

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly **worker**

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No 1525 February 13 2025

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TO STOP  
GENOCIDE**



## LETTERS



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

## Direct action

I am worried about the current trajectory of the *Weekly Worker* group (WWG). In his latest of very many and very wordy articles, ('Going beyond strikism' February 6), Mike Macnair's conception of "socialist revolution" is stated as being "the working class offering to lead the society"! "Offering to lead society"? And what if the current ruling class decides not to accept the kind 'offer' of the working class to rule society in its place?

I know Macnair basically rejects every policy and action the Bolsheviks took after taking power - he seems to advocate a sort of the SPGB-type late 19th century social democracy, but this highly respectable and academic concept of 'revolutionary change' is surely taking the concept of keeping only to 'high politics' too far, even for the WWG? It's not completely accidental that Eddie Ford in the same edition calls for a "mass Communist Party" based on Kautsky, among other pre-Bolshevik Marxists. Of course, it is 'Kautsky, while he was a Marxist', but was there nothing in Kautsky's 'Marxist period' in his whole style and approach which indicated his potential future direction of travel - not to mention, his appalling betrayal and support for the First World Slaughter?

Lord save us from any idea or concept of the Communist Party as a "party of a special type", a weapon of working class struggle, as an organiser and director of current immediate struggles! Whose role is to inject the politics and perspectives of Marxism-Leninism into such struggles, to extend and deepen these, until the question of state power and the continued existence of the capitalist system is raised. No, according to Macnair, the role of the "Communist Party" is simply to provide a "voice for the working class". How very nice, acceptable and respectable.

Macnair seems to want to strip out from even 19th century Marxism anything or everything which is actually revolutionary. He constantly emphasises the need for 'high politics', for nice intellectual debates about 'the constitutional order', for 'electoralism', and exudes positive contempt for things like mass democratic action, direct action, strikes, general strikes, soviets as alternatives to bourgeois parliaments, etc.

Steve Bloom in his attempted polemic with Macnair was 100% correct: these should all be seen as different aspects or components of the overall comprehensive class struggle. The weight each should have at specific moments or stages in the struggle and how they should be interconnected are matters of strategic and tactical judgments by a real Communist Party.

Macnair rails against the very notion that a Communist Party should have any form of coordinating role of all class struggles, when actually this is one of its main purposes! It is *precisely* the role of a Communist Party *not* to show contempt for day-to-day struggles or for economic struggles, but to distil out from *all* the struggles the necessary political line and strategy to take state power and establish socialism - 'politics as concentrated economics'.

The SPGB can - and will no doubt - speak for itself, but in my view its central weakness is not its consistent advocacy of socialism/communism (its version is the higher form of communism, which hopefully we all advocate and believe in) - that is actually to its credit - but its complete self-removal from all current 'immediate struggles' of the working class against all various aspects and encroachments of capitalism on working peoples lives, on the grounds this automatically leads to 'reformism'.

Just three quotes should suffice to illustrate the true Marxist approach to the links and relationships between the present reality and the aimed for future:

■ "If workers did not press for higher wages when they can by cowardly giving way in their everyday conflict with capital, they would certainly disqualify themselves for the initiating of any larger movement" (*Wages, prices and profit*).

■ "We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence" (*The German ideology*).

■ "The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present they also represent and take care of the future of that movement" (*Manifesto of the Communist Party*).

Pretty clear and succinct, one might have thought.

Various political programmes and similar documents of the Communist Party in Britain (and in the international communist movement, whose entire history Macnair appears to reject) have always sought to apply the principles of Marxism-Leninism to British conditions, history and circumstances, and how involvement in and leadership of immediate class struggles against various aspects of capitalist rule and its consequences can lead to socialist revolution and the achievement of socialism in this and as many countries as possible.

Macnair's 'logic' and argumentation is all over the place and constantly falls into the traps he alleges of others, like for example, his mechanical counterposing of different forms and aspects of class struggle to others - electoralism to strikes, parliaments to soviets, etc. His polemical counter-positioning of the hard-copy medium to the digital (with Lawrence Parker) was completely absurd.

I suspect one element of the problem is Macnair aiming to become the "dominant intellectual force" in the *Weekly Worker* group. Good luck with that (I think it has one already). The other part, I fear, is the mechanical and confused concepts of the 'minimum programme' held by the WWG - its confusion, relation and separation from the socialist revolution itself (and the actual achievement and implementation of a socialist and communist society).

If it is not all clear how a whole shopping list of "immediate demands" in section 3 of the *Draft programme* can actually translate into socialist revolution and socialism itself, it is not that surprising that some members will fall on one side of this created gap or the other, rather than treat the communist programme as an integrated whole.

If you really want communist unity and a much larger Communist Party, then it might be a good idea to actually join a real Communist Party, or at least support it on a more ongoing basis.

Andrew Northall

Kettering

## No transition

Mike Macnair's article begins with an analysis of the Socialist Party of Great Britain's contribution to the *Prometheus* journal. As an SPGBer myself, I would like to respond. There are two main points that I would like to address, but before doing so might I deal with Mike's point about 'vanguardism'?

The SPGB, as most people here probably realise, is resolutely opposed to the principle and practice of vanguardism. We hold that it is fundamentally elitist, undemocratic and antithetical to the Marxist principle that the emancipation of the working class must be carried out by the workers themselves: it cannot be done by some enlightened minority, however well-meaning.

Mike, unfortunately, misunderstands what is meant by 'vanguardism'. He comments: "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."

No, Mike, this is not what the argument against vanguardism is about. Of course, one can legitimately talk about a group being a "vanguard" in the sense of being a minority ahead of its time. The expression '*avant-garde*', for instance, originated from the French military term meaning 'advance guard' and came to be used in other contexts, such as '*avant-garde*' art, where the artists concerned were considered to be ahead of their time in terms of innovation. You could, I suppose, call the SPGB a vanguard in that sense - as prefiguring what will hopefully become the outlook of workers in general.

However, vanguardism as a political theory means something quite different. What it means is a political party hoping to achieve socialism by capturing political power in advance of the working class itself becoming socialist in outlook, and presuming to take steps, once it has taken power, to nudge workers in the direction of socialism or introduce socialism behind their backs. Such vanguardist thinking is very clearly expressed in the writings of people like Lenin and Trotsky.

We in the SPGB have argued very strongly against such thinking. We concur with Engels on this point that "The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of masses lacking consciousness, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in on it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are fighting for, body and soul" (Introduction to Marx's *Class struggles in France 1848-1850*).

SPGBers are not superior to any other workers who are just as capable as us of becoming socialists and understanding what socialism is about. The fact that we are socialists, and not them, is purely a matter of contingency and accident. We are not special and we see our role as essentially one of just propagating an alternative vision of the future

among our fellow workers, not to lead them in any way. We absolutely recognise that, unless a majority of workers become socialists who want and broadly understand what is meant by socialism, there can be no chance whatsoever of realising a socialist society. In order to work at all, socialism needs to be understood and embraced by the majority.

In the absence of majority socialist consciousness, the fate of any political organisation seizing political power - even one sincerely desiring to establish socialism - would be to administer capitalism by default. But there is only one way in which you can administer capitalism - and that is in the interests of capital. Inevitably that means siding with the interests of the capitalists or constituting yourself as a new (state) capitalist class in the process.

This brings me to my first point. Mike refers to the SPGB's attitudes towards reforms. This is very often misunderstood, unfortunately. The SPGB is not opposed to reforms as such. What it is opposed to is 'reformism' - the political approach of trying to attract workers to your organisation by advocating certain reforms that you feel might encourage them to join and so enlarge your support base.

It is not so much that reforms cannot sometimes be of benefit to workers that concerns us, but rather that all such reforms - even if they are successfully implemented - are enacted in the context of a society that must necessarily operate in the interests of capital and therefore against the interests of wage labour. Once you go down the reformist road, you are locked into an inexorable logic that will incrementally push you ultimately into embracing capitalism. This was the fatal mistake that broke the back of Second International - the nonsensical assumption that you can somehow strive to both mend capitalism (the minimum programme) and, at the same time, strive to end capitalism (the maximum programme of socialist revolution). The anti-Labour Party of Keir Starmer is the completely predictable outcome of embracing such reformist thinking.

Another way in which the SPGB's outlook is so often misunderstood is with regard to what is actually meant by reforms or reformism. Engaging in militant trade union activity, for example, is not reformism, but an economic necessity for workers, which they dispense with at their own expense in the field of industrial struggle. SPGBers are also trade unionists, as it happens. As with the question of vanguardism, we feel compelled to clarify that what we specifically mean by reformism amounts to legislative measures enacted by the state to ameliorate some or other social problem arising from the capitalist basis of society. In other words, the field of reformist activity is essentially political, in contrast to trade unionism, which is an essentially economic and defensive struggle - a distinction also, incidentally, made by Marx. It is in the political field that we are best able to register our opposition to, or support for, the existing social order - not the economic field.

Finally, Mike refers to the question of the transition. Look, this whole question is really quite straightforward. If socialism depends on a majority wanting and understanding it and if we can clearly demonstrate the attainment of this majority politically, or by electoral means, then where is the need for a transition beyond that? We would have fully met the preconditions

for establishing a socialist society - the other precondition being the technological potential to satisfy the reasonable needs of the population, which potential has been around for at least a century, if not more.

I really don't understand the left's obsession with this idea of a 'transition period'. We don't need a transition after we are the majority and Marx only talked of the need for a transition between capitalism and communism because the productive forces were not sufficiently developed at the time to support a communist (aka socialist) society. That is not the case now.

Actually, in a sense we are (hopefully) already in the transition period right now. What we need is simply an appropriate exit strategy to move from capitalism into socialism - not some feeble excuse for perpetually postponing the latter - putting it on the back boiler and pretending to pay lip service to it as some kind of vague 'long-term' goal. As Keynes said, in the long term we will all be dead.

Robin Cox

email

## Marginal force

A few small clarifications regarding comrade Macnair's article in the latest issue of your esteemed publication.

I did not claim that small parties *can't* win seats in 'first past the post' (FPTP) elections (Letters, January 30). I was quite specific in my wording: "electoral parties *usually* need to function as broad fronts" and "electing even a single MP is usually prohibitively difficult when the left's vote is split". The risk of splitting the left's vote is the more fundamental issue here than the nature of the party in question - how its structured, what its politics are, whether it is big or small, broad or narrow, etc, since there are a number of different factors that can affect whether or not or to what extent the left is likely to be split.

It might be that there is a formal or informal electoral alliance between separate parties agreeing to each stand candidates only in specific constituencies, or the different political tendencies might coexist within one electoral party and use that party's structures to select a single candidate in each constituency, or it may just be that the specific balance of forces in a specific constituency and election means that there is obviously only one viable candidate. The present weakness of the left in Britain, and especially of the communist left, means that, at least for the time being, that latter case rarely obtains in our favour.

I confess I don't understand comrade Macnair's insistence that it is "nonsense" to describe the Green Party of England and Wales as a "broad front" party. It is a party which contains conservatives, liberals, socialists, even some communists. It's a party which seems to have little in the way of internal discipline, and whose elected officials and local branches often diverge wildly from one another in their politics. And it's a party with a platform of standard social democratic policies hardly distinct from that of Corbyn's Labour or from the upstart different left-of-Labour projects over the years - and I don't see any reason to assume that the new electoral formation which many on the left have been pushing for since 2019 will have a substantially different platform. In fact, it's entirely conceivable that a new post-Corbynite party may end up with an almost identical



policy platform to the Greens, but with substantially less internal democracy.

Anyway, I'm not presenting an argument here about how we must approach electoral work, but I think it's vital that we're totally clear-headed about the extent to which FPTP represents an obstacle for marginal communist forces seeking to transform themselves into a political force on the national level without diluting their own politics in order to break through that electoral hurdle. When others on the left repeatedly return to the idea of a lowest-common-denominator broad-left electoral vehicle, this is not merely stupidity or conservatism (which is not to say that stupidity and conservatism don't play their part): it is an objective tendency of Britain's electoral system.

For whatever it's worth, my instinct is that the most likely path out of this is by acting as a communist 'party within a party' within some broader electoral formation (whether it's the Greens, Labour or some other party or coalition), while pushing for electoral reform, but I remain open-minded. Whatever the ideal electoral strategy may be, it nevertheless doesn't change the fact that our priority is regrouping our forces within a unified communist organisation, where we can work out the way forward collectively!

**Archie Woodrow**  
RS21 North London

## Broad alliance

I was pleased to read Mike Macnair's critique of my *Prometheus* essay in his latest article. The comrade is correct that I argued in 'One big party?' for something like the Socialist Alliance to be recreated.

Far from being possibilist in abandoning constitutional demands, when it came to intervention in the 2001 general election, the manifesto of the Socialist Alliance did not gloss over principles of democratic republicanism. The SA called for the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords and the introduction of proportional representation for elections to the Commons. The inclusion of these democratic demands will have been down to the participation of the CPGB and others.

This suggests to me that it is possible for a democratic-republican conception of socialism to be fought for - even within electoral formations which are of a broad-front character.

My article for the *Prometheus* journal was written before the start of the Forging Communist Unity initiative, which, although a welcome development, is unlikely to directly reach the militants of the larger leftwing groups at this stage. If it is successful, there will be a larger campaign for a mass Communist Party. But there will not be a mass Communist Party.

The task of programmatic unity cannot be counterposed to participation in an electoral alliance of the left.

**Ansell Eade**  
email

## Spart critic

Having undergone a recent reorientation, Spartacists now want British communists to adopt a strategy akin to third-period Cominternism. They want us to break all links with reformism, trade union bureaucrats, liberalism, the Corbyn, and the Greens (Letters, February 6).

It appears that the Sparts may have done a complete reversal of their strategy, which has landed them in the camp of ultra-left communist sectarianism. Where did these types of policies, or strategy,

lead to in the past, especially in Germany during the Weimar period? It led to Hitler being appointed chancellor and the defeat of the left, and communists being murdered in Nazi concentration camps.

All this tragedy for the left resulted mostly from communist sectarianism of the third period. What is needed is not more sectarianism, which the Sparts are calling for (albeit unconsciously) nor the endless calls for a new party. We don't need a new workers' party in Britain at this stage. What is needed is a campaign for democratic socialism and a mass anti-fascist movement. This is the road to left unity, which can lead either to winning the Labour Party over to socialism, or a new party if necessary.

My own view is that Labour can be won over socialism. The Corbyn episode proves this, and he became leader even without the collapse of capitalism. The period where the right wing dominated the party is coming to an end. The real danger we will face in the future are clueless sectarians taking over the party, when the right are forced to step down or decamp. Even the Corbyn movement held the danger of turning Labour into a sectarian rump ...

The sectarian line being presently advocated by the Spartacists also ignores the fact that the working class cannot take power and hope to hold it, if the mass of the petty bourgeoisie or middle class is opposed to working class rule. Our task is not to turn our backs on these strata as the Sparts suggest, but rather make links with them.

