

weekly **worker**



JD Vance meets AfD and sends Europe's liberal establishment into meltdown over 'firewall'

- Letters and debate
- Labour's new town hell
- Collective dead-end
- CPGB's 'bad culture'

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Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

THREE YEARS AS WEST'S WAR HERO NOW HE'S YESTERDAY'S MAN



LETTERS



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

Promising

I attended the *Prometheus* and Talking About Socialism 'Marxist Unity' conference. Held in Salford, Manchester, at the Working Class Movement Library, the conference was attended by three organisations that are currently in unity talks: members of *Prometheus's* editorial board, TAS and CPGB. There were also members of RS21's Marxist Unity Caucus, Communist Party of Britain, Socialist Party of Great Britain, and myself as someone who sits on Transform's Council.

Along with this there were many people who were no longer or never had been members of any kind of socialist organisation, which is a good sign that these events can reach people who aren't yet organised. About 40 people attended, many of whom were relatively young (late 20s, early 30s), which is a positive sign of the partyist movement's recent growth.

The first session was a panel featuring Mike Macnair and Catriona Rylance. Comrade Mike's speech was a synthesis of the points he's been making in his *Prometheus* article and in his responses to other articles in the 'What is the party?' series. He argued regroupment outside of Labour was unlikely, given Collective's failure to resolve the differences between its partyist and movementist factions. Further, even if it did manage to launch, it is likely that it is now well past the moment it could have achieved mass membership, which would have been when Corbyn was kicked out of the Labour Party; and I would add that we are now well past the 2024 general election, when there was some excitement about left independent campaigns.

Moreover, he argued that even if Collective posed a threat, Labour could always veer to the left and crush the nascent project. He then made the positive argument for the goal of replacing the Labour Party with a mass Communist Party, drawing on the book *Reforming to survive*, which showed how the Norwegian elites conceded to the working class the social democratic system just after the Norwegian Labour Party radicalised and applied to join Comintern.

Catriona Rylance made the argument that our political goal, communism, is what should inform our political strategy, rather than short-term needs of the movement (need to recruit more people, needing to outreach to communities, to work with other parts of the broad left) determining our political strategy. This leads to a critique of broad-frontism and putting primacy on assemblies and the need for a Communist Party. Another point was that talks about communist unity would need to be an open substantial political discussion where differences in opinion will be clarified and worked through.

Many of the responses were broadly positive of the arguments for partyism. Tina asked "what would a mass Communist Party look like?", to which Mike replied that a mass Communist Party would look like around 25,000 members if we could unite with the sects, but ultimately we need a party of eight million. I put forward that though Collective would likely fail, it has succeeded in getting the Revolutionary Communist Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales into the same room, with the Socialist Workers Party aspiring to also enter, and that, if it did succeed, joining Collective as a faction might be a way of reaching these sects.

After the panel discussion we had two sets of workshops. With limited time to answer four questions in each workshop, not all the questions were answered by the groups, nor were any answered in depth, but were good prompts to discuss the issues with the left and with partyists. Older comrades have said that they were more positive than most previous experiences they had with workshops and I think this is reflective of the left working together better than it has previously.

On the challenges of left regroupment, my workshop argued that there was a difference between the broader structural issues facing the left and problems that we can deal with, such as the lack of a Communist Party. On the issue of whether partyists should join a wider left (mass) party as a faction, Edmund Potts made the point that this could lead to a situation where communists are working more towards a broad left party and its electoral campaigns rather than working towards a Communist Party.

On the issue of how to get to a mass Communist Party, it was argued that unifying a faction of *Prometheus* with CPGB and TAS would be a good first step that could lead to 50-100 members. The next step would be to build an organisation that all partyists in the UK would want to be a member of. But after that the strategy gets more difficult: how would a communist unity organisation approach the sects or the broad left?

The casual conversation after the conference revealed some of the trickier parts of the unification process. Part of the editorial board of *Prometheus* would like the journal to remain independent so that it could more impartially publish a whole range of left perspectives, despite their commitment to partyism. Members of the Marxist Unity Caucus in RS21 are unsure about their future involvement with any unity talks due to a desire not to jeopardize their status in RS21, with it being a much bigger organisation that potentially could be won over to partyism. Concerns over red lines, especially over transphobia, were discussed, and there doubtless will be other issues that need to be ironed over. Overall, it was a very positive conference and I would be up for helping to organise a similar event in London.

Bryce Bailey
London

Significant

I was very pleased with the Salford event - not just with the number of people who were willing to give over a whole Saturday to having these discussions, but also the level of political engagement and developed contributions amongst everyone present. This came through clearly to me in the workshop sessions, however challenging and critical the exchanges may have been at points. Someone commented during the day that they couldn't have pictured us having these kinds of discussions, at this level and in this way, 10 years ago. And I think that's right.

The experiences of Corbynism, the student movement, the anti-austerity movement, etc - these have mobilised, coordinated and developed people, but have also left a great many questions and exposed different limitations in horizontalism, movementism, broad fronts, etc. There is an appetite to have the type of discussions that were posed at Saturday's event: How does a mass Communist Party look different to these organising experiences? What are the barriers or challenges to advancing it? What work can we do towards it in the here and now? It is clear to me that there is a greater opportunity now for

advancing the argument for a multi-tendency, democratically organised Communist Party than there has been for 15 years or more.

One thing that struck me too from the day was the desire for active engagement amongst many of those participating - not just part of a passive audience to these discussions. In *Prometheus* we orientate our work to publishing written articles trying to advance these arguments widely, but the space in which we can then bring these discussions to life with others is a fundamental partner to that work. Likewise, for those of us involved in the Forging Communist Unity process, it is clear from Saturday that there are a number of people who have an interest for more active engagement. This is something important to think about in terms of what that might look like and when/how there might be an opportunity to do this.

None of this is to get ahead of ourselves - we remain a profound minority on an already isolated left. What is on the table through this work though - both through events like this, but also through organisational efforts in the FCU process - is the opportunity to cohere and strengthen a partyist core. To reinvigorate ourselves through this process and to think seriously, and with renewed perspectives, about what the work of an organisation fighting for a mass communist party should look like in this period. If we are successful in this then the result, I believe, could make a significant impact within the left.

Cat Rylance
Prometheus editorial board (pc)

Optimistic

This was the first event of its type organised by *Prometheus*, and it was a positive step forward for it to be co-hosted by Talking About Socialism. A significant number of comrades from both organisations are based in Manchester, which bodes well for further collaboration of this type. We should look at other parts of the country too.

As ever, there will be things to learn from and improve upon. Breakout groups are a bit controversial, but clearly stand the best chance of success if there is a tight focus to the discussion questions, allowing the reconvened meeting to move forwards as a whole.

Thirty eight people gave up their Saturday to attend a day school on the theme of Marxist unity. The majority were not in any organisation. That should indicate two things.

First, there is a significant number of people interested in organising together as communists, going beyond both 'the sects' and left reformism.

Second, while partyist organisations have faced diminishing returns in recent years, if the Forging Communist Unity process succeeds in creating a credible and open organisation greater than the sum of its parts, then it might well win a significant number of adherents.

Nothing is guaranteed; success will depend in large part on us demonstrating that it is possible in practice to move beyond sectarian division. But Saturday gave us reason to be optimistic.

Edmund Potts
Prometheus and TAS

Serious

It was very positive to see a good turnout for *Prometheus's* and Talking About Socialism's day school on partyism in Salford last Saturday. The comrades have clearly judged that there is a changed mood across our movement with members of several

different groups in attendance. More and more people are not just interested in the arguments for a new party, but that it should be a Communist Party. The speakers helped guide the discussion, but it was in the workshops where the day really proved its worth.

Although breakout groups often hinder rather than help discussion, the two I attended fostered lively and productive exchanges. Particularly of note was the discussion on 'red lines versus programmatic commitments' and how we deal with reactionary views on trans people in a mass Communist Party. I argued that there should be no red lines, that during discussion in party organisations, in our trade union branches or during an election campaign you confront reactionary ideas and change them over time. What is important is the collective commitment as outlined in a programme to resist attacks on trans people and to fight to extend their freedoms and control over their own lives, healthcare, etc. The importance of this discussion was such that we even ignored the lunch bell.

The day continued with similar seriousness, as comrades from the CPGB, *Prometheus* and TAS outlined the need for communist unity and discussed the ongoing regroupment efforts between their organisations. Recent years have seen a surge of interest in communist ideas. You only have to look at the Revolutionary Communist Party's successful 'Are you a communist?' campaign to see that more people are seeking out communist ideas and organisations than were a decade ago. Collectively we have a responsibility to meet this moment with increased efforts towards communist unity.

It would be a small and in many ways a long overdue step forwards if a faction of the new *Prometheus* editorial board, TAS and the CPGB unite. The numbers are small, but many in the movement here and abroad are watching. If successful it could be a totemic moment and all communists should encourage and support this process as a thread in the struggle for a mass Communist Party. That we had a chance to thrash some of this out in person last Saturday was invaluable and we must ensure that the discussion continues and we keep meeting and figuring out a way forward together.

Chris Strafford
Manchester

Disproportionate

Through the day, there were many points of real depth of reflection on these key questions for us as communists aiming to build this - the tensions between ideological alignment and flourishing debate; whether we start with a broad communist programme or a tighter organisational form; the path between a currently limited ideological current and a mass party.

However, these highlights were contrasted for me with a somewhat myopic focus on a currently topical 'regroupment' between two (or maybe even three) small organisations. While there is cause for celebration in the practice of finding paths for unity and collaboration between our contemporary fragmented forms, this was often taken to be a disproportionately important topic. This felt symptomatic of some lack of self-reflection on the role we may potentially take in this historical process. As was suggested by other participants throughout the day, to be a movement which truly seeks not only to understand the world, but to change it, we must face outwards as

well as in. Our success will rely on our readiness to be deeply involved in the worker, anti-imperialist, climate and other frontline struggles of our class, to bring in historic knowledge and develop a wide cadre to fight for a communist future.

Attending this event demonstrated the principled commitment of *Prometheus* in organising the day, and gave me faith that they will work with, and beyond, those attending to widen and deepen this conversation, even as we face difficult tensions in our approaches.

Toby McKenzie-Barnes
email

Patience needed

Firstly I would like to praise the comrades who organised the event for taking the initiative to build on recent party discussions and take them offline and out of London. The opening panel discussion featuring Mike Macnair and Cat Rylance set the tone for the day as an event which would be comradely and open-minded without shying away from debate or disagreement.

The opening session was followed by two breakout group sessions and a closing plenary, which provided an opportunity for all attendees to take part. While I think that these sessions could have been more focused by limiting discussion topics to one or two questions per session (the first session had six questions to discuss in 15 minutes, while the second had five to discuss in 30), I think that the value of the event was really solidified by these sessions. Comrades from a variety of left groups and tendencies debated and discussed their perspectives amicably and enthusiastically, and displayed a very healthy attitude to disagreement and the question of building Marxist unity. While the real questions of unity building are likely to involve sharper disagreement in practice, it was a positive example of the kind of new communist culture we seek to build, where a similar event even several years ago may have been more toxic and hostile.

Several key questions emerged throughout the day about the current prospects and barriers to Marxist unity. The first of which was around the ongoing Forging Communist Unity talks between the CPGB, TAS and (a section of) *Prometheus*, which would potentially build a slightly larger and more dynamic pro-party campaign organisation than its constituent parts. The fact that these talks are taking place is certainly positive, but my view is that in practice such a fusion process would look like a slightly larger version of the present CPGB, albeit with a much needed injection of different perspectives and a modification of its *Draft programme*. I wish the comrades involved all the best on this process, but in the recognition that Marxist unity will only come about by the long-term, patient process of convincing the other existing Marxist groups of the necessity for a mass, multi-tendency Communist Party united in principle around a common programme, and that the prospects on that front do seem further away.

I spoke briefly as a member of the newly launched Marxist Unity Caucus in RS21, where a group of us have proposed a common platform in favour of RS21 taking a pro-party and pro-regroupment position. We are so far pleased with the response that the announcement of our platform has received, and are pleased that RS21 is open-minded and diverse enough that such a platform can exist, where other organisations would take more hostile attitudes to minority perspectives. We will have the

opportunity to discuss our platform and partyism more generally in a 'partyism and regroupment' session at RS21's upcoming All Members Assembly.

In light of this, I would urge comrades to be patient when addressing groups such as RS21 which could be potential allies of whatever new organisation comes out of the FCU process. This is not to say that disagreements or criticisms need to be ignored or dropped, but also not every organisation that is cautious to enter into immediate unity talks is hostile to the prospect of unity as such. The reports that were published in the *Weekly Worker* on Jack Conrad's assumptions of the RS21 position were quite understandably read as an attempt to pose ultimatums and shape the narrative in bad faith. RS21 is an organisation of roughly 300 members, so any decisions to engage in unity talks will naturally require much more consideration for a majority view to be reached. While the comrades in the CPGB may be frustrated by what they view as an unwillingness to enter unity talks, any attempts to rush those who have taken the time to hear you out will only act against the longer-term interests of unity-building.

Relatedly, another key topic of the day was on the question of what the 'red lines' to unity will be. To me, the reason why this topic became a key element of the discussion is related to the view that the CPGB has a relaxed attitude to transphobia. I accept the argument that the CPGB comrades pose, which is that a mass communist organisation will inevitably attract reactionary minority tendencies, and that we would need to find ways to defeat those reactionary tendencies politically rather than resorting to bureaucratic expulsions and backroom manoeuvring.

However, I believe that any draft programme of a communist party should include a strong opposition to social oppressions such as transphobia, and one which is strong enough that it could not accommodate transphobic groups such as the CPGB-ML without them having seriously reconsidered their perspectives. I think the CPGB quite rightly recognises this to be the case in regards to how state-loyalist groups such as the AWL should not be able to be accommodated in a unity process without having reconsidered their state-loyalism.

