

# weekly worker



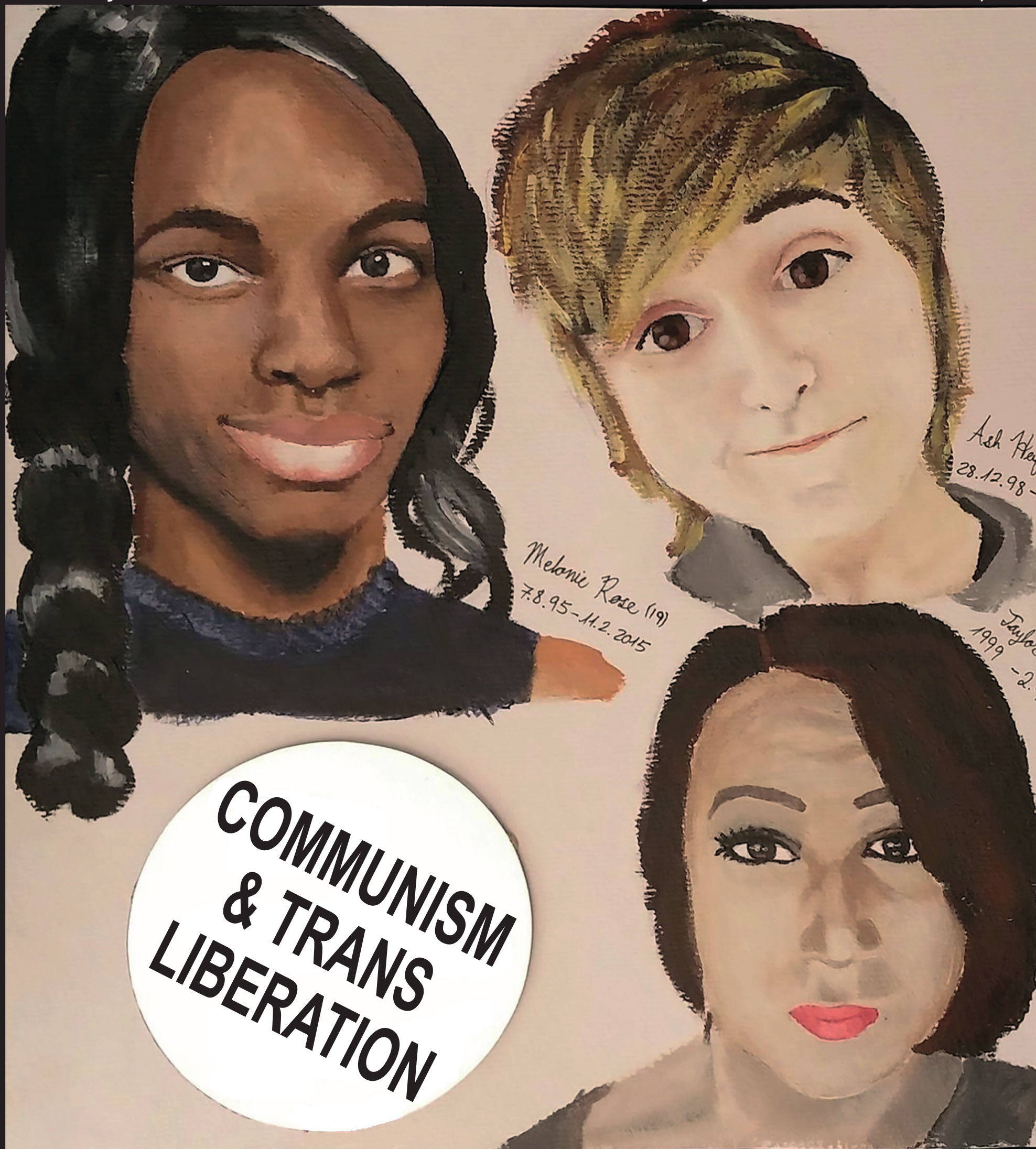
**Peter Taaffe 1942-2025: no doubt about his dedication, but nothing consistent about his strategy**

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No 1536 May 1 2025

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10





# LETTERS



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

## Sad state SWP

Comrade Carla Roberts provides yet another useful update to the electoral trials and tribulations of the Socialist Workers Party's central committee in her latest article, 'What's the point?' (April 24). I do get the feeling that comrade Roberts follows all this and reports back to us as an example of the maxim, 'I do this so you don't have to'. For this we should all be grateful.

The article focuses in the March 29 We Demand Change (WDC) rally in east London. The entire event has been uploaded onto YouTube under the video title, 'We Demand Change', on a dedicated WDC channel and also on the 'Project for Peace and Justice' Channel by Jeremy Corbyn's YouTube site. It is an over seven-hour marathon watch, but the interesting part starts at around four hours 44 minutes, when there is a debate on an electoral road forward and a possible party formation. The panel consisted of some big hitters like Andrew Feinstein, Zoe Garbett of the Greens and Richard Boyd Barrett TD - the latter being of the SWP's Irish sister party and a member of the prestigious Irish acting dynasty, the Cusack family. He is also the owner of a perpetually smug facial expression, whose dream of a ministerial Mercedes, courtesy of Sinn Féin, seems to be fading sadly.

Anyway, this was very much a controlled SWP show. The sectarian kicking the Greens got was pretty bad. I almost felt sorry for Ms Garbett. It seems that after ignoring elections for 17 years (since the collapse of Respect) the SWP central committee is now all in for elections. Comrade Feinstein seemed to follow Jeremy Corbyn's general thinking and Jeremy Corbyn is a skilled hand at keeping the SWP at arm's length - saying a lot, but meaning very little, while throwing the SWP the occasional bone. We all know that Jeremy would go back into Labour tomorrow if he could.

The contributions from the floor began with a few Green Party members, but these were quickly shut down by the obedient chair (complete with a red flag to wave). The Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century comrade made a good contribution (5:40:20). Also a black male comrade did too. The rest were mainly bellicose SWP hacks unfortunately. They displayed the sort of 'pre-comrade Delta' hubris, while conforming to the worst 'Dave/Davina Spart' stereotypes - basically shouting and screaming about the Green Party, while saying bizarrely that unity with them was somehow needed. This performative nonsense is just no good for electoral appeals to the working class. They will dismiss it instantly.

Comrade Roberts mentioned Lewis Nielsen, the SWP national secretary. He was seen in the background prowling behind the panel, smartphone in hand - an intense young man, who rarely describes himself in interviews as an SWP senior member, but as a "Stand Up to Racism officer". No doubt this is the organisation that pays his full-timer wages, courtesy of the NEU union. No doubt the reason that SUTR allows racist Zionists on its demonstrations is to keep the union funders sweet and the money supply rolling in - comrade Nielsen gives the air of a 'professional revolutionary' who is yet to work in a real job. Quite how one can be a professional

revolutionary in a society with zero revolutionary consciousness is beyond me. Maybe Richard Seymour was correct when he said, "We are all Reformists now!"

Well, to go back to the *Weekly Worker* article title, 'What's the point?'. Not much, it seems. No-one worthwhile will unite with the SWP in a new party lash-up and it is left to them to run 'independent' candidates who will hopefully save their deposits, so they can somehow 'prove' to the left that an electoral initiative is worthwhile.

A rather sad state of affairs for the party of Cliff, Hallas, Foot and Harman.

Paul O'Keeffe  
email

## Irrelevant unity

I have cancelled my subscription to the *Weekly Worker*, because both the paper and the political group which you represent, the Communist Party of Great Britain, seem to have lost all sense of direction and perspective.

I have been associated, however loosely, with the *Weekly Worker* for over 20 years since the dissolution of the Socialist Alliance, both as a contributor to the paper and, during the Corbyn era, working with your members in Labour Against the Witchhunt.

We live, as Graham Bash recently reminded us, in an "age of monsters". In his *Prison notebooks* Gramsci spoke of how in the interregnum "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters." Yet what we are facing is not a brave new world, which is what the defeat of fascism represented, but a new dystopia represented by the genocide in Gaza - a "post-apocalyptic killing zone", in the words of Philippe Lazzarini.

Perhaps the best representative of this dystopia is Donald Trump, the deadly clown and convicted felon, whose saving grace is that he doesn't even pretend to have any morality, commitment to democracy or civilisation, as he presides over a system that kidnaps students and migrants off the streets in order to deport them to far-off jurisdictions, bypassing the first amendment entirely.

Imperialism and Zionism are joined at the hip, as 'anti-Semitism' is employed in order to justify any war crime and any atrocity. In the USA, Britain and western Europe there is an ongoing war on the Palestine solidarity movement, abetted by complicit university administrations, such as at Columbia. In Britain a whole series of activists and dissident journalists, including myself, have suffered raids and arrests by the 'anti-terrorist' police. In Germany, Berlin is a veritable police state for Palestine solidarity.

In Britain the Labour Party is indistinguishable from the opposition, as it ramps up military expenditure, whilst continuing to arm and support the Israeli state. At the same time it is attacking claimants, the disabled and refugees, as it defers to the wishes of capital. We are also faced with the growth of a mass far-right party. Regardless of whether Reform wins the May 1 by-election in Runcorn, it is establishing itself as a major political contender in Britain.

Yet what is the CPGB's political priority? Forging unity between itself and two or three micro-political sects in the belief that it can create a new Marxist party! This is the political equivalent of rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic, as it is sinking. The *Weekly Worker* and the CPGB have next to nothing to say about building a left that can begin

to address the political situation as it is. Instead its main priority is in building another left sect.

Last July we saw the coming together of some forces on the left, when Jeremy Corbyn won his seat, as did five independents. Not all of them, of course, were necessarily on the left, but the defeat of Jonathan Ashworth was particularly welcome. Others such as Jess Philips and Wes Streeting narrowly avoided defeat. One might expect in this situation for the CPGB to have something to say about building a left that can challenge Starmer, Zionism and imperialism and the attack on democratic rights, to say nothing of Labour's neoliberal agenda.

One thing is very clear. We are not in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary era. Working class struggle is at an all-time low. The major trade unions are controlled by the right, yet the CPGB maintains radio silence on all of this and pretends that all we have to do is emulate the Bolsheviks in the entirely different situation of Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Hence your fascination with dead Bolsheviks.

Little things like the atomisation of the working class and Britain's de-industrialisation make no difference to your analysis. Yet without a working class capable of acting as the 'grave diggers of capitalism' there can be no socialism. It would seem self-evident that there is a need for a mass party of the left that is capable of resisting the growth of a mass racist party and a Labour Party that is indistinguishable politically from the Conservatives. We also face a growing climate crisis, which throws into question the very survival of the planet.

Yet, instead of engaging with these questions, the *Weekly Worker* and CPGB have turned their backs on the living political struggle in favour of an irrelevant unity project. The idea that revolutionaries, Marxists and reformists should unite in one mass party is rejected out of hand in favour of an unrealisable sectarian project.

Tony Greenstein  
Brighton

## Backward ideas

My niece is now a Reform voter. She is worried that a council-sponsored housing development next to her home will be used to house asylum-seekers who've crossed the Channel in small boats. She told me that, if these new homes are "filled with Muslims and Pakis", she will move.

Hopefully, as Marx pointed out, the whip of counterrevolution will lead to an advance of revolutionary forces. Perhaps the victory of Reform in the Runcorn by-election, the mayoral contests, and the winning of hundreds of seats in the county council elections will act as a spur for the left to get its act together and form the embryo of a mass Communist Party.

I therefore wish every success to the Communist unity discussions between the CPGB, RS21, Prometheus and Talking About Socialism. Perhaps, now that Peter Taaffe has passed away, the members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales will see sense, and stop flogging the dead horse of a Labour Party mark two, and join in with the Communist unity discussions.

John Smith  
Cambridgeshire

## Ignorant trope

Amy Wilhelm's letter (April 24) contains one point which is valid. I said (and wrote) "trans activists", when I should have said (and written) "the politically dominant

tendency among trans activists". It was incorrect on my part to flatten views in this way.

Nonetheless, I stand by my political characterisation of the politically dominant tendency among trans activists. In essence, this rested on the idea that the *specific* oppression of trans people could be addressed by accepting the state's insistence on rigid gender binarism, but demanding state-recognised 'gender recognition': a policy analogous to the struggle for gay marriage. But, unlike gay marriage, this demand required a demand for *speech policing*. And the result was to create what military writers call an indefensible salient - which has duly collapsed under attack, with worse consequences for trans people than if it had not been created in the first place.

Otherwise, comrade Wilhelm's letter is largely unproductive. At several points she denounces my "ignorance". This is merely a standard rhetorical trope used by the gatekeepers of the popular-frontist and academic left - whether Eurocommunist, Foucaultian, intersectionalist, 'anti-class-reductionist' or whatever. The trope denies implicitly that there could possibly be *reasoned disagreement* with their orthodoxy: this must instead be accounted for by "ignorance". I am only too familiar with both the trope and the 'anti-class-reductionist' arguments it protects: I have opposed them since the 1980s, albeit in different contexts.

Taking the other points in order, my reference to the idea that the UK Supreme Court's ruling requires post-operative trans women to use men's toilets, etc is not intended to argue that only people who have had surgery matter. It is merely to point out that the UKSC's ruling is *unreasonable on its own terms* and that the Communist Party of Britain and Young Communist League's support for it is also unreasonable on their own terms.

Comrade Wilhelm says that "transphobic" is used - by analogy to 'homophobic', as a broad term meaning 'anti-trans'. I am perfectly aware of the point, but have argued explicitly *against* this usage (also in relation to 'homophobic'), on the ground that it carries deeply undesirable political baggage (see 'Clearing the ground' *Weekly Worker* February 9 2023). It is both misleading on the explanation of Republican and Tory political operatives' cynical entering-wedge attacks on trans people, and by psychologising the issues, pre-emptive of disagreement.

Comrade Wilhelm's assertion that "Trans women are women" is the alternative, solidaristic politics that Mike so longs for" is question-begging. The slogan only makes sense in the context of leaving the compulsory gender binary intact, but demanding special state recognition (the point I made above). In this context, it is immediately *un-solideristic* with other groups who are also oppressed by the compulsory gender binary, but who would not benefit from 'recognition' in a destination gender.

So claiming it is solidaristic requires the meaning of 'solidarity' used by intersectionalists: that is, that nothing is 'solidarity' unless it accepts the self-identified demands of 'the oppressed' (as defined without reference to class and to other oppressed groups). I have argued at length against this approach to what counts as solidarity: see my 2018 series in this paper (June 7, 21, 28 and July 5) or 'Intersectionalism, the highest stage of western Stalinism?' *Critique* vol 46, pp541-58.