Finally, in the advanced capitalist countries, communists are unlikely to come to power outside of a global crisis of capitalism. In other words, for the left to come to power two things are necessary: a correct, non-sectarian strategy and the coming collapse of capitalism. We can expect such a collapse around the end of this decade.

**Tony Clark**  
For Democratic Socialism

## Spart fan

Just reading last week's letters page, which as usual was highly communicative, I don't think that any kind of assault should be made against the *Workers Hammer* writer. His letter doesn't erase the discussions the CPGB are promoting, but complements them by bringing a more generalised outlook to the necessary narrow format that the CPGB is arranging.

We need both - and the letters pages of the *Weekly Worker* brings both to the table.

**Elijah Traven**  
Hull

## Time to jump

Poor old Stevie Freeman. Speaking in the discussion during the Why Marx? forum, 'Why are we fighting for a Communist Party?', comrade Freeman said the future for Marxist regroupment is coddled inside a fantasy mass social democratic party. Indeed, there are "tens of thousands" of people in Britain who could be in such a party, he told us.

And he pointed to the failure of communist rapprochement between the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and his Revolutionary Democratic Group (which split from the Socialist Workers Party sometime last century) as evidence why comrades can't fight for a mass Communist Party in the here and now.

Of course, there aren't thousands and millions of people in Britain who see a parliamentary road to the overthrow of capitalism. Instead, Corbynism was a left expression

of 'managing capitalism' in the interests of 'ordinary people'. Fund the NHS, tax the rich - that sort of thing. While not leftwing, there is a party of *hundreds of thousands* based on the trade unions already aimed at reforming capitalism in the 'interests of ordinary people'. It is the Labour Party.

And why did communist rapprochement between the CPGB and RDG fail? I think Steve needs to buy a mirror to answer that question. Like a nervous horse at the Grand National, he approached every hurdle and asked for it to be moved a little bit further away before organisational unity was possible. Nearly 30 years later, he still balks.

In stark contrast, I commend Nick Wrack's serious and mature attitude in the meeting, where he said that sometimes you lose a vote.

Steve, after 30 years it's time to jump. Otherwise, as Jack Conrad said, best of luck to you.

**Martin Greenfield**  
Australia

## Firewall

I can easily imagine a coalition between the Christian Democrats and the AfD (Alternative for Germany) after this month's German general election. The so-called 'firewall' against the far right is a myth - the Christian Democrats' anti-immigration resolution places them where the AfD once stood and, in some respects, even goes further. The other main parties all go along with the anti-immigration theme, offering 'constructive criticism' at best. What separates the political establishment from the AfD is foreign policy - specifically, its stance on the Nato-Russia proxy war in Ukraine.

AfD represents the national manufacturing capital, which suffers from the sabotage of Nord Stream and the German self-embargo against Russian gas - it needs cheap energy to survive. The German political establishment, on the other hand, has so far followed the lead of its American master, even when that master blew up the vital pipeline.

If the election results favour a coalition between the two parties, I could see things going one of two ways. Either the Christian-Dems use the coalition to try and tame the AfD on foreign policy. This is how I concluded my presentation at a Rete dei Comunisti event last June:

"Of course, the establishment could identify a 'reasonable' personality or faction within the AfD willing to accept the fundamental interests of the United States - someone like Meloni. It would be surprising if they were not already trying to find such a faction."

Alternatively, now that Trump is openly positioning the US as a competitor to the EU, Germany's precarious position might necessitate a different path: the Christian Democrats could follow the AfD's lead and, for reasons of competitiveness, reopen negotiations with the Gazprom energy corporation. A risky move, but how else could they facilitate Germany's 'reindustrialisation', which they call for in their current platform? Surely not on the basis of expensive US fracking gas.

If Trump were to reach some agreement with Russia, that would favour the latter outcome. All the bluster about 'fascist Putin' would be forgotten for the time being. But, overall, I think option one - Germany's economic degradation under the auspices of comprador politicians - is more likely. We'll see.

**Maciej Zurowski**  
Italy

# ACTION

## 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. Protest, as Palestine continues to face Israel's genocide, settler-colonialism, military occupation, apartheid - and now Trump's shocking plan for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events/15-february-national-demo-for-palestine](http://palestinecampaign.org/events/15-february-national-demo-for-palestine).

## Red Vienna: when taxes paid for housing

**Monday February 17, 5.30pm:** Seminar, Pollard Seminar Room, N301, third floor, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1. Danny Bee speaks on Red Vienna, where, between 1919 and 1934, the socialist council built over 64,000 homes, supported by health, education and welfare services. Free, registration required. Organised by London Socialist Historians Group: [www.history.ac.uk/events/red-vienna-when-taxes-paid-housing](http://www.history.ac.uk/events/red-vienna-when-taxes-paid-housing).

## Perspectives on human origins

**Tuesday February 18, 6.30pm:** Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taverton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'On an anarchist anthropology' - Erica Lagalisse in conversation with Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/1283014522748961](http://www.facebook.com/events/1283014522748961)

## 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](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1041517924681254).

## It's the 20% we disagree on that matters

**Thursday February 20, 6.30pm:** Online discussion in the series, 'Building a communist Party'. Looking at why broad-left fronts like Collective, Socialist Alliance, Respect, Left Unity, the LLA, etc will keep on failing. Speakers: Cat Rylance (*Prometheus* editorial board, personal capacity) and Marcus Strom. Organised by Why Marx?: [www.whymarx.com/sessions](http://www.whymarx.com/sessions).

## Racism and the far right in France

**Thursday February 20, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Racism as a structural factor in support for the French far right. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: [x.com/CCSoc](http://x.com/CCSoc).

## Stop tech wars

**Saturday February 22, 10.15am to 4.30pm:** Online conference. Drones are proliferating, enabling belligerents to kill at distance. Military planners are incorporating AI into autonomous weapon systems. Build campaigns to challenge these developments. Registration free. Organised by Drone Wars UK: [dronewars.net](http://dronewars.net).

## Free Palestine: defend the right to protest

**Saturday February 22, 1pm:** Rally, Unitarian Church, 60a Hall Gate, Doncaster DN1. Pro-Palestine demonstrations are being criminalised. Speakers include Chris Nineham (Stop the War). Organised by Doncaster Stop the War Coalition: [www.facebook.com/events/1759892291539229](http://www.facebook.com/events/1759892291539229).

## Support striking Birmingham bin workers

**Tuesday February 25, 9am:** Lobby of the city council, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1. Over 350 refuse workers began strike action in January over pay cuts of up to £8,000 for 150 workers. Unite fears this is just the beginning - expect more assaults on pay, conditions and job security. Organised by Unite the Union: [www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news](http://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news).

## Stop £150 million of cuts in Birmingham

**Tuesday February 25, 12 noon:** Lobby of the city council, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1. Reject the cuts budget, fund the services. Organised by Brum Rise Up: [x.com/BirminghamPeopA/status/1888706580436209786](http://x.com/BirminghamPeopA/status/1888706580436209786).

## 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](http://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](http://housmans.com/events).

## Eleanor Marx on Clerkenwell Green

**Thursday March 6, 6pm:** Local history talk, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Biographer Rachel Holmes explores the life of the political activist, translator and youngest daughter of Karl Marx. Free, no booking required. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/491](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/491).

## CPGB wills

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



## MIDDLE EAST

# Organise to stop genocide

Take Trump's plans seriously, says **Yassamine Mather**. Not the 'riviera' stuff, but the clearing out of Palestinians from Gaza. That explains why there has been a welcome across the Zionist spectrum

In the last week, following Donald Trump's initial statement about turning Gaza into the "riviera of the Middle East", we have heard a constant repetition of this policy by the US president and his allies - all this despite the surprise and horror expressed by liberal bourgeois commentators and most European and Middle Eastern leaders.

On February 9 Trump once again emphasised his plan to control Gaza and relocate the Palestinian population, and said that the USA is determined to "buy and own" Gaza - adding that the US would "take them under our control and make sure that Hamas does not come back". In response to a question about Arab governments and their opposition to uprooting the Gazan population and resettlement in neighbouring countries, Trump said that the reason for their opposition is that "I have not discussed this with them yet". He also described Gaza as a big "ruin", whose buildings are unsafe to live in.

By February 11 Trump was claiming he does not need to 'buy' Gaza after all - the US will just take it over. On the same day he threatened Hamas with "unleashing hell" if all hostages are not released by February 15, also threatening the visiting Jordanian king, Abdullah, that he will withdraw all US aid to his country, if there is no compliance with his wishes.

## Interpretations

There have been several interpretations of Trump's initial 'sensational' declaration. However, as he doubles down, it looks like many who took it as mere hot air were indulging in wishful thinking. For example, some claimed that it was an attempt at forcing oil-rich Gulf states to pay for the reconstruction of a Hamas-free Gaza. I do not think this was Trump's *main* intention: doubtless they would have stumped up huge sums anyway. However, they have no wish to be seen as being complicit in the ethnic cleansing of the Gaza Strip and emptying it of all, or most, of its Palestinian population.

Jeremy Bowen, the BBC's international editor, says: "Trump's Gaza plan won't happen, but it will have consequences", adding that "Some - perhaps many - Palestinians in Gaza might be tempted to get out if they had the chance. But even if a million left, as many as 1.2 million others would still be there."

Of course, the plan is not really about a "riviera of the Middle East". Nor is it about Palestinians voluntarily leaving. Even after more than 16 months of horrific bombardment and occupation, I doubt whether more than a few tens of thousands would willingly take up such an offer to relocate. The people of Gaza are refugees, or the children, or grandchildren, of refugees, from other occupied Palestinian towns. They know from bitter past experience that if they leave their homes, they will never be allowed to return.

Bowen adds: "Presumably the United States ... would have to use force to remove them. After America's catastrophic intervention in Iraq in 2003, that would be deeply unpopular in the US."

Again this assertion is debatable. Engaging in such an operation would indeed invoke memories of battles in Iraq (and earlier in Afghanistan), but here we are talking of a far more unequal struggle in a cramped and enclosed geographical zone. And, of course, Trump has repeatedly made



"A big ruin" ... ripe for ethnic cleansing

it clear: there will be no US troops involved. No, what he has done is open the door for Israel to do the job. Aluf Benn, writing in *Ha'aretz*, is therefore correct to point out that "Trump has normalised the discourse around ethnic cleansing in Gaza".

As Trump made his 'riviera' statement, it was obvious from the nasty smirk on Benjamin Netanyahu's face that he was the winner in all this. After weeks of facing carping criticism from within the ranks of his government and from far-right Zionist parties in the Knesset - who were demanding an end to the ceasefire and a renewal of war, a war to finally exterminate Hamas in Gaza - Trump came to his rescue. His promise of 'buying and owning' Gaza, was manna from heaven. Zionism got what it always wanted ... the green light for mass expulsions. Next it will be the West Bank.

Netanyahu is not alone. Not only is Trump's plan being welcomed on the far right of the Zionist spectrum: people like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich. So-called centrists - eg, Benny Gantz - have responded positively too. Israel's 'progressive' Zionists are a little bit more circumspect. Gilad Kariv, of the Democrats, warns of a possible 'nightmare' ... for Israel! Meanwhile, 82% of Jewish Israelis, the Hebrew population, support 'encouraging emigration' of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.

Everyone knows that this is not an American land grab. No, it sets the stage for yet another *Israeli* land grab and the realisation of the 'greater Israel' dream of Zionism going back to its very origins. Zionism wants all the land ... from the river to the sea.

If the Palestinians do not go voluntarily, they will be forced out, first by being denied medical facilities, then starved, then made to move at the point of a bayonet. They will be driven over the border into Egypt's Sinai and over the river into Jordan. The IDF has been told to draw up plans to put that into effect (there has even been the suggestion of deporting Palestinians to Puntland on Somalia's pirate coast).

Those who refuse to leave will be left to go hungry and die - in other words, genocide is on the cards. There are already crocodile tears from Arab leaders and western liberal politicians. But that is a distinct danger which no-one should dismiss or play down.

## Response

Those such as Sir Keir Starmer, who keep going on about the illusory 'two-state solution', do not seem to have woken up to the fact that we live in an era that is now completely different from the 'rules-based' world order we were supposed to

have lived under since the end of World War II, that is for sure.

In the last three weeks US citizens have witnessed sweeping internal changes, including emails 'encouraging' them to take voluntary redundancy. Meanwhile, major government offices, such as the US Agency for International Development have been closed amidst accusations of them being havens for 'woke' liberals and 'cultural Marxists'. Thousands of NGOs and think tanks have been promptly defunded.

## Jordan

In countries already hosting refugees, such as Jordan, some of the fiercest opponents of the US plan are Gazans who had previously found refuge there. A man who was forced to leave the Gaza Strip as a toddler told the BBC reporter interviewing him that 57 years later he is still living at the camp set up as an 'emergency' settlement in 1968. There are currently 2.39 million officially registered Palestinian refugees living in Jordan, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. Numbers which could easily be doubled.

Trump has made it clear there will be consequences for defying his proposals. He has warned that he would withhold aid - Jordan, for example, receives \$1.45 billion annually in military and economic aid from the US, Egypt gets a much reduced \$1.5 billion.

And those who think the US president's plan will never happen should listen to king Abdullah's comments, when he and Trump were giving their press conference. Asked: "What do you feel about the US taking Gaza?", he replied: "This is something that as Arabs we will come to the US to discuss: we will talk about the options." The reporter then commented: "Take it under what authority? It is sovereign territory." At this point Trump replied: "Under the US authority" ... and the king just dumbly sat there.

Hamas politburo deputy chief Moussa Abu Marzouk has described Trump's talk of US control of the Gaza Strip as "political balloons". I am afraid he is wrong, however: we should not underestimate what the US president is planning and what he is about to do ... unleash the Israeli attack dog.

The pictures of the Jordanian king sitting next to Trump, as he repeated his remarks about a US takeover of Gaza, should teach us all a lesson. Especially as it is only a prelude to carrying out exactly the same kind of operation on the West Bank.

Naturally, Arab presidents, kings and prime ministers condemn the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from Gaza, but no-one should be under any

illusion that this has anything to do with genuine solidarity. These self-serving leaders are primarily worried about their own survival. They are aware of the fellow feeling and sympathy of their own citizens for Palestine. However, not least when it comes to Jordan and Egypt, they are even more concerned about the dangers of hosting hundreds of thousands - even millions - of Palestinians. In Egypt, for example, despite the repression of all opposition, president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi remains vulnerable, as the Muslim Brotherhood expands its underground activities. For his army-bureaucratic-capitalist regime, what could be worse than the arrival of young Palestinians, radicalised by a year and a half of Zionist horror?

The same is true of the Saudi royal family, and the Kuwaiti and Qatari emirs. True, Arab leaders, have raised strong objections to the Trump/Netanyahu plans, including the "categorical rejection" of Netanyahu's suggestion that Gazans should be resettled in the Saudi kingdom. The Egyptian foreign minister called the proposal "reckless, irresponsible and unacceptable", adding that it "directly infringes upon Saudi sovereignty and constitutes a clear violation of international law and the United Nations charter".

