

weekly **worker**



Reform is polling ahead of both Labour and the Tories. But our prime focus should not be on the far right

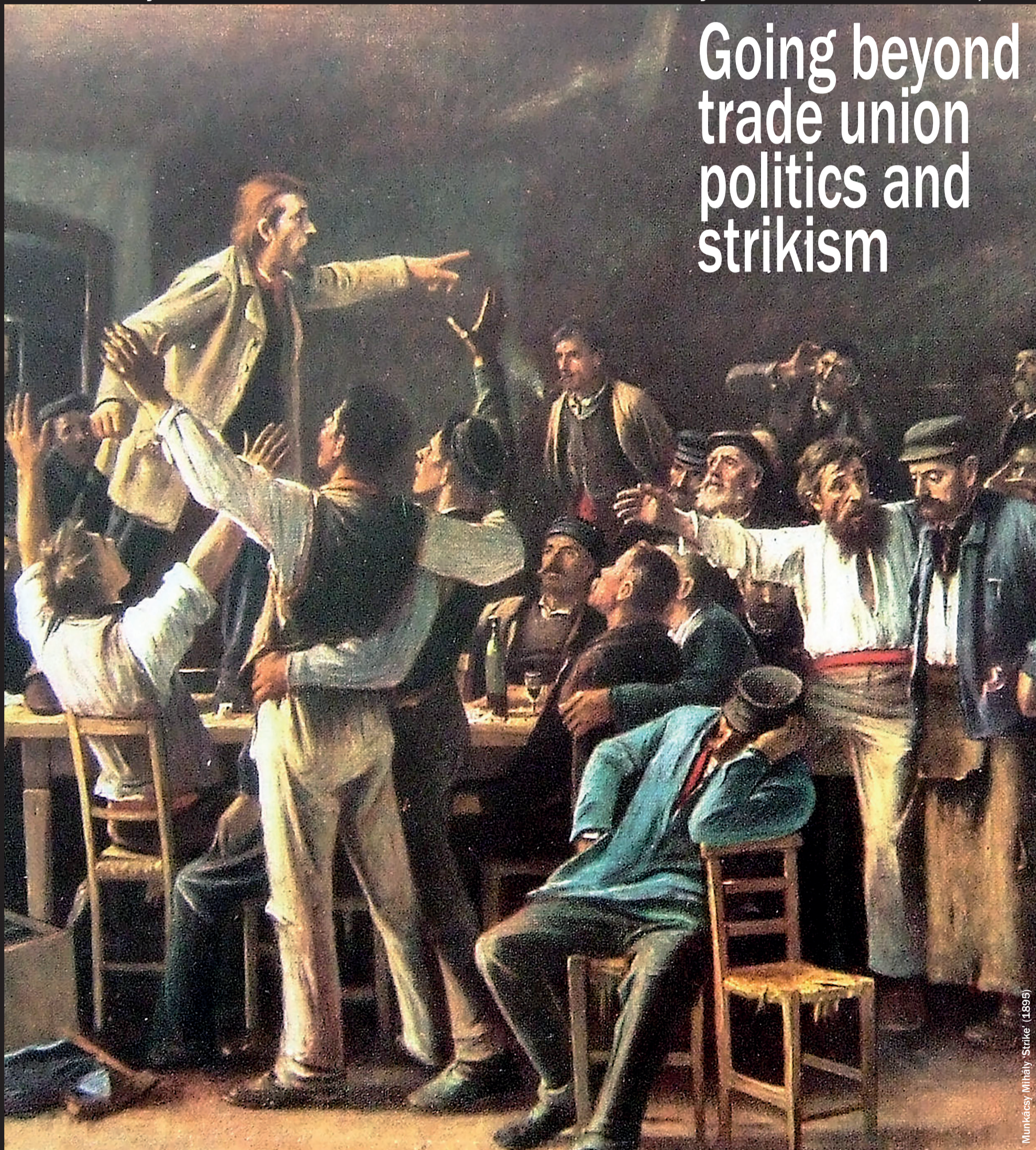
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Going beyond trade union politics and strikism



Munkácsy Mihály, 'Strike' (1895)

LETTERS



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

Centrist fudge

In a December article published in the *Freedom Socialist* in the USA, Jed Holtz argues that the crucial task for socialists in the United States is to demand the formation of a Labor Party that can unite workers behind a single political platform and fight the right. This party would be “kick-started” by the trade union movement and unite broad working class layers behind a reform programme. The article paints a rosy picture of such a party, arguing that a working class party would be able to bring the fight to the right and the Trump government. However, in reality, a call for a Labor Party is nothing more than a centrist fudge of the real issue.

By calling for a Labor Party, and not an explicitly socialist party (socialism is not mentioned once!), Holtz is calling for a political party rooted in the leadership and structures of the trade unions. This form of party, which exists in several countries, from British and Australian Labour parties to the Canadian New Democratic Party, is not a revolutionary party, but rather a bourgeois (liberal) workers' party.

If a Labor Party was to form in the United States today, its leadership would likely include anti-immigrant stooges like Sean O'Brien of the Teamsters. It would include rightist trends in the trade union movement. These questions are not addressed at all. We cannot fudge the most vital task in the development of the socialist movement: the formation of a *revolutionary* party!

Then there is the question of programme. While a full proposed programme is not sketched out, the article does not mention once the minimum democratic tasks of a socialist programme in the United States - tearing up the slaveholder's constitution, and establishing a maximally democratic republic. To

call for a Labor Party instead of a Socialist Party is a dangerous fudge. Working class independence can only be guaranteed by a socialist programme.

Holtz, who is a member of a Trotskyist political organisation, should know better.

Edith Fischer
Australia

Sparks aim right

With a rightwing Labour government in power and Trump and Reform UK setting the political agenda, there are currently a lot of discussions among leftists about the need to create a new left party. The need for a working class and socialist alternative to Starmer's Labour is dire, and we support any initiative in this direction. However, the current discussions among various left groups have brought to the surface everything that is wrong with the British left, and provide examples of how not to advance this goal.

This starts with the group, Collective, linked to Jeremy Corbyn, Len McCluskey and many others. They had a series of closed meetings, whose main purpose seems to have been convincing Corbyn to launch a party - only for him to refuse. Carla Roberts' coverage in the *Weekly Worker* ('Corbyn's maybe party', September 19 2024) did a pretty good job of showing how this band of finished Labourites is hopeless, so we will not dwell on it.

Finally, many are realising that waiting for Jeremy can't be the only strategy for the left. This is the context in which Prometheus issued a call for a debate on the need for a new party, with many individuals and groups (CPGB, RS21, Why Marx?, etc) responding. But we need to be frank: the discussion so far has been a talk shop centred around organisational matters. What type of structure should a party have? What sort of democracy would it need? An electoral alliance or a party? Should it have a paper press or an online one? And on and on... Nothing of substance has been written on why the left is so weak and divided. And, crucially, what should

this new party fight for? If this debate is to be useful, it must be pursued on a different basis.

It seems many in this discussion assume that the reason the left is weak and divided is simply because no-one has ever thought of bringing everyone together before. It is in vogue to denounce the 'sects'. Very well. But many who rage against the 'sects' often happen to be members of one. The divided state of the left is not an organisational issue. It is not something that can be solved by amalgamating existing groups around a vague commitment to communism.

The left is weak and divided because it lacks a programme that can unite the working class against the British imperialist rulers. When we say programme, we do not mean an abstract description of the goals of communism and a list of general, timeless positions. This is what the CPGB *Draft programme* is, and it is no basis for unity. A programme is a guide to action to advance the interests of the working class. It must draw the lessons of the preceding struggles, lay out an understanding of the specific period we are in, confront the obstacles in the way and set the tasks of communists. While it does not resolve everything, this is what we tried to do in our document. 'The breakdown of US hegemony and the struggle for workers' power' (*Spartacist* No68, September 2023).

So, if we come down from the clouds of abstraction and get into the real world, what is obvious is that the left is weak and discredited, and growing numbers of workers are turning to the right. Any discussion about a new left party should start by explaining why this is and what to do about it.

The past three decades have been characterised by the hegemony of the US empire, whose ideological pillar was post-Soviet liberalism. Throughout this period, most of the radical left essentially adapted to liberalism, positioning itself as its most radical wing. Most socialists pursued alliances with liberal elements, middle class intellectuals and trade union bureaucrats - forces all tied to the liberal wing of the ruling class. Other socialists stood on the sidelines, clinging to Marxist purity and doing nothing to address the problem (which is what our organisation did until our recent reorientation).

Meanwhile, the working class was being pummelled by the rulers in the name of these very lofty liberal principles and institutions. Just think of Blairism or the European Union. As a result, the working class increasingly came to hate liberals and everyone associated with them. But, since the far left became indistinguishable from the liberal camp, workers turned their backs on it, looking instead to politicians like Trump or Farage and seeing in racist and 'anti-woke' demagoging an alternative to the unbearable status quo.

The Corbyn movement is a prime example of this. Corbyn first generated enthusiasm among workers, but spent years conciliating the Blairites. He campaigned for 'remain' and then for a second referendum, hopelessly trying to appease them. As for the far left, it latched on to Corbyn uncritically. The price to pay was that millions of workers turned their back on the left and looked to Johnson and Reform UK.

This is why the left is so weak: it is enmeshed with liberals. And, as a result, workers have been deserting the left, which is now almost entirely made up of middle class people - a fact reflected in the pages of *Prometheus* itself. The endless exchanges on organisational questions are typical obsessions of the petty bourgeoisie.

So the task of revolutionaries is to fight within the left for a rupture with the liberals and to turn to the working class and fight for what it needs. The radical left is in competition with Reform UK for the allegiance of the working class. Saying this might shock liberals, but it is just true. This does not mean adapting to Farage, which is the mistake of Galloway's Workers Party. It means being able to tap into the same discontent and provide it with a class-struggle road against the ruling class. To do so, socialists have to declare war on liberalism - starting in our own movement.

This is why those who propose any sort of orientation towards the Green Party are wrong. Socialists need this like a hole in the head. The Greens are a party of the liberal middle class, supporting anti-working class taxes like ULEZ and the pillars of the liberal imperialist order, like Nato and the EU. Any association with these people would be political suicide and a gift to Farage.

Equally wrong is Mike Macnair's view that "it is not the job of the party to give tactical direction to trade unions or to individual strikes" (*Prometheus* November 26 2024). What is the point of a communist party if it isn't to guide the struggles of workers? Communists will not win workers with theoretical treatises, but only if we can prove in struggle that our strategy is superior to that of Labourite union bureaucrats. Macnair's conception simply ends up leaving those people in charge of the trade union movement.

To turn to the working class and get involved in its struggles; to stand in complete opposition to the ruling class, the liberals and trade union bureaucrats; to place our hopes in the class struggle and not in Corbyn or any other Labourite 'saviour' - these are the tasks of communists. Much more could be said. We urge readers to study the current issue of *Workers Hammer*, which embodies the type of party we want to build.

Vincent David
Workers Hammer

Stop debating

It was bad enough that the CPGB decided to hold its Winter Communist University on the day that the police prevented a demonstration from going near the BBC, on the grounds that it was a threat to all law-abiding Jews. But last week's paper's first two pages featured something called Platypus and Prometheus. The former seems to be some sea creature and the latter the Greek god of fire, and they seem to be as relevant to the class struggle as both of the aforementioned.

Of course, they are communist, but the alliance of fragments of sects is not terribly relevant to what is happening today. There are bigger questions, such as why we have a continual low level of industrial struggle. While the Socialist Workers Party abandons politics for activism, being prepared to make any compromise if the trade union leaders agree to fund them, the CPGB seems to believe that the revolution will happen inside a debating society.

Perhaps it's worth reminding comrades that Reform UK is polling ahead of Starmer and the Tories. The police are in open alliance with the Zionists, as they conduct raids across the country under the banner of 'anti-terrorism' - all this while Keir Starmer and Yvette Cooper seek to quash protest and dissent.

Debate in the *Weekly Worker* consists of the social-imperialism of Daniel Lazare vs his critics, but there is very little analysis of where we are after 16 months of Israel's genocidal attack on Gaza. So let me make a few observations.

Despite the horrific situation in

Gaza and the humanitarian disaster, the Palestinians have shown that they will not accept a new nakba. Israel has not only failed to defeat Hamas, but the return of its hostages, who are healthy and well fed, is in contrast to the tortured and emaciated bodies of Israel's prisoners. The disgusting racist, Lazare, may consider Arabs "backward and primitive", but in the eyes of most civilised people it is the Israeli Jewish settler state with its rape and tortures, its destruction of hospitals and schools, who appear as modern-day barbarians.

What is absolutely clear is that the Israeli state and nation are artificial entities that rest upon the oppression of the Arab and Palestinian masses, in conjunction with the corrupt and repressive Arab regimes. Revolution in the Arab east is clearly the precondition to the end of Zionism, but even without it the Israeli state is inherently unstable. What is clear is that the Israeli working class will play the same role as all settler working classes play - completely reactionary.

What is also clear is that despite the collapse of the Iranian axis, which I called out as a paper tiger long ago, the resilience of the Palestinian resistance in Gaza has inflicted a military defeat on Israel. That is one reason why Israel is turning its attention to the West Bank, where war has been declared on Jenin and the cities. None of this, however, surfaces in the *Weekly Worker*. Instead there is warbling about Zelensky and Trump.

There is, of course, nothing about the fact that Sarah Wilkinson, Natalie Strecker, Richard Medhurst and myself, as well as others, are facing the full force of the law, because we do not accept, unlike the miserable Lazare, that anti-colonial resistance (which includes, of course, Hamas) is a form of terrorism. The British state is attacking basic democratic rights and freedom of speech in the name of fighting 'terrorism' and in the process is redefining anti-colonial struggles as 'terrorism'.

The *Weekly Worker* appears to believe that defence of democratic rights, the right to protest, the right to support anti-imperialist movements is best left to bourgeois democrats. Internal discussions about unity between different sects seems more important to it than the fight against Starmer and the police's move towards an authoritarian state.

What I do know is that at both the demonstrations outside my court appearances at Westminster magistrates court and the Old Bailey the CPGB was conspicuous by its absence.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Right 'communist'

Ask one hundred random people what communism is and you may get one hundred different answers. Is it what we saw in the Soviet Union? Or was the Soviet Union some type of "bureaucratically deformed" state (Trotskyist)? Or was it essentially a state capitalist system? Or, as Noam Chomsky has stated, there was "nothing remotely like socialism in the Soviet Union" from early 1918, as the soviets and factory councils at that point were being destroyed by the Bolsheviks.