Finally, I hope to see the same comrades and more at future events which are similar to the one on Saturday, which would only go further in helping to build the links to developing unity. I would propose that a similar event be hosted two or three times a year in different areas of the country, to maintain momentum without oversaturating the event.

Daniel Brady
RS21 Liverpool

Heidi hype

Just a few words about Die Linke and its 'shooting star', co-leader Heidi Reichinnek.

Having gone through a tough period, Die Linke has reason to celebrate. Not only do its fortunes seem to be turning - it currently outperforms the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance in opinion polls - but it has also seen a huge influx of new members. Perhaps not unimportantly, many of them are disillusioned former members of the Greens' youth organisation. Concurrently, the liberal media (*Der Spiegel*, *Die Tageszeitung* ... and now even the British *Guardian*) have been pushing Reichinnek as the great white hope of anti-fascism and a vague 'young' politics.

To cite just one typical example, in the left-liberal daily taz, co-editor Doris Akrap waxes enthusiastic about Reichinnek's "crazy tattoos"

and declares that "since Wednesday evening" [when Reichinnek made her breakthrough speech: "To the barricades!" in defence of the "anti-fascist firewall"], "she is the only person in the Bundestag on whom I can depend if the worst comes to the worst". Her taz colleague Lotte Latoir - a journalist from the antideutsche milieu - cautions that "there are, of course, still problems in Die Linke ... For far too long, the party has tolerated anti-Israel activists such as Ramsis Kilani in its ranks". Despite her reservations, Latoir shares her colleague's enthusiasm for Reichinnek and assures readers that, fortunately, "the country invaded by Putin would not receive one bullet less from us if Die Linke remained in parliament".

All of this seems to indicate that various forces are trying to push Die Linke in a more left-liberal than social-democratic direction and essentially turn the party into the new Greens. This *Richtungsstreit* - battle over direction - has intensified since Sahra Wagenknecht left Die Linke, as many in the party's liberal wing see an opportunity to cleanse it of any 'totalitarian', 'authoritarian', and 'antisemitic' - read: socialist - residue, consolidate their internal hegemony, and finally transform Die Linke into a respectable soft-left force fit for national government coalitions.

Symptomatic of this tendency was, for example, an article in the unofficial party organ *Neues Deutschland* by Jan Schlemmer, a political analyst in Die Linke and antifa activist. He characterised Sahra Wagenknecht as embodying "left authoritarianism" - an amalgam into which he squeezed Robespierre, Lenin and Stalin, but also Ernst Niekisch and the Weimar-era ultra-right fringe movement known as National Bolshevism ('Die Linke ohne Wagenknecht: Gegen Autoritarismus von Links', January 22 2024). To "left authoritarianism", Schlemmer counterposed a defence of Western liberalism, with minor suggestions for improvement. The status quo is, he argued, under threat from a "Eurasian hegemony forced by China and Russia", supposedly supported by "left authoritarian" figures such as Wagenknecht. This, dear reader, is what anti-fascism has degenerated into - and it is indicative of the ideological outlook of considerable forces now struggling to wrest control of Die Linke.

Who, then, is Heidi Reichinnek? On the face of it, she is a harmless woke auntie who likes TikTok, speaks out against "digital violence", and doesn't rock the boat too hard when it comes to delicate issues such as Ukraine and Israel. On the latter issue, she declared in a speech in the Bundestag on March 21 2024 that "naturally, Israel has the right to defend itself", though one should also "be allowed to criticise the military actions of a democracy, let alone a friendly democracy [such as Israel]". Not quite the stuff to make Germany's political establishment and arms industry shake in their boots ... Needless to say, Reichinnek made sure to condemn the "brutal massacre by Hamas" and the organisation's "brutal violence against children and sexualised violence against women" in the same speech, delivered five months into Israel's barbaric onslaught.

Over at abgeordnetwatch.de - a popular online platform that allows the public to question members of the German parliament - Heidi Reichinnek has answered 77% of all questions directed at her. Unfortunately, for the past three months, she has had no time to answer the following one: "Why have you not spoken out about the allegations of possible genocide in Palestine? What is your position on this and on Germany's role in the conflict?"

Regarding Ukraine, Reichinnek has criticised the German government

for not applying sanctions effectively enough. She proposed the "freezing and confiscation of [Russian] property in Germany" - the government was doing "far too little" on this count.

It is unlikely that Reichinnek is a died-in-the-wool *antideutsche* - though her press spokesman Felix S. Schulz, who recently issued a public apology for some "daft and partly disgusting" past tweets about Palestinians and the Nakba, certainly is. Notably, in 2019, she even signed an open letter thanking Sahra Wagenknecht for her political work when the latter announced she would not stand for party chair again. How deep her support ran is another question - given the growing calls to push Wagenknecht out of the party, the letter could be seen as merely a conciliatory gesture for party unity.

Perhaps this is where Reichinnek's talent lies - in her ability to be conciliatory and vague, somehow keeping the various remaining factions of the brittle ship that is Die Linke together. The fact that she leads the only party standing up to the unprecedented rightward push of the entire German party-political landscape in recent months is not without value. But that dramatic drift to the right is also a gift to the liberal wing of Die Linke, as merely being 'against the far right' is now the only issue a left-wing party really needs to define itself by.

Despite all this, I still consider the *Weekly Worker's* call for a vote for Die Linke (Carla Roberts, 'Firewall and Hot Air') essentially correct - though not for anti-fascist reasons, but simply because the party remains a pole of attraction for various factions of the left, which operate more or less legally, albeit with great difficulties within its ranks. Therefore, it remains a site of struggle for communists. Wagenknecht's outfit may currently have better foreign policy positions, but is merely an electoral vehicle targeting the disgruntled, in which one cannot even become a member.

Regarding Die Linke's opposition to the "right-wing stampede in parliament," as comrade Roberts put it, it is certainly preferable to the active participation of the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance in it. However, in light of Die Linke's ongoing liberalisation mentioned earlier, it is also something of a double-edged sword. Unlike comrade Roberts, I am not convinced Die Linke has "slightly moved to the left" - and it wouldn't be the first time that anti-fascism has served as a cover for entirely different agendas.

Maciej Zurowski
email

Reformism

Andrew Northall comments: "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'" (Letters, February 13).

With all due respect, Andrew, this is somewhat misleading. If you mean by "immediate struggles", those that occur in the economic field between workers and employers, then you should know that the SPGB is fully supportive of the efforts of workers to protect their own interests in these struggles through militant trade union action. Moreover, it has never been our view that this would "automatically lead to 'reformism'".

Robin Cox
email

ACTION

Drop the charges against Ben Jamal

Friday February 21, 9am: Protest outside Westminster Magistrates Court, 181 Marylebone Road, London NW1. Stop police attempts to suppress solidarity with Palestine. Demand the spurious charges against Ben Jamal, director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, are thrown out. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/23421.

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.

Free Palestine: defend the right to protest

Defend the 70-plus arrested on January 18, defend the right to protest and demand that the repressive Public Order Act is repealed. **Saturday February 22, 1pm:** Rally, Unitarian Church, 60a Hall Gate, Doncaster DN1. Speakers include Chris Nineham (Stop the War). Organised by Doncaster Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/1759892291539229.

Saturday February 22, 1pm: Public meeting, Brunswick Methodist Church Hall, Brunswick Place, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Speakers include Louise Regan (Palestine Solidarity) and Lindsey German (Stop the War). Organised by Newcastle Stop the War: www.facebook.com/events/571090625889932.

Perspectives on human origins

Tuesday February 25, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'On anarchist anthropology' - Erica Lagalisie in conversation with Chris Knight.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/961250565907452.

Fight for our right to protest!

Tuesday February 25, 7pm: Public meeting, Moseley Community Hub, 496 Moseley Road, Balsall Heath, Birmingham B12. Speakers include Chris Nineham (Stop the War) and Fran Heathcote (PCS). Organised by Birmingham Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=957530296512256.

Patients, not profit - keep NHS public

Wednesday February 26, 12 noon: Protest and rally, Old Palace Yard, Westminster, London SW1. Tell Keir Starmer to invest in the NHS, not the private sector! Organised by Keep Our NHS Public: keepournhspublic.com/event/month-of-action-london-komp-rally.

Stop arming Israel's assault on Gaza

Thursday February 27, 6pm: Protest. Assemble at Eros statue, Piccadilly Circus, London W1. Nearby is the HQ of Leonardo UK, makers of the laser targeting system for the F35 fighter jet, used in Israel's destruction of Gaza.

Organised by London Campaign Against Arms Trade: www.facebook.com/events/1247970632970331.

The Communist Party of Marx and Engels

Thursday February 27, 6.30pm: Online discussion in the series, 'Our history'. Speaker: Marc Mulholland.

Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Food control in WWI Britain

Thursday February 27, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. The suppression of the market? Food control in World War I Britain.

Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc.

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.

Homes for people, not profit

Saturday March 1, 1pm: Demonstration. Assemble Peckham Square, London SE15. March to Borough Triangle, near Elephant and Castle. Oppose the Aylesham Centre development for 877 new Berkeley homes, where just 12% are designated as 'affordable'. Stop overdevelopment - no private housing on council land.

Organised by Southwark Housing and Planning Emergency: www.ayleshamcommunityaction.co.uk/SHAPE.

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.

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.

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.

UKRAINE

Notes on the war

Three years since the launch of the 'special military operation', the post-World War II order is being shredded by America. Trump is a revolutionary counterrevolutionary, says **Jack Conrad**

There are those on the left who insist on treating Donald Trump as "ignorant", "stupid" and a "fascist".¹ A claim which in its own right is "ignorant" and "stupid". Trump may have a short attention span, he is certainly no book worm.² However, he has a mercurial intelligence and sixth sense for the public square. Above all, though, out of pure self-interest, and doubtless to feed an already inflated ego, Trump has willingly become the deep right's "synthesis of monster and a superman".³ He makes the perfect avatar.

Meanwhile, the billionaire-funded Heritage Foundation has fed Trump with ideas by the batchload, vetted and trained bright young staffers and provided him with a multifaceted strategy for restoring America's imperial glory. And since assuming office on January 20 Trump has performed exactly according to its Project 2025 playbook: defeat the 'enemy within'; shred the 'rules-based' post-World War II global order.

At home that means using the already considerable powers of the presidency to launch a counter-revolution against environmental protection, established working conditions, women's reproductive health, sexual deviants, migrants and civil rights era gains. Government employees have also been retired *en masse*. A frontal assault on the Democrats and their rainbow coalition that will leave in its wake countless human victims. Once again states will be able to ride roughshod over 'diversity, equality, inclusion and accessibility'. Nothing, but nothing, is to be allowed to interfere with capital accumulation.

Trump, stating the obvious, has absolutely no need for non-state fighting formations here. A defining marker of fascism qua fascism. The totally botched January 6 2021 attempted self-coup with its Proud Boys and boogaloos was a different matter. Today he has executive orders, a thoroughly purged state apparatus, majorities in both houses of congress, the supreme court ... hell, he's even got a spaceforce. There is, moreover, no unresolved revolutionary situation. The working class poses not the least threat, neither to the ruling class nor the constitution.

Trump is not attempting "to recreate the imperial presidency that was buried in the mid-1970s after Richard Nixon's resignation".⁴ A somewhat cosy establishment claim, approvingly echoed by the SWP's Alex Callinicos.⁵ No, he is intent on going way beyond that. He aspires to be America's Boss (yes, with a capital 'B'). A combination of a start-up CEO and a Roman Caesar who exercises absolute power. Yes, Trump wants to stampede America into becoming a Christian, nationalist autocracy, to start with by issuing an unstoppable barrage of executive orders. Project 2025, note, advocated just that: there is an "existential need for aggressive use of the vast powers of the executive branch".⁶

On a roll, entitled, utterly brazen, tech billionaires - eg, Peter Thiel and deep right thinkers, such as Curtis Yarvin - do nothing whatsoever to disguise their admiration of autocracy and contempt for democracy. In fact there is an open acceptance of what we have long argued: "capitalist democracy" is an "oxymoron".⁷ Let us add, for the sake of clarity, that it is Trump, not Elon Musk, who is in charge⁸ ... and will be for the next



Making America even greater

four years, maybe more.⁹ Despite his unequalled wealth Musk could be fired in an instant and probably will be at some point.

51st state

Aboard, Trump's revolutionary counterrevolution has seen him threatening to close the Mexican border, offering to buy Greenland, promising to take back the Panama canal and incorporate Canada as the 51st state.

With the Cold War won and long gone, America has no need to cover its imperialism with cant about freedom, justice and democracy. It can afford to arrogantly parade its power and even its naked greed. America no longer asks the world to love it, instead the world is expected to fear it. Liberals are mortified. Often reduced to spluttering incoherence. And most of the left miserably tails liberal opinion. To save the old order we have entirely hollow demands for a "general strike"¹⁰ and equally vacuous calls for "determined and courageous resistance".¹¹

But here is Trump's Greater America. And it makes a grisly fit with 'manifest destiny'. Beginning as 13 seaward orientated former British colonies, the United States expanded westwards and southwards through genocide and seizing native lands, wars of anti-colonial colonial conquest and cash buy-outs. Alaska was bought from tsarist Russia for a paltry \$7.2 million in 1867. The Louisiana and Florida purchases served as the model. And throughout there were intermittent claims over British Columbia, Quebec and the whole of Canada.

No less to the point, what is to stop the US unilaterally annexing Greenland? Indian forces overran the Portuguese colony of Goa in just 36 hours in 1961. The 626,000 population were not consulted till 1967, when a referendum was held: the question was, should Goa be a separate state within the Indian Union? - that or should it merge with the nextdoor Indian state of Maharashtra? Why

do liberals assume that Greenland's 57,000 population should be given a say? Were they consulted when Denmark first incorporated Greenland after the Danish and Norwegian kingdoms separated in 1814? Does anyone really expect Denmark to fight if American forces based in Greenland stroll in to occupy Nuuk? Will Greenland's indigenous population launch a winnable war of national liberation? Unlikely.

