

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly worker



Major gains for Reform - but is Nigel Farage's outfit about to replace the Tories? Paul Demarty is sceptical

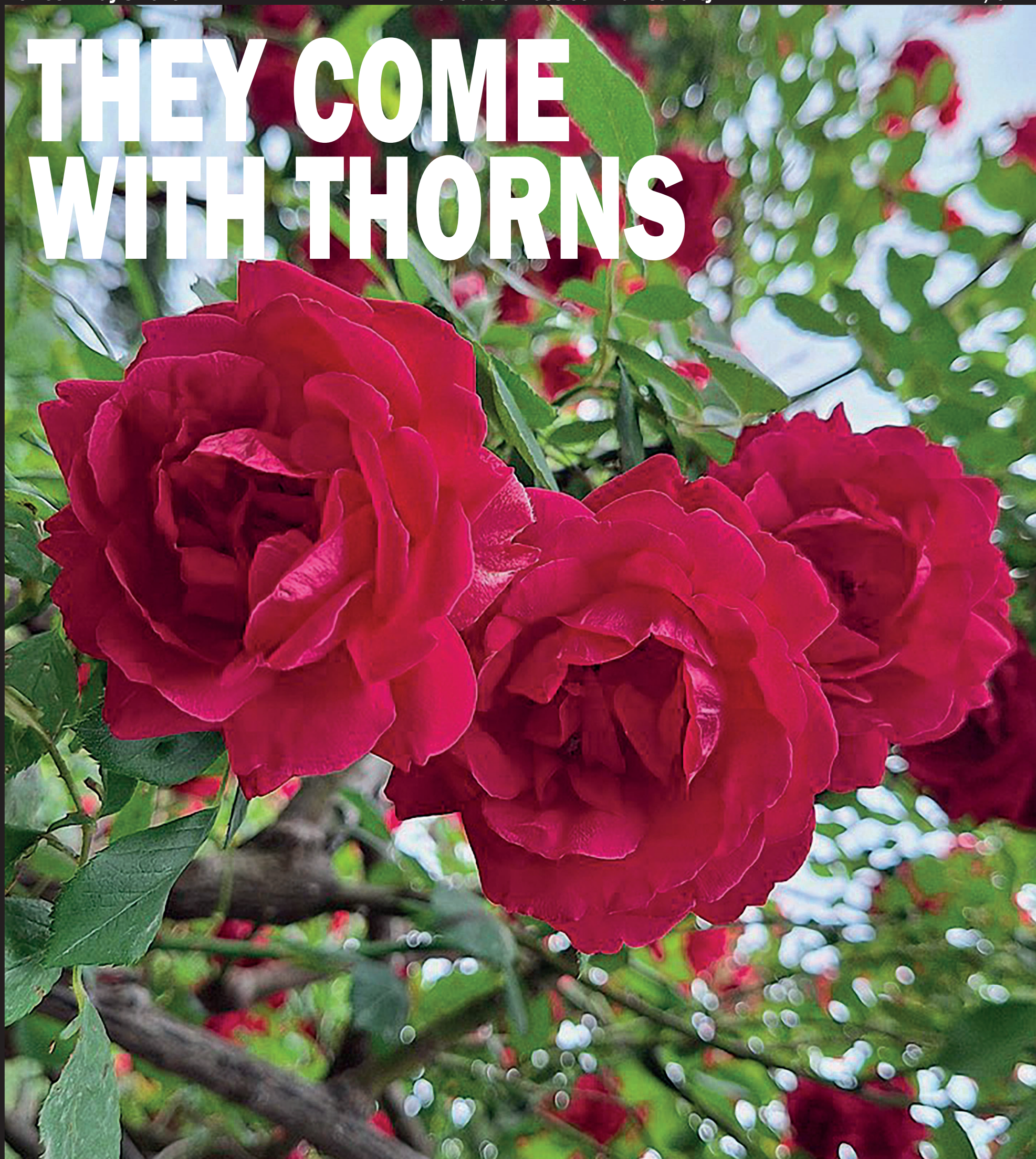
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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THEY COME WITH THORNS



LETTERS

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

Bowing to Greens

The Socialist Workers Party is pushing ‘We Demand Change’ hard as the next big thing. Having initially set it up merely as a front to sneak into Jeremy Corbyn’s maybe-party, Collective (from which it was banned because of its ‘rape apologist’ past and the ongoing decision to allow Zionists on the marches organised by their other front, Stand Up to Racism), it is now spending considerable time and effort on building ‘local summits’ under the WDC title.

Collective, it seems increasingly clear, has had it. There were too many weird and wonderful groups involved. Instead, Corbyn and his hangers-on are now looking at an (electoral) alliance with various ‘independents’ - and, possibly, the Green Party. The SWP at least is hoping that WDC might become that vehicle - though for now it is very insistent that WDC is neither supposed to become a new left party nor an electoral alliance. It is an organisation in limbo. Corbyn, we suspect, is as usual keeping his powder dry and watching what develops.

Step forward Zack Polanski, deputy leader of the Green Party, member of the Greater London Assembly and speaker at the WDC launch event of March 29. He has also been invited as a speaker at the WDC summit in Sheffield on May 18 alongside Corbyn. There is at least one vocal group, Sheffield Left, kicking up a stink about Polanski’s invitation - and the plan to invite local Green Party councillor Alexi Dimond, who’s been faithfully voting and arguing for cuts in the council chamber.

With WDC not wanting to become a party or even electoral alliance (yet) and SWP members hiding their membership under various trade union and ‘united front’ hats, that obviously leaves the Green Party to Hoover up all those who are looking for a more serious and effective alternative. In effect, the SWP is acting as a conveyor belt into the Greens.

Polanski has incidentally just launched his bid for the leadership of the Green Party, explaining to *The Guardian* on May 5: “I don’t believe there are more people in this country who align with the politics of Reform than they do with the Green Party. In fact we know that, because when Green Party policies are polled, they are frequently popular. But we’re not visible enough. I don’t want to see our membership grow incrementally. I want to see us be a mass movement.”

Seems quite clear to us why he is hitching his wagon to WDC. The man clearly has ambitions. He only joined the Greens in 2017. Before that, he was a member of the Liberal Democrats - and candidate for the Greater London Assembly. Around that time, he famously heckled a certain Jeremy Corbyn at a Momentum rally in 2016 in front of the assembled mainstream media, shouting “What about Europe, Jeremy? Where were you when we needed you?” He also went along with the anti-Semitism witch-hunt and was one of the main advocates in the Green Party for the adoption of the IHRA’s fake definition, which conflates anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism.

On July 26 2018, he posted this bizarre tweet (which is still online): “Jeremy Corbyn himself does not represent an ‘existential threat’. Agreed. However his absolute complicity in saying or doing, or sometimes not saying and doing,

is an existential threat. The Jewish community needs better than someone who is primarily concerned with power.”

There is a funny little video being sent around WDC circles showing Polanski doing a sort of ‘mea culpa’ over Corbyn - no doubt in order to assure lefties in and around the SWP that he’s okay now.

He explains: “Having had the experience now of being in a leadership position and having experienced attacks from the *Jewish Chronicle* and other Jewish organisations, as a Jewish person, I do have a new appreciation of what Corbyn was dealing with at that time. It was not helpful for me to assume that the Labour Party was rife with anti-Semitism when we now know that blatantly was not true. But what did I have at the time to go on as evidence? I had the leader himself saying, ‘I have anti-Semitism in my party’. I know this is a complex and nuanced answer and there is an apology to Jeremy Corbyn in there too. I would love to move on and see the left unite on this, because being pro-Palestinian should never be conflated with being anti-Semitic.”

No it should not, Zack. But that is exactly what the anti-Semitism smear campaign in the Labour Party was all about. The “evidence” of anti-Semitism being “rife” in the Labour Party was a miniscule number of incidents, which were very clearly instrumentalised and blown out of all proportion by the right and the entire establishment in order to bring down Corbyn and stop all criticism of Israel. We could all see that it was “blatantly not true” - even then.

Yes, Polanski might now speak out for the Palestinians and is indeed being heavily criticised for it in the *Jewish Chronicle*. But forgive us for being more than sceptical about Polanski’s latest political turn. The man is clearly first and foremost a career politician - and a rather opportunistic one at that. What on earth is the SWP doing acting as cheerleaders for him?

Tina Becker
Sheffield

Marxist Christian

Jack Conrad’s recent article upon the death of Pope Francis (‘Death of an absolute monarch’, April 24) coincided with a round of Twitter discourse on the relationship between the organised left and religious institutions like the Catholic church. With many Gen Z comrades confronting this question for the first time, a bit of direction from a party elder is certainly called for.

On first reading I found myself in familiar territory - as a Marxist and a Protestant I’ve inherited both intellectual and epigenetic disdain for ecclesiastical hierarchy. Jack’s criticisms of Rome are all grounded in truth. Every historical fact presented is verifiable, every accusation provable, every crime heinous ... and none of it adds up to an argument or offers a call to action.

The article begins with a confused characterisation of Francis’s papacy. Jack declares that his good qualities (preference for the poor, condemnation of capitalism, advocacy for peace) simultaneously represent both “bog-standard Catholic themes” and insincere pandering to “the naive end of leftist public opinion”. What Jack ironically leaves out of his polemic with the recently departed pope are the positions which critics from the left normally highlight, like his refusal to entertain the ordainment of women, bless gay marriages, fully embrace transgender rights, or even remove abortion from the index of sins incurring excommunication

(murder, rape and genocide are notably absent from this list).

I’m reminded of when an interviewer pressed Francis on the issue of ordaining women, asking if the church could ever be reformed in that direction, and he responded with a stern “no”, refusing to elaborate. At the same time, he was infamous among traditionalists for opposing the Latin mass, pursuing ecumenical relations with other churches, and advocating empathy (if not civil rights) for transgender and queer people. This man’s positions were not chiefly informed by “21st century vogue” or “13th century dogma”, but the 1st century teachings of Jesus Christ.

Further into the article we’re treated to Jack’s theory on why people are drawn to religion. It’s the usual ‘opium of the masses’ spiel, which explains it as an emotional solution to a material problem, with the inherent evils of capitalism driving people to the church as a false provider of security. This is typically contrasted with the secular eschatology of scientific socialism, in which humanity’s ascension to global communism will be accompanied by the abolition of oppression, exploitation, material want and spiritual need.

Jack explains the material forces driving proletarians into the church like this: “For those who need to sell their labour-power to survive, the resulting anxiety goes way beyond the tyranny they daily experience in the workplace: they fear family break-up, they fear their children going off the rails, they fear joblessness, they fear homelessness, they fear being denied proper medical treatment, they fear nuclear war, they fear runaway global warming, etc.”

All shadows. What everyone fears, regardless of our class position, is death. We will all die, and what’s worse is our loved ones will die. Our babies will die. The immortal science of Marxist dialectics has no solution for sudden infant death syndrome or stillbirth. It offers no comfort for those who grieve nor hope for those who despair. The collective labour of all humanity cannot and will never conquer the certainty of death - but the church gives us hope that God already has. To be honest, that’s the only compelling argument I’ve found for continuing my life after losing my daughter.

Jack enumerates the Catholic church’s many failures: the administration of feudal exploitation, sponsorship of crusades and colonialism, anti-communist hysterics that led to alliances with fascists and neoliberals. All true, all horrible, and all with analogues in the history of the socialist movement. Every human attempt at building a society free from iniquity, whether secular or spiritual, has thus far ended in failure. The biblical word for failure is נָכָח, usually translated to English as ‘sin’.

In his first interview as pope, Francis was prompted to introduce himself to the world. He responded, “I am a sinner”. Unfortunately the harshest critics of the church in general and Francis in particular can only preach to the choir. Perhaps we socialists can learn something from their humility.

Cliff Connolly
email

Prison slavery

A few months ago, the International Trade Union Confederation, the largest union federation, crafted a 47-page report based on observations on the failed implementation of Convention No105 by the government of the United States of America. The undisclosed report concluded that the conditions of labour by people

confined in US prisons are in violation of obligations under the convention. Based on its observations, the ITUC provides several recommendations.

Though many believe that slavery in the United States ended after the Civil War, the 13th amendment exception still allows for forced labour as a punishment for crime across the US. Prison slavery in the country has been the subject of contentious debate. Prison labour exploits incarcerated individuals, prioritises profits for corporations by minimising labour costs at the expense of rehabilitation. Advocacy organisation Worth Rises indicates that over 800,000 incarcerated people in state and federal prisons in the US are forced to work, while making an average of \$0.86 per day. Prisoners won’t get paid anything for most of their work in seven states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas.

The US ratified convention 105 on September 25 1991, which prohibits the use of forced or compulsory labour as (1) a punishment for the expression of political views, (2) for the purpose of economic development, (3) as a means of labour discipline, (4) as a punishment for participation in strikes, or (5) as a means of racial, religious or other discrimination. However, the convention is poorly known in America, even for those who campaign for people in custody.

In November 2024, the ITUC submitted the observations to the International Labour Standards Department, a United Nations agency, and waited for feedback from its ‘Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations’, expecting it to call for reform in the International Labour Organization’s 114th conference scheduled for June 2026. Based on its observations, ITUC provides several recommendations:

- Repeal federal and state constitutional clauses excluding incarcerated people from bans on slavery and forced labour.
- Ensure that all work in prisons is fully voluntary by eliminating any laws and policies that require forced labour or impose adverse consequences on incarcerated workers who are unable or unwilling to work.
- Guarantee incarcerated workers the standard labour protections available to other workers in the United States.
- Ensure incarcerated workers are paid prevailing wages no less than the minimum wage of the state where they work and eliminate or limit wage deductions.
- Protect incarcerated workers from injuries and hazards.
- Permit incarcerated workers to join labour unions.
- Ensure that incarcerated workers have adequate and speedy access to redress when their rights are violated.

The 113th session of the International Labour Conference will

be inaugurated on June 2. Employer and worker delegates from the ILO’s 187 member-states will address important world-of-work matters. And groups from the United States will call for reform to improve the situation.

Milton Beckman
USA

Blow the whistle

Platform Films is inviting people to blow the whistle on attempts to censor what’s going on in Palestine. Having produced the acclaimed documentary *Censoring Palestine*, we are working on a follow-up film and want to know of any efforts to downplay, distort or obliterate from public view the terrible events in the country.

For every act of censorship we hear about there are hundreds that go unreported. We want to shine a light on those unreported incidents. Whether it’s in the news, in the classroom or in the arts or entertainment, voices speaking out against the genocide in Palestine are being silenced. We want people to tell us about what’s happening - and we guarantee their anonymity.

There has been a change in mainstream media coverage of Palestine since the ending of the ceasefire, but much remains unreported. The appalling suffering of Palestinians exposed on social media has forced mainstream outlets like the BBC to give the topic more coverage, but the active participation of the UK and US remains hidden and uncommented on.