The important factor for me is to explain what communism is, counter the disparaging propaganda against it and correct the opportunistic groups who have championed communist ideals, when clearly they have stood for something completely different, such as simply opposing the far right.

In a recent podcast, Crispin Flintoff interviewed attendees at the central London rally on October 26 organised by Stand Up to Racism, where many,

Fighting fund Success!

Good news to start with: we crept past the *Weekly Worker's* £2,250 monthly fighting fund target in the last couple of days of January - thank you, comrade DG, who transferred an excellent £50 via PayPal on January 31 (!), MD for his £10 monthly standing order and comrade Hassan, who handed a £5 note to one of our team. That £65 took our final total for the month up to £2,267 - in other words, we were £17 over!

But at this point I must mention once again the huge increase in our printing and postage expenses. Last week I mentioned the need to increase our subscription rate, which will happen very soon. But what we were thinking of will not be enough to cover all our extra costs - we would only get there by more than doubling the current price! This clearly means that we must also increase our fighting fund target.

I can't say how grateful we are to all those readers and supporters who help us - some making outstanding regular donations. Take the first few days of February. So far we have received £100 (!) from comrade AC, £50 from LC and £30 from CG, while there were other standing orders/

bank transfers from RG (£25), DL and MT (£20 each), BG (£15), RM (£13), MM (£11), AN and DI (£10), plus £6 each from comrades DC and JS.

That takes us up to £316 after five days - not a fortune, but a reasonable start to the month. But we really do need to step on the gas - just to make sure we reach our current £2,250 target in a month that has just 28 days!

But we also need all our readers and supporters to seriously think about what they can do to help us out in the long term, including those who read the *Weekly Worker* online only. If you haven't already set up a standing-order or PayPal donation, why not do that? If you have, can you afford to increase it? See below for the web link explaining how you can do that.

Even before we announce out new monthly target, we look forward to hearing from you! ●

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

far from being 'far right' (whatever that means, because no-one bothers to define it and therefore it is used conveniently as a derogatory term), expressed concerns about their future, their children's and that of the country. These are the 'far right', according to some!

Here's an excerpt for illustration: "You can kind of see the, um, the dissatisfaction and a lot of what people are talking about in my opinion doesn't really have anything to do with refugees or people from other countries. It's people being kind of disenfranchised and, like, unhappy with the state of things in the UK. I think people are understandably really upset and frustrated with the state of things - you know, things like the housing crisis and benefits and every ... there's so many struggles."

This was a young woman who had arrived late for the Stand Up to Racism rally and had found herself amongst "Tommy Robinson supporters". Another attendee said: "I'm worried about the country. I'm worried about the way that it's being run by Keir Starmer. I'm worried for my children, my grandchildren. I'm just a wife and a mother and a grandmother from a small seaside town and I see our prime minister letting criminals out onto the street ... Our borders are ... not being controlled and I'm just worried for our country ..."

These are the so-called 'far right' that communists are meant to 'stop'. It's a simplification to lump them all together as supporters of Tommy Robinson. Who are we attempting to stop? People who are concerned about what's happening around them?

One issue these rallies highlight is the glaringly obvious two-tier policing and justice. Is the 'left' really going to ignore this because it's an issue the so-called 'far right' have highlighted? Are we really going to highlight the plight of UK journalist Sarah Wilkinson, and oppose the way she has been treated by the authorities, because she's a Palestinian supporter and support her campaign for justice, but at the same time ignore the plight of individuals in similar circumstances who are seen as belonging to the 'right'? Maybe we should support all individuals suffering from two-tier policing and justice!

Many of these arrests and incarcerations involve issues of free

speech and censorship. Therefore we should focus on those issues and not on the presumed political alignments of those on the receiving end. Does the 'left' bypass issues of censorship and free speech, or even oppose the idea of these issues because it has become lately a penchant of the 'far right'?

There's a patheticism in all of this. You're being played, comrades. It's divide and rule and many of you go along with it in full awareness, as there's personal interests involved. I was aware early on of a hierarchy of status even within fringe, leftwing political parties. There are reputations at stake for stating the bloody obvious. 'Yeah, I'm actually in favour of free speech, but we don't want to be associated in any way with the other side,' laments a long-time party stalwart who's developed a kind of reputation within leftist intellectual circles, but doesn't want to tarnish that by placing himself or herself in a position where he or she could be accused of 'rightist tendencies', or whatever the latest bullshit is.

Lenin has even been accused of being a "rightwing deviation of the socialist movement" (Noam Chomsky). Can no-one see the irony in that? The difference for me between today and the political activists of the early 20th century is that they don't seem as slapdash with their attacks and the use of pejorative labels. Opponents of Lenin back in the day explained the reasons why they opposed him presumably so that understanding could take place. It is and was the difference between mere name-calling, or pejorative labelling, and substantive, ideological critiquing. Lenin's critics didn't just sling insults at him for the sake of it - as is happening now throughout mainstream and alternative political culture, when someone's views are being objected to: they often articulated well-reasoned arguments to explain why they believed his actions contradicted their own political values or the original goals of the Russian Revolution.

In other words, they didn't merely dismiss him as 'rightwing' (take note, comrades) or a 'tyrant' or 'dictator' without explanation: rather they took the time to analyse his policies and actions, and showed how they undermined the democratic ideals and revolutionary principles that had

initially sparked the movement. They pointed to specific practices like the centralisation of power, repression of opposition, and the consolidation of authority in the hands of the Bolshevik Party as evidence that Lenin was veering away from the original goals of socialism - goals like worker control, democratic decision-making and revolutionary freedom - the heart and soul of what communism, and socialism, stands for!

On the February 1 rally in London, 'left' activists were urged to "oppose Tommy Robinson supporters" and "stop the far right". Are you really saying that all of the marchers were Tommy Robinson supporters? The possibility exists that a large number of people attended this rally because they feel disenfranchised from the political process in Britain at this time, as highlighted above in the Crispin Flintoff podcast.

How do we know what the attendees are there for when those opposing are in their own tribal group at the opposite side of a police cordon? It's exactly what the authorities desire - every issue split down the middle, with two clear opposing camps, basically just heckling each other. Is it not possible that a large proportion of the marchers agree with some, but not all, of what Tommy Robinson advocates? Surely, there are communists who reject two-tier policing and justice in Britain? Surely there are people out there who oppose someone, viewed either as left or right, being incarcerated for essentially making a documentary?

Yes, we can go into the ins and outs of the issue, but 'shutting people up' is essentially at the heart of the matter. Journalists Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney were also arrested and temporarily incarcerated for making the *No stone unturned* documentary, essentially. It was a message essentially to all activists out there not to challenge the contemporary power structures in society.

Let's take the example of Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney. Are people in Northern Ireland thinking they'll support both journalists, because they're championing the issue of free speech and highlighting one of many injustices perpetrated against innocent people, or are they looking at the issue from a sectarian perspective? One side may support the journalists because that furthers their agenda, while the other side just ignores the issue because it goes against their agenda. Why don't we all support both journalists and oppose their treatment by the Northern Ireland police because their plight highlights the need for more freedom of expression, more state accountability, more journalistic freedom, better journalism, and less censorship? We all benefit from such freedoms.

Why don't we support the marchers in London because of their "concerns" - communists must have similar concerns too! No? Oh, dear, so communists aren't concerned about the way things are being run in Britain? They're not concerned about the British government's support for terrorists in Syria, for example? Or pensioners losing their winter fuel payments? Or worried about their children's future, as the woman articulated above in Crispin's podcast?

What is 'far right'? Is it a belief in zero immigration? If so then I can categorically say without any hesitation that the vast majority of marchers do not believe in zero immigration. Neither, though, will they believe in unfettered immigration, which would have horrendous consequences to the economy and budget allocations, etc. To borrow a term from Lenin, that would be "infantile leftism"!

Louis Shawcross
County Down

ACTION

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.

Free Palestine, defend the right to protest

Saturday February 8, 2pm: Rally, Hamilton House, 80 Stokes Croft, Bristol BS1. Arrests of Palestine demonstrators are a blatant attack on the right to protest. Speakers include Chris Nineham (Stop the War) and Ben Jamal (Palestine Solidarity). Tickets free. Organised by Bristol Stop the War: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

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.

Perspectives on human origins

Tuesday February 11, 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: 'Architecture meets anthropology: Womb Temple - Lunar Rebirth'. Speaker: Sasha Farnsworth (with Hossein Sadri). Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/560137453591524.

Workplace day of action

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

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.

What kind of party: non-ideological, democratic

Thursday February 13, 6.30pm: Online discussion in the series, 'Building a communist Party'. Looking at why small confessional sects will keep on failing. Speakers include Moshé Machover. Registration free. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Shock horror: the Milgram experiment

Thursday February 13, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Speaker: Edmund Griffiths. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc.

No to ethnic cleansing: stop arming Israel!

Saturday February 15, 12 noon: National demonstration for Palestine. Assemble in Whitehall, London SW1, then march to the US embassy. Palestine continues to face Israel's genocide, settler-colonialism, military occupation and apartheid. Campaign in solidarity with the struggle for freedom. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/15-february-national-demo-for-palestine.

Defend the right to protest!

Wednesday February 19, 6.30pm: Rally, Brady Arts and Community Centre, 192-196 Hanbury Street, London E1. Defend the 70+ arrested on January 18, defend the right to protest and demand that the repressive Public Order Act is repealed. Speakers include Chris Nineham (Stop the War) and Ben Jamal (Palestine Solidarity). Organised by Newham and Tower Hamlets Palestine Solidarity: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1041517924681254.

Free Palestine! Defend protest rights!

Saturday February 22, 1pm: Rally, Doncaster Unitarian and Free Christian Church, 60a Hall Gate, Doncaster DN1. Speakers include Chris Nineham (Stop the War). Organised by Doncaster Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1159264702654283

Fighting for anti-racist workplaces

Saturday March 1, 11am to 5pm: Conference for trade unionists, venue in London to be announced. Plenaries and workshops on fighting racism at work and countering the rise of the far right. Registration £11.55. Organised by Stand Up To Racism and the TUC: standuptoracism.org.uk.

Christopher Hill: the life of a radical historian

Saturday March 1, 7pm: Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Author professor Michael Braddick discusses his fascinating and detailed biography of Marxist historian Christopher Hill. Tickets £3 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

Online Communist Forum



Sunday February 9 5pm
Making sense of Donald Trump's nonsensical Gaza plan - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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

POLLS

March to the right

Reform is now polling ahead of both Labour and the Tories. But our prime focus should not be on the far right. No, says **Eddie Ford**, we need a principled programme and a working class alternative to Labourism

As we see almost everywhere, politics is moving to the right. We can see this in Britain with Reform UK, which is now riding high in the polls on an ‘anti-establishment’ ticket appealing to those totally alienated from mainstream politics, disgusted by its lies and hypocrisy, believing that Nigel Farage is somehow the answer (or at least an improvement).

Diehard pundits and eager young fogies in *The Daily Telegraph* are delighted by this situation, of course - saying with relish that Nigel Farage’s ‘insurgent party’ is now calling itself the ‘real opposition’, therefore creating a far more fertile ground for reactionary ideas to flourish.¹ As the paper is happy to report, in all seven of the latest surveys by the major pollsters, Reform is ahead of the Tories by at least one point - adding around 10 points to its support since the general election. Then it won 14.3% of the popular vote and five seats, while the Conservatives got 23.7%, its worst result on record. Labour is still ahead in the aggregate poll of polls, but *The Times* recently ran with a YouGov report of Reform being a 1% whisker ahead of Labour.² Meanwhile, the government’s popularity has nosedived relative to its performance at the general election only seven months ago - remember that Sir Keir Starmer’s party got half a million fewer votes than in 2019 under Jeremy Corbyn.

But, as has been widely reported, Reform is now regularly ahead of Kemi Badenoch’s Conservatives. Sometimes by 1%, sometimes by 4%. The Tories are, of course, still much more successful with those aged above 55, while Reform - you guessed it - gets more approval for those below 55 (the ‘youth vote’!). In other words, Reform and the Conservatives have different demographics.

Putting two and two together, Michela Morizzo, chief executive of the Techne UK company (dedicated to ‘empowering business’), said that the combined votes of Reform and the Tories would represent an ‘unassailable’ lead over Labour. Of course, we all know that things do not work out like that in the real world, as bolting the two parties together would have both positive and negative effects - possibly diminishing Reform’s vote because it is joining with the establishment and diminishing the Tory vote because they are joining forces with the ‘far right’.

However, though it would be far from straightforward, there is talk again of some electoral deal or alliance between the two parties - especially as a growing number of Tory MPs are beginning to question Badenoch’s overall strategy, particularly her refusal to roll out new policies or rebrand the party. Hence the discernible anger amongst the back benchers over the comments last week to *The Sun* by shadow foreign secretary Priti Patel, saying it was ‘totally distortionary’ to suggest the previous Tory government had thrown open the UK’s borders under the points-based system for work visas introduced after Brexit - which saw net migration reach around 728,000 in the year ending June 2024.³



Nigel Farage: now stoking hate from the green benches

Afterwards, Patel realised she had made a political blunder even though the raw statistics are unarguable. She issued a statement insisting she ‘was not happy’ about the levels of immigration under the previous Conservative government, after Badenoch had distanced herself from the remarks, and her spokesperson saying the Tories would ‘tell the truth about the mistakes we made’. But the damage had been done. Quick as a flash, Labour said the Tories were ‘out of touch with reality’, remarking that Patel ‘seems proud of her central role in the Tory open-border experiment’. Naturally, Nigel Farage saw an opportunity to make hay, declaring that the Conservatives had a ‘disastrous record on immigration’ and, if given a chance, ‘would do it again’.

Coalition

Further confirmation that things are generally moving towards Reform can be found in a poll of almost 18,000 voters carried out by the Focldata polling company, but commissioned by Hope Not Hate, the favourite organisation of liberals and the Socialist Workers Party, not to mention the intelligence services.⁴ Its analysis in particular of almost 4,000 voters inclined to back Reform is quite revealing. It found that one in five were ‘moderate, interventionist’ voters, unlike most of those who had backed Farage at the last election, or had supported either Ukip or the Brexit Party in the past. For instance, they were quite positive about immigration and in favour of a ‘strong state’, but disillusioned with the ability of the main parties to deliver.

