



weekly worker



Debating ‘communism’: Marx was notorious for the sharpness of his polemics ‘among fellow socialists’

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Scattered Spider and how they do what they do

LETTERS



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

Monarch threat

A new book by Lord Hennessy and Andrew Blick, *Could it happen here? The day a prime minister refuses to resign*, makes amusing and instructive reading. The authors speculate about what might ensue if a rightwing, populist prime minister were to lose his majority in the House of Commons, and attempted to cling to power through a minority government, on the ground that his party is the largest. In such a constitutional crisis, with the prime minister refusing to resign, what expedients are available for the restoration of order?

The answers to this question make Hennessy's and Blick's account interesting to a constitutional critic: they tell us plainly - and quite ingenuously - that the securities on which the constitution depends *in extremis* have a dark and sinister aspect.

They tell us, for example, that the king - far from being a purely ceremonial head of state, as we are incessantly told - would play an important part in the resolution of such a crisis, in accordance with his pledge to uphold the constitution. He retains the legal power, we are reminded, to dismiss a prime minister, and to dissolve parliament if he wishes: although such powers have not been employed for approximately 200 years, there is still no legal barrier to their being used.

Perhaps the king would not go to such an extreme: he might confine himself to making a public broadcast, directly intervening in the politics of the day, and exerting pressure upon the embattled government. In the meantime, the palace would conduct private discussions with the speaker of the House of Commons, and other political parties, as part of efforts to re-establish order. Behold the powerless, ceremonial British crown! The authors do not stop to contemplate what ruinous effects the monarch might have, if - as is just possible - a fool, a fascist or a corruptionist were to inherit the throne: for there is surely no better means of selecting a constitutional guardian, than by the lottery of birth.

We learn from our authors too that the security services may (regrettably) have to become involved in such a crisis, for the Security Service Act 1989 stipulates that the function of the service includes the protection of national security "from actions intended to overthrow or undermine parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means". The same act, it is true, tells the security services to refrain from inappropriate intrusions in party politics, but that has never stopped them before. Indeed, even the surveillance of the communications of members of parliament - and, below them, members of the devolved legislatures - is lawful, provided that the prime minister approves it. It begins to seem, I venture to say, that Britain is not so perfect a democracy as we are accustomed to think!

In a discussion of what might be done by cabinet ministers, on the supposition that they may turn on the "limpet prime minister", we are told the following: "A chancellor of the exchequer, for example, might choose not to use their power to impose courses of action upon the Bank of England intended to deal with problems in the financial markets, which can be the most potent force of all in trumping political outcomes." There are no misgivings or anxieties

here for the fate of democracy: the "trumping" and "potent" financial markets wield their authority free of concern for such superficialities as elections; and it perhaps makes little difference whether a renegade chancellor decides to help them along.

The list of constitutional barricades continues: perhaps the chief of defence staff might refuse to follow prime ministerial instructions; perhaps the speaker would decline to sit upon his chair, and the clerks abandon their table; and so forth.

I do not raise these matters because it would gratify me to see a hard-right prime minister remain in office: I raise them because any attempt to democratise British society, and challenge the established power of the capitalist class, will no doubt be met with the full catalogue of sinister designs; and socialists ought, therefore, to understand them. In the interval, it is our obligation to expose the oligarchical armour of the British constitution, and to labour for a true democracy, capable of promoting the general interest.

Talal Hangari
London

Trans pedagogue

A friend sent me your recent article on the draft theses of the CPGB on trans people ('Communism and trans liberation', May 1). He liked my reply and suggested I share it with you. I'm glad the CPGB is taking tentative steps to join our side, but there's more to do. This critique is offered with love, in the hope you can do more and give us the Communist Party we need.

The draft theses state: "... it is possible to stand unequivocally against the fraudulent rightwing witch-hunt of trans people, and to campaign for the liberation of trans people from their present-day oppression, without accepting the framework of 'intersectionalist' tail-endist politics, which necessarily leads to 'Vote Harris, get Trump' and to 'Vote Sturgeon, get the UK Supreme Court's Christianist definition of 'woman'.""

I don't think it's wrong to question intersectionality in this day and age, as it's frequently used as a meaningless concept. It's been commodified and is often poorly applied. I know communists have spent a while trying not to be bigots, but also not to buy into cringy liberal identity politics ('idpol') stuff and it's not necessarily easy even if they want it to be. Anti-idpol ideology is a square peg: they're trying desperately to fit the round hole of not being a dickhead to people.

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

The question of whether there's a socially constructed sex and biologically constructed gender is very contentious in gender conservative and trans spaces. There are thousands of theories, but I categorise them like this:

■ **Gender Conservative Extreme:** Sex and gender are one thing and sex is entirely biological and predetermined. People should dress according to their biology, use biological pronouns, and carry out their biologically ordained role in society. (Sorry, ignore the last bit there.)

■ **Gender Conservative Lite:** Sex is immutable, Gender is a feeling some people have. Gender identity doesn't really cover anything except maybe

what pronouns and name you have to use to be polite.

■ **Normie:** Sex is immutable and what's in your pants. Gender is what's in your head and is maybe changeable.

■ **Trans Lite:** Sex is mutable - that hormone replacement therapy works is the evidence of this. But it is biologically determined - or was before 'biological' started to mean 'in keeping with the beliefs of *Daily Mail* columnists'. Gender is probably more mutable, and it's socially determined, or determined by force of self-will. There are lots of options.

■ **Trans Extreme:** Sex and gender are one thing and sex is, ultimately, a concept understood and given meaning by its social context. Dividing sex and gender in political and ideological terms has been a mistake - driven by cis allies, who want to retain their ability to think of trans women as being really men.

People often assume that the dreary model of sex and gender sold in trans inclusion training is trans ideology. Or, worse, they develop a view of 'trans ideology' from *Daily Mail* articles. You can't generalise the trans theory of gender to necessarily backing economic policies, because there is no one trans theory of gender.

The theses state that it is not necessary "to commit to the psychobabble language of 'transphobia' (or homophobia or Islamophobia), which, precisely by their over-psychiatrising character, destroy the space for rational disagreement". I can kind of see that. But if your response to 'Trans people are in shock, trying to organise themselves to fight a transphobic government' is 'I don't like the word "phobia" there', you're not in solidarity with us facing a crisis: you're in the way while we're working.

Nor is it necessary "to imagine that no platforming 'terfs' is a productive policy", it continues. This policy has developed from specific events, where trans people did debate with gender conservatives, but were given less chances to speak, were put in danger, had the conversation framed around issues that were irrelevant to them, etc. No tactic is sacred, but if you've sat out a decade of campaigning and you come in now to critique it, then shut up, sit down and learn the theory and history first.

The theses go on to state: "In the very short term, the dominant tendency among trans rights activists made themselves specifically vulnerable to this sort of attack by committing themselves to 'intersectional' unity with capitalist liberals, and thereby identifying themselves both with 'human resource departments' managerialism, and with free-market financial globalism."

There are conversations to be had around the liberal project of trans rights and whether it works. It desperately needs to be re-evaluated and I'm glad I've been involved with activists discussing this. But also, alongside talking to the bosses and representing worker's interests with them, we've been on the streets, in unions, at protests, building a movement. The reason the CPGB has to consider their policy is because their youngsters believe us and, worse, they march with us, live with us, learn with us, are us. Communists are often good comrades and we rely on them. The CPGB knows we're going to be a bigger force in protests in future and they need to position themselves on our side, so they can sell their newspaper.

If you critique the 'no platform' policy, you can't also critique us for turning up to meetings where

our rights are discussed with gender conservatives. Without a concept of transphobia *being* a phobia it's hard to explain why society cares when a gender conservative has to attend training at work, but was silent when a trans person was medically tortured and threatened with life imprisonment for protesting.

Then there's this: "The form of this identification has most visibly two elements: the demand for official recognition as a member of the destination sex/gender, within the implied framework of accepting gender as a strict binary; and no-platforming 'transphobes'."

The Tories asked for a slate of policies that could help trans people, then they picked the one that seemed the easiest to actually work on. That was self-ID. We ended up having to fight on this one and the fight has been picked again and again. Legal recognition has material consequences and that's especially true, now we have lost so many of our legal rights. Sadly these are the issues where we have a united front with the liberals. We've never been good enough at prioritising material concerns, but losing the fight on legal identity impacted our children, prisoners, rape survivors and homeless members of the community. We can't abandon the fight for legal recognition without abandoning the most vulnerable members of our community.

I think it's unfair to say we wanted "the implied framework of accepting gender as a strict binary". Fighting for non-binary rights has been at the core this whole time. I think what the CPGB draft theses really want is us to accept being 'third-sexed'. Please read Talia Bhatt on the treatment of Hijras for a view from a politically radical, third-world feminist on why this is a bad idea.

