

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**Rediscovering a common Marxist  
language to overcome common  
misunderstandings between Marxists**

- Letters and debate
- JD Vance explained
- Trump's tariff war
- Chinese capitalism

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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## FORGING COMMUNIST UNITY





# LETTERS



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

## Liquidate into RS21

As a fervent reader of the *Weekly Worker*, I was incredibly excited to read the first few reports on the Forging Communist Unity process. A merger of the five groups initially involved seemed like such a huge step forward for Marxists in Britain that I even wrote about it for the newly founded magazine, *Paraat!*, of my own organisation, ROOD.

However, most of my excitement has since waned, after it became clear that Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century, Why Marx? and half of the *Prometheus* editorial board would not commit themselves. I now seriously doubt whether the actual fusion of CPGB, Talking About Socialism and half of the *Prometheus* EB will number over a hundred members - a negligible number in the UK - let alone be able to make a serious dent on the wider British left. Seeing these two sects and less than 10 individuals argue about the specifics of a political programme disappointed me even more. Truly, what's the point?

Even though I understand that even this small merger is progressive, in the sense that it can set an example, and that even in small cases the fusion organisation will be stronger than the sum of its parts, I can't help but feel that a different route to communist unity is preferable. My solution would be this: the CPGB, TAS and the pro-party faction of the *Prometheus* EB should liquidate themselves organisationally into RS21 - strengthening it as a whole, as well as strengthening the Erfurtian faction. This Marxist unity faction would find a strong press organ in the *Weekly Worker* and would be strengthened immensely by the influx of experienced advocates of Marxist unity.

In this situation, RS21 could become, without a doubt, the anti-sectarian sect that takes itself and its revolutionary activism seriously in the meantime.

Koen de Kooter  
Netherlands

## Depressing attack

I was depressed to read Carla Robert's attack on David Miller ('From SWP to Iranian asset', April 3). She proclaims that he should be allowed freedom of speech, at the same time as she tells pro-Palestine groups that they should have nothing to do with him. But surely it is exactly within such groups that Miller's views (if they are as unsavoury as Ms Roberts claims) should be discussed. Iran's treatment of women is dreadful, but does that mean its support for the Palestinian cause cannot be welcomed?

How best might we tackle the

overwhelming support of Jews for Israel? By shutting down examination of these questions - by making out that David Miller should be shunned for raising such matters - we are seeing yet another leftwing witch-hunt in action. It appears to be so much easier to attack fellow travellers than allow open debate in the places where views might be explored and challenged.

This narrow-minded condemnation of fellow pro-Palestine campaigners, as frequently practised by Tony Greenstein and now by Carla Roberts too, is symptomatic of a lazy, tribal approach to politics that so bedevils the left. The endless splittism it encourages is why the Tories so often end up winning - they stick together by tolerating a wide range of views, coming up with new ideas that so often leave the left on the defensive.

To conclude, it diminishes the *Weekly Worker* to publish such personal attacks, which advocate 'no-platforming', especially upon one who has already been persecuted for his anti-Zionist views. It undermines your claims to support freedom of speech.

Pete Gregson  
Edinburgh

## Trotsky fanboy

Thanks to the *Weekly Worker* editor for the correct title he gave to Tony Clark's letter: 'Stalin fanboy' (April 3). The accusation of ultra-leftism directed at Trotskyism in general and me in particular equally applies to Lenin, Marx and Engels for daring to propose the ultra-left notion of the socialist revolution to overthrow capitalism - so brilliantly successful in October 1917, and the greatest single event in human history.

Tony's attack on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution reverts to the typical Stalinist stages theory. Lenin's April theses represented the realisation of that theory in practice: he consigned the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' slogan to history and 'All power to the soviets' became the Bolshevik's new orientation, after Lenin overcame the opposition of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin. Since Nikolai Bukharin wrote his book *Imperialism and world economy* in 1915, to which Lenin wrote a very favourable introduction and his own 1916 *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism*, they had understood and propagated the theory that class-consciousness was not a national phenomenon, but was global - albeit with each nation's own particularities.

The 1917 February revolution was the first stage of the October revolution: it was not possible to make a bourgeois revolution first, which awaited a whole historical period for capitalism to develop, until Russia, or any other third world country, became ready for the socialist revolution. This was the Menshevik theory, which led them to support the Provisional government and would have resulted in a counterrevolution defeat if followed.

We can take the case of South Africa today, which is an example of the outcome of a two-stage revolution. Here principled Trotskyists proposed the permanent revolution *Workers' charter* as against the African National Congress/South African Communist Party *People's charter*. The success of the latter gives us one black billionaire - Cyril Ramaphosa's brother-in-law, Patrice Motsepe. Ramaphosa himself is worth 'only' between \$500 and \$750 million and all the leaders of the substantial parties are millionaires; they were bunged again and again to ensure their loyalty to the apartheid establishment and its six white billionaires. The black working class and poor are now worse off than under apartheid - South Africa is the world's most unequal country, if measured by the Gini coefficient. Elon Musk - the world's richest man at \$362.5 billion - is from South Africa.

In the July days Lenin correctly understood that the masses were not ready for the seizure of power - they had not yet captured the crucial soviets. Following the state crackdown, Lenin had to flee abroad and Trotsky was arrested. In August general Kornilov attempted a coup by marching on Petrograd. The Provisional Government under Kerensky had to call on the Petrograd soviet to defend the city and he was forced to arm them, which then made the existing dual power situation even more radical. The Bolsheviks responded correctly, forcing a united front - Trotsky, then released, organised the Petrograd Red Guards in the defence of the city. Bolshevik agents also infiltrated Kornilov's forces and there were big desertions. By the end of August Kornilov's coup had failed and he was arrested. This set the scene for the advance of the Bolsheviks in the soviets - Trotsky taking control of the Petrograd soviet, as he had in 1905. The consequent leap in class-consciousness of the masses saw them lead the revolution in October, confirming the correctness of the theory of permanent revolution.

Tony writes in reference to the Brest-Litovsk treaty of March 3 1918 that Trotsky was wrong. It is true that Trotsky tried to string out the negotiations in the hope of a revolution breaking out in Germany. Ironically one did break out, but it was as a result of mass desertions from the Germany army being reposted to the western front.

"Trotsky had previously fought this ultra-left mistake, but he did so from another ultra-left stance, which would have strengthened fascism," he writes in reference to the third period of Stalinism - 1928-34/5 - in which all political forces were termed 'fascist' apart from themselves. In particular Stalin identified the social democrats as the main enemy and actually allied with the Nazis and several rightwing parties against them in the Prussian Landtag in what they called the 'red referendum' in 1931, which failed due to a low turnout.

This alliance with the Nazi trade union sector was repeated in the Berlin transport strike of December 1932, just a few short weeks before Hitler came to power in January 1933. Tony fails to tell us what was Trotsky's position, which he thinks would have strengthened fascism. In fact, Trotsky demanded a united front of the communists and social democrats against the fascists, from above and below: ie, placing demands on the social democratic leaders to expose them before the membership - in contrast to the Stalinist bogus 'united from below', which merely demanded that the membership join the communists.

The irony of a so-called democratic socialist championing Stalin's actions

during World War II can be lost on no-one. Remember the Moscow show trials of 1936-38, at which all the remaining members of Lenin's central committee - apart from Alexandr Kollontai, who sensibly refused to return to Moscow from abroad - were executed, as were all the active participants in that great revolution that Stalin could apprehend. That was during the popular front of the war years and Tony supports the jailing of the Trotskyist leaders for opposing this political treachery of the communists in Britain and France, which saw them actively assisting the scabbing against the labour disputes in 1944.

The class struggle during the war reached a peak in 1944. The official number of strikes was 2,194 in that year, with more than 3,700,000 working days lost. These revived the labour movement and inspired the Labour victory in 1945, at a time when the Communist Party was still following Stalin's instructions for a popular front with Churchill. The mass of the British working class was now to the left of Stalin and the CPGB. The heroic Trotskyists of the Revolutionary Communist Party - Roy Tearse (industrial organiser), Ann Keen, Heaton Lee and Jock Haston - were jailed for supporting these strikes.

Tony piles confusion on confusion, when he tackles my assertion that Donald Trump is in the process of creating a fascist state in the US. Finance capital will deal with Trump, he thinks, because isolationism is contrary to globalisation. But we must not forget that Hitler too was initially an isolationist. Just as the war eastwards for 'Lebensraum' was Hitler's priority, war with China will be Trump's, if he succeeds in installing the fascist state. We are confident he will not do so without provoking a major uprising of the working class and possibly a civil war.

Gerry Downing  
Socialist Fight

## Wartime flip

My thanks to Tony Clark for reminding me that there are some activists in the labour movement who have (possibly deliberate?) memory loss, when it comes to the Communist Party and World War II. According to

Tony, the CPGB had an uninterrupted popular front policy throughout the war, supporting the efforts of British imperialism in their war with Germany.

Unfortunately Tony has omitted the infamous removal of Harry Pollitt as CPGB secretary in September 1939, when Harry and others were slow to grasp the change in the Comintern line following the non-aggression pact (the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact) between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, signed on August 24 1939. Comintern now declared its opposition to an imperialist war. Pollitt, who had only just published his pro-war CPGB pamphlet *How to win the war*, was sent back to Moscow for re-education. Only when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 did the line zig-zag again and full support to British imperialism return as Comintern and CPGB policy.

Throughout this latter period the CPGB used its shop stewards to oppose trade union actions designed to defend workers' rights. It was rewarded when Churchill's government lifted the ban on the *Daily Worker*. In return the CPGB agitated for the 'People's War' (sic) and supported attacks on workers' conditions by employers.

Facts can be inconvenient, of course, but Tony Clark's omissions show disregard for those many fine trade unionists and socialists who fought to retain union rights and opposed both British imperialism and fascism between 1939 and 1945. Tony and others may enjoy my best-selling novel, *A peal of socialism*, which covers these issues and this period.

Graham Durham

Socialist Labour Bulletin editor

## Whose interests?

Coming up is the anniversary of the Easter Rising and the obligatory Irish Republican parade in Derry on Easter Monday - plus a commemoration event in a cemetery somewhere, maybe on Easter Sunday. It's all pomp and charades, of course, and rhetoric harking back to antiquated times, when the cause meant something: ie, a release from Britain's institutionalised, discriminatory rule in Ireland - towards something approaching self-rule. Irish nationalists won equality in Northern Ireland in the period from the 1970s to 1998.

## Fighting fund

# We need your help

Our April fighting fund received a healthy boost this week with the brilliant £100 donation from AC. Excellent stuff, comrade! Other bank transfers/standing orders came our way from BO (£35), CG, DV and NH (£30 each), JD (£20), RD (£12), IS and SM (£10 each).

Then we had PayPal contributions from ST (£20) and MH (£20), meaning that we received £307 altogether in the last seven days, taking our running total for April up to £573.

You might be thinking, 'That's not too bad after just nine days', but, to be honest, it's quite a bit behind the going rate for our new monthly target of £2,750 - especially when you realise that we still need well over £2,000 in exactly three weeks!

But I'm confident that our readers and supporters won't let us down. They know only too well that the *Weekly Worker* plays a vital role in fighting for

the one thing that the working class desperately and urgently needs: a single Communist Party that seeks to recruit millions to its ranks in order to win the battle for democracy and achieve working class power, not only in Britain, but across the world.

So now we need to step on the gas, so will you play your part? Send us a cheque, make a donation via PayPal or - best of all - make a bank transfer. I say 'best of all', because it's not only the quickest way to get us the money you're donating, but nothing is deducted.

For more information on all the above, please go to [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate). We really need your help! ●

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](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)

## Communist University

Thursday July 31 until Thursday August 7 inclusive  
Central London venue, a short walk from Great Portland Street tube  
Details of speakers and sessions will be posted here:  
[communistuniversity.uk](http://communistuniversity.uk)

Cost:

Whole week's attendance, including accommodation: £250 (£150 unwaged)  
Weekend, including one night's accommodation: £60 (£30)  
Full day: £10 (£5).  
Single session: £5 (£3)

You can reserve your place by sending a £30 deposit to account:  
Communist Party of Great Britain  
Cooperative Bank, sort code: 08-92-99, account number: 65109991  
IBAN: GB33CPBK08929965109991, BIC: CPBK-GB-22  
Make sure to reference 'CU 2025'



This isn't to say there's been an end to all kinds of discrimination towards Irish nationalists living in Northern Ireland from successive British governments, but unionists have also experienced similar discrimination. British governments, like all governments across the world, have been heavily influenced by finance capital, which is blind to political affiliations and only seeks greater and greater profits for a wealthy elite - which is internationalist, or stateless, in outlook. In all the clichéd ramblings we'll hear over Easter from a ragtag bunch of amateurs playing the Irish militant Republican card, we'll hear nothing about finance capital, which is what rules over Ireland today and everywhere else.

Of course, none of these paramilitary-uniformed actors will be arrested, as that would go against everything the spectacle is meant to achieve. Arrests would draw attention towards particular individuals, which could risk blowing their cover and having their personal details scrutinised, leading to their real identities as British agents or operatives. It seems the state today prioritises arrests solely for people who use hurty-hurty words on social media. Parents arrested and detained for criticising their child's school in a WhatsApp group is the latest state overreach. This, as Gaza is flattened and Palestinians slaughtered with British complicity. But, of course, it is those who protest against the genocide in Gaza who are now being labelled as *terrorists*, like Palestinian Action cum Filton 18.