The breakdown of Reform voters further found that, apart from this newer group of voters that do not meet the traditional profile of gammons and bigots, there were ‘radical young men’ inspired by the likes of Elon Musk, as well as older groups of Conservative and working class voters opposed to immigration - what you could call a coalition of libertarian free marketeers alongside those who want greater state intervention and ownership of key

industries. According to the study, Reform is currently picking up 12% of those who voted for the Tories at the last election and 7% of those who backed Labour. It is picking up between 10% and 15% of those who voted Labour at the last election in seats where there is a large white working class population. By the same token, defections to Reform are much lower in Labour’s more ethnically diverse metropolitan seats - no surprise there.

From all this, the poll posits the idea of a ‘new era’ of four-party politics, where ‘people are angrier’ and there is a lot more voter fluidity. Focldata suggests that Reform would win 76 seats if an election were held now. Of those, 60 would be won from Labour, including seats across the so-called ‘Red Wall’, as well as in Wales and across the south of England. However, here is the real sting in the tail for Starmer: the analysis also shows that even a relatively small further swing towards Reform could see it pick up another 76 Labour-held seats - meaning logically that the party is especially susceptible in the event of a high turnout among Reform voters.

This is what really concerns those who commissioned the poll, it goes without saying - the ‘clear and present threat’ to Labour posed by Reform. Nick Lowles, chief executive of Hope Not Hate, worries that ‘there is no single way’ to fight Reform, as there are ‘different types’ of Reform voters and each needs a different approach. He wants to restore faith in Labour, and in mainstream politics in general, by demonstrating that the government can ‘make a difference in their lives’ - learn to love Sir Keir, not Nigel Farage, and then hopefully politics will revert back to normal. You must be kidding, Nick.

Of course, having said all of this, what will happen in a *real* election with a ‘first past the post’ electoral system might be a very different matter. Strangely enough, nearly all the articles about the recent polls fail to mention this incredibly important fact. After all, episodic surges towards parties not part of the big two are hardly unknown. In

1981 the Social Democratic Party/ Liberal alliance was polling nearly 50% of the vote and was 20 points ahead of the ruling Conservatives. In 2010 came Cleggmania and the Lib Dems surged in the polls. Though they secured a coalition deal with the Tories, the Lib Dems were ‘squeezed’ in the general election by the two main parties. And lest we forget, in the summer and early autumn of 2019, Jo Swinson’s Liberal Democrats were polling almost as well as Reform is now - but no political earthquake followed.

It is also worth remembering that historically the Tory Party has gone through a series of not only splits, but also *fusions*. Some of us, growing up politically, used to know the Tories as the ‘Conservative and Unionist Party’, perhaps thinking that meant the Ulster Unionists. But, no, the name actually came from the Scottish unionists. So it would be foolish to dismiss the possibility of a ‘Conservative and Reform Party’.

Campaign

The typical left response to the rise of Reform, as readers well know, is to demonstrate and protest - look at almost any issue of *Socialist Worker*. Whenever Reforms rears its head, whether by standing in a council or national election, we will oppose them - *no pasarán!* Which might sound very militant to anyone new to politics (or just naïve), but what does it actually mean in practice?

For instance, a recent issue of *Socialist Worker* says that if there is there a Reform candidate standing in their local area, then ‘get in touch with Stand Up To Racism to campaign against them’ - SUTR being the SWP’s favourite front organisation, of course.⁵ So does that mean voting Tory or Lib Dem if that would prevent the Reform candidate from winning? But if you are voting Labour for that reason (which is presumably what the SWP is really saying), then you are effectively joining forces with the very problem that people are rebelling against. They are not voting Reform because they are happy with Labour, to state the obvious, but because they are utterly alienated from the entire

political establishment.

When it comes to the next round of council elections the SWP/SUTR is to become to all intents and purposes an adjunct of the political establishment. *Party Notes* proudly proclaims: ‘Our primary work will be campaigning against Reform UK by unmasking the Farage party’s racism and exposing R[eform] UK’s policies that target workers, the NHS and the unions.’⁶

This poses the very real danger - just like in the United States recently - that you become *part of the problem*, not the answer. Confronted by the choice between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, most of the left - like the ‘official’ Communist Party of the USA - said vote Harris (some justifying this on the grounds that Trump supposedly represented a fascist threat). Well, you voted Harris and got Trump, with no move to the left. In fact, society is stampeding to the right - the same being true for Germany, with the left being dragged more and more to the right. What was unacceptable a year ago becomes acceptable. What was unimaginable five years ago becomes the new norm, the new common sense.

Yes, the last general election saw the SWP vote for a very select few left-of-Labour candidates (including, of course, their own comrade, Maxine Bowler, in Sheffield). The problem is that the politics they were standing on were without exception Labourite - left Labourite, yes, but Labourite nonetheless. So, when Alex Callinicos says ‘revolutionary socialists’ ought to ‘help initiate and build’ an ‘effective radical left alternative’ when it comes to elections, we should not get our hopes up too high.⁷

After all, the SWP played the leading role in both the Socialist Alliance and Respect. It even put a toe into Tusc for a while. This saw SWP members vote down manifesto proposals to stand for republicanism, a woman’s right to choose an abortion, opposition to migration controls, even international socialism.

From the CPGB perspective then, what we need is *independent* working class politics, which, as a matter of course, requires challenging Reform, Tory, Lib Dem and Scottish nationalist candidates, but above all provides an independent working class alternative to Labourism.

The only serious possibility of doing that is building a mass Communist Party solidly based on the sort of programme championed by German social democrats such as Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel and Karl Kautsky, the sort of programme written by Karl Marx and Jules Guesde and the sort of programme that saw the Bolsheviks transform themselves into a mass party which, in October 1917, successfully led the worker-peasant masses to state power ●

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Notes

1. *The Daily Telegraph* February 1 2025.
2. *The Times* February 3 2025.
3. [bbc.com/news/articles/c360zegpl0xo](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c360zegpl0xo).
4. [theguardian.com/politics/2025/feb/02/reform-uk-can-win-scores-of-labour-seats-in-england-and-wales-says-study](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/feb/02/reform-uk-can-win-scores-of-labour-seats-in-england-and-wales-says-study).
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6. *Party Notes* February 3 2025.
7. *Socialist Worker* January 7 2025.

TECHNOLOGY

Making sense of AI wars

Has China caught up with the United States in artificial intelligence? That depends on what the race between the two countries is actually about, says Paul Demarty

The launch of R1, a new large language model (LLM) from the Chinese company, DeepSeek, caused a great commotion in the United States.

As Deepseek is apparently capable of producing roughly the same quality of output as the best LLMs available from US companies like OpenAI and Anthropic, but at a fraction of the cost, there was an immediate blow to market confidence in the big AI firms and their investors (Microsoft owns half of OpenAI, for example) with a trillion dollars being wiped off the tech-centric Nasdaq stock market index in one day. Panic spread among the AI cognoscenti.

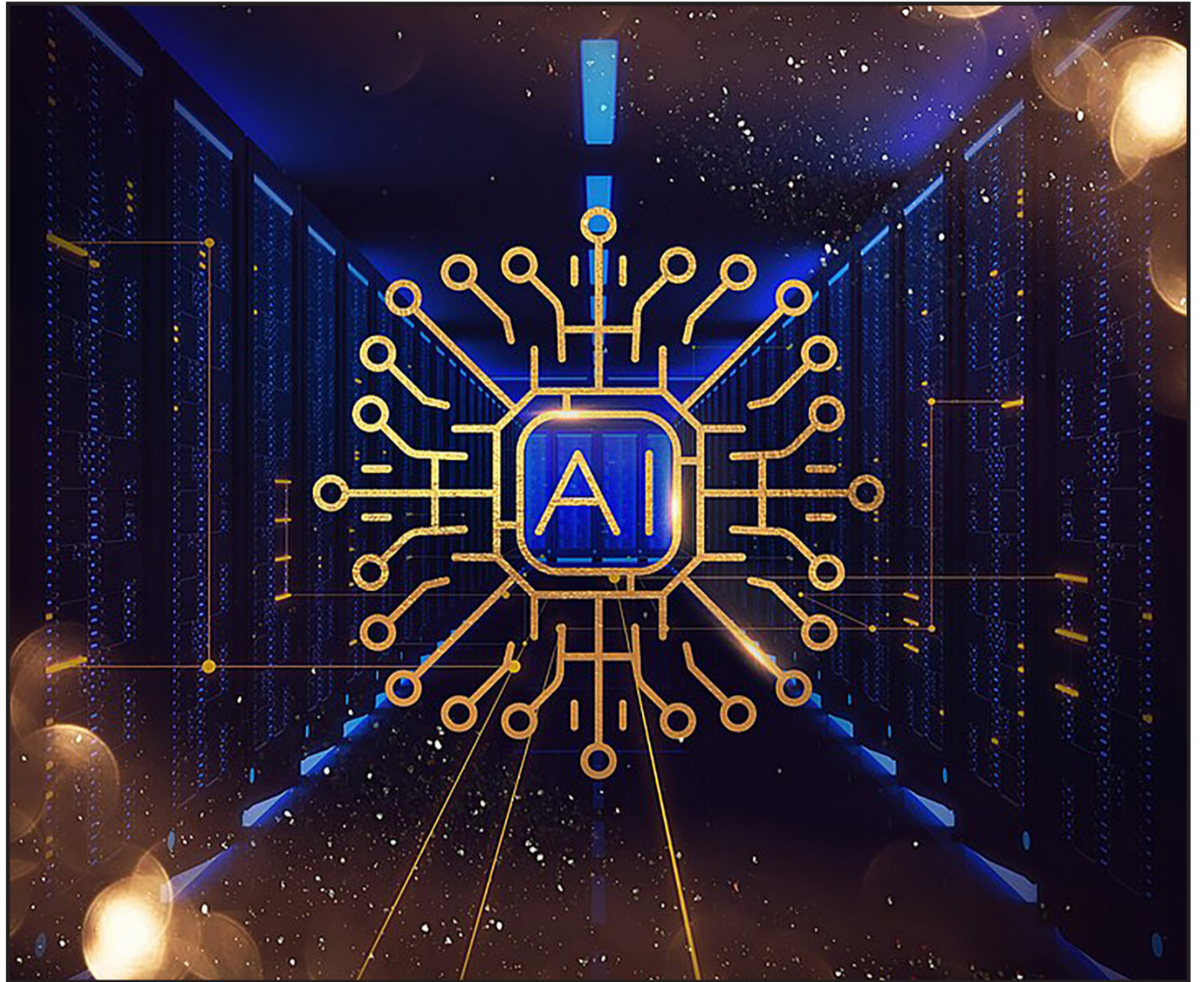
Yasmine Mather provided a useful introduction to the technicalities of the AI sector and DeepSeek last week.¹ Yet the technicalities are hardly revolutionary. Faced with certain constraints, DeepSeek's programmers cleverly optimised their software - that is, changed it so that it does the same thing, but faster or with less resource consumption, etc - but the optimisations used are not world-changing technical discoveries. They are the same kind of things that programmers have always done when they try to squeeze a bit more juice out of a computer. The most striking effects, in the medium term, are not going to be in the far frontiers of what artificial intelligence can do, but rather in its impact on the relationship between the US and China, as they compete for economic and political dominance.

In my discussion here, I make two working assumptions: first of all, that at least *some* of the AI hype is true, and comparative advantage in this technical field will have a really meaningful impact on overall success in this new round of global competition. Secondly, that the appearance of total economic chaos in the early days of Trump's new administration is false, and that its competitiveness in geopolitics will not be affected more than briefly. I have my doubts on both points, but it is still worth thinking through the implications.

Breakthrough

The DeepSeek breakthrough is, as noted, not a technological marvel, but rather the application of disciplined effort to improve the efficiency of, essentially, the same underlying technology used by the American AI models. It is easy enough to see why American firms were *not* able to do this. They had settled on 'scaling' as the main way of advancing their AI products - that is, throwing more and more chips at the problem - because it is relatively predictable (you can project quarterly spending and give more or less coherent answers to investors about how much it is all going to cost). It is also a strategy where the downside of not pursuing it is high - that is, suppose Google decided to go for optimisation instead of hoarding silicon. Suppose it does not work, and they cannot make more efficient models. By that time, OpenAI, Meta and Anthropic will have bought up all the chips. Not good!

For DeepSeek, this dilemma never arose, because successive US governments have imposed export controls on advanced silicon chips to China. Embarrassed US tech people have insisted that there *must* have been some evasion of sanctions here, and that DeepSeek must have had access to better chips than they claim. But in that case, they would



Chips will decide?

presumably be competing over a far *smaller* supply of cutting-edge NVidia graphics processing units (that is, those that were successfully diverted around the export controls) than were available to the US in any case - or what? Did they all fall off the back of a lorry the size of Guangzhou? This is not serious. Plainly the constraints ensured that only major breakthroughs in performance would give any Chinese firm a chance of competing with the west.

DeepSeek's breakthrough, indeed, may tell us more about America than China *per se*. The *Financial Times* reports that increased state involvement in Chinese tech industry has actually made it *harder* to take initiatives:

As state-owned funds in China have taken on a larger role funding start-ups in the past few years, the entrepreneurial ecosystem has felt pressured to guarantee returns for fear of losing the country's assets. DeepSeek is distinctive among Chinese generative AI start-ups in that it has not raised any external financing and has therefore been free from these constraints.²

This has the whiff of *FT* negative spin. It cannot be denied, however, that DeepSeek is not typical of China's tech sector. It is effectively a hobby company funded out of the disposable income of a hedge fund business called High-Flyer, run by one Liang Wenfeng. High-Flyer invested a

lot in AI and high-performance computing for algorithmic trading and, like similar outfits in the US, recruitment to the firm is ferociously competitive. Quantitative trading is an extremely performance-sensitive business. Microseconds matter. It is thus no surprise that High-Flyer/DeepSeek had just the people to throw at a problem like getting a little more oomph out of old silicon. Even supposing the *FT*'s jaundiced view of the Chinese tech sector is correct, we should probably expect state investment to become less conservative, with such results dropping into its lap, just as this arms race heats up.

Worse is better

The major concern for the United States, under the circumstances, is that its tariffs and export controls have very obvious limitations. The usual imperialist playbook - of locking subordinate countries below you on the value chain - is visibly failing. It may well be the case that no Chinese supplier will be able to match the best chip designs coming out of the States or the state-of-the-art chip fabricators run by TSMC in Taiwan. (No US planner should be so complacent as to take this for granted, of course.) The questions posed by DeepSeek is: does that actually matter? How good is 'good enough'?