Not that we communists are indifferent. On the contrary, we favour the *voluntary* union of peoples. But that does not prevent us from recognising the role of brute force in the past ... and in the future.

The same goes for Panama. Will it fight an American takeover of the canal zone? Again unlikely. The odds are overwhelmingly against such a scenario. True, Canada is a different matter. It has a population of over 40 million and would be no pushover. No wonder Trump talks of *persuading* Canada to join the United States ... in return for the lifting of the 25% tariffs.

Pan-Americanism has, though, little purchase in Canada, not least because of Trump.¹² Pierre Poilievre, leader of its Conservative Party - endorsed by people close to Trump - has made his position abundantly clear: "We will never be the 51st state."¹³ So America has to find, or create, a unionist party and bring around at least a section of the electorate. Not impossible. England did something like that with Scotland in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Custom tariffs were imposed, Scotland's Darien colonial adventure was wrecked and bribes were liberally doled out. Union of the parliaments in 1707 saw an end to tariffs, compensation paid to the elite for Darien and an economic boom in Scotland.

When it comes to the rest of the world, Project 2025 still envisages America's main energies being directed to countering the "existential threat" of China.¹⁴ However, that does not mean continuity. JD Vance spelt out the new reality at the 61st Munich

Security Conference on February 14.

Breaking with the normal diplomatic conventions, the vice-president berated European mainstream politicians for their liberal intolerance and apparent indifference to mass migration. Hence, he described the greatest dangers in Europe being "internal", rather than from the external challenges of Russia or China. Adding insult to injury, he subsequently met with AfD leader Alice Weidel. Not chancellor Olaf Scholz, not the CDU's would-be chancellor, Friedrich Merz.

Weidel and Vance discussed the war in Ukraine. Weidel and Vance discussed German domestic politics. Weidel and Vance agreed that the so-called *Brandmauer*, or 'firewall', that bars the AfD from joining governing coalitions in Germany, was an outrage that should immediately be extinguished. Those who do not, or cannot understand the significance of this change in US policy and its impact, and not only in Germany, understand nothing.

What about Ukraine? Instead of Joe Biden's ironclad insistence of Ukraine getting everything back and seeing the back of every Russian soldier, there will be bilateral negotiations. Vance bluntly announced that neither Europe nor Ukraine have a seat at the table.

As is well known now, Trump wants an agreement with Russia, freezing the whole of the 800-mile front line and then, immediately after, establishing a buffer zone - Sir Keir Starmer has already volunteered British "troops on the ground".¹⁵ Baltic, Polish, Netherlands and Nordic contingents are also expected. Nato peacekeepers can, of course, easily become Nato peacemakers: ie, 100,000 active combatants. Hence, outraged objections from Sergei Lavrov in Riyadh.

Trump is ready to allow Russia to keep what it has got: ie, around 20% of pre-2014 Ukrainian territory. Doubtless, if negotiations continue, there will be haggling over Kursk and other such thorny issues.

But Vladimir Putin can claim a victory. He has already won a firm commitment that there will be no Ukrainian membership of Nato for the foreseeable future. Russia will too once again be able to base its warships in Crimea's Sevastopol and thereby secure free access to the warm waters of the Mediterranean.

Leave aside Nato troops stationed along Russia's new border (perhaps defended by US air cover). One might guess that what remains of Ukraine will be armed to the teeth and provided with various security guarantees. A sort of Israel, but much, much bigger. Either way, Trump has discarded Biden's goal of regime change in Moscow ... for now. Remember, however, that Trump comes not only bearing an olive branch: he carries a big stick too. If the Putin-FSB regime rejects his peace deal, there is the threat of "increased American support for Ukraine".¹⁶ Perhaps Trump would dust off Zelensky's now almost totally forgotten victory plan ... and then add some more. In other words, though Trump is seeking some kind of accommodation with Russia, failing that, there is the "phasing into World War III" he once warned about.

Stab in the back

As things stand, Zelensky is highly vulnerable. His spectacular political career looks like ending in inevitable failure ... soon. Trump himself has been talking about holding those much delayed presidential elections and even before that there is the distinct danger of Zelensky being ousted by some kind of Azov putsch.

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

What Donald Trump would make of such a blatant violation of Ukraine's constitution is beyond me. He might condemn it, he might welcome it. But, as with Zelensky, an Azov regime would still have to come to terms with the changed global realities brought about by Trump ... that or fight an asymmetrical war with Russia in the east and south, and risk defeat and the incorporation of the whole of Ukraine into Putin's neo-tsarist empire.

Meanwhile, Trump's deal essentially mirrors what was discussed between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in Minsk, Antalya and Istanbul back in March and April 2022. Those talks ultimately failed, supposedly because Kyiv refused to budge on rescinding anti-Russian language laws and agreeing to neutrality. But it was the Biden administration which really scuppered things. Boris Johnston, a loyal US satrap, was dispatched to Kyiv to relay Washington's instructions: 'Fight, fight and fight again'.

Despite that many Ukrainians will blame Zelensky, not Johnson, not Biden, for three years of unnecessary war and tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths - to achieve what? Essentially the same deal that was on offer in 2022. That is why he is already yesterday's man.

Conditions are certainly ripe for a Ukrainian version of the 'stab in the

back legend' (*Dolchstoßlegende*). Germany's far right, crucially the high command, insisted that they had not suffered defeat on the battlefields of 1914-18. No, instead they had been betrayed on the home front by communists and social democrats. Almost instantly, the idea was given an anti-Semitic twist, not least by Adolf Hitler and his chief ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg. The death of the Weimar republic was already in sight.

There are precious few communists and social democrats in Ukraine today, but Zelensky is Jewish, its army has resisted successfully for three years, the country is set to concede 20% of its territory and Trump is demanding a \$500 billion slice of its critical minerals as "payback" (a higher share of Ukrainian GDP than the "reparations imposed on Germany" by the Versailles Treaty¹⁷). Absurd conspiracy theories will surely flourish and produce their toxic fruit.

Ukraine, note, has a long, horrible and deeply ingrained history of anti-Semitism. During tsarist time there were frequent pogroms. The whites slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews in the 1918-21 civil war. And, to this day, Stepan Bandera, a fascist and in the early 1940s a Nazi collaborator, is venerated as a hero, especially in western Ukraine. His anti-Semitism combined with anti-Bolshevism: "The Jews are the most faithful prop of the Bolshevik regime and the vanguard of Muscovite imperialism in Ukraine."¹⁸ There are statues of him, streets, bridges and squares named after him, postage stamps bear his image ... in other words Banderaism is the ideal ideological vehicle for a reactionary national revolution in Ukraine.

While parallels with Weimar are easy enough to draw, Ukraine cannot, of course, give birth to its version of the Third Reich. Empire, national independence, even neutrality are all chimeric. Small and medium countries are dependent countries. Switzerland and Ireland are dependent on the EU; Belarus is dependent on Russia and Brexit Britain is dependent on the USA. Without powerful outside backers a post-Zelensky regime can do nothing serious militarily, that is for sure. Ukraine lacks an independent arms industry. Eg, though Ukraine can upgrade Soviet-era T-72 'coffins', it is overwhelmingly reliant on western supplies of military hardware.¹⁹

So once again imagine - this time that Zelensky defies Trump and orders his army to keep fighting. The flow of arms, money and technical assistance instantly dries up. Without real-time satellite information, SAM missiles, military instructors, artillery shells and a constant supply of spare parts, Ukraine's fighting capacity would thereby rapidly degrade. Well before that, plummeting morale could easily see troops deserting front-line trenches *en masse*.

Will Germany ride to Ukraine's rescue? I doubt it. There are elections on February 23 and everyone knows the days of Olaf Scholz as chancellor are numbered. Moreover, Emmanuel Macron's emergency summit on Ukraine ended in total disarray. Sir Keir decided to placate Trump with his 'troops on the ground' offer and Scholz walked off in a huff. So the chances of Zelensky getting a European army to end the stalemate and sending the Russians packing are nil. It will simply not happen.

The same goes for Mark Rutte, Nato general secretary, and his generous offer, made in Davos, that the EU could foot the bill for US arms deliveries. It begs exactly the same question: American arms for euros is going to happen only if Trump wants it to happen ... and he is determined to get a deal.

Back in the third century CE the Chinese imperial chancellor, Zhuge Liang, orchestrated a conflict between the Han state in the north

and the Chu state in the south, allowing the state in the west to rise to dominance.²⁰ It became known as the 'Three kingdoms' strategy. The US pursued just such a course in World War I and World War II. It stayed aloof from the struggle to begin with, profited hugely from the fire sales of assets, granted loans and sold arms ... and then came in late to tip the military balance.

Grand manoeuvres

As we have argued, such grand manoeuvres are doubtless being contemplated once again in the Oval office.

Europe, it seems, is to be radically subordinated by a resurgent US. Ideas of an "ever closer" EU have been well and truly scuppered by the Ukraine war. Blowing up Nord Stream 1 and 2 in September 2022 amounted to rubbing Europe's face in the dirt. Now we have Trump demanding increases in 'defence spending' from below 2% of GDP, to 2.5%, to 5%. It amounts to extracting tribute. A good slice of any such expenditure will, after all, go to US arms makers such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, RTX and Northrop-Grumman. Combined with tariffs, that means stagnation, possibly the "threat of complete economic decay" in Europe" that Trotsky prematurely warned about in 1923.²¹

Given the absence of European unity, Trump recognises only three great powers: the US, China and Russia. I have already speculated about him offering Russia entry into the lower ranks of the imperialist club. In other words, revive the G8.²² Indeed that very offer has now been made.²³ In return for such a welcome in from the cold, Russia would presumably be expected to break its 'no limits' alliance with China - a Mao-Nixon rapprochement in reverse. Probably that is what Trump's peace plan is designed to achieve. But, let's be honest, we really don't know.

Geoff Raby, former Australian ambassador in Beijing, argues that China is expanding in central Asia at Russia's expense, that Russia is losing more in Asia than it could ever gain in Europe. Still, if Raby is correct and Putin sees it this way, a rapprochement with the US would, therefore, include Russia regaining influence in its central Asian near abroad.²⁴

But Raby might easily be wrong. Does the Putin-FSB regime really resent China's growing eastern influence? Or does Moscow think it is getting a good bargain with 'Chussia'? After all, China imports all that oil and gas, which keeps the Russian economy afloat and on a war footing. Officially, the two countries are committed to developing cooperation in Eurasia, especially in central Asia, which will allow them to build what they call a fairer economic model - certainly compared to western neoliberalism. Either way, they surely have mutual or partially overlapping interests.

Leave aside Russia's relations with Xi Jinping, things point towards some kind of deal in Ukraine. Russia would at the very least see an end to western sanctions and gain some internationally recognised territory under Trump's peace plan. On the other hand, if Trump took up Zelensky's victory plan, Putin might not survive in office and the FSB regime could easily go down to a colour revolution that ends in the break-up of the Russian Federation. Unless, of course, China intervened.

China is, however, already subject to swingeing US tariffs on its commodities - and an additional 10% with Trump. That promises not just extra tax revenues flowing into Washington's coffers, but, in China, the prospect of something resembling Japan's three lost decades (slow or negative growth rates). Moreover, a US-Russia grand deal would see

China surrounded at a stroke and either forced into accepting the status of a US neocolony, having its arms industry dramatically scaled down, its big banks and companies bought up for a song, etc - that or face strangulation and potential state collapse. Understandably, with the historic experience of the 'century of humiliation' (1839-1949) seared onto its collective consciousness, China might well choose to resist any such outcome, using whatever means it has at its disposal.

Then again, strategists in Moscow and Beijing will be looking for ways to stop MAGA. Exacerbating cracks, tensions and divisions between the US and the EU has long been a Russian stratagem. There will doubtless be further Russian attempts to cleave Turkey, Hungary and Slovakia away from what is now a thoroughly discombobulated US-European alliance.

Paradoxically, an AfD government in Berlin would represent a massive boost for both Trumpists in American and Putinists in Russia (not that this will happen on February 23: a role as a junior partner in a CDU government is the best that the AfD can possibly hope for). Trumpists would see an opportunity to reduce the EU to a deregulated common market and the chance of picking up all manner of German companies at bargain basement prices. For Putin/FSB there would, of course, be the prospect of renewing lucrative oil and gas deliveries.

Objectively Germany has a pressing interest in achieving peace in Ukraine - one of the reasons behind the rise of the AfD (that and opposition to migrants and migration). Germany has, after all, become the "sick man of Europe" - no, not because the country abandoned nuclear power (an extraordinarily daft idea). It is the Ukraine war which has left it at the bottom of the G7 performance table: "Germany's terms of trade deteriorated hugely after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as the price of natural gas soared," writes the FT's Martin Wolf.²⁵

The lurid picture painted by Germany's political mainstream - social democratic, green, liberal and conservative - of Putin just itching to attack Nato's eastern flank, before heading all the way to Berlin, is simply not credible. War in Ukraine, against a third-rate army, with no air cover worth talking about, has exposed Russia's armed forces as decidedly second-rate. Triggering a war with Nato, even just Poland and Germany, by invading one of the Baltic republics would surely end in failure and state collapse. So such a suicide mission is an extraordinary remote possibility.

However, besides peace, Germany also has an objective interest in uniting around itself a *Kerneuropa* (core Europe) and again becoming an imperial player in its own right. A fourth Reich! Its industries require friendshoring in neighbouring countries when it comes to auxiliary production facilities and the protection of markets that only a militarily strong state can provide. Otherwise there is a risk of deindustrialisation and absolute decline.