There'll be intermittent phrases in embarrassingly bad Irish Gaelic and even the English parts will be stammered through, as anyone who has ever borne witness to one of these events can affirm. If these are the best spokespersons they can muster for such a prestigious occasion, then it only adds to the pantomime. It feels that the people are reading from a script they've only just been handed - written, one might conjecture, by members of the British army's 77th Brigade, I would think.

The events themselves complement the agenda of the British state, as they imply there is still a threat from Irish militant Republicanism, which there isn't - apart from sections of Irish republicanism funded, managed

and controlled wholly by British covert agents. The existence of Irish militant republicanism also justifies a militarised British state, which will use its prowess against striking workers and/or generally against those opposing the official narratives - as we've seen recently against protestors, for example.

Protests at home are being treated as terrorist offences, whereas sending spy planes to fly over Gaza, and providing the Israel Defence Forces with bombing coordinates for civilian infrastructure they want to target, is merely a 'nothing to see here' moment (Declassified UK). The 'threat' of militant Irish republicanism has to be maintained by British intelligence, as there always needs to be the option available, if the need arises, to misdirect people's attention and to instil hatred on both sides. For example, if a mass secular movement of people within Northern Ireland gained enough participation and momentum to challenge not just British rule, but the rule of international finance, usury, etc, possibly the militant Irish Republican card would be played and the other side's militant antagonists, formerly kept in storage, unleashed in kind.

These are the issues that encompass the bedrock of all states' power across the world. The secret society networks and oligarchical gangs in control around the world don't fear the loss of British state rule from Ireland, as it's just a reflection of their own rule, which can be interchanged so easily with a tricolour, whenever that stage in the delusive narrative is reached. So, as always - and to evoke the parroted phrases of 'Our day will come' and 'No surrender' that each side readily appropriates, helping to rigidify each side's bigotry - that day will never come until at least the issue of finance capital starts to be addressed. On the flipside, all of us will continue to surrender our rights every day and things will continue this way until we decide that finance capital is not the benevolent landlord we may have once thought it was.

I think anyone believing vehemently in a united Ireland or union with Britain hasn't spent enough time studying the world, as a united Ireland will be controlled by the same financiers who control both

sides of the border today. Britain, with its long history of blood-stained hands, being caught again facilitating genocide in Gaza, isn't worth seeking union with and can never be reformed.

Louis Shawcross  
County Down

## Zionist Passover

Jewish festivals are traditionally favourite times for attacking Jews. Such attacks, of course, include the physical, but also spiritual, political, cyber and propagandistic: conspiracy theories and 'free speech' will be the order of the day.

Among the left-leaning union and student bodies, Friday nights are popular occasions for demonstrations, conferences and resolutions against Israel, Jews and 'Zionism'. Jews and some who are Jew-ish are conveniently less likely to attend and object.

An interesting, yet predictable, opportunity for social observation, research and introspection occurs next week, centred on Friday April 11, which is the eve of Pesach (Passover). Jewish households all the previous week will have been in a frenzy of maniacal cleaning, expunging the household of the most minor traces of food and dust that may contain unleavened material - the very essence of 'Kosher for Passover'.

Most Jews will sit at a family/community meal and service. The ancient story of Exodus will be told, while formalised, old (and some new) prayers will be offered. Symbolic food will be central, while dishes from the traditions of Afghanistan, Persia, Yemen, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Turkey and two dozen other lands will be there. Emphasis is placed on the centrality of children. We will sit leaning to the left, drink (at least) four cups of wine (whisky is forbidden!), eat (and hide to be held hostage) matzah (flatbread; no Christian blood - sorry, folks, that's not our thing) and we remember '*Vihi Sheamda ...*': in every generation they rise up to destroy us. And we offer "all who are hungry - let them enter and eat". The service is formally concluded with the prayer/declaration/hope: "Next year in rebuilt Jerusalem!"

For those of you who want to learn a little of what Passover is, I recommend you get hold of the Pesach user manual. It is called *The Haggadah* ('the telling'). It describes in minute detail the *seder*: that is. the 'order' of the event and songs and stories. You could find them old-fashioned - for children, adults in comic format, every artistic and cultural approach imaginable. It's an inexpensive pamphlet, and often given out free. In the Anglosphere, paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, the Aramaic and Hebrew is accompanied by English, side by side.

Pesach paints the picture of those who are Jews and Jew-ish - and those who are not. It is also the most intense intersection between Judaism and only-resort Zionism of all the festivals in modern times. If you have not been to a Pesach *seder* or had it explained to you in detail, you do not know Jews.

It is also historically one of the most popular times to attack Jews. And this year - what a great and fearsome opportunity! Pesach occurs on a Friday! The streets can be confidently expected to roil with outrage on Saturday April 12. Many of the demos will have already been scheduled.

If you have any questions, and know not who to ask, send them to the editor. I'm sure he'll be kind enough to forward them to me!

John Davidson  
email

# ACTION

## Stop Labour's attack on disabled people

**Saturday April 12, 10am:** Protest against Emily Thornberry MP and Islington Labour council, Islington Town Hall, Upper Street, London N1. Bring banners, signs and music.  
Organised by Disabled People Against Cuts:  
x.com/Dis\_PPL\_Protest/status/1907553381809328362.

## End the genocide - stop arming Israel

**Saturday April 12, 12 noon:** East London march for Palestine. Assemble Altab Ali Park, Whitechapel Road, London E1. March to Wennington Green, London E3. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/east-london-march-for-palestine.

## Stop racist hate in Bournemouth

**Saturday April 12, 12 noon:** Counter-protest. Assemble Town Hall, Bourne Avenue, Bournemouth BH2. Ukip leader Nick Tenconi is planning an anti-immigration event calling for mass deportations. Organised by Stand Up to Racism Bournemouth: www.facebook.com/events/1207747164261905.

## We demand change

**Saturday April 12, 1pm:** Protest outside Sheffield Town Hall, Pinstone Street, Sheffield S1. Fight Labour and confront the far right. Put people before profit, welfare not warfare, make the rich pay. Organised by Sheffield Stand Up to Racism: www.instagram.com/p/DII5zcrNapy.

## Welfare, not warfare

**Saturday April 12, 1.30pm:** Public meeting, Tyneside Irish Centre, 43 Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1. Public-sector cuts and increased arms spending have nothing to do with peace. Organised by Newcastle Stop the War and Durham Stop the War: www.facebook.com/events/1237097354737519.

## How to beat your landlord

**Wednesday April 16, 6pm:** Workshop, Holbeck WMC, 3 Jenkinson Lawn, Leeds LS11. Learn how to organise against landlords, letting agents and bailiffs, and how to respond to unfair rent hikes, repairs not being done and eviction threats. Organised by Acorn the Union: www.acorntheunion.org.uk/leeds\_how\_to\_beat\_your\_landlord.

## No to Starmer's military spending

**Wednesday April 16, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, North London Community House, 22 Moorefield Road, London N17. Welfare, not warfare. Speakers include Lindsey German (Stop the War). Organised by Haringey and Enfield Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/1399142234840111.

## Formation of the CPGB and its early years

**Thursday April 17, 6.30pm:** Online session in the series, 'Our history'. Speakers: Lawrence Parker and Jack Conrad. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

## Liaison Committee - rank and file organisation

**Thursday April 17, 7pm:** Online lecture with professor Roger Seifert. The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions was a Communist Party-inspired organising body set up in the mid 1960s to strengthen rank-and-file militancy within the unions. Registration free. Organised by General Federation of Trade Unions: www.facebook.com/events/1584733909089646.

## Bristol's radical history

**Saturday April 26 and Sunday April 27:** Festival. Saturday venue: M Shed, Wapping Road, Bristol BS1; Sunday venue: The Cube Microplex, Dove Street South, Kingsdown, Bristol BS2. Talks, walks, exhibitions and stalls. All activities free except for the evening films. Organised by Bristol Radical History Group: www.brh.org.uk/site/event-series/bristol-radical-history-festival-2025.

## What it means to be human

**Tuesday April 29, 6.30pm:** Series of talks on social and biological anthropology. This talk is online only, via Zoom: 'The politics of Eros - how BaYaka women make their egalitarian world'. Speaker: Morna Finnegan. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/1881787289248052.

## Do workers need protecting from AI?

**Wednesday April 30, 7pm:** Talk followed by discussion, Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford M5. Speaker: Adam Cantwell-Corn (Connected by Data). Registration free. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: wcml.org.uk/event/do-workers-need-protecting-from-ai.

## London May Day march and rally

**Thursday May 1, 12 noon:** Assemble Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. March to Trafalgar Square for rally. Organised by London May Day Committee: www.londonmayday.org.

## Is British politics getting more Americanized?

**Thursday May 1, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc/status/1905322121036771583.

## Revolution! May Day weekend

**Saturday May 3 and Sunday May 4:** Conference, SOAS, University of London, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Registration £20 (£7.50). Organised by Counterfire: www.facebook.com/events/1572236653477897.

## Nakba 77: free Palestine, end the genocide

**Saturday May 17, 12 noon:** National demonstration, central London, venue to be announced. Commemorating the 1948 Nakba expulsion of Palestinians. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: stopwar.org.uk/events/national-demonstration-for-palestine-nakba-77.

## CPGB wills

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

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday April 13 5pm

## Marxist Unity Group in the United States reports on Trump and the recent spate of anti-Trump protests sweeping the country

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



**CPGB**

# Unity in three parts

When it comes to Forging Communist Unity, acceptance is vital, agreement is not. **Thomas West** reports on Mike Macnair's opening to the April 6 CPGB aggregate of members, candidate members and invited visitors

**O**n January 4, Talking About Socialism made a proposal for a six-point plan in which the three groups' representatives in the Forging Communist Unity process would first talk about the political basis for unity; subsequently there would come questions about the necessary organisational form, etc. On January 11, the three groups met and agreed upon six points. However, disagreement on the *Prometheus* editorial board about continuing this project produced a situation discussed on February 9: that day's meeting included a *Prometheus* pro-talks faction participating in the first stage of discussions of the basis for fusion.

Comrades from TAS and the pro-talks wing of *Prometheus* objected to the CPGB's *Draft programme* as being too long for ordinary readers. On March 8 an in-person meeting in London discussed TAS's 17 points of agreement. In TAS's view this is the minimum political basis of agreement necessary for a common organisation. The CPGB had already given its view that, whatever anyone agrees, the basis of common organisation is not *agreement* to everything, but *acceptance* of it as a basis of common action. That is how we regard the *Draft programme* - the basis of common action. Nonetheless, the CPGB agreed to go ahead with the meeting to identify points of agreement and disagreement. Mike proposed identifying a parallel text, as it were, between TAS's points of agreement and the equivalent points in our *Draft programme*, but that was lost track of at the first point of disagreement.

## Transition

That first area of disagreement was the question of transition. Is there a period of transition after the working class takes political power - a period of transition to communism? Should we call the period after the working class takes power 'socialism', which the CPGB does? Or should we instead recognise a period of workers' power and use the word 'socialism' as a synonym for 'communism', as does TAS?

Secondly, there was the disagreement over the Soviet experience. There is no common position between the CPGB and the other participants on this question, or, probably, within any of the groups. The problem is partly one of history and partly theory. How do you approach this? TAS comrades seek to take moral distance from the Soviet experience, asserting that our socialism will be democratic. The argument that there is no period of transition seems to be part of the same issue. Its comrades are only recent users of the word, 'communist', while *Prometheus* comrades use it more extensively, and the CPGB has, of course, done so since the beginning.

At our latest online meeting in March, comrades from the three organisations went further into the question of the *Draft programme*. On the question, 'Do we need a minimum programme at all?', there was a clear disagreement with TAS comrades, but not with those from *Prometheus*. Should we simply propose our maximum aims? Karl Marx and others invented the minimum programme in 1880. 'Maximum programme' was not their phrase, but it was used in the 1890s within German social democracy; Marx called it the outline statement



Francisco Goyal 'The forge' (c 1817)

of the communist aim.

Will the working class, on taking power, socialise everything, including the pub down the road, the barbershop two doors away? It appears that the comrades from TAS object to the CPGB's assertion that the working class must take political power in the first place, and then there will be a process of rapidly taking over the larger concentrations of infrastructural capital, the banking and the finance system, and large monopolies. But there will be a substantial surviving petty bourgeoisie when the working class takes power and therefore a period of transition, in which the process of socialisation takes place.

TAS comrades also objected to Mike's formulation observing that there will be substantial skills and information monopolies in the hands of the managerial middle class. Again, there must be a period of transition, when the managerial middle class is held in subordination to the working class through mechanisms of political democracy; and at the same time the skills and monopolies that they hold as private property are socialised by virtue of term limits and the expansion of education and training. Is there such a period of transition or not? Comrade Ed Potts of TAS argued that, because of the development of working

class skills in the last century, we could expect, immediately on taking political power, to dispense with the managerial middle class altogether. That is a matter of very substantial, fundamental political difference, not to be underestimated in importance.

Like Bakunin's position and similarly Proudhon's, this is a form of the difference which says: socialisation has to come first, not political democracy. This was not the view of Marx and why he preferred Narodnaya Volya over those who self-identified with Plekhanov as Marxists in Russia around 1880. Is the development of capitalism such that problems of skills and monopolies or small private enterprise and the petty bourgeoisie have disappeared?