And absolutely nothing gets into the mainstream about the way journalists and pro-Palestine activists are now being constantly detained, intimidated and imprisoned by the police - often flagrantly misusing counter-terrorist laws. How many members of the general public know, as we speak, that we have large numbers of people in prison serving time simply for trying to stop the genocide? We desperately need those people who do know what’s happening to blow the whistle on it. If there is enough exposure, this horrifying and disgraceful cover-up cannot go on.

Censoring Palestine is an investigation of the way the truth about Gaza genocide has been systematically suppressed by the mainstream media and the UK government. It includes contributions from veteran filmmaker Ken Loach, comedian Alexei Sayle, Stop the War convenor Lindsey German, world famous musician Roger Waters and many more. It got its first online screening on the Crispin Flintoff Zoom show on Sunday May 4, followed by a panel discussion with commentators including Holocaust survivor Stephen Kapos, activist Jackie Walker and journalist Sarah Wilkinson who was subject to a dramatic dawn raid by ‘counter-terrorism’ police.

Norman Thomas
Platform Films

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Make sure to reference ‘CU 2025’

USA

Trump’s first 100 days

Liberals have been profoundly shocked. Maybe it is a pose; after all, almost everything was announced during the presidential election campaign, says Yassamine Mather

Giving the first 100 days of a US president particular significance, making it into a symbolic milestone, dates back to Franklin D Roosevelt. There is, of course, also Napoleon Bonaparte’s 100 days after he returned to France from his exile on Elba ... but that did not end well.

As for Donald Trump’s first 100 days, they have certainly been what you might call eventful. From the start, there was a rapid rollout of executive orders - almost too many to track. One widely circulated photo shows Trump’s desk piled with orders awaiting his signature. This strategy, recommended by the rightwing Project 2025 blueprint from the Heritage Foundation, aimed to “flood the zone” - to overwhelm the opposition with a rapid, relentless assertion of executive power. This was not a president who cautiously tested political waters, but one charging ahead with controversial initiatives, many of which he had fielded during the campaign.

Tariffs

Tariffs, for instance, were expected. The shock lay not in their arrival, but their scale. They targeted not just US adversaries, but also allies, in an attempt to secure more favourable trade terms. China, in particular, was a major target, and the trade war initiated during this period saw both countries refuse to back down. Behind the scenes, China had long prepared for such a conflict - economically and militarily. Neither side blinked, despite public speculation and diplomatic gestures.

The US economy experienced turbulence and, although Trump continued to blame the economic downturn on Joe Biden, signs of strain - partly induced by aggressive tariff policies - were already visible during these first 100 days. Global repercussions were inevitable, as the world economy is closely tied to US performance.

On migration, the Trump administration’s approach was openly punitive. Migrants were deported *en masse*, including to hell holes like the CECOT prison in El Salvador. The cruelty was deliberate - meant to act as a deterrent by showcasing the dangers of seeking illegal entry to the US. Yet economic desperation globally meant that push factors often overrode these fear-based policies. Even remote chances of escape seemed better than the certainty of misery at home.

At the same time, figures like Elon Musk, and others within the broader Trumpist orbit, promoted the illusion of anti-government disruption. Yet federal spending increased under Trump, undermining such libertarian pretences. Key institutions like the Department of Defense remained untouched, revealing the limits of this so-called anarcho-capitalism.

Foreign policy under Trump has been imperial when it comes to the North American continent. He wants the Panama canal back, he wants Canada as the 51st state and he wants to buy Greenland. Elsewhere things have been transactional. The Middle East - particularly Gaza - was treated with brutal *Realpolitik*. Trump’s statements, flanked by Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, signalled an unapologetic endorsement of aggressive Israeli military policy against Palestinians. The suggestion of turning Gaza into a resort was less a serious plan and more a grotesque presentation, that greenlighted ethnic cleansing and perhaps outright genocide.



Executive orders

Yet Netanyahu failed to gain support for his plans to bomb Iran. Surprisingly, Trump embarked on talks with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Even if these talks fail and lead to war, they demonstrate who holds authority in US-Israeli relations, as I wrote a couple of weeks ago.¹

Last week’s removal of Mike Waltz as national security advisor was also linked to his unauthorised talks with Netanyahu regarding potential military action against Iran - conversations that took place without Trump’s knowledge and in defiance of his current approach. This breach reportedly angered Trump and was viewed as an affront to his authority, which he is known not to tolerate.

Netanyahu consistently advocates the complete dismantlement of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure, including a permanent ban on uranium enrichment and ballistic missile development. However, the Trump administration’s current approach appears more flexible - a bizarre attempt at revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - the deal from which Trump withdrew seven years ago, focusing on limiting enrichment levels and extending verification measures rather than pursuing total elimination.

On Ukraine, there was a definite continuity between campaign rhetoric and governing policy. Trump appeared ready to trade land for peace, accepting Russian control of Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine in exchange for a peace deal. Trump famously browbeat Volodymyr Zelensky into submission and even extracted a \$500 billion rare earths deal. The question remains whether Nato or other forces would be stationed along any buffer zone. The underlying goal was less about resolving the conflict and more about extracting tribute - from Europe in the form of military spending and arms purchases. Trump aimed to shift more of the burden onto European allies, pulling them into greater dependence on US defence contractors.

China

The broader geopolitical posture focused on confronting China. Both Republicans and Democrats have squarely framed China as the primary strategic rival. In that light, even US Ukraine policy was understood as part of a global chessboard, where weakening Russia - or drawing it away from China - served a larger objective. Some on the left misread this as support for Ukrainian sovereignty: in reality, it was more about gaining US dominance in Eurasia.

Here, Chinese assessments of Trump’s first 100 days are of particular interest. Officially, Chinese analysts project a calm, confident stance, emphasising their own country’s strategic programme and long-term planning. Rather than claiming victory, they urge China to “do its own thing well” - to focus on internal stability and development to withstand US pressure.

There is cautious optimism about China’s ability to counter Trump’s first 100 days by stimulating its own economy. China’s internal political dynamics reveal growing

class contradictions, even as official ideology avoids such language. The working class has become increasingly restive, facing both domestic capitalist pressures and global economic uncertainty. However, a summary of articles written on the occasion of Trump’s 100 days in office, reveals different solutions proposed by Chinese thinkers:

■ Yu Yongding, a prominent Chinese economist, advocates increased investment in infrastructure and technology as a means to stimulate economic growth, preferring these over consumption.

■ Others recommend government intervention to address local debt and housing issues.

■ Some argue that China should assume global leadership in trade by lowering tariffs and promoting multilateralism - primarily to win over the global south. Others suggest exporting capital to replicate development abroad.

Despite Trump’s bravado about his first few months in power, most see the US in secular decline, reflecting internal dysfunction. Views on Trump range from scathing to analytical - some see him as erratic, others as strategically consistent with past US policy. Most agree that US-China relations are structurally adversarial.

Chinese commentators remain sceptical of a US-Russia alliance (said to be a “reverse Nixon” strategy). Feng Yujun, a prominent Chinese scholar specialising in Russian and Eurasian affairs and a professor at Beijing University, warns that Russia is inherently aggressive and a destabilising global force, even suggesting it helped install Trump as a strategic asset.

Internal policy

Domestically, the Trump movement has many liberals and leftists drawing comparisons with ‘fascism’ - a label that often masks more than it reveals. However, unlike historical European fascism, which arose to crush a threatening working class, the American proletariat today poses no such threat. Trumpism is better understood as a form of authoritarian populism, emerging at a time of US decline. The goal is reasserting US hegemony and reversing relative decline through coercive means - tariffs, deportations, sanctions, military pressure - and political spectacle.

Trump’s ambition, if not always formalised, leans toward creating a kind of super-presidency. With weakened congressional oversight, a willingness to defy the judiciary and aggressive media manipulation, the role of the US president already borders on monarchical. Trump’s flirtation with the idea of a third term, though constitutionally barred and occasionally denied, underscores this trend.

Any serious analysis of American politics today must examine the fractures within the ruling class - between big tech, finance, fossil fuels and the military-industrial complex - and how those divisions shape national policy. Labels like ‘fascism’ oversimplify things - even if you assume they are somehow accurate. Understanding the actual contradictions offers a clearer path forward for any opposition - not least that of the working class ●

Notes

1. ‘Netanyahu is rebuffed’ *Weekly Worker* April 24: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1535/netanyahu-is-rebuffed](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1535/netanyahu-is-rebuffed).

ACTION

Birmingham bin strike megapicket

Friday May 9, 6am: Solidarity picket, Lifford Lane Depot, Ebury Road, Kings Norton B30. Unite bin workers are facing pay cuts of up to £8,000 a year. They are on strike against the Labour-controlled city council, who are using agencies to provide scab labour. Organised by Unite Community Birmingham and Strike Map: www.facebook.com/unitecommunitybirmingham.

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.

Welfare, not warfare; stop arming Israel

Saturday May 10, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble Buchanan Street Steps, Glasgow G1. Fund wages, homes, hospitals and schools. End the supply of arms for the genocide against Palestine. Scrap Trident nuclear weapons. Organised by Glasgow Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/1359168371880406.

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.

Stopping the arms fair

Saturday May 10, 2pm: Planning workshop, Dalston Solidarity Cafe, 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.

Challenge the government over arms for Israel

Tuesday March 13, 8.30am: Protest outside Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London WC2. Back the legal challenges to the UK government over arms sales to Israel. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events.

What it means to be human

Tuesday May 13, 6pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, The Two Chairmen pub, Dartmouth Street, London SW1, and online. This meeting: ‘Where have all the menstrual huts gone?’, introduced by members of the Menstrual Hut Coalition. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/2397136053983011.

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.

1917: woeful effects of isolation and retreat

Thursday May 15, 6.30pm: Online session in the series, ‘Our history’. Yassamine Mather discusses the British road to socialism, anti-imperialist popular fronts, patriotism, class collaboration, etc. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

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.

Roman credit money and its implications

Thursday May 15, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc/status/1905324402247410169.

Nakba 77: free Palestine, end the genocide

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

Defend the right to protest

Wednesday May 21, 6.30pm: Protest outside Scotland Yard, Victoria Embankment, London SW1. Protect the right to protest, demand the police drop the charges against Palestine protestors. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: stopwar.org.uk/events/defend-the-right-to-protest-drop-the-charges.

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.

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CECOT

Cruel and unusual punishment

Trump's use of prisons in El Salvador as a means of terrorising migrants is a flagrant attack on constitutional rights and the rule of law, writes **Ian Spencer**

Tump's administration is on a collision course with the US judiciary over its brutal deportation of people by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement department. So far, 158,000 have been arrested and deportations have exceeded 142,000. The Department of Homeland Security is bullish in its description of them as "criminal" and "illegal aliens" - many of whom are said to be associated with "criminal gangs" designated as "Foreign Terrorist Organisations". The basis for the arbitrary seizures is the "common sense" of law enforcement officers. The DHS is at pains to point to the illegality of those arrested and deported, which is assured by the rigid enforcement of the Alien Registration Act.

In addition, thousands have been encouraged to "self-deport". The message is clear: if anyone entered the US illegally, the choice is either to leave in the hope of one day being able to apply to enter lawfully (what are the chances of that happening?) or be deported with no hope of ever being allowed to re-enter. A climate of fear has been created and there is no doubt that the process of arrest, detention and deportation has also included many who were residing lawfully in the country. Some of the detentions have been to the notorious Guantanamo Bay, but others are suffering the appalling conditions of the Terrorism Confinement Centre (CECOT - Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo) in El Salvador.¹

CECOT - now the largest prison in Latin America - is located in Tecoluca, a remote area 70km east of San Salvador, the country's capital. It has been operational since February 2023, when US secretary of state Marco Rubio met with president Nayib Bukele, who offered to accept convicted American criminals and incarcerate them at CECOT for a fee. So far \$6 million has been paid by the US.

The prison's director, Belarmino Garcia, estimated in April that the population is close to its capacity of 40,000 inmates, but has plans to expand to 80,000.² The conditions are horrifying - reminiscent of a concentration camp. Each of the 256 cells can house an average of 156 inmates! They are equipped with four-level metal bunks with no mattresses or sheets, two toilets, two wash basins - and two bibles! The cells are lit 24 hours a day and are calculated to have a tiny 0.6 square metres of space per prisoner. The inmates wear all-white uniforms and are allowed out of their cells for just 30 minutes of exercise a day (CECOT was originally constructed with no outdoor exercise facilities). There is not the slightest pretence of rehabilitation. Visits are not allowed and there are no plans to release any of the inmates.

Most of the prisoners were detained in a crackdown on 'gangs' ordered by Bukele. The criteria for detention is unclear and many are detained without due process. Detention can be simply based on having known gang tattoos, it seems. Miguel Sarre, a former member of the UN Subcommittee for the Prevention of Torture, described CECOT as a "concrete and steel pit" used to "dispose of people without formally applying the death penalty".³ Amnesty International has issued a statement which reminds the governments of El Salvador and the US that "the rights to freedom, a fair trial, asylum, legal defence and protection against torture



Salvadoran justice minister Gustavo Villatoro and US homeland security secretary Kristi Noem gawping at inmates

and enforced disappearance are not privileges, but rather obligations that their governments must uphold at all times".⁴

No evidence

Since March, Trump's administration has deported 271 Venezuelan and Salvadorian expatriates from the US to CECOT. Washington claims that all the deportees belong to criminal organisations, but has provided no evidence. Many of the deportations have been carried out using the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, which gives the president the power to detain and deport natives of 'enemy' nations without the usual processes. The act has only been used three times before - all during war. The last time was during World War II, when people of Japanese heritage were interned.

Out of the 261 Venezuelans deported to El Salvador as of April 8, 137 were removed using the Alien Enemies Act. While a lower court had temporarily blocked such deportations in March, the Supreme Court ruled on April 8 that Trump could use the Alien Enemies Act, but those facing deportation must be given a chance to challenge their removal. The American Civil Liberties Union maintains that none were told they had this right.

Among the deportees is Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a 29-year-old father of three from El Salvador, who fled from the country at the age of 16, as his father's company was being threatened by gangs. In the US, he had been granted a work permit and refugee status. He is married to someone with leave to remain and has never been convicted of a criminal offence. He was deported to CECOT and, despite the State

Department admitting that his arrest was due to an "administrative error", it has flatly refused to allow him back despite an order from the Supreme Court. This has been justified by the claim, without evidence, that Abrego Garcia is a member of the notorious MS-13 gang - apparently on the basis that he was wearing the apparel of the Chicago Bulls basketball team (evidence enough, it would seem!).

We have, of course, been here before. The US and UK have both cooperated in outsourcing repression to evade judicial standards in our respective countries. Whether that is for the 'extraordinary rendition' to Uzbekistan, or other countries where they could be tortured with impunity, or whether it is US use of Guantanamo Bay in the hope that the abuse of prisoners would evade scrutiny during the so-called 'war on terror'.⁵

What marks Bukele's contribution as different is his treatment as the poster child for authoritarian repression by so many in the rightwing media. El Salvador's youngest president was born in 1981 and had a career in his father's advertising company before his entry into politics. He joined the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front in 2012, after it had abandoned the armed struggle and entered Salvadorian electoral politics as a broad left-nationalist-Catholic front, winning the 2009 presidential elections with former journalist Mauricio Funes as its candidate.

