

weekly worker



Alice Weidel and AfD were big winners in Germany's election, but Die Linke got a real boost too

- Letters and debate
- Forging Communist Unity
- Jordan Peterson's ARC
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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OUR 2025 ASSESSMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES



LETTERS



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

Toxic warrior

In last week's *Weekly Worker*, Mike Macnair responded to accusations of the CPGB's bad culture and mentioned "comrades' failure to specify what it is that counts" ('Speech controls yet again' February 20).

I'm not convinced that this kind of argument over culture is even helpful, as culture is ultimately moulded by political economy, but we do also inherit past culture produced by past political economy, which we have to address on its own terms to truly rid ourselves of those parts of it we don't want. In any case, to the extent arguing about this is useful, it only really can be if we're not talking past each other.

To that end I would like to offer a definition of 'bad culture' specifically in regards to debate, which seems to be the main area people chafe against with the CPGB. I'm certain this won't hold up to serious scrutiny, but I hope it'll help concretise criticism anyway.

Without a definition, accusations about 'bad culture' will struggle to distinguish between the kind of ordinary interpersonal disputes that any relationship between two or more people has to contend with and truly bad culture. One has to roll one's eyes at accusations of 'bad culture' which feel more like tone policing or accusations of 'bad vibes'. Likewise accusations of 'bad faith' which *themselves* contribute to bad culture as they are in my view far more often than not - without any real justification - maligning someone's intent to the exclusion of the substance of issues.

By 'culture' I mean beliefs and behaviours which are persistently prevalent. This can stem from more overt or codified conventions, but might also be inherited 'common sense'. Examples include those the CPGB rightly attacks on the regular: keeping debate internal, as comrade Macnair rightly denounces in the

same article; ban on official public factions; safe spaces; broad-frontism (leading to diplomatic silences and fudges); and so on. All things with consequences that go way beyond 'bad culture', but things which produce it nevertheless.

An organisation has a bad culture with respect to debates if either of the following apply:

1. Arguments put forward in favour of a position or action are often responded to either *first* or *only* with an accusation of weak or malevolent character or intention on the part of the person putting forward the argument, rather than responding to the argument.

2. There is often no proportion in relation to different issues. This will in reality take one of two forms:

(a) Issues are routinely discussed in a dry, procedural way, whether they are about fundamental principles or small organisational tasks and issues. That is, major issues are brought down to the importance of minor issues. Issues which *can't* easily be brought down in this way are generally excluded.

(b) Issues are routinely elevated to a position where they are seen as fundamental disagreements or as needing to be investigated as if fundamental disagreements lay behind them. That is, minor issues are brought up to the importance of major issues.

If any of this is often done by officials, this amounts to a method of bureaucratic control.

I consider these to be the two main features of bad culture around debate because persistently prevalent well-poisoning and significant disproportionality are so inherently self-perpetuating. I can't think of anything else as toxic.

In (1) it's important that an *argument* is put forward, as it's more understandable for someone to respond "with an accusation of weak or malevolent character or intention" if the person or group has merely asserted something (especially if done angrily).

The effect of (1) is to make it so that debates about the substance of issues get sidetracked into debates about character or intention.

This is well-poisoning. Newer comrades in particular will shy away from contributing when this is the case, as they haven't been around long enough to establish a history of evidence of their conduct to combat an accusation of bad character or intention, and on a more basic level are more likely to lack confidence if they are new to politics generally. If this becomes sufficiently widespread, it will lead to a generalised breakdown of trust, collapsing the organisation into much smaller, tight networks of trust which might form the basis of future splits.

One minorish but I hope useful example. In *Weekly Worker* 1429 (February 9 2023) Ryan Frost (CPGB) and Andries Stroper (CP in the Netherlands) were called an "opportunist duo" by a letter title written by comrade Jack Conrad. Serious accusations like this should be the conclusions of arguments, not tossed out like a swear word (and it was meant seriously, not as swearing). Had comrade Conrad's reply in the following issue explained the "opportunist" designation slapped on one of the CPGB's own newer comrades - or had he retracted it - this would still be unfortunate, but less bad. Sadly, his reply did nothing of the sort (and was titled the same way - presumably to put up the middle finger over a negative reaction to the first title).

The effect of (2a) is to make it hard for people to passionately disagree about major issues, as this would be straying from the stuffy old norm. Passionate arguments will be pushed back on by reference to accessibility, safe spaces, or - more common in a workplace - professionalism. The longer this goes on, the more entrenched it becomes. No one in their right mind could accuse the CPGB of this.

An example: I sat through a Transform meeting which had this character, where the issue of centralism or federalism (along the lines of the national branches) came up, and where little more was said beyond things along the lines of 'this is important for some comrades' and was punted onwards to some future meeting or the steering committee. I suppose explicit arguments about it were avoided to avoid any kind of acrimony.

The effect of (2b) is to make it hard for people to bring up more minor organisational or political issues. A lot of molehills will be turned into or seen as a mountain. That'll have the effect of obscuring what the real molehills are and the organisation's ability to quickly and effectively deal with them, and the effect of obscuring real mountains. Smaller organisational/political issues won't be dealt with when people don't want to bring them up for fear of triggering the erection of another pseudo-mountain, and that'll just cause increasing frustration, and on the (then necessarily rarer) occasion that things *are* brought up the rareness of it will only make every issue appear even more like a mountain.

We can do a bit better than mere example on this one, as it is an explicitly celebrated method of comrades Mike Macnair and Jack Conrad which I think necessarily leads to cultural sins of this form. From Conrad's side this seems to be taken from his over-reading of Lenin's general approach in *One step forward, two steps back* and is summarised by Macnair in issue 1513 ('Debating our culture', October 31 2024) via Trotsky as "From a scratch - to the danger of gangrene". This method is completely toxic. Lenin's

evaluation was reached after careful consideration and studying of the stenographic minutes over *months*. It was *not* a knee-jerk response to the raising of an on-its-face minor issue. To be a touch tongue in cheek, treating almost every new initiative or issue raised as if it might hold dire risks is like an organisational equivalent of the oppressive practice of helicopter parenting, generated by a deep fear of 'the outside world'. In most cases a scratch just needs a cheap plaster slapped on it.

As an aside, I think this toxic method lay behind the pointless and rather tedious escalation which led to the aggregate report in issue 1464 (James Harvey 'Opportunism in matters of organisation' October 26 2003).

Of course, minor disagreements very much *can* be substitutes for major ones which lie in the background. The trigger for the final phase of a romantic relationship regularly takes the form of a disagreement like someone not doing the dishes or not taking out the bins. One reason why is fairly obvious: it is *hard* to bring up major issues, especially when one only *feels* there is some major issue present but are struggling to grasp at *what and why*. Another reason, surely less common, is duplicity. Lenin really does do a good job at getting to the root of an issue of this kind - where minor issues obscure a deeper, more important issue - in *One step forward, two steps back*.

How can one address this systematically? For individuals, there is couple counselling. For organisations, I don't know ... Make sure you have yourself a few Lenins? No easy answers, I think.

So, it is right to say that the CPGB displays instances of bad culture. Every organisation will. It just needs to be frankly acknowledged and worked on, or else the rot will set in. It is wrong to say that the CPGB *has* a bad culture, because none of this is displayed routinely or often enough.

Scott Evans
Glasgow

Stalinist minority

Robin Cox of the Socialist Party of Great Britain argues that there is no case whatsoever for a "transition" period of any description between existing capitalism and socialism, by which he and they mean what communists usually call the higher phase of communism ('No transition', Letters, February 13). Extraordinarily, he even claims the world today is in effect "in the transition period now", (to that socialism).

The SPGB defines socialism (the higher phase of communism) as a stateless, moneyless, borderless, world society, in which people voluntarily labour to produce goods and services to meet the common good, goods and services are produced in abundance so people can freely access anything they want from this common production, and all their material needs will be satisfied. People will, through a high level of socialist consciousness, choose to labour for the common good without the need for any material incentive, money and any form of rationing, in which will all have been abolished or faded out of use.

Crime and social disorder will similarly have faded out of existence, as all people can freely access what they need and they all have such a highly developed level of consciousness and responsibility they wouldn't dream of committing any form of anti-social or criminal offence, hence removing the need

and basis for any form of state apparatus.

I agree this is indeed the higher phase of communism which many socialists and communists are genuinely striving for, but is Robin and the SPGB *serious* that all this literally higher state of society and consciousness can be instantly brought about, simply as a result of a majority vote in favour of socialism?

Robin and SPGB argue the material basis for socialism/communism has already been created and in existence for at least a hundred years. I agree, hence the classic Marxist-Leninist analysis of capitalism entering into the moribund, decaying, decadent phase of imperialism and all the negative, destructive, consequences of that, including world wars, mass destruction of human life, including through wars, starvation, disease and destruction of the basic eco system and environment etc.

Having the *potential* material productive capacity to meet needs is very different from actually *producing* the socially necessary goods and services required and to the necessary quantities to meet basic and then higher human needs.

So much of existing production is completely wasteful, destructive, often poisonous or otherwise harmful. If a worldwide "socialist majority" was able to "peacefully and democratically" capture all the world state apparatuses and use them to expropriate all the means of production and distribution, it would surely take *time* for the socialist majority to convert all that production and capacity for destruction into genuinely socially useful goods and services.

Until that basic material condition had been achieved, ie, socially useful goods and services being produced sufficient to meet all needs, by the SPGB's own measure, you couldn't even begin to think of that society being the higher stage of communism. So, you would still have material incentives, restrictions on what people could consume and state apparatus required to enforce the rules of society.

As well as creating the material basis for socialism, how long would it realistically take for the socialist and human consciousness of the vast majority of people to develop to the level required to genuinely allow for free labour, free access, and no law enforcement agencies?

I do believe in the inherent positive qualities of most people, but I am equally not naive and recognise it may take generations before all the harmful attitudes, behaviours and thinking associated with capitalism to be fully removed from general human consciousness and human society.

There is a blunt question as to whether it is actually possible to create a socialist majority of people under conditions of existing capitalism. The poor state (in terms of membership, influence, votes, etc) of many genuine socialist and communist groups and parties (I don't include the hundreds of sectarian Trot groups, sects, fragments and individuals within this heading), despite hundreds of years and generations of damaging and destructive capitalism, seem to demonstrate the immense challenges and difficulties of the SPGB's parliamentary majority road to socialism.

Even if it was possible to develop a socialist majority under existing capitalism, that surely by definition would leave a very large proportion of the population

Online Communist Forum



Sunday March 2 5pm

A week in politics - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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

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

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

who were decidedly not socialist, and may well be antagonistic or downright hostile to attempts to bring about socialism. Again, the higher phase of communism is simply inconceivable with such a large recalcitrant (or even just non-socialist) minority.

And having democratically and peacefully won a majority in parliament, do we *really* expect the capitalist class and all its layers and strata in wider society and especially in the state apparatus, just to passively accept their being thrown out of their current positions of immense privileges, wealth and power? Some may accept the proposed new order, a few may actually welcome it, but it would surely be sensible to assume significant numbers will not and will use every means at their disposal to halt and reverse any such social changes, including through violent and other illegal means.

So, from my perspective, while, obviously I would want to see a world communist society brought about in the shortest possible time, it must surely take *time* to take over, disable and replace all the state apparatuses in the world, *time* to physically expropriate all the means of production and distribution from all the world's capitalist classes, *time* to convert all these into socially useful goods and services, and then produce to the necessary quantities, and *time* to suppress, hold down, neutralise etc the dispossessed capitalist classes and all those layers, strata and numbers who will fiercely oppose and will resist efforts by a genuine mass socialist movement to establish and embed real socialism.

Over whatever total timeframe all this may require, a working class state apparatus, work for material incentives, wages and benefits in order to access many goods and services, will all surely still be required, indeed essential. And I would suggest will also be required to some degree for the much greater amount of time it will inevitably take for the vast majority of people to acquire full socialist consciousness, values and responsibilities, as would allow state forces, money and other related elements to be fully dispensed with.

I am absolutely *not* arguing there should or will be completely separate and distinct stages between the initial establishment of working class power, a stage of full socialism and then communism. I *am* saying though that to completely reject or even just ignore the very real and practical steps that will be required to actually achieve full socialism and ultimately communism, and the different elements, changes and phases each will or may undergo, is

simply not to be credible or serious about the aims of socialism and communism themselves.

Andrew Northall
email

SPGB minority

Robin Cox (Letters, February 13) says we need an "appropriate exit strategy" from capitalism, not a transitional period.

But comrade Cox once had a willingness to theorise a transitional period: in 1987, as part of the Guildford branch of the SPGB, which circulated a critique entitled 'The road to socialism'.

This document issued with the party's big-bang theory of socialisation. It was published in Nos 27 and 28 of *Discussion Bulletin* in 1988 and is available to read online (files.libcom.org/files/discussion-bulletin-1988-27-jan.pdf and files.libcom.org/files/discussion-bulletin-1988-28-mar.pdf).

The proposal of the Guildford branch was that "socialistic institutions" might exist in "a transitional stage to socialism" which would continue "until the market sector is reduced to a size that can be socialised by 'enactment' without causing widespread social disruption".

This minority perspective was not adopted by the party but I would be interested to know comrade Cox's thoughts on the matter today.

Ansell Eade
email

Non-political?

The 80th anniversary celebrations on Holocaust Memorial Day were held on January 27, the date, in 1945, when Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz - though Russia was, of course, not allowed to attend.

Catching some of it, unintentionally, my wife and I saw a parade of candles - Mr and Mrs Macron, Mr and Mrs Starmer, Mr and Mrs Windsor, Mr Zelensky ... Queue up, put your candle on the counter, stand back, bow, walk off.

The great states people of the world were not allowed to speak: it was to be non-political. Holocaust survivors were to speak but also we had the World Jewish Congress president, Ronald Lauder, who said (*Guardian* January 27): "the horrors of Auschwitz and Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel were both inspired by "the age old hatred of Jews". Antisemitism "had its willing supporters then and it has them now", he said. When Auschwitz was liberated, the world saw where "the step-by-step progress of antisemitism leads. It leads right here ... Things are not OK."

How non-political can you get?

I saw a piece online a while back from a US lady who wrote of her

Zionist upbringing. She spent a good part of Sundays learning Hebrew, which she thought was a waste of time, and Jewish history which she said ended in 72CE until it started up again in 1945.

Jewish Voice for Labour has a series, 'Jewish journeys from Zionism', currently on number 16. The participants are mostly, I think, in their 70s or thereabouts and grew up with US civil rights and black power, Vietnam and anti-apartheid and so had quite a political education. A major step in their journey, for many of them, was spending some time in Israel - on a kibbutz or on holiday. They saw then how Palestinians were treated and realised they had a lot to think about.