## Negative

There is a danger of generating a negative dialectic, where you have a debate that pushes the participants into *opposing* positions - both of which are more incorrect than the original positions held. The clearest example is the debate about soviets and democracy in 1918: it resulted in Kautsky abandoning his pre-war position, in favour of now seeing 'democracy' as meaning Weimar-style constitutionalism with an independent executive and judiciary, but with universal suffrage. On the other hand, Lenin and co-thinkers

pushed towards rejecting "democracy as such". This led to the idea that the proletariat as a class needed to be represented by its advanced part: the party of the advanced minority, which rules over the backward majority in the period of transition. This was a position striking at the foundations of Marx's politics.

However, the danger is that the negative dialectic induces the TAS comrades, in attempting to avoid the danger of insufficient political/moral distance from Stalinists, to take the position of the Socialist Party of Great Britain - nothing happens now except *propaganda* for socialism, until billions agree - then you can introduce full communism on a world scale.

From the CPGB's side, the danger is to underestimate the substantial element of socialisation in what we propose in the minimum programme. What the CPGB proposes is basically political democracy. But we propose substantially more socialisation in the minimum programme than the Eisenach, Erfurt or Russian Social Democratic Labour Party programmes, because capitalism has developed further. Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha programme* sees a first stage of communism of "To each according to their work". However, today's NHS and public education system are "To each according to their need". There is a

danger in downgrading the element of socialisation, and failing to recognise that we are in transition - a process that begins before the working class takes power. However, when the working class takes power, that becomes a decisive moment in the transition. But a lot happens before then and we need a minimum programme now.

We can expect very rapid developments after the working class takes power. In 1688, the bourgeoisie seizing power in this country took the form of a Dutch invasion, putting in a government opposing the monarchical regime: it kicked off a nine-year European war and open warfare in Scotland and Ireland. But it also led to the very rapid creation of the London stock market, the Bank of England, insurance companies, paper money, road transport companies and newspapers funded by advertising.

The rapidity of what takes place after the seizure of power is important, but the question also arises concerning what needs to happen beforehand. If we leave in place the managerial regimes within the workers' movement, no-one can imagine the working class or any collective group of workers running society. As long as we do not have clear and unambiguous struggle against managerialism and for political democracy in the state and the workers' movement, we cannot pose the question of socialism. Working together without agreement on this question is still possible, but this is a very important, fundamental issue.

## Public faction

The second point is the question of unity in itself. The CPGB has been happy to function as a public faction within broader unity projects in the Socialist Alliance, Respect (where it was more difficult), Left Unity and the Labour Party through Labour Party Marxists. The CPGB also had the experience of working in the Campaign for a Marxist Party (which also came to nothing).

We have operated as a public faction in the various unity projects, even where there is a substantial difference. The same would be true, supposing the SWP and SPEW somehow merged, saying 'We're the party'. The CPGB would be happy to function as a public faction within such a unification process. But what are we actually looking for from this unity project? Is it possible for us to have *communist* unity, as opposed to another one of those 'broad front' projects? We must be aware that (1) many outside our ranks are interested in this as a possibility and (2) if we cannot accomplish unity in this project and it fails, it will cost us politically. Such failure will say to those outside that unity is not possible, given the level of differences between the various groups. It matters to the CPGB that we try to make the Communist Fusion project work.

Based on experience, that unification must be on the basis of principles that we intend to be valid from here to the revolution, not principles which are defined by the current conjuncture. It is in this context that the CPGB has agreed the need to keep discussing this question of the programmatic basis of organisation for some further meetings before going on to other issues ●



## USA

# Articulate attack dog

Despite being from a troubled background, JD Vance found the help of some very rich friends. Mike Belbin looks at the ideas, compromises and ambitions of the US vice president

**W**hy discuss JD Vance? As US vice president, he has played sidekick to Donald Trump - for example, at the Munich security conference, attacking the EU; or back in the Oval office, upbraiding Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelensky.

He makes extreme statements that anyone can dismiss, if they care to. The most recent one was his rudeness about certain "random countries who haven't fought a war in 30 to 40 years". He could have been referring to Germany, but, of course, it was taken up in the UK as insulting British troops. Vance may one day say the wrong thing as far as the boss is concerned and be frozen out, but as VP he has the power, along with a cabinet majority, to start a process of impeachment against the president. However, for now he is comfortable as the voice ready to articulate a total rightwing vision.

## Background

Vance was not his original name. He was born as James Donald Bowman in 1984 in Middletown, Ohio, his mother and grandparents (the Vances) being from Kentucky. His parents divorced and his mother, Beverly, became a drug addict.

In 2016 he brought out his autobiography, *Hillbilly elegy: a memoir of a family and culture in crisis* (lauded by the then liberal *Washington Post* as "the voice of the Rust Belt"), emphasising his working class roots. Vance himself has said that the book was written to explain why his people supported a candidate like Donald Trump. He was at the time one of Trump's opponents, saying, "I never did like him". His book shows how his relatives and neighbours were formed by (1) the Scots-Irish 'hillbilly' culture and (2) their condition after they moved northwards and were hit by recession and infrastructure cuts. It closes with his reflections on how this group might resist these detrimental influences.

After his father left, Beverly had a succession of partners, some of whom Vance liked, describing them as "caring and kind men".<sup>1</sup> As a boy Vance found that his grandparents were a relief from his stressed parent. He describes them as self-reliant and hard-working, while his mother and her neighbours were "consumerist, angry and distrustful".

Acting now as his new 'Mama' and 'Papa', his grandparents meanwhile believed in "defending your own". When a pharmacist was rude to JD they busted up the pharmacy! 'Mama' would also use a gun at the slightest provocation. However, they had that attitude that many parenting figures shared post-World War II: they wanted their kids to do better, to rise and "get out". Vance comments that, though they did not want help from "outside the family", they would accept such help when it was offered.

Vance, however, "wasn't ready" for college, the "unstructured" life and "the rigors of advanced education" (pp155-56). So he joined the Marine Corps, which initially hurt him, but then made him a "man", who was self-reliant and with enough cash to buy rounds of drinks. Vance was selected to do senior work in media relations, and found he enjoyed working on the "optics", especially for US forces in the Iraq



JD Vance: sworn in

war, although he never himself saw actual combat.

Back in the USA he went on to Yale Law School. After Yale, Vance began briefly as a corporate lawyer and worked at Mithril Capital. From 2017 to 2021 he was a member of the board of AppHarvest, which carried out indoor vertical farming. Workers - mainly migrants from Mexico and Guatemala - eventually protested about the "brutal" high temperatures in the company's greenhouses. It went bankrupt in 2023, owing \$350 million, yet later Vance said he had been unaware of the complaints.

Vance started "our Ohio renewal", focusing on advocacy regarding education, addiction and other "social ills". It closed in 2021 with sparse achievements. Vance had already decided to run for the Senate and the organisation spent over \$63,000 on an executive who also acted as a political advisor to him - more than it spent on programmes to fight opioid abuse.

In 2011, while at Yale, Vance attended a talk by Peter Thiel, co-founder of PayPal. It was on how tech professionals were being constrained by government bureaucracy. They became close friends, as Thiel went on to sponsor Republican senators. In March 2021, it was Thiel who introduced Vance to Trump, and Vance at last "crossed to the dark side". In 2021 he explained on Fox News that "I didn't fully appreciate the president's appeal as a person". He had realised that Trump was advocating his kind of politics, such as opposition to US Marine pilots policing the no-fly zone over Ukraine.

In 2022 David Sacks, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist, gave a pressure group \$900,000 to support this "American patriot", Vance. Thiel then added \$15 million. In 2023 Vance endorsed Trump as candidate for president and in 2024 Trump chose him as his running mate. Had then Vance found in Trump his perfect father figure, who would save his community and 'Make America Great Again' by recruiting Russia, subordinating Europe and intimidating China?

In the last half of his book Vance

discusses what he thinks was wrong with the class he escaped. He is not above mentioning the effect of recession and the flight of industry from Ohio as part of the problem. He mentions the other influences, according to him: permissiveness (easier divorce) and weak child-rearing. The crisis in his book's title had arrived because his hillbillies had moved north to 'improve', but life there had made them worse.

He also lays into the masculinity ethic for discouraging his appreciation of school; he thought "boys who get good grades were 'sissies' and 'pussies'" (p245) - a critical observation he forgets in some later podcasts.

## How it happened

He does admit that his own career is one where he got plenty of assistance from both family and official structures. He recalls that "many thumbs were put on the scales" for him (p239).

Like others in his community he distrusted politicians, but distanced himself from the Republican cliché of blaming 'big government'. Instead, he was looking for a new ethic of personal responsibility, not simply frontier resilience. He asserts that policies should be "based on better understanding of what stands in the way of kids like me" (p244). They were lacking in the grants he had received, as well as low-interest student loans and "need-based scholarships for law school" (*ibid*).

However, in college Vance still had to take on extra paying jobs and once fell sick due to lack of sleep, alcohol abuse and cheap food. When his mother heard about this, Beverly drove straight over and cared for him till he was well. Vance tells us that she too, like his grandparents, encouraged an interest in education and learning, but observes that "the real problem for many of these kids is what happens (or doesn't happen) at home" (p245).

But he also blames the policy on schools, for example, segregating working class children from the middle class. When the Middletown administration tried to mix "lower-income kids and those who have

a different life-style model ... the federal government balked" (*ibid*). Such divisions produced a lack of belief in the future and the self-activity of the young - a hopelessness that leads to drug abuse and violent relationships. When he left Yale, he wanted to promote personal responsibility and greater expectations among his brethren. He was confident then that a mix of self-help and economic support could do it.

People often talk about young men falling in with the wrong crowd: older guys who hang around street corners, whom the younger admire for their attitude and for getting somewhere. Vance fell in with the wrong crowd, but they were not on street corners. The people and ideas he came in contact with after college began to inform him what he judged possible to do.

By 2020, as he had considered running for the Senate, he turned to the solutions of certain key figures of the new right or neo-reactionary ideology, following his buddy and sponsor, Peter Thiel, and that main source, Curtis Yarvin. Yarvin himself was drawing on a 2001 book by Hans-Herman Hoppe: *Democracy: the god that failed*. This neo-reactionary message (also stemming from the 19th century Scot, Thomas Carlyle) was one in favour of a capitalism without electoral competition, one commanded by corporate elites and political dictators not unlike the party structures of the People's Republic of China.

This mix of economic 'libertarianism' and political 'authoritarianism' was aimed at an 'enemy within' - the votes from liberals and minorities who had 'weakened the national order'. Such a concern with the negative effects of 'democracy' goes back at least as far as the 19th century British prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli: the fear that if you grant the majority the vote, all too soon they may vote *against* the ruling minority.

Thiel himself had declared that democracy and liberal progress had failed the American people - that is, an individual's right to live well and do better. As Curtis Yarvin has asserted in his many blogs, democracy had precisely declined into a corrupt oligarchy, which he called "the Cathedral" - a left-leaning culture that dominated the universities and government agencies. This should be replaced by the power of one man - very much a monarch, "a national CEO" - who could debug the political order like a computer programmer dealing with a virus of bad code. As Vance advised in a 2021 podcast, "I think what Trump should do, if I was giving him one piece of advice: fire every single mid-level bureaucrat, every civil servant in the administrative state. Replace them with our people."

When Vance was introduced to Trump in March 2021, he had no doubt found that the candidate had similar ideas about democracy versus liberty. In becoming the running mate, the confident Vance began to make those less nuanced statements he is infamous for.

However, he also had to trim certain other opinions, such as on abortion. In early 2021 he was still opposing abortion without room for any exceptions, like rape and incest. "Two wrongs don't make a right,"

he said. He preferred to frame the issue as "whether a child should be allowed to live" rather than a woman's right to choose her life and not be enslaved to another's wishes. In February, after meeting Trump, he began making the allowance for each of the US states to decide on their policy rather than observe a national edict.

At the time, members of Trump's campaign were concerned about the "suburban women's vote". In fact, 60% of the whole US electorate believed abortion should be a universal right. In November 2023, however, Vance still could not resist reminding people that "we can't give in to the idea that the federal Congress has no role in this matter".

Overall, Vance is an attack-dog for Trump (certainly agreeing early on about the importance of Russia as an ally), but he has not thrown away his other ideas that are less attractive to the president - he is perhaps waiting to take over as the heir apparent and become even more extreme than the current boss.

As his 'childless' opponents know, his obsession is with children and the youth - hence his ideas on taxing universities and opposing 'sissy boys'. As long ago as September 2021 (after meeting Trump), he said that boys who fought imaginary monsters "become proud men who defend their homes", while the other kind of boys who "want to feed the monsters" will not want to defend the 'interests of the United States'.

After publishing his memoir, JD Vance could have supported greater help for his people's morale and even continue to insist on the destabilising effects of capitalism, but he chose to join the neo-reactionaries and "make things happen" - things like his own rise up the ladder.

## Our response

In May 1981, one Margaret Thatcher said: "Economics are the method: the object is to change the heart and soul." President Trump sees himself as the deal-maker (with the instincts of a bully), the bringer of more profits and greater power to the USA plus the networking of useful alliances.