Having been expelled from the FMLN in 2017, Bukele built his political career on the back of campaigning against corruption and crime, especially the 'war on gangs' from 2022 to the present. For the bourgeois press, where history started yesterday, Bukele is portrayed as a

'populist' and 'authoritarian', and he has described himself as the "world's coolest dictator".

His approval ratings of 80% are lauded, as is the dramatic decline in the Salvadorian murder rate, formerly one of the highest in the world. He has been the subject of fawning interviews by rightwing TV host Tucker Carlson, who gushingly said that president Nayib Bukele "saved El Salvador" and "may have the blueprint for saving the world".⁶

Huge problem

For communists, gangs trading in drugs and people are not primitive rebels or part of the proletariat, but the product of class forces, and their extortion is another burden on an impoverished population. However, neither are they merely the result of misgovernment or regimes that have been 'too soft.' They have their own history, which needs to be understood.

The bourgeois press chooses to ignore the fact that barbarism in El Salvador is, in part, the product of a 13-year civil war, in which the government, supported by the US, killed at least 75,000 people. Many of those were sympathetic to the FMLN, and many were killed by government-backed death squads. These existed to prevent self-determination for the people of El Salvador, particularly where they threatened profits or US control of the region, during the closing years of the cold war.

Bukele is as much the creation of US imperial domination of Latin America as the gangs themselves - gangs which made life in El Salvador so intolerable that many left to seek a 'better life' as superexploited, illegal workers in the US. Brutalising and arbitrary detention of people from

an impoverished population that has turned to crime as a response to destitution is not part of the solution: it is a huge part of the problem.

If Bukele faces resistance from an independent press, trade unionists or workers demanding more than poverty, they too can face disappearance into CECOT, with no questions asked. One example is Giovanni Aguirre, a trade unionist who was imprisoned in 2022 and has not been seen since. Civil rights lawyer Ingrid Escobar, who has represented thousands detained without due process, has been fighting for his release. "The threat is real," she said. "There are activists and unionists in prison. There are others with arrest orders out for them. Yes, we are afraid."⁷

The parallel between Bukele and Trump is clear - that of a model which extols a hard-line approach to crime, yes, but also entails an assault on civil society and democratic institutions, and the accumulation of near absolute power. Even before Trump began his second term of office, the US had one of the highest rates of imprisonment in the world. That trend is only going to accelerate.

Bukele achieved some success in his war on gangs by doubling the size of the army and paying for it with US loans. He used the army to intimidate the National Assembly into approving a request for a loan of \$109 million to pay for the 'Territorial Control Plan', which has also led to a massive expansion of El Salvador's prisons - including CECOT.

The Legislative Assembly has also approved Bukele's proposals to reduce the number of municipalities from 262 to 44 and the number of seats in the legislature from 84 to 60. He ran for re-election in 2024 and won with 85% of the vote after the Supreme Court of Justice 'reinterpreted' the constitution's ban on consecutive re-election.

As for the US constitution, its eighth amendment prohibits "cruel and unusual punishments".⁸ The context was, of course, the history of the American revolutionary war of independence from British control. The new republic was supposed to prohibit the kind of arbitrary imposition of force characteristic of a country emerging from the remnants of feudal society. But it is a constitutional prohibition that never stopped judicial execution, whether by electric chair or whatever, and did little to prevent extra-judicial lynchings.

The people today being deported in tens of thousands from the US were there in the first place precisely because of the poverty induced by a system headed by a world hegemon in decline. The cruel and unusual punishments currently inflicted in CECOT are a foretaste of what is to come if the global proletariat fails to organise politically in order to stop it ●

Notes

1. www.dhs.gov/news/2025/04/29/100-days-making-america-safe-again.
2. www.wsj.com/world/americas/el-salvadors-bukele-plans-to-double-giant-prison-holding-u-s-deportees-at950c70.
3. www.dhs.gov/news/2025/04/29/100-days-making-america-safe-again.
4. www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/la-cooperacion-represiva-entre-eeuu-y-el-salvador.
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6. x.com/TuckerCarlson/status/1798520181112664531.
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ELECTIONS

Breaking the mould?

Last week saw major gains for Reform UK - but is Nigel Farage's outfit about to replace the Tories? They have, after all, been in perpetual chaos for years. Paul Demarty is sceptical

It would not be quite true to say that Reform UK was the only winner on May 1. The Liberal Democrats will be cheered by a strong outing that saw a net gain of 146 councillors, taking overall control in three counties; and the Greens more than doubled their strength in council seats under contestation.

That said, Nigel Farage and his merry men and women were rampant. They took one more seat in parliament, beating out Labour in Runcorn by six votes - a by-election held after previous MP Mike Amesbury was caught on video beating the hell out of a local man, which I suppose is a neat illustration of the mutual comity between major-party MPs and their constituents at the present time. Reform further took the new mayoralities of Hull and East Yorkshire and Greater Lincolnshire. They picked up a staggering 648 councillors, taking control of 10 councils.

The councils in play were largely rural, and so it is no surprise to see that the victims of the Reform wave were principally Conservatives. The Tories lost control of every council they held - eight straight to Reform, and the other seven to no overall control, all thanks to Reform. That said, Reform did take one council, Doncaster, from Labour (where it narrowly lost the mayoral race).

This is a serious problem for the Tory leadership, to put it mildly. The Conservatives are, after all, His Majesty's extremely loyal opposition; with the government in a state of perpetual chaos and demoralisation, they should really have their tails up. Not last week. I think back, rather sadly, to an article I wrote after Kemi Badenoch's victory in the leadership race, cautioning people against writing her off too early.¹ That one, as they say, really aged like milk. Her job is surely under threat; the in-tray of Bob Blackman, chair of the 1922 Committee, will surely groan under the weight of letters demanding a confidence vote.

Wipeout

In fairness to the woman, she has been dealt a poor hand. Last year's general election saw a Tory wipeout, with her party assailed on the right by very substantial Reform votes, and on the left by strong showings from the Lib Dems in the 'blue wall' seats of the south-east, whose voters are more plugged into the London economy and therefore wary of hard-Brexit policies that tend to degrade the City. If she survives, she will have to find some way to deal with these twin threats; if she fails, her successor will be in the same pickle.

As often on days like May 1, there is much chatter about the possible death of the Conservative Party. Such a thing is hardly impossible, but we should be cautious. Ours remains a cruel electoral system for third parties; and, more importantly, the Tory Party is a truly historic organisation - the oldest political party in the world, and for centuries a load-bearing institution in the British constitutional order. It is a true *class* party, which represents the interests of the bourgeoisie by creating a constituency in the petty bourgeoisie and backward elements of the working class.

Such parties can die, but they are not vanquished all at once by a poor day at the office in an off-year election. The question is rather whether we have seen, over the recent period, a sufficiently severe *fundamental* decay



Only winner on the night

in its ability to keep this alliance together and turn it out at the polling booth. If that is the case, it is not clear yet: nothing we have seen is *incompatible* with the interpretation that the Tories are still punch-drunk from their drubbing last year, not to say the five years of disaster that preceded it, and will recover in time.

If they are to recover, they have two obvious approaches - wait out the Reform threat and recapture the votes they have lost well enough to reduce their deficit in 2029; or work out some kind of arrangement with Reform that will, ultimately, lead to reunification (which is what, really, it would be - very many of Reform's councillors are previously Tory activists, and even Nigel Farage was a member until 1992).

Which of these is the result depends very much on *Reform's* progress in the coming years. Can it build on its successes in the last 12 months? There are, again, reasons for scepticism here. Previous Farage outfits have had successes in local elections that have later collapsed. The UK Independence Party took over Thanet council in 2015; but a vicious row over plans to reopen a local airport eventually resulted in the implosion of its council group and a reversion to Tory rule. Farage himself has a history of vicious feuds with subordinates.

Puzzle

The Reform operation looks a little more professional at face value. Yet, if anything, it has a more difficult *political* puzzle to solve. Ukip - at least in its Farage iteration - sold voters a pretty orthodox version of Thatcherism. It had the same economic policy of deregulation, privatisation and the like; its hatred of Europe was strongly associated with Margaret Thatcher's later years, when she relentlessly campaigned on the back benches and in the Lords for the basic Brexiteer demands. The core Ukip vote was basically a Tory vote, and their strongholds were (former) Tory strongholds.

Reform has, in fact, succeeded in doing what overexcited commentators

always supposed Ukip to be on the verge of - taking votes from the Tories *and* Labour on an essentially populist platform of opposition to an unaccountable and ill-defined elite. So far as the 'elite' can be stereotyped as a bunch of politically-correct, censorious liberals who wish to flood the country with immigrants, this works just fine. As soon as one gains control of, say, 10 municipal councils, however, the reality principle looms larger - of a society already stripped to the bone and barely able to keep up with the basics of local governance (picking up refuse, social care and so on).

What, in that case, is the political platform of Reform? Ukip-style turbo-Thatcherism, or the sort of far-right nativist social democracy that so many have sought to project onto Donald Trump in the US? The top-line pledges in the party's manifesto (its "contract" with the British people) attempt to square the circle. Raise the income of the poorest ... by raising the threshold for income tax to £20,000. Reduce NHS waiting times ... through tax breaks for doctors and nurses and cutting back-office costs.² Those are, of course, *national* policies, even if they were more than wishful thinking, and, when the cold winds of local government as it actually exists start blowing in, more sanguine centrists are probably right to expect a degree of (perhaps localised) disillusionment, and perhaps Ukip-in-Thanet-style implosions.

All that said, people *are* voting for them. The idea is abroad that, above all, immigration is to blame for all the various social dysfunctions. As the Reform "contract" promises, "all non-essential immigration [will be] frozen to boost wages, protect public services, end the housing crisis and cut crime". It is hardly surprising that the idea is abroad; both the Conservatives and Labour have frothed about immigration as a diversionary tactic and promised to do something about it - and broken those promises in spectacularly obvious ways.

For those of us who persist in the idea that immigrants are to be

treated decently and not made the scapegoats for a combination of large-scale economic injustice and small-scale political incompetence, it is the worst of all possible worlds - state capacity continues, in stages, to degrade; at every stage, blame is placed on incomers; but, since the incomers are quite genuinely necessary to keep both basic functions of society and more rarefied institutions like universities and financial firms afloat, they keep coming, ensuring new cycles of scapegoating.

Atrophied

That such idiocy should spread among the reactionary petty bourgeoisie is, alas, to be expected. More *might* be expected of the working class; but the workers' movement's formerly formidable sinews of war have atrophied, and so we must face the reality that in this country and many others, chauvinism with respect to migrants has spread widely in a working class atomised by the decline of its mass organisations and thus pushed towards the political psychology of the petty bourgeoisie.

This is not a mere ideological fancy. We can illustrate this through a standard left-right argument about immigration. A rightwinger will argue that, if there is mass immigration, companies will employ lower-cost migrant workers and displace native labour; therefore, it is necessary to restrict immigration to keep wages up. A leftist might argue that illegalising migrant labour merely makes it more precarious, and therefore employers will exploit *that* fact to drive wages down.

The reality is that *both* of these arguments are correct. Employers will exploit any and all prevailing conditions to drive wages down - heads they win, tails we lose. The only way out is working class organisation to curtail the employers' power to do so. However, this really does pan out decisively for the left side of the argument, because in both cases you only have a chance of fighting back by organising both native and migrant labour; but doing so is far easier when

the migrant part of the coalition is not in constant, immediate danger of deportation.

QED: except, as mentioned, the formations that could make such common organisation a *reality* are reeling after decades of defeat. That is why working class hostility to migration makes sense: in the absence of militant trade unions and workers' political parties, one must merely pick one's poison, and it is perfectly rational, though hopeless, to pick the poison that you are not currently being fed. Anti-migrant chauvinism tends to feed on itself - and, since it can never really be consummated, the answer is always more of the same. It is like the Turkish delight in *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe*: "Anyone who had once tasted it would want more and more of it, and would even, if they were allowed, go on eating it till they killed themselves." And so, if Reform should fail, another gang of reactionaries is sure to pick up the torch.

Senseless

It is this rather treacherous situation that makes the approach of the Socialist Workers Party to Reform so hopeless. Alex Callinicos, writing in the latest *Socialist Worker*, does at least conclude that "it's urgent that the radical left gets its electoral act together to pose an alternative." (How well the SWP's electoral-alternative-mongering is going is another matter.)³ Its concrete activity in this electoral cycle, however, has consisted more or less entirely of purely negative anti-Reform campaigning under its Stand Up to Racism banner. As I write, here are the headlines of the first five posts on SUTR's website: "Reform win Runcorn: time to get organised"; "After the May elections, stop Reform UK"; "Stop Reform UK, Scotland Summit"; "Fund the campaign to stop Reform UK"; "Joint statement: stop Reform UK". My point, I take it, is well made.

This is consistent with SWP practice within SUTR and its predecessors, Unite Against Fascism and the Anti-Nazi League: since all of these fronts depend for their perceived legitimacy on their political breadth, they definitionally cannot endorse any positive alternative. To say "vote Green" would alienate Labour people, and vice versa; to say "vote Tory" would alienate themselves, naturally. Yet going around various rural county councils saying *merely* don't vote Reform is exactly the same as saying "vote Tory". Who the hell else is there?

A positive alternative is, as I have argued, a tricky thing to offer. There is not some magic combination of slogans that will reverse the steady course of reactionary 'progress'. It depends on us really rebuilding the fighting capacity of the class, which means giving up on cheap talk and short cuts. As always, the time to start this very long job is now - yesterday, indeed. Making ourselves outriders of a declining political establishment is suicidal ●

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Notes

1. 'A modern chameleon' *Weekly Worker* November 7 2024: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1514/a-modern-chameleon](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1514/a-modern-chameleon).
2. assets.nationbuilder.com/reformuk/pages/253/attachments/original/1718625371/Reform_UK_Our_Contract_with_You.pdf.
3. See Carla Roberts, 'What's the point?' *Weekly Worker* April 24: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1535/whats-the-point](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1535/whats-the-point).

FUSION

Programme 'n' chips

Differences are inevitable. Unity can, however, be forged around a democratically agreed programme and the commitment to building a mass party. **Jack Conrad** reports ... and considers organisational cultures, good and bad

We had our second face-to-face in Manchester on May 4. That makes seven Forging Communist Unity meetings in total. Edmund Potts and Nick Wrack represented Talking About Socialism, Cat Rylance the pro-party faction of *Prometheus*, and Jack Conrad and Mike Macnair the CPGB (Farzad Kamangar also attended as an observer). Comrade Potts chaired the first session.¹

Proceedings began with brief report-backs from each organisation. Comrade Wrack touched upon TAS Zoom meetings. Those attending are enthusiastic and hopeful, but ask about the sort of organisation we envisage. *Prometheus* are commissioning articles on the road towards a mass Communist Party. I raised the question of the non-talks faction of *Prometheus* - we shall send another reminder about our agreed meeting.