Sleepwalk

Expect geostrategic shifts in the coming period. True, the Brics+ have nothing in common - apart, that is, from chaffing against US hegemony. But this does give Russia allies, or at least a sympathetic hearing, amongst what it calls the "global majority". Amongst those who have, want to, or have been invited to join are Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Aukus has already been established, and Japan and South Korea bolted on. This has broken Australia from its natural trading partner, China, and secured it firmly in the US-UK camp.

The US can perhaps rely on India to be antagonistic to China, but not Russia. There is, moreover, the danger of the three great powers being dragged into conflicts over Iran, Israel, Korea, Taiwan, etc, etc, with all manner of unintended consequences.

Bear in mind, in this context, the long 'sleepwalk' towards World War I.²⁶ Enemies became friends and friends became enemies. The Franco-Prussian war of 1870 transformed Germany from being the fragmented and weak centre of Europe into its most dangerous power. Soundly beaten, resentful and fearful, republican France sought allies to contain the newly formed German Reich - the most obvious partner being tsarist Russia.

Their 1894 alliance committed each side to mutual aid. True, this meant that in the event of war Germany would have to fight on two fronts. The alliance, however, was just as much directed against Britain. France and Britain were, of course, old enemies and there were bitter rivalries between Britain and Russia over Afghanistan, Persia, China and the Turkish Straits. Russia longed to gain unfettered access to the Mediterranean by getting its hands on Constantinople.

And it was fear of Russia that took Britain into alliance with Japan in 1902. A few years later, in 1904, the Japanese-Russian war began and ended in unexpected defeat for Russia. British-built and British-designed Japanese battleships featured prominently - a global shock and a trigger for the 1905 revolution in Russia.

Against the Franco-Russian alliance Germany responded by tying Austria-Hungary ever more closely to itself. Because Austria-Hungary and Russia were fierce competitors in the Balkans, this committed Germany to a war with Russia that it really did not want. Germany also started an ill-judged naval race with Britain. Germanophobic scare stories were regularly promoted in the *Daily Mail* and *The Times* and featured in popular novels, such as Erskine Childers' *The riddle of the sands* (1903). The German Reich came to be seen as Britain's most deadly global rival by elite and middle class opinion alike.

As Britain just managed 'a near-run victory' in the second Boer War, it felt compelled to abandon its 'splendid isolation' from continental European concerns and instead embraced its old enemy, France - an arrangement cemented in 1904 with the Entente Cordiale. France's alliance with tsarist Russia became, in due course, a triple alliance between Britain, France and Russia. Historic rivalry, pitting Russia against Britain over southern Asia, ended with various robber-deals, including dividing Persia into two zones of interest.

Such realignments readied the conditions needed for defeating the central powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary and Ottoman Turkey. True, the US eventually entered the war and guaranteed the outcome, and Russia was taken out of the imperial system altogether by the October 1917 revolution.

Yet, while between 15 and 22 million died, in the end, Germany was much reduced territorially, stripped of colonies and saddled with crippling reparation payments. As for the Austro-Hungarian empire, it was fragmented into a series of small, often rival, states. That left Austria as little more than a pocket-sized territory with a grand imperial capital. And, apart from Turkey itself - 'liberated' by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk - Anglo-French imperialism neatly sliced and diced the Ottoman empire into colonial or semi-colonial administrative units.

Clearly there is more than a whiff of pre-World War I about the current

situation - ie, great-power military conflict seems all too possible - but with the added danger of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. However, tragically, what is lacking is a viable socialist alternative.

Today the general secretaries of the countless confessional sects hold out the promise to their little band of followers that they are on the cusp of another October. The comforting myth is that the Bolsheviks went from nothing to everything in the eight short months between February and October 1917. Absolute and total nonsense, of course. From 1905 onwards, despite periods of severe repression, the Bolsheviks were, in fact, the *majority* party of the working class - proved by newspaper circulation figures, workplace donations, duma, trade union and, from the summer of 1917 onwards, soviet elections in Petrograd, Moscow and other major towns and cities.

No, we must do away with sect delusions - along with broad-frontism and left Labourism - and get down to the serious business of uniting in the common struggle to build a mass Communist Party here in Britain and internationally. That remains the main, the key, the abiding task ●

Notes

1. Clauereen Ryan, 'A general strike to stop Trump' *Solidarity* February 12 2025.
2. Michael Wolff claimed in his *Fire and fury* (2018) that "Trump doesn't like to read at all". Nor does he "process information in any conventional sense". In some ways, he is "postliterate - total television". But that does not make him "ignorant" or "stupid".
3. F Nietzsche *The genealogy of morals: a polemic* London 1913, p56.
4. E Luce, 'Trump's imperial emporium' *Financial Times* February 5 2025.
5. *Socialist Worker* February 12 2025.
6. R Vought, 'Executive office of the president of the United States' in P Dans and S Groves (eds) *Project 2025: mandate for leadership* Washington DC 2023, p44.
7. P Thiel, 'The education of a libertarian' *Cato Unbound* April 13 2009.
8. A daft claim upheld by *The Guardian's* US columnist, Moira Dunegan: "... it is Musk who controls government operations and federal spending, and so it is Musk who is running the country." See 'It is Elon Musk who is now running the United States. Not Donald Trump' *The Guardian* February 6 2025.
9. A third term would be possible, despite the constitution, if, say, in 2028, Trump and Vance ran on a joint ticket with Trump as vice-president nominee and Vance as the presidential nominee, but with Vance committed to stand down in favour of Trump in the event of victory. However, age will some time catch up with Trump. He is already 78.
10. Clauereen Ryan, 'A general strike to stop Trump' *Solidarity* February 12 2025.
11. A Callinicos *Socialist Worker* February 12 2025.
12. Trotsky's 1926 claim that "Most Canadians consider themselves Americans, with the exception, ironically enough, of the French section of the population, which considers itself profoundly English" was badly misinformed on both counts (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1926/02/europe.htm). Historically most Canadians do not identify themselves as being American. In fact, beginning with the influx of empire loyalists after the American revolution, a key part of Canadian national identity has meant actively distinguishing themselves from Americans. Mistaking a Canadian for an American - easy for a Brit like myself - can cause offence. As for the *Québécois* being "profoundly English", please, let's get real. That's never been the case.
13. *The Independent* February 17 2025.
14. P Navarro, 'The case for fair trade' in P Dans and S Groves (eds) *Project 2025: mandate for leadership* Washington DC 2023, p766.
15. *The Daily Telegraph* February 16 2025.
16. *The Independent* June 25 2024.
17. *The Daily Telegraph* February 17 2025.
18. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_of_Ukrainian_Nationalists.
19. mil.in.ua/en/articles/can-ukraine-produce-tanks.
20. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhuge_Liang.
21. L Trotsky *The first five years of the Communist International* Vol 2, London 1974, p342.
22. J Conrad 'Notes on the war' *Weekly Worker* November 14 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1515/notes-on-the-war).
23. www.reuters.com/world/trump-says-russia-should-be-readmitted-g7-2025-02-13.
24. www.afr.com/world/asia/xi-is-thumping-putin-in-the-great-game-20241016-p5kixp.
25. *Financial Times* July 16 2024.
26. See C Clark *The sleepwalkers: how Europe went to war in 1914* London 2013.

FAR RIGHT

Making Europe Great Again

Riding high in the polls and brimming with confidence, the far right is being actively promoted by the US state - as JD Vance made clear in Munich, writes **Eddie Ford**

Though it may horrify many, the post-World War II international architecture is being rapidly dismantled, as the unthinkable becomes thinkable.

Donald Trump's aggressively assertive administration is serving as a spur for the far right everywhere - Europe being no exception. Once, the continent was dominated by the consensus politics of social democracy on the 'centre left' and Christian democracy on the 'centre right'. Nor was the UK fundamentally any different, at least from the late 1940s to the late 1960s. The phrase 'Butskellism' summed up the closeness of the two main parties (Hugh Gaitskell was Labour chancellor and Rab Butler his Tory successor).

The post-World War II consensus was actively promoted by the US state department in the Cold War drive to 'contain communism'. Concessions were conceded, full employment and rising wages were cynically celebrated. However, last week, US vice-president JD Vance, speaking in Munich, introduced Europe to a very different Washington consensus. Those in attendance seemed to be genuinely shocked by what they heard. Why? Haven't they been keeping up with the news? Haven't they listened to anything Trump has been saying?

"There is a new sheriff in town." Vance declared, going on to say that "democracy will not survive if their people's concerns are deemed invalid or, even worse, not worth being considered". By this he meant that Europe's "threat from within" is graver than that posed by Russia and China, criticising the cancellation of a recent election in Romania, the prosecution of an anti-abortion protestor in the UK, media censorship, political correctness and wokeness.

Going further, Vance openly questioned whether Europe was even worth defending and blasted policies which allowed mass migration. Throwing fuel on the fire, he directly connected immigration policies to an attack in Munich the previous day that injured 36 people: "We saw the horrors wrought by these decisions yesterday in this very city," he said, and if you are afraid of "the opinions and the conscience that guide your very own people", then "there is nothing America can do for you". Nor "is there anything you can do for the American people".

What particularly dismayed liberal commentators was the fact that Vance pissed upon the supposed 'firewall' that has long been used to separate the liberal mainstream from a far right which has organisational and ideological associations with fascism - eg, Alternative für Deutschland.

In an act full of symbolism, the US vice-president met for 30 minutes the AfD leader, Alice Weidel - not the current chancellor, Olaf Scholz of the Social Democratic Party, nor the leaders of Christian Democratic Union of Germany/Christian Social Union, the Free Democratic Party or the Greens. They reportedly discussed the war in Ukraine, German domestic politics and the 'firewall'.

That Munich meeting was not the first between the party and a figure close to the Trump administration, of course. Now leading a DOGE purge of the US federal government that involves sacking nuclear safety employees, Elon Musk praised the virtues of the AfD last month after its election launch when he hosted Weidel in a 75-minute live conversation on X.



Sending mainstream Europe into meltdown

In a rambling session that covered Douglas Adams, Schopenhauer, the meaning of life and whether Adolf Hitler was a communist, the billionaire claimed that "only the AfD can save Germany".

Even if the numbers do not appear to add up at the moment, a CDU/AfD coalition is clearly no longer taboo in Washington.

Tornado

Showing how emboldened the far right feels was a Make Europe Great Again rally on February 8 in Madrid, attended by around 2,000 select people and hosted by Santiago Abascal of Spain's Vox party - a devoted gathering of those who bask in the cult of Trump. You had all the big names you would expect, such as Viktor Orbán, Matteo Salvini, Marine Le Pen, the charming Geert Wilders, who once compared *The Koran* to *Mein Kampf*, former Czech prime minister Andrej Babiš and Herbert Kickl of the Freedom Party of Austria. Prior to the event, leaders met behind closed doors with special guest Kevin Roberts, president of the Heritage Foundation - the rightwing think tank behind the plans of Project 2025 to dismantle large parts of the federal government and remove checks on executive power, as part of its agenda to elevate Trump into the position of an autocratic monarch.

The rally also acted as the first official summit of Patriots for Europe, which was formed in May last year and became the European parliament's third largest voting bloc, with 86 MEPs. It does have to be said that PFE's stated goal of 'uniting the right' across Europe has not been entirely successful. AfD, Poland's Law and Justice, and Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy have not joined - nor have

broadly similar groupings in Slovakia and Slovenia. Interestingly, France's National Rally objected to AfD joining because of a statement saying that any former SS member was not "automatically a criminal", though it appears that there were other tensions as well.¹ Maybe some things are still beyond the pale, but do not expect that to last for too long.

At the rally itself a jubilant Viktor Orbán said the "Trump tornado" has "changed the world in just a few weeks", declaring that "yesterday we were heretics; today we're mainstream". Well, perhaps it would have been more accurate to say that today we are heretics and *tomorrow* we will be mainstream - but who is going to split hairs when amongst your ranks there is a prime minister and a deputy prime minister?

Everyone skewered the "liberal fascists" who want to replace Christian civilisation with "a sick Satanic utopia" and "the creeps" who want to "turn our children into trans-freaks". Marine Le Pen got excited by the idea that "we are facing a real tipping point" with which the European Union "seems to be stupefied" (which has a certain point) and Wilders warned to his favourite themes by declaring that "we refuse to bend our knee to the extremist agenda of the woke left" and "refuse to surrender to the guilt tripping of multiculturalism" - celebrating Trump's declaration that the US will recognise only two genders that cannot be changed.²

Kickl argued that "people everywhere are rising against the impositions of the EU centralists and leftwing ideologies" - wanting a new model of European cooperation based on "national sovereignty" - and Petr Macinka from Czechia's 'Motorists for Themselves' party hankered for a "return to realistic policies based on a

free market and strong nation-states". And "only patriots can make Europe great again", not liberals, progressives, socialists or anyone who believed in wokeness.

An overarching (if not obsessive) theme of the Madrid rally was making the continent a beacon again for Christianity and resisting the "invasion" of Muslim immigrants. In other words, a *white* Christian civilisation has been smothered by what some think is the *intentional* ethnic replacement of native-born Europeans - a favourite topic of conspiracy theorists - or a "genocide by substitution", even if no-one actually used that phrase at the rally.

One after the other, speakers vowed to "reconquer" Europe from the forces of socialism and liberalism - building explicit parallels to Spain's *Reconquista*, the time when Christian kingdoms reconquered the Iberian Peninsula from Muslim rulers, the Moors, which finally ended in 1492 with the fall of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada.³

Reconquest

Muslim migrants, woke liberals, cultural Marxists, climate change fanatics and trans rights activists - are today's invaders. Orbán and others said the *Reconquista* was an example of "the spirit" Europe needed today if it was to restore 'greatness'. Now we are dealing with an agenda of not only erecting new borders and keeping people out, but actually expelling undesirables who are already here.