Apparently there is very little coverage in Israel of what is happening in Gaza, except perhaps for IDF hooligans parading their savagery. But some at least must be aware of international outrage and they have access to social media. However, Zionist propaganda in the mainstream media and at school and university seems to keep the 'eternal victim' flag flying high. The youth on their trips to Auschwitz between school and IDF are conspicuous with their flags on their backs.

The reactions to October 7 - shock, horror, thirst for revenge. Reactions to thousands of dead Palestinians, including children - very little, perhaps glee. This is not all Israelis, clearly - just, it seems, the majority.

To repeat an oft repeated question: 'Never again, or never again to us?'

Jim Nelson
email

War profiteer

And we thought wars were about morality - right and wrong. Not so. It's about power and resource control. Zelensky says, "I defend Ukraine. I can't sell our country." But the US wants \$500 billion in rare earth minerals from Ukraine. After all, the US *et al* have supplied Ukraine with so much weaponry, it's only fair that Ukraine responds in kind, but with its resources. What a wonderful world we live in.

Did the Russian-Ukraine conflict have anything to do with principles? As Victoria Nuland stated, "We must stand up to Putin's aggression and support the people of Ukraine in their fight for a free and democratic future", but in the process extract as much wealth out of the country as we can reasonably get away with without coming across as opportunist vultures taking advantage of a weakened, vulnerable 'ally'. So in return for arms largely bought with US tax money and given to Ukraine, the US wants \$500 billion in mineral resources from Ukraine, which will largely benefit, presumably, large US corporations who at the same time receive heavy subsidies from their government.

It would be an unorthodox contention, admittedly, to claim that maybe the same corporations benefitting from the \$500 billion resource-grab from Ukraine could possibly stump up the money for the original arms transfer and maybe even stand on their own without government subsidy, as ordinary people and small businesses have to do. But that would be contrary to the golden rule of capitalism, where costs are socialised while profits are privatised; and it would also make war less profitable and therefore less likely to take place in the first place. These are some of the real reasons for the war. The war wasn't designed for these consequences, but the players certainly know how to take advantage of 'natural' developments, and in so doing they reveal the true nature of the system which always puts profits on a pedestal, with people merely agents towards greater profits.

Louis Shawcroft
email

ACTION

Stop Britain First in Nuneaton

Saturday March 1, 11am: Counter-protest. Assemble at Nuneaton railway station, Bond Street, Nuneaton CV11. BF leader Paul Golding has called for a 'remigration' event in Nuneaton. Stop the victimisation of refugees.

Organised by Nuneaton Unity Against Fascism:
www.facebook.com/events/591729190411940.

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.

Justice for Anne Marie

Saturday March 1, 1pm: Protest outside Premier Inn Riverlights, Morledge, Derby DE1. Anne Marie was fired for raising safety concerns and union organising. Organised by Unite Hospitality:
www.facebook.com/UniteHospitality.

Free Palestine! defend the right to protest!

Saturday March 1, 1.30pm: Rally, Racquet Club Hotel, 5 Caledonian Road, Liverpool L3. Defend the 70-plus arrested on January 18, defend the right to protest and demand that the repressive Public Order Act is repealed. Registration free.

Organised by Merseyside Stop the War Coalition:
www.facebook.com/events/1171331704440258.

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.

Perspectives on human origins

Tuesday March 4, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviston Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'Neonaturist body painting: a red RAG to patriarchy', International Women's Week special lecture with Christine Binnie.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:
www.facebook.com/events/3975995755953652.

Lewisham council: sell your shares in genocide!

Wednesday March 5, 6.30pm: Rally outside Lewisham town hall, 1 Catford Road, London SE6. End the Lewisham Local Government Pension Scheme's investments in companies that enable Israel's slaughter of Palestinians.

Organised by Lewisham Palestine Solidarity Campaign:
palestinecampaign.org/events.

The miner birds

Thursday March 6, 2.15pm and 7.30pm: Play by Lisa Bowler. New Vic Theatre, Etruria Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5. Celebrating the voices of women mobilised during the 1984 miners' strike and their determination to continue fighting. Tickets £15 (£10). www.newvictheatre.org.uk/productions/the-miner-birds.

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.

Lassalleans, Eisenachers and Gotha unification

Thursday March 6, 6.30pm: Online discussion in the series, 'Our history'. Speaker: Mike Macnair.

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

The race to the South Pole

Thursday March 6, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1.

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

The undercover police scandal

Thursday March 6, 9pm: Three-part documentary series, ITV1. Exposing the vast, systemic scale of this 40-year undercover policing operation, through the eyes of five women who were seduced into relationships, then abandoned by men later revealed to be police spies. A Raw TV production. #spycops.

Library Book Sale

Saturday March 8, 11am to 3pm: Annex, Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford M5. Featuring duplicate working class history books, badges, posters and pamphlets.

Organised by Working Class Movement Library:
wcml.org.uk/event/library-book-sale.

Freedom for Palestine - no to ethnic cleansing

Saturday March 15, 12 noon: National demonstration, central London, venue to be announced. Stop arming Israel.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition:
www.stopwar.org.uk/events/national-palestine-demonstration.

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.

Fighting fund

Urgent help

As expected, the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund received a big boost this week, following the very poor start to the month.

A reminder: we desperately need a *minimum* of £2,250 each and every month just to cover our rising costs, but seven days ago we only had £775 in the pot for February.

This week we received no less than four *three-figure* contributions - thank you SK, JC, PM and LM. In addition, other standing orders/bank transfers came from OG (£22), DR (£20), TT (£10) and DS (£4). All that came to no less than £775 - not

bad for one week! So our running total now stands at £1,796.

But, of course, there are, as I write, only two days left in the month, so please help us out as soon as you read this - make a bank transfer or PayPal donation. See below if you want help in doing this.

Please play your part, comrades! ●

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



More than a restoration of the Nixon imperial presidency

Sober realities and future prospects

Mainstream politics continues to move to the right, and that has dragged the opportunist left ever further to the right too. However there are some positive developments. **Paul Cooper reports**

C PGB members and supporters met on February 23 for our annual general meeting, where we discussed political perspectives and elected our Provisional Central Committee. There was general agreement on the perspectives document produced by the PCC, with a number of amendments leading to a useful discussion. An additional motion exploring proposals to develop our weekly Online Communist Forum was welcomed, though not voted upon.

Jack Conrad opened on behalf of the PCC and began with a note of caution, questioning those expecting a massive swing to the left around the (small) buzz over the communist fusion process, Forging Communist Unity. He suggested that the protracted global shift to the right will be having its impact on the general left ecosystem. The perspectives document opens by noting that although “we live in the epoch of the transition from global capitalism to global communism”, we remain in a prolonged period of reaction.

The neoliberal era of capitalist triumphalism of Blair and Clinton has now definitely finished but the rise of the far right has caused confusion across the left. Noting an obsessive preoccupation with the 1930s and Nazi Germany, he discussed how Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers’ Party rightly refuses to label Trump as a fascist, thinks little more is going on than a going back to the “imperial presidency” of Richard Nixon. In fact, the victory of Trump takes us “well beyond this”, comrade Conrad said. The sacking of government employees, outlandish dictats and policies scapegoating the transgender community all point in a more serious direction. The comrade thought this was “not fascism necessarily”, given the absence of working class forces threatening the status quo - the historic conditions for fascism. “Trump clearly does not have to turn to fascism, there is no need.”

Later in the aggregate, Marek Orłowski questioned if the historic definition of fascism is enough to analyse today’s developments. Yes, Trump and co are not fascists.

But they are not just traditional right-wingers either. The comrade admitted that his amendment on this issue was “somewhat underdeveloped” and withdrew it. Nevertheless, the meeting agreed entirely with comrade Orłowski’s sentiment that the organisation must develop a deeper analysis of the rise of the populist right - ideally leading to a series of articles in future editions of the *Weekly Worker*.

Comrade Conrad discussed Trump’s rapprochement with Vladimir Putin, that could possibly lead to Russia rejoining what will again be the G8. Meanwhile, a radically changed policy on Ukraine means a stagnating Europe will find it difficult to move towards closer unity, as nationalist routes are sought by its component parts.

The US as global hegemon continues to exploit the world, and this now means that the ‘diplomatic arrangements’ with Europe, in place since World War II, are breaking down. This *should* provoke the development of a combative left at some point; however, we live in an era when the capitalist barbarisms of war and climate breakdown are intensifying. Given the collapse of the USSR, the working class no longer has a world centre, which - no matter how deformed - tempered international relations in the post World War II period. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, we witnessed the collapse of much of the ‘official communist’ movement, including its mass parties.

How the US will emerge from this process is hard to say and we cannot write off some form of short term spurt of the US economy, although this would undoubtedly be at the expense of the rest of the world, which is likely to have profound political consequences.

Moving on from this, some time was spent exploring development around the Forging Communist Unity process, which involves comrades from Talking About Socialism and the Marxist Unity faction in *Prometheus*. Events have quickly moved beyond initial plans for a joint educational series to a focus on fusion, which “took us by surprise”, comrade Conrad reminded the meeting. He warned

that we “need to be realistic” with regards to what this means numerically. However, as a serious example of what is possible, “this process sends a powerful message to the rest of the left”.

A number of amendments were accepted by the PCC, including one covering developments in Scotland. CPGB supporter Anne McShane introduced two amendments, suggesting that we should replace the word “UK” with “Britain”. Following a useful exchange on the national question in Ireland and the impact of tailing republicanism on the Irish left, these amendments were defeated.

A further amendment by comrade McShane, which was passed, explored the important role played by CPGB members in opposing the witch-hunt and fighting for principled politics in the Labour Party via Labour Against the Witch-hunt and Labour Party Marxists. This was followed by a useful discussion on the potential dangers that come with the necessity to intervene in movements and organisations like the Labour Party. There will always be a pull to the right in such work and we have to be aware of that danger.

An amendment by Farzad Kamangar and Mike Macnair (which was later also supported by comrade Conrad) contextualised this by identifying the various pulls to the right on the ostensibly Marxist left, which finds reflection in continuing calls for broad left parties. These parties of recomposition are usually conceived as a pool for recruitment by the left, which stands in stark contrast to the Marxist strategy of winning the majority for revolution - a strategy which requires organisation in a mass communist party.

Farzad Kamangar, Mike Macnair and Jack Conrad were re-elected to the PCC. It was accepted that this body is getting older and we need to prepare for a generational replacement. Looking ahead though, the fusion process certainly opens up new possibilities for progress. We are in a period where opportunities exist and applications to join the CPGB have noticeably grown. However, we should be sober about present realities ●

Our 2025

1. We live in the epoch of the transition from global capitalism to global communism. However, nowhere is the working class in a position to take power. That has produced and continues to produce all manner of futile attempts at short cuts, negative anticipations, strange dead-ends and self-defeating accommodations with the politics of capitalism. Such is our present-day tragedy.

2. Because of a string of political and economic defeats, because of the left’s systematic failures, because of a now cemented bourgeois triumphalism over the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in the USSR and eastern Europe, class consciousness, that is the class consciousness of the working class, is at a very low ebb in Britain and throughout Europe, the Middle East and North America.

3. Overall, politics continues to move to the right. The evidence, sadly, is all too abundant: (1) a left that easily collapses into social imperialism over Ukraine, a left that seeks solutions in broad leftism and popular frontism, a left that is increasingly mired in economism and tailism; a left that flips over into the far right; (2) the rise of parties such as National Rally, AfD, Austria’s FPÖ, Canada’s Conservatives and Reform UK and their very real governmental aspirations; (3) governments in India, Russia, Argentina, Ukraine, Iran, Turkey, the Philippines, Italy, Israel and Hungary.

4. Most importantly there is the US and the election of Donald Trump to a second term. Frankly, this was something to be expected. Already, in our 2022 perspectives, we wrote about the failure of the Joe Biden administration and how “the Republican Party looks well placed for the 2022 and 2024 elections”. Nonetheless, not least considering the Democrats and their campaign of lawfare, Trump’s comeback is remarkable and will doubtless result in all manner of revenge measures domestically along with a general rollback of civil rights era concessions. Something that will be facilitated by the Supreme Court and Republican control over Congress.

5. It is fundamentally mistaken, of course, to equate the Trump presidency and Magaism with fascism. Fascism is first and foremost about smashing the organised working class and negatively resolving a revolutionary situation. To state the obvious, there is no revolutionary situation in the US and the organised working class poses no threat to the capitalist class. Nonetheless, as with January 6 2021, Trump has mobilised fascist forces, eg, the Proud Boys and various other boogaloes.

6. Trump 2.0 will have a global impact. Leave aside the Panama canal, Canada and Greenland, doubtless there will be trade wars and the threats of trade wars in the attempt to utterly subordinate both friends and foes alike to the US. We should also expect associated ‘culture wars’ and the promotion of a far right agenda by the US state machine itself. Those on the left who look to the Democrats for salvation - a straightforward capitalist party - betray the elementary interests of the working class and the cause of socialism. Lesser evilism has nothing to do with the politics of Marxism.

7. True, there are exceptions to the general shift to the right, eg, Sri Lanka, but most notably in parts of Latin America. However, the ‘pink tide’ represents little more than tepid reformism. The US tolerates it for the moment, but continues to treat Venezuela and Cuba as rogue states. Naturally, we demand the end of

sanctions, while giving no political endorsement to the regimes in Caracas and Havana.

8. The July 4 2024 general election in the UK also represents what might be considered a partial exception when it comes to the general shift to the right. Labour won a huge parliamentary majority; however, this was the result of the peculiarities of the first-past-the-post system. Labour secured 411 MPs with just 33.7% of the vote. If the Tory and Reform vote was combined it would have given them a clear victory. We note the talk of Reform targeting Labour voters and some sort of Tory-Reform electoral pact. We also note that the election of Kemi Badenoch as Tory leader is another step to the right. Historically, of course, the Tories are a party of the far right.

9. Meanwhile, Sir Keir Starmer presides over the most rightwing Labour government ever. The only thing positively recommending Labour in the 2024 general election was that they were not the Tories. Hardly inspiring. Not that it was wrong to vote Labour. However, the correct approach was ‘vote left where you can, vote Labour where you must’. This slogan posed the necessity of breaking with auto-Labourism.

10. The Labour left has, for the moment, been completely marginalised. In part this is due to the ‘anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism’ big lie. In part, however, it is due to the self-inflicted political failure of the Labour left in general and the Corbyn movement in particular. We should expect nothing worthwhile coming from this quarter. The rebellion and suspension of seven Socialist Campaign Group MPs over the two-child cap in July 2024 has not been followed by anything in terms of popular mobilisation. Nor has the Independent Alliance of five pro-Palestine MPs, including Jeremy Corbyn of course, proved to be in any way effective.