According to the theses, "This theoretical commitment also directly counterposed the claims of trans rights activists who pursued this policy to the lived experience of the majority of women, in which the oppression of women is an embodied experience inescapably linked to the ways in which the class order exploits human biology." I'll let the trans rape and domestic violence survivors in my social circle know that their experiences are merely ideological liberal constructs and not an embodied experience linked to the ways in which the class order exploits human biology. I'm sure they'll be thrilled.

They continue: "... constructing solidarity to defeat the witch-hunt is therefore a problem of constructing solidarity of the working class as such, not of constructing solidarity either of trans or of LGBT+ people as a distinct group". So show us some solidarity then. Right now I want solidarity with workers who'll show up and do the work, not Marxist dialectical theorists. My community is in a crisis and we already have brilliant radical theorists of our own. If the CPGB wants to show up to fight with us, we need people who'll work; not people who want to manage and coordinate us.

The there's: "... self-identification versions ... imply both over-claims and extensive policing of speech, appear as a threat to the very large majority who remain cis and heterosexual." The appearance of a threat is true of any liberation movement - especially ones where someone is seen as threatening. We trans people cannot help but be seen as a threat, no matter what we do, and experience has shown that, if we ask for less or do less, what we do is always perceived as a threat to those who are irrationally afraid of us.

"The aim of communism is a society without classes, state or dependence on the family as an economic institution. ... Such a society will probably have the resources to enable a 'full' biological transition - one which produces self-generated hormones and fertility in the destination gender. Certainly, it will have no need to repress lesser forms of body modification." If your dialectical materialism has nothing to offer more than pie in the sky by and by, then you're offering me no more than Christianity and less than new-age progressives, who at least turn up to the fight and offer immediate help.

The theses state: "More fundamentally, such a society will have no need to insist that everyone must be either man or woman, and be publicly identified as such." The CPGB has not covered gender abolitionism or non-binary rights. If they had, I'd say this is fine. But this just reads like 'Trans women don't need to be women. The important thing is they're valid'. If I want meaningless platitudes, I'll talk to the HR department, thank you. At least they pay me to be there.

I have no massive issue with anything in the CPGB's suggestions for immediate action and I think it's in line with radical transfeminist thinking in some ways, but I think the 'intentional absences' are worth noting.

What's not here:

1. Anti-fascism - a big thing trans activists have been involved in is opposing the Posie Parker rallies. These objectively do unite local fascist groups with a wider liberal middle class audience. The CPGB is not opposing the fash and in fact you're critiquing us for doing that.
2. The CPGB talks about unisex toilets, but a lot of people really don't want this. I don't think the CPGB understands the purpose sex-segregated spaces have, and why trans people need to be included in them. It's promising pie in the sky - 'Don't ask for legal recognition now, as that will scare people, but after the revolution we'll abolish sexual assault, then single-sex spaces'.
3. The CPGB isn't going to protect trans prisoners so they are - to borrow a word they love - *necessarily* asking us to abandon our most vulnerable working class people.
4. I don't care about the church in this context. Of course, I want to disestablish the church, but the one thing that is relevant to trans people in this is conversion therapy, which the CPGB doesn't mention. Why should I care whether the priest who's abusing a trans kid lives in a church-owned vicarage or not? The abuse is the problem.

The CPGB knows we are powerful in the leftwing spaces communists work in. They want the benefits of joining the movement for trans liberation without having to get their own house in order or confront their long-running divisions on trans rights.

They think, because we've been beaten, what they offer can now be viewed as enough, but really it's only like three degrees to the left of the Equality and Human Rights Commission on anything they could actually immediately do. This is disappointing. If you're going to critique performative, liberal, trans-liberation politics, at least do something other than saying nice words and asking for a trans ally lanyard.

It reminds me of a typical management tactic. Say 'What we really need to do is something radical and impossible' and use that to justify doing nothing now. And trans people need communists. So many

of us are communists. Our friends are communists. We work with and campaign with communists. Communists are already in our movement.

I invite the CPGB to join us.

Devon Laing
email

Reform supporter

I would like to reply to the letter by Reform UK Limited supporter Dave Douglass (May 15).

Yes, a section of the working class is racist, including some former miners. Nigel Farage’s answer to the working class reaction to the effects of 40 years of neoliberalism is to simply blame migrants. All this guff about nationalising steel and water without compensation is just window-dressing to get elected. Marine Le Pen in France and the AfD in Germany similarly pose left by calling for workers’ rights, etc. However, this is just a smokescreen for their racism against migrants.

I live in Wisbech in North East Cambridgeshire parliamentary constituency. Wisbech town centre, just like the red-wall towns in the north of England, is run down - consisting of pound shops, charity shops and betting shops. The biggest problem faced by working class people in Wisbech is the high cost of rented accommodation. Fenland District Council, which covers Wisbech, hasn’t built a single council house or flat for more than 25 years now.

In the 2016 EU referendum, 72% of Fenlanders voted for Brexit. In the recent county council elections Reform UK Limited won five out of the nine county seats covering Fenland. At the same time, in the election for mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Fenland was the only district where the Reform candidate for mayor came first.

I therefore read with interest Paul Demarty’s article about how Starmer’s anti-migrant stance is aimed at the Tories with the view to the next general election being a straight Labour-Reform fight, leading to a Labour victory (‘Starmer among strangers’, May 22). If this is so, Morgan McSweeney is completely wrong to think that such a Labour-Reform fight would result in Labour winning. The idea that Lib Dem and Green voters would vote Labour *en masse* to keep out Reform is sadly mistaken. As both Dave Douglass and I fully understand, the support of working class people for Reform UK is widespread and could easily result in a majority Reform government at the next general election.

However, as Aaron Bastani of Novara Media has correctly pointed out, the wiping out of support for Labour in the elections to urban councils (including in London), the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament will lead to the removal of Keir Starmer by the 405 Labour MPs. Already the days of chancellor Rachel Reeves and Downing Street chief of staff Morgan McSweeney are numbered. Reeves will soon be replaced in a reshuffle and, according to Bastani, McSweeney will be gone by Christmas.

At the same time, Angela Rayner, as reported in *The Daily Telegraph*, is on manoeuvres. So is Wes Streeting. The bookies are already giving odds on a Rayner-Streeting leadership contest. Rayner has called for a wealth tax to pay for the reintroduction of the universal winter fuel allowance and the scrapping of cuts to Personal Independence Payments and Universal Credit.

Dave Douglass should be careful what he wishes for. A Nigel Farage-led government would replace the NHS with a US-style private insurance scheme. Farage would introduce a flat tax, where

millionaires pay the same rate of income tax as a binman.

Finally, if Alf Garnett was around today, he would, like Dave Douglass, be a Reform supporter. It must not be forgotten that Garnett was a London docker, and the dockers supported Enoch Powell.

John Smithee
Cambridgeshire

Reform conscious

Dave Douglass has criticised the CPGB’s involvement in the Forging Communist Unity discussions (Letters, May 15). His argument appears to be threefold: firstly, he questions the need for organisation (“The structures are elaborated, a constitution hammered out”); secondly, he calls for “a truly working class organisation” to be “built by the workers themselves, and be fashioned from their demands”; finally, a call is made for the adoption of slogans that “the workers themselves are demanding”.

I believe Lenin’s *What is to be done?* is a decent enough starting point to address these points. He began writing it upon his return from exile in 1900, when he found that the political groups in Russia were focusing exclusively on the ‘spontaneous’ economic struggle of workers. Without dismissing the importance of those struggles, Lenin characterised those workers as having achieved “trade union consciousness” - the understanding that there is an economic struggle between them and their bosses. However, he identified the importance of workers attaining full class consciousness, which can only be achieved when they come to understand that they must move beyond capitalism and end their exploitation altogether. Lenin believed it was a mistake to neglect political issues ‘beyond the factory walls’, as this would ultimately fail to raise the class consciousness of workers.

He argued that the leap from ‘spontaneous’ to ‘class’ consciousness needed to be guided “from without” - not meaning, as opponents would argue, an elitist vision of the intelligentsia imposing it, but rather its need to come from outside everyday bourgeois thinking. Lenin proposed that workers can achieve class consciousness by engaging in the general political struggle, not merely day-to-day economic struggles. Only then could they successfully engage in the working class organising to take power in its own name.

With Lenin’s advice in mind, let us take a look at Douglass’s points. Firstly, in regard to ‘slogans’: I agree the CPGB should be bold and forceful about what strategy and tactics the workers’ movement needs to adopt. But when Douglass uses the slogans of Reform as examples of those “the workers themselves are demanding”, he unconsciously confirms the need for class consciousness. Reform’s tactical slogans are populist, looking to address day-to-day struggles of workers (cynically, by the authors’ own admission). There is no strategy behind it to raise class consciousness, as this would risk threatening the ruling class/status quo, which Farage *et al* ultimately defend.