Kicking things off I made the admittedly somewhat anodyne point that the whole FCU process was a positive step forward at the start, but that we never thought things would suddenly leapfrog forwards. 'Slowly, slowly' is the right way to go. Communist University will be a particularly important moment. Something we discussed at the end, but mainly in terms of details. CU 2025 will perhaps enable us to see whether or not things will work out.

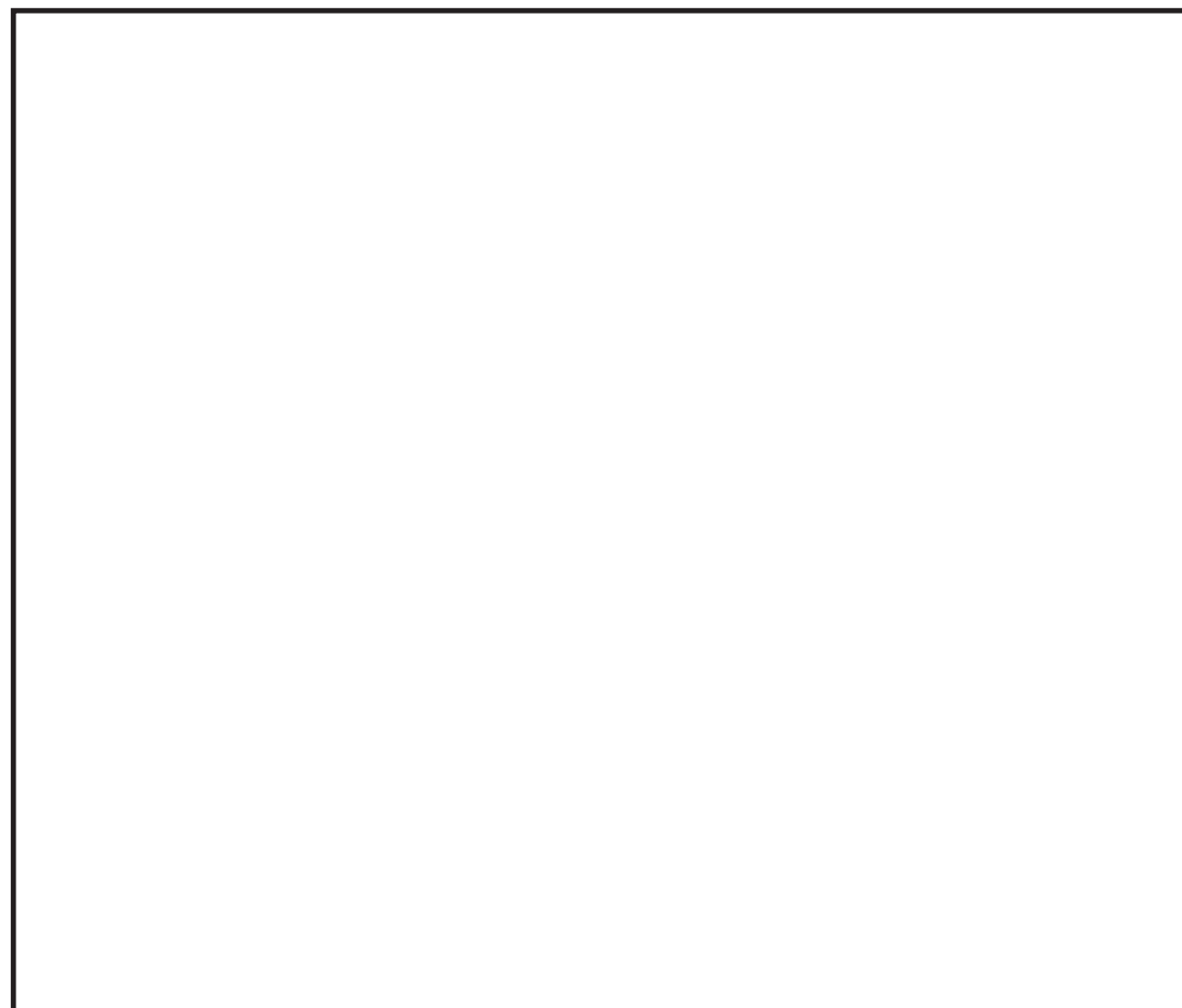
Comrade Wrack agreed: 'slowly, slowly' is the best way forward. Trying to rush things will end in a mess. "Shotgun weddings are usually unsuccessful." Comrade Macnair referred to his experience in the Mandelite International Socialist Group and how it came apart, because unity was essentially based on tactics. When circumstances changed the various components each went their own way.

Comrade Rylance expressed her view that the process could go faster. She warned of the danger of things becoming "lost and meandering". To aid the convergence between the three organisations she proposed trying to arrive at "shared formulations to overcome mere terminological differences". If that did not do the trick, there is always voting at the fusion conference. Without that we will continue in separate organisations ... which would be very negative. She referred back to the idea suggested by the *Prometheus* pro-party faction of a joint committee to draft a common programme.

Responding, I reckoned that there is a "good chance" of us *not* coming to an agreement. When it comes to the middle classes and the transition period, there appear to be differences of real substance. That is important - how important remains to be seen. But we can unite despite our differences, because what we have in common is of far, far greater importance. All three organisations agree that having a programme is essential, and that, to turn that programme into practice, building a mass Communist Party is essential.

Together we reject the absurd notion of some elitist confessional sect leading the mass of the working class - by the nose - to power using the so-called 'transitional method': ie, relying on spontaneity, economic struggles and eschewing high politics and democratic questions.

Any mass Communist Party will



have areas of disagreement - that is bound to be the case. Indeed, the more we discuss, even at this stage, the more disagreements we will discover. That need not constitute an inseparable barrier: members are required to accept the programme, not agree.

Flame us

As for a committee to draw up a draft programme, I argued that if our CPGB representatives in FCU junked our *Draft programme* for the sake of coming to an *agreement* with *Prometheus* and TAS, we would, rightly, be flamed by CPGB members, cells and aggregates. Our *Draft programme* was designed, from the start, not merely to politically equip a small group of communists, but a mass Communist Party.

It should be added that our *Draft programme* is the work of years. Prepared in the 1980s, formally agreed in 1995, it has been amended and twice updated (2011 and 2023). Indeed, if we look at the programmes of classical social democracy, they too were long in the making. The programme of the French Workers' Party (1880) included a year surveying working class opinion. Yes, Marx famously dictated the maximum section almost without stopping for breath. He was able to do that, however, because of decades of prior political experience. A draft of the *Erfurt programme* was worked on and amended (including by Engels) during the course of 1891.² The *Iskra* programme presented to the 2nd Congress of the RSDLP began with Lenin's first thoughts in 1895, was batted to and fro between himself and Plekhanov over the course of 1901-02, culminating in the 1903 vote.

Anyway, I personally envisage the CPGB submitting the *Draft programme* to a fusion conference for

amendment and voting - on section by section, line by line.

We would, of course, surely, dissolve the *binding* discipline over existing CPGB members at such a conference. So we would not necessarily vote as a solid bloc. Yes, we would perhaps meet, consult, come to agreements. But that would be a voluntary act of co-thinkers. We would expect the same approach with the other components of the fusion process - though, it has to be admitted, certainly when it comes to *Prometheus*, that there is no discipline to begin with. It is a loose circle.

So the idea of *Prometheus* producing anything worthwhile when it comes to a programme is pretty far-fetched. Yes, maybe a lowest common denominator. But that would be retrogressive. It is, though, conceivable that such a programme might be agreed by a fusion conference. If that was the case, we would reserve the right to consider the possibility of constituting ourselves as a public faction of the fused organisation.

As for TAS, the comrades had promised us a draft programme some little time ago. That might help, because where comrades Wrack and Potts disagree with our *Draft programme* is sometimes unclear. Comrade Macnair made the same point, albeit from a different angle: is TAS committed to what we would call a minimum-maximum programme? It is hard to tell.

No problem

Speaking for himself, comrade Wrack explained that he does not have a "problem or issue", if people agree with the CPGB. "That's their right" - it is just that "we need to discuss it out and have a comradely debate about it".

He agreed that the absence of a TAS alternative is a problem.

However, there will be "differences within TAS on the question of the min-max programme". As he interprets it, the CPGB *Draft programme* emphasises the minimum side, with the "maximum side being *relegated* to a different stage".

Comrade Wrack also clarified TAS's commitment to a programme. Not an SWP-type 'What we stand for' column, or an SPGB maximum-only, or an essay along the lines of *Militant: what we stand for* (author Peter Taaffe). Frankly, that was good to hear. I readily admit to being worried on that score.

He went on to emphasise that one of the "attractions of the CPGB's approach which makes it stand out is its emphasis on the democratic aspect of the programme. And that is what has attracted a layer of people internationally to the writings of the CPGB". Once again, good to hear ... however there is a catch.

Some of those people internationally "seem to have developed that to the conclusion that what is needed as a stage in the development of history is the democratic republic". The socialisation of the means of production is left out of the frame. "If the democratic republic is a modern term for the dictatorship of the proletariat - no problem", he said.

"When the working class comes to power", the comrade continued, the task is to "socialise everything". As a flourish he declared that this would include "every fish and chip shop, every corner pub".

In reply, I pointed out that we are not responsible for the comrades in the Marxist Unity Group in the US - or anywhere else for that matter. We have never hankered after an 'oil slick international'. Yes, maybe there are one or two in MUG who downplay

the centrality of class politics and the struggle to abolish wage-labour. Perhaps comrade Wrack has Gil Schaeffer in mind - I do not know. I have heard of Sweden being described as the 'democratic republic'! Obviously ridiculous ... and not just because it is a monarchy. But, as far as I know, that is not the position of MUG ... let alone the CPGB.

If comrade Wrack and other TAS comrades were suffering under such a misconception, I am glad to disabuse them of that idea. Anyone, even just flicking through at our *Draft programme*, will see that, as well as fighting for the minimum programme under capitalism, we envisage its full realisation only with the socialist constitution and the transition towards (full) communism.

The democratic republic is, for us, the *form* that the rule of the working class will take. The rule of the working class ushers in what Marx called the "first phase of communism". What we, following Lenin, not least in *State and revolution*, call 'socialism'.

As for socialising everything. We agree ... but *slowly*. As Marx and Engels put it in the *Manifesto*: "The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie."³ Revolution, taking power, is a moment. A qualitative change or leap. But socialisation, while it will doubtless begin by taking over the banks, the utilities, nationalising land, etc, will then, with small and medium-sized enterprises at least, proceed gradually, voluntarily, through encouraging cooperatives, etc.

Middle classes

There is a middle class today. We expect there to be a middle class both before ... and immediately after the revolution. Under current conditions we want the working class to champion the middle class against monopoly capitalism, the banks and the government (as long as it does not violate trade union rights, limits on hours, etc). Why? Because, when it comes to revolution, one of our strategic tasks is to reduce the social base of counterrevolution to as near zero as objective circumstances permit. Hence it matters what we say and do in the here and now.

Talking about socialising *every* fish and chip shop, *every* corner pub is, on the one hand, unnecessary, in part because they are being put out of business already by capitalist development. One closes after another on a daily basis. On the other hand, it is politically irresponsible, because it hands our enemies a potent weapon. They will accuse us of advocating something like Stalin's first five-year plan, or Pol Pot's 'year zero'. Leave aside the middle classes and the question of skill monopolies, demands for socialising *every* fish and chip shop, *every* corner pub - in other words, expropriating the petty bourgeoisie - will deliver a whole social stratum numbering millions straight into the arms of counterrevolution. That is what, yes, I call, "strategically dumb".⁴ Sorry if that is regarded as a hurtful accusation. Nonetheless, it is true.

As for "relegating the maximum programme", that is demonstrably false. On the contrary, that is what we ultimately aim for, because, in the words of our *Draft programme*, this

is where “[r]eal human history begins and society leaves behind the realm of necessity. In the realm of freedom people will become rounded, fully social individuals, who can for the first time truly develop their natural humanity.”⁵ It is this, the culmination of the maximum programme, that makes the minimum programme worth fighting for. The road to human freedom goes via the democratic republic and the rule of the working class. There is no other way of arriving at our ultimate goal.

Comrade Rylance said she thought that it is “really important to state what the purpose of the different elements of the programme are”. The example of the programme of the French Workers’ Party was cited. Apparently “parts of it are completely unclear”. That is why she is looking forward to proposing amendments to a draft programme in order to spell things out. She sees the programme as offering an “advisory perspective” for the future.

Comrade Macnair insisted on stressing democracy and taking a “cautious” attitude towards the middle classes. In that context he dealt with the question of structure. We all live under the “shadow of Stalinism” and the programme has to take account of that historic fact. That is why attempts to stick with the brevity of the programmes of classical late 19th century social democracy cannot but fail. We could certainly begin the programme in a similar manner: ie, start with the maximum, the goal of communism and full human freedom, as does the programme of the French Workers’ Party. But, on balance, it is better, in the 21st century, to begin with the minimum or immediate programme, centred on “winning the battle for democracy”.

Warning against getting fixated on secondary questions, comrade Wrack said the programme could be called ‘min-max’, but what counts is that it is a programme of working class rule. Turning to history, he said, “The problem with the min-max is that it was drafted in a period in Russia not for the immediate implementation of socialism, but in the first instance for democratic rights, etc.”

Nonetheless, he promised to draft a programme along the lines of the programme of the French Workers’ Party ... only in modern language, and longer. He said the CPGB’s *Draft programme* contained too many unnecessary details. Anyway, there needs to be a new programme. It will not come out “this week and it will be rough and ready”. Whether this “rough and ready” programme will be the work of just comrade Wrack alone, the joint work of comrades Wrack and Potts or of TAS as a collective we shall see.

I was allowed to close the first session. The programme of the French Workers’ Party was very much of its time. The maximum part was certainly about more than a still unrealised future. It drew lines of demarcation *against* Proudhonists, Blanquists, left-Jacobins, anarchists and syndicalists. Therefore it caused much controversy on the French left. Opponents furiously *attacked* it as the work of that Prussian ‘red doctor’ living in London. So, for sure, it had nothing to do with a lowest-common-denominator compromise.

As for length. Our *Draft programme* is far from excessive. It comes in with about the same word count as the 1919 programme of the Russian Communist Party. Detailing our firm commitment to democracy is no indulgence. No, it is absolutely vital. Not only because of the Soviet Union: there is today’s alphabet soup of confessional sects: the CPB, NCP, SWP, SPEW, ACR, SA, RCP, etc, etc.

My last point: the programme of the RSDLP was divided into a minimum and maximum section. But it is hardly our model. Indeed it

was exceptional in terms of European social democracy, because Russia was *exceptional*. The minimum section centred on the overthrow of tsarism and the tasks that would follow thereon after, as *capitalist* industry and agriculture develops.