Finally, I made the point that trans women have medical needs that are distinct from cis women, and trans men medical needs distinct from cis men. I gave the example of risks of breast cancer and of prostate cancer. In a previous article ('Tailism cannot deliver' *Weekly Worker* March 9 2023), I cited some relevant sources for both these points. Obviously, the fact that trans women who are taking hormone treatment have a radically raised risk of breast cancer relative to cis men is a good ground for them to be screened (comrade Wilhelm's reference). But it does not raise the risk as high as the one-in-eight risk affecting cis women.

Moreover, the point was merely an example. Trans people complain - rightly - of health services' failure to provide for their specific needs. But this precisely requires that trans people are *not* treated, for the purposes of medical treatment, as identical to people of the destination gender.

Mike Macnair  
Oxford

## Genuine solidarity

Amy Wilhelm's rather laden letter effectively dismisses the concerns of women and frames comrade Macnair's initial letter almost as a loaded hate piece. It blatantly ignores the concerns of biological women and their lived reality through purely an activist lens and instead focuses solely on trans issues.

Amy makes an immediate false equivalence by decrying the rejection of 'Trans women are women' as being akin to saying disabled women cannot be women 'for some purposes'. This is boxing in biological women as a subtype of their own sex - a ridiculous hit job - and frames the rights of male-born people as immediately adjacent to and part of the misogyny experienced by women throughout our entire existence as humans, erasing the material impacts that our patriarchal society continues to have by equating the experiences of biological males and females, as if there is total equality. 'Trans women are women' functions as a *liberal demand*, based on individual self-definition rather than a *collective material analysis* of oppression. It's not about abolishing oppressive structures, but about seeking validation within them, which Marxists should be sceptical of.

To claim that 'self-ID' has had no negative impacts again is incorrect - examples in the media include the 'Wi Spa incident' in August 2021, where a male paedophile identifying himself as a woman was found to have exposed himself to women and children. A Californian women's prison has begun to provide condoms after trans prisoners were transferred there and females almost inexplicably fell pregnant shortly after. This is one example amongst numerous others. Single-sex spaces (like prisons, shelters and sports) exist because of historical and continuing male violence and female vulnerability. Undermining the legal category of 'woman' could risk making protections for biological women unenforceable.

Trans people without a doubt face their own struggles and oppression, but the slogan, 'Trans women are women', is divisive and the Supreme Court ruling did not attempt to legislate this phraseology: it merely clarified existing guidelines as they were originally intended. Trusting capitalist institutions (like the healthcare industry, courts and governments) to define categories of oppression (via 'gender identity' laws) puts the working class at the mercy of liberal elites, not in control



of its own struggle for liberation.

Prioritising identity politics is inherently incompatible with the Marxist principle of class-consciousness. Identity politics elevates individual identities over the collective interests of the proletariat, distracting from the fundamental struggle against class oppression. Likewise, the promotion of ‘gender-affirming healthcare’ serves to reinforce and fuel the capitalist healthcare system that Marxists fundamentally oppose. Marxism is grounded in material reality - including the biological reproduction of the species, which is a foundation for the family unit (which in turn is a foundation of class society). Ignoring biological sex undermines Marxist analysis of how women’s oppression is historically rooted in their role in social reproduction.

The rights of women and trans people are both incredibly important and both have a home in the proletarian struggle, but to align both as a single cause is problematic and erases the continuing struggles of women in the face of patriarchy. True solidarity is not about erasing differences, but about recognising them and organising collectively. Denying the material reality of sex undermines women’s ability to organise around their specific oppression. Recognising biological sex is not an attack on trans people, but a necessary foundation for building genuine solidarity across all oppressed groups.

ACS  
Manchester

Sex changing

In response to Amy Wilhelm’s letter, let me say that we need to recognise there’s a whole new vocabulary to get acquainted with - and even a whole new way of thinking about our bodies and how we respond to people who have concepts about body and gender identification that for most of our lives were absent from our consciousness. We need to be tolerant during this learning curve, especially in regard to the older members of society who haven’t been brought up in a world where these terms were being used and the concepts have been without prominence.

It’s a bit like the terminology surrounding leftwing politics. I’ve been in the fringe politics movement all my adult life and I am still perplexed when I hear particular phraseology, such as from an article in the *Weekly Worker* (‘The relevance of Lenin today’ July 12 2012). It was a reference to Rosa Luxemburg’s, foundational political document, ‘On the Spartacus programme’, and how it “offered a remarkable argument about the complex, recursive historical dialectic of progression and regression issuing from 1848”. Sigh ... But do you get the point? I’m not anti-communist, by the way, and I’m not an anti-intellectual for not understanding this type of terminology.

We must keep the floodgates of discussion open and be understanding about the complexities of this issue and many others. It’s different for people growing up in today’s world. They’ve never known a time, for example, before the smartphone, or before most of us didn’t spend the majority of our waking hours looking at a screen.

I’ll just end the letter by stating my views on transgenderism. For me, people are always born into the right bodies and we should teach children this. If these children want to express themselves in a characteristic way associated with people of the opposite sex, then they should be allowed to do this without feeling they need to change their sex, either because they’re a boy who feels like a girl, or because they’re a girl who feels like a boy. Physical transformation is for me a different issue from people wanting

to express themselves via gender types.

Let any physical transformation issue at adulthood - even adults deciding these things later regret it. So why would we place these burdens on children? Take this comment from Julia Grant, a pioneering transgender activist in the UK, who said, “For many years, I felt like a woman in a man’s body. And then, after surgery, I felt like a gay man trapped in a woman’s body.” Julia was in her 20s when she first transitioned.

I hope I haven’t broken too many plates, no matter how ham-fisted I am in normal life.

Louis Shawcross  
County Down

Hamas out, out ...

Daniel Lazare gets quite worked up about the CPGB silence on anti-Hamas demonstrations in Gaza in his letter (April 24). Apparently he has noted “the most important political development since the war began some 18 months ago: ie, the eruption of mass anti-Hamas protests” and - blow me - the CPGB is trying to cover them up. I wonder if they go anywhere towards matching the number of Israelis who have, with immense courage, opposed the war within Israel and the ramped-up ethnic cleansing on the West Bank.

Lazare is very upset about the airbrushing of the protests out of history by Ian Spencer, but I think there are bigger targets. I’m a regular reader of *The Guardian* yet I’ve seen no reference there to this “eruption”. Perhaps I’ve missed a small inside article or just failed to read their online pages? But, given the general position of *The Guardian* on events in Gaza, I would expect it to make front-page news for several days.

I also dip in online every few days to the *Jewish Chronicle* and *Jewish News* - nothing there either. Perhaps I haven’t scrolled down far enough to see their coverage of “the most important political development since the war began ...” Again, I would have expected this to make front-page news.

But, I’m forgetting, Lazare is in the States, so has he seen this story on the front page of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*? Has it been the top story on NBC and Fox News? Strange that it did not make its way to the UK with the same oomph.

By the by, have there been any other important political developments since the war began? I suppose it depends on what you mean by “political”, as opposed to repeated episodes of mass murder. The election of Donald Trump might count as “important”, and the cutting off from Gaza of aid, food, water, power, medication, etc might be “political”!

Anyway, apparently the destruction of Gaza and so many innocent men, women and children was the fault of Hamas. Was the Bund then responsible for the crushing of the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943?

Indeed, Lazare implies that nobody should stand up to oppressors - they’ll only make it worse. Much better to endure and, as he says, “Like most people on earth, they want peace, work and democracy and are therefore sick and tired of a party that stands for the opposite.” Are you sure, Dan, that they’re not sick and tired of Zionism?

Jim Nelson  
email

Defend Wrack

NASUWT, the teachers’ union, the sixth largest union in the TUC, is in difficulties over its appointment of Matt Wrack - former general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union and TUC president - as its general secretary.

Having announced that Wrack was elected unopposed, the union has been taken to court by one of its own

staff, Neil Butler, who was blocked from seeking nominations on the grounds that he is not a member of the union. There is a clear hypocrisy here, in that the executive’s chosen candidate, Wrack, is not only not a member of the union, but also not a member of the industry he would now be representing. The union has capitulated (paying a substantial amount in costs) and branches now have until May 26 to nominate general secretary candidates. Butler, or anyone else, will need 25 nominations and meanwhile Wrack is left as acting general secretary.

There is a bit of momentum building against him, but it is worth interrogating the different places this is coming from and the politics involved. Partly the reaction is a natural response of grassroots members of “the teachers’ union” to the appointment of someone who is very clearly not a teacher. Following the 2017 amalgamation of their rivals - the National Union of Teachers and Association of Teachers and Lecturers - to form the National Education Union, NASUWT reacted by rebranding themselves “the teachers’ union” (laughably instructing every speaker of theirs at TUC events to begin every speech with ‘Joe Bloggs, NASUWT, the teachers’ union’) as an attempt to counter the industrial unionist approach of the NEU.

NASUWT members understandably vented anger on social media at the idea that a former firefighter should be appointed general secretary without an election. Some other attacks were predictable and, despite their origin, quite on the nose. Paul Embery, embittered former comrade of Wrack, took great joy in quoting Wrack himself from 2017:

“I hear people who are described as officials of unions. To me an official of a union is someone who’s been elected by workers to represent them, not someone who’s got a job as a researcher or policy or whatever. In my union, all our officials, the people we call officials, are elected; we employ members of staff, and I have a great deal of respect for them, but we wouldn’t call them officials of the union. *That’s one of our strengths - everyone has come through the industry, everyone has been a firefighter, or worked in the fire service*” (emphasis added).

It is hard to say there is no hypocrisy involved here from comrade Wrack, and even harder to defend the undemocratic process by which he was initially appointed. However, I have yet to see an NASUWT member raise the issue the mainstream media is most concerned about. *The Guardian* kicked off the smears on April 12, and was swiftly followed by the likes of the *Jewish Chronicle* and the *Daily Mail*. The issue? Summed up by *The Guardian* as “Jewish leaders say Wrack downplayed reports of anti-Semitism within Labour” as “the so-called furore about so-called anti-Semitism”, framing it as “an attempt to undermine Corbyn as leader”. Surely in 2025 the only qualification to recognise that the anti-Semitism ‘scandal’ in Corbyn’s Labour Party was an attempt to undermine the leader would be to be resident on planet Earth, so undeniable is it.

Ultimately members should run trade unions, not appointed leaders, no matter how good their politics - but certainly not Tory MPs or the courts. Communists should defend Matt Wrack against these ruling class smears, and recognise that the demonstrable fear of teacher union unity (on industrial and political issues) is a positive reflection of the influence this section of the class has on the wider struggle. We should also fight for democracy in our unions and unity between them.

Sean Carter  
London

ACTION

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](http://www.facebook.com/events/1572236653477897).

Manchester May Day festival

**Monday May 5, 3pm:** March, followed by music, speeches and food. Assemble at St Peters Square, Manchester M1, then march to Niamos Centre, Chichester Road, Hulme M15. Speakers from trade unions, community groups and international campaigns. Organised by Manchester Trades Union Council: [www.facebook.com/events/3175512045932036](http://www.facebook.com/events/3175512045932036).

What it means to be human

**Tuesday May 6, 6.30pm:** Series of talks on social and biological anthropology. This talk is online only, via Zoom: ‘Romani and Egyptians in Albania’s informal recycling economy’. Speaker: Arba Bekteshi. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/1881787289248052](http://www.facebook.com/events/1881787289248052).

Protest at Barclays AGM

**Wednesday May 7, 9.45am:** Protest, QEII Centre, Broad Sanctuary, London SW1. Barclays bankrolls the genocide in Palestine. They invest over £2 billion in arms companies supplying Israel. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events/protest-at-barclays-agm-2](http://palestinecampaign.org/events/protest-at-barclays-agm-2).

Stop Labour’s welfare cuts

**Wednesday May 7, 6.30pm:** Protest, Lewisham Town Hall, Catford Road, London SE6. Lobby Labour councillors to oppose cuts to PIP payments, carer’s allowances, universal credit and other disability benefits - welfare not warfare. Organised by South East London People’s Assembly: [x.com/PeoplesSELondon/status/1915695194030145553](http://x.com/PeoplesSELondon/status/1915695194030145553).

From birth to liquidation: CPGB 1920-1992

**Thursday May 8, 6.30pm:** Online session in the series, ‘Our history’. A debate between Lawrence Parker and Jack Conrad. Organised by Why Marx?: [www.whymarx.com/sessions](http://www.whymarx.com/sessions).

Reading War and peace on VE Day

**Thursday May 8, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: [x.com/CCSoc/status/1905323329264726295](http://x.com/CCSoc/status/1905323329264726295).

With banners held high

**Saturday May 10, 10.45am:** March and labour movement festival. Assemble Smyth Street, Wakefield WF1. A full day of trade union and community festival activities, now indoors at Wakefield Exchange. Organised by With Banners Held High: [www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10235883290924275](http://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10235883290924275).

Protect education now

**Saturday May 10, 1pm:** National march and rally for UCU members and supporters. Assemble at Bessborough Gardens, London SW1, then march to Old Palace Yard, Westminster. Post-16 education in crisis. Fight back against cuts, attacks in the media, financial mismanagement and the erosion of professional pride. Organised by University and College Union: [www.ucu.org.uk/2025rally](http://www.ucu.org.uk/2025rally).

Stopping the arms fair

**Saturday May 10, 2pm:** Planning workshop, Dalston Solidarity Café, Halkevi, 31 Dalston Lane, London E8. Learn about resistance to the DESI arms fair, scheduled for September at the ExCel centre. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: [caat.org.uk/events/dsc-staf-caat-workshop](http://caat.org.uk/events/dsc-staf-caat-workshop).

Nakba Day workplace action for Palestine

**Thursday May 15:** Nationwide actions in solidarity with Palestinian workers. Demand an end to government and corporate complicity in Israel’s atrocities. Demand an immediate ceasefire, end arms sales to Israel, support BDS and free Palestine. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events](http://palestinecampaign.org/events).

Which communism?

**Thursday May 15, 7pm:** Online book event. David Camfield discusses his new book, *Red flags: a reckoning with communism for the future of the left*. He explores societies such as the USSR, China and Cuba and argues they were never in transition to communism. Organised by Manchester RS21: [revsoc21.uk/events](http://revsoc21.uk/events).

Nakba 77: free Palestine, end the genocide

**Saturday May 17, 12 noon:** National demonstration. Assemble at Embankment tube, London WC2. Commemorating the 1948 Nakba expulsion of Palestinians. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [stopwar.org.uk/events/national-demonstration-for-palestine-nakba-77](http://stopwar.org.uk/events/national-demonstration-for-palestine-nakba-77).

Disclosure: unravelling the spycops files

**Friday May 30, 7pm:** Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Kate Wilson introduces her account of police infiltration of activist groups, including sexual relationships and spying without warrant on hundreds of innocent civilians. Then the 20-year struggle to uncover the truth. Tickets £4 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: [housmans.com/events](http://housmans.com/events).