As for Vance, he may have stepped back for a while, but he has his eye on 'the soul' - that is, the creation of a neo-monarchist patriarchal state, in order to discipline the majority and to repel perceived enemies, both foreign and domestic. He is still there, alongside the boss, regarded among many of the inner circle as the coming leader.

Can we provide an answer to both the vice president and his book? That can only come in the shape of our own movement for transformation - social and personal: that is, a party not just for changing the government, but for rejecting the "script" (as Adler would call it) of passivity, encouraging in each and every member a belief in an active, supported intelligence.

We need a culture not just of complaints, but of an alternative: countering the bossy plan of Vance and the others in his Project; approaching the same questions, but with different answers ●

## Notes

1. JD Vance *Hillbilly elegy: a memoir of a family and culture in crisis* London 2017, p288.



## DISCUSSION

# Rediscovering our words

Communist unity needs solid programmatic foundations if it is going to succeed. Towards that end, Jack Conrad says that we need to return to our common language to overcome common misunderstandings

Some 12 years ago, when working in that ill-fated venture, Left Unity, we briefly united with comrades Edmund Potts and Nick Wrack in the Socialist Platform. Regrettably, nothing came of it. We strongly objected to the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty being included; we objected no less strongly to the imposition of indicative votes and a take-it-or-leave-it 'Statement of aims and principles'.<sup>1</sup>

Thankfully all that is behind us now. However, the reason I raise old history is that some old problems remain with us today - not least our lack of a common political language.

In the context of Left Unity and the Socialist Platform, I wrote about how words, phrases and formulations, such as 'minimum programme', 'socialism', 'communism', 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' and 'democratic centralism', will often be misunderstood.<sup>2</sup> After all, our movement has been tragically separated, divided, disorganised into numerous parties, groups and sects over many years. All too frequently then, we mean different things when we say the same thing. There is a disjuncture between speaker and listener.

By way of an analogy, I used the example of the Polynesian peoples and their colonisation of the Pacific. They headed out from Taiwan some time between 3,000 to 1,500 BCE and settled on one island after another. Their descendants finally reached Tonga and Samoa around 900 BCE. While they all remained part of the same Lapita culture, for the most part their 40 main languages developed in isolation. There was little, if any, two-way communication. Hence, although the languages spoken by Polynesian peoples are closely related and have many words in common, when a Samoan talks to a Tongan there is confusion, misinterpretation and sometimes just plain "mutual incomprehension".<sup>3</sup>

So, when former members of the Militant Tendency or members of the SWP, SPEW, RS21, the Communist Workers' Organisation, Counterfire or this or that sect of one hear us talking about reorganising the Communist Party, the centrality of programme, the necessity of having a minimum (or immediate) section of that programme, of socialism being the transition period between capitalism and communism, or of socialism beginning as capitalism, but ruled over by the working class, there is frequent misunderstanding and sometimes downright incomprehension.

## Real differences

Of course, it is not only a matter of language, of words. Discussions in the Forging Communist Unity process have revealed wide areas of agreement, as would be expected from those who call themselves communists, but important differences too - crucially when it comes to certain key strategic conceptions and aims. Differences can be overcome, at least in part, through further exchanges. This year's Communist University (July 31-August 7) will be a great chance to make progress. There is joint sponsorship, a tripartite organising committee and there will, of course, be many formal and informal opportunities to debate and discuss over the week. There is always the possibility too, if we can get to that stage, of minorities loyally



And god punished them by "confusing their speech into different languages": Pieter Bruegel the Elder 'The Tower of Babel' (1563)

abiding by majority votes, trying to win the argument and thereby become the majority. Meanwhile, we need clarity.

Before proceeding, let me outline a few areas of broad agreement between the CPGB, Talking About Socialism and the pro-party faction of the *Prometheus* editorial board. We all reject notions of a British road to socialism. Socialism is international or it is nothing. Together we envisage Europe as a strategic point of departure. Therefore, the absurd delusions peddled by the SWP, SPEW, Counterfire, the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain in Lexit are to be condemned. Leaving the European Union has done nothing to progress the struggle for socialism. Nor do we think there was anything to admire, to emulate when it comes to the Soviet Union of the five-year plan epoch. The same goes for today's China, Vietnam and Cuba ... nowadays all examples of bureaucratic socialism on the capitalist road. Doubtless, what marks us out collectively though is a commitment to communist unity, not least through a process of organisational fusion - that has, by the way, been consistently upheld and championed by today's CPGB and its Provisional Central Committee since its very inception.<sup>4</sup>

What about our differences? First and foremost there is programme. Nick Wrack is right when he says that the CPGB wants its *Draft programme* to be the "basis for the programme in any fused organisation" and that TAS disagrees with us about that. Yes, we envisage submitting our *Draft programme* to a fusion conference for debate, amendment and a binding vote. That is one of the reasons we have a *Draft programme*. It not only provides the programmatic basis for today's CPGB members, committees and media: it is the programme we envisage for the mass CPGB of the future (up to the point of the conquest of political power by the working class, when, obviously, it will, depending how secure we are, need to be thoroughly rewritten).

TAS, on the other hand, wants a programme - more like an article of faith - for a new, fused organisation that sets out "essential points in succinct, easily understandable points, so that any worker or young person can readily grasp what our organisation is about".<sup>5</sup> As the new organisation grows, not least through new fusions, the idea appears to be that new "essential points" will be added as pleasers. Either way, what is being suggested is something like the minimalism of *Socialist Worker*'s emaciated 'What we stand for' column rather than a comprehensive, fully rounded, communist programme.

The comrades denounce capitalist society and promise an end to exploitation, the hierarchical division of labour and classes under socialism. There will too, they insist, be extensive democracy. Good stuff, which we can readily agree with. However, it seems, that the TAS comrades reject the idea of a minimum-maximum programme *tout court*. I say "seems" because at the moment it is more implied than explicitly stated. Nonetheless, comrade Wrack does provide us with this telling statement:

I see the programme ... as being a programme for government - a government by the working class. It is a statement of intent, a series of policies that the working class will implement to change the way society is organised, to break the power of the ruling class, to end for ever the exploitation of the majority of the world's population.

If the programme is based on the ultimate destination, but fails to map out the route needed to get there, then what we have is an attempt to combine the SWP's minimalism with the utopian impossibilism of the Socialist Party of Great Britain and its 'Our object and declaration of principles'.<sup>6</sup> We shall see.

Apparently though, a minimum-maximum programme is an utterly

obscure concept, understandable only by Marxist wonks like you and me. It cannot, however, be understood by their "any worker or young person." Hard to credit, if that is what the comrades are really suggesting. After all, they rightly insist on emphasising how comparatively well educated workers and young people are today in Britain, compared with, say, a century ago. Workers and young people in the 21st century are, therefore, surely able to grasp the ABC idea that the communist programme consists of two main parts.

## Thin air

First, there is the immediate economic and political demands we fight to realise under capitalism. Second, the maximum: what we seek to attain after taking state power, beginning with the working class constitution and going all the way to achieving our aim of a communist society, where "real human history begins" and there is "general freedom".<sup>7</sup>

And remember the minimum-maximum arrangement has its origins in the programme of the French Workers' Party (1880), the German Social Democratic Party's Erfurt programme (1891) and the programme of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (1903). These parties - and parties like them - recruited on a huge scale.

We are told that the demands contained in the minimum section of our *Draft programme* were written by a few people and plucked out of thin air. Hardly. No, our demands and aims are what workers need to fight for in order to make them into a class for itself and therefore a potential ruling class.

They are certainly no more plucked out of thin air than the programme of the French Workers' Party drawn up by two Frenchmen and two English Germans in the front room of London's 122 Regent's Park Road. The preamble - the maximum section - was dictated by Karl Marx, and he and Jules Guesde formulated the minimum economic and political

demands with help provided by Fredrick Engels and Paul Lafargue (the economic section reflecting the current, spontaneous, demands of the workers' movement in France). Engels described the maximum section as "a masterpiece of cogent argumentation".<sup>8</sup> Later he highly recommended the economic section to the German social democrats in his critique of the draft of the 1891 Erfurt Programme.

TAS comrades want to substitute the minimum programme with a few vague phrases about securing whatever gains that can be made under capitalism. Specifics are notable by their absence. Likewise the comrades deny, skip over, denounce any notion of a transformation period, long or short, perhaps lasting a generation or two - a period we, following Marx's *Critique of the Gotha programme* and Lenin's deservedly famous *State and revolution*, call the lower phase of communism, what we call socialism, that necessarily must happen between the capitalism that the working class takes over and the realisation of full communism.

Let us examine Marx's *Critique* beginning with this celebrated passage:

What we have to deal with here [after the working class has achieved state power] is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.<sup>9</sup>

Marx outlines how this society will operate according to the bourgeois principle of equal exchange. People will work and according to their work they receive back from society a commodity equivalent of what they have given (minus what is needed for the "common funds"). But, therefore, Marx explains, this "equal right is an unequal right for unequal labour." People are different, some work more, some work less, some have children, some do not. Such a defect is "inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society." What of fully developed communism?

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and with it also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but itself life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly - only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!<sup>10</sup>

Hence for Marx there is a phase of transition from capitalist to communist society, which the state, he said "can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."<sup>11</sup>

By the time Lenin got round to publishing his *State and revolution* (1917) it had become usual or



common to call this lower phase of communism, “socialism”.<sup>12</sup> Note too: Karl Kautsky writes of the “commonwealth of the future” and “socialist production”.<sup>13</sup> Nikolai Bukharin calls the transition to fully communist relations of production “state capitalism turned upside-down.”<sup>14</sup> Equally, Evgeny Preobrazhensky took it for granted that the Soviet Union was a “commodity-socialist form of economy”.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, socialism is not, and cannot be, a mode of production, with a definite social law: ie the law of value or the law of the plan. It combines both, the outcome being decided by which law wins out and which law loses. Hence we envisage the gradual transformation of material conditions and the gradual transformation of human beings, so that the law of the plan eventually triumphs over the law of value, with the realisation of the higher stage of communism. TAS rejects the economic gradualism of Marxism. Instead they propose a Bakuninist leap from today’s capitalism to the communist future, where there is no state, no classes, no money, no markets.

Therefore, the comrades not only risk triggering economic chaos. They fail to take into proper account the danger of foreign blockade, wars of intervention and attempts at sabotage. A working class state with its accompanying popular militia is essential. Correspondingly, they fail to consider the position of the middle classes - neutralising them, winning them as allies, slowly, voluntarily drawing them into the socialised economy, through material advantage, through the benefits of cooperatives, etc. Note, in the UK there are some 6.5 million small to medium enterprises employing from zero to 49 workers. If we take Europe, our decisive starting point, the proportionate size of the middle classes is substantially bigger. Those who see only two classes, proletarian and capitalist, who refuse to acknowledge the existence of the middle classes, might as well live on the moon.

We are breezily told that after the overthrow of the capitalist state there will be no exploitation through wage-labour, no private ownership of the means of production: “there will be the complete eradication of private (capitalist) ownership of the means of production”.<sup>16</sup> So are we to envisage forcible expropriation? The closure of specialist building firms, little breweries, artisanal furniture makers, landscape gardeners, corner shops, single-boat fishing enterprises? Laws to prevent family farms hiring seasonal hands? An approach reminiscent of Pol Pot ... which will, I guarantee, drive the middle classes into the arms of reaction and constitute them as a counterrevolutionary bloc. Strategically dumb, to say the least.

Not that small and medium (capitalist) enterprises will be left free to enrich themselves and become big (capitalist) enterprises. There is a working class state and a communist government. That means progressive taxation, much improved legal protections, a massive extension of trade union membership, tough safety regulations and radically shortened hours.

## Struggle continues

So the CPGB insists that the class struggle continues after the working class overthrows the capitalist state and constitutes itself as the ruling class. Why? Not only is there the middle class and hostile foreign powers: the exploitation of the working class cannot be abolished overnight. Even if, as we would expect, there was the nationalisation of utilities, infrastructure and the

commanding heights, we still begin with wage-labour, money, markets and forms of commodity production. That is a simple statement of fact that only utopians can deny. Such features are inherited from capitalism and are slowly superseded, as the law of value gives way to the law of the plan. Something that cannot be a spontaneous process. It relies on consciousness.

Nor, closely related to this, can the position of the working class as an underclass be ended overnight. Privileged background, education, accumulated wealth, personal connections, the division of labour - all ensure that there are those with massive advantages ... which also sometimes gives them a socially vital role (say, in management). Hence the class struggle must be continued on the cultural front too. Access to the arts, science, sports, etc can be made available to all. Education should not end at the age of 18 or 21, but be lifelong. That way, skill monopolies enjoyed by various middle class professionals can be rapidly overcome, as we train ever more red doctors, surgeons, dentists, statisticians, architects, computer programmers, engineers ... and managers.

Meanwhile, there has to be a class struggle to overcome women’s oppression by socialising housework and childcare. Nor should historic national, ethnic and regional disadvantages be overlooked. There has to be a levelling up. No less to the point, the working class needs to prevent a bureaucratic caste emerging from within the new regime. A real danger, as seen in today’s trade union movement, the co-ops and political parties, including the larger confessional sects with their self-perpetuating central committees and labour dictators. That means *demanding* term limits, caps on incomes, access to information and popular supervision of elected officials.

There is too, therefore, the likelihood of mass campaigns *demanding* the removal of a particular official or set of officials. Obviously we do not know. But till there is the self-administration of the general population by the general population, we should not imagine everything proceeding in sweet harmony. Even then there will surely be all manner of individual and group disputes, arguments, conflicts and demands.