But in the summer of 1905 Lenin wrote his *Two tactics*, which mapped out the perspective of the workers and peasants overthrowing tsarism in the ‘bourgeois revolution’, but without putting the bourgeoisie into power. Instead there would be the ‘revolutionary democratic (majority) dictatorship (decisive rule) of the proletariat and peasantry’, which triggers the European socialist revolution and therefore allows backward Russia to go uninterruptedly to the tasks of socialism without a specifically socialist revolution. Needless to say, there was no thought of expropriating the peasantry. Cooperatives would be encouraged.

A brilliant application of Marxism to the conditions in early 20th century Russia ... and Europe. But, as already stated, hardly our model.

Second session

Programme was mixed with what we might call organisational culture in the second session. True, they are closely related, programme being the main determinant.

Anyway, I began by saying that we in the CPGB favour democracy - not only in society, but within our own organisation too. Cell secretaries are elected, the PCC is elected. We are also committed to open debate and discussion - the open airing of differences is considered as much a duty as a right. There is too the right for co-thinkers to form factions. However, the slogan, ‘strength in diversity’, is certainly not mine. We surely want political unity around a correct, a principled programme. That is where *real* political strength comes from.

We are for robust polemics. The right to conduct polemics in an honest, hard-hitting way - we consider that a healthy culture. Attempts to police language, to draw up a list of ‘bad words’, attempts to guard people against offence, stop them getting upset, etc are utterly alien to our culture.

Hence, we fought and refused to abide by Left Unity’s safe spaces, limits on free speech, bans on heckling, etc. Indeed from our very origins with the first publication of *The Leninist* in November 1981, ours was an open rebellion against the ban on factions and the biannual limits imposed on open political criticism.

Of course, it is a two-way street. The criticised can criticise.

Comrade Rylance brought up our standing formulation: “going through the left”. What she meant by this is the sort of work a fused organisation would conduct in relationship with the rest of the left.

Comrade Macnair, chairing the second half, thought that it would be best not to “jump” to that question. We need more discussion on programme. Nonetheless, he made the valid point that, even if we experienced an organisational leap, what we can do is still going to be limited. We can take this or that initiative, but what we actually can do will in large measure depend on wider political developments, including on the left. Some things are just unpredictable. He gave the example of Corbynism.

In my opinion the CPGB, TAS and the *Prometheus* pro-party faction have explored the programme question as far as we can for the moment. We have though put our *Draft programme* on the table.

Comrade Wrack stressed the importance of a programme - something not common nowadays on the left. He also stressed that he agreed with much that is in our

Draft programme. In point of fact he seems to have gone over it with a fine-tooth comb. Which is excellent news: it shows real seriousness. In light of that he said he recognised the existence of the middle classes and the need to “reassure” and “assuage real concerns”. Again excellent. Towards that end he called for a study of Britain’s class structure and its dynamics. A good suggestion.

Presumably to stimulate discussion comrade Wrack asked whether or not dual power was an example of the dictatorship of the proletariat? Certainly the rule of the working class would see “continuing struggle for power.” At the moment though we should not worry about “hostility among sections of the middle class”. After all we have yet to even gain a hearing from the mass of the working class.

Language please

However, he did finally turn to our organisation and our culture. Comrade Wrack said he was fine with robust polemics. He opposed attempts to regulate and police discussions and how they are conducted. But ... he wants a leadership which is “skilful enough” and “knows how far to go”. Here we were approaching the rub. He called for accurate reporting as a “first commitment”. We should not fall into the “trap of exaggerating”. Language should take into account that “others are watching”. It is important that we share the “same goal”.

What is for one ‘robust polemics’ is ‘I’m not coming here again’ for another. And, though he has read our draft rules, the comrade said that he did not really know how the CPGB works. Does it, for example, suppress differences?

Comrade Macnair went into the ins and outs of ‘official communism’ and how it did actually suppress criticism of others in the name of unity. The SWP does exactly the same thing in We Demand Change, Stand Up to Racism, etc, etc. As for us, the comrade cited internal criticism within our organisation over using the phrase ‘useful idiot’ in the context of trans rights, because it will be used against our side.

As far as comrade Wrack was concerned, he had “no problem” with the term. Comrade Macnair continued giving examples of harsh language: eg, calling Paul Mason a ‘scab’. That does not mean we want to prevent discussion on language, discussion and debate.

Comrade Rylance said that she “accepted” that she had “bent the stick” against the CPGB over harsh polemics against others on the left. But she raised concern over the role of leaderships, authority and hierarchy.

For my part, I said the discussion had gone a “little pear-shaped”. I welcomed comrade Wrack’s remarks on the middle classes. We also need to fight for working class hegemony over all democratic questions from Scotland to Palestine, from women’s rights to gay rights, from migration to crime and prison. And, no, dual power is not the working class in power. It is the working class half in power, near taking power. It is a temporary, highly unstable situation, that can be resolved in one of two ways: revolution or counterrevolution.

On polemics and organisational culture, one person’s demand for accuracy can be code for curbing another’s freedom to criticise in the manner they choose and think appropriate. Our opponents often seek to shield themselves by citing the ‘right’ to be guarded against intimidating language, the ‘duty’ to promote unity by only using respectful language, the ‘obligation’ not to put off potential recruits by refraining from off-putting polemical language.

Here I referred to Marx himself.

Even as a young man, in 1842, he was to be found passionately arguing in favour of unrestricted freedom of expression: “Whenever one form of freedom is rejected, freedom in general is rejected,” he defiantly wrote.⁶ Of course, freedom comes with its hurtful side. Marx tellingly writes: “Keep in mind that you could not enjoy the advantages of a free press without tolerating its inconveniences. You could not pluck the rose without its thorns!”⁷

Our movement is dominated by opportunism. We must therefore do everything we can to encourage thought, encourage criticism, encourage rebellion. Our comrades need to be tough, not snowflakes. We are not interested in cosy deals with the forces of opportunism. We declare war. The left has, unfortunately, not just declined in numbers: it has declined in terms of culture too. Always poor, it has become altogether poorer.

Comrade Potts said he agreed with that. However, “Language that is appropriate to one section may not be appropriate to another section.” There is too much burn-out of rank-and-file comrades. Comrade Rylance basically concurred. Comrade Wrack too. He worries about the “unpleasant tone” adopted by *Weekly Worker* writers, when it comes to the “rest of the left” ... for example, Jack Conrad had written about him showing a “visceral hostility towards organised communists” and being “strategically dumb”. This was, it should be mentioned (a) in the context of Left Unity and his Socialist Platform⁸ and (b) irresponsible talk of immediate, total socialisation of small and medium businesses.⁹

Either way, the comrade is “thick-skinned”: such criticisms are “water off a duck’s back”. However, what about those who “agree” with the CPGB, but “won’t join”? Methinks this ‘agree ... but’ formulation is actually cover for political *disagreement* that dares not speak its name. Anyway, comrade Wrack thinks robust polemic “tips over into personal abuse or denigration” and puts them off.

Comrade Wrack calls for self-critical reflection. “You can,” he said, “be the best football team in the world. You’ve always got to be better. Even if we have the best ideas and best culture.”

Frankly, I reject the charge that we engage in *personal* abuse and

denigration. Our focus is always *political*. We can get into an argument about the personal *being* political. And there is a truth here. However, our prime concern is always the *political* persona.

Nonetheless, I think I can sum up my own and comrade Macnair’s reply to comrade Wrack by saying this: yes, we do indeed think that the CPGB has the best ideas and the best organisational culture ... they form an inseparable unity. Can we do better? Yes! Must be we better? Definitely!

Something that will surely be aided, enhanced and taken to a new level by forging communist unity ●

Notes

1. This report relies not only on my own notes, recollections and thoughts. Largely I have followed the chronology and extracted from the minutes taken by Ed Potts. Comrade Yassamine Mather also made extensive notes. They were twice as long, not least because, as a participant, comrade Potts tended not to note his own contributions. Either way, I decided to base my report mainly on comrade Potts, because he and comrade Nick Wrack constitute one voice, when it comes to TAS. Therefore it is safe to assume that his account is acceptable to TAS as a whole.
2. See B Lewis (ed and trans) *Karl Kautsky on democracy and republicanism* Leiden 2020, p307-28.
3. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 6, New York, NY 1976, p504.
4. J Conrad ‘Rediscovering our words’ *Weekly Worker* April 10 2025.
5. CPGB *Draft programme* London 2023, pp48.
6. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 1, London 1975, p181.
7. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 1, London 1975, pp164-65.
8. Left Unity’s Socialist Platform was established in 2013 at comrade Wrack’s initiative. However, what distinguished it first and foremost for us was a refusal to countenance any democratic changes to its ‘Who we are’ statement (see - leftunity.org/socialist-platform-statement-of-aims-and-principles). Comrade Wrack narrowly won the vote on this at the first conference, tellingly with help provided by the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers’ Liberty. By the way, we wanted to kick them out, but lost that vote. However, for what it is worth, and it is worth very little, when it came to *indicative* votes we won every ‘amendment’ bar one. Showing what, I think is fair to say, was a definite hostility to us, comrade Wrack voted against every single proposal coming from the CPGB. We went on to form the Communist Platform, which, before we split from Left Unity in February 2016 over its criminal refusal to positively engage with Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party, had a four-strong faction on its national council. Of course, all of that is ancient history now and has absolutely no relevance when it comes to Forging Communist Unity. I am just putting the record straight here, not trying to rake over old coals.
9. J Conrad ‘Rediscovering our words’ *Weekly Worker* April 10 2025: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1533/rediscovering-our-words.

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POLEMIC

They come with thorns

Demands for ‘civility’, avoiding ‘name-calling’ and approaching others ‘in a comradely way’ are phrases that come straight from the dominant culture of opportunism. **Mike Macnair** defends the CPGB’s good culture of open criticism and robust polemics

Last week has seen the return of complaints that the CPGB and this paper have a ‘bad culture’. The *Why Marx?* online meeting on May Day offered a platform for the three groups engaged in the Forging Communist Unity discussions. It was well attended, with 100 present at one point. The discussion from the floor was to a considerable extent addressed to the issue of “approaching others in a comradely way” (as comrade Soraya Lawrence, for example, put it); or “avoiding name-calling” (as comrade Danny McGowan put it). The issue also formed a substantial part of our discussions at the weekend’s Forging Communist Unity meeting in Manchester on May 3 (see Jack Conrad’s report).

Meanwhile, it has been reported by CPGB comrades that RS21 people have complained about my article on the UK Supreme Court’s Christianist ruling on the definition of ‘woman’.¹ The complaint is about my characterisation of the position of much of the left (including RS21), who cling to defending Theresa May’s model of self-identification within the framework of the compulsory gender binary, as ‘useful idiots’. This is, allegedly, an example of the CPGB’s ‘bad culture’.

Regrettably, the boot is exactly on the other foot. In demanding ‘civility’ and ‘comradeliness’ in debate, against sharp forms of polemic, comrades of the 21st century British² far left have, without recognising what they are doing, internalised norms of the *bureaucratic right wing* of the workers’ movement, which were created with a view to suppressing sharp political dissent.

It makes no difference that what is sought is tactical self-censorship rather than formal censorship regimes. Tactical self-censorship was already what Georgi Dimitrov called on the communist parties to do at the 7th Congress of Comintern in 1935: to refrain from criticising the right wing unless they broke the unity of the united front or people’s front.

It equally makes no difference that diplomatic language is sought towards potential ‘allies’, as opposed to ‘enemies’. On the one hand, the whole of the workers’ movement, including its right wing, have to be seen as potential allies (in relation, for example, to the successful conduct of strikes, or to forcible self-defence of the movement against fascism). On the other, former leftists may suddenly become Atlanticists (like Paul Mason), mutating from friends to enemies; in 2015 one of the CPGB’s own former members broke with us and became a participant in the anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism witch-hunt.

It makes no difference either that new or young comrades may find sharp language ‘intimidating’ (a point argued by comrade Cat Rylance at Saturday’s Forging Communist Unity meeting). It is equally true that new or young comrades may find unfamiliar democratic procedures, or the use of Marxist theory, intimidating. So, too, the more bureaucratic procedures of trade unions or the Labour Party, which comrades need to learn to work with if they are to fight effectively against the right wing. The solution is education and self-education.

The use of civility and deference in political debate is *anti-educational* for young and new members. It blurs differences - and it is through dialectic



Rosa Luxemburg: condemned for being rude

in its old sense - the confrontation of opposed ideas - that new starters acquire the ability to form *their own* opinions, as opposed to being ‘trained’. ‘Civility’ involves in practice deference to the ideas that are dominant not just in the movement, but also in the *society* - which are the ideas from time to time promoted by the ruling class.

Insults

I begin with ‘useful idiots’, because it is actually rather a good example of the problem. It is an expression first attested in 1864, which means someone who naively adopts a political line that can be exploited by more sophisticated political operators - whether by opponents, as in the 1864 example, or by ‘supporters’ (in quotes) who actually have ulterior motives (as is more commonly the case in more recent uses).³

In my article I said that non-conservative feminists who celebrated the UK Supreme Court decision were useful idiots who were fronting for their supposed supporters from the Christianist right. I went on to say that the majority position of the left - to defend Theresa May’s scheme, as attempted by the Scottish National Party government - *also* involved being useful idiots: this time, because the scheme created a *soft target* for the cynical dog-whistle operation conducted by the Christianist right.

It has been suggested that I could have used less harsh language. The problem is that, if I am right on the issue, the comrades who hold the view I am criticising have adopted a policy that is disastrous immediately for trans people and in the medium term for women. If I had said that the comrades had adopted a ‘soft target policy’, or that they had ‘naively

adopted a political line that can be exploited by more sophisticated political operators’, this, too, could perfectly well have been described as ‘harsh language’, ‘name-calling’ and so on. The issue is one of substantive political difference, in which I charge the comrades with having made a very serious political mistake: and there is no soft-touch or diplomatic way of expressing this difference.

Of course, I may be wrong. Precisely for this reason, the *Weekly Worker* has a largely open letters column, and also invites comrades who disagree to write at more length. But to avoid stating the objection to a policy I regard as disastrous, on the basis of the *possibility* that I might be wrong, would, in essence, be to fudge the substantive political difference.

The underlying problem is that what is ‘insulting’ or ‘offensive’ language is in the eye of the recipient. Thus in 1721 the mayor of Northampton was prosecuted for sending a licence to keep a pub to the Earl of Halifax - “which the court said was a libel (defamatory, insulting) in the case of a person of his [the earl’s] quality”. More recently, in *Masterson v Holden* in 1986, the court held that two gay men kissing at a bus stop was “insulting behaviour liable to cause a breach of the peace”, so that they were properly convicted under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1936 (originally purportedly aimed against Mosley’s fascists).⁴

Yet more recently, the anti-Semitism witch-hunt has been extensively conducted under the aegis of section 26 of the Equality Act 2010, which defines ‘harassment’ as conduct that (among other phenomena) has the *effect* of creating an *offensive* environment for the complainant - and the complainant’s view is the *first* of

the factors listed for courts to take into account.⁵ Palestine protests are then claimed to create an offensive environment for Jews who support the state of Israel, and thus amount to ‘harassment of Jews’.