'Good enough' is often a far better target, in many technical domains, than whizz-bang amazing.

Departing from computers for a moment, you need only think of the AK-47 assault rifle; never especially high tech, but - precisely *because* of that - reliable, weather-proof, easily repaired and in continuous use for 80 years. By being a 'worse' gun than many flashier competitors, it makes the actual *soldiers* more effective, less dependent on logistical support, and so on. You do not hear it so much now, but in the 1980s and 90s the slogan, 'worse is better', was widely used in the software industry, to name just this paradox of very sophisticated programs somehow turning out to be less useful than relatively crude ones.

In the AI world, the big Silicon Valley firms have been improving their models by throwing silicon at the wall, brute-force training on enormous computer clusters at exorbitant expense. It was already widely known that returns were diminishing. OpenAI, for example, has faced enormous difficulties getting its GPT-5 model into a state that is worth releasing. Every attempt to train it takes months and tens - if not hundreds - of millions of dollars. If they succeed, what exactly is the point? Slightly better document summarisation - and with a real price of production that means it can never be profitable?

The silver lining to the DeepSeek humiliation is, of course, that the Chinese firm was good enough to give everything away, describing their techniques in depth and releasing

the model as open-source. There is thus little comparative advantage for the Chinese state. Software optimisation, moreover, is also a world of diminishing returns: we should not necessarily expect fresh revolutions in training efficiency. Perhaps, then, the pendulum does swing back to simple brute-force scaling. The optimisations applied - a relieved OpenAI, Google, etc - can go back to building out vast data centres. The Chinese state is still faced with the daunting task of creating chip fabs that can compete technologically with TSMC and the like (or, I suppose, just annexing Taiwan ...).

The two sides compete to find the first real killer app - emphasis on 'killer'. The large language models will have their effects on the white-collar labour market and whatever else, but there is one pre-eminent axis of economic competition: the means of destruction.

In this respect, it seems fair enough to say that China *has* caught up. Its AI industry is 'good enough' to compete meaningfully with the US in the automation of warfare. We all await, with some disquiet, the result of this competition ●

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Notes

1. 'Coding good, politics bad', *Weekly Worker* January 30: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1523/coding-good-politics-bad.
2. www.ft.com/content/0e8d6f24-6d45-4de0-b209-8f2130341bae.

PARTY

Going beyond strikism

Too much of left politics is trade union politics. But what is urgently needed, argues **Mike Macnair**, is the working class posing a political alternative to capitalist rule

After a couple of weeks' break, I return to reviewing contributions to the discussion of the party question from *Prometheus* online journal and elsewhere. This week I am concerned (briefly) with the Socialist Party of Great Britain's contribution;¹ somewhat more extensively with three arguments for trying yet again the last 30 years' attempts at broad-front arrangements from Ansell Eade, Steve Freeman and Chris Nineham;² and finally with the issue these pose, which is *why* it is impossible to go round the organised far left.

Let us start with the SPGB. It used to be traditional among the far left to give the SPGB as an example of a dead-end sect that counterposed itself to the organised workers' movement and was, as a result, marginal. Given the marginality of the rest of the far left at the present date, this argument is now obviously useless.

It is worth saying, however, that the SPGB's organisational methods are plainly no better than the rest of the far left at avoiding unprincipled splits; a series of splits between 1911 and 1991 are listed by Wikipedia, while the Socialist Studies group, originating in the split of 1991, is still active.³

The SPGB text for *Prometheus*, 'The end and the means', is primarily concerned with making the entirely correct point that a socialist/communist revolution will have to be the work of the majority, who will have to be "ready to be proactive participants in the socialised system of production". The comrades then argue for their distinctive position, of rejecting "promoting reforms of capitalism", and instead the need to "make use of what passes for 'democracy' to promote socialist ideas until such a time that enough socialists are voted into power over the state machine in order to abolish it, as part of the revolutionary process, and establish an administration of things rather than a government over the people".

On this basis, the comrades argue:

... the political vehicle the socialist majority choose to win control of political power must be fully democratic, reflecting the sort of society they are seeking to establish ... So the mass socialist party must not be a vanguard party controlled by a leadership, but a democratic party controlled by its members; in fact there must be no leaders or leadership - just administrative bodies carrying out the democratically arrived at decisions of a membership that wants and understands socialism.

I set on one side the arguments for a more or less prolonged *process* of transition from capitalism to communism, filled with contradictory forms that begin under capitalist rule and continue after the overthrow of the capitalist state under working class rule.⁴ In fact, the SPGB comrades implicitly assume such a transition: "It's not for us to describe in detail how people will choose to organise their lives once a socialist form of production has been introduced: the different resources, technology and mindsets which will exist then are difficult (impossible?) for us to empathise with now." If we could leap to the *abolition* of the state and the "administration of things", in a single act, whether that single act is the SPGB's recruitment of members



Nurses taking industrial action in 2022 over pay and conditions

to reach above 4.1 billion (a majority of the world population), or the Bakuninists' one big strike movement, no such problem of imagination could exist.

Prefigurative

Consider, however, the case for a prefigurative party - which has some truth in it. A socialist revolution *will* have to be the work of the majority as proactive participants, as will the construction of the cooperative commonwealth. The problem with the SPGB's approach to this has two sides.

The first is that the actual achievement of full democracy is impossible under capitalism. This claim is basic Marx from the 1840s.⁵ Its practical implication is a point I have made previously, and earlier in this series against comrade Lawrence Parker: we cannot practically organise without the work of volunteers; and capitalists' general unwillingness to employ people who have previously worked for the far left (or, for that matter, been trade union militants) means that there are serious practical limits on our ability to rotate officers.⁶ In the absence of *elected* officers, the result would be merely the "tyranny of structurelessness" dominance of unaccountable individuals, who are for one reason or another able to put more resources into organising.⁷

The SPGB comrades in fact say in their article that "branches ... nominate delegates to various committees to carry out party work": whichever of these committees takes responsibility for the *Socialist Standard* will in practice be a "leadership", whether or not comrades wish to give it that name.

Equally, a "vanguard" is merely people who get somewhere first:

SPGB comrades claim that they are right (as against the large majority who disagree). If they are, indeed, right, and the rest of us come to agree with them, they will *ipso facto* be a vanguard - however much they wish to deny it.⁸

The other side of the coin is that if we recognise that *full* prefigurative democracy under capitalism is impossible, there are nonetheless means available of developing *more* democracy under capitalism - and not only in a socialist party that denies the utility of fighting for reforms. We can fight to maximise democratic functioning and the work of the majority as proactive participants in existing workers' parties, in trade unions, in cooperatives, in campaigns. By doing so, we promote the proactive participation of the majority; their readiness for a future socialism; and their ability to *imagine* a future cooperative commonwealth as an alternative to capitalism.

In doing so we will, of course, be fighting *against* the efforts of the capitalist state and the capitalist media to force workers' organisations into a managerialist mould (to date largely successful, including with the far left). We can counter these efforts by campaigning for democracy in the state itself (raising constitutional issues). This, too, promotes a majority of proactive participants. But this, of course, would be to reject the SPGB's foundational claim about 'reforms'.

Possibilists

The SPGB originated as a part of the 'impossibilist' opposition in the Social-Democratic Federation, which opposed engagement in the Labour Representation Committee and unity initiatives towards the Independent Labour Party and argued

for rejection of collaboration with the existing trade unions. There was significant influence at first of the ideas of Daniel De Leon of the US Socialist Labor Party, who argued for party-controlled trade unions. In May 1903, 80 SDF members, mainly in Scotland, voluntarily split to form the British De Leonist SLP; the remaining possibilist leaders (in London) were expelled in April 1904, and 88 SDFers formed the SPGB on June 12 that year.⁹

Why 'impossibilist'? The answer is that this was a reaction to the arguments of the 'Possibilists' (capital P) in the French workers' movement led by ex-Bakuninist Paul Brousse. Brousse argued that the "minimum programme" of the *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier* (1880), drafted by Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue with the collaboration of Karl Marx, was sectarian and tended to separate the party from the working class, because of its insistence on raising constitutional issues: instead, the party should concentrate on raising reform proposals that were "possible" and could alleviate the immediate situation of the working class, which would enable the party to win mass support. This tendency was therefore 'Possibilist' (its formal name) and its opponents were denounced as 'impossibilist'.¹⁰ The Second International was founded in 1889 through a split between the French Possibilists (and the British TUC), on the one hand, and the 'Marxist' trend led by the Social Democratic Party of Germany, on the other.¹¹

De Leon, and the left opposition in the SDF, embraced the name, 'impossibilist', as a badge of honour.¹² This seems to me to be a negative dialectic - not in Adorno's sense, but in the sense that the polemic drives both

sides towards worse positions than they had before. A clearer example is the polemic over 'democracy' in 1918, in which Kautsky's use of 'democracy' to mean liberal constitutionalism and support for Entente war aims led Kautsky towards constitutional loyalism, and Lenin and Trotsky to denounce 'democracy as such' - in doing so striking at the foundations of Marx's strategy. In the 'impossibilism' polemic, the De Leonists and the SPGB were led by rejecting the Possibilists' reforms-only line to denounce any involvement in campaigning for reforms *at all*.

Why this history is relevant is that, while the SPGB are 'impossibilists', comrades Ansell Eade, Steve Freeman and Chris Nineham - and, it must be added, the large majority of the British far left - are 'possibilists' - though they would never admit to it.

Ansell Eade in his *Prometheus* article, 'One big party?', argues that "the political conditions and structures in Britain mean that what partyists have in mind - unity of the Marxists snowballing into a mass party - is more likely to emerge from an electoral alliance of the broader left". The argument for this proposition in summary is that the 'first past the post' (FPTP) electoral system requires electoral parties to be broad coalitions; that the trade union leaders will not break with Labour, "because no alternative exists with which to influence legislation"; and that the far left is splintered, because "these barriers prevent any purely Marxist formation from achieving the snowball effect necessary to win wider layers to its politics".

And breaking with the left's anti-factionalism without an immediate road to the masses is excluded: "The divided Marxist left will not unite into a single, yet multi-tendency, party for the sake of putting together the resources of individual organisations and becoming instead open factions, unless there seems to be a guarantee of growth." What he proposes is - pretty explicitly - a return to the Socialist Alliance(s) of 1998-2003.

Steve Freeman's 'The commonwealth party and the communist party' argues:

There is no basis for a mass communist party in the UK. The existing fragmented communist groups are wedded to Stalinism or Trotskyism. Although republican communism is a revolutionary democratic break with these two main ideologies, it is far too weak to launch an alternative world party. Of course, the case for a different kind of world party needs to be made.

There is, however, the basis for a mass social democratic party in England and the rest of the UK. This possibility was shown in the rise of the Corbyn movement, with hundreds of thousands of supporters in the Labour Party and millions of votes won in 2017 and 2019. Despite the defeat and fragmentation of the Corbyn movement the conditions for a mass party still exist, not least with the war in Gaza, the Palestinian solidarity movement and the defeat of the Tories in 2024.

Hence, he argues, "social democratic workers and communists can and should unite in the struggle for a mass social democratic labour party".

And “If communists have any use to the working class beyond sectarian self-promotion, it is in fighting for a minimum social democratic programme.”

Chris Nineham’s ‘A party mood?’ starts with the idea that “there is a big left in this country, whatever its weaknesses. It formed the activist base for Corbynism, it coalesced again around the short-lived 2022 strike wave, and it has been at the heart of today’s unprecedented Palestine movement.” He argues that there needs to be a revolutionary organisation, by which he means a *Cliffite* organisation:

... what type of revolutionary organisation do we need? It must be an organisation that puts class at its centre. That means being rooted in the day-to-day struggles of working people. It must be based on action. If action is central to winning people to revolution, then it must be central to what revolutionaries do. Marxism, as developed by Marx, is not about emphasising differences with other people on the left or proposing socialist ideas from the sidelines.

But this ‘revolutionary’ organisation needs to apply the method of the united front, and Trotsky is selectively quoted from a 1932 article in support.¹³ Nineham’s *interpretation* of the united front is not Trotsky’s - of unity in action within which differences can and must be openly expressed - but Georgi Dimitrov’s Stalinist version from the 1935 Seventh Congress of Comintern, that the revolutionaries must be the “best builders”¹⁴: “The revolutionary organisation then has two main tasks: First to initiate, support and develop actions with other forces to its right. Secondly, to argue for the most militant tactics within the movement and to explain to workers the significance of their actions.”

Only militant tactics - not substantive political differences.

Paradoxically, Nineham’s proposed application of the policy of the united front is a “new anti-neoliberal and anti-war party”. It is paradoxical, because Trotsky’s united front slogan in 1932 was precisely for forms of unity with the *right wing* of the SPD against the rise of the Nazis. Nineham proposes a ‘united front’ party *against* the Labourite majority of the organised workers’ movement, and including an anti-war policy that is the fundamental historical dividing line between social democracy (the pro-war or loyalist wing of the workers’ movement after 1914) and communism (the anti-war, disloyalist and internationalist wing).

Such a ‘united front’ could never ever become the road to workers’ councils (as Trotsky in the 1932 article Nineham cites posed the outcome of the united front): “Forgotten is the fact that the soviets were founded as workers’ parliaments and that they drew the masses because they offered the possibility of welding together all sections of the proletariat, independently of party distinctions; forgotten is the fact that therein precisely lay the great educational and revolutionary power of the soviets.”

All of these arguments are plainly enough variants on Paul Brousse and his co-thinkers’ arguments from the late 19th century. According to these comrades, like the late 19th century Possibilists, Marxist politics may be relevant at some point in the future; but, for the present, advocating Marxist politics is an obstacle to what needs to be done, which is to focus on ‘the possible’.

History

The short answer to all this is that all these comrades propose, in slightly different forms, to *repeat what the left has been repeating, with diminishing returns, over the last 30 years*. George Santayana famously said that “Those

who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”¹⁵ The broad-frontist left clings to its dogma and not only is unable to remember the past, but *refuses* to do so.

The first point that is forgotten is that small parties *can* win seats in FPTP elections, contrary to the claims of comrades Woodrow and Eade. The old pre-1991 CPGB did so, occasionally, before the point in the 1950s at which its Stalinism became a mark of Cain to working class voters, while the 1951 *British road to socialism* promoted voting *Labour* as the road to communism. Other small parties have done so in parliamentary elections. The small left parties of pre-1914 were able to win seats in *local* elections, in ways which leveraged the idea of socialism into public politics.