11. The Labour Party has returned to its position as the largest party in Scotland and it is probable that the Scottish National Party will remain weak and the unionist vote in Holyrood will become even more fragmented, with Reform launching in Scotland earlier this year. Yet support for independence remains steady, and there is scant evidence of the left in Scotland breaking from pinning its tail on the backside of independence, which amounts to little more than a militantly posed leftish gloss on a narrow nationalist political horizon. We remain committed to supporting the closest democratic union circumstances allow and to that end stand for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales.

12. While Trump talks about bringing about peace in Ukraine, there is the distinct danger of Israel being given the green light to ‘finish the job’ with the Palestinians, ie, a second nakba, and, combined with that, making war on Iran - in particular, striking its nuclear facilities. We oppose imperialist sanctions on Iran along with the extraordinary dangers represented by US plans for regime change *from above*. Along with Hopi we stand for regime change *from below*. We note the very considerable audience for our ideas in Iran and the Iranian diaspora. Collaboration with comrades such as Torab and Moshé should be continued and deepened, not least with more Zoom talks. We would welcome the launch of an online version of *Khamsin* and should consider merging the Hopi and VOR websites.

13. Following the audacious Hamas-led October 7 2023 Gaza prison break there has been a huge global movement in solidarity with the

assessments and perspectives

Palestinian masses. That is more than welcome and can pressurise this or that government in this or that direction. However, without communist organisation protest politics always meets definite limits. What is needed is the politics of power.

14. While the CPGB rightly recognises the reactionary nature of Hamas, we have correctly defended the BDS campaign, opposed the erosion of civil liberties and highlighted the particular settler-colonial political economy that lies behind ethnic cleansing and the danger of genocide. We emphatically reject the idea of putting an equals sign between Hamas and the Zionist state and calling for defeatism on both sides. If we had forces on the ground in Palestine we would definitely be part of the resistance. Above all though we have provided a clear strategic perspective. We uphold an immediate programme of equal national rights within Israel, oppose Zionist colonisation of the West Bank and Gaza and yet recognise that the only genuine, the only viable, solution comes from the working class taking the lead in bringing about Arab national unification that also fights for the voluntary affiliation/merger of the Jewish/Hebrew nation with an Arab Socialist Republic. Calls for a one-state or a two-state solution within Mandate Palestine are illusory.

15. It is vital not to be naive about Ukraine. The Kyiv government might refuse to accept Trump's compromise deal because of internal opposition or revolt. Eg, the Azov movement. So too might Moscow. Note, Trump has threatened to unleash all hell against Russian forces in Ukraine if he does not get a satisfactory deal. The risk of shifting from a proxy war to Nato direct involvement and even escalating to the point of an exchange of nuclear weapons is all too real.

16. We have therefore been correct to place great emphasis on Ukraine. From the beginning of the 'special military operation' we have consistently upheld revolutionary defeatism. We have also correctly denounced the outright treachery of social imperialism, the illusions peddled by social pacifism and the particular dangers of centrist conciliationism. Revolutionary defeatism is more than a moral stance. It is not a call for merely upping the politics of protest, no, once again, it is a call for the politics of power, ie, replacing the rule of capital with the rule of the working class.

17. When it comes to global hegemony, the US has only one serious rival and that is China: the world's second largest economy and a proto-imperialist power. The EU is hopelessly divided and militarily weak. Russia has actually proved itself militarily weak too with the Ukraine quagmire. Though Russia possesses an awesome nuclear arsenal - increasingly vulnerable to ABM defences - it is no economic rival. Japan is held in military subordination and the UK is little more than a useful minion. China alone is a full-spectrum challenger - economic, military, diplomatic, technological and ideological. Hence the well-financed propaganda over freedom of navigation opportunities (FONOPs) in the South China Sea, Taiwan, Tibet, human rights, Hong Kong democracy and the so-called Uyghur genocide. All carefully crafted to cover for the push to surround, strangle and subordinate China. The left must adopt a clear defeatist line in relation to the bellicose policy being pursued by the US and its allies, without in any way prettifying the Beijing regime.

18. The US is without doubt in relative decline, but we would be foolish in the extreme to declare that

the American century is over and done for. Firstly, the dollar remains the global reserve currency. Secondly, the US possesses unequalled economic, military, technological, diplomatic and ideological power. Thirdly, there is the US-dominated system of alliances: Nato, the Five Eyes, the Quad and Aukus.

19. While it is clear that China will not be a viable alternative hegemon any time soon, over the last three decades the country has seen massive, historically unprecedented, economic growth, especially since 2001 and WTO membership. Modern China's revolutionary origins, state-controlled capitalist development, successful integration into the world market and Mao-Deng-Xi 'official communism' has made it something of a model. Not only is there Vietnam, Cuba and various former 'socialist-orientated' regimes elsewhere in the third world. 'Official communist' parties have started to take their lead from China, eg, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. In the UK too there is the *Morning Star's* CPB and former Trotskyite sects such as Socialist Action. Surely there will be many more leftwing Sinophiles. Marxists - ie, genuine communists - need to develop a concrete analysis of China in all its contradictory complexity, not content themselves with either bestowing trite labels or echoing the nonsense of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'.

20. Humanity not only faces the increased risk of nuclear war. There is the climate crisis. The hottest year on record was 2024: 1.6°C above pre-industrial levels. That followed a decade of hottest years. There is now no hope whatsoever of keeping to the Paris 1.5°C limit. The danger is of a 2°C, a 2.5°C, a 3°C, even a 4°C temperature rise during the 21st century. That means melting ice caps, devastating rises in sea levels, the inundation of many big cities, extreme fires and the degrading of existing agricultural land and wildlife habitats. Civilizational breakdown is a real possibility.

21. Market forces cannot deal with the climate crisis. That is to state the obvious. Indeed, with the climate crisis capitalism approaches its absolute limits. We must seek to give the climate crisis movement a clear, strategic perspective. Demonstrations, petitions, road sit-downs, sabotage, stunts, media stardom - none of that can bring about the fundamental system change that is needed. Hence the dominant mood at the moment seems to be one of resignation brought about by the failure of protest politics. Stiff prison sentences and draconian legislation have served to cow protesters too.

22. Regular articles in the *Weekly Worker* and our pamphlet *The little red climate book* have provided a clear Marxist approach and warned about the danger of elitist terrorist actions or even some sort of climate socialism - imposed by, or agreed in close collaboration with, the capitalist state. Something, which is at the moment, a mere theoretical possibility. What is noticeable at this juncture is the refusal, the inability, of mainstream politicians, therefore the capitalist class, to do anything remotely serious about the climate crisis. They remain in thrall to 'production for the sake of production'.

23. Socialism - that is, the rule of the working class and the transition to communism - is the only rational solution. What that poses is not the necessity of "rebuilding British industry" - a delusional nationalist perspective upheld not only by George Galloway's Workers Party, but also

by much wider sections of the left, including self-identified Trotskyists. No, what is posed is independent working class politics and building a mass Communist Party. Obviously, alien territory for an existing left which remains trapped in broad frontism or/and the false perspectives of the confessional sects.

24. Once, great hopes were placed in so-called parties of recomposition. In practice, as we consistently argued, they have proved to be merely reformist and easily slotted into the politics of bourgeois coalitionism: Syriza, Podemos, the Workers Party of Brazil, Communist Refoundation. That or they proved to be dead-ends: Die Linke, New Anticapitalist Party, Respect, Left Unity, Scottish Socialist Party, etc. Despite that sorry record there are still those who hanker after yet another broad left party.

25. Not that we stand for the politics of isolation. Eg, from the beginning we argued with American comrades that the Bernie Sanders movement was of real significance. To have stood aloof would have been criminal. For the first time in a hundred years masses of Americans have begun to describe themselves as socialists. Of course, what is meant by socialism owes more to universal healthcare than the rule of the working class. Nonetheless, that, and the very considerable growth of the Democratic Socialists of America, gives Marxists in the US a real chance of building themselves into a real force.

26. In Britain there was the Corbyn movement. Once again, to have stood aloof would have been criminal. Note that is exactly what the SWP and SPEW did. The *Morning Star's* CPB even asked Labour's witch-hunters for names so that they could be expelled. The election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader and the mass influx into the Labour Party radically changed the political landscape. True, the level of political consciousness of Labour's existing and newly acquired mass membership was never high. Indeed there was widespread desperation and therefore a willingness to believe that a Corbyn-led government was just about to usher in an era of equality, prosperity and peace.

27. There were various, often competing, broad-left projects. All failed: Momentum, CLPD, LRC, Red Labour and the Labour Left Alliance. Vague, indistinct, woolly politics went hand in hand with 'tick box' democracy and conferences that were top-table-dominated rallies, with little or no time allotted for serious debate. The common assumption of all such broad-left initiatives is that political strength derives not from developing a definite programme and firmly upholding principle, but from compromise, from agreementism, from selling out, from marginalising, even silencing, awkward leftwing voices and ideas, in order to be acceptable to the politically naive (and, therefore, to the right, and ultimately the capitalist class).

28. Indeed, that is what the grand strategy of the Corbyn leadership, including the Straight Leftist advisors, amounted to. Hence the tailing of the 'remain' wing of the establishment during the 2016 referendum campaign, the never-ending attempts to conciliate with the Parliamentary Labour Party and the willingness to actually participate in, even to urge on, the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt. Allies, friends, good comrades, were thrown to the wolves in ever-increasing numbers, but, inevitably, Jeremy Corbyn himself became a victim. Profound demoralisation and widespread disorientation had to follow.

29. The 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt was the form taken by the countertransformation. But left illusions disarmed not the few but the many. There were those, for example, who insisted that Sir Keir thought he had no hope of becoming prime minister, that he lived in dread of the left, that his sole purpose was to purge the left, that Labour relied on the left to do the donkey work in election campaigns - stupid ideas all.

30. Nonetheless, because of the hard casing provided by Labour's organisational structures, there was the outside possibility of channelling mass discontent into transforming the Labour Party. That is why we supported the launch of Labour Party Marxists well before the Corbyn moment. We continue to fight for the transformation of the Labour Party into a united front of a special kind. Towards that end, we shall, if and when appropriate, renew our engagement with the Labour Party and organisations of the Labour left. Labour remains, of course, a bourgeois workers' party. It is not, and has never been, a British version of the US Democratic Party.

31. CPGB members played leading roles in opposing the witch-hunt and fighting for principled politics in the Labour Party via Labour Against the Witch-hunt and Labour Party Marxists. However, that we had comrades within our ranks who fell in with the Corbynites, who wanted to downplay the importance of the witch-hunt, who joined the witch-hunters or who embraced the politics of broad leftism testifies to political fragility. We freely admit that our organisation is far from perfect. The lesson that must be learnt is that short termism leads nowhere worthwhile, that strategic vision is vital and that uncompromisingly upholding the communist programme is central to anything serious.

32. We also had important differences over the women question, free speech and Ukraine. Once again this testifies to political fragility. We shall continue to encourage members, supporters and party organisations to study and debate, including, of course, through Online Communist Forum, the talks organised by Why Marx? and in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*.

33. All new recruits need to have a basic grasp of our *Draft programme* and towards that end a reading list of useful books, chapters and articles will be produced. Each new recruit ought to be provided with a suitable mentor.

34. Our organisation remains pitifully small and we should not expect any dramatic change in the immediate term. We live in an extended period of reaction. Blame culture, demoralisation, attempts to conciliate with those to our right, all are manifest dangers. We need to be brutally honest about that. There are no easy answers. As the society has moved to the right, the broad-leftist, people's-frontist and 'transitional method'-ist left has been dragged right with it: Both Respect and Left Unity were to the right of the Socialist Alliance, the Corbyn movement was a long way to the right of the last mass Labour left, George Galloway's Workers' Party of Britain is far to the right of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. In the far left, the drag to the right has in the last few years taken the form of demands for diplomatic agreements and silences, and for 'safe spaces' against offensive forms of speech. In this political situation, it is essential to undeviatingly defend our culture of robust open polemic, our programme and our political ideas, so that they can be handed on to future generations.

35. The beginning of fusion talks

between the CPGB, Talking About Socialism and the *Prometheus* editorial board is a very welcome development. If successful it would send out a vitally important message to the rest of the left. There has to be a break with the dual curse of sectism and broad frontism. Unity around firm principle, unity around a clear communist programme, unity around building a mass Communist Party is what is needed. Depending on the success of fusion talks we should consider appropriately expanding the Provisional Central Committee.

36. Communist University has long been a highlight of our year. In person attendance is far too low and that dampens discussion and debate. We should not only seek the active involvement of overseas comrades in 2025. We should transform CU into a joint school organised by the CPGB, TAS and the *Prometheus* editorial board.

37. While a proto-Communist Party might well be built through recruiting the ones, the twos ... even the hundreds, our strategic expectation is that the *initial* breakthrough will come through a series of splits in the existing left groups - including those inside the Labour Party - and from that fusions. In terms of going through the existing left, there is every reason for optimism. What the *Weekly Worker* says matters and is increasingly influential. In the interests of unity, clarification and educating the wider left we should in particular encourage comrades from TAS, *Prometheus* editorial board and RS21 to contribute articles to the paper. We do not want to limit these articles to a specific size: we have no problem with publishing single pages ... or supplements. OCFs would too be a useful forum for rapprochement and clarification.

38. Whatever various leaderships say, the existing left is either stagnant or shrinking. Something that applies more or less across the board. Claims of soaring success for this or that group invariably prove to be fleeting or chimeric. No less to the point. There has been a general decline in the culture of the left. Entirely secondary questions are elevated to prime importance, class politics downgraded to the level of narrow trade unionism and a commitment to elementary principles is too often replaced by abject tailism. That or dead-headed dogmatism rules. Hence everywhere there is the miseducation of new recruits.

39. As a general approach we are against comrades in existing left groups simply resigning. That is unfortunately an all too common occurrence. Instead we say: 'stay, organise and *openly* fight'. This way lessons can be learnt for the entire left and comrades can develop themselves.

40. Given its 'slow burn' success we really need a second, updated, edition of Mike Macnair's 2008 *Revolutionary strategy*. It has already been translated into a number of languages by sympathetic comrades. Putting together and editing up his articles on imperialism, identity politics and partyism would be more than a good idea too. In terms of our publication list we should also add that the first book of Jack Conrad's *USSR: a Marxist autopsy* has been completed and its being readied for proofing, suggestions and final launch. The first book is subtitled: *Achievements, contradictions, laws and origins*. Three other books are envisaged.

