-benioff-william-yeoh-macron-amherd-dimon-reeves-dalio-maxima-philippe-mathilde-sting-coster-waldau.
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