On the macro level, there is the climate crisis. Restoring the planet to good health will be the work of many decades - such is the horrendous damage already done. There will, though, have to be radical measures, curbing - perhaps stopping - certain lines of production and certain forms of consumption. Those who believe that there are no natural limits and everyone should be able to enjoy the lifestyle of today’s billionaire class will surely loudly object.

Again with the climate crisis in mind. Perhaps some low-lying areas, even whole town and cities, have to be abandoned to the rising seas. There are bound to be those - eg, those living there - who will oppose any such policy. They could well demand more coastal defences, more flood barriers, more pumping stations. They could even stage mass protests and live-ins.

A micro example. Take something really basic like the allocation of living spaces. Everyone can have good-quality accommodation - that is comparatively easy to achieve through takeovers, good organisation and a determined building programme - but not everyone can have a penthouse flat overlooking the Thames or a Georgian townhouse sitting on the edge of Hampstead Heath. It cannot be otherwise. Such problems come with geography -

ie, the finite nature of space - and will have to be resolved by coming to some sort of agreement, perhaps sealed with an authoritative vote. Most will have to settle, therefore, for second best when it comes to location, location, location.

## Demands

Comrade Wrack has things proceeding altogether smoothly. Eg, he has no time for the idea of demands after the working class has achieved state power: “... when the working class comes to power it will not be ‘demanding’ that anyone else, not any other class, implements these policies. It will implement them as a class itself, acting collectively.” Obviously something to discuss and debate, but it surely has to be admitted that our *Draft programme* deals with real political tasks, real social contradictions, real dangers that have not been plucked out of thin air and which have to be recognised (not wished away).

No less to the point, we should not paint a Manichean black and white picture of the pre-revolution and the post-revolution society. There is a process of going out of existence and coming into existence. The political economy of the working class emerges under mature capitalism, with developments such as Chartism and the demand for a 10 hour day, and continues to advance, true, contested step by contested step, with strong trade unions, cooperatives, mass political parties, measures of workers’ control over production, concessions such as universal suffrage, unemployment benefit, universal primary and secondary education, health services provided according to need, etc.

Clearly, not a linear process - gains can be and are taken away. Nevertheless, the political economy of capitalism, the law of value, is in decay because of the political economy of the working class. A political economy that is carried over into socialism and in due course fully blooms. Taking power is a vital, qualitative moment, true, but in what is an “epoch” of transition “from capitalism to communism” that begins long before.<sup>17</sup>

Comrade Wrack is blind to this dialectic. He calls for an immediate, a complete, a total break with capitalism. Therefore he objects to our *Draft programme* when it says this: “Following on from here are the immediate political, social and economic measures required for winning the battle for democracy and ensuring that the market and the principle of capitalist profit is subordinated to the principle of human need.”

He (mis)interprets this formulation as saying that it appears that the CPGB sees the “working class taking power and instituting democratic changes but ruling for a considerable period of time while presiding over capitalist property relations in the *workplace and the economy as a whole*”. Well, yes, in a lot of small to middling workplaces, but hardly the economy as a whole. Moreover, there is the transition from the capitalist principle of receiving according to work done, to the communist principle, as Marx envisaged, ie, receiving according to need (a transition, of course, dependent on the progress of the world revolution).

In the name of total collectivisation comrade Wrack therefore objects to a 2007 Mike Macnair article saying the following: “Forced collectivisation of the petty proprietors is to be rejected. This implies a substantial period of transition between capitalism and socialism [communism] which begins with the overthrow of the international capitalist states system.”<sup>18</sup>

Again, “I do not agree with

this,” says comrade Wrack. Yes, he wants to leave aside the “issue of ‘forced collectivisation of the petty proprietors’”, which “nobody [sic] has advocated”. As if this was not what is at issue. He accuses us in the CPGB of advocating “a long period in which the working class does seek to manage capitalism, rather than abolishing it”. He does not see how it is possible for the “market and the principle of capitalist profit [to be] subordinated to the principle of human need”. Capitalism and the principle of human need are “irreconcilable”. The two are in “permanent conflict with each other”.

He is right: capitalism and the principle of human need - ie, the political economy of the working class - are indeed “irreconcilable”. The two are in “permanent conflict”. However, that does not stop them coexisting. That is the case under capitalism. It is likewise the case under socialism: ie, the *revolutionary dictatorship* or rule of the working class.

As an aside, in the attempt not to be tainted by Stalinism, the TAS comrades want us to completely dissociate ourselves from terms such as the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ and concepts such as democracy ‘as a form of the state’ withering away. A capitulation to the ruling ideas of the bourgeoisie that will simply not work.

We *are tainted* by our past. A past that has to be scientifically - ie, rationally - explained. We cannot, though we might like to pretend otherwise, skirt around the fact that the militarisation of Bolshevism under civil war conditions did contain within it the seeds of what happened in the 1930s. Not that the purges, the gulag, the slave labour were inevitable.

And Marx, as we have seen, proudly used the term, ‘*the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*’, to describe the workers’ state, and Lenin explained, taking his cue from Engels, not least in *State and revolution*, that this extremely democratic state, ie, working class rule, would give way to general freedom.<sup>19</sup> Any half competent TV interviewer would therefore skewer us if we attempted to claim that we simply uphold democracy and oppose all forms of dictatorship. Well, of course, we can make such a claim ... but, logically, that would lead us to abandon terms such as ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ (newly adopted by TAS) and, in time, the whole body of orthodox Marxism. That is something we in the CPGB refuse to do.

In fact the class struggle involves words and their meaning as much as wages and conditions. We can leave terms such as ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’, ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ to the likes of the CPGB (M-L), because the permanent persuaders of the bourgeoisie - successfully at the moment - lie, twist and distort. That or we take ownership of the canon of Marxism and insist on historic context, original meaning and our own take. There is no need to kowtow before the bourgeois consensus ... even when it comes to supposedly ‘objective’ dictionary definitions.

## Expropriation

Anyway, back to universal expropriation. Unless that happens, says comrade Wrack, we would have a situation that would be “unacceptable” to workers. They “appear to have control of the [new] state, but continue to be under the arbitrary and tyrannical rule of the bosses at work”. The situation would be “intolerable”, he writes.

Well, yes, except workers really do have state power and they exercise control over what remains

of the boss class both from above, in the form of the state, but also from below in the form of strong trade unions and workplace committees. It would be essentially the same, to begin with, in state-owned enterprises. To pretend otherwise is either to peddle a deliberate lie or to foster utopian illusions. Communists should do neither. Our class needs the unvarnished truth.

Nonetheless, if capitalism continues, albeit in highly attenuated forms, comrade Wrack fears that workers would experience “demoralisation” and thereby open the “door for the capitalist class to make a comeback”. That is why he rejects “half-measures” and wants a “complete break with capitalism”.

Exactly what Stalin said in 1929 with the launch of the first five-year plan, the forced collectivisation of peasant agriculture and the liquidation of the kulaks as a class. A counterrevolution within the revolution which coincided, of course, with the re-enslavement of workers, mass starvation, the emergence of monocratic rule ... and eventually led, not to communism. No, after terrible suffering, it led to the 1991 counterrevolution within the counterrevolution and the restoration of capitalism, albeit of a gangster sort.

Note, however, that comrade Wrack and TAS want us to *agree* that what happened in Russia had “nothing” to do with socialism. A muddled formulation, because what they mean, I hope, is that what happened in the Soviet Union post-1929 had nothing to do with proletarian socialism. We in the CPGB can agree with that. But the 1917 October Revolution had everything to do with the heroic attempt to take “steps towards socialism”. Isolation, failure in Europe (crucially in Germany), blockade - that is what led to defeat, not the failure to go for immediate, total nationalisation.

Let the fusion process continue ●

## Notes

1. We split from Socialist Platform and formed a separate Communist Platform - which, of course, was run on fully democratic lines. Before finally breaking with Left Unity in February 2016 over its complete failure to engage with the Labour Party following the election of Jeremy Corbyn and the mass membership influx, we had a four-strong fraction on its national council (see ‘Why we’re out of Left Unity’ *Weekly Worker* February 22 2016).
2. J Conrad ‘Left Unity: communicating across the archipelago of isolation’ *Weekly Worker* August 29 2013: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/975/left-unity-communicating-across-the-archipelago-of-.
3. See P D’Arcy (ed) *Peoples of the Pacific: the history of Oceania to 1870*, chapter 13 Abingdon 2008.
4. So FCU is a very positive step forward, especially for TAS, which only a short while ago refused to countenance even talking to the CPGB - see W McMahon and N Wrack ‘Nothing positive to be gained’ *Weekly Worker* January 4 2024: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1472/nothing-positive-to-be-gained.
5. N Wrack ‘FCU - dealing with differences’ April 4 2025.
6. www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/our-object-and-declaration-principles.
7. CPGB *Draft programme* London 2023, p48: communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme.
8. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 46, London 1992, p148.
9. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 24, London 1989, p85.
10. *Ibid*, p87.
11. *Ibid*, p95.
12. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 25, Moscow 1977, p472.
13. K Kautsky *The class struggle* New York NY 1971, chapter 4.
14. N Bukharin *Economics of the transformation period* New York NY 1971, p71.
15. EA Preobrazhensky *The crisis of Soviet industrialisation* New York NY 1980, p56.
16. N Wrack ‘FCU - dealing with differences’ April 4 2025.
17. CPGB *Draft programme* London 2023, p9: communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme.
18. M Macnair ‘Leading workers by the nose’ *Weekly Worker* September 12 2007: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/688/leading-workers-by-the-nose.
19. See VI Lenin ‘Engels on the overcoming of democracy’ *CW* Vol 25, Moscow 1977, pp459-461.



## ECONOMY

# Recession threats loom

Where is the full-scale US-China trade war taking the world? Michael Roberts looks at the likely outcome when it comes to the headline inflation, output and productivity stats

Last week Donald Trump announced another barrage of tariffs on imports into the US in what America's voice of big business and finance, *The Wall Street Journal*, has called "the dumbest trade war in history".<sup>1</sup>

In the latest round, Trump raised tariffs on imports from countries that have higher tariff rates on US exports: ie, so-called 'reciprocal tariffs'. These are supposed to counter what he views as unfair taxes, subsidies and regulations by other countries on US exports.

The overall impact of Trump's tariff hikes is to raise the average tariff rate on US goods imports to 26%, the highest level in 130 years. The moves will have a significant impact across the countries of the global south. Some of the highest tariff rates are among lower-income developing countries in south and south-east Asia like Cambodia or Sri Lanka.

US officials have repeatedly singled out the EU's value added tax as an example of an 'unfair trade practice'. Digital services taxes are also under attack from Trump officials, who say they discriminate against US companies. By the way, VAT is not an unfair tariff, as it does not apply to international trade and is solely a domestic tax - the US is one of the few countries that does not operate a federal VAT, relying instead on varying federal and state sales taxes.<sup>2</sup>

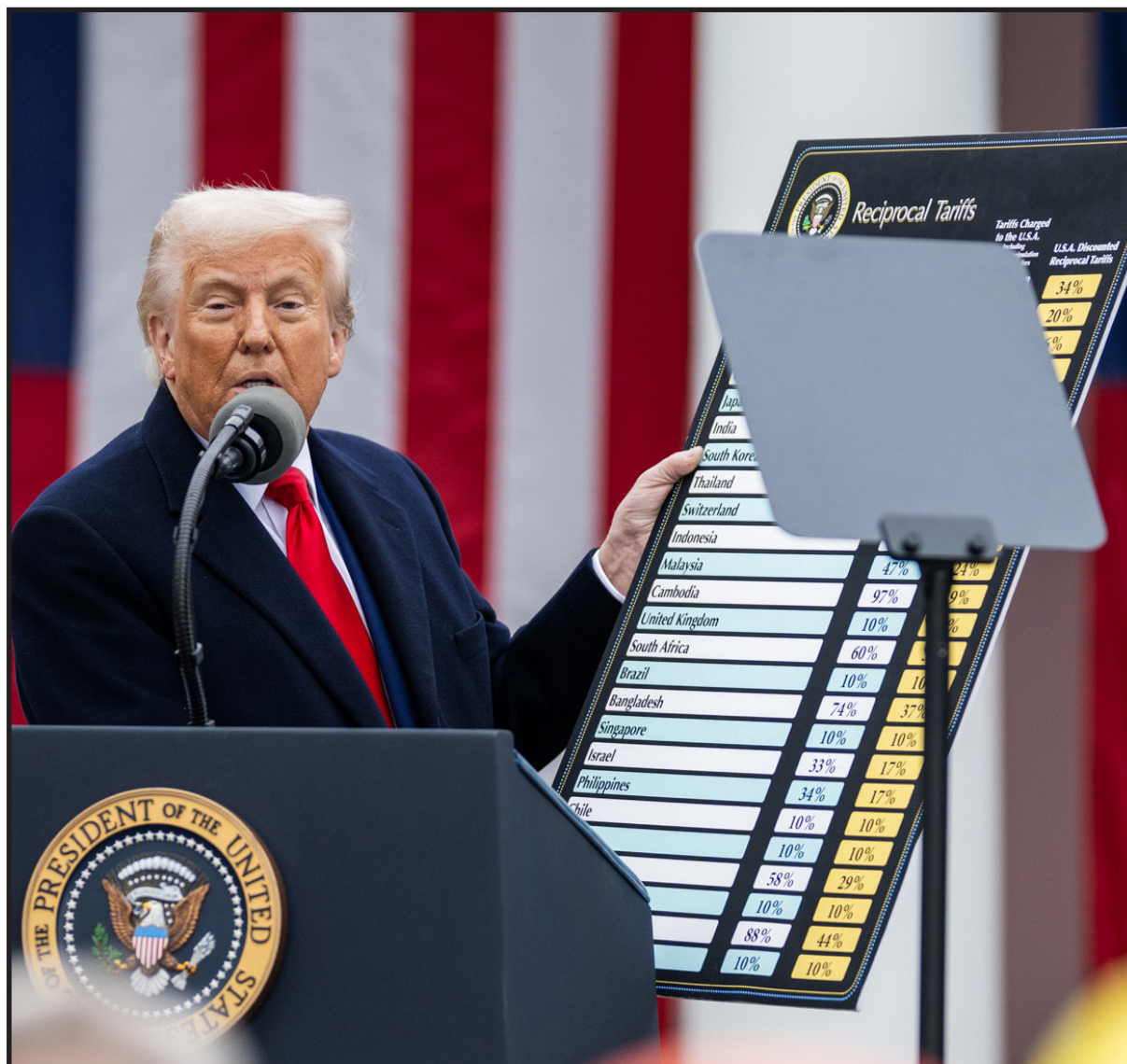
### Huge deficit

Trump claims that his latest measures are going to 'liberate' American industry by raising the cost of importing foreign goods for American companies and households, and so reduce demand and the huge trade deficit that the US currently runs with the rest of the world. He wants to reduce that deficit and force foreign companies to invest and operate within the US rather than export to it.