41. To maintain and boost our healthy financial situation we commit to a Summer Offensive target of £25,000 ●.

FUSION

Programmatic starting point

Without a comprehensive, fully worked-out programme, our party will have no chance of taking coherent form, guarding against opportunism or navigating the road to socialism, argues **Jack Conrad**

Our fifth round of Forging Communist Unity talks, on February 23, centred entirely on the programme question, specifically the CPGB's *Draft programme*. Myself and Mike Macnair represented the CPGB; Nick Wrack and Ed Potts, TAS; Cat Rylance and Sam Turner the pro-party *Prometheus* faction. Minutes were taken by Gaby Rubin.

Helpfully, the day before, the TAS reps presented us with their ideas, objections and alternatives in two shortish documents.¹ I could therefore open the discussion for the CPGB by countering their *considered* criticisms and misconceptions. A great advantage when it comes to taking our fusion process forward to the point where we arrive at *binding* votes.

The first issue I touched upon was length. Our *Draft programme* totals some 13,000 words (10,700 if you leave aside the introduction and the closing section on the Communist Party). Excessive, according to TAS. Well, ignoring the *Communist manifesto* (11,400 words), the programmes of classical social democracy were much, much shorter: eg, the Gotha programme, the Erfurt programme, the Programme of the French Workers' Party, the programme of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

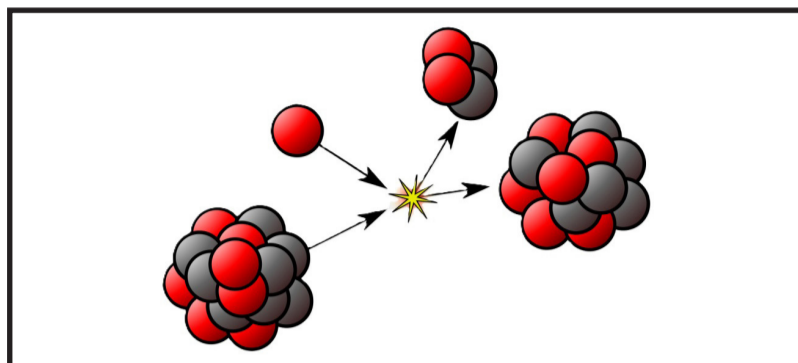
However, I argued, while minimalism was perfectly suitable in the late 19th and early 20th century, that is no longer the case. The passage of history, terrible failures, expanded needs, new challenges, all necessitate more: more subjects, more democratic commitments, more stress on combating bureaucracy. We can no longer expect to be taken at our word, that is for sure. To imagine otherwise would be naive in the extreme.

Longer

This was already the case when the Bolsheviks came to redraft their highly serviceable 1903 programme in 1919. Not only was there the October Revolution and the seizure of state power. There were the horrors of inter-imperialist war, the treachery of official social-democracy, the main goals and problems of the newly created soviet state, the formation of the Communist International and the dangers of pacifism and centrism. All had to be included. Hence, whereas the programmes of classic social democracy were between a few hundred and a few thousand words, the 1919 programme of the Russian Communist Party amounted to 9,100 words. The same can be said of the *notes* drawn up by Nikolai Bukharin for a draft programme of the Communist International in 1922. That comes in at 6,500 words. Fully fleshed out it would probably easily exceed 13,000 words.

Moreover, our *Draft programme* is surely *obliged* to deal with the Soviet Union turning into its opposite in the 1930s and, following that, the collapse of bureaucratic socialism and 'official communism' in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Then there are little matters such as the danger of nuclear war and the threat of civilizational collapse brought about by anthropomorphic climate change.

Either way, both myself and comrade Macnair stressed that we in the CPGB have rightly resisted the inevitable tendency to add, add and add again. We want to avoid the prolixity of *Britain's road to socialism* (30,500 words).² Nonetheless,



Rotten elements: easily kept out

we do not think that 21st century communism can go back to the minimalist programmes of classical social democracy. To do so would be farcical. Hence our approach: as short as possible, as long as necessary.

Accept or agree?

Another, far more important, question where there appears to be a dispute with TAS is over whether Communist Party members are required to 'accept' or 'agree' with the programme. We take the 'accept' approach of classical social democracy, Bolshevism and Comintern as a given. That means, when it comes to this or that programmatic formulation, there can be theoretical and tactical arguments, even differences over principles.

However, while minorities have the right to fight for their viewpoint to be adopted and thereby become the majority, in the meantime, when it comes to agreed actions, they will be expected to unite with the majority and put up with being in a minority. Not a nice position to be in, but better, far better than the *indiscipline* of minorities resigning in a silly huff or forming yet another stupid sect.

TAS comrades want to begin with an 'agree' approach. Without that they fear notorious social-imperialists such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Anticapitalist Resistance will wheedle their way into our ranks with their 'self determination for Ukraine' excuse for promoting what has been, at least from 2014, a Nato proxy war against Russia.

I assured them that we would have not the least trouble in keeping out such rotten elements. Programmatically, they are beyond the pale. However, opportunism arises spontaneously and has to be constantly fought. Unless that happens, yes, there is the danger of a single scratch turning into gangrene. That is why we favour open, sharp and sometimes fierce polemics.

There are real problems when it comes to the TAS 17-point 'heads of agreement' which the comrades "consider to be essential ingredients which members of any fused organisation should *agree* with". Take point xiv: "Communism is democratic. We reject the idea that what existed in the former Soviet Union and similar states, or that exists today in China or North Korea, was or is in any way communist or a transition to communism. We oppose all forms of dictatorial rule."

Comrades X, Y and Z disagree. Comrade X wants the "bold slogan" of "Overthrow the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the proletariat!"³ Comrade Y explains: our "ultimate political aim is to surpass the whole state and, thus, democracy too."⁴ Communism is not "democratic" because democracy is

a form of the state and communism sees the withering away of the state to the point where democracy itself withers away.

Let us allow comrade Z to elaborate a bit: "after the 'socialist revolution' the political form of the 'state' is 'the most complete democracy'. But, says comrade Z, it 'never enters the head of any of the opportunists, who shamelessly distort Marxism' that what we see is the 'dying down of itself', or 'withering away' of democracy. "This seems very strange at first sight. But is 'incomprehensible' only to those who have not thought about democracy also being a state and, consequently, also disappearing when the state disappears. Revolution alone can 'abolish' the bourgeois state. The state in general, ie, the most complete democracy, can only 'wither away'."

Comrade Z concludes, like comrade X, they definitely support one form of "dictatorial rule". "The theory of class struggle, applied by Marx to the question of the state and the socialist revolution, leads as a matter of course to the recognition of the political rule of the proletariat, of its *dictatorship*, ie, of undivided power directly backed by the armed force of the people."⁵

Anyone with the least familiarity with Marxism will instantly recognise that comrade X is, in fact, Karl Marx himself, comrade Y is Frederick Engels and, of course, comrade Z is Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. But TAS would keep them out because they disagree with point xiv of their 'heads of agreement'. And, as an orthodox Marxist, I too would find myself excluded.

And having complained about the length of our *Draft programme* and listed 17 'must agree' points, the comrades come up with this:

We also believe that a statement in respect of the *current* inter-imperialist rivalry between the USA and its subordinates and the rising power of China should be part of our programme. Specifically, our position is that we do not take sides in the battles/rivalries, whether economic or military, between rival capitalist/imperialist powers, but point out the need for the working class to impose its own solution. [This position would be supported broadly by other groups, including the RCP, SWP, Counterfire, Soc Alt and maybe some others.]⁶

For our part, we are against falling for such temptations, ie, discussing *current* politics in the programme. Why? Because it all too easily becomes instantly dated. The fate of one edition after the other of the *British road to socialism*. Put to one side the hugely complex and highly contradictory political economy of China and whether and to what

degree it can really be described as straightforwardly capitalist. There is always the possibility of shifting geo-strategic alignments. Europe could, for example, make overtures to Beijing in the attempt to end its subordination to the US, there could be a rapprochement between the US and Russia, etc.

No, much better to briefly deal with the past, highlight the inevitability of war under capitalism, but, as we have done in our *Draft programme*, steer well clear of *current* politics. Certainly we should not be putting forward programmatic positions because they would be "supported broadly by other groups". That smacks of diplomacy.

And it is presumably diplomacy that leads the TAS comrades to fight shy of including the fight for extreme democracy *under capitalism* anywhere in their 17 points. Nothing about abolishing the monarchy, House of Lords, MI5 or the standing army and replacing it with the popular militia. Nothing about the right of Scotland and Wales to self-determination and a federal republic. Nothing about the unity of Ireland. Nothing about free speech. Nothing about the ecological crisis. Nothing about women. Nothing about sexual freedoms. Nothing about free movement and migration. Nothing about religion and the separation of church and state.

Is it that the comrades forgot such vital questions? Or is the absence of high politics designed to appeal to *economistic* groups such as the RCP, SWP, Counterfire, Soc Alt and maybe some others?

The TAS comrades have an organisational, stagist, approach to programme. Their starting point is not the programme required for the working class to go from the cramped, demeaning, unpromising conditions of today to the conquest of state power. No, it is about thoroughly instrumental *organisational* steps. I might get them wrong, but they appear to be saying that we should adopt a *different* minimalist programme - really something like *Socialist Worker's* 'What we stand for' column - stage by stage during the fusion process, till, that is, we reach the stage of a mass Communist Party, but with the emphasis, especially to begin with, being on agreement: eg, "We see little reason, at this stage, to include anything in the programme which goes beyond what we would expect any communist to agree with."⁷

Does this mean a dozen, two dozen programmes? True, with the growth of membership, adding this or that group, room would, thank heaven, be given for 'acceptance' and therefore the permissibility of programmatic discussions. But certainly not to begin with.

There is an obvious danger here. The politically backward, those inclined to conservatism and lowest common denominator unity will exercise a veto. This owes more to the consensus politics of petty bourgeois protest campaigns than the politics of Marxism with its tradition of debate, resolutions, amendments and binding majority votes.

If the TAS approach had been adopted by the RSDLP in 1903 the Bundists and *Rabocheye Dyelo* economists would have decided everything and the 2nd Congress would have been a total fiasco. But, of course, nothing of the kind happened ... and because they could not tolerate being in a minority, the Bundists and *Rabocheye Dyelo* eventually

stormed out and gave Lenin and his comrades their majority (Bolsheviks = majorityists).

Compared to our TAS comrades, we advocate a diametrically opposite approach. Our starting point is the programme itself. From the programme we build the organisation. Not the other way round.

The RSDLP really began with the 1903 programme first drafted by Georgi Plekhanov and batted backwards and forwards by him and Lenin before the *Iskra* group finally presented it to the 2nd congress and its 43 full, voting, delegates gathered in Brussels/London (there were 33 *Iskra* comrades, five Bundists and two *Rabocheye Dyelo* delegates). With a couple of amendments the congress adopted the *Iskra* programme by a thumping majority (there was just one abstention). We shall not deal with the Bolshevik/Menshevik split - suffice to say that both main wings of the party agreed that the rules should begin by stating: "A party member is one who accepts the party's programme ..."⁸

From solid programmatic foundations the RSDLP went on to become a mass party (yes, albeit with two bitterly opposed, big factions). It was the same, though, with German social democracy, the French Workers' Party, etc. Programme - not gathering in additional groups, not growing membership figures, not parliamentary representation - came first and foremost.

Hence our *Draft programme* is both a propaganda weapon of the here and now, and also our road map to the future. As such we expect a fundamental redraft only with the conquest of state power by the working class (a long and possibly winding road which could both see the CPGB assume mass proportions, but also reduced to clandestine, underground, operations carried out by dedicated revolutionary cadres in periods of reaction and, therefore, of severe repression).

Put another way, the programme is about epochs, strategy, essential social laws and transforming the working class into a hegemonic class for itself. Not organisational vicissitudes.

Middle classes

Another area of disagreement involves the necessity of the Communist Party winning over the middle classes as allies (or at least neutralising them). The TAS comrades appear to imagine that the middle classes represent not the least problem. As the Communist Party becomes a real social force they will flock to our banner ... even though TAS says that they envisage (forcibly?) expropriating all capitalist concerns immediately, or almost immediately, after the revolution, no matter how tiny or marginal. They plead on behalf of workers employed by small capitalists: why should they remain exploited wage slaves! A strategic blunder of the first order.

There are today some 5.5 million small enterprises in the UK (0-49 employees).⁹ Instead of leaving them to the Tories, Reform UK and other far right outfits, we need to champion their interests (within definite limits) as against the interests of big capitalist corporations, the banks and the state machine. Eg, we should aim to split small farmers from the far right and the agro-industrial lobby when it comes to the inheritance tax issue.

The same basic approach applies after the working class assumes political power. The TAS comrades

envisage a wonderfully easy hop, skip and jump to full communism and a society without money, wage-labour, exploitation, etc. They brush aside the standard Marxist expectation that between “capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other.”¹⁰ In other words, there will be a first or lower phase and a second or higher phase of communism. We insist, therefore, that the lower stage is not and cannot be a *mode of production*. Its essence is movement, change, flux. Neither the law of value nor the law of the plan dominate. Rather the lower stage is the rule of the working class state over capitalism *as it is* and which ends with the withering away of the state and the realisation, at last, of a society of freely associated producers. Since the late 19th century Marxists have called this, the lower stage of communism, the “socialist commonwealth” or more “commonly” simply “socialism” (the last quote coming from Lenin’s *State and revolution*).¹¹

Hopefully the TAS comrades are right. The transition to communism will be an almost instant event. But probably they are wrong. Probably badly wrong. Either way we should at least consider the possibility of a drawn out, highly contested, bitterly fought transition from capitalism to communism. A transition during which we would be well advised not to alienate the middle classes either by threatening or actually forcibly expropriating them (every corner shop, every restaurant, every small farm, every local plumbing business). Why? Because the chances are that, firstly, any such move would result in chaos, economic regression and cause widespread consumer discontent; and secondly, that any such move would see the middle classes flocking into the arms of counterrevolution.

Our approach, which is directly dependent on the progress of the world revolution, crucially winning the core centres of capitalism - Europe, North America and Japan - is therefore softly, softly. Encourage voluntary cooperatives, explicitly reject any suggestion of using force, treat the middle classes as potential allies rather than a fifth column. That approach is, of course, outlined in our *Draft programme* but dismissed by the TAS comrades, who appear to see advanced capitalist economies as only having two classes. Yes, there are two *main* classes. However, when it comes to political strategy, to ignore or downplay the middle classes is to adopt the sociology of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin and the ‘we are the 99%’ popularism of the fleeting Occupy movement. There is proletarianisation. There is, too, bourgeoisification.