Douglass’s points on organisation are also answered in *What is to be done?* Far from looking to create another “lefty liberal lash-up”, the unity discussions aim to create a party for those that have achieved class consciousness as a vehicle for carrying out the move beyond capitalism, whilst also pursuing tactical interventions to assist and educate workers (like myself: a construction worker from outside the “London backyard”), who have achieved ‘trade union consciousness’ in those day-to-day economic struggles.

The point about the need for “a truly working class organisation” is entirely valid. Many attempts have been made

to this end - not a few by George Galloway, who Douglass mentions in his letter. Douglass touches on several aspects of the epoch in which we are living: large-scale apathy and despondency towards politics amongst the working class; the failure of social democracy; the lack of political democracy in the bourgeois system. To this I would say there is no silver bullet. For those looking to transition beyond capitalism, adopting the tactics of Reform - based as it is on populist slogans, backed up by a compliant, rightwing media - is certainly not an option. Reform was certainly not “built by the workers themselves” nor “fashioned from their demands”. Nor, I would argue, is Galloway’s Workers Party of Britain, which, despite being able to claim it is more connected to the workers, is unable and unwilling to raise the class consciousness of the workers, as it looks to replicate Labourism.

I support the CPGB’s organisational efforts in the unity discussions, and applaud the principled stand in looking to create a party which aims to arm workers with the class consciousness required to transition beyond capitalism, when the time comes. Another organisation describing itself as a ‘workers’ party’ with little more than popular slogans and the ideology of Labourism is the last thing we need.

Carl Collins
Stamford

Hope at last!

George Monbiot has written much fine stuff over the years - in particular on climate and the environment, but also on the slow, but steady, privatisation of health, including a recent article on the near end of NHS dentistry. But what is to be done? He’s generally seemed to me to be one of those who thinks that ‘we’ or ‘the government’ needs to do something. But how? When?

Now at last we have an answer. In *The Guardian* of May 27 he writes that the real problem is the ‘first past the post’ electoral system. People want, apparently, proportional representation, so that we can get, between us, the government we want: “Here’s the strategy. Join the Lib Dems, Greens, SNP or Plaid Cymru. As their numbers rise, other voters will see the tide turning. Encourage troubled Labour MPs to defect. Most importantly, begin the process in each constituency of bringing alienated voters together around a single candidate.”

We’d better get on with it, we may only have four years before we’re lost forever, but “Game the system once and we’ll never have to game it again. No longer will we be held hostage, no longer represented by people who hate us.” This all looks very ‘promising’, doesn’t it? We get all those Lib Dem, Green, SNP, etc MPs together. King Charles asks one of them to form a government (this is assuming, I guess, after Nigel Farage has perhaps failed in that quest). An act of parliament passes in the house, the Lords (?) and then the king gives his assent.

Then what? A quick election under the new rules, so that we will no longer be “represented by people who hate us”? Somewhere in this process we might have to consult some of the others who hate us - the International Monetary Fund, the US government, the EU ... Onwards and upwards!

I think it might have helped if he’d included in the article some of the governments in the world where proportional representation has already delivered what he wants. Albania? Belgium? Germany? And how they’ve delivered it, and how loved the governments are? Perhaps that’s an article for the future - I’ll keep an eye open.

Meanwhile, I still think we need a mass Communist Party!

Jim Nelson
email

ACTION

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. Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

It’s the people versus the developers!

Saturday May 31, 1pm: Demonstration. Assemble Peckham Square, London SE15. Homes for people, not for profit; council housing, not luxury flats; stop overdevelopment. Organised by Southwark Housing and Planning Emergency: www.ayleshamcommunityaction.co.uk/SHAPE.

Rethinking the roots of British communism

Monday June 2, 5.30pm: Online seminar. Author Tony Collins references his book, *Raising the red flag: Marxism, labourism and the roots of British communism, 1884-1921*. Registration free. Organised by London Socialist Historians Group: www.history.ac.uk/events/rethinking-roots-british-communism.

Why is Oxford always bottom of the league?

Thursday June 5, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Problems with organising students in a collegiate university. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc/status/1905328002390462625.

Derby silk mill lockout festival

Saturday June 7, 10am: Procession and family festival. Assemble Market Place, Derby DE1, and march to Cathedral Green for rally. Commemorating the silk mill workers, locked out by their employers in 1833 for refusing to accept pay cuts and abandon their trade union. Organised by Derby Silk Mill Festival: www.facebook.com/events/1749378975673078.

Bargain books

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

Welfare, not warfare; stop the cuts; tax the rich

Saturday June 7, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Portland Place, London W1. March to Whitehall for rally. Labour’s cuts target the poorest, most vulnerable in society. Demand funding for welfare, wages and the NHS. Organised by the People’s Assembly: thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Invest in peace, not nukes

Saturday June 7, 12 noon: Day of action. Assemble at Guildhall Square, Armada Way, Plymouth PL1, for open-top bus tour of Plymouth and its nuclear links. Followed by protest outside the Trident nuclear dockyard, Camel’s Head, Devonport PL5. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: cnduk.org/events.

Printworkers and the 1986 Wapping dispute

Thursday June 12, 7pm: Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speakers Ann Field and Matt Dunne provide details of this defeat for the working class. Registration free. Organised by General Federation of Trade Unions: www.facebook.com/events/966566215671025.

Demand Orgreave justice

Saturday June 14, 1pm: Anniversary march and rally. Assemble City Hall, Barkers Pool, Sheffield S1. Demand an inquiry into the brutal police attack on striking miners at the Orgreave coking plant on June 18 1984. Organised by Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign: otjc.org.uk/orgreave-rally-2025.

Arms embargo now!

Tuesday June 17, 11am: Protests outside three sites producing parts for F-35 fighter jets, used to drop 900kg bombs on Gaza: Lockheed Martin UK: Assemble at Havant Park, Havant PO9. BAE Systems: Marconi Way, Rochester ME1. Forged Solutions Group: Meadowhall Road, Sheffield S9. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Festival of the oppressed

Saturday June 21 to Sunday June 22: RS21 weekend school, Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7. 26 sessions covering how oppression is defined and remade by capitalism, and how to resist and transcend this oppressive social world. Registration £36.50 (£21.00, £11.00). Organised by RS21: revsoc21.uk/festival2025.

Jarrow rebel town festival

Saturday June 21, 11am: Parade. Assemble pedestrian tunnel, Tyne Street, Jarrow NE32. Led by Felling Silver Band. Speakers include Mick Whelan (Aslef), Kate Osborne MP and David Douglass. Followed by social at The Crown and Anchor, Chapel Road, Jarrow NE32. Organised by Jarrow Rebel Town Festival and Seven Lads of Jarrow: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069808375202.

National march for Palestine

Saturday June 21, 12 noon: National demonstration, central London, venue to be announced. End the genocide. Stop arming Israel. Stop starving Gaza. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/national-march-for-palestine.

CPGB wills

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

TECH

Dark forces of extraction

Who are Scattered Spider and how do they do what they do? Paul Demarty investigates the recent spate of ransomware-attacks on top companies and the extreme fragility of global IT systems

Last week, the National Crime Agency - whose job it is to look busy when large-scale skulduggery strikes in Britain - announced that it had a suspect in the case of a series of crippling cyberattacks on major retailers, including Marks and Spencer and the Co-op.

Paul Foster, head of cyber-crime at the NCA, fingered the notorious collective, Scattered Spider, which has already attacked major US casinos, as well as various major companies that use the cloud database and storage service, Snowflake (including AT&T and Ticketmaster). The Scattered Spiders are, according to the bourgeois media, notable primarily for their youth (many participants in these antics appear to be teenagers) and for their not hailing from what we are told are the real hotbeds of cybercrime, Russia and North Korea.

In reality, of course, these are not such great distinguishing features after all. Certainly there is a lot of cybercrime originating in Russia, and the North Korean state sponsors a great deal of cyber-sabotage, given its available means. Yet such crimes are, at this point, as American as apple pie - I am not aware of any especially great British capability on this point, but the extremely aggressive hackers of Israel mysteriously go unmentioned in the output of the BBC and the like when they discuss these questions. Israel's Unit 8200, meanwhile, makes a point of recruiting *teenagers* - who are presumably on the hunt for a relatively low-risk posting during their military service.