Strangely enough, nobody at the rally mentioned the fact that the popular hero, El Cid, whose name is very much associated with the *Reconquista* (played, of course, by Charlton Heston in the famous movie of the same name) had at one part of his career actually fought

for Muslim rulers, while the most celebrated achievement of his career - the conquest of the kingdom-city of Valencia - was actually achieved in close alliance with the Banu Hud and other Muslim dynasties. Another thing nobody mentioned was that the final expulsion of the Moors went hand-in-hand with the expulsion of the Jews. Mythology is so much more comforting than actual history.

Reform UK

Also feeling full of optimism for the future is Nigel Farage, even if he is not totally in sync with the Trump administration by resisting the calls from Elon Musk to embrace Tommy Robinson, who the tech billionaire obviously regards as a martyr who can 'save Britain' - just as Alice Weidel can 'save Germany'. But watch this space.

Farage must seriously imagine replicating the success of Trump. The most recent poll by YouGov, for example, has Reform on 27%, up one point from the week before, with the others unchanged - Labour 25%, Tories 21%, Liberal Democrats 14%, and the Greens 9%.⁴ No wonder he boasted in an interview with *The London Standard* that there is a "35% chance" that he will be prime minister by 2029, while also promising to rid Reform of "lunatics and maniacs".⁵ He fears Robinson and his fascist mates are vote losers.

But Farage too glorifies "Judeo-Christian culture" that apparently underpins western civilisation - even telling a recent conference of rightwing activists in London, the 'Alliance for Responsible Citizenship', that its values were at the root of "everything" in Britain. Perhaps his most interesting comment was that the right in Britain is "not split", because "the Conservative Party is not on the right in any measurable way" - mainly because it has permitted record levels of legal mass immigration ever since Brexit - even if a desperate-sounding Kemi Badenoch is now saying that western civilisation "will be lost" if the Tory Party fails, which can only mean that we are all doomed.

While respectable liberal opinion may be gnashing its teeth at the rise of the far right, the undeniable truth is that such forces are attracting increasing support because of the obvious failures of mainstream politics to provide any hope for people alienated by the endless lies and deceit. People are not fools and cannot be duped for ever, and the only answer that Sir Keir Starmer appears to have is to ape the policies and programme of Nigel Farage - even to the point of launching a series of Facebook adverts in Reform style, boasting about deportations.⁶ But that will only build up support for Reform, as there is no point bothering with a copy when you can have the real thing ●

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Notes

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HOUSING



Fake plastic bungalows

Government plans to solve the housing crisis by building 'new towns' are likely to fail - private ownership of this essential human need is the true problem, argues Paul Demarty

The mood music from the current government, when it comes to housing, is altogether very familiar. Keir Starmer, announcing a new wave of nuclear power investment, trotted out the phrase, "Build, baby, build" - but that has usually been applied to the housing question by neoliberal 'yimby's' ('yes, in my back yard'), and it perfectly well encapsulates the ideas of the government on this point.

There was some controversy when Starmer and Angela Rayner accompanied Charles Windsor on a visit to Nansledan, a new town on the fringes of Newquay in Cornwall. The yellow press accused him of 'dragging the king into politics' - always a laughable and hypocritical complaint from any major party, all of whom are perfectly willing to hide behind the constitution's dignified part when it suits. It is more than usually ridiculous in this case, however, since one matter of policy on which Charles has insisted on inserting himself repeatedly is that of architecture and development.

His description of a proposed extension of the National Gallery as "a monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much-loved and elegant friend" gave the architectural profession the heebie-jeebies, but also an enduring name for its failures. An ironic award, handed out to "the ugliest building in the United Kingdom completed in the last 12 months", is called the 'Carbuncle Cup'. Charles's big idea for development is small towns, designed in accordance with 'traditional' architectural styles, that are fairly self-contained and crucially not so car-dependent as the average suburb. The most famous example is Poundbury - another initiative out here in the south-west, in this case near Dorchester in Dorset. Nansledan is clearly a chip off the Poundbury block - pastel-coloured terraces, all very chocolate-boxy; amenities all within reach; and a refuge from the carnage of Newquay in the peak of the tourist season. It is wholly an operation of the Duchy of Cornwall (which has long been Charles's private empire, though now in the hands of William).

Wrong problem

The government's intention is to create 12 such new towns, though not necessarily to Charles's aesthetic specifications. Local authorities are scrambling to submit their proposals, in the hope of a golden ticket. There is much government rhetoric about cutting through red tape to get it all done. Optimism is hard to come

by - after all, didn't David Cameron promise us new 'garden cities'? We shall see.

The basic difficulty with all this is that it is solving the wrong problem. It is important to note, I think, that Charles's ideas about architecture and planning are not wholly senseless. Given his overall outlook as a remorseless traditionalist, it is easy to forget what his actual target was in his ruminations on the topic - not so much urban "carbuncles" as suburbanisation: the creation of vast swathes of purely residential development that presuppose long car journeys to giant supermarkets and whatever else. His ideal was more or less self-sufficient conurbations, and in this respect he was surely correct - and correct *against* Thatcher, rather than Labour leaders *per se* (who, alas, were also rather enamoured with the motor-car in the mid-20th century). Even his aesthetic obsessions are shared, to some extent, with radicals like William Morris, who viewed access to beautiful and useful objects, including homes, as a fundamental right of all. Morris would not likely have been any more fond of brutalist tower blocks or mock-Tudor semis than the present king.

Yet, to hear Charles or Starmer talk about it, it is as if we are coming to an end of a long nightmare, where those people called planners spend most of their time refusing to allow any building to happen at all, and the rest of it ensuring that what is built is ugly and slipshod. Soon there will be new planners, like those employed presumably by the Duchy of Cornwall, with a zeal for building, and the talent and common sense to build good places that are nice to live in. It is a matter of expertise, or at least the right kind of expertise, and then of intelligent design of regulations.

Absent from the discussion - and how could it not be? - is the political economy of housing. Most of these new towns are expected to be in the south-east and, however they are planned, will effectively be suburbs of London. Why does London need suburbs? It is already, after all, pretty large. Yet we face the uncomfortable truth that, like many other great or once-great cities, nobody much lives in the middle of it. How could they? To say rents are unaffordable is a preposterous understatement. Residential property in central London is increasingly a matter merely for speculation among international financiers and oligarchs. The various borough councils that govern the city

- not to say the central administration of the mayor's office and the London Assembly - are entirely incapable of dealing with *that* problem, because that is just what London (and indeed Britain) is: an offshore centre beholden to just such interests.

Suburban

For the same reason, even outside the capital, the results of major developments like new towns are doubtful. Back to the south-west, near where I grew up in suburban Plymouth, they have recently built such a place by the name of Sherford. It is a strange old place; a village-sized conurbation built up of fake Regency town-houses. For all the promises of amenities, the first grocery shop only opened a few weeks ago.

The houses are notoriously built on the cheap. In the main phase of construction, you could keep up with the goings-on every time you needed to get a tradesman in to fix something in your own gaff. They had all been getting work out there, and gossiped guiltily about the corners being cut. Already scaffolding has gone up around many of these places barely a year or two after they were finished. In several of them, it turned out that the layers of insulation had been installed in the wrong order - not something, in the wake of Grenfell Tower, you really want to screw up.

Now, if Sherford had been built by Plymouth city council (or South Hams district council), you would at least have some recourse for this insanity - vote the bastards out, ideally to be replaced with somebody who can procure the work on anything other than a 'lowest bidder' basis. However, Sherford was not built by any council, but by a private developer, and the private developer gets paid when the houses get sold - not when the school or the shop opens (there is, at least, a school). At that point, it is all somebody else's problem. Councils are entirely emasculated anyway, and could not undertake such an endeavour if they wanted to (but no doubt many do, given the problems in our cities).

The whole set-up is, then, hopelessly ridden from top to bottom with bad incentives. And we must now add the final problem: developments of this sort, as noted above, are designed to be sold. That, in the end, is where the developer gets their percentage. It is also a general political objective that has, for decades, been shared by both

main parties. Margaret Thatcher is most famous here, seeking to remake Britain as a "property-owning democracy" - of course, the Tories always at bottom considered state housing an outrage, but with Thatcher, something like a new ideology attached itself to the historic class interests of landlords.

Spreading home ownership among the general population, it was thought, was the key to class peace. Once you had a mortgage, you then had a direct interest in ensuring the economy was 'well-managed', because your house value would go up, and your mortgage would not suddenly skyrocket because of the emergency action of the central bank during some crisis. The general population would now begin to reason like little capitalists; in reward, they would at length possess an asset that they could liquidate if necessary to pay for care in old age, or pass on to upwardly-mobile children, or whatever.

Over the years, this opened up a contradiction between the use-value and asset price of housing. Buying was increasingly out of range for ordinary Joes, after the initial 'right to buy' bonanza. Wealth tended to accrue to landlords; everyone else was subject to a rental market, where rents tended, equally, to increase. The inevitable result is what we see today: mass homelessness, universally precarious letting arrangements that make a joke of the formal duties of landlords to their tenants, and a big divide between them and those fortunate enough to own their own homes. The fact that the only answer the neoliberal consensus can come up with, exemplified by the 'Yimbys', is *more supply*. Build, baby, build! But the fact that these are private, rather than social, properties simply makes the problem worse (and, of course, guarantees the opposition of the Nimbys, who are quite rational in attempting to protect their own asset values by opposing new supply).

Going back

For Marxists, the answer must begin with going back to the use-values. Housing is an elementary human need. A housing policy that does not actually house people is at best merely a government giveaway to developers and landlords. It must, once again, be the prerogative of municipal government to provide housing for people in the locality; achieving this requires a drastic change in the relationship between central and local

government, of course, and equally drastic improvements in democratic function in the localities. Private rents must be subject to strict and stringent controls, with a view to the eventual 'euthanasia of the rentiers'. So far as this forces private landlords out of the market, their properties must be subject to compulsory purchase.

This would, on its own, add up to the abolition of real estate as a form of personal investment. One can hardly weep over the expropriation of landlords or the banishment of parasitic property developers, yet it will be politically wise to ensure a soft landing for run-of-the-mill owner-occupiers, whose equity would now be underwater; that would, in turn, demand the socialisation of the banking sector to wind up all the bad debt in good order.

Social housing

From this short summary, I hope to press home the point that this is one area of policy that *really does* directly pose the question of power. We only got the mass social housing of the 1950s and 60s because the capitalist class feared a socialist outcome, in the form of the massively enhanced power of the Soviet Union after World War II. We need to think far more radically than is typical on the left, which either demands council houses be built without confronting the question of power, as is typical of Trotskyist groups in this country, or supposes that grassroots organisation of renters can substitute, as is typical of various anarchistic types. (Needless to say, though we will not elaborate here, such sweeping expropriations as I have outlined would be impossible to achieve in one country alone, never mind a country so utterly colonised by finance capital as Britain.)

The homes built under such a regime will not typically be single-family dwellings of the sort found in Nansledan. Some balance will have to be found between quality of life, environmental impact and optimal supply. I expect this will mean spacious apartments in mid-sized blocks, with plenty of room for children's play areas, green spaces, five-a-side cages, and whatever else you like.

That can all, happily, be left to the desires of the people who will actually live there, and the ingenuity of architects and engineers liberated from the regime of the lowest bidder ●

ECONOMY

Recipe for looming crash

Low or zero growth and rising prices. There's more than a whiff of stagflation in the air, warns **Michael Roberts**

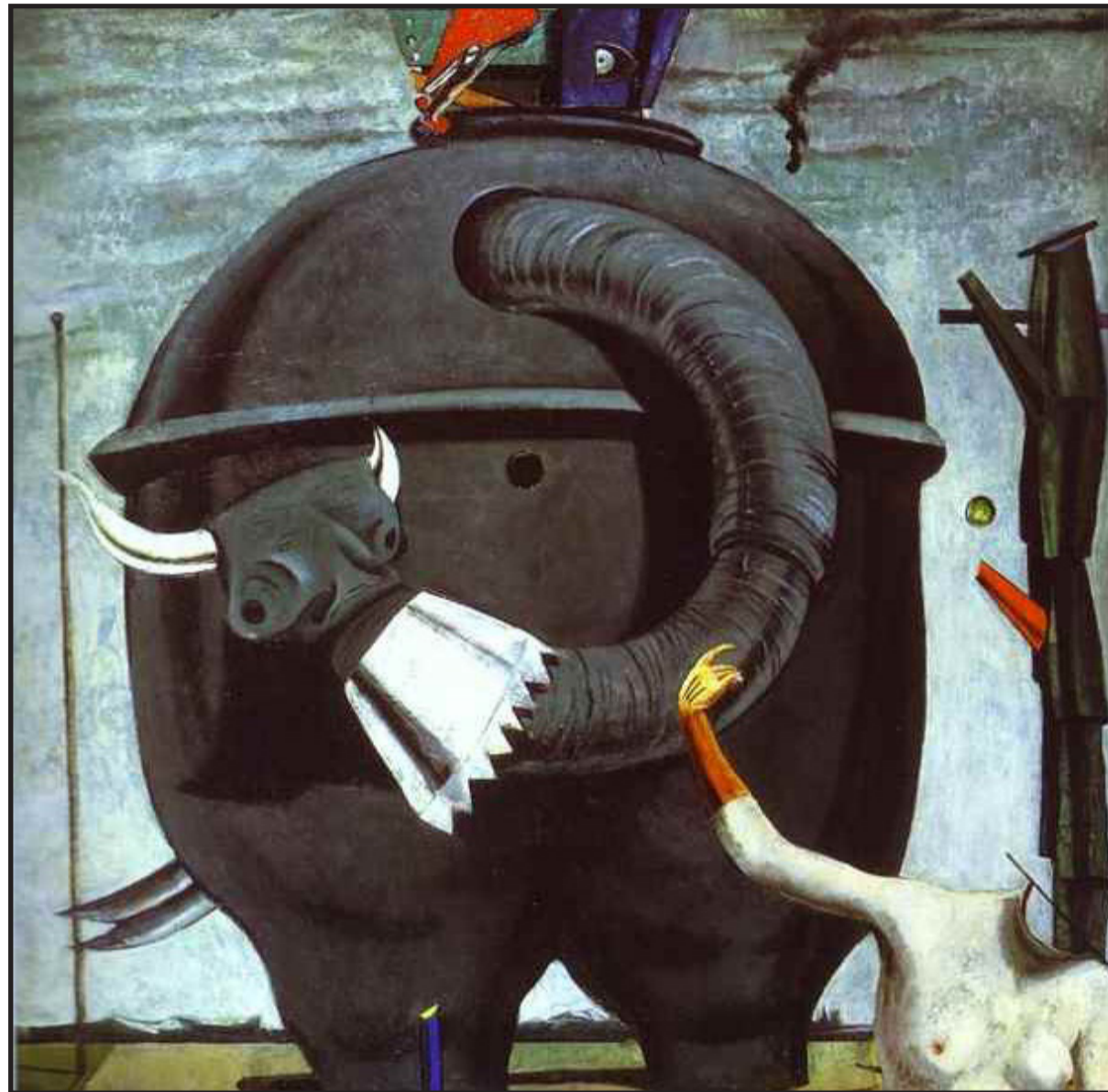
US consumer price inflation reached 3% year-on-year in January 2025. Energy prices rose for the first time in five months and food price inflation stood at its highest rate in a year. Food prices have leapt back up, as the cost of eggs rose 15.2% - the largest increase since June 2015, driven by an avian flu outbreak that caused a shortage. In addition, cocoa and coffee prices have rocketed due to bad harvests in the global south, as climate change and global warming causes unpredictable and extreme weather events in growing areas.