The TAS comrades appeal to the plight of wage-workers in the post-revolution petty bourgeois economy. On day one after the revolution we freely admit that alienated labour will not have been abolished. Nor on day two ... or three, either. The working class will have won political power but will not have fully liberated itself. Money, commodity production, wage labour, skills monopolies will continue but simultaneously take on transitional forms as the class struggle continues, under conditions that now are radically advantageous to the working class. While big capitalist companies will be fully socialised, run democratically, with ever expanding measures of workers’ control over management - such as election and recallability - there will, too, be full trade union rights, social protection, limits on hours, etc, throughout the remaining private sector.

Doubtless the stage will be reached when work is rewarded simply on the basis of hours done. The law of value is therefore being superseded,

and the transition towards work being its own reward comes ever closer. But everything depends on the global revolution. We agree, to state the obvious, with the TAS comrades about the “impossibility of socialism in one country”.

However, the idea that this was “not easily envisaged in the early years of social democracy” is demonstrably false.¹² Marx, Engels, Kautsky, Plekhanov, Lenin, Zinoviev and Trotsky all took it as axiomatic ... and explicitly said so. Read *Principles of communism* onwards. National socialism was considered an exotic rightwing aberration amongst those who called themselves Marxists - till Stalin’s *Foundations of Leninism* (1924 second edition).

We are sure that TAS comrades, along with the pro-party faction of *Prometheus*, agree with us that socialism is an act of self-liberation by the great mass of the working class for the sake of the great mass of humanity. But for us, a necessary precondition for working class state power is organising the working class into a disciplined political party founded on the solid foundations that, alone, a comprehensive, fully worked out programme can provide.

Though it may appear paradoxical to some, that party is built top-down. As Lenin bluntly explained, doubtless simplifying for the sake of the argument:

We have said that there could not have been social democratic [communist] consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness: ie, the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals.

By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of social democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.¹³

Lenin had in mind the role of the Emancipation of Labour group founded by Georgi Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, Leo Deutsch and Pavel Axelrod - members of the “revolutionary socialist intelligentsia” who had gone over from Narodism to Marxism in the early 1880s. They studied, adapted and applied the theory of Marx and Engels to Russian conditions and then brought it to the working class from the outside - the outside in this case not being from Switzerland, where they were exiled, but, as Lenin made clear, from outside the economic struggle between workers and employers.

Economic struggles in and of themselves produce nothing more than trade union consciousness and therefore trade union politics - what Lenin called the “bourgeois politics of the working class”, because trade unionism primarily involves selling, bargaining over the market price of labour-power (a commodity, in principle no different to any other commodity).¹⁴

We have devoted some considerable time and effort to drawing up our *Draft programme*. Not to present others with an ultimatum - an accusation made by the fearful, the ditherers and the plain dishonest. No, our *Draft programme* comes with the same idea in mind as when the *Iskra* group commissioned and finally presented the Plekhanov-Lenin draft programme to the RSDLP’s 2nd Congress.

Basis

It is a contribution and, hopefully, it will provide the substantive basis for amendments that the refoundation congress of the CPGB will debate and decide upon. That is, of course, entirely a matter for the assembled delegates. If we have the majority, as was the case with the *Iskra* comrades, then debating our *Draft programme* will certainly be one of the first agenda items.

As a long established, authoritative, pro-party centre, we might expect a clear majority. Who knows? That is for the future. But, even without that majority, there are very good reasons for delegates to take our *Draft programme* as their starting point.

Obviously we need to reject the programme phobia of the SWP, Counterfire, RS21 ... and maybe TAS. Not that the rest of the left is much better. The *Transitional programme* was wrong in 1938, and nowadays just excuses the most abject tailism, economism and sub-reformist politics. The national roads of ‘official communism’, the Scottish Socialist Party, George Galloway’s Workers Party are hopeless. Our *Draft programme*, by contrast, constitutes the only serious basis for building a mass Communist Party.

Naturally, the Communist Party - organising the advanced part of the working class - reformulates and adjusts the programme when necessary. But in many ways the Communist Party is in itself an outgrowth of the programme. Recruits are attracted to its far-reaching, inspiring, but theoretically well-grounded demands. Members are then trained, steered, made into mass leaders by the struggle to realise its goals. In that sense the programme is responsible for generating the Communist Party. For certain, the main determination runs not from organisational considerations, but from the programme and its principles to the organisation and its membership.

Form and content

As already explained, our *Draft programme* is as short and concise as possible. Everything nonessential was deliberately kept out. Passing facts, prime ministers, presidents, the latest round of mass demonstrations, opinion polls on Scottish independence and episodic international alliances and deals have no place in the communist programme. Engels urged exactly that approach: “All that is redundant in a programme weakens it”.¹⁵

Our *Draft programme*, rightly, concentrates on principles and strategy. Particular tactics, theoretical and historical explanations - all that should be dealt with elsewhere: party meetings, articles in our press and on the internet, seminars, pamphlets and books. As we confidently stated back in 1991, it should follow that our programme “will therefore not of necessity need rewriting every couple of years, as with the programmes of the opportunists, let alone go out of date even before they have come off the press, as was the case with the CPB’s version of the *BRS*”.¹⁶

Not that our programme owes anything to holy script - it is not fixed, timeless and inviolate. On the contrary, given a major political rupture - eg, Brexit, the break-up of the UK and its historically unified

workers’ movement, the abolition of the monarchy, etc - then various passages in our programme ought to be (and have been, in the case of Brexit) suitably reformulated.

The programme must become the political compass for millions. Again, as argued not a few years back:

Every clause of the programme must be easily assimilated and understood by advanced workers. It must be written in an accessible style, whereby passages and sentences can be used for agitational purposes and even turned into slogans.¹⁷

We have sought to learn from the best: eg, the Marx-Engels *Manifesto*, the Erfurt programme, the first and second programmes of Russia’s social democrats/communists, etc. Of course, we have not mindlessly aped. Conditions in the UK, its history, economic peculiarities and specifics, and, not least, its constitution and class structure must be, and are, fully taken into account. Let me, therefore, briefly describe the structure of our CPGB *Draft programme*.

There are six sections, each logically leading from the one to the other - form and content being closely connected.

The opening section is a brief preamble, describing the origins of the CPGB and the inspiration provided by the October 1917 revolution. We also, rightly, touch upon the liquidation of the ‘official’ CPGB by its various opportunist leaderships and conclude with the subsequent struggle to reforge the party.

This matters. The CPGB was not just another sect. It organised, for good and bad, key layers and segments of advanced workers. Indeed the CPGB was arguably the highest achievement of the working class movement in Britain. That is why anyone who aspires to build a mass Communist Party would be well advised to adopt the CPGB name that we successfully rescued, took, appropriated, from the Eurocommunist liquidators.

The next section - the *real starting point* - outlines the main features of the epoch: the epoch of the transition from capitalism, by way of socialism, to communism. Then comes the nature of capitalism in Britain and the consequences of its development. Following on from there we arrive at the economic, social and democratic measures that are needed if the peoples of Britain are to live a full and decent life.

This minimum, or immediate, section of programme is most definitely *not* an attempt to throw the social weight of the working class into the ‘liberal’ task of completing the bourgeois revolution.¹⁸ That happened in 1688. The monarchy, the House of Lords, the established Church of England, the Privy Council, etc, are not feudal relics. They are thoroughly embourgeoisified forms, through which capital rules - bourgeois democracy being, of course, an oxymoron. The only democracy the capitalist class considers ‘natural’ is ‘One share, one vote’. Hence every *real* democratic advance has been won from below, crucially by the organised working class - in the face of savage opposition from those above. To credit capitalism with democratic rights, such as universal suffrage, free speech and the right to strike, is ahistorical and politically naive to the point of treachery.

Though our minimum programme is *technically* feasible within the framework of present-day capitalism, in actual fact, its demands can only securely, genuinely, fully, be realised by way of revolution and the Communist Party forming a government. So the minimum programme is not a programme to reform capitalism, so that it matches

some entirely bogus liberal ideal. On the contrary, our programme is designed to shift the main focus of the class struggle from the day-to-day economic, to high politics and the question of state power and beyond.

Those who reject the minimum programme, as Rosa Luxemburg did in 1918, disarm the party: “socialism”, she proclaimed, “this is the minimum we are going to secure”.¹⁹ In the midst of a revolutionary situation it is doubtless right to raise slogans such as “All power to workers’ and soldiers’ councils”. But, if the revolutionary situation is drowned in blood and becomes a counterrevolutionary situation, what does the party have to say then?

Anyway, from our minimum demands we move on to the character of the British revolution and the positions of the various classes and strata. Marxists, let it be emphasised once again, do not consider non-proletarian classes to be one reactionary mass. Sections of the middle classes can and must be won over. Next, again logically, comes the workers’ government in Britain and the worldwide transition to socialism and communism. Here is our maximum programme. Finally, comes the necessity for all partisans of the working class to unite in a reformed Communist Party.

The essential organisational principles of democracy and unity in action are then stated and we underline in no uncertain terms why the CPGB must combine unity in action with internal democracy and the open expression of differences.

Towards that end let the fusion process continue ... we have much to talk about ●

Notes

1. talkingaboutsociology.org/tas-contribution-to-the-forging-communist-unity-process-23-february (1,797 words) and E Potts talkingaboutsociology.org/developing-a-suitable-programme-for-communist-unity (3,259 words).
2. *Britain’s road to socialism* is the programme of the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain. Since the early 1950s the programme of the ‘official’ CPGB was called the *British road to socialism*. However, be it the *British road* or *Britain’s road* they all had to be hurriedly updated. Indeed on not a few occasions they were already outdated even before they came off the printing press. Take the November 1989 version. Its Labour government ‘road to socialism’ was premised on what was supposed to be the “decisively” shifting international balance of class forces. “Socialism” in the Soviet Union, eastern Europe and China would allow a peaceful road to national socialism in Britain through the election of Labour, CPB and progressive MPs. Needless to say, when the CPB rewrote its programme in 1992, we find that the Soviet Union and the “socialist countries” in eastern Europe have been crudely airbrushed out. Predictably, however, the parliamentary cretinism, the popular frontism, the national socialism remained. For a critique of the *BRS* see my 1991 book *Which Road?*
3. K Marx *CW* Vol 10 New York NY 1978, p69
4. F Engels *CW* Vol 27 London 1990, p417.
5. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 25 Moscow 1977, p402.
6. My emphasis, ‘A contribution to the Forging Communist Unity process from TAS’.
7. ‘A contribution to the Forging Communist Unity process from TAS’ point 9.
8. www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/rsdlp/1903/rules.htm.
9. www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2023/business-population-estimates-for-the-uk-and-regions-2023-statistical-release.
10. K Marx *CW* Vol 24 London 1989, p95.
11. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 25 Moscow 1977, p472.
12. E Potts ‘Developing a suitable programme for communist unity’.
13. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 5, Moscow 1977, pp375-76.
14. *Ibid* p426.
15. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 27, London 1990, p220.
16. J Conrad *Which road?* London 1991, p239.
17. *Ibid* pp235-36.
18. The thesis of Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson presented in a series of *New Left Review* articles beginning in January-February 1964 and subsequently demolished by EP Thompson (*The poverty of theory* 1978) and Ellen Meiksins Wood (*The pristine culture of capitalism* 1991).
19. M-A Walters (ed) *Rosa Luxemburg speaks* New York NY 1997, p413.

GERMANY

From powerhouse to powderkeg

AfD was the big winner but Die Linke got a real boost too. Carla Roberts does not rate the chances of the centre holding for much longer

If we are to believe most commentators, 20.5% of voters in Germany (just under 10.3 million people) have just voted for “fascism”. *Socialist Worker* identifies a “fascist surge”. Christine Buchholz, a former MP of Die Linke and a member of the SWP’s German section (currently named Sozialismus von Unten, seemingly choosing a new name for every new political turn) writes that the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has “over a few years developed from a right-wing populist party with a fascist wing, to becoming an outright fascist party”.

In order to “stop fascism”, the comrades have set up Aufstehen Gegen Rassismus, which does not just want to go on demonstrations, but argues that “the broad street protest must hit the party directly”. Not with baseball bats, we should add, but “with a more militant blockade movement”.¹ The comrades are basically trying to stop AfD members going to party meetings. To put it mildly, if these were really “fascists”, surely we would have to consider something a touch more “militant” than sitting down on our arses in front of them.

While there are a fair number of eccentrics and right-wing nut jobs in the AfD, it is not a “fascist party”. There are no fascist gangs roaming the streets. The AfD does not organise hit squads to break up meetings of trade unionists or communists (not that there are many). In fact, most AfD supporters and voters tend to be rather quiet about their affiliation - so overwhelming is the establishment’s ongoing taboo.

Firewall

The so-called *Brandmauer* (firewall) has been shown to be not very solid at all. While shouting about ‘fascists’, most political parties in Germany have moved rapidly to the right, adopting policies to further restrict asylum rules while promising to radically reduce migration. All in order to try and stop the rise of the AfD. To no avail, as the election results have shown - unsurprisingly really, as the establishment parties have proven that the AfD is in fact ‘right’ about the issue.

Although the AfD is perceived as the main winner of the election, it will not be allowed to join a government anytime soon - ideal conditions for the party to grow some more, of course. With 28.6% of the vote, the CDU/CSU might have come first, but with a considerably lower vote than expected. In all likelihood it will now form a ‘grand coalition’ with the SPD, the chief loser of the election, which experienced its worst ever result (16.4%).

The Green Party might be asked to join, too, but if anybody believes that might push the government to the left, think again. It too jumped on the anti-foreigner bandwagon, with its leader Robert Habeck publishing a nasty 10-point-plan on how to reduce migration. Add to that its role as the most enthusiastic war party in the previous government coalition and it explains why it was punished at the election with 11.6% of the vote (down by 3.1%). Habeck has since resigned the party leadership and is considering not taking up his parliamentary post.

We had hoped Sahra Wagenknecht would take similar ‘responsibility’ for the performance of her party, BSW (Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht), which went from



Germany’s parliament: further and further right

about 20% in the polls when it first split from Die Linke, to narrowly missing getting into parliament. So keen was she to catch up on the march to the right that she tried to do one better, proposing a “national referendum” on migration, which she hoped would reduce “the influx” from the current 500,000 to 50,000 a year. In the process, she and the other BSW MPs voted with the conservative CDU and the AfD to limit the right to asylum.

With the BSW result as close as it was - with 4.972% of the vote, the party failed to clear the 5% hurdle to get into parliament by a mere 13,400 votes - it is perhaps no surprise that the BSW is likely to continue on its rightwards march. Wagenknecht is in fact considering “a legal challenge” to the election result. The reason? There are 260,000 Germans who live abroad and because of the nature of a snap election, many of them did not receive their ballots in time. Wagenknecht’s hope that those would have changed the balance seems entirely misplaced: are people who have made the conscious decision to leave Germany *more* or *less likely* to support a nationalist-populist party? Well, you ask the question...