The same is true of the Greens, in relation to ‘green politics’ more broadly. The claim made by comrades Woodrow and Eade that the Greens are a “broad front” party is nonsense: the “broad front” parties pretend to be ‘real Labour’. The Greens, in spite of including various *forms* of green politics, do not pretend to be ‘real liberals’. On the right, the successive pro-Brexit parties have pushed politics to the right, even without winning parliamentary seats, but merely by taking votes from the Tories.

Thus, the claim that FPTP requires broad-front coalitions for *any electoral representation* - as opposed to *for government* - is merely a false dogma, promoted in the interests either of Labourism or of ‘anti-electoralism’ (what Lenin and Trotsky characterised as “anti-parliamentary cretinism”).

The second point is the calamitous history of broad-frontist formations in Britain since 1995. We can start with Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party. Long in gestation - the private discussions that led to its formation had already started by 1992, but the party was only launched in 1996 - the SLP was committed from the outset to a bureaucratic-centralist and anti-factionalist mode of operation, aided by the broad-frontist Mandeliste Trotskyists of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus and later by other auxiliaries. This method led to a series of purges, demoralising to members, and sterilised its possibilities.

Meanwhile, it could not escape from being “one among the far-left groups” because it had an immediate competitor in the Scottish Socialist Alliance from 1996, and in Coventry and some other, less significant, local Socialist Alliances set up by Militant/ the Socialist Party in England and Wales from 1998.

Ken Livingstone’s independent London mayoral election campaign in 2000 led this organisation (CPGB) and others to build a London Socialist Alliance, and to promote the creation of a national Socialist Alliance. This, however, was short-lived, because SPEW split it in December 2001 on the “principle” of federalism: that is, bureaucrat-baronial control - in reality to preserve SPEW’s freedom of “initiative” towards what would be claimed to be broader, mass-based campaigns.¹⁶

The Socialist Workers Party, in *majority* control of the Socialist Alliance, decided to liquidate it in 2003 - again in favour of a broader front initiative, expected to get more mass support - Respect. This, too, turned out to have a short life. The involvement of George Galloway, and of elements of the south Asian origin-communities mobilised by the mosques for the anti-Iraq war movement, was not enough to take it into the ‘big time’. On the other hand, preserving ‘breadth’ meant that the SWP was committed to suppressing political discussion within Respect.

What resulted was a wholly unpolitical split in August 2007 - which could not be explained, because the method adopted to achieve breadth precluded honest discussion of

differences.¹⁷ Neither the SWP wing of the split, nor ‘Respect Renewal’ of George Galloway, some of the Muslim forces, and the Mandelites (International Socialist Group/ *Socialist Outlook*, more recently *Socialist Resistance* and currently Anti-Capitalist Resistance) could be taken seriously; the ISG split Respect Renewal in 2010 on the fatuous ground that George Galloway proposed to stand against the Scottish Socialist Party in the 2010 general election.

The next large broad-front attempt was SPEW’s, in collaboration with the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain and the left leadership of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union - ‘No2EU, yes to democracy’ launched in 2009 for the EU elections that year and continuing down to the 2014 EU elections. This was certainly no more than an electoral coalition, and really did no more than offer a sort of ‘left’ version of the British nationalism of Ukip. However, from 2010 it morphed into the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (Tusc) - an alliance between SPEW and the RMT leaders. With the RMT leaders now gone, the “breadth” of Tusc is reduced to the presence of a few ‘independent’ lefts.

Next came Left Unity - again a product of a fairly prolonged gestation of private discussions, like the SLP, but actually launched in 2013 on the back of the success of Ken Loach’s 2013 film, *Spirit of ‘45*, and an appeal from Loach. Left Unity was composed primarily of ‘independent’ lefts, though *Socialist Resistance* was involved at the core and some other smaller groups - the CPGB included - came on board. It did not attempt bureaucratic-centralism, but rather what we in the CPGB have in the past called ‘anarcho-bureaucratism’ or - in my own view better - ‘legalism’. This resulted in Labour Party-style conference organisation, and in a mass of fatuous disputes over local disciplinary proceedings. Always in potential competition with Tusc (and debating its relationship to Tusc), the Left Unity project was marginalised when the Corbyn movement in 2015 showed that Labour *could* - at least temporarily and at least in rhetoric - turn sharply to its left.¹⁸

Momentum was essentially a version of the same broad-front project *within* the Labour Party - as was the Labour Representation Committee of John McDonnell and others, created in 2004.¹⁹ But Momentum, on the back of the Corbyn wave, was much bigger, with the result that preserving its possibilist ‘breadth’ required tougher bureaucratic-Bonapartist measures, in the form of the fraudulent plebiscitary overthrow of its original constitution and the exploitation of private intellectual property rights as a means of apparatus control.²⁰

I have intentionally left out all the numerous smaller broad-front projects that have gone nowhere. But the fundamental lessons to be drawn are dead simple.

In the first place, Labourism without Labour will be marginalised, if it gets anywhere, by the ability of Labour - even now - to throw up a left. That was the fate of Tusc and Left Unity. Comrades who claim that the radical defeat of Corbynism prevents that should remember the extent to which the majority of the left was claiming that there could be no new Labour left in 2010-15.

Secondly, it is not possible to *go round* the larger organised groups of the far left. If one group is relatively successful with a broad-front initiative, another will set up a competing ‘spoiler’ group, or come in and take over (the SWP in the Socialist Alliance) and so on.

Such phenomena are not only British. The French far left has displayed the exact same dynamics over a slightly longer period, as the Mandelites (currently Nouveau Parti

Anticapitaliste/L’*Anticapitaliste*), the Lambertistes (currently Parti Ouvrier Indépendant/*Informations Ouvrières*) and Lutte Ouvrière take spoiler initiatives against their opponents’ initiatives, while the Parti Socialiste and Parti Communiste Français are also enabled to manoeuvre temporarily to the left to disrupt such initiatives of the far left. No doubt the same happens elsewhere; I am merely less familiar with the history beyond France.

Comrade Eade is correct that the left groups will be reluctant to give up independence in favour of public-faction status without guaranteed success. But there can be no guarantees of success. What can be guaranteed is repeated *failure* if the far left will not break with anti-factionalism and keeps attempting the broad-frontist perspective.

Class struggle

The far left thinks of ‘class struggle’ in terms of trade unionism and strike struggles. Hence the Spartacists’ comment (on my *Prometheus* article) that “What is the point of a communist party if it isn’t to guide the struggles of workers? Communists will not win workers with theoretical treatises, but only if we can prove in struggle that our strategy is superior to that of Labourite union bureaucrats.” Evidently battles for electoral representation of the working class, (like the Bolsheviks’ elections campaigns in 1912 or 1917) or campaigns like the 1840s ‘Ten-Hour Day’ campaign or the 1860s suffrage campaign do not count as “class struggles”: only strikes do.²¹

This is both a strength of the far left - which is why the larger far-left groups have sufficient weight that it is impossible to go round them to create a mass movement - and a weakness, which is why it can never pose the question of political power.

Trade unionism is probably the most elemental form of working class organisation: going back to the ‘confederacies of masons’ to raise wages (banned under that name by an act of 1425). A trade union is more than a simple strike committee, because it is a membership-based organisation with funds raised by subscription and elected leading bodies, which exercises discipline over its members’ actions.

The application of this model to politics was not present in Chartism in the 1830s-40s. This had the organisational forms of bourgeois parties - loosely connected clubs and societies. The model was applied to politics by the Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiter-Verein (ADAV - General German Workers’ Association) founded in 1863 under the leadership of Ferdinand Lassalle. The ‘Eisenacher’ Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Workers Party of Germany) founded in 1869, led by Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel, copied the membership-based form of the ADAV, though rejecting its ultra-centralism. The result was forms of party that had considerable power to organise not only elections, but also other sorts of campaigns. This basis of organisation is the root of the weight of ‘Leninist parties’.

The trouble with trade unionism, however, is its primitive *sectionalism* - most vivid in the old craft unions (like the United Friendly Boiler Makers’ Society, the Amalgamated Society of Clothworkers and Warehousemen, or the still-surviving Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen). Sectionalism is also present, though, in Unite’s support for UK arms spending, as long as it supports UK jobs.²² It is also, in Gramsci’s coded phrase, ‘corporatist’ (seeking merely to promote worker interests within the frame of capitalism) rather than ‘hegemonic’ (promoting an alternative to capitalism, and the working class offering to lead the society).

Trade union sectionalism is reflected in the insistence of each far-left group on organised independence. Trade union corporatism is reflected in anti-electoralism. In practice, anti-electoralism leads to just supporting Labour as a default position (just as Trotsky commented that the Spanish anarchists in the 1930s revolution and civil war, rejecting electoralism, ended up supporting the People’s Front government).

To pose the question of a socialist alternative, it is necessary to *step beyond* support for strike struggles, and so on, to posing a policy alternative in the interests of the class as a whole (like limits on working hours) and an electoral alternative.

The far-left groups are as strong as they are because their politics is at the end of the day trade unionism, and thus grows directly out of the earliest form of class struggle - one that persists in spite of many defeats. But this clinging to trade unionist politics has the result that they stand as an obstacle to the working class posing a political alternative to capitalist rule ●

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Notes

1. prometheusjournal.org/2024/12/13/the-end-and-the-means.
2. Eade: prometheusjournal.org/2024/12/11/one-big-party; Freeman: prometheusjournal.org/2025/01/15/the-commonwealth-party-and-the-communist-party; Nineham: prometheusjournal.org/2025/01/24/a-party-mood.
3. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Party_of_Great_Britain_breakaway_groups is a convenient reference.
4. I have written about this on several occasions - some collected at communismiversity.uk/mike-macnair-programme-and-party-articles; also weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/823/socialism-is-a-form-of-class-struggle; weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/824/representation-not-referendums; and weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/831/transition-and-abundance (2010). I should stress that much of what I have to say in these articles is wholly unoriginal, orthodox Marxism; I merely cite them for convenience.
5. Various writers, but most recently Bruno Leipold’s *Citizen Marx* Princeton 2024, chapter 3.
6. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1521/anti-party-partyism/ and references at note 11.
7. www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm.
8. There is another possible usage of ‘vanguard’: that is, as short-hand for the broad activist layer of trade union, workers’ party and ‘independent’ militants in single-issue campaigns linked to the workers’ movement. The idea of a “vanguard party” is actually more useful in this usage than in that of the “arriving first” sense.
9. M Crick *The history of the Social Democratic Federation* Keele 1994, pp97-102, 165-68.
10. For Brousse and the possibilists, see D Stafford *From anarchism to reformism: a study of the activities of Paul Brousse 1870-90* Toronto 1970. The 1880 draft programme in English is at www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm; the French text actually adopted as of 1882 is at materialisme-dialectique.com/pdf/dossier-1/Le-Parti-Ouvrier-Francais.pdf.
11. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/berstein/works/1889/xx/reply-justice.htm gives a contemporary account from the ‘Marxist’ side.
12. De Leon: eg. www.slp.org/pdf/de_leon/eds1905/nov15_1905.pdf. For British ‘impossibilists’ see note 10 above.
13. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/next02.htm.
14. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm#7; see section on The chief arguments of the opponents of the United Front.
15. en.wikiquote.org/wiki/George_Santayana, with useful context.
16. Peter Taaffe’s SPEW interpretation is at www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/108548/09-10-2017/36-the-socialist-alliances, and www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/108571/09-10-2017/socialist-alliance-splits. More history can be found in the *Weekly Worker* archives.
17. Dave Renton’s SWP interpretation in RS21 form is at revsoc21.uk/2024/03/18/the-socialist-alliance-george-galloway-and-respect-left-electoralism-the-last-time-around. More history is available in the *Weekly Worker* archives.
18. Left Unity still exists; once again, more history can be found in the *Weekly Worker* archives.
19. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Representation_Committee (2004).
20. There have been various reports in this paper.
21. iclfi.org/pubs/wh/255/workers.
22. www.uniteunion.org/news-events/news/2024/november/unite-extra-defence-budget-spending-must-prioritise-uk-jobs.

GERMANY

Firewall and hot air

Migration is the number one issue. While almost all parties are marching to the right ahead of the February 23 general election, Die Linke's slight move to the left might well justify a critical vote, argues **Carla Roberts**

If you want to know how fragile international capitalism currently is, just look at Germany. Europe's power house is seriously creaking and likely to go into recession (defined as a fall in gross domestic product in two successive quarters). GDP contracted by 0.2% in the last three months of 2024 and a similar result is expected for the first quarter in 2025. Mass layoffs, including in the mighty German car industry, have shaken the country - and more is to come if Donald Trump's tariffs are really imposed.

Politics is in flux too. The German 'centre ground' - symbolised by the *Mutti der Nation* ('mother of the nation'), former chancellor Angela Merkel and her famous political 'flexibility' - has dramatically shifted to the right in the last couple of years, with almost all political parties joining in the increasingly brutal attempt to blame refugees and migrants for the economic malaise. They seem to want to outdo the increasingly popular far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Merkel's decision in 2015 to allow a million Syrian refugees to settle in Germany - hailed as a great success by everybody at the time, especially companies looking

for cheap labour - is now universally seen as the 'worst decision ever'.

Sahra Wagenknecht, leader of the 'left' breakaway party, the BSW (Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht), has been doing her best to keep up and stop the slide of the BSW in the polls (currently at around 4% - down from a massive 20% just after its launch), by proposing in the last couple of days a national referendum on the migration question, which, she hopes, would limit annual numbers to a "manageable" 50,000.¹ For reference, in 2024 there were 250,000 people who applied for asylum, plus another 175,000 actual migrants. As one of the cleverest and best-educated people in politics, Wagenknecht knows very well that, at a federal level, the constitution allows for binding referendums for only two purposes: changing the constitution and the creation or restructuring of states. It was nothing but a cheap and nasty PR stunt.

As all this demonstrates, the February 23 federal election looks as though it will be dominated by one issue alone: migration. The results will have worldwide implications, especially if Germany makes serious moves to build a 'fortress

Syrian refugees heading for Germany in 2015

Sahra Wagenknecht: pushing hard anti-migrant agenda

Europe'. The climate catastrophe, war and increasing inequality will create more and more refugees, but 'keeping them out' is clearly not a strategy that can work in the medium or even the short term. Incredibly, only Die Linke now dares cling to yesterday's common sense - migration is happening, is actually necessary and should be positively welcomed and financially managed, with communes that house refugees receiving adequate support, etc.