Gulf states have likewise condemned the proposal. The United Arab Emirates rejected Netanyahu's "reprehensible and provocative" idea and expressed solidarity with Saudi Arabia against "any threat to its security, stability and sovereignty". Non-Arab Muslim countries such as Iran, Pakistan and Turkey have voiced similar sentiments. However, at the end of the day it goes without saying that none of these countries are in any position to halt the US-Israeli plans.

Egypt's military rulers are unlikely to survive without US aid, while Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf countries can be threatened with the kind of crippling sanctions that have destroyed Iran's economy. That or the withdrawal of US protection,

not least from their own people.

On the day of the 'riviera' statement, Trump also signed a series of measures in favour of "maximum pressure" against Iran. He has directed the treasury and department of state to implement policies aimed at driving its oil exports to "zero".

However, Trump claimed he found signing these executive orders "very tough", blaming his advisors and adding he was open to a deal with the Islamic Republic and is willing to talk to its leadership. "With me, it's very simple: Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon," Trump said. Asked how close Tehran is to getting its hands on such a weapon, he replied, "They're too close."

## Realistic

Looking at the current situation in the Middle East - this terrible latest phase of ethnic cleansing planned for Palestine and the possibility of Israel bombing Iran's nuclear facilities - we have to be realistic.

The empty rhetoric of Iran's Islamic Republic and its weakened and humiliated 'axis of resistance' has got nowhere. Hamas will doubtless continue to resist, but it can hardly defeat the IDF. Demonstrations, however large and radical, will not stop Israel forcibly depopulating Gaza either. Nor will direct action stunts by brave activists or even boycotts at ports and airports. Welcome as they all are, we must start thinking about the politics of power.

As far as the Middle East as a whole is concerned, the answer is obvious: the overthrow of the reactionary regimes throughout the region. The same goes for America, Europe and elsewhere. But for that we need organisation. Not just any organisation, however: what is required are mass communist parties that coordinate at the highest level. There is no alternative ●

## Notes

1. [www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-02-09/ty-article/.premium/trump-and-netanyahu-are-fulfilling-a-legacy-of-jewish-supremacy-day-after-transfer/00000194-e71c-dc0f-a7de-ff3c10da0000](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-02-09/ty-article/.premium/trump-and-netanyahu-are-fulfilling-a-legacy-of-jewish-supremacy-day-after-transfer/00000194-e71c-dc0f-a7de-ff3c10da0000).

## Fighting fund

# Play your part

Are we going to continue with the positive results of recent months in achieving our fighting fund target of £2,250? Let's hope so, because very soon we'll be increasing that target in view of the extra expenses we have incurred of late!

Thanks to the £461 that came our way over the last week, February's running total now stands at £777. As usual, the largest proportion of the cash raised came via standing orders and one-off bank transfers. So a red salute goes to comrades PB (£70), BO (£35), DV and NH (£30 each), NR and GD (£25), AM (£15), CS and RD (£12), and finally IS, SM, PM and CC (£10).

These were backed up by comrades who clicked on that PayPal button on our website - RL and US comrade PM (£50), SL (£40), MH and GS (£10) and JV (£7). Of the above, let me mention in particular comrade SL, who wrote: "Thank you for providing structured Marxist analysis and debate on ongoing

affairs!" Definitely worthy of the £40 he donated!

So, at the moment, we're a bit behind the going rate - and don't forget there are only 28 days in February, so we're just two days short of halfway, as I write! That means we really need to up the pace, so can you help? As well as the ways mentioned above, you can, of course, send us a cheque - or even hand some cash to any of our comrades you see distributing the *Weekly Worker* (there'll be a good few of those at Saturday's Palestine demo, of course!).

For more details, click on the link below. Please play your part in helping us to raise the cash we need to keep producing this paper! ●

**Robbie Rix**

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USA

# The American Sulla

Concessions won during the New Deal and the civil rights era are under attack. The old world order is being shredded. **Edith Fischer**, a member of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation in Australia, looks at Trump 2.0 and his programme

**E**lon Musk, the richest man alive and perhaps the most powerful individual on earth, once called for an 'American Sulla'. Invoking the name of the *optimates'* despot, Musk seeks to conjure up the figure of a reactionary dictator, come to suppress the *populares* and restore the minoritarian political order. In Trump, Musk believes he has found his Sulla.

The vicissitudes of the new American regime are not the result of personal vanity and madness of the man himself, or to the particular predilections and absurdities of his political clique. They are a coherent, if at times schizophrenic, programme for the reorganisation of the dominant regime of accumulation in the US and its position in the world system. This programme represents the interests of a distinct section of the US bourgeoisie, which is aiming for the greatest transformation of the American social formation since the New Deal.

The trajectory of American capitalism is in many ways shaped by the sedimented historical defeats of the US working class, whose systematic lack of political independence, and unique stratification by race and skill, gave rise to a form of state capitalism in the New Deal period. This fused the workers to their employers, limited corporatism at the level of the state, and constrained the social wage. This social compact was bought by the rising wages guaranteed by productivity increases in industry, and the falling price of consumer durables that gave rise to the vast suburbanisation of American life following World War II.

At the same time, the American proletariat expanded to include millions of white-collar workers in bureaucracy, administration and the culture industry - all fuelling a vast increase in the scale of the administrative state. Similarly, suburban civilisation was served by a huge growth in cheap service work - everything from nail salons to house cleaning. This created a growing division between a propertied, skilled working class that lived in the suburbs, and a growing proletariat working two jobs to pay rent on their rat-infested urban slums. This vast division in the working class was the political basis for the cross-class alliance that brought the New Right to power, hulked across the country from the Sunbelt to DC.

The emergence of neoliberalism was precipitated by what Giovanni Arrighi called the "signal crisis" of the American-led world system: the stagflation and oil shock of the 1970s. This crisis signalled the apogee of American capitalism, and the beginning of the long decline. Over the course of the following decades, the predictions of the likes of Arrighi and Immanuel Wallerstein were borne out in practice. Systematic disinvestment saw the industrial base stripped of its capacity. The labour aristocracy that this industry had fed collapsed into poverty, while trade union power was thoroughly smashed by the Reaganite offensive. Even the cadres of the American state have been slowly underfunded, crowded out by contractors and systematically deskilled.

Trump then stands within a particular relation to Reagan: best



Sulla: 138-78 BCE

understood as both the completion of Reaganism's historic task of dismantling the New Deal-civil rights state, and also the negation of Reaganism's neoliberal mode of political operation. While Reagan was the Sulla for the epoch of generalised free trade, Trump is the Sulla for the epoch of direct inter-imperialist conflict.

## Democrats

Who are the Democrats? First of all, they are the party of the *haute bourgeoisie*, of high finance, of the transnational corporations. Overwhelmingly, the largest bloc of capitalists supports the Democrats, along with the various institutions of the state. This class is represented in politics by the multilateralists, the liberal internationalists; they are the party of the UN, Nato and free trade. In short, they are the 'party of order'.

However, like all bourgeois parties, the Democratic Party is a hegemonic coalition of multiple classes. Nowhere is this more true than in America, where the party-state is so institutionalised as to make serious political fragmentation functionally impossible. The Democrats are a coalition of the urban middle classes, professionals, managers, petty capitalists, intellectuals and public servants - fused with organised labour (represented by the social-imperialist AFL-CIO union bloc) and politicised layers of the black and migrant working class.

The Democratic Party relies on mobilising its working class base in order to win elections. However, it must ultimately govern in the interests of its ruling class benefactors. This creates a particular political dynamic which has been widely commented upon by the socialist movement. The

bourgeois liberals and republicans are quick to mobilise the spectre of reaction in order to mobilise their base, whipping them up with fears of an imminent clerical-reactionary takeover of the state apparatus. However, in practice, the Democrats are a party of the bourgeoisie and will ultimately seek the unity of the bourgeois state over any popular front of all classes. Inside the Democrats, the most advanced sections of the American workers are strangled.

Why did they lose? The Democratic Party has been defeated precisely because it could not offer a strategy to save American hegemony from its historic demise. Trump offers such a strategy. The Democratic Party offers nothing to its multiracial working class base, and in turn they did not vote. Voter turnout has fallen significantly since the 2020 election, and the Democrats were unable to rally the popular front they constantly attempt to summon. They are led by a liberal political caste that is wholly out of touch with reality, and unable to produce a politics with mass appeal. And so the House of Biden and the dream of a Harris presidency collapsed.

## Trumpism

The Republican Party is the party of extractive capital, of mining and logging, of the rancher capitalists and farmers, of agricultural producers, and of small and medium capitalists in the American regions. If the Democrats are the party of the universities, then the Republicans are the party of the country clubs and the chambers of commerce. Importantly, the presidential election saw the defection of a bloc of financial-technology capital to the Trump campaign.

Behind them, the reactionary MAGA movement draws up the entire middle strata of the American regions: the local elites of the towns; the evangelical churches and traditionalist Catholics; the petty producers and independent contractors - all the varied layers that stand against the proletariat. In turn, layers of the American working class - in particular white, non-unionised workers - have long supported the Republicans.

The Republican coalition is just as fractious as the Democrats. Christian theocrats, ethnic nationalists and Silicon Valley anarchists are not natural allies. What draws them together is a common sense of grievance - a sense that their position as the 'rightful rulers' of the social order is being denied by liberal political domination over the state apparatus.

The programme of Trumpism is more radical now than it was eight years ago. It can be broadly understood to consist of five elements: (1) Aggressive trade policy and tariff regimes; (2) Competition with European capital; (3) A reorientation to direct 'spheres of influence' imperialism, rather than multilateralism; (4) A deportation regime to discipline American labour markets; (5) Strengthening the basis of social reproduction in the family.

The traditional Yankee leadership of the Republican Party (such as the Bush clan) has either been jettisoned or bent the knee. Gone are the days of free-trade Republicans: Trump promises radical economic nationalism, a brutal tariff regime that is guaranteed to drive inflation, and a recession-inducing wave of austerity in the federal government. The aim is to unleash a storm of inflation and unemployment that would see workers' wages reduced to poverty levels. It is only on the basis of such a dire assault that competitive domestic manufacturing and small-capitalist profitability can be restored. This will no doubt provoke a furious response. But with the American working class disorganised, there is no clear road to defeat the Trumpist programme.

Such a revolutionary programme is also going to shatter the Trumpist base. The small and medium capitalists are certainly fervent in their support of economic nationalism and attacks on the wage rate. But inflation will also decrease their savings, devalue their assets and tighten their ability to consume the luxuries they so covet. This layer may soon find itself high and dry, as economic shocks shake the nation.

With birth rates falling, America is reliant on immigration to sustain the population growth capitalist accumulation demands. However, mass immigration destabilises the ethnic coalitions that guarantee the power of local elites, especially outside the big cities. The only alternative to immigration is to reinvigorate the family unit, which functionally means throwing women into domestic servitude. Attacks on abortion and gay rights, demands to censor pornography and crackdowns on "sexual degeneracy" - all act to defend the family, which is in fact the nucleus of private property. We should not underestimate the popularity of patriarchal ideology, especially amongst the young.

Reactionary patriarchal politics plays on the oedipal structure of the family unit, and it stirs up great feelings of resentment and disappointment.

There is a misapprehension, even by some socialists, that Trump and his coalition are opposed to war and military adventures abroad. Even more absurd is the claim that Trump is some kind of anti-imperialist. Trump's initial cabinet is a *war cabinet*: staffed with anti-Iran hawks, militarists and anti-China cold warriors. Whatever isolationist rhetoric Trump might pander to, he is not opposed to the fundamental dynamics of the American empire, or even to military intervention. What Trump is seeking is a renegotiation of the terms under which the empire is organised.

## American gentry

The view that the small and medium capitalists are less imperialist than their *haute bourgeois* cousins is erroneous in the extreme. Nicolas D Villarreal outlines this fact masterfully in his essay, *To hell with the American gentry*:

The problem of allocating surplus with limited economic growth is one that has had a time-honoured, consistent solution for those societies that are unable to give up the bloated excesses of their ruling classes: imperialism. It should be noted that Trump's insistence on withdrawing the US military across the world wasn't so much about non-intervention as securing better terms of payment for US support, to turn the US empire once again into a profit-making enterprise ... The continued rise of petty-bourgeois power entails a movement away from the global trade system supported by the American military, and instead towards the old way of exclusive spheres of influence.

Because of this necessity of imperialism to support such an 'aristocracy', this paradise for the gentry will still entail massive financial monopolies - only ones that are pointed outward rather than inward. This is necessary to impose the vast rents on the countries within the empire's sphere of influence, to gorge on ever more labour time and resources.

Such a reorganisation of imperialism is already underway. By threatening Nato - both by sabre-rattling over Greenland and placing tariffs on Canada - Trump is indicating a shift away from the multilateral imperialism that has historically guaranteed American supremacy. In turn, by placing sanctions on Taiwan, Trump has destabilised the 'pivot to Asia' that was at the centre of imperialist strategy throughout the Obama years.

Such a turn is not without its real benefits: by seizing Canada and Greenland, and by asserting American control over the Panama Canal, Trump would control two vital trade routes and vast reserves of strategic resources, including land and fresh water. Trump is promoting an imperialism of direct annexation, inter-imperialist competition and treaty ports. It is a return to an epoch of direct spheres of influence ●



**FUSION****Two meetings and many possibilities**

No-one thinks we stand on the threshold of mass politics. But there is clearly an audience, especially amongst those wanting to go beyond the confessional sects. **Carla Roberts reports**

It would be foolish to overstate the numbers involved in the current fusion process, 'Forging Communist Unity': the three groups involved are small, even smaller and miniscule. Nevertheless, it would be equally foolish to underestimate the potential impact this could make on the stuck-in-the-mud British left - and already has, as two events in the last week have shown.

Around 135 people attended the February 6 launch meeting of the new Zoom series, 'Building a Communist Party: past attempts and future prospects', organised by Why Marx?, which, while not officially part of the negotiations, is "accompanying the fusion process in a spirit of solidarity".<sup>1</sup> Jack Conrad of the CPGB, Nick Wrack of Talking about Socialism (TAS) and Cat Rylance of the *Prometheus* journal (who spoke in a personal capacity) set out their hopes for the future of the fusion process. The livestreamed video has already been watched thousands of times on Facebook, TikTok and YouTube.