Linke envy

Many BSW supporters will now look at their former home, Die Linke, with some envy, after it jumped from 3% in the polls just a few weeks ago to a thumping 8.8%. This was due to the party moving (marginally) to the left in the few months before the elections, which partially became possible because of the departure of Wagenknecht and a dozen right-wingers in Berlin.

The new Linke leadership has come out with a firm (and new) commitment against weapons exports to Ukraine and Israel and a (left-liberal) stance of “solidarity” with refugees and migrants. And, for the first time ever, the party stood on an election manifesto that committed the party to stay in opposition. That truly is unheard of for Die Linke - but, we should say, does not extend

to participation in local or regional government: the party currently props up the regional governments of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Bremen.

In Berlin, the party surprisingly came first, with almost 20% of the vote. This despite the fact that in the last regional elections, in 2023, the party achieved only 12% and was kicked out of the governing coalition. Perhaps many of those disappointed with Die Linke’s performance as loyal managers of local capitalism felt that they finally had a reason to vote for them again.

The pull to the right will be immense. Yes, a few of the most right-wing Linke MPs are now retiring, somewhat reducing the influence of the pro-Israel ‘Anti-Deutsche’ trend. However, it is still there and will continue to stop the party from clearly standing in solidarity with Palestine. The party continues to hold a ridiculous ‘bad apples on both sides’ position, calling for an increasingly non-sensical ‘two-state-solution’. But at least it is not in open solidarity with Israel anymore.

Die Linke is now particularly popular with young people. Among the under-25s, it came first with 25% of the vote, followed by the AfD with 21%. A gender break-down shows that it was, in fact, *young women* who are overwhelmingly on the left: 35% voted for Die Linke, followed by 14% for the AfD. Different among young men though: 15% voted left, but 26% voted for the AfD, making it the most popular party in that demographic.

Those in Britain running the new Collective party-to-be will look at the success of Die Linke with great interest - but would do well to remember that the party firmly commits itself to “overcoming capitalism” and fighting for “democratic socialism” (whatever that means), while Collective has not even started to discuss its programme. Plus, Die Linke allows open and permanent political factions to organise - which puts it miles ahead of the current state of Collective, where Karie Murphy

(Jeremy Corbyn’s former right-hand woman) seems to hold veto rights on everything.

It is no surprise that many disgruntled Green Party and SPD supporters did not just vote for Die Linke - they also joined. Membership numbers have shot up from just over 50,000 in 2022 to currently 91,088, with the healthy-ish average age of 43.² “A record number”, rejoices the Linke leadership - which means they are not counting the membership figures of its forerunner parties, PDS (which had around 100,000 members in 1992) or, indeed, the SED, the ‘official communist’ party of East Germany, which had around 3 million in the late 80s. But then, the party really has changed quite dramatically. While it used to be immensely popular in the east and only achieved marginal support in the west, this has now evened out almost entirely.

Fight ‘fascism’

Which brings us back to the AfD. It has been particularly successful in the east of Germany, where it came first in a staggering 45 of the 48 constituencies. It won 38.6% of the vote in the federal state of Thuringia, for example. The BSW too fared much better in the east.

The reason for the success of the AfD, especially in the east, is, of course, the economy - in a direct and an indirect sense. The issue of migration is, in reality, just a reflection of a much bigger problem. The state of international capitalism and the stagnating global economy is hitting Germany particularly hard, because, in addition to higher interest rates and declining exports, it has also been Ukraine’s biggest financial supporter in Europe.

The billions of Euros spent on the Ukraine war have made the dire, post-Covid economic situation ten times worse. German industry has suffered greatly from the CIA-directed sabotage of Nord Stream 1 and 2, which would have supplied the country with much-needed, cheap energy. Instead, energy

prices have doubled and continue to rise. 250,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost and many more are threatened. Even the mighty German car industry is crumbling.

In addition to that, many people in the east still see themselves as being ‘on the losing side’ of the unification of 1989 - which in reality was an annexation and is very much perceived as such, even among young people. This is a fertile ground for the rise of right-wing populism, irrationality and fear of ‘the other’.

When questioned about their economic situation, 39% of those who consider themselves in a “bad place” voted for the AfD. 85% of AfD voters think “the situation in Germany is unjust”. 34% of the unemployed support the AfD. Most worryingly, among those who identify themselves as “workers” (as opposed to “employees”), the AfD is the strongest party with 38%.³

So while the national and regional AfD leadership might appeal to, and are comprised of, members of the petty-bourgeoisie (self-employed, accountants, small business owners, etc), it is clearly also very attractive to those who see themselves as ‘left behind’. Even if it were true that the AfD leadership are “Nazis”, does that mean we should write off those who voted for them?

To simply shout “fascists” at AfD supporters is clearly the wrong approach. It shows that the SWP and other similar groups have no strategy to win over the majority of the working class. If the principled left got its act together internationally, it could actually provide some coherent answers to the problems that many people are currently facing.

Capitalism is in total disarray. And with ‘King Donald’ rewriting all the rules in an attempt to bolster US hegemony, worse is yet to come. Especially if Germany’s new government really insists on egging on the pointless war in Ukraine. This has less to do with the war itself - which in any case could not have continued for long without US support - but the future of Europe.

The government will have to decide - and soon - what to do about Trump and his pursuit of a weak Europe. “Germany must turbo charge Europe in opposition to Trump”, demands the *Guardian*. But will Friedrich Merz really rebel against Trump and, for example, continue to pump money into Ukraine? Backing the war in Ukraine will also not go down well with many in Germany. With the AfD being the most outspoken opponent, their support could substantially increase.

Will the new government be pushed into reviving the old idea of a European state with a European army? That would not only set up a confrontation with the mighty USA - the contradictions within the EU countries would become ever more profound.

Simply giving in to Trump and pulling out of Ukraine will make the new government look like a total pushover and the sacrifices of the last three years entirely pointless. It would also show that the AfD was ‘right’ again. Germany has gone from Europe’s powerhouse to its powderkeg ●

Notes

1. socialistworker.co.uk/anti-racism/a-new-anti-fascist-movement-in-germany-interview-with-christine-buchholz.
2. de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Linke.
3. www.derwesten.de/politik/weidel-afd-arbeiter-arbeitslose-bundestagswahl-id301450026.html.

RIGHT

Rebels without a clue

It's all well and good being a dangerous, dissident rightist - but what if you win? Paul Demarty looks at the strange goings-on at the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship

I have visited the Excel Centre in London exactly once - not even deliberately, just on a wander around Docklands to kill a Saturday afternoon. A huge, flat thing - like a datacentre overdesigned by Santiago Calatrava. One could not enter, because there was some big trade show going on, gathering all the people in the world - one assumes - involved in the manufacture of (if memory serves) some crucial material involved in abdominal surgery.

That is what it's for: trade fairs, comic conventions, and the like. It's an upgrade - size-wise - from Earl's Court. So it is, on the face of it, a strange place to hold a gathering of people who consider themselves brave dissidents, bearing uncomfortable truths that the "elite" don't want you to hear. It is as if Solidarnosc had booked out the whole ground floor of the Warsaw Palace of Culture in 1983. Something does not quite add up.

Thus the conference of the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship - a peculiar international NGO set up by, among others, the weepy Canadian charlatan Jordan Peterson and Paul Marshall, hedge-fund manager, former Liberal Democrat and now the proprietor of several right-wing media outlets, notably the *Spectator*, *GB News* and *Unherd*. Speakers at the event included Kemi Badenoch and Nigel Farage both - what exactly divides them politically at this point is hard to tell.

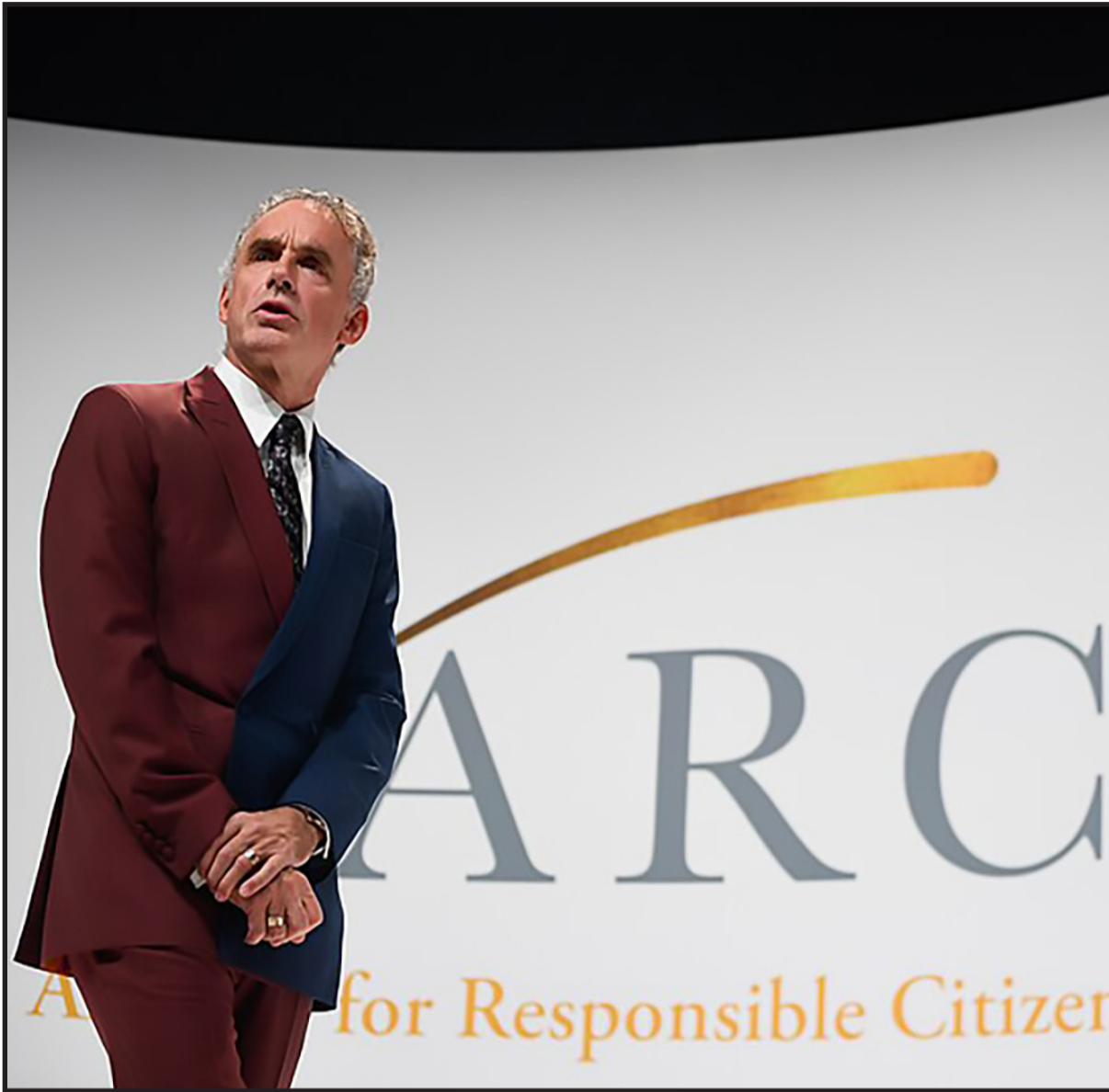
Beyond them, there was Douglas Murray, indefatigable peddler of culture war gibberish and dubious 'free speech' warrior; Niall Ferguson, the neo-conservative historian, interviewed on stage in bizarre fashion by Peterson; and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, anti-Islam activist and wife of Ferguson, who recently converted from 'New Atheism' to Christianity without, obviously, changing her mind on the existence of god. Liz Truss was floating around, promoting her own absurd book and continuing her improbable attempts at a political comeback.

No scandal

Not long ago, the presence of the Tory leader on such a platform might have occasioned some kind of scandal. Yet there was really very little, though the event was widely reported in the bourgeois press. As far as I can tell, only *Socialist Worker* was terribly offended, and I'm sure she feels she can survive opprobrium from that quarter.¹

It is not really surprising. Though Britain is governed by a huge Labour majority, the *global* direction of travel is plain enough to the chauvinist, nationalist right, and polls currently predict - for what it's worth - a three way tie between Labour, the Tories and Reform, with some kind of lash-up between the latter two increasingly mooted. Donald Trump is a month into what is shaping up to be a bracing second term; his *consiglieri*, Elon Musk, spends the time he has spare from retweeting internet Nazis and hacking away at the administrative state like a meth-addled Javier Milei, indiscreetly funnelling money to hard-right outfits like Alternative für Deutschland.

Semi-coherent ranting about the dauntless power of the woke mob and the blob would seem, then, *not* to be the order of the day; but that really does seem to be all they have



Jordan Peterson: charlatan

in their locker. If Stonewall did not exist, Paul Marshall would probably have to invent it, to give his various media thralls something to complain about.

This peculiarity has, indeed, been noted within this general milieu. Sebastian Milbank, writing in *The Critic* - perhaps the only dissident-right publication *not* funded by Marshall at this point - asks:

What is it all for? At the height of the great awakening, it could feel like a victory to even be able to gather, to tell the truth about gender, migration, or policing. So censorious was the climate, and so absurd the lines being held, the bar for resistance and defiance could be ridiculously low ... Unlikely coalitions between dissidents of left and right emerged under this same extreme pressure, and libertarians, conservatives, post-liberals, rationalists, classical liberals and reactionaries all found themselves improbably cast adrift on the same raft.

He enumerates some of the problems faced by this movement in its current state: a "shallow intellectual bench", a "lack of ideas and positive policy". Thus, he concludes, "those who rightly despised progressive authoritarianism must now find shared loves around which to gather, rather than shared hates."²

On the face of it, as I noted in relation to the similar National Conservatism conference in London a couple of years ago, this seems all but impossible.³ Niall Ferguson, for instance, was only a moment ago engaged in frothing arguments with JD Vance about America's

abandonment of Ukraine. Very large numbers of those in attendance at the Excel will have agreed with Vance; and many others with Ferguson. Ultra-Thatcherites rub shoulders with reactionary socialists of the Blue Labour type (Milbank, so far as I can tell, is one of these). There is nothing that unites all these people except their enemies.

Shallow

It does not matter too much because many of the positive attachments of this crowd are so shallow. Religion is perhaps the most instructive example. For all the endless evocations by the ARCists of the "Judeo-Christian tradition" and the threats arrayed against it, this is a remarkably unpious milieu for the most part. We mentioned Hirsi Ali's conversion, seemingly on the basis that it is a more robust defence against Islam than atheism. Peterson rabbits on endlessly about Christianity, and has even recently produced a very prolix and very bad book on the Book of Genesis; yet he notoriously refuses to say whether he is in fact a believer, from which we may safely deduce that he is not.