Bargain books

**Saturday June 7, 11am:** Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Get your hands on Marxist classics and rare pamphlets. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/497](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/497).

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.



## TECHNOLOGY

# State-of-the-art genocide

The revelation of Microsoft's complicity in Israel's Gaza massacre is merely the latest evidence that big tech is entirely dependent on the state, argues **Paul Demarty**

**E**arlier this month, Microsoft held a grand old birthday bash for itself - it is now 50 years since the IT behemoth was founded as a scrappy startup.

The endless self-congratulation was briefly interrupted, however, when an employee began loudly heckling the company's AI chief; later on, a similar stunt was pulled during a cosy roundtable discussion between current and past CEOs Satya Nadella, Steve Ballmer, and Bill Gates. (Gates's philanthropy is famous, but Ballmer has made his own generous donations - to the Jewish National Fund.) The grievance of these brave staffers? The extensive use of Microsoft's technology by the Israeli state in its military operations. Hundreds of MS employees have organised to put internal pressure on executives to wash their hands of this particular customer; several have been fired. We expect the protestors of April 4 - Vaniya Agrawal and Ibtihal Aboussad - to join that list, if they have not already.

Microsoft is not the only cloud giant to profit from the suffering of Palestinians. Its main rival, Amazon Web Services, and Google's less successful Cloud Platform, also provide extensive services to the Israeli war machine. Off-the-peg AI is used to identify 'terrorists' under programmes with charming names like 'Where's Daddy?' - a task to which the AI brings the accuracy and precision we have all gotten used to.

The story of the Microsoft protestors is all too familiar. According to a recent interview, courtesy of the *New Arab*, their efforts date back to 2023, unsurprisingly, during which time they have assembled petitions, raised awkward questions at company events, and engaged in physical acts of protest. The company has mostly responded by quietly stonewalling them - petitions are met with the 'We see you, we feel you' kind of verbiage that indicates a desire to be seen to take something seriously, when one has no intention of actually doing anything about it. Questions on Palestine are quietly edited out of 'ask me anything' events with executives. Public acts of protest result in dismissal.<sup>1</sup>

## Money and power

People with long memories may recall similar ructions at the various cloud companies during the first term of Donald Trump, which had a strongly radicalising effect on the middle class professionals who staff these great corporations. The 'Great Awakening' has become the butt of many jokes - I have made fun of it many times myself - but there were always extremely serious issues involved (the silliness was more in the methods than the motives). In one salutary example, back in 2019, Google employees attempted to warn their bosses off competing for a major contract with the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. ICE's recent record of chilling thuggery is a timely reminder of why the agency was so despised among liberal tech workers. Google made the *pro forma* emollient noises, and ploughed on regardless.

To ask *why* is to invite one blindingly obvious answer: money. These are publicly traded companies,



Israeli war machine

who do quite genuinely compete with each other for big contracts - among them naturally government contracts - in order to generate returns for their shareholders. Google was more vulnerable here, its cloud business distantly trailing those of Microsoft and Amazon. It was particularly unable to withdraw from the tender process. Yet, despite the best efforts of Elon Musk, the US budget is a staggeringly enormous pile of money for these oligarchs to fight over. Yes, Google adopted the motto, "Don't be evil" - because they thought it would help them make money. They quietly dropped it at around this time. Fancy that ...

There is a little more to it than money, however, which is illustrated better by the Israeli connection. After all, big American companies can only be expected to compete for American government contracts. Why *Israel*?

Sure, the state of Israel has plenty of money to throw around itself. Yet it is hardly unique in that respect. It has favoured status as a buyer precisely because it is a strategic ally of great importance to the United States. The fact that the cloud hyperscalers are up to their necks in Palestinian blood indicates their *dependence* on the American state, and especially the *military* state, which plays out in part through the close integration of the tech industries of America and its most belligerent ally.

The link between tech and the military is well-established and quite old - indeed, it predates the modern computing era entirely. Military need, particularly since the era of totally-mobilised modern warfare, has always been a driver of technological innovation in the wider economy. The *retreat* of the American state from such total mobilisation, during and after the cold war, has if anything deepened this relationship. Fighting wars mostly from the air places a huge premium on intelligence - on knowing where to drop the bombs. That may be a matter of spy-planes and satellite photos, or it may come from signals intelligence; and so on, through the vast surveillance

apparatuses run by governments and contractors like Palantir, to suicide drones and all the rest.

The internet itself is a strange by-product, having first been created by the defence department in the late 1960s. Though its importance for human civilisation has vastly outstripped its limited initial application of maintaining lines of communication during a nuclear exchange, it remains under the control of the US for practical purposes, and is an instrument of both soft and hard power in that respect.

## Unit 8200

The Israeli state has moved in a similar direction, seeking to protect itself from engagements where significant casualties are expected - since especially their bruising encounter with a well-entrenched Hezbollah in 2006. That was also the year that Hamas took power in Gaza, and between then and 2023, Israel's general approach to the Strip was to wall its inhabitants in, develop an army of informants by means of blackmail, and subject the population to constant and intolerable surveillance. The *status quo* was punctuated by occasional episodes of punishment bombing - a practice known to the Israel Defence Forces brass as "mowing the lawn".

In this period, Israel's tech industry thrived, particular in the general area of military and surveillance technology. The line between the state and private industry is, to put it mildly, blurry. There is the particular case of the IDF's Unit 8200 - an intelligence unit that mostly recruits the very young and very bright, as the time comes for their military service. Alumni of the unit then move into private industry, many presumably retaining close relationships with their old colleagues. Companies founded by Unit 8200 people include Waze, the GPS service acquired by Google, and NSO, which created the infamous Pegasus spyware.

Google has only recently dipped into this pool again, acquiring Wiz

- a well-established cybersecurity firm, whose founders, again, hail from Unit 8200. Concerns may legitimately be raised about the likelihood that Google has thereby gained a bunch of senior executives who are plausibly Israeli spies; but, of course, that was probably true anyway. The utility of Israel to the US leads to a remarkable level of tolerance of such espionage, and foreign agents of multiple countries are probably endemic at the tech giants.

One case we know of concerns not Israel, but Saudi Arabia. In 2022, A Saudi national by the name of Ahmad Abouammo was convicted as an unregistered foreign agent for using his employment at Twitter to funnel information to the Saudi state. He was caught after he was paid for services rendered with the gift of a \$50,000 watch, which he attempted to sell on Craigslist - presumably Israeli cybersecurity boffins have better brains for opsec (and, in any case, they seem all but exempted from the Foreign Agents Registration Act).

## Dissonance

As I have noted before, this strong dependency of the tech industry on the state presents an odd contradiction to that industry's elite. Their self-image is of brave pioneers out on the frontier - not imprisoned by the stolid certainties of the old elite. They are great men of destiny, who will turn empty lands into a new world in their own image (and at least the internet, unlike the American continent, *really was* empty). Elon Musk wants to colonise Mars - whether Jeff Bezos has such grandiose aims for his own space programme remains unclear. Several Silicon Valley oligarchs are captivated by the idea of a 'network state' - a great secession from the prevailing regime; they want to coin their own money in the form of cryptocurrencies; and so on.

Yet a cold, hard look at the business interests of these men belies their self-conception. All of Musk's businesses - above all the space programme - are utterly

dependent on state largesse of different types. Cryptocurrencies have never amounted to anything more than asset bubbles, and never will. The real money is denominated in dollars.

It has become common to describe these men as oligarchs, but in fact this is misleading for the same reason the phrase, 'Russian oligarch', has been since Vladimir Putin's purge of the post-Soviet *nouveaux riches*. They are suffered to maintain their fortunes, so long as they are useful - so long as they kiss the ring when required. This does not seem to bother Jeff Bezos terribly much, but the cognitive dissonance seems to have driven Musk raving mad. He is the closest thing to a true oligarch, having taken on a government position as reward for his ample financial backing for Trump's re-election and waged all-out war on the administrative state; but it is starting to look like the administrative state has won. You cannot buck the market, goes the old saw, but the market cannot buck the state either.

Of course, the fact that the core repressive and military activities of the state are conducted via favoured partners in private industry has its effects on the host organism as well. What results is a system of quite staggering and brazen corruption. It need not be very grand-scale to catch the eye. Over several years, a Malaysian contractor by the name of Leonard Glenn Francis - better known as 'Fat Leonard' - systematically bribed US Navy officers in the Pacific to obtain classified information about ship movements, which information he then used to drive business to his firm. The bribes added up to a cool \$500,000 in cash, plus gifts in kind of the usual sort (wild parties, prostitutes, and so forth); after years of lethargy, the US finally prosecuted a few dozen people for their role in what is, in principle, a catastrophic security breach. (It seems never to have occurred to 'Fat Leonard' to sell the secrets to the Chinese: why kill the goose that lays the golden eggs?)

Compare Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency people, who - during their campaign against "government waste" - attempted to sneak a nine-figure contract for armoured Tesla vehicles into the budget. Musk was found out, because he is an idiot; but the amount of money sloshing around here all but ensures a bonanza for those on the take. It is 'Fat Leonards' all the way down. In return, what do the governments get? Many things: indulgence from the investor class, for giving them their percentage, for one. But another thing is deniability - responsibility for disasters can be offloaded.

Which returns us to Israel, and its 'AI-targeted' murders: what better excuse for 'accidentally' reducing a hospital to brick-dust or starving a thousand children to death than to point at a computer and blame it? Everything must be kept at arm's length; by such a conjurer's trick, everything is permissible ●

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## Notes

1. [www.newarab.com/features/ex-microsoft-employees-expose-companys-role-gaza-genocide](http://www.newarab.com/features/ex-microsoft-employees-expose-companys-role-gaza-genocide).



## ARGENTINA

# No anarcho-capitalist quick-fix

Milei came to power promising to transform the Argentinian economy. He has overseen high unemployment, great poverty levels and the granting of more loans. But, says **Michael Roberts**, the IMF is happy

**O**n April 14, the International Monetary Fund announced that it had agreed to lend Argentina a further \$20 billion (on top of existing loans) to tide over president Javier Milei's government in meeting its debt obligations and restoring its fast-falling foreign exchange reserves.

The deal will release an initial \$12 billion, with \$3 billion more coming later in the year. The government says that it is set to receive \$28 billion in 2025 alone, including the \$15 billion of IMF money, \$6 billion from other multinational lenders, \$2 billion from global banks and \$5 billion from extending a currency swap with China. Milei boasted, "What you'll have is a mountain of dollars" - with a target of doubling gross foreign exchange (FX) reserves to \$50 billion.

With these funds, the government plans to 'free' the Argentine peso from controls and allow it to float freely within a moving band. The aim is expand the current band by 1% each month. The government and the IMF claim that this will eventually achieve a "fully flexible exchange rate in the context of a bi-monetary system, where the peso and US dollar coexist". In other words, the financial speculators and investors will believe that the peso was strong enough to be fully convertible to the dollar without having to be devalued.

That has not been possible for decades, because of the huge dollar debts owed by the government and the lack of FX reserves to back the peso. Milei has targeted the year-end for undoing FX controls - or sooner if the IMF speeds up payouts: "The currency controls will no longer exist on January 1 [2026] - maybe sooner," he said. As a result of the news, the 'freed up' official peso rate fell around 9% to 1,170 per US dollar, while, in contrast, the black-market rate strengthened - almost closing the gap between the official and informal rates that had widened sharply in recent years. However, the peso rate against the dollar remains no better than when Milei came to power at the beginning of 2024.

Despite his boast, until the IMF came to the rescue, FX reserves had been dropping fast, with net reserves (ie, after debt obligations and flows) at a negative \$7 billion. That is not far short of the deficit that Milei inherited from the previous Peronist government.

### Photo opportunities

Milei came into office in 2024, with the image of being a 'free-market', libertarian, 'anarcho-capitalist'. He was going to close down the central bank and 'dollarise' the economy and he was going to free up the peso and Argentine industry to market forces. But soon all this anarcho-capitalist talk melted away and instead Milei was forced to adopt the standard neoliberal economic package for an emerging economy in debt distress and with hyperinflation: namely vicious cuts in public spending and services, alongside incentives to big business and foreign investors - and, of course, the backing of yet another IMF package. Milei wielded a chainsaw to both public-sector and private-sector jobs and in just a few months under his presidency, Argentina was facing the same job losses seen over the four years under



Musk, Milei and his chainsaw

the previous rightwing president, Mauricio Macri.

The IMF under managing director Kristalina Georgieva has been suitably impressed, holding lots of photo opportunities with Milei and stating, "The country appears closer to a semblance of macroeconomic stability than at any point since the 2000s." What the IMF likes is that Milei is committed to a 'net zero' government budget. Having cut through public services and sacked thousands of government workers (while raising employee social security contributions), the government aims for a surplus in the budget (before interest payments) and an overall balance in 2025. It will go on squeezing government spending and raising taxes to run surpluses in future years - similar to the fiscal austerity programme that the EU 'Troika' imposed on Greece 10 years ago to pay back its loans (it is still paying them!), but this time with the enthusiastic support of the incumbent government.

In 2018, the IMF approved a \$57 billion loan to the rightwing Macri government - its largest ever to a single country - nearly \$45 billion of which was disbursed.<sup>1</sup> Most of this just financed capital flight of around \$24 billion by 'carry-trade' speculators: ie, those using the funds to buy foreign bonds. The rest was used to amortise roughly \$21 billion in unpayable sovereign bonds - debt that eventually had to be 'restructured' in 2020.

Now the IMF is loaning yet more money, violating its own lending rules. That is because, unlike in 2018, Argentina now has a law - passed almost unanimously by both houses of Congress in 2021 - requiring congressional approval for any IMF financing programme, with the aim of preventing future governments from borrowing massively in foreign currency without proper legislative oversight.<sup>2</sup> But the Milei government has bypassed the law by issuing a 'Decree of Necessity and Urgency' - the Argentine equivalent of Trump's emergency executive orders - to avoid Senate approval altogether.

And the IMF is happy to go along with this. That is because it wants the Milei government to survive the mid-term Congressional elections by being able to show that inflation has come down, the economy is booming and the peso is stable. As the IMF says in its report, this will be possible, given "ongoing spending discipline, efficiency measures, and well-sequenced reforms of the tax, revenue sharing, and pension systems". What is more, by

building on the impressive ongoing efforts to deregulate the economy, the programme seeks to deepen structural reforms to boost Argentina's growth, including via its vast potential in energy and mining. Efforts will focus on further (i) strengthening product and labour market flexibility, and gradually opening the economy; (ii) improving state efficiency and its regulatory predictability; and (iii) enhancing governance and transparency, including by further aligning anti-corruption and AML/CFT ['anti-money laundering' and 'combating the financing of terrorism'] frameworks with international standards.

It is true that inflation has fallen back from astronomical levels. That has been achieved by slashing government spending and holding the peso artificially above its real rate to the dollar, thus making imports cheaper. In effect, hyperinflation has been replaced by a major slump.