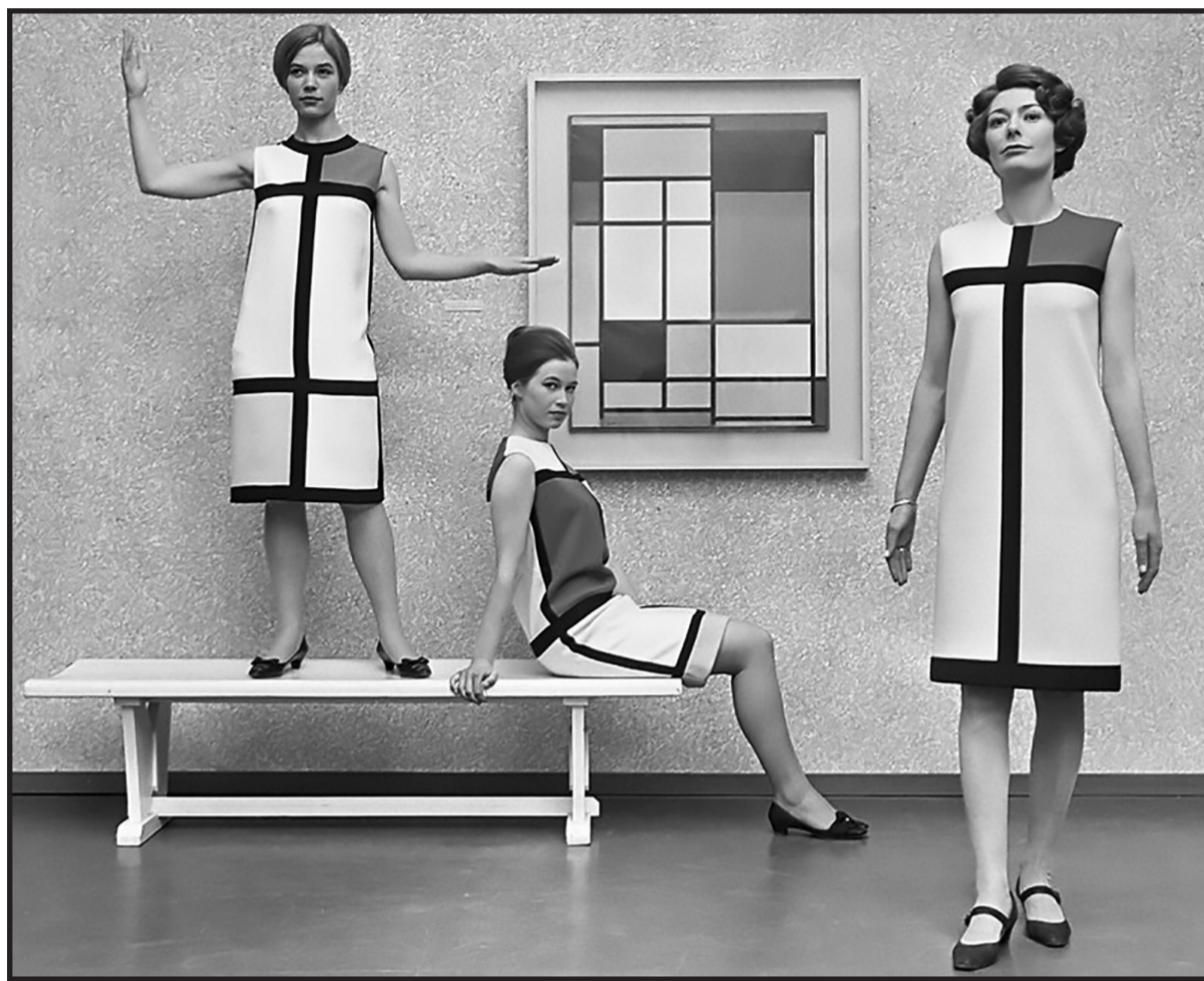
A couple of days later, on February 8, 40 people came to the day school on 'Marxist Unity' in Salford, organised by *Prometheus* and TAS and also attended by a number of CPGB members and supporters. Both events attracted a fair number of members from other left groups, including the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Party of Great Britain and Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (interestingly, there were members present from both sides of the current 'partyism' debate in RS21). The majority of participants, however, were individual socialists and communists who are currently not involved in any organisation.

**Potential**

At both meetings, comrades spoke openly and frankly about the possibilities, as well as the potential problems, of the current process, as well as the wider question of 'What kind of party?'. Almost everybody on the left now seems to agree that there is a need for 'regroupment' and 'unity'. But even amongst those who believe this unity should be based around a programme for communism and Marxism (and not motherhood and apple pie), there is, not surprisingly, a certain amount of scepticism about the current fusion process. For some, this is a hesitation about the *Weekly Worker* and its "style", as an RS21 comrade put it in Salford, while others fear that their particular 'red lines' would not be adhered to.

At the heart of these worries is the fact that the British left has been utterly and pathetically divided, for many decades. The futile attempt to pursue 'purifying splits' has ended up creating dozens of almost identical sects. Much of the 'revolutionary left' has been preaching to the many tens of thousands of people that have gone through their particular sect mill that their little group is 'it' and just has to grow a bit more. And in order to achieve that, it would have to set up or engage in 'broad-left fronts' in which members of the said revolutionary group will have to support sub-reformist policies that often bear no relation to the aim of revolution.

In other words, we really do have our work cut out to convince socialists to fight for something entirely different. Everybody involved in the fusion process is painfully aware that any organisation coming out of it will



**Clear lines: Yves St Laurent inspired by Piet Mondrian (1966)**

not be a 'mass' party any time soon, in the sense of "leading the most advanced sections of the working class", as Jack Conrad explained. At the Salford school, Mike Macnair put it like this: "We need a party of hundreds of thousands to make revolution. But, even if just the existing left united and brought with them their former members and those they still influence, we could have a party of about 30,000 people very quickly. Such a party could make a huge difference."

All speakers agreed that our pre-party formation (as well, of course, as the emerging Communist Party) would have to be based on important political principles and a programme that "spells out clearly that we are fighting for the overthrow of capitalism and that we are not interested in managing the current system", as Nick Wrack put it at the Why Marx? launch. He hoped that "communism can and should become the common sense" among the working class - but that "because of the failures of the socialist movement" we have some way to go. "We must say from the outset that we are not talking about the 'communism' of the Soviet Union or China, but the communism developed by Marx and Engels, which we need to bring up to date and apply in the modern world." Comrade Wrack outlined that such a party "cannot be built by a personality or a clique" and that many of today's groups "are actually scared of the prospect of a mass party - because it would mean disagreements and dissent."

Comrade Rylance noted that there is "a lot of potential for a principled political party today and things look politically much more advanced than even 10 years ago". She outlined some of the "practical problems" we face, explaining her encounters with activists from Assembly: "There is this idea that we would just get activists into a room and from that they would develop naturally into some kind of party with a coherent programme. That is our task at hand - to show that this does not work." She

bravely explained the much-criticised idea that at the beginning this process would indeed have to be "top-down": "It is absolutely crucial that we clarify the politics first and that only once we have worked out our programme, we build an organisation, a structure around it", she said. "We therefore need substantial discussions and must resist the pressure to just 'get out there' and get things done - we need to be clear what we actually want to achieve."

Jack Conrad agreed that "there clearly is an urgent necessity to form a Communist Party, considering the climate catastrophe and the shift to the right in global politics. But we also need a degree of patience in order to achieve that unity. The process of forging communist unity will have to be as short as possible, but as long as necessary." He explained that, if we are successful, "which I think we will be, this process will resonate with the rest of the left". He agreed with comrade Wrack that we will have to show that

... we are clear that the USSR was an abomination. It was a step forward, but also a huge step back for our movement. Yes, our party needs agitational ideas, but we must also account for what went before and explain why what we're attempting to do this time will be different. That's where the programme comes in. We need to explain why good people did terrible things.

He explained that it requires a mass Communist Party mainly for one reason: "To resolve a future revolutionary crisis in a positive way. If we cannot overcome the left's division, that will be impossible. Yes, all groups will probably grow a bit, but the revolutionary crisis is likely to be resolved negatively." If it was enough to simply back strikes and other spontaneous actions, "we would have had socialism decades ago. But look at where we are at."

All speakers stressed that this party - and the campaign for it -

would have to be deeply democratic, allowing for political differences, big and small, to be aired and debated publicly and "sometimes fiercely", as comrade Conrad put it. Otherwise the rest of the left and, crucially, the mass of the working class will not even be tempted to join our party - and why would they, if they think they will have to shut up and simply follow the leadership line once they have joined.

**Dumb questions**

Comrade Rylance expanded on this point in the Salford day school: "We have to create a culture where members can question everything and ask what might be seen as dumb questions. We must be allowed to make mistakes. That is part of the way that people learn." There are no doubt some differences between comrades Conrad and Rylance over the correct 'debating culture' - and we will no doubt continue to discuss this in a comradely and productive manner. This is a crucial question, especially as some of the questions and comments raised at both events show that there are quite a lot of misunderstandings and plenty of confusion among pro-partyist comrades.

This was particularly evident in the two 'workshops' that followed the main plenary session with Mike Macnair and Cat Rylance at the Salford event. I must admit I am not generally a fan of workshops - especially ones laden with six questions that we were supposed to discuss in 30 minutes. We could only touch on some of the questions posed. Having said that, many attendees clearly had a lot of unanswered questions that they did not want to raise in the plenary. From that perspective, it was quite useful and allowed us to at least start a discussion on some of the contested issues. Questions raised included: ■ Aren't there already plenty of revolutionary parties, including (at least) a couple that bear the name 'Communist Party'?

First off, we should say that the name for us is secondary. We favour

the word 'communist' in the name, because it shows that we see ourselves in the tradition of Marx and Engels, whose most famous text was called, after all, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* - although, like today, such a party was not in existence then.

We do not ignore the existing left, but hope to win them over to the idea of a democratic, principled, genuine Communist Party. But that requires a cultural revolution on the left. For a start, most groups today are organised like traditional Trotskyist sects and with an ideological line given out by the leadership that members have to agree with. If our fusion process is successful, this could put real pressure on some of the groups to change their *modus operandi* and/or join the fusion process.

■ How are we going to deal with differences?

The slogan of 'unity in diversity' was raised a number of times. As was the idea that members of a genuine Communist Party should be asked to 'accept' the party programme rather than having to 'agree' with every dot and comma. The programme is, incidentally, not a holy text set in stone. It is always up for debate and can be amended - it has to be a living document. Members must be allowed to get together with other members to raise criticisms - up to and including the formation of open and permanent factions, which should find proportional representation on the leadership, for example. Minorities must have the right to express their views, not just internally, but also in the party's press and in front of the working class. That is the only way we can attract the 'mass' of the working class to our party.

■ Should the party have particular 'red lines'?

This issue came up repeatedly in Salford, reflecting that the concept of 'red lines' is very much part of the culture of many young people today, including in RS21 and its periphery. The issue of trans rights was mentioned a few times in the workshops and the idea that 'I cannot be in a Communist Party that allows Terfs to join'. We will be discussing this issue in more detail at the February 16 Communist Forum, which features a discussion between Mike Macnair and Roxy Hall. Another workshop raised the issue of China, with a member of the Communist Party of Britain suggesting that a definition of China might be part of the "minimum conditions" of a new mass Communist Party.

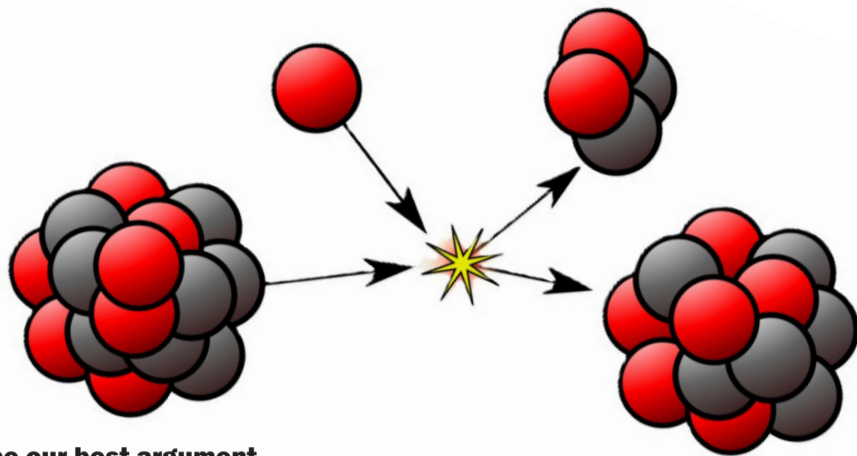
In general, while our programme should be based on definite political principles - in this case, a clear statement that we are in favour of trans liberation and that we do not excuse or seek to mimic the crimes of Stalinism - it would be completely counterproductive to subject members to some communist version of the inquisition. We are for keeping people with overtly reactionary views outside the ranks of the party, but the emphasis will be on education, debate and challenging backward ideas such as sectionalism, narrow trade-unionism or nationalism. There is also unity in action.

All of these issues, and many more, will be further discussed openly in the pages of the *Weekly Worker* and at the Why Marx? education series - and, no doubt, in the meetings organised by TAS and in the *Prometheus* journal ●

**Notes**

1. [www.whymarx.com/sessions](http://www.whymarx.com/sessions).





Our forward momentum will be our best argument

# Problems and progress

We are ready now to get down to programmatic specifics, but there are the ‘partyists’ who are not walking the walk ... yet. Jack Conrad reports

Our fourth round of Zoom discussions, on February 9, began with reports from Cat Rylance and Ed Potts about the situation with the *Prometheus* editorial board, the third element of the Forging Communist Unity process. Both comrades are EB members.

It should be added that myself and Mike Macnair represented the CPGB’s Provisional Central Committee and Nick Wrack was there for Talking About Socialism (comrade Potts too - wearing ‘two hats’). Gaby Rubin was also present taking minutes.

The comrades told us that the *Prometheus* EB has divided, roughly 50:50, over FCU. Things are not hard and fast. Shades of opinion exist on both sides.

Understandably, there are legitimate concerns amongst RS21 comrades. Continuing to work in that diffuse, but politically fluid, organisation, while participating in a process that at some stage will require a definite commitment to abide by the outcome of a communist fusion conference, might be incompatible.

As we have explained before, that is absolutely not the case with us. Members of RS21 who join the Communist Party would be encouraged, even obliged, to

maintain their membership, contacts and struggles. The aim would be to win the majority for communist fusion.

Other comrades on the *Prometheus* EB will doubtless have their own particular concerns and perhaps there will be those who, while they talk the talk of partyism, fear doing the walk ... as of the moment. You can read the EB’s *very diplomatic* statement on its website.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, in our tradition, we would name names and openly present exactly what the differences are about to readers. Either way, there is a pro-party EB faction that is committed to the process and we agreed to continue our discussions with them - that while seeking to meet with the doubters and worriers. If that happens - and we hope it will - there will be a get-together of some sort between Nick Wrack and myself representing FCU and the comrades.

Naturally, we shall attempt to persuade them all. But, failing that, we shall not allow those holding back to hold us back. Indeed our progress will be the biggest argument in favour of communist fusion. Not that we should be afraid of splits - the expanded core of the over-delayed future mass Communist Party that we all envisage will doubtless be

arrived at through a series of splits and fusions on the existing left.

Ones, twos, hundreds ... thousands even can be recruited individually. But positively overcoming the confessional sects, the illusions in broad-frontism and the *bourgeois* politics of the trade union bureaucracy cannot be ignored, skipped or avoided.