You could compare these people to the Pope, hated by them as a progressive, even a communist, and currently gravely ill in hospital. Whatever the truth of his 'progressive' credentials, however, there is no serious doubt that Francis believes that, if he doesn't make it through this illness, he is to meet his maker. His preaching makes it clear, furthermore, that he has a terrifyingly literal belief in the devil (which often makes his liberal fans uncomfortable). The same might be said of Rowan Williams, the

famously liberal former Archbishop of Canterbury, who recently delivered a gently scathing review of Peterson's book.

Much the same might be said of 'free speech' - for so long now a rallying cry of the right, but mysteriously silenced when the 'free speaker' is a communist denouncing imperialism, or a fiery imam preaching jihad, or a blue-haired woman on a trans rights demonstration unloading on Terfs through a megaphone. Then, suddenly, it is a matter for the police, or immigration officers, or whatever the case may be. The rote arguments for free speech are memorised, and wheeled out when convenient; but there is no *culture* of free speech on the right (though it is sadly true enough that there is no such culture on the left either).

What strong commitments there are vary from person to person. We suppose that Marshall and the other hedge-fund guys (always *hedge-fund* guys ...) that litter the place have a strong commitment to their bank balances and the success of their investments. For the rest, there is - given their shared hatreds - their adulation for the great men, and occasionally women, who dare to fight back against their enemies. Trump and Farage, and for some, also Viktor Orbán and even Vladimir Putin, assume the kind of importance that Napoleon did for many continental intellectuals in the early 1800s, or Frederick the Great did for Nietzsche.

The weakness of the substantive claims is, in this perspective, actually a *strength* of the movement, which can thus be overdetermined by the charisma of the man on horseback.

Campaigning, Trump promised both to destroy the administrative state and to reindustrialise America. He thus hoovered up support from intellectuals who favoured each of these things. These are flatly contradictory aims, on the evidence of the history of capitalism, but it need not matter. Now he is in power, he can pick his favoured course, and not even fear the loss of the support of the other faction. Where else are they to go? What leverage do they have?

Though Farage has nothing like the unstoppable charisma of Trump, he can equally set himself up as a totem in Britain, an apparently willing instrument for all manner of agendas. In reality, he remains the true-blue Thatcherite he always was, and a hypothetical reunited Tory-Reform ticket under his leadership, victorious at the next election, would likely govern accordingly. So long as enough cruelty was directed against migrants, however, he would likely retain the preference of the Red Tories and Blue Labour defectors. What are they going to do - vote Liberal Democrat?

Tradition

That is the tragedy of the modern right-wing intellectual: their projects are only incidentally connected to the real contest over power in society, between classes and fractions of classes. They are traditionalists without traditions: only the abstract concept of a tradition. You could imagine them looking with some envy at, say, Joseph de Maistre. In his defence of the French *ancien régime* against Jacobinism and Bonapartism, he could at least in full intellectual honesty advocate his true programme - the restoration of the House of Bourbon to the throne and Catholicism as the supreme religion - because these were *actual possibilities* before him, which indeed transpired towards the end of his life, however briefly.

Compare that with attempting to make a Trump presidency into a new dawn of conservative social democracy, as some have; or Brexit into a revival of Britain as a great power, as others have. Advocates for such projects - sometimes very acute minds, unlike the clowns at the ARC conference - have had to rely on the hope that, given the chaos such persons and events unleash, things will somehow fall out perfectly: as if a road collision between lorries full of eggs, flour and milk should spontaneously produce a feast of pancakes.

The frustration of such wishes can have two results. One is a real reckoning with intellectual failure, which may in turn result in changing sides or withdrawal and quietism. The other is projection: blaming the failure of their impossible projects on the treachery of their enemies, and thus a positive choice of obedience to the great man (or the great cause, like Brexit) regardless of one's substantive aims. That, in the end, explains the paranoid and irritable goings-on at the Excel Centre - anyone who had outgrown such pantomime would not have bothered to attend ●

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2. thecritic.co.uk/whats-the-point-of-being-anti-woke.
3. 'Heirs of Edmund Burke', *Weekly Worker* May 25 2023 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1444/heirs-of-edmund-burke).

EDUCATION

Three Rs and no arts

Rather than being trained to be wage slaves, Eddie Ford argues that we should demand the right to develop ourselves as fully rounded human beings

Anyone who still believes in the myth of a meritocracy should take a look at acting. Here is a profession that, in the UK, has been increasingly dominated, if not near monopolised, by privately educated individuals who have all the right connections. Doors tend to fly open for them, while remaining stubbornly closed for others regardless of potential talent.

Perhaps the best example is the ubiquitous Benedict Cumberbatch, who rose to prominence for the *Sherlock* TV series and has appeared in numerous movies - *The Imitation Game*, about Alan Turing; *The Fifth Estate*, in which he played Julian Assange; *12 Years a Slave*, *Tinker Taylor Soldier Spy*, *Star Trek into Darkness*, *Dr Strange*, and so forth, not to mention a whole string of leading theatrical roles like *Hamlet* at the Barbican and *Hedda Gabler* in the West End. Cumberbatch, of course, attended boarding schools from the age of eight, and then Harrow - where he learnt his chops as a member of the Rattigan Society and made his acting debut aged 12 as Titania, Queen of the Fairies, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Apparently, his drama teacher at Harrow warned him against a career in acting because it was a "tough business". After spending his gap year being a volunteer English teacher at a Tibetan monastery in Darjeeling, as you do, he then went to the illustrious London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

What was true for Cumberbatch is also the case with many other well-known actors who went to various fee-paying private or 'independent' institutions, like Eddie Redmayne (Eton), Dominic West (Eton), Tom Hiddleston (Eton), Henry Cavill (Stowe), Tom Hardy (Reed), Rosamund Pike (Badminton), Juno Temple (Bedales), Imogen Poots (Latymer), Emily Blunt (Hurtwood House), Dan Stevens (Tonbridge), Andrew Garfield (City of London Freeman School) - just work your way down the list. This is seriously intimidating for anyone working class who wants to get a break in acting and in all likelihood will not even bother trying.

Empowered

Of course, there was a brief period of time in the 1950s and 1960s when working-class voices were seen and heard everywhere on stages and screens all over the country - Alec Guinness, Tom Courtenay, Michael Caine, Terence Stamp, Albert Finney, Richard Harris, and so on. This was during the post-World War boom. Capitalism felt compelled to make concessions, especially when it came to restive working class youth, who were increasingly not content to live like their parents. As expectations rose, so did the crumbs. Hence, increasing numbers of young people from so-called ordinary backgrounds could get to college and university, or drama schools like LAMDA and even the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, thanks to the system of *student grants* - now gone and replaced by student fees.

Julie Walters, born into an Irish Catholic working class family in Birmingham, told *The Guardian* over 10 years ago that "people like me wouldn't get a chance today" because she got a full grant - saying she "don't know how you get into it now" and "kids write to me all the time and I think, I don't know what



Student drama class: 'The taming of the shrew'

to tell you".¹ She also pointed out that her real opportunity came when she went to work at Liverpool's Everyman theatre - "a fantastic time, alive with possibility and empowered working-class voices" with Alan Bleasdale and Willy Russell writers in residence, both writing parts for her and for others with "explosive talent", such as Pete Postlethwaite. "It felt like a revolution" to Walters, "like being on the frontline of something."

Then jump forward for a revealing contrast to an actor like Christopher Eccleston, born in 1964 to a working class family from Salford. He gained wider recognition for being the ninth incarnation of Dr Who - whose companion, Rose (Billie Piper), was a young working-class woman who lived on a council estate - but for one season only, due to a chronic breakdown in relations with the show's producers regarding the "work environment" and "poor management practices on set" that Eccleston did not want anything to do with (later saying that he had issues with the show's "politics" rather than disliking the actual character he played). From an early age, though inspired by shows like Bleasdale's *Boys from the Blackstuff*, he "had a sense acting wasn't for me because I'm not educated", feeling disadvantaged compared to the actors who went to fee-paying schools. He has said that he had to virtually beg for roles, something he resented, and that the women around him also seemed trapped - and his northern accent held him back when trying to get roles in Shakespearean productions. Something that would not have been an issue with Shakespeare's original Globe Theatre in the 17th century, putting it mildly, as that would have been a smorgasbord of regional accents and backgrounds.

This has led to a dismal state of affairs where the chances for working-class actors have rapidly diminished, especially with the apparent bursting of the soap bubble that once gave them a route into the

profession - with the disappearance of *The Bill*, *Holby City*, *Doctors*, and now *Hollyoaks* moving from five episodes a week to three. Meaning that there is no longer a way to go from being an ambitious newbie to someone experienced with a reputation - you either need extraordinarily good luck, or nothing. A situation that has been described as Benedict Cumberbatch or bust.²

Rigged

And what is true for acting is also true, unfortunately, for the creative arts in general, with a "rigged system" that stifles working class talent. This was the conclusion of a recent analysis by *The Guardian* and the Sutton Trust of artists, directors and actors, showing that almost a third of major arts leaders were educated privately and came from "upper middle-class backgrounds".³ Not in the slightest bit surprising, of course, but still shocking nevertheless.

Hence the survey of 50 organisations that receive the most Arts Council England funding revealed a disproportionate number went to either Oxford or Cambridge, 17.5% of artistic directors and more than a quarter (26%) of chief executives compared with less than 1% of the general population. Of these artistic directors and other creative leaders, almost a third (30%) were educated privately, despite a national average of only 7% going to such institutions. The same goes for the organisations' chief executives or other executive directors, with more than a third of them (36%) going to private schools. Meanwhile, 43% of Britain's best-selling classical musicians and 35% of Bafta-nominated actors were alumni of private schools; and among classical musicians, 58% had attended university, as well as 64% of top actors like Benedict Cumberbatch, who studied drama at the Victoria University of Manchester. Unsurprisingly, researchers found a less stark divide in pop music, where only 8% of artists were educated privately and

20% university-educated, getting close to the national averages.

Furthermore, the number of UK students taking arts subjects has also plummeted in recent years leading to a "creativity crisis" in state schools. Since 2010, enrolment in arts GCSEs has fallen by 40% and the number of arts teachers has declined by 23%. About half of all A-level students took at least one humanities subject a decade ago, but by 2021-22 that had fallen to 38%, with the proportion taking arts subjects such as music, design and media studies dropping to 24%.

In other words, working in the arts is an unobtainable goal for more and more people - the projects and venues that once existed have vanished from so many places. Michael Socha, who recently starred in *The Gallows Pole* and started acting via the Television Workshop on Nottingham, told the *Guardian* that the middle-class environment of film and TV could be difficult to navigate with a "lot of impostor syndrome sometimes" - admitting that even when he got a big job, he was often "quite intimidated by how elitist it is". *Happy Valley*'s showrunner, Huddersfield born Sally Wainwright - who has previously worked on soaps like *Emmerdale* and *Coronation Street* - remembers as a child her father saying to her, "People like us don't become writers". And he was a senior lecturer at a polytechnic! As for the award-winning playwright, Beth Steel, she was able to get a foothold in the world of theatre by securing a place at a live-in property in London where her rent, including bills, was £135 a month - now an unimaginably low sum - that allowed her to work on her breakthrough play, *Wonderland*, about the mining community in Nottinghamshire where she was raised - maybe a very familiar story for some readers of the *Weekly Worker*.

However, recent research by Netflix - based on interviews with 500 National Youth Theatre participants and 2,000 parents and carers - found that nine in 10 working-

class parents would discourage their children from pursuing a career in film and television as they did not see it as a viable career.⁴ One in four respondents also said their parents or carers were unsupportive of their creative endeavours and just under 75% said their potential career choice was viewed as a waste of their education. Instead, they would prefer their offspring to go into "traditional" professions such as law, medicine and finance, as they are seen as safer bets for aspirational young people.

Not for nothing has Equity, the actors' union, been campaigning against the unfolding "arts apocalypse" - one of the clearest signs of what has gone wrong with our entire system - arguing that a "commitment to arts education is essential to arrest the decline and to build an education system fit for the 21st century".⁵ It goes on to say the arts are "essential to human fulfilment", yet in education "what is recognised in principle is often denied in practice" in an underfunded system. Thus the decimation of arts education in schools as they are forced to "make impossible decisions on an ever-dwindling budget" that has a "damaging focus" on an incredibly narrow, soul-destroying, curriculum.

Gradgrind

Of course, the idea that the Arts Council will make a difference with its tick box approach is risible. For that we need a strong, highly organised counterpower which is committed to the total transformation of society. Rather than settling for an education system that trains us to be docile wage slaves, sights can be lifted and young individuals given the opportunity to develop all their talents and potentialities.

Without that the emphasis will remain on exam results and preparation for the jobs market. Once that was summed up by the 'three Rs' (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic). Under the last Tory government and Rishi Sunak that was reduced to arithmetic. He waged a Gradgrind, a war, against the "anti-maths mindset" - trying to make it compulsory for all pupils in England up to age 18 to study maths. Our Rishi complained that only half of all 16-19 year-olds study any maths at all even though we live "in a world where data is everywhere and statistics underpin every job", and therefore "require more analytical skills than ever before". Yes, mastering basic maths is essential, but what about those pupils who also want to play the violin, paint, dance or read poetry? Form a band? But artistic and genuine spiritual development has next to no place in the philistine void that constitutes so much of formal education today ●

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REVIEW

Just a dash of insurrection

Daniel Fish, *Elektra*, Duke of York's Theatre, London, until April 12

There are two principal and very different versions of the Elektra story - one by Sophocles, the other Euripides. For Sophocles, Elektra is a heroine who has the fortitude to keep the wheels of justice in motion through years of stasis until it is time to rise up and wield the knife. Euripides, on the other hand, is not so sure of her moral right for retribution, and questions whether order is ultimately restored.

It's important to make this distinction because Daniel Fish's production of *Elektra* - note, that's Elektra spelt with a spray-painted rebel 'k' - says it is a modern staging of Sophocles's text. Yet, for all the hardboiledness of his lead protagonist, this Elektra is no noble heroine seeking justice for her father's murder. For sure, she is a warrior - but it's as an "I'm at war with everyone" picture-perfect rebellious teenager, complete with girl-punk band Bikini Kill T-shirt with the sleeves ripped off, baggy jeans, stomper trainers and prerequisite buzzcut.

Like any stropky teen, Brie Larson's Elektra makes her presence known as soon as she appears. Striding onto the stage, she takes up a microphone that hangs from on high and jolts the audience to attention from their pre-performance smalltalk with a sudden yell-sing "No!"