So-called 'core inflation' (which excludes supposedly volatile food and energy prices) rose even more, to 3.3%, as insurance, rents and medical care costs continued to rise for American households. Used car prices rose sharply, as Americans looked to find cheaper cars than expensive new electric vehicles. And mortgage rates remained at highs not seen since the 1980s. So, as the headline inflation has fallen, the core rate has stayed higher.

Then there is the Sticky Price Consumer Price Index (CPI). This is calculated from a subset of goods and services included in the CPI that change price relatively infrequently. So they are thought to incorporate expectations about future inflation to a greater degree than prices that change on a more frequent basis. This measure has remained even higher.

What is clear is that US inflation is not moving any further towards the 2% a year target that the Federal Reserve has set for claiming that the 'war against inflation' is won. That is why the Fed is holding back on any further reductions in its policy interest rate, which sets the floor for all borrowing.

Unfortunately for the Fed, US economic growth is beginning to falter. The US economy expanded at an annualised 2.3% in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2024 - the slowest growth in three quarters, down from 3.1% in Q3. And the economic activity index for the US fell to its



Two or more apparently unrelated realities: Max Ernst 'The elephant celebés' (1921)

lowest level since last April. What was most worrying was the fall in business fixed investment, both in structures and equipment. Fixed investment contracted for the first time since Q1 2023 (-0.6% vs 2.1%), due to equipment (7.8% vs 10.8%) and structures (-1.1% vs -5%).

It was much worse in the UK, where, although the inflation rate dropped a touch to 2.5% a year in December, it is expected to have hit 2.8% year on year (yoy) in January. Indeed, the Bank of England is now forecasting that inflation will rise to 3.7% yoy by the year-end! The BoE will probably still cut its base rate again, as it has no alternative but to try and help the UK's very weak economy from continuing to stagnate. It now predicts that the British economy will only grow by 0.75% this year - down from its previous forecast of 1.5% just three months ago.

As for the euro zone, the annual inflation rate rose to 2.5% yoy in January - the highest rate since July 2024, driven primarily by a sharp acceleration in energy costs. The core rate stayed at 2.7% yoy. So inflation is still above the European Central Bank target and rising. Nevertheless, the ECB still hopes that its 2% a year target will be met by "the end of the year". In the meantime, the euro zone is stagnating: ie, very little real GDP growth.

The annual inflation rate in Japan jumped to 3.6% in December 2024 from 2.9% in the prior month, marking the highest reading since January 2023, while food prices rose at the steepest pace in a year. The core rate also hit 3% - the highest since August 2023. Japan has been noted in the past for non-existent inflation - that has now all changed.

Japan's monetary authorities have been trying to get inflation up, on the grounds that this will boost economic growth (a weird theory). Yet the country's real GDP in 2024 was up only 0.1%, compared to 1.9% in 2023, although the economy did pick up a little in the last quarter, driven mainly by exports.

So in the major economies, there is an increasing whiff of stagflation: ie, low or zero growth alongside price increases. And this is before the inflationary and growth hit that could come if Trump implements his import tariffs and government spending cuts measures over this year.¹

So far, financial investors in the US stock market seem unworried.² Even the recent DeepSeek launch that undermined the value of AI investments made by the US tech giants has been seen through. After an initial fall, the US stock market price index is again close to a new high. It seems that financial investors are not convinced that Trump will implement all his threats on tariffs and they like Musk's trashing of government departments to get a 'smaller state'. They are confident that Trump will go through with more tax cuts on corporate profits and high-income earners.

Most relevant is that corporate earnings are still growing. Standard and Poor (S&P) 500 earnings growth for the fourth quarter of 2024 is estimated to have risen 15.1% from a year earlier. Some believe that earnings growth could be even higher at 16.9%, the highest year-over-year earnings growth rate reported since Q4 2021. It will also mark the sixth consecutive quarter of year-over-year earnings growth for the index.

This earnings boom is driven by the banking sector, which is making good profits from high interest rates and corporate borrowing deals. And, of course, the other sectoral winner is communications, with the media tech giants accounting for about 75% of S&P 500 earnings growth in 2024. The so-called Magnificent Seven drive US stock market prices, and the US stock

market drives world markets.

But earnings growth for these titans will likely fall back this year, given the huge spending on AI capacity that they have committed to. And most important, for the vast majority of US companies, those outside the burgeoning banking, social media and tech, things are not so great. S&P 500 free cash flow per share has not grown at all in three years. According to the Russell 2000 index, 43% of the companies are unprofitable. At the same time, the interest expense of these firms as a percentage of total debt hit 7.1% - the highest since 2003. US corporate bankruptcies have hit their highest level since the aftermath of the global financial crisis, as elevated interest rates punish struggling groups. At least 686 US companies filed for bankruptcy in 2024 - up about 8% from 2023 and higher than any year since the 828 filings in 2010, according to data from S&P Global Market Intelligence.

US companies are defaulting on junk loans at the fastest rate in four years, as they struggle to refinance a wave of cheap borrowing that followed the Covid pandemic. Because leveraged loans - high yield bank loans that have been sold on to other investors - have floating interest rates, many of those companies that took on debt when rates were ultra-low during the pandemic have since struggled under high borrowing costs in recent years.

When you strip out inflation from stock market prices and US corporate earnings, it reveals how far out of line the US stock market is, compared to the real profits being made in the productive sectors of the US economy (that is, excluding financial profits).

I have also compiled a similar measure to compare the stock market value compared to profits in the US corporate sector. Tobin's Q is the ratio of stock market value divided by the book value (ie the value of their assets as recorded in the accounts of the companies quoted on the stock market). Then I have measured corporate profits relative to the net worth of company assets. Tobin's Q is at a record high ie the stock market value is way out of line with corporate assets. And corporate profits relative to company assets are relatively low.

To repeat what Ruchir Sharma, chair of Rockefeller International, said recently, the US stock market boom is "the mother of all bubbles". According to Sharma,

Talk of bubbles in tech or AI, or in investment strategies focused on growth and momentum, obscures the mother of all bubbles in US markets. Thoroughly dominating the mind space of global investors, America is over-owned, overvalued and overhyped to a degree never seen before. As with all bubbles, it is hard to know when this one will deflate, or what will trigger its decline.

The major economies are exhibiting signs of stagflation. That means interest rates could stay high, while economic growth goes missing. That is a recipe for an eventual crash in financial markets. ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/02/04/trumps-tariff-tantrums.
2. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/01/28/ai-going-deepseek.

Online Communist Forum



Sunday February 23 5pm
Tina Becker assesses first results of Germany's election and Jack Conrad reports on communist fusion

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

Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and
Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk
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A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain

COLLECTIVE

Dead-end politics

Secret conclaves, weird local campaigns, self-appointed gatekeepers and a complete lack of democracy. **Carla Roberts** takes a look at yet another broad-frontist party in the making

How could we not compare the democratic practice of the communist fusion process to the secret shenanigans currently taking place, which might or might not lead to the launch of the Collective party (which might or might not be called 'Fightback' and might or might not include a certain Jeremy Corbyn in a position of some sort).

In the last eight months or so, there have been regular Zoom meetings between the groups involved, as well as three real-life 'organising' meetings - the last one was on January 25 in London. Around 70 people were in attendance at that one, we hear, and every group involved was allowed to send a maximum of two delegates - ie, there were far more groups present than are currently listed on the Collective website,¹ including, for example, the all-new Revolutionary Communist Party (aka Socialist Appeal) and a number of weird and wonderful local campaigns. Judging by a recent editorial in the *Morning Star*,² it looks like the Communist Party of Britain might also jump on board (while not quite giving up its Labourism):

Support for [Starmer's] agenda is unconscionable for socialists... There is always the alternative argument of 'stay and fight' within the Labour Party. Raising the questions of whether it is possible to both stay and fight, or if a choice is required; and how those who wish to stay and fight can make common cause with those who leave or are excluded.

Without naming Collective, the editorial raises the possibility of a number of 'left' MPs joining up to a new "alternative" - the main reason being that they will, in all likelihood, not be allowed back into the Labour Party (despite their best efforts):



Re, re, revolutionaries in a sub-reformist swamp

Four of the seven suspended from the parliamentary party for opposing the two-child benefit cap have been readmitted. Three remain outside. John McDonnell hopes to be readmitted once the Metropolitan Police have conceded there is no case to charge him - and Jeremy Corbyn - for participating in the delegation to the BBC at the end of the last protest for Palestine. He may be erring on the side of overoptimism.

The other two - Zarah Sultana and Apsana Begum - "clearly have little

chance of being readmitted", the article states, probably correctly - though it goes on to claim, rather stupidly, that the reason for that is "even were they to agree to mute themselves entirely... they would still remain guilty of being Muslim women". Is it racism and misogyny that led to Corbyn's expulsion? Obviously not. Sultana and Begum are, like him, broadly on the left, which is why they are in Starmer's crosshairs, not because they are "Muslim women". In any case, they have certainly done their best to remain as 'mute', unobjectionable and useless as possible.

Overoptimism

Showing that the editor, Ben Chacko, could likewise be charged with "overoptimism", he goes on to also count "the five MPs of the Independent Alliance - Corbyn and four pro-Gaza MPs elected in constituencies with a substantial Muslim vote". According to the *Morning Star*, "their only misstep has been in supporting (Corbyn excepted) the Tories in opposition to VAT on private schools on religious grounds". There is a big fat 'yet' missing, clearly. All five voted against the assisted dying bill - for (slightly) different reasons, I suspect. But, as soon as a 'social' issue like the right of a woman to choose an abortion comes before parliament, the political difference between those five will become very obvious. Corbyn, despite all his faults, is a socialist of sorts. The other four represent essentially petty-bourgeois class interests.

It is entirely possible to have partial and temporary unity with those four (and many other) MPs over this and that issue - but they are unlikely to want to join up with a bunch of leftie socialists in Collective, even though they are doing their absolute best to disguise their politics.

In any case, it looks like Collective will indeed launch some time soon - but even people who have attended the strictly 'by

invitation only' meetings and are part of the WhatsApp group do not know when or how it will happen. Despite the ever-growing number of participating groups, there is not a single meeting report to be found anywhere. No minutes. No explanation of what is happening and when.

As usually happens with such undemocratic proceedings, there are, however, plenty of rumours and even more leaks. We hear, for example, that Corbyn briefly showed up to the January 25 event, making a rambling speech that was entirely unconnected to the party question. When somebody dared to ask him about his actual involvement, they were immediately shut down by chair Pamela Fitzpatrick, who admonished them for "putting Jeremy on the spot", leaving participants none the wiser. Perhaps a bit wiser, actually: had Corbyn's answer been a resounding 'yes', no doubt she would have been happy to let him clarify that. He is content to be associated with Collective, just as he is content to be associated with the Stop the War Coalition and other such 'worthy broad fronts'.

We are told that Fitzpatrick and the well-connected Karie Murphy (formerly Corbyn's right-hand woman, while he was leader of the Labour Party, and partner of former Unite leader Len McCluskey) have set up "working groups on everything under the sun: admin, finance, media" - but that there is not even an attempt to discuss what kind of political programme this maybe-party will have. That is apparently for the future membership/leadership to discuss/decide. There is not even a short platform that would clarify what Collective actually wants to achieve. The website still only features the five mini-platitudes of Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project ("Real pay rise for the many"; "Green new deal"; "Housing for the many"; "Tax the rich to save the NHS"; "Welcome refugees" and "World free from war"), plus "a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and an end to decades of Israeli impunity". Without any idea of how to get, for example to a "world free from war".

One thing is for sure: judging by the interim constitution leaked by the blog, *Left Lane*, it will almost certainly be entirely undemocratic.³ It refers to the (as yet unwritten) 'aims and objectives' of the organisation, which all groups which want to be part of have to "agree to" and "abide by" - in that case the "interim leadership" would "consider them constituent groups". The interim leadership does the "day-to-day-running", can approve new members (or not), will draft the constitution, can change it and dissolve Collective, "until such time as the leadership structure is decided for the full constitution".

Oh and who is on this interim leadership, you ask? And how could it be challenged or changed? That is where things get decidedly murky. All it says is that it will be made up of "the Collective secretariat, the Collective Scotland secretariat and the Collective Cymru/Wales secretariat" - with, presumably, all three secretariats chosen by appointment and overseen by Fitzpatrick and Murphy. There is no talk about elections or, for that matter, accountability or democracy. A bureaucratic nightmare, designed to assure tight control and keep out troublemakers.