That is why sharp polemics and drawing clear lines of demarcation are vital throughout. Those who describe that tried and tested method as a problem reveal either unschooled naivety or ingrained opportunism (the first is easily overcome and should be treated with patience; the second requires much harsher medicine).

Anyway, having discussed the factional divisions on the *Prometheus* EB, we moved on to the main item of the agenda - the first of the six fusion points proposed by Talking About Socialism. That is: “What should a partyist organisation’s fundamental principles and programmatic commitments be?”<sup>2</sup>

After an initial silence, I dived in with an *unprepared* four-point answer: (1) the aim should be a mass Communist Party: that is, a party that organises the advanced part of the working class and goes on to lead the working class as a class, and which can therefore exercise hegemony over the middle classes, even elements of the bourgeoisie; (2) democracy in the party, in the workers’ movement and in society as a whole; (3) decisive working class rule: ie, the working class party in command of state power; (4) international socialism and therefore the global transition to communism, socialism in one country being delusional. All fleshed out, as I stressed, in the CPGB’s *Draft programme*.

Showing where we are at, there were no dissenters. Comrade Potts explained that the TAS six points were more like prompts and were designed to be taken as a whole.

Anyway, we turned to the CPGB’s *Draft programme*. Comrade Wrack said that he might take a different approach, mentioning in particular the length. He and comrade Potts will present their thoughts at our next meeting in a fortnight’s time.

Both myself and comrade Macnair readily admitted that our *Draft programme* is long, certainly compared to the very, very brief minimum-maximum programmes of the Second International. Theirs took a few thousand words or less, ours around 13,000. We have, though, made a determined effort to cut the wordage wherever possible and resist the endless calls to add this, that and the other. Yes, less is more!

But, especially in the light of the experience of the Soviet Union, we have considered it necessary to go in for far greater detail than in the past. Our commitment to democracy needed to be explained and emphasised whenever possible. The fight for democracy is vital in the workers’ movement and in relation to the capitalist state as well. Hence the demands for elections, recallability and officials taking only the average wage, and calls to abolish the House of Lords and the monarchy, for a federal republic, replacing the standing army with a popular militia, etc. The fight for democracy must continue under socialism too till the point where the state itself finally withers away and we have the mere administration of things.

The same goes with internationalism. It needed to be explained and emphasised. Communist internationalism is about far more than anti-imperialism and opposition to nationalism. It is a recognition that the working class cannot liberate itself in one country alone. It requires organisation and coordination on a global scale. The decisive breakthrough will though probably happen on a continental scale. That is why we devote half a page, a whole section (3.1.6), to Europe.

Not that the programmes of ‘official communism’ were short. If anything, they were/are far longer than ours ... and have a habit of already being hopelessly dated even before they come off the printing press. The *British road to socialism* comes to mind.

Finally, we noted the successful launch of the Why Marx? ‘Building a Communist Party’ series on February 6 and the *Prometheus*/TAS ‘Marxist unity: building a mass Communist Party’ February 8 day school in Salford.

Both evidence of modest, but real progress ●

## Notes

1. [prometheusjournal.org/2025/02/03/february-editorial](http://prometheusjournal.org/2025/02/03/february-editorial).
2. For all six points, see ‘Second-round progress’ *Weekly Worker* January 16 2025: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1521/second-round-progress](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1521/second-round-progress).

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## Online Communist Forum



Sunday February 16 2.30pm (note: earlier start)  
Mike Macnair and Roxy Hall discuss  
Marxism and the goal of trans liberation

Use this link to register:  
[communistparty.co.uk/ocf](http://communistparty.co.uk/ocf)

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](http://communistparty.co.uk) and  
Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at  
[Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be  
viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly worker

## Stereotypes are often true

## Politics of the generation game

How leftwing are the Zoomers? We are told that 47% want “the entire way our society is organised” to be “radically changed through revolution.” Paul Demarty examines generational dynamics

A rare piece of cheery news greets readers of *The Socialist*, the weekly paper of the Socialist Party in England and Wales:

47% of people aged 13-27 think: “The entire way our society is organised must be radically changed through revolution”, according to a Channel 4 report, ‘Gen Z: trends, truth and trust’. Other reported findings reveal a deep mistrust in establishment institutions and a sense that ‘the system is rigged against us’.<sup>1</sup>

In various mainstream publications, this is more a cause for alarm than celebration. *The Guardian* is typical:

The Channel 4 report ... found 33% of those aged 13-27 agreed that the UK would be better off “if the army was in charge”, and 47% agreed that “the entire way our society is organised must be radically changed through revolution” ... Is the younger generation really so keen on authoritarian leadership?<sup>2</sup>

For the UK’s leading liberal daily, it is no surprise that desire for revolution is *ipso facto* authoritarian and of a piece with a desire for military rule. The piece also notes some eye-catching survey answers procured by the *Daily Mail* - that found a supermajority of this group in favour of the chemical castration of sex offenders, and 45% in favour of restoring the death penalty.

### Crunching numbers

What, then, are we to make of ‘Gen Z’, the ‘zoomers’, or whatever else you want to call people who are between 13 and 27 years old?

One’s first instinct is to say - nothing terribly much. What is one to do with such crude generational stratification? I am what they call a ‘geriatric millennial’, which feels half-right. Does an arbitrary 28-year-old have more in common with me than she does with an arbitrary 27-year-old? Does a 13-year-old have more in common with a 27-year-old than a 12-year-old? Is this more or less meaningful than Myers Briggs-style personality types, or indeed star signs? What is all this stuff for?

The straightforward answer is - it is for marketing. When you are trying to sell consumer products and services to people, you need to understand the consumers sufficiently to sell enough of your stuff to make your business viable. Crude statistical methods may be just fine for the purpose, even if they defy common sense, so long as revenue comes out the other end of the model. It is marketing, after all, that gave us the old ‘ABC1C2DE’ set of social class categories, which admittedly are more memorable to us geriatric millennials (and, I suppose, baby gen-X-ers) than the young folks. People seem more obsessed with age today.



Five generations: Armenian family (1901)

It is not an uninteresting axis of sociological analysis, but one beset by the troubling reality that people insist, against their better judgment, on getting older. Who should we compare ‘Zoomers’ to: their ‘millennial’ contemporaries, or those same millennials 14 years ago, when they were the age of the Zoomers?

Such subtleties do not seem to have unduly worried the authors of ‘Gen Z: trends, truth and trust’, which Channel 4 rather ambitiously called a research study on political attitudes - and specifically attitudes to the media - and which is the basis for *The Socialist*’s glee - and *The Guardian*’s panic.<sup>3</sup> On closer examination, we discover that this is all in fact the work of Craft, a market research agency (what else?), based at 1 Canada Square - the pyramid-capped carbuncle in the middle of Canary Wharf. This is the third such report it has produced for Channel 4 on this subject.

From squinting at the footnotes in the flashy pdf C4 published, it seems to be based on a survey of 2,000 ‘Zoomers’, with a survey of 1,000 people aged 28-65 for comparison. This is claimed to be nationally representative, but there are no details as to *how* this was assured, or in which terms ‘representativeness’ was conceived for two spectacularly tiny samples. I have been unable to find any description of the survey methodology, which is not encouraging. By way of contrast, the annual British Social Attitudes survey is always accompanied by a long pdf offering all these gory details - the 2024 edition comes to 20 pages.<sup>4</sup> The marketing mavens of Craft plainly consider scientific transparency *infra dig*.

That said, the fact that this crew were able to find a thousand or so youngsters with a clear (if no doubt somewhat politically indeterminate) sense of the necessity of revolution is heartening on its own - even if, *per impossibile*, they have conducted the least representative survey in

history, and somehow managed to interview *everyone in the country* in that age bracket prepared to openly call for revolution. I would propose, however, that we should take heart not from the idea that a great youth revolt is about to sweep socialism into being, but from more modest encouragements.

### Size

The fundamental problem for the socialist left is a simple one: size matters. This is obvious as a matter of common sense - larger parties and organisations, all other things being equal, have more *potential* impact than smaller ones. (All things are, of course, not equal - but I leave that to one side.)

There is something deeper here, however, than mere common sense. All the non-size-related advantages in the class struggle - control of production and distribution, preponderance of armed strength, control of the political and judicial apparatuses, etc - accrue to the ruling class and its various proxies.

In order even to obtain small, partial victories, the workers’ movement must unite large numbers. Victory in a single strike requires minimising the number of scabs, for example, which in turn demands that the workers at the firm refrain from scabbing, but *also* that the unemployed in the surrounding community abstain from scabbing under severe economic pressure. It is mass organisation, at a larger scale, that allows us to redress some of the other imbalances - gatecrashing the political system, gaining some economic leverage through union strength and cooperatives, arming ourselves, and so forth.

To belong to the socialist left in times when it is small and marginal, therefore, is intensely demoralising. It is to watch the world around you grow meaner, crueller, ever more debased with violence. Unchallenged, capitalism at some point devolves to warlordism. It is a

hard thing to watch, helplessly, from the sidelines.

After the great snowstorm in February 2018 - the ‘beast from the east’ - I found myself in a tailback on a country lane, which turned out to be obstructed by a vast snowdrift. At the front of the queue, a man was digging away at this mountain with a tiny child’s beach spade, presumably the only relevant item in his car boot at just that moment. In times of reaction, we are all that man. There is so much to do - more and more every minute - and no tools to hand to do it all with. Before long, you cannot imagine seeing another victory in your life.

The means by which we get through these periods are, ultimately, generational. This is true in both directions. Older comrades, who have lived through both success and failure, have an important role to play, which is not always properly appreciated in a leftwing political culture somewhat too enamoured with youth. But so also do the young, with minds still voracious for fresh understanding, and readier to take risks.

The struggle is a long one, and decisive in its success or failure is generational replacement, especially in fallow periods. When done well, the generations shape each other. It is a kind of conflict, but *agonistic* rather than antagonistic. The youth fearlessly challenge the elder comrades on those points that have, perhaps even unnoticed, become unquestioned dogmas among them; to get out of their routines, among other mere technical matters. The elders in turn teach the youth how to operate in the wider movement, to think strategically, perhaps over more time than the young recruit has yet been alive. There must be friction - it is never *a priori* obvious whether a policy is patient or merely complacent, daring or merely adventurist. They learn from each other. In the process, a political tradition is handed on, but necessarily changed in the effort.

I may be accused here of dealing in stereotypes, but stereotypes are often true. It is merely a fact of human neurobiology that, to put it crudely, young minds are on average cleverer and more foolish, and old minds wiser and more stupid. These things matter. We are, after all, seeking the liberation of all human beings *as they are*, not some collection of immaterial souls floating frictionlessly around a spirit-world.

### Wrong

Let us think of how it can all go wrong. There are many ways: the anarchist, well into middle age, still insisting on starting brawls with the police on demonstrations; or the precocious youth who has become fixated on some *outré* philosopher or another and can no longer be even minimally corrected by the elders’ transmissions from planet Earth.

But the most spectacular examples are the most instructive.

Think of the Socialist Workers Party, which recruits healthy numbers of youngsters at university - only to burn them out by exhausting their energy in fruitless attempts to recapture past glories. When the SWP rape scandal broke in 2013, the leadership - disproportionately drawn from older comrades - could only lean harder on their command-and-control methods in response. The vast majority of the youth decamped, largely to become absorbed in facile identitarian fads.

Suppose Channel 4 and Craft have done a somewhat representative survey. Large numbers of young people have taken stock of the world around them - as I did, in the wake of the Iraq invasion, and a former generation did in the midst of the horrors of Vietnam, and as people a little younger than me did when the financial system came to the brink of collapse and only banking oligarchs were protected from the dismal consequences - and decided that revolutionary change was needed.

Any adherent of the revolutionary left should find this a matter of relief and great promise. More than the possibilities presented by this particular cohort of potential recruits, which are great enough, we are reminded of the basic point of Marxism: that capitalism, like all class societies, trains its own gravediggers, and no end of strength in force of arms or ideological enforcement can convince everyone, all of the time, that we live in the best of all possible worlds. It is worth digging away, even when we only have a child’s spade to hand!

What we must *not* do - and here I speak, frankly, to and for the contingent who have been around the block a few times - is idealise the youth, or put too much on their shoulders. We must not project onto them an image of SWPers or CPGBers, ready to sprout fully-formed. We must not suppose that new layers will be insensate to our political weaknesses and cultural deficiencies.

Nor should we pretend that some new turn of world events will deliver a huge generation to our disposal. Allegiance must be earned, in a culture of equality - above all in a culture of honesty denuded of official optimism - and it must be earned from the new layers that are actually there, not the ones we complacently imagine just over the horizon.

The youth of today will be the elders of tomorrow only if their commitment can survive the setbacks intrinsic to the struggle. That is our duty, regardless of the survey data ●

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### Notes

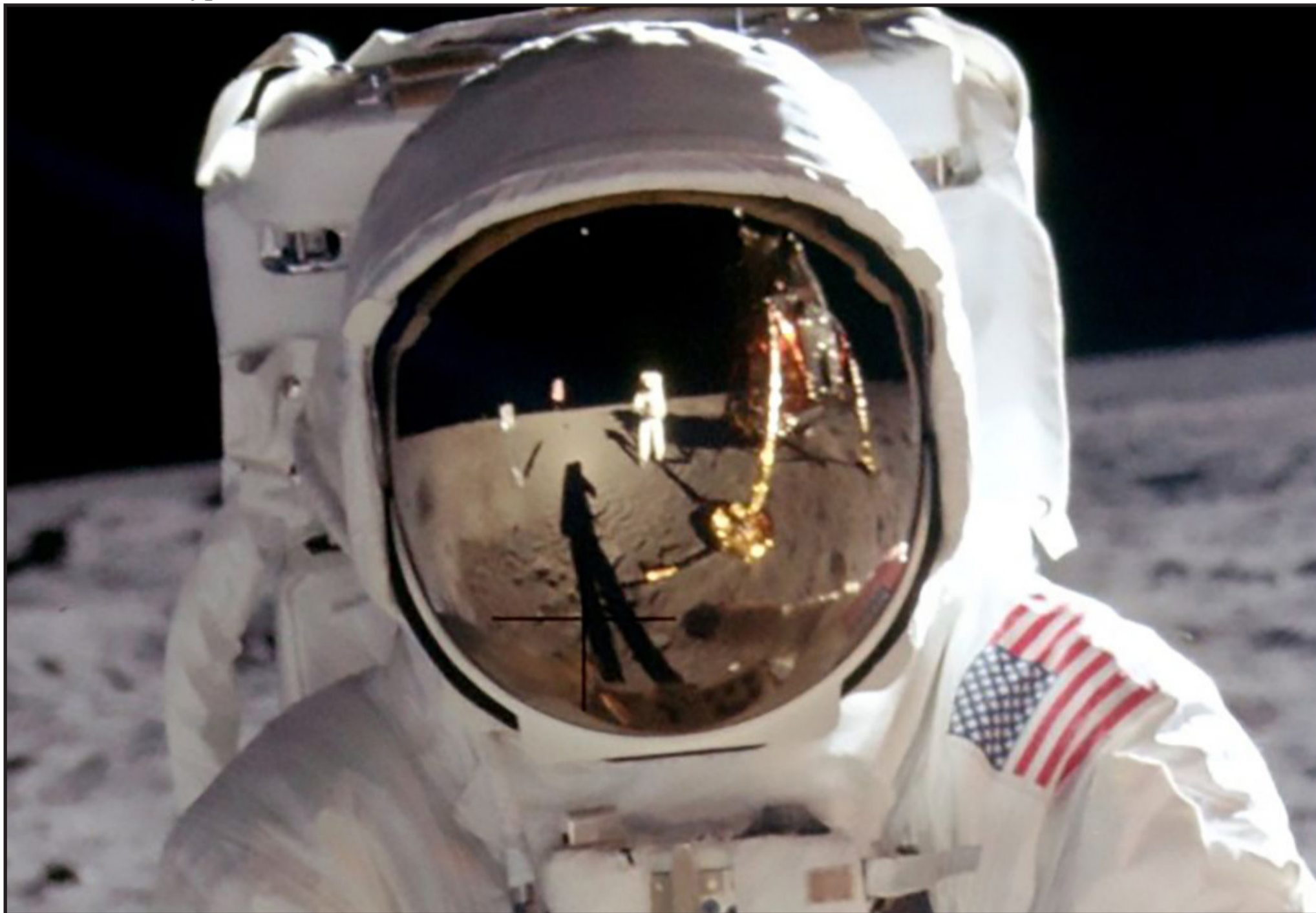
1. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/135356/05-02-2025/millions-want-revolution-but-how.
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SUPPLEMENT