In short, to accept the principle that what we write should not be considered by the targets of disagreements to be insulting or offensive is to give people who merely *claim* to have been insulted, ‘name-called’, or whatever, the right to control the *political content*, not just the style, of what is said.

History

The history of this claimed right not to be insulted is long and closely associated with the right wing of the movement. This year is the 150th anniversary of Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, originally merely sent privately. This was published in 1891, against the furious objections of ‘Lassalleans’ on the leadership of the Social Democratic Party of Germany to its insulting character, as can be seen from Engels’ correspondence at the time.⁶ Rosa Luxemburg and Alexander Parvus were both accused of using an excessively insulting tone in their early polemics against Bernstein in 1896-1900.⁷

Luxemburg was again targeted in similar terms by Heinrich Cunow, defending in 1915 the SPD leadership’s decision to vote for war credits:

The opposition to our Reichstag fraction’s vote on August 4 and December 2 last year is assuming ever more obnoxious forms. Those who do not agree with the vote on war credits undoubtedly have the right to criticise it, in an objective, party-comradely fashion, of course

- although even on this condition one could be of the view that for certain reasons it would be better to postpone criticism until after the war. Yet, when the German social democratic working class and its leaders are accused by opponents in Germany and abroad of cowardice, betrayal, a lack of principles, abdication, collapse and so on, then surely there can hardly be any talk of objective criticism.⁸

Cunow and his immediate co-thinkers had been part of the SPD *left* before August 1914 led them to jump to social-chauvinism.⁹ This demand for “objective, party-comradely” criticism was repeated in stronger forms by the Labour right complaining of “intimidation” by Corbynistas in 2016-17.¹⁰ Thus the pro-capitalist right wing of the workers’ movement has been demanding ‘civility and respect’ in debate, meaning deference to their scab politics, ever since the ‘revisionism’ debate in the SPD in the 1890s-1900s.

In 1920, Lenin argued in *‘Leftwing’ communism*:

The Communist Party should propose the following ‘compromise’ election agreement to the Hendersons and Snowdens: let us jointly fight against the alliance between Lloyd George and the Conservatives; let us share parliamentary seats in proportion to the number of workers’ votes polled for the Labour Party and for the Communist Party (not in elections, but in a special ballot), and let us retain complete freedom of agitation, propaganda and political activity. Of course, without this latter condition, we cannot agree to a bloc, for that would be treachery; the British communists must demand and get complete freedom to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as (for 15 years - 1903-17) the Russian Bolsheviks demanded and got it in respect of the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens: ie, the Mensheviks.¹¹

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

The December 1922 Executive Committee of Comintern’s *Theses on the united front* similarly maintained:

The Executive Committee of the Communist International considers that the chief and categorical condition, the same for all Communist Parties, is: the absolute autonomy and complete independence of every Communist Party entering into any agreement with the parties of the Second and Two-and-a-Half Internationals, and its freedom to present its own views and its criticisms of those who oppose the Communists. While accepting the need for discipline in action, Communists must at the same time retain both the right and the opportunity to voice, not only before and after, but if necessary during actions, their opinion on the politics of all the organisations of the working class

without exception. The waiving of this condition is not permissible in any circumstances. Whilst supporting the slogan of maximum unity of all workers’ organisations in every practical action against the capitalist front, Communists cannot in any circumstances refrain from putting forward their views, which are the only consistent expression of the interests of the working class as a whole.¹²

Comintern began to concede ‘civility’ to the right with Georgi Dimitrov’s speech to the 1935 seventh congress:

“The Communists attack us,” say others. But listen, we have repeatedly declared: We shall not attack anyone, whether persons, organisations or parties, standing for the united front of the working class against the class enemy. But at the same time it is our duty, in the interests of the proletariat and its cause, to criticise those persons, organisations and parties that hinder unity of action by the workers.¹³

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

This in turn has led the *far* left to internalise the same principles - going back in this country to the International Socialists/Socialist Workers Party’s 1976-77 ‘Right to Work Campaign’, modelled on the popular-front version of the old Communist Party’s 1930s unemployment campaigning; and to the Anti-Nazi League from 1977 (a model that the SWP has been attempting to repeat, with diminishing returns, ever since).

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

Like and dislike

Comrades who put forward these objections to the CPGB’s ‘bad culture’ commonly preface them by saying that they like the CPGB’s democratic politics, and/or the open character of the *Weekly Worker*. Fifteen months ago comrade Archie Woodrow from RS21 in a letter combined very similar criticisms with characterising himself as a “great admirer of Mike Macnair’s writings on revolutionary strategy and the need for communist regroupment”. I responded the following week with the observation:

... he needs to be aware that my *Revolutionary strategy* book could never have been published without the character of the *Weekly Worker* as a paper of “Marxist *polemic* and Marxist unity” (emphasis added), of which he complains.

As Karl Marx wrote in 1842, “you cannot enjoy the advantages of a free press without putting up with its inconveniences. You cannot pluck the rose without its thorns!” The book originated as a series of articles in this paper polemicising with the 2006 debate on strategy in the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire and Alex Callinicos’s interventions in this debate. Both the Ligue and

Callinicos would certainly have regarded the articles as ‘rude’ if they had bothered to respond at all.¹⁴

Majorities usually regard minority views as rude, condescending and ‘abstract and self-important polemicising’. This is just the normal left-bureaucratic or debating-society method. And the demand for ‘politeness’ is in reality the same demand made by the Labour right against the left (compare my article, ‘Attempt to outlaw justified anger’, October 20 2016¹⁵) - just on a smaller scale.

The reality is that free speech is indivisible. The call for tactical self-censorship is as much a call to shut up as any other sort of no-platforming.

Unity

Moreover, the CPGB’s rejection of ‘civility’ requirements is a necessity for any real and stable unity.

First, no-one on the far left is willing to deny themselves the right to call Keir Starmer (for example) a scab and a class enemy. The requirement of civility and comradeliness is restricted to potential friends, not to open enemies.

But, as we have already seen, potential friends can rather rapidly *become* open enemies. Starmer started out as a Pabloite Trotskyist in his youth, was among members of the Parliamentary Labour Party willing to serve under Corbyn, and even when he stood as Labour leader *claimed* (almost certainly falsely) that he would continue Corbyn’s policy platform. The British far left has repeatedly celebrated (and insisted on diplomacy towards) soft-left groups: Corbynites, Podemos, Syriza, Die Linke, Rifondazione Comunista ...

The question posed is then: *when* do we say that these soft-left projects of one sort or another are almost certain to end in political collapse? Is saying so *before the moment of actual political collapse* ‘failing to approach others in a comradely way’, or in some other way ‘bad culture’? (This is certainly the view of the CPGB held by leaders of the SWP, or of Anti-Capitalist Resistance, and so on, in so far as they pay any attention to us at all).¹⁶ If you take this approach, you guarantee endless repeats of the far left’s diplomatic approaches to the soft left.

Secondly, as I have argued earlier in this article, what counts as an insult is a matter of subjective judgment. It is inherent in politics that any united left organisation will throw up disagreements. It is inherent also that some of these disagreements will pose the question of one side possibly going over to the enemy camp. There will be anger and sharp or objectionable characterisations of opponents in argument.

If you attempt to prevent this sort of ‘uncomradely’ behaviour, the result is to stifle dissent and double standards. Back in Left Unity in 2013-15 we noted that the proposer of a ban on heckling (which we opposed) promptly heckled a CPGB speaker in the same meeting. This problem of indeterminacy and double standards means that, as soon as serious disagreements arise, the opposing side will be accused of ‘bad culture’, ‘uncomradeliness’ and so on. Left Unity is, in fact, a classic example: its ‘safe spaces’ rules (never actually voted in during that period, but used in practice) gave rise to the organisation’s disputes committee being utterly clogged up with meritless complaints.

Another variation. In Britain, the Mandelites have been through a series of ‘unity projects’ - both in the form of broad-front projects and ‘revolutionary regroupment’ factions within these. The broad-front projects have not lasted - but neither have the ‘revolutionary regroupments’. The organisation which is now

Anticapitalist Resistance was before that Socialist Resistance and before that in turn the International Socialist Group.

The ISG originated in 1987 as a regroupment. On one side were tendencies that had recently split from the old International Marxist Group-Socialist League - principally the International Group led by Phil Hearn, Dave Packer and others; on the other was the Socialist Group of Alan Thornett, John Lister and others, who had recently been expelled from Sean Matgamna’s Socialist Organiser group (itself a collapsed regroupment; now Alliance for Workers’ Liberty). The regroupment was joined by elements of the Chartist Minority Tendency (which ran *Labour Briefing*); by the Socialist Labour Group, the British group of the Lambertiste ‘Fourth International - International Centre for Reconstruction’; and by some others. By the early 1990s it was plain that the group was merely an enlarged International Group: Alan Thornett had become fully integrated in the Mandelite core, the Socialist Group wing had withered away, and most of the other tendencies (including what became the Fourth International Supporters’ Caucus in the Socialist Labour Party) had split off. The 1990s were to see a series of further splits and attrition, which reduced the ISG to a small size.

Splitters

In part these splits were attributable to the dogmatism of the splitters. In particular, for the Chartist Minority Tendency and the Lambertistes, Labour Party entry was a matter of strategic principle and any involvement at all with attempts to regroup the left that went beyond the Labour left therefore amounted to a ‘principled’ basis for a split.

More fundamentally, however, what made it impossible for the differences within the ISG to be contained within a single organisation were two fundamental and linked features of the Mandelite ‘tradition’: the diplomatic conceptions both of ‘the united front’ and of party unity. The original 1987 unification was on the basis of agreement on documents which were fuzzy on questions of principle, rather than openly and clearly expressing points of difference: they could therefore be agreed by comrades who held mutually opposed strategic conceptions. The Mandelites also work in the same way in relation to their version of the policy of the ‘united front’: it involves, for them, diplomatic accommodations of their public political positions to the people they plan to work with.

These diplomatic approaches have two consequences. The first is that, since strategic and programmatic principles are never clarified, any unification is in fact not on the basis of principles, but of tactics. As soon as the tactical agreement is overturned by new developments in the political situation, the basis for unity disappears. The second is that the public press of the group has to apply the diplomatic approach to the group’s current external collaborators. As a result, the press is bound to be politically anodyne in character and controlled by a narrow group who ‘really’ understand the tactic.

A trivial example from my own experience - in 1986-87 I wrote for the IG-ISG’s journal a critique of *Militant*’s policy of introducing socialism through an ‘Enabling Act’. My critique was based on the politics of British constitutional law. Publication was refused on the ground that this would be read as an implicit critique of the IG-ISG’s Labour-left allies. I was perfectly well aware that I held minority positions in the IG-ISG, though I was surprised to find that I held them on this particular question, and I was

an old lag (long-time dissident). So this little bit of bureaucratism was no great shock to me. For other comrades (who had believed what was said in the unification discussions), when tactical differences came to the fore, and as a result they themselves came up against this bureaucratic-clique self-censorship of the group’s press, reasons for staying in the group were weak.

The political approach of diplomatic silence in broader organisations thus entails the silencing of dissenting views that might disturb the broader diplomatic unity. And this in turn produces unmotivated and unprincipled splits and attrition of membership at the base.

The pattern of unity on the basis of diplomatic agreements, followed by overreaction to ‘insults’ and provocations, is not just a matter of the history of Left Unity and the ISG. It is the history of far-left splits more generally; a relatively recent example is the 2014 collapse of the International Socialist Network over ‘chairgate’.¹⁷

Suppose - and it is perfectly possible - that the opponents of the CPGB’s ‘bad culture’ persuade enough of the CPGB’s members and supporters that publication of this paper in its present form should be brought to an end. That would not prevent the logic of splits.

The alternative is to unite on the basis of a clear, long-term, programmatic-strategic project - not on the basis of leftwing ‘motherhood and apple pie’ sentiments or agreement on *immediate* tasks - and within that framework, to accept that there *will* be forms of polemic that are considered offensive or insulting.

For the CPGB to compromise for the same of unity on the issue of open and sharp polemics would, then, in fact be to destroy any *real* possibility of unity of the communists, and to condemn ourselves to repetition of the patterns of left failure of the last 50 years.

An indefinite future repetition, but not an *endless* repetition, because it will only last until the growing ascendancy of the irrationalist right results in a generalised nuclear war. This growing ascendancy of the irrationalist right is itself the product of the Marxist left’s self-silencing

acceptance of the loyalist and ‘official left’ labour bureaucracy’s demands for confidentiality and ‘civility’ ●

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Notes

1. ‘Case of judicial usurpation’, April 24: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1535/case-of-judicial-usurpation.
2. From my limited reading of left materials from other countries, the problem seems much less severe there. But, of course, there are sharp limits both on my language competence and on my time for reading, so this may be merely an impression based on a limited range of countries. “21st century” because this oversensitivity to sharply critical language among the *far* left seems to be a recent development.
3. wordhistories.net/2021/03/26/useful-idiot.
4. *Mayor of Northampton’s case* (1721) 1 Strange 422; *Masterson v Holden* [1986] 1 WLR 1017.
5. www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/26.
6. foreignlanguages.press/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/C16-Critique-of-the-Gotha-Program-1st-Printing.pdf collects the letters.
7. P Nettl *Rosa Luxemburg* Vol 1, Oxford 1966, chapter 5.
8. *Partei-Zusammenbruch? Ein offenes Wort zum inneren Parteistreit* Berlin 1915 (*The collapse of the party? An open word on the controversy in the party*) p3 (Ben Lewis’s translation).
9. B Lewis, ‘World War I: SPD left’s dirty secret’ *Weekly Worker* June 26 2014: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1016/world-war-i-spd-lefts-dirty-secret (and subsequent articles in that series); M Macnair, ‘Die Glocke or the inversion of theory: from anti-imperialism to pro-Germanism’ *Critique* Vol 42 (2014), pp353-75.
10. See, for instance, ‘Attempt to outlaw justified anger’ *Weekly Worker* October 20 2016: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1127/attempt-to-outlaw-justified-anger.
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Fighting fund

Up your payment

After last month’s brilliant success in shooting through our £2,750 monthly target on the last day of April, I wonder if we can do the same thing in May - only this time giving ourselves a few days to spare!

Well, the first week of the month is always notable for the large number of standing orders we receive and this one was no exception. No fewer than 19 comrades contributed their usual SO - the best being the fantastic £100 from comrade AC. Then there were the regular donations from LC (£50), BO (£35), MM (£31), CG (£30), NR and RG (£25 each), DL and MT (£20), CP (£16), RG and AM (£15), RM (£13), RD (£12), MM (£11), AN, DI, IS and SM (£10 each).

On top of that, a further couple of tenners came from MH (via PayPal) and comrade Hassan (his usual banknote), taking our total for the first week of the month up to £478. Well, not bad, but it is, of course, quite a bit below the going rate - something like £650 is the average weekly amount that would see us home.