The inflation rate has fallen from 300% a year to around 50% (still high). But that has meant a rise in real wages in the last half of 2024, taking the average back to the end of 2023. But during the whole of 2024, average real wages still fell 12% and public-sector workers took a hit of 20%, with 30% for informal workers without rights. The rise since mid-2024 is entirely due to improved incomes for informal workers in the private sector; public-sector waged

workers are still down 20%, while for private-sector workers it is 5% - but all workers are still worse off than at the beginning of 2023.

### Poverty

During the Milei-induced slump of 2024, the official poverty rate hit a record 51%. That has now dropped to 38%, due to a combination of the fall in inflation, the relative rise in informal wages, extra benefits in the universal child allowance and food support to cover inflation, aimed mainly at poor children and mothers. Without that, the World Bank reckons extreme poverty might have been 20% higher. Even so, the poverty rate is still as high as when Milei came to power.

Two-thirds of Argentine children under the age of 14 are living in poverty. Multidimensional poverty (measured as income, plus lack of access to key welfare factors) increased inter-annually from 39.8% to 41.6%, and within that figure structural poverty rose from 22.4% to 23.9%. In sum, 25%-40% of Argentine families are in deep poverty. And there has been a further increase in inequality. The top 10% of income earners now earn 23 times more than the poorest decile, compared to 19 times a year ago. The fall in income reached 33.5% year-on-year in real terms among the poorest decile, but only 20.2% among the richest. The Gini inequality index has hit an all-time high of 0.47.

But from here, Milei and the IMF are full of optimism. According to the IMF, real GDP growth is expected to expand by about 5.5% this year, and converge to about three percent over the medium term. But after the slump of 2024, such a rise in 2025 would only take per-capita GDP back to the level of 2021, when the economy was emerging from the pandemic. And indeed the per-capita GDP index would still be well below its peak of 2011, some 15 years later.

Inflation is expected to fall to around 18%-23% in 2025 and reach single digits by 2027 - as long as there is "a strict adherence to the

fiscal anchor, along with a more robust monetary/FX regime with greater exchange rate flexibility to address shocks and strengthen aggregate demand management"<sup>3</sup>. In other words, indefinite austerity.

Martin Guzman, a former economy minister with the Peronist bloc, said that the risk of a new IMF deal was that the funds would simply be used to "firefight" the slide in the peso, eventually leading to greater debt loads: "The positive aspect of a new agreement would be the refinancing of the IMF debt, which begins to mature in September 2026. The negative aspect is more debt."<sup>4</sup> Contrary to Milei's boast, Guzman reckoned that it was "highly unlikely" currency controls would be lifted soon, because it would allow global firms to flee an estimated \$9 billion that had been stuck in the country, pressuring the exchange rate down and inflation up.

The key to economic success in Argentina, as it is in all economies, is an increase in the productivity of labour through more investment in the productive sectors of the economy. All the previous IMF loans ended up being smuggled or invested abroad or used for financial speculation. Neither rightwing nor Peronist governments did anything to stop this speculative robbery of the Argentine people and resources.

There are only two major economic sectors that have flourished under Milei - finance and mining. They provide little in the way of tax revenue and employ relatively few workers (4% of the total). By contrast, the three major sectors that are still deep in recession are construction, industry and commerce, which account for almost half (44.5%) of the job market. Argentina's biggest export sector and source of foreign exchange is agricultural products and this sector is suffering a wave of debt defaults.

Argentina could possibly get out of its mess if there were a boom in commodity prices, as there was in the early 2000s. The country is the world's largest exporter of soya bean oil and meal, the number two exporter of corn and the third biggest exporter of soya beans (although, for now, soya bean and corn prices are not very buoyant). Argentina has the world's third-largest lithium reserves, making it a key player in the global energy transition. However, lithium prices have dived recently. Argentina also has considerable reserves of shale gas. The Vaca Muerta oilfield is one of the world's largest unconventional hydrocarbon resources, with an estimated 16 billion barrels of oil and 308 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and just coming on tap. But oil prices have fallen.

And Trump's 10% tariff hike on all US imports will just add to Argentina's export woes ●

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### Notes

1. www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/imf-throws-argentina-a-57-billion-lifeline.
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## ASSESSMENT

# Following the sign of the zigzag

Peter Taaffe died on April 23 2025. While there can be no doubt about his dedication to what he understood by socialism, there was little or nothing consistent, when it came to his strategic ideas. In many ways, argues **Jack Conrad**, he embodied all that is wrong with today's confessional sects

**B**orn to working class parents in 1942 Birkenhead, Peter Taaffe instinctively gravitated towards leftwing politics as a teenager. Having joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, he soon found himself in the Labour Party. Here he discovered Trotskyism in all its myriad varieties.

Initially, Taaffe hit upon the Socialist Labour League led by Gerry Healy. Understandably he liked neither the man, nor the politics, nor the internal regime. There were not a few other organisations to choose from, but, with Ted Grant and his Revolutionary Socialist League, Taaffe found what he was looking for (the RSL originated in the Revolutionary Communist Party, which broke apart in 1949-50 and was one of the many splits from the so-called Fourth International, then dominated by the likes of Michael Pablo, Ernest Mandel, James Cannon and Pierre Frank).

Taaffe seems to have joined the RSL in 1960. He proved to be a dedicated and tireless worker. Grant provided what he grandly called the intellectual 'unbroken thread' with Leon Trotsky and, going back before him, to Vladimir Illich Ulyanov. Taaffe, however, turned Grant's ideas into a real organisational force. He, was, with good reason, described, as a "brilliant young fellow" by John Baird, a prominent Labour MP and future cabinet minister.<sup>1</sup>

His comrades say that he had, and never lost, the common touch. A valuable asset. Taaffe could talk to so-called ordinary people in ordinary language about any subject from socialism ... but especially to soccer (he was a keen Everton fan).

He could talk to the elite too. In 2012 Taaffe was amongst the speakers at the Oxford Union debating the motion, 'This house believes that capitalism has failed the poor'. The other speakers supporting the motion were Sir Ronald Cohen, a self-confessed venture capitalist, Michael Brindle QC and a student, Scott Ralston. Each made telling points about various aspects of capitalism's failures. They wanted, however, to make capitalism work more humanely.

But, of course, Taaffe argued that capitalism had not only failed the poor. It had to be replaced by a socialist system. Amazingly, the motion won the day.<sup>2</sup>

## Clear field

The Grantites found themselves with a clear field in the Labour Party Young Socialists. Formed in 1965, replacing the Young Socialists, by 1967 the Militant Tendency, as it became known, was more or less the sole Trotskyite show in town.

Incidentally the Labour Party bureaucracy has repeatedly closed its youth organisation, following what it regarded as hostile takeovers: 1936, 1940, 1955 and 1964. However, craving respectability, the 'official communists', at some point in time (I do not know quite when), rejected the previous policy of keeping recruits within the Labour Party and its youth organisations.

The growing tide of radicalism in the 1960s found its main expression outside the Labour Party. We are talking about the anti-Vietnam war protests, anti-apartheid, student occupations, women's liberation, youth counterculture, shop steward networks, mass strikes against government attempts to curb trade



**Never lost the common touch**

union power, etc. The Labour Party, with its endless points of order and labyrinthine rules, was off-putting for the majority of those impatient for sweeping change, that is for sure.

The Healyites, the Mandelites, the Cliffites *et al* found themselves either proscribed or doing far better outside the committee rooms, when it came to gaining recruits. But not the Grantites. They stayed put ... and without serious competition they too grew.

In 1964, at the prompting of Sinna Mani, a former member of Healy's SLL, Grant agreed to the launch of *Militant* as a monthly for "Labour and socialist youth". The first issue came out in October, just days before the general election and featured the headline, "Drive out the Tories - but Labour must have socialist policies". The editor ... a young, ready and eager Peter Taaffe.

True, he appears to have had no direct oversight of the first few editions. Arguably that explains why his name was misspelt (with only one 'f'). *Militant* was apparently "effectively edited" by Mani, who also served as business manager for a short while.<sup>3</sup> He, along with Roger Protz, encouraged different viewpoints and even commissioned articles on mods and rockers, the Beatles and other such high-profile cultural matters of the day.

Either way, the idea of Harold Wilson's Labour Party adopting "socialist policies" was hard to swallow. Yes, compared with today's Labour Party, the 1964 election manifesto was wildly leftist, but that is not saying much.

When I came across *Militant* in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a young member of the Young Communist League (and, unique to my home town, a joint member of the Labour Party Young Socialists), the paper circulated pretty widely, but was, like most left papers then, and today, excruciatingly boring.

These were, remember, the heady days of the so-called underground press, with all sorts of design innovations, psychedelia, *avant-garde* poetry and established norms and moral boundaries being

challenged and crossed (along with plenty of state and rightwing pushback).

*Militant* was - how should we put it? - well, it was journalistically, politically and theoretically unimaginative, stolid, conservative ... in a word, it was economistic to the point of chemical purity. It shunned women's liberation, the alternative music scene, critical sports commentary, the environment and wanted nothing to do with illegal drug use, let alone bourgeois perversions such as homosexuality. Nor did it take anything but a hostile view of the IRA struggle for Irish reunification. Everything would be put to rights under socialism.

Meanwhile, there was the demand to nationalise the top x, y or z monopolies, electing a Labour government and celebrating the achievements of the Soviet Union and the so-called deformed workers' states ... including Ba'athist Syria. Sputniks, rockets to the moon, economic dynamism, free education and cheap transport, "provides glaring proof of the decadence and impotence of capitalism in our era".<sup>4</sup>

## Deep entry

During the 1950s more or less the whole gamut of Trotskyism was committed to what they call 'entry'. Basically that meant going into the Labour Party as a small group and then, after a relatively short time, coming out as a slightly bigger group. That could be excused as a tactic - it was recommended by Leon Trotsky in the mid-1930s. Grant, however, not only considered it a "correct tactic" in the 1930s: he went further with the idea of "total" or "deep entry".<sup>5</sup> This meant a small group going into the Labour Party and staying in with the intention of transforming the host body. Taaffe thoroughly internalised "deep entryism" ... well, till the 1990s.

Lenin, of course, famously sided with those who called for the newly formed CPGB to seek affiliation to the Labour Party: a party of the Second International, from which he was doing his utmost to lever away the communist and revolutionary

forces in order to win them to the banner of the Third International.

There is, though, a world of difference between Lenin's affiliation tactic and deep entryism. Wanting the CPGB to affiliate to the Labour Party did not mean fostering illusions. 'Deep entry' does ... if the entryist adapts politically to the host.

Lenin called Labour a "bourgeois workers' party", which "exists to systematically dupe the workers".<sup>6</sup> However, given the small size of the CPGB and the strength of Labourism, it was vital to open up an active dialogue within the working class between the advanced, communist minority and the Labourite majority. If the CPGB was unable to do this and establish close links with the mass of workers, "then it is not a party, and is worthless in general" (Lenin).<sup>7</sup>

What made the 'British exceptionalist' affiliation tactic viable was Labour's federal structure. Before 1918 it was not a party in any full sense of the term; membership came through its affiliated trade unions or cooperative or socialist societies. After 1918, the Labour Party rules made provision for individual membership.

As far as Lenin was concerned, CPGB affiliation to the Labour Party would give the communists a far wider audience; indeed affiliation could only have been the result of successful communist mass work in the trade unions and Labour Party wards and constituencies. On the other hand, if the CPGB was turned down, Lenin said that "we shall gain more, for we shall at once have shown the masses that [the Labour Party leaders - JC] prefer their close relations with the capitalists to the unity of all the workers".

The affiliation tactic demanded, as a matter of elementary principle, that the CPGB would have "full freedom of criticism" and be "able to conduct its own policy". The CPGB would openly declare it would support the Labour Party leadership like a "rope supports a hanged man".<sup>8</sup>

*Militant* Tendency, at least in private, liked to draw a direct correspondence between Lenin's 1920 tactic and its strategy of deep entryism. It circulated Grant's 1959 *Problems of entryism*<sup>9</sup> to new recruits, but in public its members behaved like chameleons, taking on the colours of left reformism. In point of fact, deep entryism was extended internationally to the parties of social democracy - and even to out-and-out bourgeois parties: eg, the Pakistan People's Party.

What passed for programme was written by Taaffe himself. *Militant*: what we stand for is a slightly more left, but also more Labourite, version of the 'official' CPGB's *British road to socialism* programme (for my 1991 critique see *Which road?*<sup>10</sup>).

Its socialism would result from an enabling act passed through the House of Commons by a Labour majority. The monarchy, the Lords, MI5, the army, the courts, etc are all easily overcome and Britain thereby becomes a shining beacon of progress and prosperity that people abroad will admire, envy and rush to emulate. Blockade, sanctions, counterrevolutionary civil war - all of that is brushed aside with hardly a thought.

To justify this touching perspective, Taaffe had to concoct and dissemble. For example, the treachery, strikebreaking and

imperialist warmongering of the Labour Party, the reason why it has historically operated as a "second eleven of capitalism", was, according to Taaffe, because the right wing had "infiltrated the labour movement". And Militant Tendency alone represented the continuation of an original Marxist strand in the Labour Party. "Marxism", maintained Taaffe, "has always been part, and an important part at that, of the Labour Party right from its inception".<sup>11</sup>

Obviously, Taaffe was attempting to turn the rhetorical tables on the right. Fair enough. But it made bad history, which, when all is said and done, amounts to a gross distortion of the facts. Neither the implication that Militant Tendency somehow dates back to the origins of the Labour Party nor the idea that the Labour Party has some sort of Marxist ancestry (if not from both parents, then at least from one) stands up to serious examination.

When the Labour Party was established in 1900, it is true that the Social Democratic Federation counted as an affiliate. Two executive committee seats were allocated to it. But the SDF almost instantly walked. Later, in 1916, the British Socialist Party, the organised continuation of the SDF, affiliated and went on to provide the bulk of the newly formed CPGB in 1920. However, its affiliation bid was rejected by one Labour conference after another. More than that, the CPGB was proscribed and individual communists were hounded out and barred from membership by rule.

No, the actual Labour Party was conceived in the bowels of the TUC and became a serious parliamentary force through the recruitment of a bevy of trade union-financed Lib-Lab MPs (ie, in the official lingo, "men sympathetic with the aims and demands of the labour movement"<sup>12</sup>). It was the TUC and Lib-Lab MPs who were the mother and father of Labourism. There was no rightwing "infiltration": the right dominated the Labour Party from the very start.

## Success and failure

Of course, for the Grantites the main focus was the routine of LPYS meetings, LP conferences and directing trade union struggles into the Labour Party. And by 1970 they found their reward by gaining more or less full control over the LPYS.