# Flags on Mars

In his inauguration speech Donald Trump talked of extending America's "manifest destiny" into space and planting the "Stars and Stripes on the planet Mars". **Jack Conrad** says the left would be well advised not to fall for the hype



All that the astronauts did on the moon was plant the American flag, shoot some amateur film and carry back a few bags of rocks

**D**onald Trump's aim of landing American astronauts on Mars within the next four years clearly delighted Elon Musk. He gave it an instant two-thumbs-up. Musk stands not only to make shedloads more money from lucrative government contracts: he sees this as a vital step towards establishing a human colony on the planet. A lifetime passion.<sup>1</sup>

However, the four-year time frame is far from realistic. After all, because of repeated delays in Nasa's Artemis programme, there has not even been a return to the moon. Last time was Apollo 17 in 1972. But, whereas the moon is reachable within about three days, it takes a *minimum* of six months to get to Mars. Because of the huge distances involved, there are only two effective launch windows open during Trump's presidency: late 2026 and late 2028.

Musk's Starship is ideal for such a mission in terms of lift, cost and planned production run. However, it is obviously still under test and development. Flight 7, on January 17, successfully lifted off from Starbase in Texas, but ended eight minutes, 27 seconds later with what rocket engineers call 'disassembly' - ie, an explosion - and the release of 95 tons of metal and nitrogen oxide pollutants into the upper atmosphere. So maybe an uncrewed mission in 2026? Most likely not though.

What about 2028? Leave aside Space X's Starship: there needs to be multiple strides forward in life support technology. Astronauts have to be shielded from deadly solar radiation and provision must be made for medical care, hygiene, water, food supplies and overcoming the inevitable psychological problems. That is, if astronauts are to return happy and healthy to Earth after more than two years of isolation. Remember, no real-time communication, nor any chance of rescue in the event of things going wrong.

More realistic would be a first crewed mission within 10 years - the sort of time frame set by John F Kennedy's 1961 'moon speech'. Even that would be a breathtaking technological achievement.

Meanwhile, there is America's ongoing plan to put a space station in high moon orbit and build a moon base - the Gateway programme (known informally as the Tollbooth). Some time in 2027 an Artemis space craft is due to head off to the moon with the initial modules and components. Perhaps a year later, another Artemis will deliver the first astronauts to the space station, from where regular moon landings will be launched. Once that gets underway, a permanent surface base would, stage by stage, be locked and bolted together - perhaps at Shackleton Crater near the lunar south pole, which is known to harbour water ice. Moon base would support a team of four astronauts for up to a week at

a time.<sup>2</sup> With such an outpost up and running, the engineering, endurance and survival techniques and equipment needed for a Mars mission in the mid-late 2030s can be tested and perfected with relative confidence.

However, it is clear that Nasa is in a mess. Leave aside purging the agency of Trump's 'diversity, equality, inclusion and accessibility' bugbear, not to mention the two astronauts, Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams, stranded aboard the International Space Station due to the failure of Boeing's Starliner spacecraft. There is the moon. Why does Nasa need an orbiter? Why not go direct? Space X's Starship could, once it is fully tried and tested, do that, if, of course, it was equipped with a suitable lander. But Nasa threw money at the so-called 'National Team' - a consortium consisting of Blue Origin, Lockheed Martin, Draper Labs, Boeing and some other smaller companies. Political sway decided. Robert Zubrin, a dedicated space wonk, damningly argues that, unlike Apollo, Artemis is "not a *purpose-driven* programme. It is a *vendor-driven* programme". He says that the Apollo programme "spent money in order to do things", while "Artemis is doing things in order to spend money".<sup>3</sup>

Given the orbiter's \$6 billion price tag, incompatible equipment, the duplication of effort and what is seen as painfully slow progress, some, including Musk, demand a 'straight to Mars' approach. Why bother with

the boring old moon. And, whereas once he kept his criticisms private, he's now gone full XXX. On Christmas Day, for example, Musk issued this blunt message: "The Artemis architecture is extremely inefficient .... Something entirely new is needed." Later he added: "No, we're going straight to Mars. The moon is a distraction."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, since January 20 he is no longer just a private citizen (who happens to be the world's richest person). Musk now possesses unique political leverage *within* the Trump administration and is tasked with cutting government spending by \$2 trillion. Starliner, Artemis, Gateway and Nasa itself must be targets for his axe. We shall see.

Basically, today's US space programme is Trump's space programme going back to his first administration. Compared with what had gone before, he oversaw a definite shift in emphasis. Trump told Nasa to establish an overwhelming military superiority in near space and to simultaneously press ahead with deep space missions. The Donald loves display.

He certainly has no time for the long-term considerations, that is clear. The Asteroid Redirect Mission was defunded in March 2017. Designed to bring an asteroid into the moon's orbit not only with a view to studying it, ARM would be used to develop the technology necessary to head off an asteroid that threatens the Earth (65 million years ago an asteroid smashed into what is now the Gulf of Mexico,



# SUPPLEMENT

sent a huge plume of ash and debris into the upper atmosphere and triggered the extinction of roughly three-quarters of all animal species, including the dinosaurs<sup>5</sup>).

No less myopically, Trump ordered a \$100 million cut in the already modest Earth science programme. The DSCOVER, OCO-3, PACE and CLARREO Pathfinder missions were scrapped - all devoted to monitoring global warming.<sup>6</sup> But, when it came to the militarisation of space, Trump ordered a 10% spending hike. And, further pandering to the top brass, Trump formed the United States Space Force, which now stands alongside the traditional branches of the US military - army, navy, marines, airforce and coast guard. The reasoning is straightforward: who commands near space commands the whole world.

Understandably, Russia, China, Japan, the EU, India and the UK all try to compete. Each country/bloc now has independent capabilities. Russia, of course, continues within the Soviet-era paradigm of regular manned flights, rocket launches, satellites, etc. Nonetheless, Dmitry Rogozin, director general of Roscosmos, Russia's space corporation, has outlined plans for crewed moon landings beginning by 2030. Cosmonauts would live in an inflatable module. In pursuit of this ambitious goal Russia commissioned the new Yenisei super heavy booster with the capacity to lift 27 tons into lunar orbit.<sup>7</sup> Yet, given the parlous state of the Russian economy, most observers express strong doubts.<sup>8</sup>

Over the last few years, officials from the European Space Agency have likewise vaguely talked of establishing a permanent moon base, which would, once again, be located near the south pole.<sup>8</sup> The claim being that it will provide a staging post for getting Europeans to Mars by 2040.<sup>9</sup>

China, however, ought to be taken rather more seriously, when it comes to space. Through spending big time - around \$19.89 billion in 2024 - China has undoubtedly hauled itself into the premier league. Progress has been steady and sure. In October 2003 the Shenzhou 5 spacecraft orbited Earth 21 times. Yang Liwei became the country's first taikonaut. In September 2011 China established its first space laboratory (abandoned in 2013) and in May 2018 the country made the first soft landing on the dark side of the moon. A few days later its rover, Yutu 2, began exploring the giant Von Kármán crater. Not long after that, in 2020, China established the permanently crewed Tiangong space station. The third and final module was successfully added two years later.

Displaying an impressive confidence in the future, Chinese officials have plans for a crewed moon landing in 2030 and eventually going to Mars. Admittedly, this owes more to ambition rather than hard commitment. China's Mars time frame lies somewhere between 2040 and 2060. Nonetheless, it is determined to catch up with and eventually overtake the US. The Hong Kong-based space consultant, Blaine Curcio, says China's space programme is "perhaps now only 10 to 15 years behind the US's in terms of technology".<sup>10</sup> There has, despite that, been talk of getting there by 2033.<sup>11</sup> However, I take it as that - talk.

Meanwhile, US expenditure on space still more than equals that of the rest of the world put together.<sup>12</sup>

## Economics

Private capital has been central to US space programmes from the start. But, where there were once multiple Nasa contractors, now private companies put cargoes and crews into orbit under their own brand name: eg, Space X, Blue Origin, Boeing and Sierra Space. And not only do we now have reusable launchers and disposable satellites: the cost of putting stuff into space has dropped massively. Titan II could launch a kilogramme into low orbit for \$30,600, Saturn V \$5,400 and the much vaunted Space Shuttle a whopping \$65,000. With Space X's Falcon Heavy it is a mere \$1,500.<sup>13</sup>

Such dramatic cost reductions have made the commercialisation of space a viable prospect. Space tourism is being heavily marketed to the super-rich - a cash-strapped Russia was selling trips to the International Space Station for between \$20 and \$25 million. That came to an end in 2010. However, Space X, Blue Origin and Boeing each have their own plans for cislunar tourism and there is a long queue ready and waiting

to go. The promise is that they will be sent looping round the moon and back to Earth, awed and "forever changed".<sup>14</sup>

There are other commercial plans afoot too. Companies such as Deep Space and Planetary Resources have well connected billionaire investors and the idea is to capture and direct mineral-rich asteroids into Earth orbit. About 15,000 asteroids have been identified for potential mining activity. One, 16 Psyche, purportedly contains \$700 quintillion worth of gold - "enough for every person on Earth to receive about \$93 billion".<sup>15</sup> Believe that and you'll believe anything. Obviously the asteroid-mining advocates appear to be ignorant of the labour theory of value, going back to Adam Smith and David Ricardo (leave aside Karl Marx). They also appear to be ignorant of the elementary laws of supply and demand (going back to James Steuart<sup>16</sup>).

Crudely put, double the supply of gold and you halve the price of gold.<sup>17</sup> Today the value of all gold ever mined is about \$7.5 trillion. Flooding the market with \$700 quintillion - that is, 700 billion billions - would quickly reduce the value of a kilogram of gold to the equivalent of cardboard! And the idea of asteroid-mining trillionaires distributing their lucre equally to "every person on Earth" is touching, but no less fanciful.

There is, after all, the little problem of getting such an object back to Earth - even if it comes in bits and pieces - that is, without wreaking massive destruction, as it slams into the planet. 16 Psyche is much bigger than London and has an estimated mass of near  $(2.287 \pm 0.070) \times 10^{19}$  kg. For the likes of you and me that means 16 Psyche weighs one hell of a lot and can potentially cause one hell of a lot of damage.

Nonetheless, such ventures have been given the green light by the 2019 Space Commerce Free Enterprise Act. It allows US companies to circumvent parts of the Outer Space Treaty agreed with the USSR back in 1967. Under the terms of that treaty not only nuclear weapons were banned from space: so too were territorial claims. And yet mineral-rich asteroids are being claimed by space capitalists at this very moment - perhaps the seeds of future space wars fought by rival buccaneer outfits.<sup>18</sup>

Mining asteroids comes with the promise, as might be expected, of doing away with the dreadful air, water and soil pollution caused by normal mining operations here on Earth. Even the child labour involved would apparently be done away with. Again believe that and you'll believe anything. Say a chunk of 16 Psyche is crash-landed into Australia's Gibson Desert. Leave aside the impact debris: the gold would still have to be extracted using existing mining methods. Frankly, though, I am sceptical. I would expect the cost of extracting a kilogram of gold here on Earth to be far cheaper in terms of labour inputs than asteroid mining for the conceivable future.

## Colonies

We need to be sceptical too when it comes to plans for colonising the moon. As its name might suggest, the Moon Society, founded in 2000, is "dedicated to promoting large-scale human exploration, research and settlement of the moon".<sup>19</sup> Jeff Bezos, boss of Blue Origin, envisages linking up with Nasa and the European Space Agency to found a moon colony "for human settlers and heavy industry".<sup>20</sup> Newt Gingrich even canvassed the idea of a 13,000-strong colony and the moon becoming the 51st American state.<sup>21</sup> Doubtless there will be exploratory missions, even bases. But heavy industry and a self-sustaining population? Unlikely any time soon, if ever.

True, the moon has water, metals and rare-earth minerals and is well suited for generating solar power (there is no air, no clouds). Perhaps that would allow for making rocket fuels, establishing hydroponic gardens and specialised industrial processes impossible here on Earth. However, the idea of exporting anything back to Earth on scale would simply be prohibitively expensive. On the contrary, any moon base or colony would be dependent on constant supplies from the home planet. Without that it is death.

The moon's low gravity, toxic regolith and lack of an atmosphere to provide protection from solar radiation, represents little or no problem for robots. That cannot be said of us flesh-and-blood human beings. Low gravity, about a sixth of the Earth's, leads to

a steady loss in bone density and many other physiological problems besides: "muscles in the arms and legs experience atrophy, the cardiovascular system is compromised, the immune system is suppressed, and increased cranial pressure leads to vision problems and neurological impairments".<sup>22</sup> Things can be mitigated through rigorous exercise, but only marginally. Our bodies are intrinsically adapted to Earth.

To avoid the sun's radiation colonists would certainly have to live in specially shielded modules - that or underground in caves. Nonetheless, the chances of getting bronchitis and cancers would considerably increase, not least due to toxic moon dust. Apollo astronauts experienced respiratory problems, itching eyes and sore throats. Apollo 17 crew member Harrison Schmitt called it "lunar hay fever".<sup>23</sup> He spent a total of 75 hours on the moon. Colonists would face far worse, their stay on the moon would, after all, be rather longer.