Basics

So in these respects, after all, Scattered Spider is all too typical. So, in fact, are its crimes. There is something almost admirable in how it goes about its business: like an overperforming football team which succeeds simply by doing the basics well. Their hackers first of all acquire personal information that will grant them access to systems - by simply buying it from the dark web, or by 'phishing' (sending deceptive emails to targets), or other kinds of social engineering (communicating with individuals to con them out of information). Having acquired such information, they use off-the-peg ransomware software to claim bounties of millions of dollars in cryptocurrencies. It is good, old-fashioned, meat-and-potatoes, 4-4-2 cybercrime.

To take the M&S hack as an example: while details are still emerging, it is clear from CEO Stuart Machin's emphasis on "human error" in his public statements that social engineering was used (ie, some human erroneously gave up the keys to the kingdom). The *Financial Times* reported on May 23 that the Indian outsourcing giant, Tata Consultancy Services, was conducting an internal investigation into its own possible role. If that was the way in, it would hardly be atypical: security measures often have to be massaged to allow contractors to do their jobs effectively. Outsourcers often take on jobs like internal IT support, which are juicy targets for social engineers, since IT support workers definitionally need to be able to grant access to different systems and do jobs like changing authentication details.

The troubling thing about this is that it works. In the early days of ransomware, 10 years ago or so, the big-name victims would make a big



We can see you: jumping spider eyes

noise about not paying up - "never negotiate with terrorists", and all that. Mysteriously such statements have become rarer. It is not altogether surprising: by the time you are reading the ransom note, the truth is that you are - to use the computing jargon - already completely fucked. How so? There are two major options, when a hacker has obtained the keys to the kingdom. One is data exfiltration - just download all the sensitive data (customer credit card numbers, detailed personal information that can be used for fraud, etc) and threaten to put it on the dark web market if the ransom is not met. The other is to encrypt all the information, rendering it unusable, and refuse to decrypt unless the demand is met.

Either way, leaving aside the vanishingly small possibility that the police will interrupt the scam while it is in progress, the hacker has already won. The target's information security measures have already been defeated. The willingness of the world's states to tolerate cryptocurrencies, meanwhile, ensures that there is a relatively risk-free way to take payment, with well-established mechanisms for laundering crypto funds into good old greenbacks. The ultimate proof that this works is merely that people keep doing it. Major corporations are, after all, hard targets. One has to commit serious crimes to compromise them - identity fraud, above all. (Humans tend to be the weakest points in the structure.) Nobody would take the risk if there was no actual money at the back end. Having worked in the software industry for over 10 years, I am surprised only that it does not happen more.

Threat models

Prevention of such breaches is a bit like barricading a door against a zombie invasion. It is not so much a matter of constructing a single, perfect defence according to a plan, but piling up stuff and hoping that the accumulated materials will do the job.

Multi-factor authentication will usually be enforced (that is, additional authentication steps beyond logging in with a username and password, typically sending one-time passwords via SMS or generating them with a phone app. This way, an attacker will need not only your password, but your actual phone). Access should be granted according to the principle of least privilege - that you should only be able to access things you actually need to do your job. Access

to private information should be disabled by default for everyone and only granted when a special request is made for it. Ideally it should not be possible to access such information alone - that way an attacker needs to compromise two user accounts, not just one. So it goes on.

All this stuff costs money and time to set up and keep going. Organisations typically have to make a decision about how far they are willing to go, which will usually be a matter of what is called 'threat-modelling' - that is, trying to decide what kind of 'adversaries' they actually face. To take an extreme example: in 2010, the Israeli security services successfully introduced the Stuxnet malware into Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment plant. The malware was specifically targeted to compromise the industrial control systems in use at the plant. The facility was 'air-gapped' - not connected to the internet - so the malware had to be brought in physically, likely on a USB memory stick. All this was done successfully, and Stuxnet raised merry hell in Natanz.

Now, if you are the head of 'infosec' at Marks and Spencer, the threat you have in mind is probably not the best and brightest saboteurs employed by the Israeli state. That is a relief, because the expense and complexity of keeping such people out is prohibitive; one could hypothetically, perhaps, run a single nuclear facility like that (which purpose defeated the Iranian state), but hardening every aspect of even a relatively modest retail empire like M&S to the point that you stand a chance of defeating a determined and well-resourced hostile state is a daunting proposition and, if achieved, would introduce so much paranoid bureaucracy as to make day-to-day business basically impossible. For that reason, such measures are rarely found outside the state core of major powers - where, however, they are very typical.

So, perhaps, a company like M&S will think instead of the more modest capabilities of cybercriminal organisations like Scattered Spider. Even these, clearly, are not straightforward to target. Part of the problem is simply that there is development in this sphere. "No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism," Theodor Adorno once wrote, "but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb." Likewise, the innovations produced in the most daring cyberattacks have a way of

leaking out to the wider criminal underground, improving the general intellect and developing the forces of destruction. No great ingenuity is required here - just diligent research into the weak points in the software and services supply chain and canny choices of off-the-peg software, which keeps getting better.

Lessons

What can we learn from all this? Firstly something about capitalism. Adorno is hardly the only person to have noticed the way that progress in the forces of production has as its dialectical shadow 'progress' in the forces of destruction. Typically we, like Adorno, think of nuclear weaponry or other such genocidal novelties. Yet this is also true, so to speak, fractally: means of destruction great and small appear throughout the economic edifice. Industrial machinery immanently poses the possibility of sabotage - the very fact that the machine works in such and such a way implies specific techniques of machine-wrecking.

The greater the complexity of the machine, the more diverse the mechanisms of sabotage. A modern corporation of the usual type, whose operations span supply chains across the world and are operated out of networks of datacentres, is an extraordinary marvel of technique, and by the same token a giant, soft target. Massively networked computing makes all this possible, but also enables a gang of teenagers to conduct very dramatic shakedowns with relatively little effort.

Capitalism, of course, provides the incentive structure that makes it all worthwhile; so much dumb money sloshing around, waiting to

be grasped. It is put perceptively in Raymond Chandler's masterpiece, *The long goodbye*: "We're a big, rough, rich, wild people and crime is the price we pay for it, and organised crime is the price we pay for organisation. We'll have it with us for a long time. Organised crime is just the dirty side of the sharp dollar."

The second lesson is for us, in the revolutionary movement. We are presently powerless enough that threat-modelling is largely a matter of daydreaming - one of the few upsides of that state of affairs. Yet we are dependent on much the same technology as corporations - the internet, above all - for disseminating our ideas and organising our activity.

Suppose that we were not so powerless - that the organised left sank sufficiently deep roots in society to be a real political actor. Then we would face countermeasures, and, more's the pity, we would face the kind of determined nation-state adversaries that keep infosec people awake at night, in addition to 'lawfare' and various kinds of legal takedown initiatives.

To suppose that we could defeat such attacks by means of technique and iron discipline seems to me a fantasy. It is like the fantasy entertained by certain Trotskyist and Maoist sects, that the revolutionary movement will one day face the armed forces of the bourgeois state in a fair fight and win.

In the military struggle against the state, the wildcard is the morale of the forces of the state. The Russian Revolution triumphed precisely by putting this factor in play, with fearless agitation among the ranks of the tsar's army, and later those of the white generals. Only when state power had been conquered was it possible for direct conflict in the field to result in victory for the Red Army during the civil war.

As regards mass communication with modern technology, there is also a question of morale - of building hegemony in society such that the censors and state-employed hackers question their loyalties. But there is also the need merely for *resilience* in the face of successful attacks. When a website is taken down, it must be replaced in short order; the dark web must be understood and exploited; *in extremis*, the sinews of the party and the movement must function even when cut off from the internet entirely.

The fragility of modern IT is on display for all to see: we must expect it to be weaponised against any movement the state deems it necessary to fight ●

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ECONOMICS

Patching up capitalism

Rose-tinted images of the past were interspersed with absurd recipes for the future - **Michael Roberts** reports on a day spent with the 'eminent' members of the Progressive Economy Forum

I recently attended a one-day conference organised by the Progressive Economy Forum, entitled 'Economic policy in the age of Trump'.

The PEF is a leftist economic think tank that advised the Corbyn-McDonnell leadership when they were in charge of the Labour Party. Its aim is to "bring together a council of eminent economists and academics to develop a new macroeconomic programme for the UK".¹ The PEF council wants to "advance macroeconomic policies that address the modern challenges of environmental breakdown, economic insecurity, social and economic inequalities, and technological change, and encourage the implementation of these policies by working with progressive policymakers and improving public understanding of economics." The only specific policy proposal that I could find in its mission statement was that the PEF "opposes austerity and the current ideology and narrative of neoliberalism, campaigns to bring austerity to an end and ensure that austerity is never used again as an instrument of economic policy".