Don't get me wrong, Elektra has much to be angry about. Her story is one of the ancient Greek sagas that tells of her father, Agamemnon, fighting in the Trojan war, and who, on returning home after many years, is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. They usurp Agamemnon's Mycenae palace, his wealth and his status as king. Elektra, who has been pining throughout her childhood for her father's return, is understandably traumatised by her mother's treachery, and smuggles her younger brother Orestes away, fearing he is next in the firing line as the rightful heir. Elektra must now spend many more years waiting for Orestes to return and help her exact revenge on their mother and Aegisthus and retake the crown that is rightfully his.

This is when we come in: on the day of Orestes' return. Elektra is not yet aware of her brother's return, and the play begins with her telling her story, her grief, and her unrelenting desire for revenge.

Punk band

Fish's production is built on the conceit of Elektra as lead singer of a punk band. In this way, while we watch her performance, at the same time we become confidants of her inner mental machinations. She sings and growls her discontent, spits every time she speaks the name of her mother and mother's lover, and belts out every "No" in song, all the way through the play. But this is no galvanising cry for liberation a la Patti Smith's 'Horses', nor an appeal for anarchy in the UK. Elektra's androgynous look and slick version of defiance is every part the modern self-conscious misfit meant to appeal to today's disaffected young, yet her self-absorption and obsession with revenge is such that she fails to take us with her and we remain mere spectators.

As Larson's Elektra stalks the stage, shoulders hung heavy, she is the epitome of someone being eaten from the inside out by internalised grief and rage. It becomes apparent that although part of her fury is directed at her mother and stepfather, much of it is self-loathing because of her inability to avenge her father's



Elektra and Chorus

death with her own hands. Powerless to perform the act of revenge herself, Elektra has instead constructed a fantasy in which she has the starring role - the lead singer in her own band. Show me a teenager who hasn't done that before.

Prowling round and round like a caged animal, Elektra is revealed as someone who is trapped - trapped by the thoughts that circle in her head and render her incapable of moving on, and by the limits of the patriarchal society in which she lives. Even though she is the daughter of a king, her status as a woman robs her of any agency to overthrow the status quo - except through marriage. As her sister says: why don't you just marry yourself out of this miserable existence?

Elektra spins on a revolving centre stage as she performs, symbolically caught in the vortex of her thoughts. But instead of pulling us into her maelstrom, her relentless self-absorption, inflexibility and alienation from those around her have the opposite effect - and like a centrifugal force, we are pushed out, unable to empathise. The alienated alienates.

If punk Elektra is meant to be identifiable to the similarly disaffected and powerless, then she misses the mark. Her punching out lines and skulking around while wearing an expression that threatens to laser anyone who catches her eye, gives more the effect of a naive young thing playing at being the epic tragic heroine.

Even Elektra's sister Chrysothemis has lost patience with her and has gone off to follow her own path of accepting what is and moving on. Only the Chorus are willing to stick around to listen to Elektra, try to soothe her, reason with her. The Chorus is done well in this production. The classical dramatic device of having a group of characters distinct from the story to comment on events, and fill in factual gaps to move the story on through song and dance is not an easy one for modern audiences to accept, but here it's not a mental stretch. For the women of the Chorus are Elektra's backing singers, spinning around the stage while harmonising with her dissonant protests. In contrast with the modern get-up of punk Elektra,

the Chorus are robed in folds of golden silk that drop to the floor, like stately Doric columns.

The action alternates between the grounds of the Mycenae palace which is the home of Elektra and her family and the tomb of Agamemnon. The stage is bare of props and detail, a white screen at the back lifts and drops to mark the change from palace to tomb. The barren staging contrasts with the colourful clothing, including the floor-length fur coats worn by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, as if to suggest that whatever they gained from the murder, it wasn't all that much - an empty victory. There are episodes when a paint gun turning on the revolving centre-stage spatters black paint everywhere - on the white screen, on Elektra's T-shirt, and the golden dresses and fur coats. It brings to mind the blood that stains the hands of Lady Macbeth, but with only a fragment of the impact value.

The vengeful slaying of Clytemnestra also fails to arrest. Let's be clear, she is killed by her son, a deed that is facilitated by her daughter. It's an act of such vile proportion that it should horrify us. Yet the violence and consequences are completely airbrushed out by this production, to be replaced with a recording of a news report that describes physical signs of torture on multiple women's dead bodies. It's not made known where the report is from and the effect just leads to confusion. Is Clytemnestra's murder a metaphor for the violence inflicted against women through millennia; or is it that acts of revenge, however we may try to justify them, are never justified (is the news recording meant to evoke the Nova festival attack?); or is it just another brutal act in a long line of brutal acts in the pursuit of power? The confused staging doesn't communicate any, but neither does it fulfil Sophocles's conclusion that this is a righteous act sanctioned by the gods to restore order to the world. Fish's Elektra is not a song for the successful struggle of the oppressed to overthrow a corrupt hegemony. There is no sense of tragic heroism in having to take your own mother's life. It just ends, and the culmination of all Elektra's resolve is an anticlimax. The production pulls its punches and lacks the courage of any convictions where it matters.

Elektra could be said to be the female equivalent of Hamlet. Like him, she stands alone in her protest and gradually disintegrates under her mother's betrayal. However, although Elektra certainly has a chip on her shoulder, there's little sense of the weight of responsibility she carries beyond white-hot rage. She is the one who leads the narrative as she cries her grief into the microphone, but there is no internal battle to come to terms with the destiny she must fulfil. She is a one-dimensional punk-rebel, not an epic tragic heroine who can speak for all the dispossessed.

Family history

Only her mother Clytemnestra, played by former Pink Lady, Stockard Channing, manages to conjure the depths of toxicity of the family and the inequity of society of which it is part. This is one complicated family history of power struggles, murders, adultery and infanticide that makes your average television soap opera seem like a simple tale of woe. She conveys the utter depths of grief from losing a child at the hands of her husband so well you can forgive her for taking his life. Not surprisingly, she got the rowdiest applause.

But in the end the play's themes of revenge and justice are too watered-down in this production to pack any real punch, like when you order a mug of strong builder's tea but get a weak, milky version in its place, as if someone is trying to save your stomach from yourself. This is a bland serving that lacks the shocking level of violence inherent in the original text, and in its confusing production fails to raise questions about insurrection and ending long cycles of corruption and violence ●

Pat Taylor

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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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Great expectations

One of the greatest achievements of capitalism is rising average life expectancy in developed countries. This has begun to stall, not because we have reached an upper limit - well, not yet, suggests **Ian Spencer**

Marx's volume one of *Capital* has numerous references to the appalling figures for average life expectancy in the United Kingdom. Many of these were derived from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Factories and other official data. They showed that in some factory districts life expectancy had dropped to 15 and were cited as evidence for the destructive effect on health of capitalist industrial production.

Since 1867 there has been a steady improvement in average life expectancy at birth across society. Average life expectancy at birth in Britain today is 78.6 years for men and 82.6 years for women. However, the trend towards year-on-year improvement has started to stall. Current UK figures are derived from data collected in 2020-22, and represents a fall in life expectancy to levels of a decade earlier (2010-12). Compared with 2017-19, it has fallen from 79.3 and 83.0 for men and women respectively.¹

Average life expectancy at birth is a measure which is greatly influenced by levels of infant mortality. The shocking figures in Marx's *Capital* did not lead to a decline in industrial productivity because of the population that was brought into the industrial centres from the countryside, particularly from Ireland. Moreover, if you lived to be five in the 1840s, you were likely to live to be 45.

So, life expectancy at other ages can also be illuminating. Life expectancy at 65 years in 2020-22 was 18.3 years for men and 20.8 for women; this is a fall of 22 weeks for males and 15 weeks for females compared with life expectancy at age 65 in 2017-19.

The rate of improvement in a range of 17 countries across Europe has started to slow, according to a study published in *The Lancet*. Moreover, this is linked to government health policy decisions. The countries that maintained some sort of improvement (Denmark, Belgium, Norway, Sweden and Iceland) were those that had policies aimed at improving cardiovascular health and the prompt treatment of cancers.

In the UK, factors such as low levels of exercise, high rates of obesity, coupled with high rates of consumption of highly processed foods were implicated in worsening life expectancy. The UK is also bad at preventing and treating heart disease and cancer.²

Some of the decline in life expectancy is attributable to Covid 19 and the increase in mortality between 2020 and 2022. But the life expectancy improvements have been slow for a decade and not just in the UK. The US has seen similar declines and, as two of the most unequal countries in the world, the UK and US compare unfavourably with other countries with similar levels of economic development.



Albrecht Dürer 'Portrait of the artist's mother at age 63' (1514)

In the US, life expectancy for males is 74.8 years and 80.2 for females, or 77.5 for both sexes.³ This compares unfavourably with Trump's would-be colony of Canada, which has a life expectancy of 81.3 years for both sexes. For comparison, Spain has a life expectancy of 83.08 years. Spain's expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP is 7.13% compared with the USA, which spends 13.43% of GDP to achieve a much worse health outcome.

But does this mean that we are reaching some upper limit for the improvement of life expectancy? We may do one day, but not yet. The commonplace statement that we are 'living to be older' is not quite true. More may be living to be old, but the absolute limit may never increase beyond around 120. However, laboratory experiments with other species suggests that there may in future be ways of intervening in the process of aging, which may produce qualitative as well as quantitative improvements in longevity.⁴

Them and us

The likelihood of an absolute upper limit does not stop billionaires trying to live beyond it, any more than it stops other billionaires trying to be astronauts. American venture capitalist, Bryan Johnson, the subject of the Netflix documentary 'Don't die: the man who wants to live forever', spends an estimated two million dollars a year on doctors and treatments aimed at prolonging his life, whatever their spurious efficacy. Perhaps one should not be surprised that one of the world's leading centres for research into aging is the University of Southern California.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the US, some of the most dramatic declines in life expectancy have been among indigenous Americans and native Alaskans who have seen declines of 6.6 years, down to 65.2 years. Among Black and Hispanic US citizens declines of around 4 years to

70.8 and 77.7 respectively have been recorded by the US National Centre for Health Statistics, which is a department of the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).⁵

Low taxes

I daresay the fact that the CDC has dismissed 10% of its total staff and 45% of its probationary staff, in the wake of the Trump and Musk assault on the US civil service, is entirely coincidental.⁶ But data on the economic impact of conservative policy on the poorest in society is an inconvenient truth, running counter to the need to keep taxes low for the wealthy.

The human achievement of longevity is a good illustration of how capitalism on the one hand creates the conditions for abundance and the enhancement of human life but at a certain point in its development becomes an impediment to further improvement. 'An ageing population' is now often cited as a reason for why health and social care is seen as a problem and potentially unaffordable. Instead of being grounds for celebration, the fact that living to old age carries with it the possibility of neuro-degenerative decline is seen as something inherent in aging. This, in turn, finds its expression in several ways, including the callous indifference of the government of Boris Johnson to the death rates in care homes and, more recently, to the cautious acceptance of assisted dying.

To be clear, while the recent attempts at legalising 'assisted dying' are aimed at the terminally ill, particularly those with cancer, the fear among many is that it could eventually find acceptance for those with Alzheimer's disease and other neuro-degenerative disorders.

The dementias, of one sort or another, are disease processes and not natural features of ageing. While a measure of cognitive decline in some

areas may be an inevitable feature of ageing, most of the dementias have a clearly demonstrable pathology, which in many cases is preventable.

Some dementias have a clear genetic link. Huntington's disease, for example, is the result of a faulty dominant gene, with its origins in Europe. It is unknown in Africa. The most common dementia, Alzheimer's disease, in some cases has a genetic link, but most cases are linked to a complex array of epigenetic and environmental factors. Japan, with its world leading life expectancy of 85.27 years as an average of both sexes, is the focus of research into the management of the dementias.⁷

The second most common form of dementia, arterio-sclerotic, is highly preventable. Broadly speaking, good heart health is good brain health, and actions to tackle high blood pressure, type-two diabetes and obesity will also prevent this form of dementia. All these conditions demonstrate a clear class gradient, in outcome and often in aetiology. Socio-economic deprivation is a factor in dementia in both the UK and the US, both of which have high levels of social inequality and relatively high levels of dementia.⁸

There is a tendency to assess dementia as a series of risk factors, which, in the context of capitalism, tends to be expressed as the outcome of lifestyle choices rather than something that could be the subject of worldwide social transformation. However, even if one looks at risk factors, age being by far and away the most important, the research results are important and instructive.

A World Dementia Council study into the management of dementia in Japan looks at biological, psychological and social environment factors in preventing dementia. Biological factors include good dental health, which is interesting when one considers the way that NHS dentistry has been left to rot, and one considers that the UK has relatively high levels of dementia. Diet and exercise are also important factors.

Psychological factors include the availability of good quality sleep, good psychological health and social contact. Social and environmental factors, including low social status (class, in other words) represents a major risk factor. Among the protective factors are plenty of cognitive activities, such as reading and writing, and high levels of social support, including that which is found in work.⁹ Marx's comments in the 1844 manuscripts have never been more apposite. While work under capitalism may be experienced as an alienating experience, in a communist society it would be humanity's 'prime want'.

The population of UK care homes is 441,479, 70% of whom are memory impaired. They reside in around 16,700 care homes, 30% of which are designated as 'nursing

homes' - that is, they must always have a registered nurse present. Half of residents are self-funded. Often that means their homes have had to be sold to pay for their care, until their personal estate dwindles to £23,250, when the local authority may contribute to the cost of care. When a resident's estate reaches £14,250, they may be eligible for full funding by the local authority.

Privately owned

Most nursing and residential homes are privately owned. Charges are highly variable, but £1,000 a week would be at the cheaper end of the spectrum. The care home world is staffed by a workforce of around 745,392, many of whom are paid at the level of the national 'living wage.' There are 131,000 vacancies in social care.¹⁰

The UK is following the US pattern, where the private care home sector is seen as a backup to the secondary care sector. Successive governments have promised a solution to social care. Theresa May's proposal for what became dubbed the 'dementia tax' was the rock on which her election gamble floundered. Boris Johnson made rash promises to cap residents' contributions that he knew he would never have to honour. Starmer's government has dealt with the question by kicking it into the long grass of yet another public enquiry. In any event, future proposals will have to compete with higher levels of military expenditure and perpetual war.

There is no chance that social care will be funded centrally by the state. In the meantime, most care homes are poor at managing decline, given staff shortages and minimal funding, where profit is the decisive motive. Capitalism has created another condition which, like climate change, it cannot solve. We can be sure that billionaires and their erstwhile servants in government won't solve it either ●

Notes

1. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/lifeexpectancies/bulletins/nationallifetablesunitedkingdom/2020to2022.
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