This gave them a seat on the Labour national executive committee and, with the LPYS acting as a conveyor belt into the Labour Party, greater and greater influence in wards and constituencies followed. Membership grew to the thousands and not only did *Militant* go weekly, feature a red masthead and increase from four, to eight, then 12 and finally, in January 1979, to 16 pages ... there was a sophisticated apparatus with many (perhaps 130) full timers, a print shop and an extensive headquarters - first in Bethnal Green, then Hackney Wick, then Leytonstone. There were too regional offices in Birmingham, Liverpool and Newcastle. The man in charge of the whole operation ... general secretary Peter Taaffe.

Because of its objectively modest, but real, success, Militant Tendency became a favourite target of a frothing, but altogether cynical, rightwing press campaign, designed to weaken Labour's electoral chances. Therefore Militant became a target of the Labour right ... and



therefore the soft left (ie, Michael Foot).

Defiant, Militant Tendency staged the 2,600-strong ‘Fight the Tories, not the Socialists’ rally at Wembley conference centre. And, despite the media baying, the comrades managed to get Pat Wall, Dave Nellist and Terry Fields elected as Labour MPs in 1983 and take the lead, when it came to Liverpool council (Derek Hatton was elected deputy leader). The high point of Militant Tendency’s fortunes.

Liverpool council set a deficit budget, which included declaring 31,000 council workers redundant. The idea was to buy the time needed to negotiate a deal with Margret Thatcher’s government. There was never the intention of sacking anyone. But the tactic backfired spectacularly. Rank-and-file trade unionists rebelled, national officials expressed outrage and Labour Party HQ seized upon it as a stick with which to beat Militant. The stage was set for Labour leader Neil Kinnock to lambast Militant Tendency at the 1985 conference for “the grotesque chaos of a Labour council - a Labour council - hiring taxis to scuttle round a city handing out redundancy notices to its own workers”.<sup>13</sup>

Labour’s NEC suspended Liverpool Labour Party in 1986. Derek Hatton believes that “Peter Taaffe and the rest of Militant” were tactically wrong to “knuckle under” to Kinnock.<sup>14</sup> The witch-hunt was never going to stop with Liverpool. And so it proved.

After a couple of years of internal constitutional wranglings and legal challenges, *Militant*’s five-strong editorial board, including Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe, were expelled. More expulsions inevitably followed. But not that many. Perhaps 200, perhaps a few less. The biggest blow for Militant Tendency was, though, the effective closure of the LPYS as a campaigning organisation in 1987.

## Poll tax

However, a new lease of life came with mass opposition to the poll tax. Imposed in Scotland a year before the rest of the country, with other sections of the left dithering, Militant took the initiative.

A Glasgow conference in April 1988 agreed to non-payment and forming a network of local anti-poll tax unions. Militant’s Tommy Sheridan was the public face. When the poll tax went national, Militant retained its tight organisational grip. Many thousands refused to pay and many were jailed. In May 1990, a riot erupted in Trafalgar Square ... denounced by Militant. Disgracefully there was even talk of naming names. Either way, there can be no doubt that the poll tax was one of the factors contributing to the fall of Margaret Thatcher in November 1990 (the other was, of course, Europe).

Here, though, were the seeds of the coming split between Grant and Taaffe. Grant thought it would be tactically astute to have MPs who supported Militant Tendency pay their poll tax - not so as to avoid prison, but to keep their Labour Party cards (Kinnock had insisted that no Labour MP should defy the law). Taaffe won the argument. How could MPs call upon millions not to pay, when they themselves paid in order to remain in the Parliamentary Labour Party? Terry Fields MP went to prison and was expelled.

Grant was determined to weather the storm. He was convinced that the working class antagonism to capitalism was inevitable (true) and that that antagonism would inevitably find itself channelled into, and expressed by, a Labour Party that would inevitably move more and

more left to the point of revolution (untrue).

He stuck like a limpet to that much quoted line in the *Communist manifesto*: “The communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working class parties”<sup>15</sup> - weirdly interpreted as a timeless instruction issued by Marx and Engels for communists *not* to organise outside the Labour Party. A formulation dumbly repeated by Grant’s present-day successors, Alan Wood and Rob Sewell ... till, that is 2024 and their born-again Revolutionary Communist Party.

Taaffe came round to the view that the time was *overdue* for organising outside the Labour Party. Apparently, he would ask his comrades, “What would Trotsky do in this situation?” He felt Trotsky would have been severely critical of Militant Tendency for not launching an ‘open turn’ at the height of the poll tax movement or even earlier, when it was driven out from the Labour Party in Liverpool (basically Hatton’s position).

Militant fielded Lesley Mahmood against the official Labour candidate, Peter Kilfoyle, in the July 1991 Liverpool Walton by-election. Our position at the time was quite clear. This was more than an internal Labour Party squabble. We opposed those sectarians who called for a ‘plague on both houses’ boycott and the soft left, Trotskyite and Communist Party of Britain and New Communist Party ‘official communists’ who lined up behind the bosses’ second eleven.

Instead we urged all partisans of the working class to support comrade Mahmood: a victory for her would be a “victory for struggle over passivity, a victory for those who call themselves socialists against the explicitly pro-capitalist policies of the Labour Party, a victory of the future over the past.”<sup>16</sup>

Of course, we could not give Mahmood and Liverpool Real Labour anything other than critical support. We wanted to see Mahmood win in order to show those who supported her that we need go further. Unfortunately Mahmood lost ... and lost badly.

Nevertheless, because Militant had broken from its programme, it found itself strategically adrift. Taaffe’s *What we stand for* was useless as any sort of a guide to action now. Some of its leaders wanted to backtrack. They wanted members to keep their heads down in the Labour wards and hope for better times. For them the 2,613 votes in Walton was no “pointer to the future”. Rather it was a dire warning that the whole 40-year deep-entryist project was about to be wrecked. The majority disagreed. They want to generalise from Walton.

Militant’s central committee split 46:3 over the question. In numerical terms a minority of three is nothing. But they were not any old three. They consisted of the grand old man, Ted Grant himself, Rob Sewell, national organiser and Alan Woods, editor of *Militant International Review*. They were prepared to remain silent as long as Walton was a one-off. When it became clear that the majority had no such intention, they went public.

In a document leaked to *The Guardian*, the three made clear their opposition to Militant Tendency’s open turn, describing it as “ultra-left adventurism”.<sup>17</sup> They argued that, with the “active base of the Tendency in Britain and internationally” shrinking, Kinnock’s purge and a general downturn on the left means that there are “objective difficulties” for Militant, that now is the time to retreat not attack.

The argument got bitter and personal too. The minority complained of a “clique” (ie, the

majority headed by Taaffe), operating “outside formal structure of the Tendency”, which has attempted to shield “individuals from criticism” and “gag” dissidents. The majority implied that Grant was getting crusty, if not senile; that, with Labour’s shift to the right, a vacuum existed on the left: “It would be criminal to pass over an immediate opportunity for expansion in order that we may cling to our few remaining points of support within the Labour Party.”<sup>18</sup> Optimism on steroids.

Remember, Taaffe dismissed any notion, any idea of a return of capitalism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as a “chimera”<sup>19</sup>. Even as it was happening, he naively welcomed the prospect of the “red 90s”.<sup>20</sup> Our assessment was rather more realistic and sober-minded. We warned of crashing living standards in the east and the reaction *sui generis* in the west. Capitalism would be triumphant, the working class badly weakened and the idea of socialism consigned to the lunatic fringe ... but the surviving, considerably shrunken, thoroughly disorientated left would likely not suffer harsh repression.<sup>21</sup>

## After Labour

Taaffe took the lead in forming first Militant Labour, then, in 1997, the unfortunately named Socialist Party in England and Wales. He served as general secretary till 2020, before handing over to his chosen heir and successor, Hannah Sell ... so he lives on with her modest talents, a much reduced membership and a weekly paper, *The Socialist*, that makes *Militant* look positively interesting.

Taaffe declared Labour dead for the working class and the struggle for socialism. Under Tony Blair, especially with the dumping of the old Fabian clause four, he insisted that it had morphed into something essentially no different from the US Democrats. In his words, Labour “has been bourgeoisified and is now a capitalist party”.<sup>22</sup>

We actually worked closely with SPEW in the Socialist Alliance. They established it as some sort of loose alternative to Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party. We took the initiative and set up the London Socialist Alliance and it was from this salient that we succeeded in bringing the Socialist Workers Party, then under John Rees, onboard. The Socialist Alliance took off with 98 candidates in the 2001 general election and showed some considerable promise.

As one of the six principal supporting organisations, we envisaged unity in a Socialist Alliance Party based on the solid foundations of a communist programme.<sup>23</sup> Not the SWP, not SPEW. The general election manifesto which they pushed through was entirely within the economic frame - democratic demands hardly featured and the necessity of a revolutionary break with capitalism was glaringly absent.

The SWP hankered after a popular front and soon dumped the SA for Respect. As for SPEW, Taaffe could not live with the SWP’s majority in the SA. Instead of courting allies, upgrading its ideas, fighting to become a majority, SPEW desperately sought excuses to split. Strategically it opted for a Labour Party mark two in the form of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Alliance - a hopeless Labour Party mark two project. Hopeless because the Labour Party mark one still exists, still has a majority of trade unionists affiliated to it and still commands the votes of most class-conscious workers.

Nonetheless, Taaffe found vindication in the Blair, Brown and Miliband leaderships - supposedly fundamentally different to Wilson, Callaghan and Kinnock. But then

the heavens fell in. Jeremy Corbyn surprisingly got onto the leadership ballot and unsurprisingly won by a landslide victory a few months later in September 2015. He got 59.5% of the first-preference votes. Labour membership surged to 550,000 and the bourgeois establishment trembled.

Humbled, humiliated and discombobulated Taaffe eventually felt compelled to write to Labour’s new general secretary, Jennie Formby. His letter, dated April 6 2018, begged for a meeting that would “discuss the possibility of our becoming an affiliate”.<sup>24</sup> As must have been expected, she flatly rebuffed his overtures ... citing Tusc election contests. But had Labour suddenly remorphed into a bourgeois workers’ party? Had Taaffe been wrong in his previous assessment? He never said. What we do know is that he sighed with relief when Formby’s ‘thanks, but no thanks’ reply came through.

Taking SPEW’s membership back into ‘deep entryism’ would have risked losing everything *organisationally*. There would have been resignations and rebellions. Complaints of being taken for a ride. Taaffe bottled it and battened down. SPEW proved itself to be *politically* “worthless in general”.<sup>25</sup> More than a pity.

However, SPEW not only declined to involve itself in the class war being fought over the Corbyn leadership. Effectively it sabotaged our side. Attempts to affiliate, or reaffiliate, trade unions such as RMT, the FBU and PCS found SPEW members arguing for unions to save their money and remain politically independent, so as to pick and choose alternative candidates ... the traditional line of the ‘non-political’ pro-capitalist right. Taaffe must have been responsible. It amounted to scabbing! Not that the SWP was any different. Narrowly conceived sect interests always came first.

The Granites took much pleasure in SPEW’s failure, the failure of Tusc and the failure of the affiliation talks letter. Of course, with the election of Sir Keir Starmer and the witch-hunt reaching new heights, comrades Woods and Sewell took their own ‘open turn’ and soon adopted a Trotskyist form of third-period politics. Out went the old ‘elect Labour on a socialist programme’ Socialist Appeal, in came the new ‘are you a communist’ RCP. Members are now promised the collapse of capitalism and a full-blown revolution within five or six years ... led by the RCP (Labour has completely disappeared from the radar as a site of struggle<sup>26</sup>).

As for Taaffe, freed from the confines of the Labour Party, and without Grant to hold him back, he allowed his members to discard the old workerist certainties and chase after this, that and the other fad. Everything was predicated on organisational growth ... a surefire road to disaster. In Scotland his comrades not only formed the Scottish Socialist Party ... they split and went full left-nationalist. It was essentially the same with #MeToo feminism and the whole rainbow array of identity politics ... Taaffe must have concluded that things were in danger of spiralling out of control.

Eventually this triggered the ruinous schism in the Committee for a Workers’ International (founded in 1974 by Militant and with some 45 national affiliates at peak success). Beginning, in November 2018, with a rather strange dispute on its executive over a phone hacking scandal in the top-heavy Irish section, things quickly went from a crack to a chasm. Within a few days there were proclamations of

“fundamental differences” and the creation of a minority faction headed by Taaffe, the wonderfully named ‘In Defence of a Working Class Trotskyist CWI’ faction. Split produced splits and the splits themselves proceeded to split to the point of atomised sects of threes, twos and ones. Note the fate of Socialist Alternative in the UK.

If truth were told, finding himself in a 23:21 *minority* on the International Executive Committee was completely unacceptable, as far as Taaffe was concerned. Rather than waiting for the CWI’s world congress, due in January 2020, he simply refused to accept the result.

Arguing, rightly, that compared with SPEW, the other sections in this oil slick international amounted to a diddly squat, he proceeded to expel, anathematised and marginalise. True, Russia with its 25 members had two representatives on the IEC. Greece with 302 members had four. Yet SPEW, at the time, claimed a couple of thousand members. It too, however, had four IEC members. But this arrangement was arrived at, in the beginning, with Taaffe’s full blessing, agreement and calculated reckoning.

Clearly he regarded both SPEW and the CWI as his *private* property. A sad coda for his 65 years in organised left politics ●

## Notes

1. M Crick *Militant* London 1984, p45.
2. *The Socialist* February 18 2012.
3. M Crick *Militant* London 1984, p47. Mani went on to be Labour mayor of Lewisham between 1993 and 1994 - after which, in 2001, he joined the Green Party.
4. R Silverman and T Grant *Bureaucratic or workers’ power* London 1982, p27.
5. www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1959/03/entrism.htm.
6. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 31, Moscow 1977, p258.
7. *Ibid* p238.
8. *Ibid* p88.
9. www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1959/03/entrism.htm.
10. J Conrad *Which road* London 1991 - communistparty.co.uk/resources/library/jack-conrad.
11. P Taaffe *Militant: what we stand for* London 1990, p29.
12. ‘Report of the Conference of Labour Representation’ London 1900, p11. These men, writes Ralph Miliband, were “in the main” ... racial Liberals, either explicitly hostile to, or with very little sympathy for socialism in any of its variants” (R Miliband *Parliamentary socialism* Pontypool 2009, p17).
13. D Hatton *Inside left: the story so far ...* London 1988, p102.
14. *Ibid* p173.
15. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 6 New York NY, p497.
16. Provisional Central Committee statement *The Leninist* June 28 1991.
17. *The Guardian* September 3 1991.
18. *The Guardian* September 6 1991.
19. *Militant* July 21 1989.
20. *Militant* January 19 1990.
21. See J Conrad *From October to August* London 1992 - communistparty.co.uk/resources/library/jack-conrad.
22. P Taaffe *Socialism and left unity: a critique of the Socialist Workers Party* London 2008, p42.
23. Our CPGB *Draft programme* - suitably edited naturally.
24. *The Socialist* September 19 2018.
25. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 31, Moscow 1977, p238.
26. Searching the RCP’s website, the *latest* article turning up with a ‘Labour Party’ is written by Rob Sewell ... in July 2021! Here he made this hostage-to-fortune promise: “We will not change our orientation towards the mass organisations, the Labour Party, or the trade unions, in which the class struggle will sooner or later find its expression. Whatever the right wing does, there is no way that Marxism can be separated from the Labour movement. Of course, we will not adopt a sectarian attitude. History is littered with the wreckage of small sectarian groups, who have attempted to mould the workers’ movement around their preconceived plans, and have failed” (‘Marxism, the Labour Party, and the witch-hunt’ *Socialist Appeal* July 23 2021). And yet, scrolling down the main webpage, we find plenty of attacks on Labour, including those equating Labour with Reform and the Tories, and denying that “Labour is a ‘lesser evil’ in upcoming elections” (M Hogan ‘Is Labour any better than Reform and the Tories on migration?’ *The Communist* April 24 2025). So when did the qualitative change happen? When Socialist Appeal, along with Labour Party Marxists and Labour Against the Witchhunt, was proscribed? Hardly credible.