For any society to survive it must produce ... and reproduce. That is true with the means of production, and it is also true biologically. Mice and medaka fish have been successfully mated in space, but, to put it mildly, "uncertainty remains around the feasibility and safety of human conception, gestation and labor in space".<sup>24</sup> The likelihood of women having spontaneous abortions and stillbirths must be very great indeed. No healthy lunar babies, no self-sustaining lunar colony.

Even if the problem of biological reproduction was somehow overcome, anyone born on the moon would not be able to function normally here on Earth due to the drastically different gravitational levels. Such people could conceivably evolve into an entirely separate species if they survived long enough as a population - the stuff of countless sci-fi novels.

Anyway, essentially the same problems are there with the Red Planet. Yes, Mars is the most Earth-like of all the planets and moons in our solar system. But that is not saying much. Gravity is about 38% of the Earth's and there is an atmosphere or sorts. But actually Mars is virtually airless - the mainly (95%) carbon dioxide atmosphere is 100 times less dense than Earth's. That counts as a laboratory vacuum. The virtual absence of an atmosphere also means that Mars has no ozone layer to shield the planet's surface from solar radiation. Once again, therefore, the safest place for colonists to live would be underground.

Barren, pitted with craters, the planet is also prone to gigantic dust storms. And Martian dust is just as sticky and toxic as lunar dust. It would not find its way into human lungs through breathing on the surface - of course not. No, it would come from "airlocks" and "spacesuits".<sup>25</sup>

To make matters worse, Mars is hellishly cold. On average the equatorial zone is 60 degrees Celsius below zero. Sometimes the temperature falls to -100°. At its warmest temperatures can nudge up to just over 0°. Antarctica is far more hospitable. Even an Earth plunged into a nuclear winter would be paradise in comparison - there would still be oxygen, oceans, a protective magnetic field. The only reason Mars is not covered in thick ice sheets is lack of surface water and lack of atmosphere.

True, there is plenty of iron and a little magnesium, titanium and aluminium.<sup>26</sup> But, as far as we know, nothing exists there that cannot be made or obtained infinitely more cheaply here on Earth. However, the problems with Mars do not end with health, economics and climate. There is politics too. Musk's stated goal is of a million-strong self-governing colony, which will escape the Earth's climate crisis and preserve human civilisation in the event of ecological collapse on Earth by spreading from planet to planet ... all the way to the stars.

Decisions will be made through "direct democracy". That is, referendums, tick boxes and weak or no political parties. In fact, "direct democracy" means decisions being made by the person asking the question!<sup>27</sup> In his half-crazed imagination that will, of course, be Musk himself - a recipe for one-man dictatorship. On X, Musk even called himself "Emperor of Mars".<sup>28</sup> Obviously a joke, but all jokes, if they are going to be funny, must have more than an element of truth to them.

His whole project, so he says, will take 40-100 years before full realisation. Well

before that, of course, Mars needs glass domes, power stations and an assortment of basic living fundamentals. After that infrastructure is complete, Musk then expects an "explosion of entrepreneurial opportunity". Mars will require "everything from iron foundries to pizza joints", he quips. Nonetheless, Musk has the honesty to admit that, to begin with, life on Mars will be "difficult, dangerous - a good chance you'll die".<sup>29</sup>

In fact, there is absolutely no chance of his project working out. Yes, as with the moon, human landings will doubtless happen sometime. There will be initial media hype and excitement. After that, though, popular interest should be expected to wane. But a million people on Mars? No - not even in a million years.

## Frontiers

Nonetheless, Trump is impatient. He wants the Stars and Stripes planted on Martian soil during his presidency. Given this is his second term, that means, as already argued, an altogether improbable late 2028.

Clearly, DJT, like JFK before him, longs to put an indelible mark on history. It almost comes off the pages of Niccolò Machiavelli: "Nothing brings a prince more prestige than great campaigns and striking demonstrations."<sup>30</sup>

Telstar, Alan Shepard, the 1969 Apollo landing, Space Shuttle, Space X, a return to the moon, mission Mars - all resonate with American national mythology. When captain James T Kirk of the USS Enterprise spoke of space being the "final frontier", he not only referred to his 23rd century present, but America's post-colonial past.

After 1783 and the Peace of Paris, Americans "shifted" from being a seaward-orientated people, with European preoccupations and a reliance on Atlantic supplies. Instead of being a European outpost, they increasingly looked west to taking hold of the interior - "that vast, tempting, unexplored wilderness".<sup>31</sup> From then on the US welcomed successive waves of poor and downtrodden Europeans to its shores ... and ever expanding frontier lands.

While many migrants settled in the great cities of the east and north-east as proletarians, millions headed west: "To the west, to the west, to the land of the free" (19th century English folk song). The native population was either subjected to genocide or driven from the best lands by wave after wave of these incomers - trappers, traders, adventurers, prospectors, loggers ... but above all small farmers. Alike Jeffersonian populism, Abraham Lincoln's Yankeeedom and Hollywood epics turned this class into a national icon: hence Daniel Boone, Davie Crockett, Bill Cody and the films of John Huston and Clint Eastwood. Dominant American ideology still lauds individualism, movement, expansion and internal colonisation ... and the final frontier is now projected into the vastness of space.

As already mentioned, in 1961 JF Kennedy made his famous speech before congress: "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth."<sup>32</sup> Kennedy spoke during the cold war. And in that atmosphere of artificially generated superpower rivalry every success for the Mercury, Gemini and finally the Apollo programme - annual cost around 1% of US GDP - generated rapturous popular enthusiasm. Of course, the US always possessed a huge technological and material advantage over the Soviet Union. Indeed, arguably, from the 1960s onwards, the USSR fell economically "under American hegemony".<sup>33</sup>

Kennedy was not around when Apollo's Eagle lander module touched down on the Sea of Tranquility. He died in Dallas, Texas, on November 22 1963, killed by an assassin's bullet. So it was Richard Nixon, the 37th president, who, on July 20 1969, made "the most historic telephone call ever made from the White House". He addressed Armstrong and Aldrin on the moon ... and an estimated 600 million TV viewers.<sup>34</sup>

Getting to Mars is going to be hugely expensive. Mainstream estimates vary from \$100 billion to \$250 billion over the time span of the whole project (though I have come across figures as high as \$1 trillion<sup>35</sup> and as low as \$1.5 billion and \$420 million annually "to keep it going" - the latter figure unsurprisingly coming from Robert Zubrin, co-founder of the Mars Society<sup>36</sup>).



Despite the preordained criticisms of such costs, high or low, the likes of Trump, Musk and Zubrin bank on the undiminished popularity of space spectacles - a YouGov poll in 2023 found 57% of Americans supported sending astronauts to Mars, with only 19% against.<sup>37</sup> Leave aside America's frontier heroes. There are sci-fi novels going from HG Wells' *The first men in the moon* (1901) to *Red Mars* (1992), *Green Mars* (1993), and *Blue Mars* (1996) by Kim Stanley Robinson. Crucially there are the long-running *Star trek* and *Star wars* TV and film franchises. Because of such mythopoeia, space is commonly thought of as ripe for human colonisation. It is the new America, the final frontier, over which naturally, America claims special responsibility. It, after all, is the quintessential frontier nation.

Space therefore constitutes one of those few elements around which national unity can be constructed in the US. As Zubrin remarks, Mars "isn't just about science. It's about America. It's about who we are. Are we still a nation of pioneers, leaders of the free world, a people whose great deeds are celebrated not just in museums, but in newspapers? The program needs to be our affirmative answer to that existential question."<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, without moving into space there is the supposed inevitability that problems here on Earth will continue to stack-up to the point of collapse. According to Rick W Tumlinson, co-founder of the US-based Space Frontier Foundation, unless we humans make the leap into space colonisation, we will "begin to slide into a new dark age".<sup>39</sup> He is far from alone. Because of "climate change, overdue asteroid strikes, epidemics and population growth, our own planet is increasingly precarious ... so humans must leave Earth and colonise a new planet soon," reckoned Stephen Hawking.<sup>40</sup> Bezos worries that Earth will "run out of resources", and that by the time we realise we need the infrastructure to get off-planet it will be too late to build it.<sup>41</sup>

## Germans and labour

In my opinion all this is bunk. The suggestion that space is the modern equivalent of crossing the Atlantic and 'discovering' the New World in 1492 is altogether unconvincing. The Americas, perhaps even before the end of the last ice age, supported abundant human life. Estimates of first habitation vary widely - "from 11,500 to 50,000 years ago".<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, whenever people first arrived, they flourished and settled everywhere from Alaska in the far north to Tierra del Fuego in the far south. They also produced their own high civilisations: eg, the Aztec and Inca empires.

Christopher Columbus, and the European conquistadors who followed him over the next 30 years, claimed vast swathes of territory and within next to no time allowed the Spanish monarchy to get its hands on unprecedented riches. The native people were enslaved *en masse* and gold and silver flooded into Madrid's bulging coffers. America, confirms the distinguished French historian, Fernand Braudel, represented the "treasure of treasures".<sup>43</sup>

There was, however, a fundamental problem: labour. Everything comes back to labour, Marx stressed in *Capital*. Because of Eurasia's much greater population densities the Spanish had developed a certain immunity to a wide range of diseases: measles, typhus, tuberculosis, smallpox, influenza, etc. Not the native Americans. European conquistadors came with their flintlocks, horses, steel swords and armour ... and germs.

Hernando Cortés beat the fiercely militaristic Aztec empire not only because his forces possessed immense technological advantages: in 1520 half the Aztec population - including the emperor, Cuitláhuac - died from a raging infection, which miraculously spared the Spanish. "By 1618," writes Jared Diamond, "Mexico's initial population of about 20 million had plummeted to about 1.6 million."<sup>44</sup> The same happened when Francisco Pizarro and his raggle-taggle army of 168 men took on the millions of the Inca empire in Peru. Smallpox arrived just ahead of them and decimated the native population, killing both the emperor, Huayna Capac, and his designated successor. Throughout the Americas it is estimated that around 95% of the native population died from European diseases.

Germans facilitated European conquest, but destroyed virtually the entire potential workforce. And without labour the Americas were as good as useless (what remained of the native slaves would annoyingly take flight into what was for them the familiar surrounding hills and forests). Labour therefore had to be recruited from the outside if the Americas were to be transformed from an ever-diminishing object of plunder into a self-expanding source of profit. After indentured European labour was tried and largely failed, the richest classes amongst the colonialists - and their Old World investors and state backers - turned to *systematically* buying black slaves.

They were typically purchased from the most *advanced* areas in west Africa (peasants made the best slaves, hunter-gatherers tended to go native and become Maroons). And, though you would not have thought it, given the British establishment's gushing nonsense about the leading role played by William Wilberforce - an independent MP, evangelical Christian and lifelong opponent of revolution and all radical causes - in the abolition of the slave trade, it should never be forgotten that slaves resisted, escaped, fought back, and, with Toussaint Louverture's revolution, they established their own St Dominique/Haiti free state.<sup>45</sup>

Only after that seismic event - a Caribbean October 1917 - did the UK parliament vote for abolition of the slave trade (not slavery). Of course, highly respectable British plantation owners, including the Church of England, made themselves fabulously wealthy through the exploitation of slave labour.

Some 12 million Africans were transported across the Atlantic (one and a half million perished during the 'middle passage' and an unknown, but surely even greater, number died prior to embarkation). These poor wretches partially substituted for the ghosts of the native Americans. African slaves were central to the plantation system - tobacco, coffee, but above all, sugar. Overwork, pitiless exploitation and malnutrition took a terrible toll. Up to a fifth of the slaves died within the first year. No problem: the labour force "could be replenished by further slave purchases".<sup>46</sup>

Only after two or three centuries of superhuman efforts - half driven by base greed, half by desperate yearnings for freedom - were the Americas reinvented and transformed into Europe's other half. Europe and the Americas fused into a single system - but one whose centre of gravity inexorably shifted from east to west. By the dawn of the 20th century the precocious US 'child' had already surpassed its aged 'parent'. The defeat of the Germany-Italy-Japan axis in 1945 certainly saw the transfer of world domination away from the exhausted British empire and the beginning of the so-called 'American century'. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left the US as the sole global superpower.

## Ecosystem

Neither the moon nor Mars are in any way modern equivalents of the Americas. Leave aside the lack of atmosphere and the absence of flora, fauna and running water: there is no native labour, nor is there a realistic chance of substantial population transfers. Zubrin writes of taking people on one-way trips to Mars at a rate similar to visits to the International Space Station - permanently manned since November 2000. To date 280 individuals have visited the facility.<sup>47</sup> However, some have made repeated trips, so we might put the total number of visits at 400. That would mean roughly 20 new Mars colonists arriving per annum.

But who would *seriously* volunteer to spend the rest of their lives confined most of the time to a system of caves or interconnected brick-covered domes, with the prospect of endless toil ahead of them? Zubrin's colony is expected to obtain its water from the underground permafrost, practise CO<sub>2</sub> agriculture in flimsy greenhouses and produce all their basic industrial needs. However, the Biosphere 2 experiment in Arizona, designed as a test bed for a Mars colony, was not able to produce either enough food or enough oxygen.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, a 2014 report by MIT researchers warns that Mars colonists would soon be dying - from suffocation, starvation, dehydration or incineration. The analysis also concludes that a fleet of 15 Falcon heavy rockets - costing around \$4.5 billion - would

be needed to support just the first four Mars colonists.<sup>49</sup>

Of course, Musk proposes the idea of thousands of Starships landing tens of thousands of people, with a view to creating a metropolis that will "preserve the light of consciousness" in the event of civilisational collapse here on Earth. An interplanetary D-Day. But, while Operation Overlord landed 150,000 allied troops on the beaches of Normandy in June 1944, they were supplied and resupplied by ships capable of carrying 10,000 tons of cargo from the other side of the Channel in a matter of hours. Starships might be able to carry 100 tons from Earth ... but they would take between 6 and 18 months in transit. Not enough could be delivered ... by far.

Regardless of the figures, no Martian colony could possibly survive a collapse on Earth. Technological civilisation "requires a vast division of labour". Given the multitude of components and alloys that go into an Apple watch, it is unlikely that any Martian colony could produce one, or "even a wristwatch battery, let alone an iPhone".<sup>50</sup>

Hence Musk's vaulting projections of a million people on Mars and the promise of phenomenal returns are quite frankly risible. There is no chance of plunder, profit, let alone sustainability. The chatter about mining "gold, silver, uranium, platinum, palladium and other precious metals" is just that - chatter.<sup>51</sup> Talk of Martian cities and towns acting as humanity's technological driver, etc owes everything to quackery and nothing to a rational investment of labour time. The relative unit costs of doing virtually anything on Mars would be a thousand, a million times greater than on Earth. Ferrying things back here, to Earth, is technologically feasible, of course, but commercial madness to the nth degree.

Nor do space fantasies stand in the noble tradition of Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein - a ridiculous suggestion, made by Dr James Williams of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.<sup>52</sup> All that the astronauts did on the moon was plant the American flag, shoot some amateur film, leave some dusty footprints and carry back a few bags of rocks. Apollo was neither about economic returns nor scientific discovery. It was a *propaganda* triumph over the Soviet Union - a second-rate superpower.