Talking of which, we understand

the Socialist Workers Party applied to join Collective a few months ago, but was told in no uncertain words to get lost. No surprise really, considering that it is still incredibly tarnished - especially among young people - by trying to brush the rape allegations against Martin Smith under the carpet.

Palestinian flags

It has also acquired a whole set of new critics by continuing to insist that its front, Stand Up to Racism, cannot possibly stop Zionists (ie, racists) from attending its events or demonstrations, because that would put off its trade union affiliates. We understand things recently boiled over, when Ben Jamal, leader of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, was asked to take down any Palestine flags and symbols before speaking at a SUtR meeting - a move which was hotly debated at the February 1 PSC AGM in London's Conway Hall.

So as to not miss out on the Collective fun, the SWP has reached into its (not very deep) toolbox and has decided to set up yet another front organisation: 'We Demand Change' launches on March 29 with a rally in London. Its name is as unoriginal as its politics:

We call on all trade unionists, campaigners and activists to begin to construct - through debate and discussion - a network of activists across campaigns and unions to turn the tide on despair. A network that can deliver solidarity to those who are taking action to protect their living standards and with those who are building the movements to free Palestine, end the drive to a war economy, stop the far right and prevent the further deterioration of our planet.

It adds: "Where there are multifaceted crises impacting on people's lives simultaneously, we will need to campaign on all. Each of the different crises impacts the other. Success on the political campaigns feeds into our ability to fight on the economic issues that confront us and vice versa."

In other words, a 'motherhood and apple pie' campaign that sounds and looks exactly like Collective and, for that matter, pretty much all the groups involved in it: Transform, For the Many Network, Tusc, etc. That is, of course, the point. And the fact that Jeremy Corbyn is among the speakers on March 29 gives it its official seal of approval - so perhaps the SWP will now be allowed to sneak into Collective under the guise of We Demand Change. Who knows.

Other speakers on March 29 include SWP member Weyman Bennett, former SWP members Lindsey German and James Meadway (both now Counterfire), Yanis Varoufakis, Grace Blakely, Andrew Feinstein and turncoat Owen Jones, whose campaign is called, somewhat confusingly, 'We Demand Better'. Perhaps they could unite to form 'We Demand Better Change'! - we certainly do, but not the sort of change much of the left is currently advocating ●

Notes

1. we-are-collective.org.
2. morningstaronline.co.uk/article/c/editorial-fight-or-flight-choices-socialists-parliament (February 11).
3. theleftlane2024.substack.com/p/an-open-letter-to-collective-leadership.

Fighting fund

Help needed!

After recent weeks when numerous comrades have contributed to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund, the last seven days stand in sharp contrast: just seven readers and supporters have come up with donations.

These are, of course, hugely welcome - thanks go this week to MM (£75), TR (£40), TW and GB (£25 each) and CG (£24), who all contributed via standing order/bank transfer. In addition, KS (£50) clicked on that PayPal button, while comrade Hassan handed his usual £5 note to one of our team.

While, as I say, the £244 that these comrades raised is more than welcome, it is very disappointing that there were so few donors this week. As a result, we have fallen quite a bit behind the going rate - our running total stands at just £1,021 towards the £2,250 monthly target. And, of course, two thirds of February has already gone, but we haven't even got halfway there!

True, the next week or so will see a number of substantial

monthly standing orders come our way, but will we get anywhere near that much-needed £2,250? And, don't forget, our costs have shot up, which means that very soon we'll need to increase that target. Please play your part, comrades - help us maintain the paper which plays such an essential role in campaigning for the single Marxist party we so desperately need.

Please make a bank transfer or PayPal donation - and, yes, there's still just about enough time to send us a cheque. For information on how to do any of those, look at the information below and click on the link if necessary.

With your help we can do it - please play your part in helping us cross the line! ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310 To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate

FUSION

Speech controls yet again

There are those who want to keep differences polite, internal and under tight control. That is the approach of the opportunist right. Mike Macnair takes issue with those complaining about the CPGB's 'bad culture'

I attended the February 8 'Marxist unity' day school in Salford organised by the *Prometheus* online magazine and Talking about Socialism. Comrade Carla Roberts has reported on the day school, and we print this week a set of letters from participants (which we put online last week).¹ In this article I am concerned with a specific feature of the discussion, which is part of a long-running 'debate' (I put quote-marks round 'debate' for reasons that will appear later). Comrade Roberts' article refers to "hesitation about the *Weekly Worker* and its 'style', as an RS21 comrade put it in Salford". I myself heard a comrade complain in the meeting that the paper was "snarky" in comments on other groups.

Among the letters, Daniel Brady offered a specific instance of complaint: "The reports that were published in the *Weekly Worker* on Jack Conrad's assumptions of the RS21 position were quite understandably read as an attempt to pose ultimatums and shape the narrative in bad faith."

Comrade Brady's point has the merit of condemning us for something specific - that is, that we speculated about what internal discussion might have led RS21 to break with the pro-imperialist, pro-war Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. What "ultimatums" are posed by our speculation on the issue is unclear - except in so far as we in the CPGB are quite open in arguing that the basis of any communist unity has to include opposition to our own imperialist state on Ukraine as much as on Palestine.

How this can be supposed to be "in bad faith" is completely impossible to see. To prevent it from "shaping the narrative" all the comrades need to do is to publish their discussion. What comrade Brady's argument impliedly claims is that RS21 has the right to the privacy of its internal discussions, and should not be forced to publish them in order to show that the *Weekly Worker*'s speculations are wrong.

On this issue we make absolutely no apology. The CPGB has been arguing since the 1990s, and *The Leninist* before it, that parties and groups that claim to offer a political lead to the working class are *obliged* to publish their internal debates - as the Social Democratic Party of Germany did before World War I, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party did down to 1918 and the Russian Communist Party did into the 1920s.

We think that this task is essential to political parties and groups playing an educative role for the broader workers' movement and being answerable to it. *Education*, as distinct from training, happens through dialectic: grappling with the confrontation of opposed views. Organisations that do not publish their internal debates and do not debate with other groups which disagree with them *tend to dumb-down their readers and the broader workers' movement*. It is for this reason that we publish groups' internal discussions when they have not and we are able to, and we speculate about where the groups have changed their position and we do not have information about the debate available to publish.

I put quote marks round 'debate' above, because, while *The Leninist* and the *Weekly Worker* have been *arguing* this position since the 1980s, almost no-one has been prepared to actually *argue* the contrary. At most we have received *assertions* (like comrade Andrew Northall's defence of Stalinist norms in our letters page²). Or we



No serious debate, no serious politics

hear general smears, without concrete evidence offered - like the complaint about the paper's "style" referred to above, or comrade Lawrence Parker's arguments - again, unsupported by evidence - about our supposed bad "culture". Without much more "further and better particulars" than has been offered so far, we are not in a position either to argue or to make concessions on this front.

Compromise

No doubt it is necessary in politics to be willing to compromise, as Lenin argued in 1920 in *'Leftwing' communism*.³ And hence no doubt there are issues on which CPGB should be willing to compromise for the sake of broader unity. But, taking this for the moment as a starting point, Lenin went on to argue in the next section of *'Leftwing' communism*:

The Communist Party should propose the following 'compromise' election agreement to the Hendersons and Snowdens: let us jointly fight against the alliance between Lloyd George and the Conservatives; let us share parliamentary seats in proportion to the number of workers' votes polled for the Labour Party and for the Communist Party (not in elections, but in a special ballot), and let us retain complete freedom of agitation, propaganda and political activity. Of course, without this latter condition, we cannot agree to a bloc, for that would be treachery; the British communists must demand and get complete freedom to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as (for 15 years - 1903-17) the Russian Bolsheviks demanded and got it in respect of the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens: ie, the Mensheviks.⁴

Compromise, then, but *not* at the price of abandoning freedom of sharp criticism. And Lenin's comment on the Bolsheviks refers to their history as a *permanent public faction* of the RSDLP. It was this public factional character that allowed the Russian workers to choose between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

The other side of this coin is given by ex-left pro-war SPD writer Heinrich Cunow's 1915 objection to Rosa Luxemburg's polemic against the SPD's August 1914 decision to vote for war credits:

The opposition to our Reichstag fraction's vote on August 4 and December 2 last year is assuming ever more obnoxious forms. Those who do not agree with the vote on war credits undoubtedly have the right to criticise it, in an objective, party-comradely fashion, of course - although even on this condition one could be of the view that for certain reasons it would be better to postpone criticism until after the war. Yet when the German social democratic working class and its leaders are accused by opponents in Germany and abroad of cowardice, betrayal, a lack of principles, abdication, collapse and so on then surely there can hardly be any talk of objective criticism.⁵

This demand for "objective, party-comradely" criticism was repeated in stronger forms by the Labour right complaining of "intimidation" by Corbynistas in 2016-17.⁶

To accede to the demand for civility in polemic is, then, to accede to the demands of the loyalist right wing of the labour movement, which supports and is supported by the capitalist state and the capitalist media.

Of course, comrades who raise this issue against the *Weekly Worker* do not *think* that that is what they are doing. But the reality is that the pro-capitalist right wing of the workers' movement has been demanding 'civility and respect' in debate - meaning *deference to their scab politics* - ever since the 'revisionism' debate in the SPD in the 1890s-1900s. Comintern began to concede to this demand from the right with Georgi Dimitrov's speech to the 1935 seventh congress:

"The communists attack us," say others. But, listen, we have repeatedly declared: We shall not attack anyone, whether persons, organisations or parties, standing for the united front of the working class against the class enemy. But

at the same time it is our duty, in the interests of the proletariat and its cause, to criticise those persons, organisations and parties that hinder unity of action by the workers.⁷

This idea has become the common coin of both the Labour left and the far left. The Labour and trade union 'official' left clings to unity with the right as the only way to get a government. Hence it internalises the right's demand for 'civility and respect'. It, then, demands of the *far* left as a condition for united action that the far left should use the methods of diplomacy, 'civility and respect', towards the 'official left', and hence should self-silence.

This in turn has led the *far* left to internalise the same principles - going back in this country *at least* to John Ross and his co-thinkers' "priority united-front axis towards the left social-democratic organising cadre" in the International Marxist Group in 1973-75, and in 1976-77 the International Socialists/Socialist Workers Party's Right to Work Campaign, modelled on the popular-front version of the old Communist Party's 1930s unemployment campaigning, and the Anti-Nazi League from 1977.

This 50-year (or more) history has so ingrained Dimitrov's ideas into the far left that both 'left independents' and small groups who subjectively seek to build communist, Maoist or Trotskyist parties cling to diplomatic methods and find it impossible to live with real political openness and sharp criticism. Thus *their* anti-educative culture appears to them as the CPGB's "bad culture".

Unity

Equally, without real openness and willingness to live with sharp criticism there can actually be no effective unification of the Marxists. The problem is already apparent in comrades' failure to specify what it is that counts as the CPGB's "bad culture". What is an unacceptable insult? We have been called out in the past for calling people "opportunist" and "centrist" - but these are merely (sharp) political characterisations. On

the other hand, comrade Lawrence Parker accuses us of having a "North Korean" internal life and other such slanders; is this to be taken as comradely criticism?

We object to the *falsity* of comrade Parker's arguments, but not to their *rudeness*. Similarly, back in Left Unity in 2013-15 we noted that the proposer of a ban on heckling (which we opposed) promptly heckled a CPGB speaker in the same meeting. The *indeterminacy* of what counts as unacceptable forms of polemic quite inevitably produces double standards in critics of the CPGB's "bad culture".

This problem of indeterminacy and double standards means that, as soon as serious disagreements arise, the opposing side will be accused of "bad culture", 'uncomradeliness' and so on. Left Unity is, in fact, a classic example: its 'safe spaces' rules (never actually voted in during that period, but used in practice) gave rise to the organisation's disputes committee being utterly clogged up with meritless complaints.

The pattern of factitious disciplinary charges against opponents from majorities (central or local) - and overreactions to insults and provocations by minorities walking out - is not just a matter of the history of Left Unity. It is equally the history of far-left splits - going back to the notorious 1953 split in the Fourth International, and continuing through the history of the 1970s (and since) splits in the SWP - and a relatively recent example is the 2014 collapse of the International Socialist Network over 'chaigate'.⁸

To compromise on the issue of open and sharp polemics would, then, in fact be to destroy the possibility of unity of the Marxists and to condemn ourselves to repetition of the patterns of left failure over the last 50 years. An indefinite future repetition, but not an *endless* repetition, because it will only last until the growing ascendancy of the irrationalist right issues in a generalised nuclear war. This ascendancy is itself the product of the Marxist left's self-silencing acceptance of the loyalist and 'official left' labour bureaucracy's demands for confidentiality and 'civility' ●

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Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1525/two-meetings-and-many-possibilities; and weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1525/additional-letters.
2. On Northall and Parker, see 'Upfront, sharp and personal', November 30 2023 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1469/upfront-sharp-and-personal), with references; on Parker, again, 'Anti-partyist partyism', January 16 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1521/anti-partyist-partyism).
3. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch08.htm.
4. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch09.htm.
5. *Partei-Zusammenbruch? Ein offenes Wort zum inneren Parteistreit Berlin 1915 (The collapse of the party? An open word on the controversy in the party)* p3 (Ben Lewis's translation).
6. See, for example, 'Attempt to outlaw justified anger' *Weekly Worker* October 20 2016 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1127/attempt-to-outlaw-justified-anger).
7. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm#7 - see 'The chief arguments of the opponents of the united front'.
8. C Winstanley, 'IS Network: self-flagellation and the "kinky split"' *Weekly Worker* February 13 2014 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/997/is-network-self-flagellation-and-the-kinky-split); D Harvey, 'ISN: not waving, but dying' *Weekly Worker* July 24 2014 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1020/isn-not-waving-but-dying).