Former lawyer Patrick Allen is the founder, chair and principal funder of the PEF. He sees its task as to "bring together the finest progressive economists and like-minded academics in the country to join with progressive politicians to show the failure of neoliberalism, the futility of austerity and provide credible, Keynesian-inspired policies to achieve a stable, equitable, green, sustainable economy free of poverty".²

The specific mention of Keynesian economics does identify where the PEF is coming from. It is 'progressive', not socialist, economics - and definitely not Marxist economics. That was clear from the many eminent speakers at the PEF conference. All were well-known Keynesian or post-Keynesian economists. The only whiff of Marxism came from a pre-recorded video opening the conference by Yanis Varoufakis from his home in Greece. Former Greek finance minister for the leftist Syriza government during the debt crisis of 2014-15, Varoufakis is a self-confessed "erratic Marxist", as he called himself once.³

In his short address, he outlined his well-known thesis that the fault-lines in capitalism are due to global imbalances in trade and capital flows, as well as the crumbling of American imperialism in trying to sustain its hegemonic position as the "global minotaur",⁴ the consumer of all that is produced. He also briefly mentioned his latest thesis that capitalism, as we have known it, is now 'dead' and has been replaced by 'techno-feudalism' in the shape of the mega media and tech companies in the US, known as the Magnificent Seven, who extract 'cloud rents' from the rest of capitalism.⁵ Varoufakis's policy alternatives to this perceived new feudalism was to: push for a 'green' bank to provide credit for investment to stop global warming etc; introduce more democracy in the corporate workplace; and provide universal basic income for all. Taking over the Magnificent Seven, the major global banks or the fossil fuel companies was not mentioned.



Gabriel von Max 'Monkeys as judges of art' (1889)

But that fitted in with the theme of the PEF conference. This started from the premise that capitalism had to be "re-purposed", not replaced, and that 'rentierism' should be constrained and social protection revised. A succession of speakers followed, talking about the failures and inequalities of 'rentier' capitalism (PEF), 'extractive' capitalism (Stewart Lansley) and 'dystopian' capitalism (Özlem Onaran) - as though these variations had replaced some original 'productive' capitalism, as we knew back in the 1950s and 1960s, which 'worked for all' then (or at least did so if managed by governments using Keynesian macro policies).

Bretton Woods

All was well under the global management of the 'Bretton Woods institutions' of the post-war period (the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organisation, etc). It seems it was only when neoliberalism and rentierism took over from the 1980s onwards that capitalism became destructive and no longer 'progressive' - with crises, rising inequalities, global warming and emerging global conflicts.

There was no explanation of why this 'progressive' capitalism of the 1960s came to be replaced by the neoliberal, extractive, rentier capitalism we have now. Why did capitalists and their policy strategists change things that were working so well for them? Nor was there mention of the global decline in the profitability of productive capital in the 1970s and thus the switch to financial investment and speculation; and the move of investment from the global north by the multinationals to exploitation of labour in the global south.

Stewart Lansley presented some startling facts about inequality of wealth since the 1980s, with the rise of the billionaires and finance: "In the post-war years financial and economic elites acquiesced, with reluctance, in the politics of equalisation, and pre-war levels of extraction fell. With capital's patience exhausted, extraction is back." So it was a 'lack of patience' that led to the switch, not a lack of profitability.⁶

Several speakers highlighted the way that American capital had now taken over large chunks of the British economy, turning it into what Angus Hanton called a "vassal state" and what Will Hutton, the economist and author, reckoned has destroyed the technical development of British industry. Europe and the UK were falling further and further behind American productivity levels. But what was the answer to this American takeover? It was nationalism, not nationalisation, apparently. Hanton: "buy British"; Hutton: develop a "British business bank" - but don't take into public ownership the utilities, the banks and big companies now owned and controlled by foreign capital (mainly American).

In another session, speakers outlined the huge imbalances in trade and capital flows globally, the signs of the weakening of US hegemony and of the dollar as the international currency, and the rise of China as the rival economic power. What was the answer to this? Well, the hope that maybe the Brics+ grouping can reduce imbalances and restore multilateralism in the face of Trump's tariff-driven nationalism!

In this session, Ann Pettifor argued that crises in capitalism were the result of excessive debt (trends in profits or investment were not mentioned) and that we should look to the work of American leftist economist and Nobel prize winner Joseph Stiglitz, and his recent book, *The road to freedom*, where Stiglitz reiterated his call for the creation of a "progressive capitalism".⁷ According to Stiglitz, "Things don't have to be that way. There is an alternative: progressive capitalism. Progressive capitalism is not an oxymoron - we can indeed channel the power of the market to serve society." You see, it is not capitalism that is the problem, but 'vested interests', especially among monopolists and bankers. The answer is to return to the days of 'managed capitalism' that Stiglitz believes existed in the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s.

He writes: "The form of capitalism that we've seen over the last 40 years has not been working for most people. We have to have progressive capitalism. We have to tame capitalism and redirect capitalism, so it serves our society. You know, people are not supposed

to serve the economy: the economy is supposed to serve our people."

In another session, the shocking inequalities of income and wealth were discussed. Interestingly, some speakers like Ben Tippett argued that introducing a wealth tax in Britain would do little to reduce inequality or provide much in the way of government revenue. A wealth tax was no "silver bullet". Tippett was right. A wealth tax would not solve inequality or provide enough funds for public investment. But nobody asked the question, 'Why do we have billionaires and high inequality in the first place?' Inequality is the result of the exploitation of labour by capital before redistribution. Taxation attempts redistribution of wealth or income after the event, with limited success.

In similar vein, we were told by Josh Ryan-Collins that building more homes would not solve the housing crisis in Britain, because that was driven by low mortgage rates (cheap loans) that just drove up demand. His answer: encourage older people with big houses to 'downsize' and free up the existing housing stock for younger buyers. Apparently, a state-funded programme to build publicly owned homes for rent, as was done in the 1950s and 1960s with great success, was not the way forward now.

Fiscal rules

Jo Michell attacked the ludicrous self-imposed fiscal rules that the Labour government is applying in order to 'balance the government books'. But he opposed them only because they were too 'short-term' in their casting. The implication was that there were no radical alternatives to raise revenue that could avoid the Starmer government going ahead with imposing fiscal austerity through planned cuts in benefits to the aged, disabled and families.

The Bank of England was criticised for its mismanagement and now tightening of quantitative easing, which was running up costs equivalent to £20 billion on the government finances (Frances Coppola). But it seemed nobody was in favour of ending the BoE's subservience to the City of London by reversing its so-called 'independence'. You see, the BoE's job was to "preserve price stability" (Frances Coppola) - a strange view,

given the total failure of central banks to handle the post-Covid inflationary spike. Apparently, keeping central banks out of democratic control by elected governments ensured that no 'profligate' government (even if democratically elected) could play with interest rates, etc, and so cause a financial crisis with markets. After all, markets rule and nothing can be done about that, apparently. Taking the major banks and financial institutions into public ownership was not on the agenda of any speaker.

In the final sessions, a broader alternative to 'rentier', 'extractive' or 'dystopian' capitalism was considered. PEF council member Guy Standing, author of *The precariat*, raised the growing risk of fascism and its threat to the 'progressive agenda'. In his theory, the traditional working class is being replaced globally and in Britain by a 'precarious' class, whose members have no permanent work or decent wages and conditions and are being 'left behind'.⁸

This growing class is open to reactionary ideas that the 'plutocracy' aims to encourage and promote; and there is a real danger of class collaboration between the extreme rich and the precariat against the 'salaried' (a term I took to mean 'the traditional working class'). What is the answer? Embrace the precariat, says Standing, instead of the working class; and dismantle 'extractive capitalism', replacing it with 'the commons'. Standing did not really explain what 'the commons' meant, apart from its historic term of 'common land'. Did he mean socialism? I am not sure, because throughout the conference, the word 'socialism' (I think the real meaning of 'the commons') was not uttered once.

John McDonnell and Nadia Whittome are two of Britain's best leftist Labour politicians. McDonnell told the conference that he has never been so depressed about the situation in Britain and globally in his 50 years in politics. What to do? We must try to get the Starmer government 'back on track' to adopt policies to help working people. A vain hope, in my view. Whittome also outlined the horrendous impact of capitalism at home and abroad. But what was the answer? Surely not better management of capitalism?

The PEF on its conference literature quotes a slogan from William Beveridge in 1942: "A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching". Indeed. But, for now, the PEF advocates patching! ●

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Notes

1. progressiveeconomyforum.com/council-members.
2. progressiveeconomyforum.com/author/patrick-allen.
3. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/05/04/memoirs-of-an-erratic-marxist.
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POLEMIC

Questions of communism

What is the relationship between socialism and communism? Can socialism be built in a single country? Mike Macnair continues his exploration of the transition from capitalism

In the first article in this series last week,¹ I identified its immediate context - our discussions in the Forging Communist Unity process about the nature and duration of the transition to socialism. I identified the fear that the CPGB is proposing a version of the ideas of 'official communism' as a part of the arguments. With this starting point, I discussed first the 1950s debate among Trotskyists, which had a similar (and, I think, related) theme. I went on to discuss a set of arguments about the topic of transition in the Communist Party of Britain's *Communist Review*.