**THESES**

# Communism and trans liberation

Judges at the UK Supreme Court unanimously ruled that a woman is defined by biological sex under equalities law - an integral part of the conservative backlash against trans people. In response **Mike Macnair** was delegated to produce a set of draft theses



**T**he CPGB has agreed that in the light of the continuing witch-hunt against trans people it was desirable that we should adopt theses on communism and trans liberation. The context is *also* the criticisms which have been made of the CPGB for failing to adopt formal positions beyond the sentence in our *Draft programme*, § 3.16 - "Gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, etc have often been scapegoated or persecuted. They are portrayed as threats to timeless religious values, sexual norms and the nuclear family - the basic economic unit of capitalist society" - and comrade Carla Roberts' proposal to amend the *Draft programme*.<sup>1</sup>

The Provisional Central Committee delegated me to produce draft theses on the issue for discussion at the next party aggregate. The draft that follows has not been discussed by the PCC - we decided at our meeting on Sunday April 27 that it would be better to publish my initial draft as soon as possible for open discussion.

These are *draft* theses, I emphasise. There will no doubt be formulations which could be improved or are simply wrong, and gaps which ought to be filled. The draft theses are, however, framed by *intentional* absences. The framework idea is that it is possible to stand unequivocally against the fraudulent rightwing witch-hunt

**Omer Yavin's artwork remembering five young trans people who committed suicide:**  
**Leelah Alcorn**  
**Ash Haffner**  
**Melonie Rose**  
**Zander Mahaffey**  
**Taylor Alesana**

of trans people, and to campaign for the liberation of trans people from their present-day oppression, *without* accepting the framework of 'intersectionalist' tail-endist politics, which necessarily leads to 'Vote Harris, get Trump' and to 'Vote Sturgeon, get the UK Supreme Court's Christianist definition of 'woman'.

Equally, and connected to this, it is not necessary to commit to arguments for the social construction of biology, which logically entail the truth of subjective marginal utility economics (and thus that unemployment is caused by workers' unreasonable refusal to accept below-subsistence wages).

Nor is it necessary to believe that gender non-conformity is *in itself* revolutionary. Nor to commit to the psycho-babble language of 'transphobia' (or homophobia or Islamophobia), which, precisely by their over-psychiatrising character, destroy the space for rational disagreement. Nor to imagine that no platforming 'terfs' is a productive policy ●

## Notes

1. See Brünnhilde Olding's letters (*Weekly Worker* July 25, August 22, September 5, September 26, November 14 2024); Carla Roberts' letter *Weekly Worker* November 7 2024) and her article, 'Two meetings and many possibilities', February 13 2025 ([weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1525/two-meetings-and-many-possibilities](https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1525/two-meetings-and-many-possibilities)).

## I. Witch-hunt

1. Since the later 2010s trans people have been subjected to an accelerating witch-hunt by the conservative right, its media and related political institutions. This witch-hunt is characterised by the systematic, fraudulent exaggeration of the very occasional cases where purported 'transition' is dishonestly used for personal advantage, and of equally rare cases of 'detransitioning' and 'transition regret'.

This method is exactly parallel to the same conservatives' and their media's exaggeration of the numbers

of false rape claims, in order to promote rape impunity by leading jurors to be unduly suspicious of complainants' evidence.

2. This witch-hunt is, in fact, a dishonest 'entering wedge' for the *imposition by law* of the Protestant-fundamentalist and Catholic-integralist doctrine that "male and female created he them" (Genesis 1.17) and the ideas of separate spheres of male and female, and permissible sexual relations to be limited to procreation, that are built on this verse: in fact, *male-supremacist* doctrine.

This is reflected also in the

conservatives' promotion of 'tradwives' and in the Trump administration's (February 2025) support for the Tate brothers being free to travel to the US, while on bail for alleged sexual assaults. In this context, non-conservative feminists who have lent their support to the conservatives' anti-trans witch-hunt play the role merely of useful idiots for Christianist male-supremacism.

3. The witch-hunt against trans people is part of the general turn of the capitalist class away from securing the consent of the lower orders through unity with the upper classes round free trade, liberalism

and anti-discrimination, and towards securing the consent of the lower orders through unity with the upper classes around nation, patriarchal family and tradition. This turn reflects the underlying duality of capitalist politics, in which liberalism grows out of market freedom, conservatism out of the authority relations in the workplace (especially the *small* workplace).

It also reflects the fact that marginal-utility general equilibrium economic theory is merely false in the same way as flat-earthism, with the result that marketisation and financialisation produces for the poor

increased dependence on the family as an economic institution, and on religious charities. And it reflects the consequent failure of liberalism to deliver for broad masses, and hence liberalism's currently declining ability to produce consent. In this aspect it is similar to the 1970s turn to liberalism and anti-discrimination, away from 1950s-60s 'New Deal', social-democrat and Christian-democrat forms of 'managed society', which reflected the declining ability to produce consent of that 1950s-60s regime.

4. In the very short term, the dominant tendency among trans



rights activists made themselves specifically vulnerable to this sort of attack by committing themselves to ‘intersectional’ unity with capitalist liberals, and thereby identifying themselves both with ‘human resource departments’ managerialism, and with free-market financial globalism.

The form of this identification has most visibly two elements: the demand for official recognition as a member of the destination sex/gender, within the implied framework of accepting gender as a strict binary; and no-platforming ‘transphobes’. Behind both lay the anti-materialist theoretical commitment to the social (meaning ideological) construction of gender. This *inherently* implied that both official recognition and the no-platforming of ‘transphobes’ were central tasks for the liberation of trans people; and conversely ones on which there could be a single-issue united front with the liberals and HR managers.

This theoretical commitment also directly counterposed the claims of trans rights activists who pursued this policy to the lived experience of the majority of women, in which the oppression of women is an *embodied* experience inescapably linked to the ways in which the class order exploits human biology. 5. Communists have to fight this witch-hunt. The primary means of doing so has to be the exposure of the fraudulent character of the witch-hunters’ claims. Second, and alongside this, it is necessary to put forward proposals for the liberation of trans people which do not depend on the Eurocommunist delusion that this can be delivered by unity with the liberals on the basis of anti-materialist arguments, for state controls of speech, etc.

## II. Oppression

6. The oppression of trans people is commonly treated as an aspect of the more general oppression of ‘LGBT+’ or ‘queer’ people. The present witch-hunt makes it impossible to approach ‘LGBT+’ as a single, oppressed ‘community’. This is, on the one hand, because the witch-hunt *specifically* targets trans people (and has been supported by some lesbian-separatist feminists). On the other hand, ‘LGBT+’ people do not form a class on which their oppressors are dependent (unlike workers or peasants). The problem of constructing solidarity to defeat the witch-hunt is therefore a problem of constructing solidarity *of the working class as such*, not of constructing solidarity either of trans or of LGBT+ people as a distinct group.

Apart from the current witch-hunt, the oppression of trans people under capitalist rule involves (a) (i) elements which are specific to trans people, and (ii) elements which are common to oppressed groups more generally and in some cases to the ‘undeserving poor’ more generally; and (b) (i) elements which are derived from the specific operations

of the current state order and its political-ideological representatives, and (ii) elements which grow out of capitalism as a class order and as a market order. These differences bear on the appropriate communist policy for the liberation of trans people from this oppression.

7. The core element of the oppression of trans people is the phenomenon displayed as politics in the witch-hunt: the insistence that everyone must be either man or woman, and be publicly identified as such.

This has immediate forms in relation to official documents; but also in the physical built environment, in male-only and female-only public spaces, which are largely an invention of capitalism. One particular instance - the provision of men’s and women’s public toilets - originates as an effort of 19th century conservatives to keep women in the home and continues to discriminate against women by differential provision.

The liberals offered to evade this issue in relation to trans people *as a specific group* (as distinct from both intersex people, and butch lesbians, femme gay men, non-binary people, etc) by offering legal sex change within the framework of the compulsory binary. This project has failed by way of the conservative witch-hunt - but more fundamentally, because of the *underlying ground of the political purchase* of the conservative witch-hunt.

That is, that the *approximate* sex binary has biological grounds in human reproductive biology; its transformation into a fetish (competitive heterosexuality) is given by the market order of relationship formation in capitalism; and capitalism also throws up the radical intensification of the policing operations of the bureaucratic-coercive state. The result is that the narrow version of gender recognition offered by the Gender Recognition Act 2004 and similar legislation is oppressive to trans people by requiring a period of being neither one nor the other (while both the state, and social expectations growing out of competitive heterosexuality, *require* being one or the other); while self-identification versions (as in Theresa May’s proposals and their defeated Scottish version), because they imply both over-claims and extensive policing of speech, *appear as a threat* to the very large majority who remain cis and heterosexual.

8. Immediately linked to this is the difficulty in obtaining gender-affirming care in health systems. This has two aspects. On the one hand, it reflects ideological gatekeeping by doctors and health administrators animated by religious and other forms of conservative politics. This is specific to trans people, but shared in different ways in various aspects of women’s healthcare, and in racism in healthcare.

The second aspect is the *general* problems of access to healthcare,

which reflect the inherent features of market- and insurance-based systems and the general squeeze on public expenditure as affecting public-funding-based systems. Long waits for diagnosis and treatment are common to trans people - and to pretty much everyone in need of treatment except the seriously rich. 9. Gender nonconformity (whether in the form of trans or other forms) is met with discrimination in employment, housing and other services. This is *theoretically* subject to policing by the Equality Act in the UK (different rules apply elsewhere) but actual practical enforcement of anti-discrimination rules is variable, and more available to the small minority who can afford effective legal representation. The phenomenon is, obviously enough, not limited to trans people, but affects also lesbians and gay men, women and ethnic minorities.

In addition, there is a more general issue of the ‘rationing’ of jobs and housing driven by market dynamics. The ‘housing crisis’, meaning *chronic* problems of under-supply of housing driven by landlord and property-speculator interests, is a permanent feature of capitalism - only temporarily alleviated by public housing supply in the 20th century. The tendency of capitalism to produce standing unemployment and precarity of employment was similarly mitigated in the ‘front-line states’ in the cold war period, but has returned with a vengeance.

10. Trans people are subject to direct violence in the form of queer-bashing, up to and including being killed (a prominent recent example is the 2023 killing of Brianna Ghey<sup>1</sup>). The phenomenon is at root driven by the performance of competitive heterosexuality; it affects gay men and lesbians as well as trans people. It is arguable that the same dynamics affect the much more widespread phenomenon of male violence against women, and also non-state racist violence.

In this context, lawyers have constructed a *specific* form of oppression which is the ‘trans panic defence’ or ‘LGBT panic defence’ (once called the ‘gay panic defence’).

11. Trans people are subjected to discriminatory policing. This reflects the general dynamic in which ‘professional’ police forces are dominated by conservatives (a feature of Soviet Russia from the early stages of the rise of Stalinism onwards as well as of capitalist countries generally). The result is that not only trans people, but also women (as in the recent Sarah Everard case<sup>2</sup>), ethnic minorities and the working class more generally, are subject to discriminatory policing.

In this context, a specific form of oppression is that trans men are far more likely to be prosecuted for obtaining sexual relations by fraud (by ‘pretending to be men’) than anyone else is for this offence.

## III. Communism

12. The aim of communism is a society without classes, state or dependence on the family as an economic institution. It is a society whose distributational principle is “From each according to their ability, to each according to their need”, and whose aim is maximising human possibilities - “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” - not to maximise profit or output.

13. Such a society will probably have the resources to enable a ‘full’ biological transition - one which produces self-generated hormones and fertility in the destination gender. Certainly, it will have no need to repress lesser forms of body

modification (note, the *present* size of the global cosmetic surgery and procedures industry is valued at \$69.4 billion).

14. More fundamentally, such a society will have no need to insist that everyone must be either man or woman, and be publicly identified as such.

15. We can no more predict the modes of formation of sexual relationships in fully developed communism than 15th century people could predict the fully-developed competitive sexual marketplace of the later 19th to 21st centuries. (This is not to say that the transition will take 500 years; merely that the *stage of the transition out of capitalism that we are at* is analogous to the stage of the transition out of feudalism that was the European dominance of monarchism after the failure of the Italian city republics and before the Netherlands and Britain showed a better capitalist alternative.) But we can be confident that the competitive sexual marketplace - which is clearly a product of capitalism as such - will wither away, as market relations wither away. With this withering away, so will the dynamics which produce queer-bashing, and so on.

## IV. Immediate

16. Our immediate programme is *working class political rule* over a society which remains class-divided and is still in a contradictory way partially market-based. It is still possible to take important steps to the liberation of trans people at the first stages of such a regime, and to fight for them as immediate demands *before* the overthrow of capitalist political rule.

17. We fight for the immediate abolition of the requirement to state sex on public documents.

18. We fight for an increase in the availability of sex-neutral facilities, moving towards the replacement of single-sex facilities with these on the basis of an increased total number. This applies, for example, both to toilets (which should be WCs with wash basin in the same room, directly accessible from public spaces) and changing rooms (which should be provided as individual rooms accessible from public spaces, not semi-public changing spaces).

In relation to the issue of single-

sex prisons, we stand for the radical reduction of the use of imprisonment as a penalty: prison should be a last resort. The prison regime needs to be radically transformed (*Draft programme*, § 3.16).

19. We fight for the defence, restoration and radical improvement of public healthcare, including gender-affirming care; including public ownership of the pharmaceutical industry, and cancellation of the odious debts incurred by public health services as a result of the financialisation frauds since the 1970s. (More in *Draft programme*, § 3.8.)