And, of course, now that

our printing costs in particular have shot up, we would really appreciate it if some of the above donors could increase their standing orders a little bit. And that obviously applies to subscribers too! There are still quite a few of them who have not yet upped the monthly payment to the actual price of £8 for UK subscribers (it’s £14 for readers overseas). If you’re one of them, please do that as soon as you possibly can - don’t forget that the new rate started over a month ago! And that applies to PayPal subscribers too, of course.

We really need our readers and supporters to help us out, so please pay us more than the basic subscription rate if you possibly can!

Just as you need the *Weekly Worker*, so the *Weekly Worker* needs you ●

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

AUSTRALIA



SSN-Aukus submarine (artist impression)

Orange, green and red

Labor's thumping election victory resulted from more than Trump and the rush for safety. Liberal dog whistles and the promise of nuclear power stations were soundly rejected. **Marcus Strom** looks at the results and calls for the creation of a worthwhile left

In the 1979 film *Being there*, Chance, a gardener, played by Peter Sellers, manages to rise to the top of political society simply by being in the right place at the right time: he mouths homilies and vapid nostrums that reassure those around him. By occupying a space and allowing people to project their wishes onto him, he channels a desire for sensible change and becomes a vehicle for their hopes. His calm demeanour and seeming wisdom in a crazy world projects stability to those around him.

In a sense, this is the political programme of Australian prime minister Anthony Albanese. Although, as I write, not every single result is known, it is clear that the Australian Labor Party has just won a thumping re-election with an increased majority. But it still lives with the ghost of Gough Whitlam, the reforming prime minister (1972-75), who achieved much, but burned out quickly: he was removed from office in a monarchical coup, dismissed by Her Majesty's representative, the governor general, and trounced at the next election.

Inner circle

Albanese and his inner circle do not want Labor to be the 'shock and awe' party that moves fast and breaks things. He wants the ALP to be the stable, natural party of a 'kinder' capitalism. In the campaign, to mark himself out from the opposition conservative Liberal 'nasty party' and the shadow of Trump, he declared that kindness is not a weakness.

Of course, underlying the ability to deliver minimal 'progressive' reform at home with 'kindness' is Australia's - and the ALP leadership's - commitment to its role in the global imperialist order. Billions for the Australia-UK-US alliance (Aukus), support for Nato and, at best, a blind eye to the horrors of Gaza.

As the storm clouds gather internationally, an Albanese government is presented as a safe harbour. Thanks to a disciplined campaign, in which Labor strengths around healthcare, childcare and education were presented as a cost-of-living salve, voters responded like nervous investors flocking to

gold and cash ahead of a looming recession. The working class, atomised after years of neoliberalism and a shrinking, bureaucratised union movement, took to the only tool it had at its disposal to ward off a Trump-lite Liberal opposition: 'Vote ALP'.

After the flow of preferences, this delivered a 55% 'two-party preferred' result for the ALP - its highest *distributed* vote share since World War II. Yet this is tempered by the fact that it is the party's *sixth lowest* primary (first-preference) vote in the 31 elections again since World War II: a mere 34.5%. While 'first past the post' systems like Britain's are more unstable, the ALP victory - like Starmer's - disguises a shallower support than the parliamentary majority would suggest.

Albanese was lucky to run a campaign with the storm merely threatening. He could pretend that a military alliance with the US and an economic reliance on China are compatible strategies. The future is yet to hit in full force. The thing about gathering clouds is they tend to deliver a storm. For Australian capitalism, that will come in the form of heightened trade wars - potentially a hot war - between China and the US. It will mean being forced to choose between its imperialist alliance with the US and economic prosperity through trade with China.

Ahead of being forced to make such a choice, Albanese thinks that, by 'being there' and occupying political office, domestic 'Labor values' of fairness and kindness will shape the country. Three or four terms in government means it will take the conservative Liberal National coalition another generation to unpick any gains, goes this logic. At his first press conference after the election, he said: "I am genuinely so optimistic that if we get this decade right, we can set Australia up for the many decades ahead." This 'steady as she goes' mantra was reinforced by chief Aukus shill, defence minister and deputy prime minister Richard Marles, endorsing a programme of "careful and stable incremental reform". Inspiring stuff!

It is not Gough Whitlam upon whom Albanese is modelling himself,

but the arch-nemesis of the ALP - former Liberal prime minister John Howard, who reshaped the country in government from 1996 to 2007. He famously urged Australians to be 'relaxed and comfortable' under his government - this would not sound out of place in the mouth of the current prime minister.

By remaining in office for more than a decade, Howard accelerated the decline of the post-war social democratic consensus, turning a country with echoes of solidarity into one where aspiration was no longer collective, but based on competitive individualism and people seeking to do 'better than the Joneses'. In 1992, 41% of workers were in unions, today it is barely above 10% (in the private sector it is 7.9%).

The ALP has not yet dared to undo this new conservative consensus. Australians are lumbered with a tax regime that favours the old propertied middle classes and punishes renting working class youth; Australia provides massive subsidies to private health insurance schemes, as well as for private and elite education, making Australia a weird outlier in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, with more than a third of school students in private education.

Ahead of the election, when pressed on what many voters saw as a lack of ambition from Albanese, he said: "I don't pretend to be a revolutionary. I'm a reformist - putting in place sensible mainstream reforms in a mainstream government."

Toast to Trump

Midway through last year, Albanese looked toast. An anti-incumbency wave was sweeping the globe and domestically the ALP in 2023 had lost in a referendum its signature social reform: a change to the constitution to include an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice in parliament. The ALP was sinking in the polls, as Liberal leader Peter Dutton's prospects rose.

That anti-incumbency wave reached its height in November 2024, which brought Donald Trump once again to the White House. And then things started to change. While it was

largely domestic concerns that gave the ALP its huge majority in parliament, Trump's shadow has loomed. Australia did not avoid the blanket tariffs regime and the mercurial announcements from Washington have sent a shiver through the body politic.

All through last year and up to the election campaign, Liberal leader Peter Dutton openly pushed Trumpesque policies - opposition to diversity in employment, dog whistles against trans people, a proposed Musk-inspired 'efficiency' office, an end to 'wokeness' in schools and, as the election campaign started, a call for public servants (many of whom work from home post-Covid) to work in the office five days a week.

As one commentator quipped, the Liberals hit the campaign trail losing. And, while Trump was an issue, blaming the orange one for the Liberal loss is, as another analyst noted, "being too kind to Dutton", who was, it turns out, unelectable. For the first time in Australian history, an opposition leader lost his own seat. A magical moment on election night.

The call by Dutton for public servants to lose their right to work from home was meant to be a wedge to split the manual blue-collar voters from the 'woke' white-collar working class. But it blew up in his face and was seen as a direct attack on the whole working class - particularly women in the workforce - thus reinforcing the Liberal Party's 'woman problem'. Dutton was forced to reverse the policy and the Liberals never recovered.

In the final week of campaigning, in desperation, the conservatives reached for the culture wars. Complaining about indigenous 'Welcome to Country' ceremonies at sporting and public events and the flying of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, the Liberals threw red meat to its racist base. The fact they did this after neo-Nazis had booed Aboriginal speakers at an Anzac Day event the previous week, let the electorate know just how the nasty party works when in action.

Amid an uncertain global political environment (with an opposition whose answer to climate change was nuclear power in a country with the highest take-up of domestic solar

power - who knew Australia was sunny?) and an opposition leader dubbed 'the Temu Trump', voters stayed with a safely underwhelming and predictably unambitious government.

Working class

On election night, the satirical news outlet, *The Chaser*, led its coverage with the headline, "Labor secures bigger majority, excited to do nothing with it". While perhaps a tad unfair, it gives you the idea that there is less than zero chance of a crisis of expectations.

With the working class reaching for the ALP to defeat a reactionary Trump-tinged opposition, the Green Party vote has stagnated at 12% and its leader, Adam Bandt, actually lost his seat to the ALP. In 2022, the Greens won four lower-house seats, but they could go down to two or even one this time around. Their last-minute lurch to the right - pushing for 'Aussie-built' drones and missiles as a militarist counterweight to its anti-Aukus policy - did not sandbag 'moderate voters' enough to retain those gains. However, the Greens will retain the balance of power in the upper-house Senate.

The ALP framed the whole campaign around its strengths - minor improvements to the public health system, Medicare, plus investment in childcare, free vocational training and a 20% cut to all university student debt. It was backed by the union movement, which campaigned on the slogan, 'Don't risk Dutton'. And it was enough. In what was seen as a cost-of-living election, the ALP had the cards. A disciplined team and a much improved ground campaign has seen the ALP turn the vote around.

As there had been a slim majority in the House of Representatives (77 of 151 seats after the last election), many expected a hung parliament. But the Australian electorate had other ideas, delivering a very unusual swing (2.7%) to a sitting government and giving the ALP at least 87 seats out of 150 in the new parliament.

Some on the left wanted a hung parliament in the hope that the ALP would have to negotiate with the progressive-reformist Greens. In fact, it would have meant negotiating

legislation with the liberal wing of the conservatives in exile - the ‘Teal’ movement of independent women MPs, who have won the wealthy, leafy seats of the metropolises.

Ruling split

There is no doubt the election has smashed the Liberal Party and thrown the ruling class’s preferred party into crisis. In all states, the Liberals have been largely expunged from the capital cities, and are likely to hold fewer than 10 inner urban or outer metropolitan seats.

This points to not only a decisive rejection by the working class, but a split in the ruling class and wealthy electorates. It seems unlikely this division is going away, with Australia’s richest person, mining magnate Gina Rinehart, saying the Liberal defeat was due to a failure to fully embrace Trumpism.

Australian capitalism is divided between its more urbane and liberal banking and finance sector and the more reactionary mining, resources and agricultural sector. Climate change is one of the big dividers here, and until the Liberal party can rein the wealthy urban ‘Teal seats’, and find new wedge issues to divide the working class, it seems unlikely to be able to form a government any time soon.

Chinese-Australians were another decisive factor in some marginal seats. There are more than a million Australians with Chinese heritage, many of whom had drifted to the seemingly pro-(small) business, low-taxing Liberals. Covid shifted that sentiment, with former prime minister Scott Morrison taking a decidedly anti-Chinese tone ahead of his election loss in 2022. This time, an accusation by a senior Liberal MP just days before the election that “Chinese spies” were handing out election material for the ALP exploded across Chinese-language social media in Australia. Seats that were once marginal - Bennelong, Chisholm, Menzies, Aston, Reid - saw big swings to the ALP on the back of Chinese-Australian voters.

According to *Guardian Australia*, “Polling booths in Chatswood and Eastwood [in Sydney] - two suburbs in Bennelong where more than 40% of people have Chinese ancestry - recorded swings to Labor of between 15% and 26%. Labor’s Jerome Laxale boosted his wafer-thin margin of 0.1% in Bennelong to almost 10%, with 77% of the vote counted so far.”

With such a resounding victory, the semi-feudal nature of internal ALP politics means that Albanese is now a *bona fide* Labor hero - ‘King Albo’ will rule all before him. This will make campaigning against Aukus or for the dismantling of the anti-worker trade union laws more difficult in the short term. It will be up to the affiliated unions to force movement on these issues internally - a faint hope.

In his victory speech, which was an outpouring of Australian nationalism and “civic pride and responsibility” (the man actually believes it when he says Australia is the greatest nation on Earth), Albanese again flaunted his Medicare card (a central prop in the campaign), but also pointed to a small legislative win for workers - the right to disconnect at the end of a shift, meaning your boss cannot phone or email you. Such a right, while a welcome gain, can only be enforced in a unionised workplace, of course. And, with Albanese emphasising an individual worker’s right to disconnect, the significant silence on the lack of our collective right to withdraw our labour resounded.

A Marxist left inside and outside the ALP must agitate for the unrestricted right of workers to strike - something largely unlawful in Australia. But that Marxist left is yet to be built, with the rump anti-Albo

left factions (the ‘Soft Left’ in New South Wales; the ‘Industrial Left’ in Victoria) likely to be demoralised at Albanese’s crowning achievement. A fundamental flaw of this ‘official’ left internal opposition is that it does not want to build a mass, militant working class party around a Marxist programme for socialism, but engage instead in deep trench warfare to win branch by branch, in order to replace the Albanese ‘left’. But this method will just create new Albaneses.

There will be some pressure in the party and the unions for the ALP to be ‘bold and beautiful’ and use its majority to enact far-reaching social reform. But this will be met with stony rejection from Albanese and his inner circle, who believe this election win is vindication that ‘slowly, slowly’ is the way forward for managerial Laborism. In the absence of any organised working class Marxist alternative internally and externally, it is unlikely they can be seriously challenged on this. Such an alternative is something that must be painstakingly built.

In a telling aside this week on FM radio, King Albo, unconsciously referring to himself as an emperor, said: “One of the things that renders our success possible is the fact that throughout the last three years I haven’t had to look over my shoulder [for leadership challengers] ... I’ve got a Praetorian Guard, if you like, who do that for me.” Quite.

Left punch

One issue largely missing from the election was Palestine and the fact that the ALP government played softball with the Israelis, keeping its criticisms muted and in line with the ‘international community’: ie, what Biden and Starmer said. In electorates with large Arab and Muslim populations, independents backed by the Muslim Vote group failed to dislodge ALP incumbents. In the Sydney seat of Watson, a 5% swing against the ALP pushed home affairs minister Tony Burke to 48.8% of first-preference votes. The pro-Palestine independent, Ziad Basyouny, won 15.3% of the vote - or 30.7% after distribution of preferences.

The ‘pro-Palestinian’ Greens failed to dislodge the ALP in the Melbourne seat of Wills - their best chance in that city on the back of pro-Palestine sentiment. Since Hamas’s ‘prison breakout’ and slaughter on October 7, Australians have been increasingly horrified at the brutal, uncompromising and murderous response of the Zionist Israeli war machine. In opinion poll after opinion poll, it is clear Australian sympathies lie with the Palestinian people, even amid the attempts to drum up fear of a ‘confected anti-Semitism plague’ in Australia.

Yet the Palestinian solidarity movement - hamstrung by sectarianism and narrowly focused identitarian politics - has failed to engage this mass sentiment and turn it into a political force. The weekly Grand Old Duke of York demonstrations against Israel’s genocide decline, as the horror intensifies.

Also largely absent from the campaign, outside the pathetic culture wars of the Liberals and their reactionary hangers-on, was campaigning on policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, let alone a push for a democratic and just treaty with First Nations people. Burnt by the failure of the Voice Referendum, the ALP left this well alone. But at least the electorate rejected the Liberals’ last-gasp attempt to enflame the culture wars around indigenous issues.

Nevertheless, the working class, in large, voted Labor - not as an expression of positive class identity, but as a negative expression of its potential against reactionary elements of the ruling class. However, in small

pockets, Marxist groups managed to gain respectable votes, punching above their normal (statistically zero) results of 1% to 2%, albeit standing on a non-Marxist election platform.