Will this work? No, for several reasons. First, there will be retaliation by other trading nations. The EU has said it would counter US steel and aluminium tariffs with its own duties, affecting up to \$28 billion of assorted American goods. China has also put tariffs on \$22 billion of US agricultural exports, targeting Trump's rural base with new duties of 10% on soya beans, pork, beef and seafood. Canada has already applied tariffs to about \$21 billion of US goods.

Second, US imports and exports are no longer the decisive force in world trade. The US share of world trade currently stands at 10.35% - down from over 14% in 1990. In contrast, the EU share is 29% (down from 34%), while the so-called Brics states now have a 17.5% share, led by China at nearly 12% - up from just 1.8% in 1990. That means that non-US trade by other nations could compensate for any reduction in exports to the US. In the 21st century, US trade no longer makes the biggest contribution to trade growth - China has taken a decisive lead.

Professor Simon Evenett calculates that, even if the US cut off all goods imports, 70 of its trading partners would fully make up their lost sales to the US within one year and 115 would do so within five years - assuming they maintained their current export growth rates to other markets.<sup>3</sup> According to the NYU Stern School of Business, full implementation of these tariffs and retaliation by other countries against





## PRC

# Capitalism with Chinese characteristics

The US-China trade war has seen both tit-for-tat tariffs and a strategic attempt to shift away from any reliance on the American market. **Yassamine Mather** gives her take on current dilemmas and the socio-economic nature of the People's Republic

In a video clip that became viral, US vice president JD Vance discussed the Trump administration's foreign trade policies with China, directly insulting the Chinese people: "We borrow money from Chinese peasants to buy the things those Chinese peasants manufacture."

Earlier, he had said: "I think it's useful for all of us to step back and ask ourselves, what has the globalist economy gotten the United States of America? Fundamentally, it's based on two principles. Incurring a huge debt to buy things that other countries make for us."

Of course, China's so-called "peasants" are now travelling on the world's largest high-speed rail network, driving cutting-edge electric vehicles and living in one of the most modern societies on the planet. Their country is making breakthroughs in AI with models like DeepSeek, proving it is not just catching up - but in some areas it is leading. Of course, Vance and his boss, Donald Trump, are upset that China did not stay a cheap manufacturing hub for America's benefit.

At the time of writing, China has just responded to Trump's 104% tariffs by slapping on its own 84% levy, driving stock markets around the world to new lows. The commentary by *The People's Daily* on April 7 shows a level of confidence about measures already implemented to mitigate the worst and immediate effects of US tariffs. Under the title, 'Focus on doing our own things well to enhance confidence in effectively coping with the impact of US tariffs', the key points can be summarised as follows:

- Reduced reliance on US exports: exports to the US dropped from 19.2% (2018) to 14.7% (2024) of China's total exports, mitigating overall economic impact. The US relies heavily on Chinese goods (over 50% for some categories), complicating swift alternatives.

- Controlled domestic risks: risks in real estate, local debt and financial institutions are deemed 'effectively contained', reflecting prior measures.

- Policy preparedness: 1, Monetary tools: flexibility in adjusting reserve ratios and interest rates; 2, Fiscal measures: plans to increase spending, and expand deficits/special bonds.

- Domestic consumption: prioritised as an economic driver, with policies to boost demand and stabilise markets.

- Contingency plans: readiness to deploy additional measures as needed.

- Strategic shift: emphasises accelerating a self-reliant 'new development pattern', leveraging China's domestic market to offset external pressures.

- Diplomatic stance: open to negotiations, but prepared for prolonged tension, urging the US to correct 'erroneous practices' through equal dialogue.

- Global messaging: China is trying to position itself as a global stabilising force committed to high-quality growth, framing the response as a strategic opportunity amid US 'containment and suppression'.

So what are China's options? It could impose its tariffs on goods from other countries to pressurise the US to back down by damaging its exports. It could try the legal route and file a complaint to the World Trade Organisation. However, such cases can take a long time and do not always lead to the required result.



**Shenzhen: China's 'Silicon Valley'**

China could devalue its currency, the yuan, to make its exports cheaper in global markets, offsetting some of the effects of the tariff. But this can be risky and upset other trading partners. The Chinese government can take the option of supporting companies affected by US measures with subsidies or tax breaks, so that they can keep prices low, even with the tariff. China can use the 'Belt and Road' initiative and sell more goods to other countries to make up for the losses. This means expanding trade with so-called developing countries, in Asia, Africa, Latin America, etc.

The Chinese government will no doubt try to reduce further any reliance on exports. Focussing on expanding its domestic economy, it is already encouraging its population to buy more locally made goods and invest within China. Meanwhile, some Chinese manufacturers might set up factories in other countries, so that their goods can be exported from tariff-light locations.

Of course, despite these remedial measures, tariffs will affect Chinese plans for economic growth and this is exactly what Trump and his supporters want.

### Our view

Let me clarify that I am not a supporter of China. I do not consider it to be any type of 'workers' state', deformed or otherwise. What we are witnessing in the trade war between China and the United States is a conflict between two capitalist powers at a time when Chinese capitalism has made major advances, making it a serious contender for becoming the 'hegemon power' in global capitalism.

China's 'Made in China 2025' initiative (MIC2025), launched in 2015, has been a relative success, boosting the country's confidence. This was a strategic shift in its development goals. The plan's declared aim was to transition from being primarily a low-cost manufacturing hub to becoming a global leader in high-tech industries. The planners of MIC2025 had identified 10 priority sectors. These included robotics, aerospace, biopharmaceuticals and new energy vehicles - with a strong emphasis on increasing domestic innovation, strengthening supply chains and reducing dependence on foreign technology and components.

So what have been the achievements so far?

- Electric vehicles (EVs): One of the most notable successes of MIC2025 has been in the electric vehicle sector. By 2023, China had not only met, but significantly surpassed, its targets. The country emerged as the world's largest producer and consumer of EVs, driven by strong government support, investment in battery technology and expansive charging infrastructure.

- Renewable energy: China has made some progress in renewable energy, particularly in solar power. It is now leading the world in the production and deployment of solar panels, playing a dominant role in the global market in this field. Wind energy and hydroelectric power have also seen significant growth.

- High-speed rail: This is another flagship area. China boasts the largest high-speed rail network in the world and has developed advanced technologies in train design, signalling systems and infrastructure, aligning well with MIC2025 goals to modernise transportation.

However not everything is progressing as planned.

- Semiconductors: Despite substantial investments, China continues to struggle to become self-reliant in semiconductor production. The country remains heavily dependent on foreign suppliers for advanced chips and cannot produce cutting-edge processors on a large scale.

- Advanced photolithography: A critical technology for high-end semiconductor manufacturing and advanced photolithography has proven particularly difficult. China has not yet succeeded in developing competitive alternatives to equipment from leading foreign firms, limiting progress in chip fabrication.

- Aerospace: Although China has made advances in developing its domestic aerospace industry, particularly with smaller aircraft and space exploration, the goal of producing large, intercontinental passenger planes remains unmet. The country still relies on foreign aviation technologies for engines and avionics.

The MIC2025 strategy has attracted considerable international attention and concern, particularly from the US and the EU. There is a level of panic over China's rapid technological rise and potential threats to global competition and this has led to tensions, and the imposition

of tariffs, export restrictions and sanctions - especially targeting Chinese firms involved in strategic technologies. In response to these pressures, even before Trump's latest tariff war, China had scaled back public references to MIC2025, opting for a more low-profile implementation approach, while continuing to pursue its objectives behind the scenes.

By April 2024 western governments and agencies suggested that China had accomplished roughly 86% of the targets outlined in the MIC2025 initiative.

### Made in China

In many ways, 'Made in China 2025' has been a transformative industrial strategy, driving substantial progress in many high-tech sectors and positioning China as a major player in the global technology landscape. While the initiative has delivered many successes, key strategic industries continue to face technological bottlenecks and external pressures. That is why the Chinese leadership emphasises the need for investment and innovation, so that in an extended time frame China can fully meet the vision originally outlined in MIC2025.

However, none of this progress has anything to do with 'socialism' - ie, the transition to communism. Here are some basic statistics which show that China is more capitalist than anything else, when it comes to the economy.

To start with, we have widespread private ownership and this is growing. As of 2023, over 60% of China's GDP came from the private sector, while 80% of urban jobs are provided by private businesses, not the state. These days private billionaires are major players in China's economy - Jack Ma (Alibaba), and Pony Ma (Tencent), to name two of the better known ones. Under any kind of socialist system, even during the first step of transition, major industries would be owned by the public, not by private entrepreneurs.

Then we have the high levels of inequality. China's Gini coefficient (which measures inequality) was 0.466 in 2022, and 0.468-0.5 in 2021 - higher than many western capitalist countries. (0 = perfect equality, 1 = extreme inequality). There are massive differences in wealth between rural and urban Chinese citizens, as well as coastal vs inland provinces. And, of course, there is that huge gap between rich

and poor families. The very fact that China's inequality has grown in the past few decades defies any illusions about there being a workers' state ('deformed' or not).

We also have markets and a crude profit drive. In China, most businesses operate to maximise profit, not to serve a planned, equitable distribution of goods. We have consumers who buy and sell freely; prices are largely set by the market. We are dealing with a situation where housing, healthcare and education are commodified. All this is often expensive and competitive. A socialist state would aim to de-commodify essential services and limit profit motives. We see no sign of this in China.

There is no workers' control or self-management of production. The working class is in no position to run factories or businesses democratically. All trade unions are state-run and do not act independently to protect workers' rights. Strikes are rare, but, when they do occur, they are suppressed. Workplace decisions are made top-down.

We also have the relentless encouragement of capital accumulation. China has a stock market, venture capital, private equity and real estate speculation - all capitalist tools. The Beijing government often supports companies that succeed in global markets, encouraging transnational capitalism.

Although these are tentative comments and there is clearly a need for considerable research, China has many of the characteristics of a form of state capitalism - an economic system where the government plays a strong role in the economy, owning or controlling key businesses, guiding economic policy, and using obvious capitalist tools (like markets and profits) to achieve national goals.

There are what are referred to as massive state-owned enterprises (SOEs). As of 2023, 142 of the Fortune Global 500 companies are Chinese (including those in Hong Kong), making China the country with the most companies on the Fortune Global 500 list in 2023. Many of them are state-owned or state-controlled: eg, Sinopec (oil and gas), State Grid Corporation of China (electricity), and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNN). These SOEs dominate key sectors: energy, banking, telecom, steel, aviation and the railways.

When it comes to the banking sector, China's top banks - like ICBC, China Construction Bank and the Bank of China - are state-owned and used to direct credit to favoured industries.

The People's Bank of China closely manages interest rates and credit, unlike most so-called free-market economies, where central banks are independent. The government sets five-year plans that lay out strategic sectors (eg, AI, semiconductors, green energy). Initiatives like MIC2025 show state-directed efforts to build national champions and reduce foreign dependency. Local governments often support industries with subsidies, cheap land and low-interest loans. In some private tech companies (like Alibaba and Tencent), the state has inserted 'golden shares' - giving it board-level control despite minor ownership.

The Communist Party of China has committees in many large businesses - even in private firms. This gives the state informal influence over decision-making, reinforcing *control* beyond ownership ●



## BOOK

# Vanishing capitalists?

A Hanton *Vassal state: how America runs Britain* Swift Press 2024, pp298, £12.99

**B**ack in the 1970s, one of the British Maoist groups promoted the chant: “Five fingers, five fingers, five fingers make one fist; death to the British monopoly capitalist!” The underlying idea was people’s frontist - unity with *non-monopoly* capitalists against monopoly capitalists.