The rise of Reform UK (now leading the polls for the first time) shows that this question will become an even bigger issue in Britain too, especially when elections are on the horizon. *The Guardian* reports that a group of 89 Labour MPs has just been set up to put pressure on Keir Starmer to become "tougher on illegal migration especially" - not because migration as such is a problem, but to "stop the growth of Reform".²

And it is affecting the left, too: The Socialist Party in England and Wales, for example, argues in the latest issue of *The Socialist*:

The trade union and workers' movement should fight against every injustice of the racist

immigration laws. Control of decisions about whether or not to grant asylum cannot be left in the hands of a capitalist government. We demand that elected committees of working class people, including from the trade unions and migrants' organisations, have the right to review asylum cases and grant asylum.³

In other words, they positively *favour* immigration controls to protect 'our Britain', but give it a left spin. A dangerous dead end.

Brandmauer

It has become almost impossible to predict the outcome of the elections. This is unparalleled in a country whose constitution was written after World War II precisely in order to prevent political unpredictability (overseen as it was by the USA).

Just a couple of weeks ago, Friedrich Merz looked like a mere shoo-in for the position of chancellor. Polling consistently around 30% for many months, his conservative Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) were way ahead of the unpopular government coalition of Social Democrats (16%) and Greens



(14%), with their junior partner, the Free Democrats (FDP), likely to be kicked out the Bundestag altogether. Newcomer BSW polled at around 20%, while Die Linke looked like it would not get back into parliament either. The big winner is, of course, likely to be the rightwing AfD, which has been polling around 20% of the vote for many months now.

That support has grown somewhat in the last few weeks - and, with every outraged comment by a bourgeois politician, every refusal to invite the AfD to a political chat show and every warning of the danger of 'fascism', its support continues to increase.

As an aside, in our view the AfD is not a 'fascist' organisation, nor is fascism 'on the rise' in Germany, the USA or elsewhere. For a start, there is no unresolved revolutionary situation and no powerful working class movement that prevents the ruling class from ruling in the old way. Capitalism turns to fascist gangs and demagogues in the attempt to save itself. Reform, the AfD, Trumpism, Meloni are certainly an expression of the global rise of rightwing populism and they will no doubt make life extremely miserable for migrants and the working class - but fascism is something else. That does not mean we do not fight those dangerous populists, of course. But we should be clear in our definitions.

Everything in Germany is now up in the air, thanks in a large part to the now world famous political manoeuvre performed by Friedrich Merz, designed to shore up the vote for his CDU. He really should have learned from the FDP's current dire straits. After all, the early election had only become necessary after the FDP pulled out of the government coalition last year, hoping to boost its own profile by attacking SPD chancellor Olaf Scholz. Instead, the manoeuvre entirely backfired and the FDP has fallen from 11.5% at the 2011 election to around 3.5% in the current polls (which means it would not clear the 5% hurdle required).

Although he probably will not say it publicly, Merz too will no doubt regret his decision to call a number of parliamentary votes to tighten German asylum and migration laws. First proposed in September 2024, the CDU paused its *Zustrombegrenzungsgesetz* (full title, 'Law to Limit the Illegal Inflow of Third-Country Nationals to Germany'), when the government coalition of the SPD, Greens and FDP fell apart in November. Speaking in the *Bundestag* on November 13, Merz promised that, for the last few months of the parliamentary term,

We want to agree with you, the Social Democrats, and you, the Greens, that we will only put decisions on the agenda of the plenary session on which we have previously reached agreement, so that neither in determining the agenda nor in voting on the matter here in the House will there be even a single accidental or actually achieved majority with those of the AfD.⁴

Merz was basically strengthening the already existing *Brandmauer* (firewall) that separated 'respectable' parties from the far-right.

In 2018, the CDU first took the official position to "reject coalitions and similar forms of cooperation"⁵ not just with the AfD, but also Die Linke - a position that was also adopted by most political parties and media outlets. Not relying on the AfD to win a vote in parliament is a step up from that - and a promise Merz obviously has come to rue.

Last month, a failed Afghan asylum-seeker awaiting deportation flipped and knifed two people to

death, including a two-year old boy. That was enough for Merz to change his mind - he feared being outdone by the AfD in the February elections and wanted to make sure he is seen as the most ruthless, when it comes to keeping out refugees. In his argument for tabling the laws, Merz claimed that they had become necessary to stop "the daily gang rapes from the milieu of asylum-seekers".⁶ Media outlets were quick to point out that this is an entirely made up accusation, which could have come straight out of the mouths of the most extreme wing of the AfD milieu.

Five points

On January 29, Merz first presented a 'five-point plan' - most of which has already been implemented, including stopping asylum-seekers at the borders if they do not possess "valid entry documents" - which most refugees do not, for one reason or another. That vote achieved a majority of only four votes. AfD voted in favour, as did the Free Democrats and six independent MPs (the BSW abstained on this occasion, with all other parties voting against). Merz ignored criticisms, because he could claim he was not *reliant* on AfD.

And so he pushed ahead with another vote on January 31, this time presenting the much more detailed *Zustrombegrenzungsgesetz*, which would bar, for example, family members from joining migrants and refugees in Germany, even if their appeal for asylum was successful or they have otherwise secured the right to live in the country. As an aside, many German politicians have argued that this could not actually be enforced in any case, as it contradicts EU law. I suspect implementation was not the key point in Merz's mind in any case. It was supposed to be a public relations coup.

Merz knew in advance that he could only hope to win the vote with the support of AfD, as most other parties had announced they would be voting against (apart from the BSW, which proudly announced beforehand that it too would be voting in favour). This time Merz lost by 11 votes, owing to some members of his own fraction voting against.

The very next day, Angela Merkel led the public outrage, making an extremely rare critical statement, in which she called his decision "wrong".⁷ Even *Bild*, the most rightwing paper in Germany, fumes: "That really was not worth it, Herr Merz."⁸ The biggest damage so far is the very public exit from the CDU of Michel Friedman, pope of Zionism and former leader of the rightwing Zentralrat der Juden, who the German establishment look to as its 'spiritual guide' on all things Israel-related.

Merz has since doubled down on his decision, which is all he could do, so close to the elections. An apology would have been interpreted as weakness, a fatal one perhaps. He is still gambling that some AfD sympathisers will vote for the more 'respectable' CDU instead. And, while he has assured the German public (as well as international capitalism) that "We will not work with the AfD - not before the election, not after - never", he cannot tell AfD MPs how to vote now, can he?

It is highly unlikely that there is going to be a CDU-AfD coalition - at least not in the near future. The blowback in the last few days has been too strong. However, Merz and his colleagues will no doubt be considering the possibility of forming a minority government - quite possibly in a coalition with the eager Green Party and ideally with the FDP - if they manage to get

into parliament. Together they could come to around 44%-48% and so would need some of the other parties voting for such a coalition (though, as mentioned above, that could change dramatically in the next couple of weeks).

He will want to avoid bringing the SPD on board, which has - rather unfairly - been blamed for causing the economic problems of the country. SPD chancellor Olaf Scholz does not help himself by refusing to link the exploding costs for energy - one of the key reasons for the slide into recession - to the increasingly unpopular war in Ukraine and the CIA's blowing up of the Nord Stream pipeline, which would have supplied German industry with cheap gas. One of the key reasons for the success of the AfD - besides its anti-immigration populism - is precisely that it has taken a very strong stand against the Ukraine war and demands that the pipeline be repaired and reopened.

A black-green government coalition might sound strange to those who believe the Green Party in Germany (or elsewhere for that matter) is on the left. But regionally in the 16 federal states, this has been repeatedly tried, tested and found entirely practical. The old fight between 'Fundis' und 'Realos' has well and truly been won by the latter - the Greens are, for example, the most gung-ho party in the German parliament when it comes to the war in Ukraine, and it was them who pushed for the increase in financial support and weapon deliveries to Zelensky.

In an interview with *Bild* after the July 31 vote, the current super-realo leader of the Greens, Robert Habeck, confirmed that they continue to be keen to govern with the CDU - and the fact that the Green MPs voted against the law should not be misunderstood as softness towards migrants. He outlined his own party's "10-point plan to solve the migration crisis", which contains plans for the "early detection of threats: the initial medical examination of asylum-seekers must now also include tests for mental illnesses"⁹ (many refugees will no doubt suffer from mental health problems, considering what many of them have gone through in their home country or on their way to Europe). It is unlikely that the Greens want to make sure they receive particularly good healthcare in Germany. No, the obvious plan is to deny those with "mental illness" the right to asylum and send them back.

To reassure its more liberal voters and members, the Green Party and the SPD took part enthusiastically in the mass demonstrations that followed the January 31 vote. More than 700,000 people demonstrated against Merz's move in various cities across Germany. The main march in Berlin attracted around 250,000 and was led by people carrying large banners that declared, '*Wir sind die Brandmauer*' ('We are the firewall'). Not surprisingly, among those participating in the protests named *Aufstand der Anständigen* (Uprising of the 'decent!') - at least those in leading positions - the need to restrict migration and tighten asylum laws has become common sense. Die Linke seems to be the exception. It is now, incredibly, the only party in Germany that has withstood the shift to the right - and has actually moved to the left, at least by a fraction.

A few months ago, it looked like the long-term decline of Die Linke could finally end in what felt like an overdue death. For decades an eager participant in local and regional government coalitions, the party has proven beyond all doubt that it has no qualms when it comes to enforcing budget cuts, slashing public-sector workers' pay and generally being a loyal servant of capitalism.

In the last few years, under the bureaucratic leadership of Janine Wissler (formerly of Linksruck, the German section of the Socialist Workers Party), Die Linke had tried to take a 'balanced' approach to most political questions, including Ukraine and Palestine, so as not to put off either its more conservative *Ossi* supporters or the more liberal *Wessi* left. But, rather predictably, it drained support in both camps, especially because Wagenknecht and her supporters were rebelling loudly. When the leadership around Wissler decided not to participate in a huge demonstration against the war in Ukraine, because "some unpleasant elements" around the AfD were expected to attend, the die was cast. Wagenknecht finally left in October 2023, setting up the BSW and reducing Die Linke to about 3% in the polls.

When the new leadership of Ines Schwerdtner and Jan van Aken was elected a year later, they immediately launched a 'listening exercise', in which party members visited tens of thousands of households across Germany. Perhaps they really learned something there or perhaps they just needed a timeout to discuss how to reorientate the party - who knows? In any case, they seem to have positioned themselves slightly to the left as a result.

Manifesto

For example, this year's election manifesto carries the headline, '*Alle wollen regieren. Wir wollen verändern*' ('Everybody wants to govern. We want to change things').¹⁰ Further on, it explains that "the millions of people who want real change, you are our coalition partner". As mentioned above, the idea that you have to be 'prepared to take over government responsibility' used to be an absolutely unshakable assumption in Die Linke. So the new line could just be PR waffle, of course, and based on the realistic understanding that the party has been so down in the polls that there is little chance of it being asked to join a government coalition any time soon.

It is an interesting shift nevertheless - and one that seems to be having its effect in the polls too (Die Linke has gone from 3% to 6%), especially as it is now the only party stating it is "in solidarity" with refugees: "Nobody flees their home voluntarily." It defines itself as an "internationalist" party of "democratic socialism" that discusses in its programme how to "overcome capitalism and the class system". Yes, that has been in the programme for some time and expresses a softness for Venezuela, Cuba, as well as Brics (which it shares with the BSW). But, unlike the BSW, at least it does use the word "socialism", which is not to be found on the entire BSW website - they are fans of "social justice" instead.

BSW is focused on what is good for "all of Germany": "It will soon be decided whether Germany will continue to belong to the league of leading industrial nations or whether it will irrevocably decline, because it loses important industries and thus the basis of its prosperity." If capitalism does well, this trickles down to the working class, right? The BSW programme smacks of the kind of nationalism espoused by George Galloway. Like his Workers' Party of Britain, Wagenknecht's BSW wants "safe streets and squares, through more police officers and a stop to irregular migration".¹¹

Yes, on the question of Ukraine, BSW is slightly better than Die Linke. While both explicitly call for an end to German weapons exports, only BSW opposes sanctions. Die Linke continues to call rather naively for "more targeted sanctions that are not directed against the population, but against Putin's power apparatus

and the military-industrial complex". Both are opposed to Nato, but instead of arguing that Germany should leave, or that it should be abolished, both are arguing in a rather convoluted way that it should be replaced with a "truly peaceful" alliance that includes China and Russia, which means it would become superfluous. Neither shows any understanding that "war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means" (Carl von Clausewitz).

On the question of Israel-Palestine, both parties are equally useless. While Die Linke calls for "a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders", it does not address the question of the right of return and, like BSW, falls in with the illusion of a 'viable two-state solution'. Both condemn Israel and Hamas's October 7 prison break in equal measure. Neither party stands up to the increasingly brutal attempts to criminalise anybody who raises criticism of Israel. Just like in Britain, the German state has made full use of the big lie that it is anti-Semitic to criticise Zionism and Israel, charging many with terror offences.

But there is one final and important difference: despite its many problems, Die Linke remains a relatively democratic organisation that allows members to organise openly and in permanent factions. Repeated attempts to abolish them have always been defeated.

BSW, on the other hand, acts as Sahara Wagenknecht's private fan club (as the name shows). You cannot actually join the BSW - though you are more than welcome to hand out leaflets, put up posters and become "a supporter" (give money). Its two 'national party conferences' were made up of hand-picked supporters known to Wagenknecht and the other nine BSW MPs. There is no internal democracy, no space to challenge the programme, no avenue to hold BSW MPs to account for their voting record. It is, in that respect, much worse even than the Workers' Party of Britain.

And, as this is now clearly an election fought over the issue of migration, Wagenknecht's chauvinist-populist proposal to cap migration at 50,000 - in effect, a reduction of almost 90% - BSW has in our opinion become entirely unsupportable and we call on socialists in Germany to vote Die Linke, albeit critically and without any illusions.

It is quite obviously not the kind of party that is needed to effectively challenge and overcome capitalism. But in the current period, its MPs are the only ones who are putting up any kind of opposition to the rightwing stampede in parliament ●

Notes

1. www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/deutschland/wagenknecht-volksabstimmung-migration-bsw-100.html.
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3. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/135087/29-01-2025/what-do-socialists-say-about-immigration.
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REVIEWS

Terror of colonialism

Caroline Elkins *Legacy of violence: a history of the British empire* Vintage 2022, pp872, £16.99

Caroline Elkins had a book published in 2005 detailing the crushing of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya by Britain (*Britain's Gulag: the brutal end of empire in Kenya*). This was a little unpopular in some quarters at the time, but some of the Kenyan survivors took the British government to court and Elkins provided a lot of the backing. Her account in the book was thoroughly vindicated when the judge in this action demanded that the government release some records that had been kept secret for decades.