The Victorian Socialists, whose driving force is the (post) Cliffite Socialist Alternative group, stood candidates in four seats, as well as for the Senate in Victoria. The Socialist Alliance - the party form of the liquidated Democratic Socialist Party and publisher of *Green Left* (no longer *Weekly!*), stood for the Senate in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia, with lower house candidates in six seats nationally.

Going national

Outside Victoria, the Socialist Alliance got the normal low votes for small, isolated sectarian groups: for the Senate, 0.3% in NSW, 0.7% in Queensland, 0.3% in Western Australia. For the lower house, it won 2.2% in the seat of Sydney (NSW), 1.6% in Newcastle (NSW), 1.9% in Rankin (Queensland) and 0.9% in Fremantle (WA). However, in Victoria, it was a different story. In the seat of Wills, a sitting local councillor - Sue Bolton of the Socialist Alliance - won 8.3% of the vote. In Corio, the SA won 3.0%.

In 2022, the Socialist Alliance and Victorian Socialists had stood *against* each other in the Melbourne seat of Wills, splitting the socialist vote. But sense prevailed this time, with the Victorian Socialists stepping aside for the Socialist Alliance and the Socialist Alliance not standing for the Senate in Victoria.

Unsurprisingly, this saw the Socialist Alliance vote in Wills move from 2.9% from 2022 to 8.3% in this election. The Victorian Socialists in 2022 received 3.1% - a combined socialist vote of 6%, showing unity can deliver a result bigger than the sum of its parts, even if only 2.3 percentage points. The Victorian Socialists stood for the Senate, attracting a modest 1.8% of the vote. But from lower-house electorates they received 8.9% in Cooper, 6.8% in Scullin, 6.6% in Fraser - areas where they have stood before and contested strongly in local elections - and 1.7% in regional Bendigo, the first time they contested this seat.

Socialist candidates did well when they stood with forces beyond narrow sect groups, where they have had strong council votes, and recontested areas where they previously campaigned - by ‘being there’. However, the method used is to stand on policies practically indistinguishable from the petty-bourgeois, left reformist Green Party.

In testament to this, the Socialist Alliance issued an election score card on ‘vital issues’ - ‘Scrap Aukus’, ‘No more coal and gas’, ‘Build and defend public housing’, ‘Cut ties with Israel’, ‘Defend the CFMEU union’, ‘Health, education, energy in public hands’, ‘Refugee rights’, ‘First Nations sovereignty’, ‘Defend LGBTIQ+ rights’, etc - and showed a solid green tick against all these for the Greens, Victorian Socialists and Socialist Alliance, adjacent to crosses for the ALP and Liberal Party.

This just underlines there is no programmatic difference in these ‘socialist’ campaigns from the Green Party’s left reformism. What is even the point of standing, if not for Marxism and socialism? It is not the role of Marxists to merely reflect back to the electorate ‘progressive’ ideas that spontaneously take root. ‘Being there’ is not enough. This in reality is the programme of Laborism - marginal reform based on the existing consciousness of society. The Marxist programme for extreme democracy, republicanism and working class liberation must go much further than this and seek to shift society beyond current limits - that is, to be revolutionary.

In a positive sign for left unity outside the ALP, the Victorian Socialists indicated they intend to ‘expand’ and nationalise their electoral campaigning. But lord help us if they adopt the name ‘Australian Socialists’ - dreadfully nationalist, but its possibility points to the woeful parochialism of the ‘Victorian Socialists’ name.

The neophyte Revolutionary Communist Organisation has recently joined the Victorian Socialists and will be urging its electoral work to go national - but on the basis of a democratic-republican, Marxist programme. In the election, it recommended a socialist vote with preferences to the ALP, unlike most of the far left, which sent preferences to the Greens. I understand the RCO will organise a communist caucus in the Victorian Socialists and seek to push this Australia-wide.

It remains to be seen if the Socialist Alliance will deepen its cooperation with the Victorian Socialists and Socialist Alternative. Past record suggests a return to sectarian bunkers, but, where there is life, there’s hope.

However, it is only by standing on a clear platform that fights for republicanism, socialism and internationalism, for system change, not climate change, and against militarism, imperialism and war, that the working class can, in the words of Marx, transform universal suffrage from an instrument of capitalist deception into an instrument of working class emancipation.

Alternatives

Any moves towards socialist unity outside the ALP for electoral work should not continue to peddle meek Green Party policies, but campaign for consistently democratic and socialist politics.

Such unity, as a minimum, could be around a platform that fights for:

- A democratic republic. Abolish the colonial-era states, for real local government.
- A constitutional convention to draft a new, republican constitution.
- Proportional representation in a unicameral parliament.
- No presidential powers - for a sovereign people
- A treaty with First Nations people, reparations for lost lands and land rights.
- Universal, free healthcare.
- Rent caps, a massive housing programme as a step to universal, low-cost housing.
- Universal, free education (including national vocational training and universal childcare). Abolish funding for private schools.
- Nationalise energy to power the renewable transformation.
- Nationalise banking and insurance.
- A liveable minimum wage, with benefits at that minimum.
- Price monitoring and caps on grocery prices.
- Exit Aukus and Anzus [US-Australia-New Zealand treaty].
- Abolish the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation.
- For universal conscription and a popular militia to replace the standing army.
- Abolish the Fair Work Act. For worker supervision of management, the right to work, the right to strike.
- For a 35-hour week and six weeks’ annual leave for all ●

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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Getting parties
banned is not
the answer

How to make things worse

Attempt to ban the AfD official opposition reveals a profound political weakness. That Die Linke has given its backing could prove to be an own goal, argues **Carla Roberts**

For the last few years, the Amt für Verfassungsschutz (Office for the Protection of the Constitution - the equivalent of MI5) has categorised the rightwing Alternative für Deutschland as “*Verdachtsfall*” - ie, it was constitutionally allowed to monitor the AfD, as it was “suspected” of promoting “rightwing extremism”. After an investigation lasting a number of years, on May 2, this category was officially changed to AfD being a “*confirmed*” rightwing extremist endeavour, due to the extremist character of the entire party, which disregards human dignity”, and “its attempts to undermine the free, democratic order”. The report is a staggering 1,100 pages long, so excuse us if we quote only from the press release, which is interesting enough.

Concretely, the categorisation centres on AfD’s

aim to exclude certain population groups from equal participation in society, subject them to unconstitutional discrimination, and thus assign them a legally devalued status. Specifically, for example, the AfD does not consider German citizens with a migration history from predominantly Muslim countries to be equal members of the German people. This is evident in the numerous xenophobic, anti-minority, anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim statements continually made by leading party officials... The devaluation of the aforementioned groups is also evident in the blanket use of terms such as *Messermigranten* [knife-wielding migrants] or in the general attribution of an ethnoculturally determined propensity toward violence by leading members of the AfD.¹

I quote the press release of the Verfassungsschutz at some length, because it does show the rather obvious problem with it. The term *Messermigranten*, for example, to describe the handful of attacks by migrants and refugees in the last couple of years is hardly a phrase that has exclusively been used by the AfD. The entire political establishment and the media have been ranting and raving against migrants, especially in the run-up to the general election in February, where the bourgeois parties were falling over themselves to pose ever tougher on migration.² You could go around *all* of the mainstream parties and indeed find “numerous xenophobic, anti-minority, anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim statements continually made by leading party officials”.

Protecting

Clearly, this is not about protecting the “free democratic order” or the German post-war constitution (drawn up with a lot of ‘help’ from the US government) - but about desperately trying to stop the continued rise of a party that is posing as an alternative to the establishment and which is,

crucially, increasingly successful at it. Having polled 20.8% in the February general elections, it has now climbed to an even more impressive 25% in the polls - head to head with the Christian Democratic Union.³

This really should make it very clear to mainstream politicians that AfD scare-mongering and setting up ‘firewalls’ does not work - quite the opposite. Yes, many AfD voters are attracted by the party’s anti-migration rhetoric (which, again, is in reality now shared by all mainstream parties). But the much bigger reason is the desire of many in Germany to give the establishment a bloody nose, chiefly over the increasingly dire state of the German economy and rising costs for energy and living expenses - while the government has just decided to allow unlimited borrowing for military purposes like propping up the Zelensky regime in Ukraine. This policy is becoming increasingly unpopular and for obvious reasons. Trump’s dramatic change in US policy towards Ukraine has shown exactly how irrational and pointless the ongoing financial support to the tune of many billions has become. Presenting the AfD as ‘beyond the pale’ and ‘outside of decent society’ will only make it *more* attractive to many who feel like ‘losers’ in today’s Germany - and there are many.

Not neutral

Needless to say, the Verfassungsschutz is not a ‘neutral’ body - it is part of the ministry of the interior. While the Social Democratic Party remains part of the new government, it has gone from the *main* coalition partner (with the smaller Greens and the Free Democrats between 2021 and 2025) to *junior* partner in the new coalition with the Christian Democrats. The coalition agreement signed on May 5 allocates the ministry of the interior to the CDU - so the fact that the Verfassungsschutz published its findings three days before the handover is widely seen as the last ‘hurrah’ of former SPD minister of the interior, Nancy Faeser: something she wants to be remembered for.

There are no immediate or automatic consequences following from this recategorisation. It does not automatically lead to AfD members in the public service getting into trouble or to any cuts in state funding. The secret service is already observing and investigating the party and its members on all levels and there are many, many undercover agents, helping the media with their various ‘exclusives’ about this or that AfD politician doing something particularly stupid. It is a purely symbolic decision - so far.

But many politicians, including Nancy Faeser, are hoping that this recategorisation will now be followed by a ‘careful investigation’ that *could* lead to the outright banning of AfD - a subject that has been hotly discussed in Germany for many years. 48% of the population want to



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see the party outlawed, according to a recent poll.⁴ Both the SPD and the CDU are split on the issue, with the SPD generally more pro-ban than the CDU - hence Faeser’s rush in getting the categorisation through before her departure.

The May 6 debacle over the confirmation of Merz (CDU) as new chancellor could give calls for a ban new impetus - because it showed how fragile things currently are. What is usually a formality descended into near-chaos, when 18 parliamentarians of the new CDU-SPD coalition initially refused to vote for Merz, meaning the necessary simple majority was not achieved - for the first time ever in the history of the Bundesrepublik.⁵ The AfD immediately called for new general elections, unsurprisingly: they would probably have won. A second round of voting in parliament on the same day however avoided that - which was only possible because MPs of Die Linke and the Greens had voted in favour of changing the Bundestag agenda (which requires a two thirds majority).

Linke leader Ines Schwerdtner used the opportunity to call on the “CDU/CSU to speak to us not only when the house is on fire, but also on other political decisions when a two-thirds majority is necessary. Democratic parties should be able to talk to each other.” Clearly, Die Linke’s slight move to the left in the run up to the general elections and its declared aim “to stay in opposition” was no principled, long-term strategy. There is immense pressure on the leadership to move the party back to become once again reliable ‘managers of capitalism’. Hopefully, the recent influx of tens of thousands of new, mainly left-wing members will at least lead to organised and vocal opposition - also when it comes to the question of banning the AfD.

There are only two political parties solidly in favour of banning the AfD - among them, predictably enough, the pro-war Green Party. The fact that Die Linke too has come out calling for a ban and the withdrawal of all state funding for the AfD, however, is not just disappointing and short-sighted - it

borders on suicidal stupidity.⁶ After all, Die Linke and its forerunners, the Party of Democratic Socialism and Linkspartei, had themselves been in the official crosshairs of the secret service ever since the foundation of the PDS in 1990, for being ‘leftwing extremists’.

Some of the 16 German federal states even imposed an official ban on employing PDS members (in the public service in Bavaria, for example, you had to sign a declaration that you were not and had never been a member - and you could be sacked on the spot if it turned out you were lying). Only when former Die Linke MP Bodo Ramelow successfully sued over being spied upon in 2014 did the secret service *officially* end the policy towards the party. We have no doubt that it has continued to keep the tabs on Die Linke - that is, after all, what we pay our taxes for in modern ‘democracies’!

Anti-migrant

As Die Linke has been the only party that has not fallen for the anti-migrant narrative and has instead moved somewhat to the left, it has been going up in the polls too, now standing at an impressive 10% (up from the 8.8% it achieved in the general elections in February). It is likely that the main parties will try to incorporate and thereby neutralise Die Linke, particularly in order to hold off the AfD. But in even slightly different circumstances, the state could easily consider taking another look at outlawing Die Linke, which states in its programme that “capitalism isn’t the end of history - we are fighting for democratic socialism” and “we want a fundamental transformation of society that overcomes capitalism”.⁷

Of course, it all depends on what you mean by those phrases and in the last 10 years Die Linke has done everything it can to show what a loyal servant of capitalism it is - running local and regional governments as badly as any of the establishment parties. But the point stands. It is entirely self-defeating to call on the state to ban the AfD. Socialists should not fight to give the capitalist state any more ammunition against forces it does not like.

As an aside, while ex-Die Linke celebrity Sahra Wagenknecht has moved dramatically to the right in an attempt to chase the anti-migrant vote - her new party, Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW), missed the parliamentary 5% hurdle by 0.2% - she is clearly a much cleverer politician than those running Die Linke. She has opposed the AfD’s new categorisation, as well as a possible ban, stating that this “politically counterproductive measure” is part of an “authoritarian reconstruction of society that curbs free speech and fights inconvenient political forces with undemocratic methods”.⁸

In another online post, she writes: “This classification, the firewall

debates and marginalisation in the Bundestag are slaps in the face for AfD voters, which will certainly not convince any of them to change their minds.”⁹ She has got the problem right, but her solutions are entirely inadequate: she calls for “common-sense policies”, which for her include demands for a referendum to reduce annual migration to Germany from 500,000 to 50,000.¹⁰ Reactionary populism. Socialists should take on the AfD *politically* by providing a principled political alternative - not by aping it or calling for a ban.

Complex

Banning a political party in Germany is an extremely complex process, which can only be started by the government or a majority in either the Bundestag or the second chamber, the Bundesrat. The last time there were attempts to ban a party - the far-right Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands - it failed rather miserably. The first time, in 2003, the process had to be abandoned after it transpired that the regional and national leaderships of the party were riddled with “too many” informants and spies (this begs the question of how many is ‘just right’). The second attempt led to a four-year process, which ended in 2017, with Germany’s federal supreme court ruling *against* a ban: although it found that the NPD was indeed acting “against the constitution”, it was deemed too small to cause any real damage.¹¹ The same cannot be said of a party that now *leads* in the German polls.

Socialists and communists should stay well clear from calls for such bans, even when in relation to fascist organisations. We are, after all, interested in overthrowing the capitalist system, including the various ‘oh so democratic’ constitutions. It is no coincidence that the last time the Federal government was successful in implementing such a ban was in 1956, when the Communist Party of Germany was outlawed ●

Notes

1. www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2025/pressemitteilung-2025-05-02.html.
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11. [de.wikipedia.org/wiki/NPD-Verbotsverfahren_\(2013-2017\)](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/NPD-Verbotsverfahren_(2013-2017)).