But even if you did not agree with the theme, the idea that there *were* in reality *British monopoly capitalists* made an obvious sort of sense (meaning, as Leninists usually mean by this expression, big capitalist oligopolies). Today this is much less obvious. It is not that there are no big capitalist oligopolies: it is, rather, that it is less easy to identify *British* monopoly capitalists.

The political problems that this issue poses have involved identifying what the specific interests are of *British capital as such* in relation to a series of issues. For example, the internal dispute in the state in 2002-03 over participation in the invasion of Iraq. Or, the peculiar quietness of “British business” in relation to the Brexit debate in 2015-16. Or, currently, the question of what *British* interest (if any) is involved in the UK government campaigning for the continuation of US and European support for the Ukrainian regime in the Russo-Ukrainian war since the policy turn of the Trump administration (whatever this turn actually is, which is not clear).

## Transnational

A line of reasoning about the issue of national capitalist interests, which was popular around 2000, saw, on the basis of the development of ‘transnational corporations’ and international institutions, the emergence of a ‘transnational capitalist class’ (TCC).<sup>1</sup> The course of events since then has seen very large ‘transnational’ capitals dependent on nation-states for bailouts after the crash of 2008, the very heavy state intervention of the Covid pandemic, and a developing trend towards US unilateralism, starting with the 2003 invasion of Iraq (at the expense of French and German business interests). This was followed by the 2014 Euromaidan colour-revolution coup in Ukraine, with a view to forcing the European states into war with Russia (effectively achieved in 2022 after a delay in 2016-20), the 2021 Aukus scheme to attack French arms production and, most recently, Trump’s tariffs. The plausibility of the TCC idea has thus been greatly reduced.<sup>2</sup> The symptoms which were interpreted around 2000 as showing the emergence of a TCC revealed, in reality, the very high level of *United States dominance* of world capitalism.

Angus Hanton’s book has been positively reviewed. It is a journalistic canter round the evidence for US ownership of businesses which are commonly assumed to be ‘British’, and US control of British government policy. It is broadly Europeanist and British nationalist in its perspectives - in chapter 13 looking across the channel for remedies in terms of controlling the sale of businesses, tax reforms, increased government interventionism and efforts to promote a British *Mittelstand* of family businesses - Hanton himself runs a family business, a sort of internet estate agency for parcels of woodland.<sup>3</sup>

The introduction to the book stresses the difficulty of establishing



City of London: an adjunct of US power

the facts about US control, which the British government actively conceals (but quite a lot of which can be found from US sources). Then chapter 1 starts with basic consumer products and US ownership of British brands, moving to US takeovers of financial services firms and other US operations in the City; US dominance of farm machinery and fertilisers, and increasing US corporate acquisitions of farms, and the role of US corporate commodities merchants as oligopsonist purchasers of farm output; US jet engine manufacturers and US oil suppliers. US corporations, he points out, account for \$700 billion of goods and services sold in the UK, amounting to a quarter of UK ‘gross domestic product’ (p27). (It is an oddity of GDP that sales by foreign firms are part of it - reflecting the fact that GDP is actually a measure of *taxable transactions*, not of productive output). Chapter 2 shows that this tendency towards US takeover has been *British government policy* since the Thatcher government. US corporations have been most generous in employing former British chancellors and prime ministers ...

Chapters 3-5 are concerned with the business models of the ‘tech giants’ - starting with their commitments to ‘scaling up’ to achieve monopoly. Part of this process is buying out in field innovators before they can become rivals. The upshot is partly what Hanton calls “toll bridges”, especially in relation to payments (chapter 4): by driving cash out, the big payments processors can carve an increasing share out of the sales

people are sucked into the USA (we should note that skilled people are on a very large scale sucked into the UK too); US culture is ultra-focussed on success in business considered as ‘dominate or submit’; the US state is routinely deployed in the interests of US business (while, by implication from the previous chapters, the British state also acts in the interests of *US* business ...<sup>4</sup>).

## Unrealistic

This brings us back to the recommendations in chapter 13, which I discussed at the outset. These are, to be blunt, unrealistic proposals. To think about *why* they are unrealistic is to reflect on the character of the book as a journalistic canter (as I said there) around the evidence for US dominance.

In the first place, a useful review from a perspective roughly sympathetic to Hanton’s is offered on *Substack* by Rian C Whitton. He makes the point that Britain is not alone in suffering increased US dominance: the same is, in fact, true of continental Europe, albeit to a lesser degree. “So, if Britain is one of the countries more in thrall to American power, I think this means we are just at a more advanced stage than other US-aligned countries. US relative decline *vis-à-vis* China for the last few decades has been countered by relative growth over Europe and, to an extent, the developed east-Asian world.”<sup>5</sup>

The other side of this coin is that, though Hanton’s book is heavily concerned with numbers, it is rather less concerned with *proportions*. And here, if we go to Wikipedia for a quick glance at the top UK-headquartered companies, we find Shell and BP among the oil majors, and HSBC among the high-ranking banks.<sup>6</sup> None of the rest get into the world top 100 either from Fortune 500 or Forbes, but Rio Tinto in mining and AstraZeneca and GSK in pharma are not far below: global-scale operators. This is not a systematic point, but symptomatic: what Hanton offers is *impressions* and, on the other side of the coin, UK-based global operators are missing. Someone who is better with figures than I am needs to do the actual *analysis* of proportions, which Hanton has not.

We can turn Whitton’s argument upside-down. Around 1970, the USA entered into *relative* decline as an *industrial producer*, while other countries began to catch up, though remaining absolutely world-dominant - as happened to Britain in the 1850s. The response of the USA was to exploit the reserve-currency status of the dollar - first by breaking with the Bretton Woods agreement in 1971-73,<sup>7</sup> then by again forcing down the value of the dollar in the 1985 Plaza Accord (throwing Japan into a prolonged stagnation, from which it has not yet fully recovered).<sup>8</sup> At each stage of the relative decline, the response is to demand more tribute from US ‘allies’ - really *all* vassal states. The Trump tariffs, and the demand for European rearmament which Starmer has chosen to spearhead (while still planning to ‘buy American’) is more of the same.

Secondly and on the other hand, the US buying up British businesses is an aspect of the decline of Britain. Hanton blames Thatcher for the phenomenon of US dominance, and at a certain level this is true enough. But the UK is not the first country to pass through industrial power to imperial dominance, from imperial

dominance to financial dominance, and from the inflow of money due to financial dominance to increased land values - leading to increased wage costs, leading to industry being hollowed out. Before us, both Venice and Genoa in the 16th-17th centuries passed through the decline of industry in favour of finance, and the Netherlands in the 18th century. The USA is in the first phase of this transition; the phenomena of the politics of ‘declinism’ and ‘Make America Great Again’ reflect the trend at work, as does the USA’s increased demand for tribute from its vassals.

It is this objective decline of Britain as an *industrial* producer which Thatcher responded to by going for open de-industrialisation and financialisation. It is entirely natural that this choice would lead to greater openness to British capitals (compared to European and Japanese capitals) being bought out by American capitals - the symptom Hanton discusses. But that also implies that Britain on its own is in no position to stand up to the US demands.

Is Europe? In 1939-45 the British empire survived (temporarily), thanks to US assistance. The US cashed this dependency in the defeat of Keynes at Bretton Woods in 1944, in insisting on Indian independence as a condition for bailing Britain out in 1945-47, and in using financial leverage to crush Britain’s attempt to act independently in the Suez crisis in 1956. Western continental Europe was forcibly conquered by the US and its British auxiliary, and eastern Europe was conquered by the USSR. In 1947-48, the USA decided to ‘contain’ communism by direct subsidies (Marshall Aid) and by allowing ‘managed trade’ protection against the US (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). These concessions allowed the continental European protection of the *Mittelstand* and small farmers, as well as concessions to the working class (welfarism).

Now that the USSR is gone, the USA has been gradually taking back the concessions. Defence of, or return to, the 1950s-70s social order is not on the table. The choice that faces Europe is between rearming as vassals of the USA, paying increased tribute to US arms manufacturers, or rearming *against* the USA ●

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## Notes

1. See, for example, L Sklair *The transnational capitalist class* Hoboken NJ 2000; WJ Robinson *A theory of global capitalism: production, class and state in a transnational world* Baltimore MD 2004; WK Carroll *The making of a transnational capitalist class* London 2013.
2. For struggles to reinterpret or limit the concept without completely ditching it, see, for instance, WK Carroll, ‘Rethinking the transnational capitalist class’ *Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research* Vol 29 (2018), pp188-206; D Chen, ‘Rethinking globalization and the transnational capitalist class: China, the United States and 21st century imperialist rivalry’ *Science & Society* Vol 85 (2021), pp82-110.
3. www.woodlands.co.uk; plus the interview in *Living Woods* magazine May-June 2009, p31: www.woodlands.co.uk/about-us/articles/living-woods-interview.pdf.
4. On this issue, compare also T Stevenson *Someone else’s empire: British illusions and American hegemony* London 2023; Hanton is only concerned with the domestic consequences of British subordination to the USA.
5. riancwhitton.substack.com/p/vassal-state.
6. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\_of\_largest\_companies\_in\_the\_United\_Kingdom.
7. history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/nixon-shock.
8. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plaza\_Accord.



TV

# Striking a nerve

Philip Barantini (director) *Adolescence* Netflix, limited season (four episodes)

It is early morning in a quiet locality somewhere in the Doncaster area, when suddenly the police batter in a family's front door and haul a 13-year-old boy out of his bed and into custody. From there on in it is downhill all the way for dad, mum and his older sister - but especially for the boy, who is accused of murder. A nightmare scenario that in *Adolescence* is the beginning of a material tragedy for two families, a neighbourhood, a school's pupils and teachers, and the population of a town.

*Adolescence* uses excellent means to achieve an impressive impact. As an example of the techniques, each of the four episodes is shot in one take (ie, using a single Steadicam, without cutaways); what we see emerges as raw and human - a powerful drama. It may be a truism that fiction can often engage more than factual forms, such as documentaries, and the emotion is certainly in evidence here. *Adolescence* is television at its best, dealing with difficult social issues and exposing to the glare of public attention situations which relate to ordinary life. This limited series (or 'season', as US programme-makers would have it) serves up via an excellent script, tight directing and filming, and admirable acting a work that is believable and empathetic.

## Role of state

It is not the fault of the series that it is now being added to bourgeois politicians' armoury in enhancing the role of the state. Unfortunately, co-writer Jack Thorne (of *This is England* fame) has publicly approved the notions of a smartphone ban in schools and imposing a 'digital age of consent', as exists in Australia. He floated these ideas to Sir Keir Starmer at a recent Downing Street meeting that included the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Children's Society.

While almost all UK schools already prohibit mobiles in some settings, the idea of a digital age of consent is a new and far-reaching proposal that would greatly restrict civil liberties for the young. It may even be impracticable, in that illegality is no barrier to those determined enough. But scenarios in which young people were publicly policed as to their digital viewing might well result in criminalisation of swathes of children in the manner of other existing proscriptions, such as illegal drug use. This is not something that anyone seeing themselves as a democrat should countenance.

In the first episode of *Adolescence*, young Jamie Miller (Owen Cooper) is arrested for murder after 'the thugs' (police slang for Territorial Support Groups) batter down the Miller family's front door and point guns at everyone. Jamie's dad, Eddie (Stephen Graham), is still in shock at the police station. An outwardly sturdy man, he is puzzled and upset during police physical examinations and interrogations. The interplay between parent and child only grows more fraught for both as police processing proceeds.

Jamie is initially bemused, unable properly to articulate his own defence or even to explain anything to his father. But he follows the duty solicitor's advice, giving 'no comment' answers when he should. Building the case against him, DI Bascombe (Ashley Walters) and fellow interrogator DS Misha



Story of a killing

Frank (Faye Marsay) present him with evidence from his mobile and street camera stills. But the clincher comes when they play a street camera video showing him stabbing fellow pupil Katie Leonard (Emilia Holliday) multiple times. Eddie is devastated, what with Jamie having just previously sworn to him that he was innocent.

Day three following the murder sees Bascombe and Frank visiting Katie's and Jamie's school: a semi-chaotic 'holding pen', according to Bascombe. Their enquiries are stymied, as no murder weapon is found. Then Bascombe's son, Adam (Amari Bacchus), a pupil two years above Jamie, enlightens his father as to the meaning of the Instagram emojis sent by Katie to Jamie. They were not flattering, and the message Jamie received was: 'You'll be a virgin forever' (ie, using 'incel'-ism against him). Adam goes on to quote the incel motivational/recruiting phrase that "80% of women are attracted to 20% of men" and highlights the red emoji that Jamie used as a 'call to action to the manosphere'. The scales fall from Bascombe's eyes, while Adam says he had to speak up because it was "embarrassing watching you blunder about". Soon after, Jamie's friend, Ryan (Kaine Davis), is arrested for conspiracy to murder for giving him his knife and Jamie is formally charged.

Here the truism is that incel ideation often has effects in specific situations such as schools, where some kids like to lord it over others, often leading to bullying. This is especially so where social media and those falling foul of it can be markedly affected negatively. But school culture, if we can call it such, is a reflection of wider society. Matters that exist beyond the school do not cease their effect once inside. As expressed in this fictitious school, there is no evidence of a countervailing culture of condemnation of the foulness created by reactionary ideas about women and associated sexual predation.