WHY MARX?



'Catalogue of the severall sects and opinions in England and other nations' (1647)

Moshé and Nick

Question, question, question, that is Marxism. Carla Roberts reports on the latest session in the 'Building a Communist Party' series organised by Why Marx?, which addressed the question of sects and sectarianism

The left is riddled with confessional sects. Of course, most members do not believe that their particular group is actually a sect. They are told by their respective leaderships that they are, in fact, the revolutionary organisation - the kernel of the future party that will lead the working class to revolution. It just has to grow a bit for 'when the day comes' (within "five to ten years", as the newly packaged Revolutionary Communist Party states).

But what is a sect? Why are there so many? And how do we build a genuinely democratic Communist Party instead? That was the topic of the February 13 session in the new Why Marx? Zoom series. (The next session will discuss the other side of the coin - the 'broad left fronts' set up by those sects).

Moshé Machover gave perhaps the best short definition in the meeting, which was attended by an encouraging 105 people (the video has already been watched thousands of times). He welcomed the current communist fusion process, "which I am very excited about. And it is successful, which I really hope it will be, I will almost definitely join. Contrast that to a sect, which will refuse to even discuss fusing with others. All they will say is 'Join us - everybody else is wrong'."

Yes, they might engage with other groups and forces in this or that particular front, but they believe they are 'it' already and just have to grow a bit. "Size does not come into it," the comrade quite rightly said. "You can have small sects and you can have big sects." A good summary by comrade Machover on the key aspects of a sect, which was discussed in more detail throughout this illuminating session.

The meeting was opened by Nick Wrack of Talking About Socialism, who has got plenty of experience on the issue, having spent many years as a leading member in Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. He outlined the key features that all sects have in common: "A lack of internal and external democracy. Members are expected to follow the leadership line. They have to agree with every dot

and comma in the programme, while we would argue that members should accept it."

He thought that there was "no fundamental difference" between, for example, the Socialist Workers Party, SPEW and the new Revolutionary Communist Party: "Their disagreements over whether the Soviet Union was state-capitalist or a deformed workers' state really does not justify having 2,000 members in one organisation and 2,000 in the other," he said (probably somewhat overestimating the actual membership numbers). "These are secondary issues, which we can have disagreements about, as long as we are united in the essential strategy - the overthrow of capitalism."

Expanding on the issue of the need for democracy, he said: "It is not just permissible to have disagreements: it is obligatory. Why? Because society will not be changed by an individual or a small clique of people - but it has to be the conscious will of the working class." Allowing and encouraging the expression of different viewpoints, including in factions and in front of the working class, therefore has to be part of what we are building, right from the start.

He agreed with comrade Machover's suggestion that an organisation's attitude towards fusion is a crucial part of the sect culture we desperately need to overcome: "In the present period, the nature of capitalism clearly demands the necessity of organising the working class in a democratic Communist Party. In the face of that clear necessity, the refusal to address that question and to use secondary differences as a justification to stay in separate organisations - that is sectarianism."

Both rejected the much-quoted definition of a sect as "pursuing interests that are separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole", which was mentioned in the generally very interesting discussion. As comrade Machover explained, "this is not useful as a definition, because no sect believes its interests are separate from that of the working class". In fact, many sects use the quote from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (!) to claim - wrongly, obviously

- that Marx and Engels were *against* forming a Communist Party and that socialists should instead stick to the Labour Party and/or subordinate themselves to the sub-reformist platitudes of the latest broad front, set up by this or that sect.

There was what looked like a disagreement between the two speakers over the role of 'ideology'. Comrade Machover disagreed with comrade Wrack's assertion that we would have to develop a 'communist ideology':

From what I understand from reading Marx and Engels, they never used the word 'ideology' in a positive way, but always in a dismissive and sarcastic way, in the sense of 'doctrine'. Of course, I am in favour of a Communist Party developing a particular set of ideas, but that for me is different to ideology. There is a tendency in sects to cling onto old ideas and to never critically re-examine them. But you cannot be a non-critical Marxist, by definition. He, Marx, changed his mind on a number of things, just like everybody else on the planet.

Comrade Machover went on to illustrate the issue with the theory of value, "which Marx never really fully solved, and he admitted as much. He asked Engels to try and deal with the transformation problem after his death, but he did not manage it either. It is an interesting theory and it is worth reading it - but it has holes and it is not a model to explain capitalism today."

Another example was Darwin's book, *On the origin of the species*:

It is a tremendous work, but it clearly is not the model textbook to explain evolution. Science has marched on. The same goes for Marx. But some on the left cling to those ideas, no matter what. This turns into a form of hero worship. For example, I find it alarming that some people still believe the *Transitional programme* is applicable today. It was written in 1938 in a very particular historical period, looking particularly at

Germany. Is it really true that capitalism has not been able to develop the forces of production? Trotsky was expecting imminent revolution. That was wrong in 1938, but excusable. There really is no excuse for clinging onto it today. We have hindsight.

The comrade also had harsh words for those who "hero-worship" Lenin:

Even early Comintern was clearly not a good model in terms of democracy, especially the ban on factions and the militarisation of the communist parties. Some people believe that before 1917 Lenin was much more democratic. He was, to a degree. But I find that his references to the need for democracy are often instrumental at best, because the proletariat needs democracy so that it can organise to overthrow capitalism. But there is very little in Lenin about democracy as being necessary in the transition to communism or communism itself. That democracy has to be the mechanism with which we come to decisions in a post-capitalist society.

In response, comrade Wrack clarified that he entirely agreed with comrade Machover's criticism of the doctrinaire nature of much of the 'ideology' visible in today's sects: "This really shows how important it is that we talk to each other in meetings like this. It all depends on how we define words like ideology, doesn't it?" ●

The series continues. See: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**Governments are
pouring money
into Artificial
Intelligence**

Codes and latest buzz words

Western countries and China are engaged in a race for domination. Yassamine Mather looks at the risks, as well as the potential of AI

The AI Action Summit, held in Paris on February 10 and 11, brought together leaders from over 100 countries, international organisations, academia and the private sector to discuss the advances and global implications of AI. It had two co-chairs: French president Emmanuel Macron and Indian prime minister Narendra Modi (the US vice-president, JD Vance, also dropped in). The agenda covered diverse issues such as public interest in AI, the future of work, plus trust in AI and global AI governance.

As in other global issues, there were significant points of contention regarding the approach to AI regulation. Vance criticised European regulatory measures, suggesting that excessive oversight could stifle innovation and hinder AI's transformative potential, adding that the new Trump administration wants regulatory frameworks that promote AI development rather than constrain it. While European leaders, including Macron, claimed they advocated robust regulations to ensure AI technologies are "ethical, transparent and aligned with public interests", at the end of the summit, the USA and UK declined to sign a declaration promoting "inclusive and sustainable" aims, which was endorsed by 60 other countries, including France, China and India.

OpenAI's CEO, Sam Altman, was there to introduce his company's latest AI product, Deep Research, designed to autonomously generate detailed reports on user-specified topics via the web. During the summit, Elon Musk and a consortium of investors made a substantial bid to acquire OpenAI - an offer that was declined by Altman. However, this was a sign of ongoing strategic manoeuvres within the AI industry.

In my talk at a recent Online Communist Forum, I mentioned the colossal waste of funds in models of AI projects that are followed in most capitalist countries. The army of overpaid administrators, project managers and business analysts often bring to the table very little that is tasked with monitoring and managing the work of code writers and software developers. Reading the statements made by various governments during and after this conference convinced me that there is a whole layer of ignorant bureaucrats and 'experts' pontificating about AI, while they have little or no understanding of machine learning software, only know acronyms of the latest buzz words and have not got a clue about how any of it works - or how it can evolve or collapse.

Of course, these days you cannot have such a conference without a pretence of addressing 'ethical and environmental concerns', and the Paris summit followed this trend. AI expert Yoshua Bengio talked about the potential risks of advanced AI systems, highlighting concerns about issues of control and alignment with human values. There were calls for a moratorium



Paris AI Action Summit: know-nothing bigwigs

on the development of artificial general intelligence (AGI). This is a type of AI that can understand, learn and apply knowledge across a wide range of tasks at a level comparable to human intelligence. Narrow AI is designed for specific tasks (eg, facial recognition, language translation or playing chess), but AGI can perform any intellectual task that a human can do by applying knowledge from one domain to another, demonstrating flexibility and adaptability. It can learn from experience, improve over time and acquire new skills without explicit programming and therefore can solve complex problems, make decisions and reason abstractly. AGI has a level of independence, in that it can operate independently, set its own goals and take steps to achieve them. It is claimed that some AGIs can have the ability to acquire consciousness or self-awareness, though this is highly debated.

Commitments

The event was an opportunity for the beleaguered French president to show off.

In a bid which is supposed to position Europe as a competitive player in the global AI landscape, Macron announced a €109 billion investment in AI infrastructure. This initiative aims to develop computing clusters and leverage the country's low-carbon nuclear energy to support AI growth, thereby reducing reliance on technologies from the US and China.

In recent years, western states, particularly the US, EU members, Canada and the UK, have significantly increased their investments in AI. These investments are driven by the recognition of its potential to transform economies, enhance national security, and improve public services. Here are some key points about their spending and approaches:

■ **United States:** The US federal government has allocated billions of dollars to AI research and development (R&D) through various agencies, including the Department of Defence (DoD), the National Science Foundation and the Department of

Energy. The American AI Initiative, launched in 2019, aims to promote AI R&D, set governance standards and ensure global leadership in AI. The DoD's Joint Artificial Intelligence Center focuses on integrating AI into military operations.

Critics argue that the US approach is heavily militarised, with a significant portion of AI funding directed toward defence applications. This raises ethical concerns about the use of AI in warfare and surveillance. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive federal regulation, leading to potential misuse and privacy violations.

■ **European Union:** The EU has committed substantial funds to AI through its 'Horizon Europe' scheme and the Digital Europe Programme. Member-states like Germany and France have also launched national AI strategies with significant funding.

The EU's strategy is full of claims about ethical AI, human-centric approaches and stringent regulations. The proposed Artificial Intelligence Act aims to create a legal framework for AI, focusing on risk management and transparency. The EU's focus on ethics and regulation is more talk than action, however. Critics argue that the regulatory framework will stifle innovation and put European companies at a disadvantage, compared to less regulated markets like the US and China. There are also concerns about the slow pace of implementation and the complexity of compliance.

■ **United Kingdom:** The government has invested heavily in AI through its 'Industrial Strategy' and the creation of the Office for AI. The Alan Turing Institute, the national body for data science and AI, receives significant funding. The UK's AI Sector Deal aims to boost AI skills, R&D and infrastructure. The National AI Strategy claims to focus on long-term growth and ethical consideration.

Critics highlight the gap between the UK's ambitious AI goals and the actual implementation. There are concerns about the lack of sufficient funding for AI ethics research and the potential for bias in AI systems developed without diverse input.

■ **Canada:** The country claims to be a

pioneer in AI research, with significant investments through the Pan-Canadian Artificial Intelligence Strategy. The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research plays a key role in funding AI research. Canada's AI strategy focuses on research excellence, talent development and commercialisation. The country has also established the Global Partnership on AI to promote 'responsible AI development'.

Critics argue that the commercialisation of AI technologies lags behind other countries. There are also concerns about the brain drain, with top AI talent often moving to the US for better opportunities.

Whose interest?

So what can we say about western approaches to AI?

Firstly, on bias and discrimination, we all know that AI systems can perpetuate and amplify existing biases - in fact some current designs are open to such abuse. However, as the post-war consensus between the US, Canada and European countries regarding 'liberal bourgeois' ideology is fraying, we might see divergence on social issues between the kind of bias added by current European governments, as opposed to the more extremist rightwing bias supported by tech leaders (and increasingly the entire tech industry) in the US.

The widespread use of AI in surveillance and data analysis also raises significant privacy issues. Critics argue that current regulations are insufficient to protect individuals' privacy rights.

It is unlikely that the current diverse approaches to AI can lead to a unified regulatory framework across western states. There are numerous inconsistencies hindering international collaboration and the EU's AI Act is unlikely to get far in the current political climate.

Then there is 'innovation vs regulation': striking a balance between fostering innovation and implementing necessary regulations will be a major, persistent challenge.

Western states are also in a race with China to dominate the AI landscape. Inevitably this focus on competition may lead to a neglect of scientific

international cooperation. We are already hearing scare stories about DeepSeek 'security' issues. DeepSeek makes no secret that it collects extensive user data, such as chat histories, uploaded files, IP addresses and even "keystroke patterns or rhythms". This data is stored on servers located in China, and western companies and governments are raising concerns about potential access by Chinese authorities under local data laws. No doubt that is true, but many thousands of people have voluntarily, and at times unconsciously, provided unlimited access to their activities, thoughts, patterns of behaviour, etc - every minute of every hour to western tech giants, nowadays owned and led by very dubious characters, some associated with extreme-right opinion. I am not sure if sharing data with the Chinese regime is going to be that much worse!

The benefits of AI advances are not evenly distributed, leading to even more economic inequality, especially as we see displacement of workers due to AI automation. We also have to be concerned about the militarisation of AI: the significant investment in AI for military applications raises many issues.

Given all the hype about AI and recognising the dangers posed by its current trajectory, *both* in China and the west, it is important that the organisations of the working class are well informed not only about the details of AI progress, but the potential risks it poses - not just to jobs, but to society in general. However, we should also recognise how, under different circumstances, humanity can benefit from the technological and medical advances made possible by AI.

In order to do so we must keep up to date with every aspect of AI development: we must understand how it works and be part of its evolution. Only then can we make practical, informed interventions to reduce military and 'security' abuse of AI. This will also help us play an active role in defending the skills and jobs currently under threat by the way capitalism sees this technology as a cutting, cost-saving tool ●