What the moon missions of China, Russia, Europe, Japan and India announce is that they too possess engineering prowess, they too have the surplus wealth needed and they too should command global respect. Such missions are certainly designed to generate a giddy popular enthusiasm. But, even with the additional bonus of eventually going on to Mars, once the first crews arrive, enthusiasm rapidly dwindles. After the first two Apollo missions the American public tended to lose interest. Subsequent moon landings did not command the same rapt attention, that is for sure. Conceivably the same phenomenon might see a future US administration concluding that Mars projects are simply a waste of public money.

Crewed Mars missions have no immediate economic or scientific worth, that is for sure - the overwhelming consensus. Let me cite three US space establishment old hands. Douglas Osheroff, a Nobel prize-winning physicist, who sat on the committee which investigated the 2003 Columbia accident, is perfectly frank: "Right now there is no economic value in going to Mars."<sup>53</sup> Ed Weiler, former assistant advisor of Nasa's office of space science, is equally candid: "These missions will not be driven by science."<sup>54</sup> Neil deGrasse Tyson, astrophysicist and member of George W Bush's Mars commission, admits that if "pure science" was the purpose, "it's obvious that you would send robots".<sup>55</sup> Compared with astronauts, robots are 50 or 100 times less expensive.

No-one with a modicum of scientific knowledge ever doubted that various metals can be found on Mars. There is also frozen surface water at the poles and beneath the planet's rocky surface. We do not need astronauts travelling in a tiny metal box over 60 million miles to tell us that. Spectroscopic telescopes, satellite cameras and rovers long ago proved that.

Some breezily talk of terraforming.<sup>56</sup> Mars might conceivably be artificially warmed with giant space mirrors, water-rich asteroids could be bought down to the surface and

nuclear-powered plants may one day pump out perfluorocarbons (super greenhouse gases). But, before water once again runs on the surface and recreates seas and lakes, much time would have to pass: perhaps a hundred thousand years. Mars would, despite that, still remain cold, alien and thoroughly inhospitable to life as we know it on Earth - except for micro-organisms.

So, once again, hidden dangers. Each one of us hosts 100 trillion micro-organisms. They constitute our "extended genome".<sup>57</sup> While Mars rovers are sterilised, that is impossible with us humans. Micro-organisms are vital for our digestive system, etc. Hence we are bound to contaminate Mars. And micro-organisms are in turn bound to evolve on Mars - if it is terraformed - maybe into forms against which we, neither on Mars nor on Earth, possess immunological defences. Note, the returning Apollo 11 astronauts were kept in quarantine for 21 days, having returned from a sterile moon in 1969.

Worshippers of science doggedly insist that going into space is the one sure way to escape the usual list of so-called intractable problems mounting up here on Earth: eg, war, overpopulation, hunger, growing inequality, global warming and resource depletion. For them technology holds the solution to virtually everything. By the same measure the huge exertions required for space colonisation would encourage humanity to leave behind parochial concerns and become themselves.

Isaac Asimov, the celebrated 20th century science fiction writer, touchingly hoped that "cooperation in something large enough to fire the hearts and mind" - like a Mars mission - would make people "forget the petty quarrels that have engaged them for thousands of years in wars over insignificant scraps of earthly territory".<sup>58</sup> Carl Sagan expressed similar sentiments: "For all its material advantages, the sedentary life has left us edgy, unfulfilled. Even after 400 generations in villages and cities, we haven't forgotten. The open road still softly calls, like a nearly forgotten song of childhood."<sup>59</sup> Ray Bradbury, author of *The Martian chronicles*, was no less embarrassing: "The moment we land on Mars all the people of the world will weep with joy."<sup>60</sup>

Marxism does not doubt the benefits that can come from cooperation, the desire to explore or overcoming parochial concerns. But cooperation, exploration and overcoming parochial concerns must be examined historically and contextualised socially; not treated in a manner which universalises the American dream and Elon Musk.

Scattered around the Indian Ocean coast, in India and Pakistan, the Philippines, and Malaysia - marking the southern route out of Africa and the "beachcombing" trail to Australia - there are genetically distinct "remnants" of the original *homo sapiens*.<sup>61</sup> Having arrived between 80,000 and 75,000 years ago, they often liked what they found. With the subsequent expansion in population numbers and pressure on natural resources, some immediate descendants would trek off to the next suitable location along the coast. But enough were perfectly happy to stay firmly put.

Nor should it be forgotten that until recent times many groups of hunter-gatherers contentedly enjoyed what some would describe as a primitive existence (others might be tempted to call it idyllic). Such was their mastery of the local environment - yes, through cooperation and exploration - that necessary labour could be reduced to a couple of hours. The rest of their day was spent eating, story-telling, playing with the children, dancing, etc. Why move under such benevolent circumstances?

Nor should technological progress be viewed as linear. After 1450 China scuppered its ocean-going fleet of big treasure ships and dismantled its shipyards (mechanical clocks and water-driven spinning machines were also abandoned). Between 1600 and 1853 Japan virtually eliminated what had up till then been a lucrative line in the production of guns. In the 1880s legislation put a stop to the introduction of public electric street lighting in London. Jared Diamond provides other examples of technological "reversals", which occurred during prehistory. Aboriginal Tasmanians abandoned bone tools and fishing, aboriginal Australians may have abandoned the bow and arrow, Torres Islanders canoes, Polynesians pottery, etc.<sup>62</sup>



# SUPPLEMENT

There are materialist explanations for all such seemingly aberrant behaviour; but clearly teleological notions of an inevitable progression from flint axes to landing humans on Mars are quite erroneous.

## Science

Marxists have always had a positive attitude towards science and technology. But we do not privilege science and technology or take an uncritical view. Motivation, application and consequences must all be thoroughly interrogated. Neither science nor technology are neutral. So it is wrong to conflate scientific and technological progress with *social* progress (a mistake which joins 'official communism', Silicon Valley billionaires and so-called leftwing accelerationists).

The main locomotive of history is class struggle and the constant striving for human freedom: eg, the Athenian citizen-peasant revolution of 508-507 BCE, the 73-71 BCE Spartacus uprising, the 1381 peasant revolt, the Hussites of 14th century Bohemia, the 1789 French Revolution, Chartism, the First International, the 1871 Paris Commune, the 19th century democratic breakthrough in Europe, the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Development of the productive forces and the rational application of science create the objective basis for generalised human freedom and the rounded development of each individual. But capitalism does not do that. Capitalism skews progress - it performs technological miracles, while simultaneously leaving millions in poverty. Capitalism perverts science - not only by bending it to the lopsided, narrow and demeaning dictates of profit, but by turning it against humanity, to the extent of threatening our very survival.

The insights, ingenuity and resources of science have been channelled into ways of killing and destroying on an almost unimaginable scale: carpet-bombing, gas chambers, nuclear warheads, chemical and biological weapons. Walter Benjamin therefore damningly wrote: "If the natural use of productive forces is impeded by the property system, then the increase in technological means, in speed, in sources of energy will press towards an unnatural use. This is found in war."<sup>63</sup> Hence for him revolutions are not so much about speeding up the train of progress, "but the human race grabbing for the emergency brake"<sup>64</sup>

The fact of the matter is that the US space business is a branch, or extension, of the military-industrial complex. Indeed there is a military-space-industrial complex. What is true for the US is true for Russia, China, the EU, Japan and India too. Satellites, rockets, tracking stations, etc owe far more to military requirements for spying, pinpoint targeting, the delivery of weapons of mass destruction, real-time command and battle communications than so-called pure science.

Loring Wirbel, a peace activist and expert in space technology, shows that even back in the 1950s the US "civilian satellite programme served as a cover for a wide-ranging spy satellite programme"<sup>65</sup> Nowadays, the US military relies on space technology, including commercial systems, which by their very nature have a dual use.

Take the Global Positioning System (GPS) of satellites, which allows motorists, seafarers, airline crews and even hill walkers to locate themselves to within a few feet. But, however welcome, this is merely a by-product. It should never be forgotten that GPS has *overriding* military functions. When a Ukrainian Storm Shadow missile hits a Russian command bunker with pinpoint accuracy, that is GPS at work. When a vehicle suspected of carrying Hamas militants is blasted to pieces by an Israeli drone strike in Gaza, that is GPS at work. When precision bombs slammed into Baghdad in 2003, that was GPS at work.

Indeed the US military boasts that during the invasion of Iraq 60% of all aerial bombardment was accounted for by GPS-guided bombs. The US deployed not so much airpower as spacepower. As former US airforce secretary James Roche triumphantly announced, concluding an April 2003 speech, "The war in space has already begun."<sup>66</sup>

Running alongside mission Mars and the highfalutin language of discovery, human adventure and manifest destiny lurks a sinister agenda of ensuring total US domination of space. The US military-space-industrial complex has tested all manner of exotic

kinetic and laser weapons. And, of course, Trump issued one of his countless executive orders on January 27 2025 giving the go-ahead to a "next-generation missile defense shield" that can "defend" the US against "any foreign aerial attack on the homeland". He has called it "the Iron Dome of America" - obviously a direct reference to Israel's successful Iron Dome.

However, to scale that up to US proportions would be insanely expensive. A \$2,470 trillion figure has been cited. Leave aside the branding: what appears to be on the table is, among other things, creating a system of monitors and sensors in space and giving them teeth with space- and ground-based interceptor missiles. The promise is that even the most advanced hypersonic ICBMs can be stopped.<sup>67</sup>

There is another aspect to mission Mars, which cannot be ignored. The US Mars project, like the rest of the military-space-industrial complex, constitutes a so-called third department of production (the other two being the production of the means of production and the production of the means of consumption). Department three allows capitalism to guarantee "maximum" self-expansion from the firm basis of the "minimum" consumption of the *relatively* impoverished masses.<sup>68</sup> Their limited ability to purchase the means of consumption no longer constitutes a barrier.

Turning the production of the means of destruction into a system of profit and self-expansion through state purchases effectively obliterates the distinction between consumption and destruction. This is possible precisely because for capital the purpose of production - the end aim - is not human consumption of use-values according to need: rather it is self-expansion. Problems of real use, and therefore *real* consumption, are overcome (though not eliminated) through the unlimited ability of the state to generate *artificial demand* and purchase waste - ie, the means of destruction - through credit and taxation. This innovative response to capitalist overproduction - initially tried before World War I and then after the 1929-33 world economic crisis - was made into a model of normality after 1945. Note, under Trump 2.0 the *peacetime* US arms budget is set to be \$850 billion in 2025 alone (well over twice as much as China and Russia combined).

The Trump administration justifies this obscene squandering of human and material resources through peddling an 'America first' patriotism (and generating jobs). Of course, this approach has a long history: eg, kaiser Germany, Bolshevism, European fascism, post-World War II USSR, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, the Taliban, Islamic State have all been credited with being existential enemies. Now it is China. Voting in favour of the endless production of waste thereby becomes a national duty and imposes a welcome internal discipline over the working class. Spending on space is essentially no different. Except that, besides patriotism, it is able to harness another misplaced idealism - the quixotic belief that space represents humanity's manifest destiny and promises solutions to countless seemingly intractable problems.

## Poverty and plenty

Meanwhile, the UN estimates that over a billion people have no access to clean drinking water, some 840 million have to survive on significantly less than the recommended daily intake of calories and around 40 million are infected with HIV/Aids. There is nothing inevitable or natural about any of this.

The International Monetary Fund and World Bank programmes of market 'reform' have greatly exacerbated the unevenness characteristic of the system over the last 40 years. Today the richest 1% own nearly half of the world's wealth, the poorest half of the world just 0.75%. And it is no surprise that a billionaire "emits a million times the carbon dioxide than the average person."<sup>69</sup> Leave aside the so-called third world: in Britain some 2.3 million people used a food bank in 2022-23.<sup>70</sup> In America, by far the richest country in the world, there are an estimated 770,000 homeless people.<sup>71</sup>

Yet with organisation and political will humanity has within its reach the ability to easily meet all basic needs. The wealth exists in abundance. Simply diverting the US arms budget to *real* human needs would do away

with global poverty - almost at a stroke. But such a turnaround can never happen through the banal platitudes and essentially diversionary calls of the NGOs, religious notables and various soft-left reformers for rich governments to do their moral duty. The modern state palpably exists to defend, serve and promote the self-expansion of capital - the two are inextricably interwoven and interdependent.

That, incidentally, is why leftwing calls to 'tax the rich' to overcome poverty, health underfunding and homelessness, is so misplaced. Mainstream governments do 'tax the rich'. Ultimately government revenue derives from profits. So, if they do not want to see the goose that lays those golden eggs taking flight, not only must tax rates be limited, but prior capital accumulation is required. Therefore, in order to 'tax the rich', the rich must stay rich ... and continue to exploit the working class. Taxing the rich in order to expropriate their riches, socialising capital - that, of course, is another matter entirely.

The fact of the matter is that capitalism long ago outlived any usefulness it once possessed. Now this most alienated of social relationships not only goes hand-in-hand with poverty, exploitation and war: it threatens to bring about a civilisational breakdown - perhaps some time between 2070 and 2090, through a tipping over of the climate crisis.<sup>72</sup> Objective circumstances cry out for revolutionary change.

Once humanity has superseded capitalism, overcome self-alienation and become properly human again, who knows what we might choose to do? Mars, along with other planets and moons in the solar system, could be explored by intelligent, self-replicating, evolving, robots as envisaged by John von Neumann.<sup>73</sup> From our solar system such probes could conceivably head off to nearby stars to explore Earth-like exoplanets.

If life arises whenever there is a suitably sized and suitably situated planet orbiting a suitably benign star, it means life must exist scattered here and there throughout the cosmos.

Life on Earth evolved through a DNA-RNA information system - albeit entirely randomly through natural selection - from a primeval soup some 3.5 billion years ago, to the point where consciousness emerged. Given the stupendous number of stars and planets in the universe, the chances are that we are far from alone when it comes to intelligence.

But is all that life out there the same as here on Earth? Does every life form need DNA-RNA? If in language, there is the Latin alphabet, can there not be the Arabic or Cyrillic ... or Mandarin characters. We have long wondered about such existential questions. It would be expected, therefore, that future generations would want to find answers, if for no other reason than curiosity.

However, the closest star, aside from our sun, the unpromising red dwarf, Proxima Centauri, is 4.24 light-years away. Even using Jupiter, the biggest planet, as the gravitational slingshot, with present-day technology, a probe would take around 80,000 years before getting there. It would also take 4.24 years till we receive an arrival message back on Earth - that is, assuming we have managed to avoid extinction.

Now, though, the main subject of humanity must *be* humanity - as we find it, here on Earth. A planet which gave birth to our species and which has everything we need in terms of our evolved physiognomy and psychology. If we want to survive as a species, our prime mission ought to be taking care of planet Earth and restoring it to full health ●

## Notes

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