One teacher mentions that she has heard some boys talking about Andrew Tate, but she clearly has no appreciation of what foul ideas this person propagates. This expresses in microcosm a weakness in the body politic, or politics as carried on throughout bourgeois Britain - a weakness resulting from the absence of left and particularly revolutionary ideas. Battling reaction and the upsurge in its revolting ideas faces humanity with a new barbarism that communists and the rest of the left must fight - and build the means to do so.

In perhaps the most moving episode, seven months later Jamie is still being held on remand, though

in an inappropriate setting that he rejects: it seems to be a youth mental health facility. Briony Ariston (Erin Doherty), a psychologist who has the task of assessing him prior to trial, appears as a welcome visitor. She has established a good rapport and teases out truths, but the biggest problem remains: Jamie maintains strongly that he did not kill Katie, despite clear evidence to the contrary. Eddie is still his hero, his preference for only male friends confusing Jamie about the very idea of having female friends himself. Briony's visit is punctuated by tempestuous outbursts; scrabbling for justification, Jamie says Katie was a "bullying bitch". Although he claims to have been put off by what he found on the internet about incel ideology and rejecting it, he still thinks the 80/20 idea is valid. Then, when Briony announces that the visit is her last, Jamie goes apeshit and is escorted out.

This deals effectively, if obliquely, with the pressures, on young people especially, caused by long periods in custody. While in cases of murder, rape or arson there is no presumption of bail in the English criminal courts, it is not ruled out. Here, Jamie exhibits negative behaviour from incarceration that bring tears, including from Briony, who nearly gives way completely after Jamie has gone. These are harbingers of what Jamie shall face and likely fail to deal with following conviction and sentence to years of confinement. And there are therefore questions that are exposed for those with eyes to see at this point: how can we not oppose imprisonment as the broad-brush approach - even to what are found to be serious criminal actions in the bourgeois courts? Is it punishment fitting the crime or rather societal revenge against those who transgress?

In the final episode, by the way, 13 months following Katie's murder, Jamie's family is not faring well. On Eddie's birthday louts spray-paint his van. Spending a morning roughing up a spray painter and hearing from Jamie that he is pleading guilty completely bend him out of shape.

A crucial lie for bourgeois regimes is that propensity for criminality and carrying out criminal acts are individuals' flaws. How that serious flaw, if flaw it be, developed in an individual is seen as secondary. Parental failure or lack of discipline is pub talk. Physical removal of aberration - anathematisation - are considered society's best solution. At one time those members of society considered sufficiently culpable were put to death. But permanently excising by death or whole-life imprisonment solves nothing and are corrosive remedies. Executions doom a *social system* to death, while

lengthy imprisonment is long drawn-out mental torture.

Certainly, in the UK there is a dearth of worthwhile activity for prisoners and little to no preparation in any real or useful sense for life beyond prison. The old saw spread by Alexander Paterson - commissioner of prisons 1922-46 - still holds, while prisons exist: those sentenced to imprisonment "come to prison as a punishment, not *for* punishment".<sup>1</sup> In other words, a prisoner should have all the rights that someone not imprisoned has, apart from the fact of her or his removal of the right to live where they want: this is the sole punishment. Beyond that as yet unachieved reform, however, abolition of incarceration has to be our eventual goal.

Stripped of legalese and bourgeois liberal reformist cant, bourgeois criminal law to this day is, of course, based on naked revenge. But then that is the incel idea, too: revenge on women for preventing 80% of men from having freely available sex. It is as (if not more) reactionary as medieval ideas about women.

## Denial of rights

Returning to issues raised around *Adolescence*, and reactionary commentaries and politicians' eagerness to bring in further state bans and prohibitions, the Online Safety Act 2023 now places a duty on social media companies to protect children (legally defined as everyone under 18) and "puts a range of new duties on social media companies and search services, making them more responsible for their users' safety on their platforms". Specifically, "Children must be prevented from accessing Primary Priority Content [which includes] pornography ... bullying ... abusive or hateful content ... content which depicts or encourages serious violence or injury ..."<sup>2</sup>

As is usual with state interventions, this act introduces blanket controls over vast areas of internet content, reducing the ability of the left - and especially the revolutionary left - to promote and recruit in the battle of ideas. Legal interpretation of the act - inevitably expensive in terms of the costs in the courts, where such matters end up - fall most heavily on those least able to bear them, let alone other criminal consequences. The overall effect on societal interchange and communication is deleterious out of all proportion to the vaunted benefits, even were they to accrue ●

Jim Moody

*Adolescence* is currently available on Netflix: [www.netflix.com](http://www.netflix.com). The series is to be made available free for use in secondary schools via the Into Film+ streaming service.

## Notes

1. See 'Why prisons?' in A Paterson *Paterson on prisons* Manhattan 1951, p23 (original emphasis).
2. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-safety-act-explainer/online-safety-act-explainer](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-safety-act-explainer/online-safety-act-explainer).

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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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# weekly Worker

**Tomáš  
Tengely-Evans  
was given a  
'stealth edit'**

## Squaring the circle

SWP tops flip-flop between left syndicalism and electoral opportunism, says Paul Demarty - sometimes too quickly for hapless editors to keep up

Our story today begins with what the journalistic trade calls a 'stealth edit'.

When a publication gets something wrong, it is common enough - especially in the internet age - for the online version of the offending article to be changed. Best practice is to call attention to the change with a note - "an earlier version of this article stated X; we regret the error." A stealth edit omits the explanation; and so it is generally considered bad form, a failure of honesty (albeit hardly the most serious class of such failures in that ethically inconsistent profession).

So to the confusion experienced by our own Jack Conrad, who was struck enough by a couple of sentences in an article by *Socialist Worker* editor Tomáš Tengely-Evans on the need for a break from Labourism to make a specific note of it: "A break from Labourism would mean seeing working class struggle as more important than winning elections. It means subordinating electoral calculations to boosting the real struggles of the working class."

When trying to find this passage to quote it in last week's *Weekly Worker*, however, he came up blank. It was apparently nowhere to be found on the *Socialist Worker* website. Had he imagined it? Was he going mad? As it turns out, no: while the above version is still the one in the PDF version of the paper,<sup>1</sup> a rather more muted version appears on the HTML page for the article: "A break from Labourism would mean seeing working class struggle as most important in winning change. It means subordinating electoral and parliamentary calculations to boosting the confidence and organisation of the working class to fight."<sup>2</sup>

We do not know when the change was made, except that it was made early - the first version of the article archived by the Wayback machine has the second version of the text. Perhaps it was corrected pre-publication and the former version snuck back into the print edition by way of an editorial cock-up - such things happen in life. The fact remains that the first version was written in good faith, and at some point sanded off by 'wiser heads'.

### Illustration

This little textual flip-flop is, in its own way, a useful illustration of the current state of the SWP, at this point in its development. It has been through a long period of anarchistic anti-electoralism, which is the organisation's resting position anyway, and served as a convenient pretext to keep its forces outside the Labour Party in the Corbyn period. It is this that is strongly expressed in the first version - "working class struggle [is] more important than winning elections", subordinating electoral calculations to the "real struggles of the working class".



Posed left to stay clear of Corbyn's Labour Party

Yet, as comrade Conrad noted last week,<sup>3</sup> the SWP is in the habit of lurching from this resting position into electoral work on extremely limited politics - this or that variant of the left Labourism which was comrade Tengely-Evans's object of polemic. Some indications are that such a shift is underway. The SWP attempted to intervene in last year's general election by standing Maxine Bowler as a 'pro-Palestine independent'; one had to dig pretty deep into her election literature to discover she was a socialist, let alone an SWP veteran.

### Summit

Now we have We Demand Change, the SWP's attempt to gather up some of the remnants of Corbynism. It was to WDC's 'Summit of Resistance' a couple of weeks ago that the *Socialist Worker* article was addressed, and the softened version - which does not contrast "working class struggle" (in SWP terms, strikes and street protests) to electoral work directly, and no longer states openly that electoral work is not "real" struggle - seems designed to at least keep the door open for what seems a hopelessly indeterminate initiative that certainly includes strongly electoralist elements.

It is this situation that Alex Callinicos, the SWP's leading intellectual, attempts to address in a more recent article.<sup>4</sup> WDC is a "potential game-changer for the radical left in Britain". His argument for this is simply that 2,000 people turned up to the 'Summit of Resistance', all of whom opposed the "ultra-rightwing Labour government". That in turn poses the question of a "left political alternative" to Labour, which turns out to be "complicated". With Labour unpopular despite its

"hollow" super-majority, the way is clear for Reform to gain control of the backlash. Unfortunately, WDC

can't fill the gap. Its strength lies in how it brings together different activist coalitions with its own agenda. These coalitions involve people who want to see a radical left electoral alternative. But the summit also drew in supporters of Labour, the Greens and of no party at all. It would be disastrous to divide all the participating coalitions - and We Demand Change more broadly - along partisan lines.

Yet it still has an important role to play:

If We Demand Change helps to promote the development of mass struggles against Starmer, the resulting confidence can invigorate a left electoral alternative... Just as the Palestine solidarity movement helped to power the massive response that overwhelmed the fascist gangs last August, the confidence gained by participating in broad and militant movements against the cuts can feed the electoral front.

This is an even more "electoralist" version of the matter than Tengely-Evans's revised paragraph - now a "left political alternative" (clearly conceived in electoral terms) is strongly favoured as a positive outcome. Yet the approach is strangely passive. If an upsurge in "mass struggles" should occur, that would increase the likelihood of such a left alternative to emerge from... where? Labour? The Greens?

Frankly, if you are already among the left-Greens participating in WDC, doesn't such an alternative already

exist? Aren't the Green Party's policies, on paper, to the left - issue by issue - of Starmer's Labour? Don't they already have a bridgehead in the Commons? To explain why this is not adequate would entail explaining why the Greens' politics amount to petty bourgeois utopianism; but that would put in question their role in this latest SWP front; so Callinicos does not bother to offer a reason to reject them.

### Perverse

This is, in fact, a perverse result of the very core of SWP politics. The group proposes, as we have seen, that confidence and consciousness accrue to the working class as a result of direct struggle against the bosses and the state. At the moment of direct struggle, any disunity is a liability: we forego it for the duration of the strike, or so long as it takes to put the demonstration together. Yet the disunity remains.

SWP theory expects such divisions to be overcome by the educative function of the struggle itself. The empirical record is, at best, uneven. This is because all sustained direct struggles immediately pose questions of general politics: a strike that spreads and becomes general, for example, immediately poses the question of general social production, of taking over production - otherwise the strikers will merely starve. If we do not already have sufficient unity concerning the next step, there is perhaps a small chance of a mass Damascene conversion of the reformists, Greens, and even working class Tories to revolutionary socialism. There is a far higher chance of the whole thing falling into disarray and defeat. Trade union bureaucrats are many things, but they are not stupid. Their timidity is in part an awareness of the danger of

overplaying their hands.

By staking everything on the experience of direct struggle, the SWP sets itself the role of preparing the ground for provoking such struggle at any cost: which means, in an important respect, acting as if the strike is *already* on, brushing aside disagreements, which might invite caution. It is impossible to do this purely 'externally', and so the group's internal culture has increasingly been characterised by membership passivity and leadership-monologism, punctuated by occasional crises.

Yet, precisely because questions of general politics are inescapable even within the direct struggle, it is those moments where - however imperfectly - we move towards this territory that become decisive for the left (the Corbyn experience being a recent example). The SWP cannot avoid being affected; and so it is periodically pulled into electoral activity (the default form of contestation over general politics in bourgeois 'democracies'). Since its only operative conception of electoral activity is as a reformist temptation, it naturally concludes that its electoral activity must be, for practical purposes, reformist in political content.

Thus the oscillation between almost anarchistic syndicalism and episodes of total opportunism - and, for that matter, the fact that SWP protest fronts are so decidedly near-apolitical. Managing such oscillations well requires a certain intellectual agility; but this very form of political activity, as we mentioned, tends to suppress internal disagreements, which in turn prevents such agility from being spread through the organisation, since people will inevitably disagree on what the key issue is, or what the immediate possibilities are, infringing on the right of the leadership to enforce their latest turn on the membership. Lenin, Tony Cliff famously argued, had a good nose (he was, of course, justifying his own political techniques rather than those of Lenin). The 'nose' theory of politics, however, inevitably entails that *only* Lenin (or Cliff, or Callinicos...) is allowed to 'sniff the air'.

Thus we arrive at the strange disagreement of the editor of *Socialist Worker* with himself. No doubt he will be, from here on out, solidly on message - until that message changes again! ●

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### Notes

1. [socialistworker.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/sw2945p13-combined-compressed.pdf](https://socialistworker.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/sw2945p13-combined-compressed.pdf) - see page 11.
2. [socialistworker.co.uk/in-depth/labourism-is-holding-us-back-the-left-must-break-with-it](https://socialistworker.co.uk/in-depth/labourism-is-holding-us-back-the-left-must-break-with-it).
3. 'Labourism without Labour' *Weekly Worker* April 3: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1532/labourism-without-labour](https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1532/labourism-without-labour).
4. [socialistworker.co.uk/alex-callinicos/alex-callinicos-building-the-left-political-alternative-to-labour-complicated-but-essential](https://socialistworker.co.uk/alex-callinicos/alex-callinicos-building-the-left-political-alternative-to-labour-complicated-but-essential).