These, I argue, illustrate the fundamental differences between the CPGB's views of the transition period and those of 'official communism'. 'Official communism' clings to the ideas of separate national roads to socialism, leading to socialism in single countries, and to the people's front policy of alliance with either liberal or nationalist capitalist parties - both on a world scale and within individual countries. It promotes *bureaucratic* rule as being 'democracy' (reflected in *Britain's road to socialism* in a series of evasive expressions, and in the highly restricted form of pre-congress 'discussion' in the CPB).² These political characteristics reflect the fact that 'official communists' refuse to draw any real lessons from the collapse of Soviet and east European 'actually existing socialism' and the increasing development of capitalism in China, Vietnam, Cuba ...

The CPGB, in contrast, starts from a serious reassessment of why 'actually existing socialism' failed. It insists on the priority of political democracy, both in the state and in the workers' movement. It insists on a class politics, which, while it does not urge the immediate expropriation of the petty bourgeoisie, does not subordinate working class interests to an imagined strategic alliance with the 'national bourgeoisie' or the 'democratic bourgeoisie'. And it insists that the working class needs to develop proletarian internationalism and seize every opportunity available for common international action.

Kennedy

In this article I focus on Peter Kennedy's article, 'Differentiating socialism and communism', posted on April 22 on the Talking About Socialism website.³ This has the merit of being a substantial argument, rather than just a short point or group of short points.

Comrade Kennedy begins with the statement that "the idea of socialism as an alternative to capitalism is an accepted common sense on most of the left". This is true, I think, in Britain, the USA, Canada and Australia, and for the reason comrade Kennedy gives: a desire to take moral distance from the disastrous experience of Stalinism. In fact, it is for the same reason illusory. While the USSR lived, the capitalist states promoted 'socialism' (meaning loyalist 'social-democracy') as a more desirable alternative to 'communism'. Once the USSR and its satellites fell, 'socialism' became just as much demonised in Anglo-American discourse as 'communism'. Where there are surviving significant communist parties, 'communism' is still in use; where Eurocommunists have liquidated them, their remnants



Conviction in the 1852 Cologne trial made it necessary for communists to use another name

have abandoned 'socialism' too (thus the Partito Democratico in Italy, Syriza (the 'coalition of the radical left' in Greece). The Eurotrotskyists of the Mandeliste Fourth International argue for the same course, with Anticapitalist Resistance in this country, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste in France, and so on.

It is worth making a number of additional points here. The first is that there is no consistency in Marx's and Engels' usage of the terms. However, there *are* historical shifts in the use of the terminology, and these are important to understanding the present issue.

'Socialism' was *not* a synonym for communism in the *Communist manifesto* (1848). On the contrary, 'socialism' meant statist and nationalist political trends, variously characterised as feudal, petty-bourgeois, German, conservative-bourgeois, or critical-utopian. 'Communism' was the preferred term for the democratic-republican politics of appropriation in common of the means of production that the *Manifesto* promoted.

The conviction of the communists in the 1852 Cologne communist trial made it necessary for German leftists to use some other word to avoid instant prosecution; the Lassalleans used 'workers', the Eisenachers 'social democratic', to emphasise their insistence on political democracy (as opposed to the Lassalleans' labour-monarchism); the unified party after 1875 was the 'Socialist Workers Party'; after partial legalisation in 1890, 'Social Democratic Party' (SPD). The success of the SPD resulted in 'social democratic' becoming until 1914 the standard identifier for Marxist parties, as opposed to non-Marxist socialists.

The split in the Second International as a result of World War I and the Russian Revolution meant that identification with opposition to war and imperialism, identification with the Russian Revolution and standing for the overthrow of the liberal mixed constitution (falsely called 'democratic') made you a *communist*, even if, like the left and council communists, you broke with Comintern and Soviet policy. 'Social democrat' and 'socialist' were now identifiers for the pro-war, pro-imperialist and constitutional-

loyalist right wing of the workers' movement.

The 'people's front' turn of Comintern led Trotsky to judge that the communist parties were now to the *right* of the left elements among the socialist parties, who maintained the traditional opposition to coalitions with bourgeois parties, and hence to promote the Trotskyists' 'French turn' towards entry in the SPs. After this turn, Trotskyists began to use 'socialist' as a self-identifier.

In practice, however, Trotskyists were still identified by the broader movement as a variety of communists. To lose that identification would require giving clear commitments to imperialism, nationalism and loyalty to the existing constitution. Some groups, like the US Schachtmanites, did follow this path; most merely whined about being identified with communism.

First phase

The second issue posed, intermingled in comrade Kennedy's initial argument, is of 'socialism' as a synonym for what Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha programme* called the first phase of communism⁴ - or, alternatively, as a synonym for the political regime of working class rule or 'dictatorship of the proletariat', which is not quite the same thing.

The root of this usage on the modern left is in Lenin's *State and revolution*: Lenin says that it is "usually called socialism, but termed by Marx the first phase of communism". "Usually called" here shows that Lenin is not innovating. In fact, the usage can be corroborated from other left writers of the Second International. For example, Trotsky in *Results and prospects* (1906), chapters 7 and 8, uses 'socialism' in a way rather closer to the CPGB's usage: that is, as a mixed economy under workers' rule, tending more or less rapidly towards socialisation.⁵

From the 1920s on, this word-usage question became entangled with the issue of 'socialism in one country' (SIOC). Because the 1920s debate was not new, it is necessary to step further back to understand the outcome.

In the *Communist manifesto*, Marx and Engels had written that "United action of the leading civilised countries at least is one of the first

conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat."⁶ In the 1864 *Inaugural address* of the First International, it is remarked that "Past experience has shown how disregard of that bond of brotherhood which ought to exist between the workmen of different countries, and incite them to stand firmly by each other in all their struggles for emancipation, will be chastised by the common discomfiture of their incoherent efforts";⁷ and, in the preamble to the general rules of the International, "That the emancipation of labour is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution on the concurrence, practical and theoretical, of the most advanced countries".⁸ And in the *Critique of the Gotha programme*,

[Gotha draft] 5. "The working class strives for its emancipation first of all within the framework of the present-day national state, conscious that the necessary result of its efforts, which are common to the workers of all civilised countries, will be the international brotherhood of peoples."

[Marx] Lassalle, in opposition to the *Communist manifesto* and to all earlier socialism, conceived the workers' movement from the narrowest national standpoint.

He is being followed in this - and that after the work of the International! It is altogether self-evident that, to be able to fight at all, the working class must organise itself at home as a class and that its own country is the immediate arena of its struggle. In so far its class struggle is national, not in substance, but, as the *Communist manifesto* says, "in form". But the 'framework of the present-day national state' - for instance, the German empire - is itself in its turn economically 'within the framework' of the world market, politically 'within the framework' of the system of states.⁹

It is worth noting that these arguments are not that international action is needed for the higher phase of communism, but that international action is *immediately* needed by the working class under capitalism and

is "one of the *first* conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat" (emphasis added).

Georg von Vollmar, at the time a leftist (he went over to the right in 1891), offered a theory of *The isolated socialist state* in 1878.¹⁰ Karl Kautsky, who was in origin a Czech nationalist, already in 1881 argued that decision-making in socialism would be *national* (as opposed to local or international).¹¹ And he maintained this belief in his exposition of the introductory part of the Erfurt programme in 1891, where he argued that socialism would imply a reduction of foreign trade, and that "A cooperative commonwealth co-extensive with the nation could produce all that it requires for its own preservation."¹² In his series of articles, 'Nationality and internationality', responding to the debate on the national question initiated by the Austrians, he argued that any modern state had to have a single common language: ie, be national.¹³

Against this SIOC perspective arguments came from the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania led by Rosa Luxemburg and others, and from the Austro-Marxists, Otto Bauer and Karl Renner. In both these cases the fundamental objection is that existing economic integration (of Russian Poland with Russia and German Poland with Germany; of the Austro-Hungarian empire) would be broken up by the creation of new nation-states, leading to economic regression and dominance of the rural classes over the proletariat - a prediction that was borne out in the inter-war period.¹⁴

More fundamentally, Parvus (Israel Lazarevich, aka Alexander Gelfand/Helfand) argued in his 1895-96 *Neue Zeit* series, 'World market and agrarian crisis', that the 'agrarian crisis' in Germany reflected the unavoidable integration of industrialised Germany into the world market for food supplies - an assessment that has also been confirmed by subsequent research.¹⁵ This implied that socialism in a single *advanced, industrialised* country would also fail, contrary to Kautsky's argument.