We stand for the separation of church and state, and the confiscation of Church of England property (*Draft programme*, § 3.17). The pursuit of Christianist and other conservative policing agendas by doctors and medical administrators (whether in relation to women’s reproductive health issues, or in relation to gender issues) should be treated as gross misconduct.

20. We fight against discrimination against trans people - as against all forms of discrimination - in employment, housing and other services. We stand for radical reductions in working hours (*Draft programme*, § 3.3) and the right to work for all (*Draft programme*, § 3.5); and for a massive revival of social housing in order to end the housing shortage (*Draft programme*, § 3.7); getting rid of shortages reduces the scope of discrimination.

21. We fight for clear legislation to abolish the ‘LGBT panic defence’.

22. We stand for the abolition of the professional police force, along with the standing army, and its replacement with a conscript people’s militia (*Draft programme*, § 3.11). While this measure will not *abolish* biased policing, it will *create the conditions* in which biased policing can be effectively combatted, by striking against the aspect of biased policing that arises out of the social dynamics of the professional police force as such ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder\_of\_Brianna\_Ghey.
2. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder\_of\_Sarah\_Everard.

## Fighting fund

# Brilliant stuff!

What a fantastic week for the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund. Last week I reported that we still needed to raise over £1,000 in exactly seven days to reach our £2,750 target for April and - would you believe it? - no less than £1,148 came our way!

In all my years of writing this column, I don’t remember ever receiving more than a thousand pounds in a single week. Brilliant stuff! And, just as incredibly, no fewer than *six* of this week’s donors contributed £100 or more! Thank you so much, comrades LM, JC, AS, FK, IB and RG. The first four of those paid by bank transfer or standing order, while comrade RG was something of a rarity nowadays - he sent us a cheque!

Other SOs/bank transfers came from LR (£60), IS and AG (£50 each), JT (£25), AB and MM (£20), DD (£18), IS, JD and MD (£10 each). Then there were eight comrades who clicked on that PayPal button on our website: thank you, KS,

JB and DB (£50), AG, SS and NS (£11), PE (£7) and ESJ (£5). Four of those PayPal donors, by the way, were subscribers who were reminded they needed to increase their monthly payment in line with the new sub charges that came into effect this month, and all of them did so and said we could keep the old price they had already paid as a donation!

All that meant that a brilliant £2,867 was donated to the *Weekly Worker* in April. But now we have to make sure that it wasn’t a one-off. This paper relies so much on our readers and supporters to help us meet the increased charges we’ve been facing, and they’re not letting us down.

Please make sure you keep that up in May, comrades! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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CHINA



# Weathering the tariff storm

Beijing is making great play of the opportunities for its capitalists, as the country attempts to shift away from reliance on the US market. Meanwhile, writes **Yassamine Mather**, the working class faces absolute exploitation with overtime and excessive hours

In an interview published in *Time* magazine on April 25, Donald Trump claimed that China’s president, Xi Jinping, had called him to discuss tariffs, adding: “And I don’t think that’s a sign of weakness on his behalf.” Trump claimed that the astronomical US tariffs on Chinese goods will “come down substantially” and promised to be “very nice” at the negotiating table. However, the call between Trump and Xi was denied by the Chinese ministry of foreign affairs spokesperson: “As far as I know, there has been no recent phone call between the two heads of state,” Guo Jiakun told a regular news conference. “I want to reiterate that China and the United States are not engaged in consultations or negotiations on the tariff issue.”

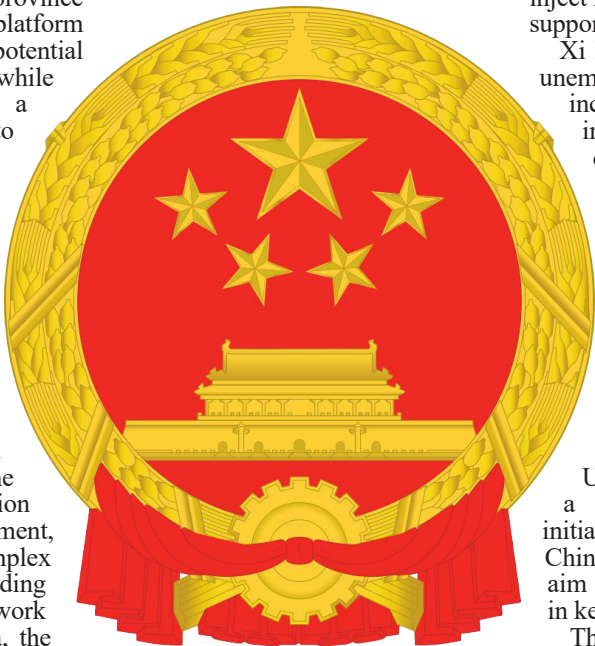
### Frictions

All this unfolds against the backdrop of rising trade friction between the two countries. The United States has levied tariffs as high as 145% on Chinese imports, prompting China to retaliate with duties of up to 125% on American products. Both nations have also adopted supplementary tactics, such as China’s move to limit rare earth mineral exports and the US decision to exempt certain electronics from tariff penalties. Despite the combative tone, there are signs of the easing of tensions. China has quietly removed steep import duties on selected US goods, including aircraft components and medical devices. However, the absence of formal dialogue and contradictory signals from both governments continue to cast doubt over the stability of global trade dynamics. In public statements, China has continued to uphold its intransigent position on the trade war, even as Trump eased his rhetoric last week. China is responding to the recent escalation of tariffs with a combination of economic resilience measures, targeted retaliatory actions

and strategic diplomatic initiatives. While the immediate economic impact is significant, the long-term effectiveness of these tariffs remains uncertain. When it comes to retaliatory tariffs, Beijing’s own 125% tariffs on US imports have put pressure on Chinese manufacturers. China is also trying to diversify imports, reducing reliance on American agricultural and energy imports, and using alternatives from countries like Brazil and Argentina. This shift aims to mitigate the impact of tariffs on some essential goods. Over the last two weeks, commerce minister Wang Wentao has held talks with senior officials from multiple countries, including Malaysia, South Africa and Saudi Arabia, claiming the need for what the People’s Republic calls “enhanced communication and stronger cooperation in times of global economic uncertainties”. To shore up foreign trade firms, major export-focused localities have come up with tailored policies. For instance, export hub Shenzhen in south China’s Guangdong province has launched a special platform connecting exporters with potential clients across the globe, while Shanghai has established a coordination mechanism to help enterprises go global.<sup>1</sup> Shenzhen Longsys Electronics Co Ltd, a semiconductor memory manufacturer, has expanded its global footprint through strategic acquisitions in recent years - making forays into markets in Latin America and Europe. According to Yao Jiashuai, investment and public affairs director of the company, “Overseas expansion is a long-term commitment, especially amid a complex external environment.”<sup>2</sup> Building on its global distribution network and supply chains in China, the

**China is responding to tariffs with a combination of economic resilience measures, targeted retaliatory actions and strategic diplomatic initiatives**

**Revealingly, while Beijing is quite prepared to admit the existence of worker dissatisfaction, what it cannot admit is the existence of class struggle. Since 1978 the concept has been airbrushed out of existence**



company reported record global sales for its USB brand, Lexar, last year, while its subsidiary in Brazil also logged strong growth. China has also made some progress in diversifying its foreign trade markets. According to customs data, China’s trade value with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations bloc rose by 7.1% from a year earlier in the first quarter of 2025, while with the ‘Belt and Road’ partner countries and the European Union it went up 2.2% and 1.4%, respectively.<sup>3</sup> We also have the use of selective tariff exemptions. This is mainly aimed at maintaining critical technological imports. In this respect, China has excluded certain US semiconductors from retaliatory tariffs and is considering further exemptions on medical equipment and industrial chemicals. **Consequences** Regarding the internal economic stimulus, China has implemented measures such as interest rate cuts and reduced reserve requirements to inject liquidity into the economy and support growth. Xi has announced plans to boost unemployment benefits, increase incomes for low- and middle-income groups, and stimulate domestic demand through infrastructure and housing sector reforms.<sup>4</sup> However, as always, China is considering long-term solutions, including diversification of exports by expanding trade relationships within Asia and other regions to reduce dependence on western markets, thereby mitigating the impact of US and EU tariffs, as well as a continuation of investment initially started with its ‘Made in China 2025’ initiative. Here the aim is to achieve self-sufficiency in key technological sectors. There is no doubt that, in the short

term, tariffs have led to increased costs for Chinese exporters and contributed to economic challenges, including a property crisis and deflationary pressures. Beijing is aware that Trump’s policies have disrupted global supply chains and US manufacturers reliant on Chinese machinery and components are experiencing increased costs and supply-chain challenges, potentially undermining the intended benefits of the tariffs. In addition, the trade tensions have inevitably contributed to global market instability, with potential risks of a broader economic downturn if the conflict persists. According to a report in *The New York Times* by its Beijing bureau chief, Keith Bradsher, published last week, shipments of magnets “essential for assembling everything from cars and drones to robots and missiles, have been halted at many Chinese ports, while the Chinese government drafts a new regulatory system. Once in place, the new system could permanently prevent supplies from reaching certain companies, including American military contractors.”<sup>5</sup> On April 4, two days after Trump’s announcement of his “reciprocal tariff” war - since suspended for all countries for 90 days except China, for which, as I have pointed out, tariffs have been raised to 145% - Beijing ordered restrictions on the export of six heavy rare-earth metals refined in China, as well as rare-earth magnets. These are essential components in the production of motors for electric vehicles and various other technologies. China currently dominates global production, accounting for approximately 90% of the 200,000 tonnes produced annually. Japan contributes much of the remaining supply, while a smaller portion - largely reliant on Chinese raw materials - comes from Germany, despite facing tariff-related challenges. Meanwhile, in eastern China, the Yiwu International Trade Market



remains a hub of commercial activity. Often referred to as “the world’s supermarket”, Yiwu has maintained a high level of business despite global trade tensions. Buyers from around the world continue to visit, negotiating prices and placing orders across thousands of stalls. Local businesses in Yiwu have shown resilience amid rising tariffs. “In Yiwu, we are doing global business and our trade will not be affected by merely a few countries or regions,” said Sun Lijuan, a vendor at the market.<sup>6</sup>

A recent survey within the market indicated that among more than 3,000 merchants engaged in US-related trade, only about 100 conduct business directly with American buyers, suggesting a relatively limited direct exposure to US tariffs.

Internal

As the world’s second-largest economy and second-largest consumer-goods market, China is capable of offering buffer zones and strong state backing for export-focused enterprises grappling with tariff challenges.

To help export-oriented firms pivot toward the home market, the ministry of commerce has met with industry associations, major retailers and distributors. These, together with e-commerce platforms, have also made contributions in this regard, establishing channels to put export-blocked inventory on shelves and helping export-focused firms better adapt to the Chinese market. E-commerce giant JD.com, for instance, has set up a procurement fund totalling 200 billion yuan (about \$27.7 billion) for the massive purchasing of export-oriented products over the next year.<sup>7</sup>

The Chinese government is telling companies they should see the current situation as an opportunity for technological innovation. Nanjing TICA Climate Solutions Co Ltd, a company specialising in environmental protection, is a prime example of how innovative development can withstand external headwinds. Thanks to continuous investment in research and development, its magnetic suspension products have outperformed competitors, securing 30% of the global market share.

Innovation has become a defining feature within China. From electric vehicles to industrial robots, Chinese products now feature greater technological sophistication. Customs data has captured the country’s transition toward high-end, intelligent and green development. In the first quarter of 2025, the export value of China’s wind turbines, lithium batteries and electric vehicles grew by 43.2%, 18.8% and 8.2% year-on-year, respectively.

One area where there is undoubted progress in development and manufacture is graphics processing units. The Communist Party’s politburo held its April study session on April 25, with an official focus on the development and regulation of artificial intelligence. State broadcaster CCTV emphasised themes of self-reliance and “healthy, orderly growth”, echoing familiar slogans that mask the leadership’s deeper agenda: tightening control over strategic technologies, while insulating the country from external pressure.

The session was led by professor Zheng Nanning of Xi’an Jiaotong University, a regime-friendly academic voice. Notably absent from the official video coverage was He Weidong, a politburo member and vice-chair of the Central Military Commission - fuelling ongoing speculation about internal power struggles and elite purges within what is an opaque political system.

Key points from Xi Jinping’s speech reveal a combination of techno-nationalism, strategic decoupling and authoritarian risk management. He called for breakthroughs in fundamental artificial intelligence technologies - chips, algorithms, and software - underscoring China’s intent to bypass reliance on US firms like Nvidia. While framed as a scientific imperative, this push reflects deeper concerns about technological vulnerability amid escalating geopolitical rivalry. Domestic champions like Huawei stand to benefit from increasing state favouritism and protectionism. However, it is clear that the rules imposed by the Biden administration to restrict the export of advanced graphics processing units to China, far from hindering AI development

in that country, actually led to an expansion and production of more advanced processor units within China.

In his speech, Xi promoted rapid AI integration into China’s economy and society, citing the country’s massive data reserves - largely generated without the kind of privacy regulations found in some western countries. The emphasis on upgrading traditional industries also points to China’s desire to boost productivity without loosening state control over the labour force.

The speech included promises of stronger state incentives for AI development, such as intellectual property protections and tax breaks. Xi acknowledged AI’s dangers, but framed them in terms of control, legality and ethical boundaries - coded language often used by the Chinese Communist Party to justify surveillance, censorship and pre-emptive suppression of dissent.

The Chinese president called for international AI collaboration, especially with global south nations, in what appears as a strategic counter to US-led efforts to restrict China’s access to advanced technologies. While couched in the rhetoric of shared development, this outreach likely serves Beijing’s long-term goal of reshaping global tech governance.

Workers’ protests

There are those, such as the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain and Socialist Action, who peddle the ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ idea. But the working class exercises no control over profits or production, let alone political matters.

As shown by a series of protests by workers in car manufacturer BYD the reality of daily life for ordinary workers is of greatly intensified labour and absolute exploitation - bosses are forcing them to work excessive hours.

BYD is a Chinese car manufacturer primarily known for producing electric vehicles, including plug-in hybrid EVs. The roots of these events can be traced back to December 2023, when BYD acquired Jabil Inc’s mobile electronics division, operating mainly through the Green Point plants in Chengdu and Wuxi, for 15.8 billion yuan. At the time, BYD promised workers that their wages and benefits would stay the same for at least 18 months. US Securities and Exchange Commission documents reviewed by the Hong Kong-based *China Labour Bulletin* show that Jabil had set aside between \$150 and \$180 million for employee severance and restructuring payments.