Legacy of violence gives a detailed picture, which stresses that the empire's actions in Kenya were not only perfectly normal for British imperialism, but were the culmination of 'lessons learned' over a couple of centuries. She kicks off with the 18th century - not with America, but with India. An early tale is of the 'Indian Mutiny', whose suppression is notable for its bestiality - notoriously, mutineers being put in front of a cannon to be blown to pieces; lies - the gross exaggeration of the 'Black hole of Calcutta'; and the worming out of responsibility - the trial of Warren Hastings, for instance.

Elkins gives an overarching view of imperial ideology over centuries: there was the early striving to 'take Christianity to the heathen hordes', especially in Africa, from where the bulk of the slaves were taken. Although young missionaries continued to pour into the empire, this became rather *passé* in the 19th century and the drive then was to 'take civilisation to the ignorant'. This was aided by the fake theories of eugenics of the time: white people were clearly superior, as exemplified in Rudyard Kipling's famous phrase about "the white man's burden".

The recent failed Tory leadership contender, Robert Jenrick, clearly thought that 19th century ideas and the gratitude owed to the empire were just the thing for Conservative Party members - not enough of them though. Certainly 'a few bob' could be made from slavery, looting, overwork and all the other 'benefits of European civilisation', but while this might be the main aim of some, for the ruling class there were more important interests at stake.

Chapter one is titled 'Liberal imperialism', and Elkins uses this phrase many times, and she says in this chapter:

The paradox between the lived imperial experience of the colonised and the laudatory claims of Britain's civilising mission can be traced to the conjoined 19th-century birth of modern liberalism and imperialism. They shaped an era in which national interests were inextricable from the growth and spread of capitalism, and in which a dominant narrative of universal human emancipation, equality, rights and the civilising mission materialised simultaneously with an underside of repression, as expressed in evolutionary thought.

So lies and hypocrisy found a natural home in capitalist exploitation.

Elkins devotes many chapters to the development in the empire of the methods needed, or at least used, to maintain rule. From South Africa (the Boer wars), through Ireland, Palestine, India, Malaya, Cyprus plus plenty more - and then they were passed on to the new hegemon for use in Vietnam. They failed there too.

The British in South Africa were



Victoria being offered crown of India by Disraeli. *Punch* 'New crowns for old ones' (1876)

famous for the concentration camps, in which all, including women and children, were held without adequate food or sanitation and allowed to die in their thousands.

On to Ireland. The 1916 Easter Rising was crushed and the British government decided to reawaken it by executing its leaders. The usual imperialist format - kill the bastards and they will be so frightened that they obey - did not work, and so the Black and Tans paramilitaries were called in - 10,000 of them! This had the extra advantage of employing some soldiers returned from the front instead of them causing trouble at home as a result of being unemployed.

Black and Tans

Along with the Black and Tans, there was the Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Not as well known outside Ireland as the Black and Tans, they "consisted of 15 hundred ex-officers with wartime and imperial experience", and were actually even worse. Elkins adds: "Legalising the paramilitary police force were nearly 70 regulations passed with the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act in August 1920." The regulations were "reminiscent of legislation in India, and variations of it would be exported to other parts of the empire". So, again, methods were learned and passed on, regardless of success or failure - the empire must be maintained. Law, never mind trials, could be scrapped and 'due process' avoided.

'Regulations' and vicious force were needed in Palestine. Land was bought up, Palestinians turfed off and the British tried to keep things calm(ish). The Palestinians were not really organised as a 'nation' - unlike the Zionists - but they did know when they were being shat on. This led, among other things, to the 'Arab Revolt' of 1937-39. Using lessons, and some personnel, from Ireland, this was put down with brutish violence.

Murder, torture, rape, summary executions, the burning of houses

and destruction of villages - all took on a new lease of life in Palestine. Another aspect of the murderous assault on the Palestinians was the close collaboration of Zionists. They were happy to join the British in their repression of the 'inferior' folk who dared to challenge their 'betters'. The Zionists no doubt learned a lot in this period, but unfortunately only showed their gratitude by blowing up some of their old mates in the King David Hotel in 1946. Any lessons learned have been developed and expanded to a horrific extent since.

Elkins devotes much space to India - the 'big one' perhaps (after all, Queen Victoria had been the empress there): it was the jewel in the crown. As readers will know, India won its independence in 1947, but, as Elkins chronicles, British imperialism tried to hang on by any means possible for as long as it could.

I think most comrades will be aware of the Bengali famine in 1942, in which two million died, much to the disinterest of Churchill - there were 'more important' priorities. But I was not aware of the Bengali famine of the late 18th century, in which "An estimated one-third of Bengal's 30 million people died". This "tragedy" led to a fall in the income of the East India Company, which had to be bailed out by the British government.

World War I had revealed the existing weaknesses of the imperial countries, as well as weakening them further - not least financially - and World War II continued both of these processes. Then Britain had stood 'alone' - apart from Australian, New Zealand and a few other Commonwealth forces (not least a couple of million from India).

Meanwhile Nehru, Ghandi and other Indian leaders spent much of the war in jail and were, not surprisingly, even more enthusiastic about independence when it was over. Britain tried to hang on, but to no avail; apart from anything else, British troops who had just fought a war were not keen on another one and Britain

was broke - hegemony heading to the USA. At the same time Indian troops were not prepared to put up with much more.

So Lord Louis Mountbatten went to India to watch flags going up and down (while perhaps catching a whiff of smoke - see below) and Britain scrambled out, leaving behind a deadly shambles. Millions migrated from India to Pakistan and the other way round. Hundreds of thousands died, but that, of course, was not Britain's concern.

Besides, Clement Attlee's 1945-51 government had other worries. The war had left Britain heavily dependent on the US, but Britain was still a 'great power' and sterling was still a reserve currency - in the Commonwealth anyway. But it still needed to buy things from the Americans, and had some large debts to repay: ie, Britain needed dollars.

Elkins tells us that the biggest supply of dollars in the empire resulted from Malayan rubber. The last thing needed here, then, was a call for independence, which was put down to Chinese communists 'causing trouble' - and they clearly needed to be stopped.

So Attlee's government - despite the introduction of the National Health Service and the welfare state at home - resorted, in Malaya, to the usual methods: rape, torture, murder, concentration camps, burning down villages, etc, etc. This policy continued until 1957.

But, unfortunately it overlapped with another problem - as they so often did. There was unrest in Kenya, as mentioned above. Kenya gave us that name for 'black gangsters': 'Mau Mau' - a bit like 'terrorist', but more menacing. We hear of such 'terrorists' all over the place now - not least the Palestinians (and, in some quarters, anyone who objects to their treatment in Britain, Germany, the US ...).

There is a problem here, however: the actual terrorists are from the ruling class. In Kenya the gangsters were the British, not to mention

their local allies. Over the centuries the British, as with all imperialists, learned to divide and rule. Some of 'the natives' can be found who, for a little bit of privilege, will collaborate in crushing the rest - a bit like capitalism in general, of course.

Running an empire requires a lot of paperwork (less so now, with computers?): there are orders, instructions, reports, accounts (financial and otherwise). Crops, goods, slaves, land - all have to be organised and records kept. Elkins points out how, on leaving a colony or some other possession, some records are left in place, some are taken back to the 'homeland', but a lot of them need to be burned. These are, after all, records of criminality - at least in the eyes of 'prejudiced outsiders'.

Hence my reference above, regarding India, to a 'whiff of smoke'. I have run through, briefly, Ireland, Palestine, India, Malaya and Kenya. There were plenty more, of course, and they all produced vast amounts of paperwork that needed burning, and there was a constant stream of public schoolboys to produce yet more.

Elkins has plunged into the surviving records, in some cases using the law to gain access, and she has provided a lot - an awful lot - of detail. The book has nearly 900 pages, but 88 of those carry the endnotes and 48 the bibliography. The latter refers to papers, articles, reports of speeches and lots of books. The books refer to the whole history, but also cover the words of victims and perpetrators. All in all, this is a meticulous academic work written from a highly moral viewpoint.

Familiar names

Elkins gives us lots of names. Some that comrades will be familiar with include Winston Churchill (from journalist to prime minister), Orde Wingate and Frank Kitson. There are, of course, many more. There are those who cut their teeth in, say, Ireland, before moving on to the likes of Palestine. There is a continuity of personnel who learn their trade in one battle before moving on to another, gradually climbing the ladder of 'expertise' and experience.

The 'expertise' tends to relate to the methods of inflicting pain and terror on Britain's colonial subjects - 'the natives'. So another round of rape, torture, mass killings, concentration camps, imprisonment and so on. None of which seem to work, in the long run - even when applied by the new hegemon, the USA.

This is a book worth reading for comrades. I thought I knew a fair bit about the history of the British empire, but I clearly had quite a few gaps and the detail contained in this book adds to the horror. A welcome wider readership might put a bit of a damper on, for instance, the last night of the proms, held in September, where we had yet another rendition of the pro-colonialist 'anthem':

Land of hope and glory, mother of the free,
How shall we extol thee, who are born of thee?
Wider still and wider shall thy bounds be set;
God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet!

Incredibly delusional - and a bit more knowledge could be beneficial.

Under capitalism the 'legacy of violence' continues; the global working class needs to end it ●

George Evans

Venezuelan lessons

Chris Gilbert **Commune or nothing! Venezuela's communal movement and its socialist project** Monthly Review Press 2023, pp216, £18

Chris Gilbert is a professor of political studies at the Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela, and co-author, with Cira Pascual Marquina, of *Venezuela, the present as struggle* (Monthly Review Press, 2020). His book is a good place to start, if you want to find out about the revolution in Venezuela: there is a lot of material in the public domain about it, but this is not reported in the pro-Nato media.

Anthropology - the study of what it means to be human - should be central to any socialist project worth developing, as Marx and Engels and many of their later followers recognised.¹ Central to their view was their concept of "modes of production".² Capitalism notoriously preserves modes of exploitation and oppression predating its full flowering; however, as Marx and Engels saw, it inevitably calls into being desires and aspirations which the subordinate classes may demand as an alternative.

Gilbert argues that the Bolivarian revolutionaries in Venezuela are trying to develop the urban and rural commune as socialism's key building block.

Both these aspects together - the incorporation of previous methods of exploitation in mature capitalism and the Venezuelan response - can be seen as an expression of the omnipresent and relentless "law of uneven and combined development".³

Key component

Hugo Chávez began arguing for the establishment of communes as the revolution's key component in 2008, and - seizing the opportunity afforded by the torrential floods and rains of 2010, which gave him the power to rule temporarily by decree - began the turn to the commune in the Popular Power Laws passed that year. This turned out to be just in time. Nicolás Maduro, as incoming president after Chávez's death, faced an imperialist onslaught, which took the form of sanctions and various coup attempts (see p20). The time seemed unpropitious for social experiments, and oil revenues appeared sufficient to carry the country through - but this proved illusory in practice. Fortunately, at this juncture the commune idea began to take root:

It was the time when the rural El Maizal Commune began to seize land in Lara state, when the Andean Che Guevara Commune began to recover cooperative coffee growing and processing its fertile hillsides, and the flagship urban commune, El Panal, set about expanding by building *panalito* modules throughout the west of Caracas (p21).

For the Venezuelan left, at this point reality started to move towards thought - to the point where in 2023 president Maduro issued a call for that to be "the year of the communes". As Gilbert points out, this ties in with Marx's repeated use of the notion of the "associated producers" as a free-growing grassroots movement (p24). This is socialism's essence, not some form of "state-party vanguardism" (p26).⁴ This movement's slogan, endorsed by Chávez, is ¡Comune o nada! ("The commune or nothing") (pp27-29).

The first chapter is about the El Maizal Commune - an example of rural self-help, in circumstances where people were starving: a neighbouring pig farm, state-owned,



President Nicholas Maduro: left Bonaparte

but disused, was taken over, plus a nearby derelict university campus: "The commune's new assets were immediately set working to produce meat, cheese and farmed fish." Chris Gilbert records a visit to it and describes its commercial alliance with small, independent producers round about. (Big commerce, a slaughterhouse and a "huge rum-making complex that exports luxury drinks to Europe" still operate close by.) We learn that the commune has an internal parliament (p46), which does not automatically plough back surpluses into the institution, but decides periodically what to do with them - including, possibly, financing other communes. In this last context it has led the launch of a Communist Union to link up existing communes and campaign nationally (p43).

In chapter 3 Chris Gilbert explores the roots of communal production in Latin America, with special reference to Marx's political development. Alongside Marx in this field we also find two anthropologists, Iraida Vargas and Mario Sanoja. And there is also José Carlos Mariátegui, Peruvian Marxist and author of *Seven interpretive essays on Peruvian reality*, who focussed on the Incan *ayllu* (Andean self-governing collective - see p53 and p199, note 5) and advocated communal ownership of land.

This echoes Marx's approach in his later years, as seen in relation to the Russian, Vera Zasulich, who wrote to him about the Russian peasant commune, the *obshchina*, and whether it could provide the basis for Russian socialism (see p199, note 8). Vargas and Sanoja were also influenced by Edward Thompson's *The making of the English working class*, which he saw as not only the passive product of capitalism, but something actually developed by the workers themselves (p52 and pp57-62). They recognised the valuable part of the Inca legacy.

Unfortunately, Inca traditions also resonate with what I would call the high tribute mode, marked by the presence of an extremely powerful state machine - dedicated, among other things, to the financing of Inca tombs, whose occupants were still seen as needing sustenance in the afterlife. Our anthropologists wisely steer clear of this, and focus on the base of Inca society, and on resistance to the Spanish *conquistadores* by indigenous

Venezuelans and imported blacks. The state, which will continue to exist for a time even in the best scenario, will ultimately need to be transcended by communal organisation.

Chapter 3 is about the Che Guevara Commune, situated in the highlands near Lake Maracaibo. They produce coffee and cacao; coffee in particular is a useful crop for growing in a situation where producers face US sanctions, and it really took off in the wake of the 2008 economic crash (see p74) - with some state financial support. They also introduced a locally based currency, the *cafeto* - equivalent to a kilo of coffee (p75). This was acceptable while the Venezuelan bolivar had nose-dived and US dollars could not be used - indeed, the local *campesinos* (peasants/farmers) were already using coffee kilos as units of account (for the disadvantage here, see pp76-77). The cacao factory is run by a collective assembly (p79) and the commune also set up a small school and repaired "an old city bus to take people up and down the steep hillsides" (p80) - all this when abundant oil resources no longer delivered life support.