Trotsky's argument in *Results and prospects* was narrower. He stated that, on the one hand, the peasantry as a class would inevitably resist the implementation of the proletariat's policy, so that

... how far can the socialist policy of the working class be applied in the economic conditions of Russia? We can say one thing with certainty - that it will come up against political obstacles much sooner than it will stumble over the technical backwardness of the country. *Without the direct state support of the European proletariat the working class of Russia cannot remain in power and convert its temporary domination into a lasting socialist dictatorship.* Of this there cannot for one moment be any doubt (original emphasis).

On the other hand, the revolution in Russia was likely to trigger the European revolution, and "there cannot be any doubt that a socialist revolution in the west will enable us directly to convert the temporary domination of the working class into a socialist dictatorship".¹⁶

Given that the obstacle to SIOC in his view was *political*, Trotsky was initially (in 1919-20) an advocate of socialist construction under economic autarky - as Richard B Day showed in 1973. After Lenin's death, however, Trotsky's arguments in *Results and prospects* became central targets of his opponents in the succession struggle in the Soviet leadership. His arguments were said to be pessimistic, unrealistic (the Soviet regime had already survived six years) and failing to grasp the *smychka* worker-peasant alliance. Socialism *could* be constructed in one country - including the backward former tsarist empire.

In practice, Trotsky was unable to defend the line of *Results and prospects* - not because it was false,¹⁷ but because it appeared inconsistent with the survival of the Soviet state, and thus offered no *political* hope. (Analogously, to argue openly that the UK is a mere protectorate of the USA and an offshore financial centre with a moderately sized productive economy attached to it, though it is to speak truly, is presently politically impossible in mainstream British politics.) Instead, he produced a series of different criticisms of the economic policies of the successive majorities in the Russian leadership.¹⁸

But this still posed the question: why was the Soviet regime, which after the first five-year plan had statised most major production and introduced radical, if ineffective, planification, not an example of 'socialism'? Trotsky's answer in the 1936 *The revolution betrayed* was to argue that it was because socialism had to be a higher-productivity form than capitalism, and because "Socialism is a structure of planned production to the end of the best satisfaction of human needs; otherwise it does not deserve the name of socialism".¹⁹ This amounts to redefining 'socialism' as what Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha programme* called the "higher phase" of communism; and in Trotsky's appendix on SIOC the same sort of reasoning is used.²⁰

In fact, of course, Trotsky in the bulk of *The revolution betrayed* goes on to analyse 'Thermidor' - that is, that the USSR displayed a dynamic *towards capitalism*. The bulk of the post-war Trotskyists,²¹ however, forgot the *dynamic* aspect of this analysis, treating it merely as more negative grounds to deny that the Soviet regime (and its imitators) were 'socialist'. At this point we arrive at the point comrade Kennedy started with ...

But the problem is that the identification of socialism with the "higher phase" of communism makes it extraordinarily difficult to think through the transition from capitalism to communism. Trotskyists have either, by forgetting the Soviet dynamic towards capitalism, collapsed into left versions of SIOC; or, by treating the regime either as state-capitalist or as a stable non-capitalist exploitative class order, collapsed in the direction of Bakunin's project of the general strike producing the immediate *abolition* of the state.

Unclear

Comrade Kennedy's second paragraph says, as the CPGB does, that "socialism is not another name for communism, and nor is it a mode of production. Socialism is an inherently unstable transitional relation premised on intensive class struggle." Good.

Instantly, however, we pass to arguments that are at best seriously unclear. "The basis of the latter [class struggle under socialism] is the socialisation of capital and of labour." What is meant here? *Capitalism* socialises capital and

labour, in the sense that it tends to replace the small household production of peasants and artisans by concentrated/centralised forms of production: that is elementary Marx. Indeed, comrade Kennedy quotes Marx, to precisely this effect: capital socialises production (from Engels' edition of some of Marx's 1860s manuscripts as *Capital* Vol III), making the state ever more clearly "an engine of class despotism" (*The civil war in France*²²).

It is, then, not helpful to say, as comrade Kennedy does, that "The capitalist class is engaged in a struggle to *contain* this socialisation (emphasis added) by amongst other things utilising, colonising and so corrupting socialism as an economic and political force, with the objective to prevent communism." The capitalist class struggles for *control* of the socialised forces of production, in order to hold the working class in subordination and thereby maintain a flow of surplus value.

"Utilising ... socialism ... to prevent communism" is, as I said earlier in this article, a description of the policy of the US state and its subordinate allies in *the cold war* - one which has been abandoned since at the latest the fall of the USSR. Comrade Kennedy's use of this idea, throughout his article, is characterised by a static perception of capitalism (which merely 'abuses' socialism in self-defence); and, like the post-war Trotskyists on the USSR and eastern Europe, a static image of China, in which both the persistence of Stalinism and the *dynamic towards* capitalism - and in the Chinese case towards imperialism - are missing.

Similarly, 'municipal socialism' is seen as an ingenious capitalist device for preventing communism, rather than becoming able to play that role only *after* workers' organisations themselves promoted it as a means of what were then called 'palliatives'.

Again, comrade Kennedy sees an original sin of the SPD in the 1875 Gotha Programme, arguing that "The socialism being proposed by SPD leaders was anchored to a top-down bureaucratic, evolutionary transformation of economy, state and society" and that "the SPD programme worked under the assumption that a party of professional socialists would transform the capitalist state into a socialist state". Given the SPD's notorious line of "not one man, not one penny for this system"; its illegality between 1878 and 1890; its leaders' argument that capitalism would collapse in a *Zusammenbruch* or *Kladderadatsch* (the target of Bernstein's polemics); and its active promotion of forms of self-organisation in the localities and in coops, clubs and so on, as well as trade unions, this narrative is flatly false.

Comrade Kennedy says of Marx's *Critique*: "The strident, venomous, trenchant and blunt tone of Marx's critique - usually reserved for the inhuman degradation of capitalism and the ruling class - arises here among fellow socialists because he sees in the programme the hallmarks of class treachery."

This is la-la land. The *normal* sharpness of Marx's polemics "among fellow socialists" is notorious, going back to *The poverty of philosophy* in 1847-48; Marx equally associated himself with and contributed to the savage polemic of Engels' *Anti-Dühring* in 1877.²³ The sharpness of the polemic in the *Critique of the Gotha programme* is not about "hallmarks of class treachery".

Plus, as Lars T Lih has shown, the programme actually adopted at Gotha (as opposed to the draft Marx and Engels critiqued) *did* take account of Marx's and Engels'

comments. And by 1879 Marx was talking about Lassallean verbiage in the Gotha programme as "a compromise having no particular significance".²⁴

In this context, it is remarkable that comrade Kennedy does *not* address here Marx's sharp critique of the Gotha draft for *nationalism* (quoted above).

Stages

Comrade Kennedy says that socialism is

... not a revolution in stages, with no end in sight, but ongoing phases in the, relatively rapid, revolutionary transformation of society, which will depend more on the international scope of the revolution and the external threats to such a revolution (what we do know is that a one-country or even several-country transformation is unviable and will have similar endings to previous ventures). There is no other reasons as to why the transition should stretch over many decades.

"Stages" is wholly irrelevant: there are few, if any, pre-capitalist societies in the world today, so there is no question of a 'bourgeois stage'. So far as 'anti-stagism' becomes *generalised* into some sort of philosophical claim, beyond the specific case of the Mensheviks' argument for a 'bourgeois stage' in Russia, it is senseless. It is necessary to turn the electricity off before working on the circuit; to jack up the vehicle before taking a wheel off to replace a tyre; to take down the building before reconstructing its foundations; and so on.

These are necessary stages in the activities in question, and other activities - including social revolution - also involve necessary stages. If Europe (or Britain) tomorrow falls into revolutionary crisis, the result *will* be the victory of the far right; because, as in fact Trotsky pointed out, the precondition for proletarian revolution is "a party; once more a party; again a party".²⁵

For comrade Kennedy, the issue is that "the terminology of 'stages' opened political possibilities for misapplication, principally, holding out intimations of separate systems in linear time and therefore the possibility of making politics by perpetually kicking the 'higher' stage into the long grass and making do with the 'lower stage' of 'socialism'". This is certainly not Trotsky's critique of Stalinism in *The revolution betrayed*, and it remains at a purely ideological level. In fact, distinguishing between 'stages' and 'phases' *fails* to yield concrete political tasks alternative to those posited by 'official communists'.

For the CPGB, in contrast, our critique of the Soviet and similar regimes poses concrete questions of *political democracy in institutional forms and procedures for the working class to hold bureaucrats, managers and policemen in subordination*, rather than the other way round; and for a continental and global revolutionary perspective, as opposed to SIOC.