However, within six months of the acquisition, many of BYD’s promises began to fall apart. Workers reported steep wage reductions, erratic schedules and harsher performance standards that did not match earlier agreements. The first large-scale protest erupted on March 28 at BYD’s Wuxi plant. Over a thousand workers, including many mid-level managers, gathered inside, holding banners and demanding that the company uphold its commitments or fairly compensate those wishing to leave. They focused mainly on the slashing of performance-based pay and the removal of birthday benefits. Videos shared online showed police rapidly intervening to break up the protests.

Just a few days later, between March 31 and April 1, the protests extended to BYD’s Chengdu site. Workers there staged similar actions, accusing management of failing to honour promises made during the Jabil takeover. Their demands included job security, clarity around workplace changes

and just compensation. In Chengdu, anger was particularly strong over shrinking work hours, forced departmental moves and cuts to allowances and bonuses.

These protests are connected to deeper structural issues. Before the takeover, Green Point workers relied heavily on overtime to earn a liveable wage, often working six days a week and up to 12 hours daily, with monthly earnings of between 5,000 and 6,800 yuan. After BYD implemented a four-shift rotation in 2024, available work hours collapsed, dropping monthly incomes to between 3,000 and 4,000 yuan - barely above Wuxi’s minimum wage of 2,940 yuan. Workers suspect the shift change aimed to drive them to resign voluntarily, saving BYD from paying severance.

CLB’s findings highlight a wider problem across China’s manufacturing industry: an overreliance on overtime to boost low base wages. For example, a forklift operator at BYD earned a base wage of just 2,410 yuan, but relied on more than 3,000 yuan in overtime - working 11-hour days and exceeding the legal overtime limit by over three times.

Adding to the pressure, BYD reportedly uses the standard five-day, eight-hour work schedule as a punishment for those deemed to be underperforming. Since base wages are low under this system, workers feel under pressure to accept excessive overtime to maintain even a minimal living standard.

CLB emphasises that genuine reform depends on collective bargaining, as mandated under Chinese labour law. Factory-level trade unions are supposed to defend workers’ rights, but have largely failed to do so - especially during the 2024 Wuxi strike. In contrast, CLB points to BYD’s experience in Vietnam, where after a 2022 labour dispute the company agreed to a 15% wage rise, better meals, additional paid breaks and an annual bonus.

The outcome of the March and April 2025 protests remains uncertain. Social media posts indicate that BYD posted a proposed settlement at its Chengdu plant, but banned workers from taking photos of it. Meanwhile, mid-level managers were asked to work overtime during the Qingming Festival (April 4-6) seemingly to appease workers. Yet grievances continue to emerge online, showing persistent worker dissatisfaction.

Revealingly, while Beijing is quite prepared to admit the existence of worker dissatisfaction, what it cannot admit is the existence of class struggle. Since 1978 the concept has been airbrushed out of existence ●

Notes

- 1. See [subsites.chinadaily.com.cn/Qiushi/2025-04/17/c\\_1086391.htm](https://subsites.chinadaily.com.cn/Qiushi/2025-04/17/c_1086391.htm).
- 2. [en.people.cn/n3/2025/0417/c90000-20303269.html](https://en.people.cn/n3/2025/0417/c90000-20303269.html).
- 3. [x.com/CE\\_ChinaEconomy/status/1913397142363717862](https://x.com/CE_ChinaEconomy/status/1913397142363717862).
- 4. [indianexpress.com/article/world/xi-jinping-economic-plan-counter-us-tariffs-shift-trade-strategy-9968200](https://indianexpress.com/article/world/xi-jinping-economic-plan-counter-us-tariffs-shift-trade-strategy-9968200).
- 5. [www.nytimes.com/2025/04/13/business/china-rare-earths-exports.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/13/business/china-rare-earths-exports.html).
- 6. [en.people.cn/n3/2025/0417/c90000-20303269.html](https://en.people.cn/n3/2025/0417/c90000-20303269.html).
- 7. [english.news.cn/20250416/3221b177e42d451a848862e907a2c6fb/c.html](https://english.news.cn/20250416/3221b177e42d451a848862e907a2c6fb/c.html).

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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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Online Communist Forum



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



# weekly Worker

**Not the Tories  
Not the Courts  
... but members**

## One union to another

Matt Wrack has been the target of a nasty smear campaign. The obvious problem, as far as his critics are concerned, is that he represents militant trade unionism. However, our movement needs radical democracy, including in its trade unions, says **Carla Roberts**

The drama around Matt Wrack's appointment as general secretary of the NASUWT, the teachers' union (formerly National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers) - and the subsequent decision to rerun the election by the union leadership after a concerted media campaign - reflects a number of problems with the way trade unions are organised and run.

After announcing that Wrack had been elected unopposed, the union has been taken to court by its Welsh regional officer, Neil Butler, who was blocked from seeking nominations on the grounds that he is not a member of the union. But then, of course, neither is Matt Wrack. No doubt, there is something in the rules that if a candidate is nominated by the executive, that rule does not apply. Nevertheless, the union very quickly capitulated (paying a substantial amount in costs to Butler) and branches now have until May 26 to nominate general secretary candidates. Butler, or anyone else, will need 25 nominations within that time - no easy feat, we would have thought.

First of all, we should say about the scandal that socialists should have absolutely no problem defending Wrack from the smears he has been subjected to in recent days. There is no question that the attacks come from the right and come with a rightwing agenda. The unnamed "government ministers", or indeed, the bourgeois newspapers quoting them, clearly do not give a flying hoot about the fact that he has "no teaching experience". They are, however, undoubtedly worried about Wrack's "overly combative approach to industrial relations, taking the union away from the mainstream views of the school workforce".<sup>1</sup>

There was - and perhaps still is - a serious possibility that the more 'moderate' NASUWT under the leadership of Matt Wrack could unite with the National Education Union (NEU), led by the leftwinger Daniel Kebede. Not immediately, mind - the NEU's recent unity call was rebuffed by NASUWT conference on April 28.<sup>2</sup> But under the leadership of comrade Wrack, the invitation would probably have been revisited. And even without a unification, it is clear to all that the possibility of united (strike) action by *all* teachers would inflict far more serious damage to the government (neither union is affiliated to the Labour Party, incidentally).

### So-called concerns

The campaign against Wrack was - as is to be expected these days - garnished with the obligatory "concerns by Jewish teachers", who allegedly oppose the "appointment of somebody who appears to be insensitive to their concerns". It turns out - entirely unsurprisingly - that rather than "Jewish teachers"



From a rank-and-file fireman

speaking out against comrade Wrack, it is in fact the 'Partnership for Jewish Schools', which was set up by the pro-Zionist Jewish Leadership Council.<sup>3</sup> They are guessing that "the many Jewish members of the NASUWT are likely to find this appointment particularly challenging". Whether they really do find it challenging, is, however, another question altogether.

### Pro-imperialists

As an aside, that has not stopped the risible and pro-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty arguing that "we should not dismiss [Jewish teachers'] concerns, or delegitimise them, just because Wrack is on the left or because others have seized on it for their own reasons", as an unsigned article on the AWL website states. It bizarrely goes on to claim that there are former members of the NEU who joined the NASUWT, because of the "repeated use in the NEU of the - highly ambiguous - term 'Zionist' as a label for the war crimes committed by the Netanyahu gang, which meant that they, as *Zionists*, were feeling held responsible, or made uncomfortable, in their own union."<sup>4</sup>

Not as *Jews*, we should note - but as *Zionists*! They should indeed feel "uncomfortable", we would argue - and then some. The current campaign of mass slaughter in Gaza is absolutely part and parcel of Zionism. After all, the Nakba in 1948 saw almost a million Palestinian Arabs violently displaced - their land, homes and belongings taken away, by Zionists. Zionism is based on the systematic oppression of the Palestinians. There clearly can be no progressive or non-racist Zionism. The AWL still cannot see the wood for the trees - or understand what role the anti-Semitism smear campaign has played in the campaign against the

left, even though it became a victim of it too (the AWL was proscribed by the Labour Party in 2022).

Wrack is being attacked by the pro-Zionist right, because he dares call out Israel's horrendous crimes in Gaza and on the West Bank. He also defended Jeremy Corbyn when he was Labour leader. Indeed, comrade Wrack led the FBU to reaffiliate in November 2015 (it had disaffiliated in 2004 in opposition to Tony Blair). In March 2016, Wrack himself rejoined the Labour Party and went on to become chair of the semi-comatose Labour Representation Committee, thereby effectively fronting its admittedly tame opposition to the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt of socialists and pro-Palestine campaigners. Wrack resigned from the LRC in 2022, when it became clear that, with the end of the Corbyn movement, the LRC had managed to shrink to nothing.<sup>5</sup>

He has also committed himself to the socialist principle of workers' leaders taking a salary based on the average pay of their members - no doubt something he learned during in his years in Militant Tendency. He explained his thinking after his election as general secretary of the FBU in 2005,<sup>6</sup> stating that he had

decided to set aside £1,000 per month from my FBU salary and I have established a separate bank account into which I pay this amount every month by standing order. The fund established in this account is intended to be used to support trade union and Labour movement campaigns and initiatives. I intend to publish each year the total that has been paid into the fund and the causes to which donations have been made.

Ten years later, in 2015, he explained to the BBC that the amount is

now about £1,050 a month, about 30% of my pay coming in. I donate to trade union solidarity organisations, the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, strike funds coming in, so a range of issues. For me it's about me not getting completely out of touch with my members. The money is not going to change the world, but about the political point of trying not to lose touch with my members.<sup>7</sup>

We also know from personal experience that he financially supported the short-lived Grassroots Momentum (set up after Jon Lansman's coup in Momentum, when he abolished all democratic structures) and many other campaigns.

We could quibble that his wages had presumably gone up more than £150 a month between 2005 and 2015, but that would indeed be petty. He tried to put into practice a hugely important principle of the workers' movement and deserves credit for that. We have not seen a similar statement since he has been in the running for general secretary of NASUWT, we must admit - but we expect him to make a similar commitment.

The more serious problem in this regard is that comrade Wrack was acting as an *individual*, not as part of an organised working class party that could hold him to account or indeed decide where the money should go. The same goes for his politics, of course. He was acting alone for much of the time. He might have been a member of the LRC (and the Labour Party) at least for some of this period, but he was not acting under the discipline or political direction of either. He is a political freelancer. And this is now starting to show.

While we refuse to be lectured by the right on the issue, there is indeed something rather odd about comrade Wrack moving from heading the FBU (having worked as a firefighter for many years) to heading a union of teachers. That does look a lot like professional trade unionism, rather than a worker representing his fellow workers.

### Allegations

Comrade Wrack led the FBU for almost 20 years, but lost to former vice-president Steve Wright in January 2025 - and decided not to contest the election result, although it turned out that there were some serious, apparently administrative, problems (it turned out that 3,059 members did not receive a ballot paper<sup>8</sup>). Considering that Wright defeated Wrack by only 1,752 votes, we would have thought that a challenge would have been the obvious thing to do.

Wright, a long-time Labour Party member, is what we might call a typical Labour 'moderate'. For example, he called on Labour MPs to vote against the benefits bill and describes himself as a "socialist"<sup>9</sup> (Sir Keir Starmer probably still does too, once in a while). While he is probably not part of the Labour right, he is clearly to the right of comrade Wrack. He stood as a "unity candidate" against the "divisions and factionalism that have dominated our union at the highest level".<sup>10</sup> A thinly-disguised reference to a 'scandal' in the FBU that had been brewing since around 2022 and was clearly based on a politicised attack on comrade Wrack, involving some minor alleged rule-breaking.<sup>11</sup> It was Steve Wright who led the disciplinary investigation against Wrack.

The comrade was cleared, but it was probably enough of a muddle to lose him the position of general secretary. Perhaps he judged that moving on to another union would be a better and 'safer' option than challenging the FBU election. Had comrade Wrack been a member of the CPGB, we would have strongly 'advised' him not to go for the job at NASUWT - and would have expected him to act as a disciplined communist.

We also would have argued for a transparent and democratic election process, right from the start. We have no sympathy with Neil Butler, whose High Court challenge led to the NASUWT executive committee's hasty U-turn. There will now be a 'proper' election - incredibly, this will be the first election for general secretary in NASUWT in over 35 years. Since 1990, the position seems to have been handed out by 'uncontested election' - ie, appointment.<sup>12</sup>

Communists fight for radical democracy in all working class organisations, including the trade unions - that is the only way to transform the working class into the ruling class of society itself ●

### Notes

1. [www.theguardian.com/education/2025/apr/12/ministers-raise-concern-over-nasuwt-move-for-ex-fbu-chief-matt-wrack](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/apr/12/ministers-raise-concern-over-nasuwt-move-for-ex-fbu-chief-matt-wrack).
2. [schoolsweek.co.uk/nasuwt-members-seek-public-dismissal-of-neu-merger](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/nasuwt-members-seek-public-dismissal-of-neu-merger).
3. [skwawkbox.org/2025/04/25/antisemitism-smear-campaign-against-wrack-as-he-takes-over-as-nasuwt-general-secretary](https://skwawkbox.org/2025/04/25/antisemitism-smear-campaign-against-wrack-as-he-takes-over-as-nasuwt-general-secretary).
4. [www.workersliberty.org/blogs/2025-04-27/nasuwt-general-secretary-appointment-masquerading-election](https://www.workersliberty.org/blogs/2025-04-27/nasuwt-general-secretary-appointment-masquerading-election).
5. 'Unconscious cancel culture' *Weekly Worker* May 5 2023: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1424/unconscious-cancel-culture](https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1424/unconscious-cancel-culture).
6. [web.archive.org/web/20160304141544/www.fbu.me.uk/newspress/ebulletin/68.php](https://web.archive.org/web/20160304141544/www.fbu.me.uk/newspress/ebulletin/68.php).
7. [www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b050yh99](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b050yh99).
8. [labourlist.org/2025/02/fbu-general-secretary-election-ballots-re-run](https://labourlist.org/2025/02/fbu-general-secretary-election-ballots-re-run).
9. [labourlist.org/2025/02/fire-brigades-union-steve-wright-general-secretary-interview](https://labourlist.org/2025/02/fire-brigades-union-steve-wright-general-secretary-interview).
10. [steve4fbu-gs.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/why-i-am-standing-1.pdf](https://steve4fbu-gs.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/why-i-am-standing-1.pdf).
11. [campaignfbu.com/revealed-how-the-fbus-general-secretary-and-a-national-officer-were-facing-serious-disciplinary-charges-until-the-executive-council-ripped-up-the-rule-book-and-collapsed-the-case](https://campaignfbu.com/revealed-how-the-fbus-general-secretary-and-a-national-officer-were-facing-serious-disciplinary-charges-until-the-executive-council-ripped-up-the-rule-book-and-collapsed-the-case).
12. [schoolsweek.co.uk/patrick-roach-elected-unopposed-as-nasuwt-general-secretary](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/patrick-roach-elected-unopposed-as-nasuwt-general-secretary).