Our needs first

We then come to the contribution of the Hungarian philosopher, István Mészáros, to the revolution in Venezuela. As Chris Gilbert shows, Mészáros's thought evolved towards a conception of socialism as the realisation of a communal system of social control. Chris also reveals the limitations of cooperatives *per se*: "Cooperatives are essentially a kind of *collective* private property, with their own adversarial relationship with other enterprises, including other cooperatives, with which they compete, and with society at large" (p88).

The chapter on Mészáros shows how both he and Chávez sprang from impoverished, subordinate-class families and how, as a result of their adult experiences, their ideas naturally harmonised. If I have any criticism here, it is only that Chris Gilbert leaves out István Mészáros's political role in Hungary and his ideological affinity with, for example, the Budapest Central Workers' Council in the 1956 uprising - an omission which fails to give due recognition to the political initiatives taken by the Hungarian workers in those days.⁵ As the protégé

and philosophical heir of George Lukács (1885-1971), active in the left wing of the Hungarian Communist Party, 1956 undoubtedly had a profound influence on his thought.

The problem is, of course, that the urban environment of the 21st century is not a site of much physical food or refreshment production. For example, in Venezuela, the Luisa Cáceres Commune, located in the port city of Barcelona, tried its hand in processing corn flour, a staple food, but found it could not compete effectively with private producers (see pp105-06). Luckily, the mayor of Barcelona decided to hand over the task of rubbish collection and disposal to nine local communes. Eight of them found this too difficult, but the Luisa Cáceres Commune succeeded by running the whole operation themselves, with their own drivers: the commune now recycles waste products and maintains a plant nursery. Members also occupied a run-down local grocery store providing cheap food (see pp110,113).

Meanwhile, the El Panal Commune (the name means 'beehive') swung into action. The group behind it began by suppressing drug dealing in its locality, and then went on to occupy a local bakery, so as to provide residents with bread at a cheap price, diversifying from there in its *Distrito Económico* (Economic District) into fish farming, pig raising and textile production. Also, like many of the communes, it runs a communal bank, which looks after the financial side of operations. Of particular interest here is tailoring - something widely practised locally, commune or no commune. Members are also beginning to recycle plastic and electrical appliances - an activity which, it is hoped, will give local youth some much-needed employment (pp177-78).

The aim, Gilbert stresses, of communal activity is to put the real needs of the community first, above those of capital production ●

Chris Gray

Notes

1. There is considerable literature on this, starting with Friedrich Engels' *The origin of the family, private property and the state* (1884).
2. My reading suggests the following categories: elementary tribute mode (eg, ancient, pre-Viking Ireland); high tribute mode (the Sumer and the Incas), which decays into feudalism; ancient slavery (classical Greece and Rome); feudalism; capitalism. This is not a hard and fast scheme, and possibly does injustice to slave systems in the Americas: eg, the southern USA, which could well count as a particularly noxious capitalist variant.
3. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uneven_and_combined_development. See also G Novack *Introduction to the logic of Marxism* Atlanta GA 1942.
4. See Marx's letter to Arnold Ruge, May 1843, in K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 3, which extols "human beings, thinking beings, free men, republicans".
5. There is a substantial body of literature on the 1956 Hungarian uprising. See *inter alia* P Fryer *Hungarian tragedy* (Durham 1956); B Nagy *How the Budapest Central Workers' Council was set up* (Bathgate ND 2006); A Anderson *Hungary 56* (Salisbury, undated) and 'Remembering 1956' (*Revolutionary History* Vol 9, no3, 2006).

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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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China might find an opportunity

Weaponising Covid

CIA claims that Covid-19 emerged from a Chinese government-run lab have nothing to do with public health and everything to do with an attack on the poorest in the world, maintains **Ian Spencer**

The Central Intelligence Agency's intervention on Covid came just days after the appointment of John Ratcliffe, Trump's nominee as its director. In an interview with Breitbart News, Ratcliffe said that "intelligence and common sense" leads us to conclude that "the origin of Covid was a leak at the Wuhan Institute of Virology" and he would ensure that "the public is aware that the agency is going to get off the sidelines". And there was me thinking that the CIA was going to cling to science, objectivity and service to global humanity, in a way that it never has before.

There is very little evidence that the Covid-19 virus had its origins in a Wuhan lab. But, as with Trump himself, his administration is never one to let the truth get in the way of a good story. However, it is not accidental that the comments came just days after Trump ditched all cooperation with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and suspended US support for aid projects around the world.

Ratcliffe's assertion was not based on any new evidence and gets only lukewarm support even from the CIA, which stated that it has "low confidence that a research-related origin of the Covid-19 pandemic is more likely than a natural origin based on the available body of reporting".¹ This assessment was a reflection of the widely held view that the origins of the virus was likely to have been in the live animal markets of Wuhan city.²

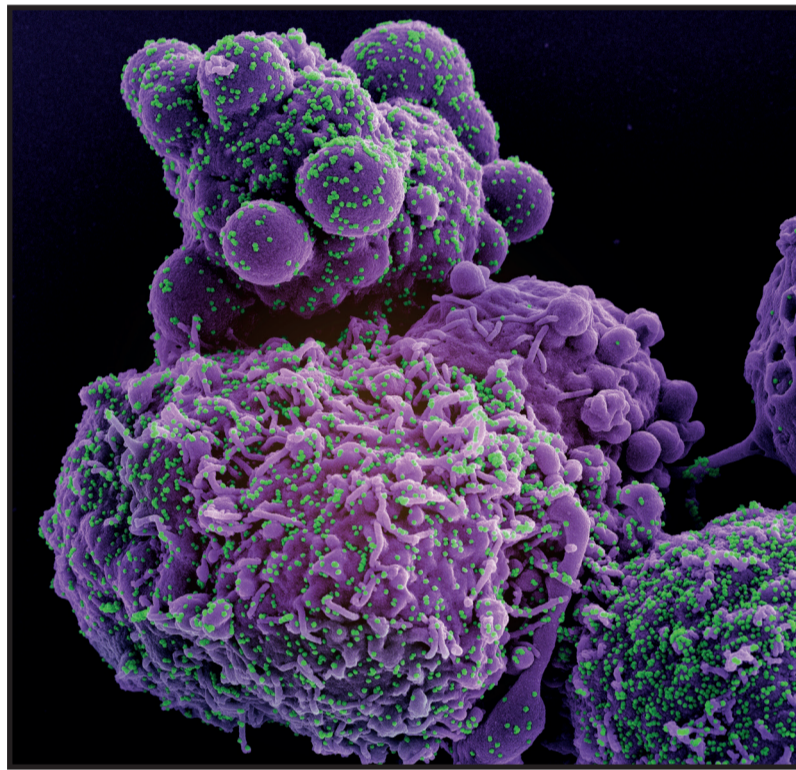
Zoonotic

The origin of zoonotic transmission from animal to human is often in the countryside, but magnified in the cities. The most likely reservoir for the virus is in bats, but also, possibly, civet cats and bamboo rats. It is far more likely that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was an innocent bystander to the unfolding catastrophe than its origin.

Formally, withdrawing from WHO requires the authority of Congress and a one-year notice period. However, Trump's love of the diktat has found its expression in a flurry of executive orders on a wide range of topics. It seems particularly vindictive in the way that it has been applied to WHO and the 'pausing' of funding to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Trump's executive orders on January 20 instructed the US Centre for Disease Control to cease all contact and cooperation with WHO and took place with immediate effect. Not that this is the first time Trump has attacked WHO. In July 2020, during his first term of office, at the height of the pandemic, he issued a similar order, but this was reversed by the incoming Biden administration.

The origins of lethal pandemic diseases have a long and highly political history. The great flu pandemic of 1918-20 that killed



Under the electron microscope: coronavirus

between 17 and 50 million people worldwide probably had its origins in the transmission of H1N1 influenza in Kansas, where the first recorded cases were. This was amplified and transmitted around the world by the concentration of thousands of US soldiers in the appalling conditions of World War I.

The HIV/Aids pandemic had its roots in the transition of the Simian immunodeficiency virus to humans - probably from the bush-meat trade, but amplified by imperialism, the international trade in blood products harvested from the poor, war and societal collapse.

Nor is it unknown for viruses to escape from laboratories. In 1978 the deadly smallpox virus, which was being studied at the University of Birmingham Medical school, infected a worker there. She subsequently became the last recorded person to die of a disease which WHO had played such a major part in eradicating worldwide.

It would, of course, be odd if the Wuhan Institute of Virology was not studying coronaviruses. Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), caused by the virus SARS-CoV-1, was the first identified strain of the SARS-related coronavirus and was identified in 2002 in Guangdong, China. It infected over 8,000 people from over 30 countries and resulted in at least 774 deaths worldwide. WHO, informed of the disease in February 2003, issued a global alert the following March, which played a part in limiting its lethal impact.

In the UK, as we have seen from the protracted machinations of the Covid-19 enquiry, the next lethal pandemic was expected to be influenza. The Chinese experience of SARS meant their focus was already,

quite rightly, on coronaviruses. The failure to access data from China contributed to a delayed response to the pandemic in the UK and beyond. While it is not impossible that a lab worker in Wuhan could have been infected, it seems highly unlikely that this would have been the cause of the pandemic, according to respectable academic sources.³

None of this has stopped people like Republican senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas, chair of the Senate intelligence committee, expressing what really might be at stake here. He said on January 25 that he was "pleased the CIA concluded in the final days of the Biden administration that the lab-leak theory is the most plausible explanation" and he commended Ratcliffe for declassifying the assessment. "Now the most important thing is to make China pay for unleashing a plague on the world," Cotton said in a statement.⁴

And, yes, China and many other countries will pay, thanks to a form of economic war, fought with US-imposed tariffs, that will have an immediate impact on the living standards of workers worldwide, including in the USA.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that WHO is being targeted because it has resolutely refused to alter the conclusions of scientific research to fit the foreign policy objectives of the world hegemon. After all, it concluded in March 2021 that the laboratory origin of the Covid virus was the "least likely hypothesis".⁵

Ironically, of the 194 WHO member-states, the US is the largest contributor, averaging around 20% of funding of the organisation's annual budget of \$3 billion, while China is the next biggest contributor.

The immediate effect on WHO

is likely to lead to a reduction of work, the loss of jobs and a reduced ability to carry out the vital task of global public health monitoring.⁶ Effectively, Trump may have sown the seeds of the next pandemic, as it would be excluded from the global monitoring of emerging diseases or dependent purely on voluntary cooperation from friendly countries.

Hindering the work of WHO and USAID is likely to have dire consequences for the poorest of the world. While foreign aid only represents about 1% of the federal budget, by the evening of January 24, secretary of state Marco Rubio had issued a directive, effectively freezing operations of the government's lead provider of non-military aid. Rubio went on to declare himself as USAID's acting director, possibly signalling its future absorption into the state department.

US funding accounted for 42% of all humanitarian aid tracked by the UN last year. In 2023, the US issued an estimated \$68 billion in foreign assistance, and over 60% flowed through USAID - which, like WHO, was established by Congress and in principle can only be closed by it. But in the meantime it is vulnerable to the immediate freeze on funding.⁷

Elon Musk

Meanwhile, Elon Musk has been given his own Department of Government Efficiency, with a brief for making efficiency savings in the US administration. His unsupported assessment of USAID is that it is a "criminal organisation". He later posted on X: "Did you know that USAID, using your tax dollars, funded bioweapon research, including Covid-19, that killed millions of people?" Musk was quickly supported by Trump, who described USAID as being "run by a bunch of radical lunatics".⁸

No new projects are to be started, no contracts are to be extended and work is to be stopped on existing programmes. By January 27 at least 56 of USAID's leaders had been sent home on 'administrative leave'. It has over 10,000 employees and thousands more dependent on it worldwide. It will also affect NGOs, religious organisations and businesses that it has contracts with to supply services.

Arguably, the 'pause' in funding for USAID has succeeded in one important objective: it has produced uncertainty in a wide range of different agencies in a range of countries. However, this may have the unintended consequence of allowing China to fill the gaps in provision. As Democratic senator Chris Coons told the Senate on January 30, "Our biggest global competitor and adversary is delighted that we've handed them an opportunity today to say to communities and countries around the world that we are not a reliable partner. The administration may be claiming that this pause is

temporary, but its effects will not be."⁹

USAID is a product of the cold war. It was founded in 1961 by president John F Kennedy to counter Soviet influence. While China may aspire to be a world power and has significant influence as a manufacturer and investor, it does not have the ideological influence of the USSR.

While the threat of tariffs is real, especially against China, it is noticeable that some have been withdrawn after forcing whatever concessions have been demanded against Canada and Mexico. Will the world hegemon so lightly discard USAID as one of the most important means of its exertion of soft power in the world?

There is no doubt that neither Trump nor Musk could give a damn about increased deaths among the poorest of the world. But they may think twice about leaving the soft-power field open to China. Waivers for a few programmes concerned with the immediate preservation of life were quick to follow the initial attack on USAID.

While no serious expert in public health thinks that Covid-19 is the consequence of a sinister Chinese government plot to unleash mayhem on the capitalist world (of which, after all, it is a part), all this will serve as a clumsy *casus belli* in the economic war to come with China.

Nor is anyone convinced by the ridiculous pretext of China's role in the export of fentanyl precursors, although one is entitled to ask why the USA has one of the highest rates of illicit narcotics use in the world. After all, there is a well-known relationship between social inequality and recreational drug use.¹⁰

In the meantime, legal challenges to the freezing of federal government funding will follow as night follows day. But no matter - for the poorest migrant labourers in the USA, for the starving of the world dependent on USAID and for US civil servants, the objective has been achieved: fear ●

Notes

1. www.ft.com/content/9880273c-8517-4502-abf0-e667319ea6bd.
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3. www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-03968-0.
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5. www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-remarks-at-the-member-state-briefing-on-the-report-of-the-international-team-studying-the-origins-of-sars-cov-2.
6. publichealth.jhu.edu/2025/the-consequences-of-the-us-withdrawal-from-the-who.
7. www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/3/us-secretary-of-state-rubio-says-he-has-become-acting-director-of-usaid.
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9. time.com/7211200/usaid-foreign-aid-freeze-trump-rubio.
10. K Pickett and G Wilkinson *The inner level: how more equal societies reduce stress, restore sanity and improve everyone's wellbeing* London 2019.