SIOC

Comrade Kennedy's comment that "a one-country or even several-country transformation is unviable and will have similar endings to previous ventures" is correct, though we have to think more carefully about it, and its significance is understated in his article.

The Soviet regime was - contrary to the argument of the Soviet majority in the 1920s - *not* a single country, but one of the great European empires. It was the military reconquest in 1918-21 of the seceded non-Russian

countries (except Poland and the Baltics) that allowed the regime to survive until 1941, and it was gains made in the inter-imperialist war of 1941-45 with US aid that allowed it to create subordinate or imitator regimes elsewhere and to survive from 1945-89. The effect was *dual power on a world scale*,²⁶ broken by the fall of the USSR. After that, the dynamic towards capitalism has become increasingly rapid in the remaining former 'socialist' countries.

Proletarian revolution in France or Germany *could* lead to the conquest of the rest of Europe in an international revolutionary war. This, in turn, *could* produce dual power on a world scale. Proletarian revolution in Greece alone (as various Trotskyists urged on Syriza), or in Britain alone, would be an ephemeral event, meaning no more than proletarian revolution on the Isle of Wight alone - starved out in the very short term.

But, once we recognise that to achieve *as much as* 1917-21 requires continental-scale action, two points follow. The first is that continental Europe includes substantially larger 'classic' petty-proprietor classes (peasants and small businesses) than the UK (which has larger *employed* middle classes and petty rentiers (private pensioners)). Once we get to revolution in the global south, which is certainly indispensable to achieving more than dual power on a world scale, the importance of small family production is all the greater. The second point is that we have a lot of work to do before we get to the point of the question of power being immediately posed. For both these purposes we need a minimum programme that is *consistent with the continued existence of money and the petty-proprietor classes*.

Now it may be that the USA will collapse without destroying the world and, with the massive destruction of capital values and debt claims involved, there will emerge a new imperialist order (probably led by continental Europe rather than by China) and a new long boom like the 1950s-60s, leading to a new phase of proletarianisation in the global south, which will change these issues. In reality this looks like a low-probability outcome. The fact that the tendency to proletarianisation in east and south Asia has been accompanied by deindustrialisation and *deproletarianisation* in the imperialist countries, the Middle East and Latin America, suggests that rather capital will not escape from its dynamic towards world degradation, and the options on the table are international proletarian revolution, generalised nuclear war or general reduction to 'Somalification'.

In his summary, comrade Kennedy says that "Short of the working class taking power, then socialism, as an unstable transitional relation with a missing pole of communism, will inevitably lead the working class back towards a declining capitalism."

But what does the working class *taking power* mean in this context? The nearest approach to a statement in this article is:

Socialism becomes the transition from capitalism to communism under the democratic rule of the working class, through communes and through the state. Which is to say, working class power, exercised through its network of communes and the state, will provide the means through which most of the population will be engaged in some form of administration and management and with the building of democratic control over every sphere of life: 'the state and politics, work and economy'.

This passage is supported by an

endnote citation to the CPGB's *Draft programme*, section 5, 'Transition to communism'.²⁷ Good. But this passage in the *Draft programme* is written on the basis of the *previous* overthrow of the state power of the capitalist class. The result of 'phases, not stages', then, is that comrade Kennedy appears unable to conceptualise the overthrow of the capitalist state order.

In the third article in this series I will attempt to address the question of transition positively in the light of the negative arguments in last week's and this article ●

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Notes

1. 'Centuries of Stalinism' *Weekly Worker* May 22: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1539/centuries-of-stalinism.
2. See, for example, 'Dumbness of dumbing down' *Weekly Worker* June 29 2003: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1449/dumbness-of-dumbing-down.
3. talkingaboutsociology.org/differentiating-socialism-and-communism.
4. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm.
5. Both chapters at www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tp/rp-index.htm.
6. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm.
7. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864/10/27.htm.
8. www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1864/rules.htm.
9. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm.
10. *Der isolierte sozialistische Staat* - abridged in G von Vollmar *Reden und Schriften zur Reformpolitik* Bonn 1977, pp51-82 (a translation at least of part of it is at deepmarxology.cc/uploads/levellingspirit/Vollmar-Der-isolierte-sozialistische-Staat-English-v1.pdf). See more generally E van Ree, "'Socialism in one country'" before Stalin: German origins' *Journal of Political Ideologies* Vol 15 (2010), pp143-59; and 'Lenin's conception of socialism in one country, 1915-17' *Revolutionary Russia* Vol 23 (2010), pp159-81; Y Sorochkin, 'From JG Fichte's "the closed commercial state" to "socialism in one country": intellectual origins of Stalinism and Stalinist utopia' (DPhil thesis, Oxford University 2019): ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:cbc04844-d31f-4d93-8618-814f64668a61.
11. www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1881/state/3-freesoc.htm.
12. www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1892/erfurt/ch04.htm.
13. Translated by B Lewis *Critique* Vol 37 (2009), pp371-89, and Vol 38 (2010), pp143-63.
14. There is a mass of literature on the Second International debate on the national question, but it largely disregards the question of economic integration beyond national borders and the relationship to SIOC. Luxemburg in HB Davis (ed) *The national question: selected writings by Rosa Luxemburg* (New York NY 1976) is clearer, because more explicitly polemical than Renner or Bauer.
15. www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/parvus/1895/weltmarkt/index.html; A Offer *The First World War: an agrarian interpretation* Oxford 1991.
16. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tp/rp08.htm.
17. My own view - *not* a CPGB common view - is that Trotsky was right that the peasantry would overthrow the proletarian dictatorship; but because, as Marx argued in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the peasantry cannot rule, but only find a representative-master who will coerce them to produce a surplus for the society, the peasants' defeat of the proletariat in 1921-29 produces ... Stalinism as a form of Bonapartism.
18. RB Day *Leon Trotsky and the politics of economic isolation* Cambridge 1973, pp97-125.
19. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/revbet/ch03.htm. "production" is missing in the MIA text.
20. I leave on one side the issue whether Marx's two phases of communism represent a *correct* conception of the transition.
21. Exceptions are the Spartacists and the Marcyites and neo-Marcyites. The *Critique* school foresaw *collapse* of the Soviet regime, but was not strictly Trotskyist.
22. For some strange reason comrade Kennedy thinks that this from 1871 is "even in [Marx's] early writings".
23. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy; www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring.
24. platypus1917.org/2023/06/02/a-review-of-karl-marxs-critique-of-the-gotha-program.
25. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/spain/spain04.htm.
26. An argument made by the Vern-Ryan tendency in the US SWP in the early 1950s, which has, I think, on the whole been confirmed by subsequent developments.
27. communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/5-transition-to-communism.

CLIMATE

Not a bright idea

An unwillingness - or inability - to deal with the root causes of the climate crisis has resulted in a frantic search for technological fixes. However, argues **Jack Conrad**, that comes with all manner of dangers

Last year was the first on record to exceed 1.5°C above preindustrial levels. The average figure was 1.6°C.¹ There is, moreover, a good chance too that average global temperatures will exceed the 1.5°C limit for the “entire five-year 2024-2028 period”.² That is what the solemn pledges agreed by governments in Paris 2016 at Cop 21 have come to.

From here on in 2°C seems like an odds-on certainty, especially with Donald Trump, America pulling out of the Paris agreement and his ‘drill, baby, drill’ message to big oil. Indeed there are serious warnings that, with atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations going from 280 parts per million in preindustrial times to 430ppm today³, climate feedback will soon kick in and catapult temperatures to 3°C, 4°C and beyond. Enough, it is authoritatively reckoned, to bring about “civilisational collapse” sometime between 2070 and 2090.⁴ That is within the lifetime of our younger readers.

Understandably then, having spent decades lurking in the shadows of secret military research,⁵ there has been a renewed interest in geoengineering (also known as climate engineering or climate intervention). That is the “deliberate large-scale manipulations of the planetary environment with the aim to counteract anthropogenic climate change”.⁶ Geoengineering - specifically its Solar Radiation Management variant - is by far the most controversial of the techno-fixes on offer, not least because it does nothing to tackle the underlying problem of greenhouse gas emissions and would, in all probability, produce all manner of unintended negative side effects.

There are other proposed SRMs on the table. Eg, deploy a giant, 2,000-kilometre-diameter sunshade in space - estimated cost around \$5 trillion (plus). Then there is building massive cloud-generating machines; whitening low-level clouds by spraying them with seawater; and, far more prosaically, painting roads, buildings and roofs white.

Marine geoengineering is another grand-scale option, with the advantage that it *does* remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Adding iron or other nutrients to surface waters would stimulate the growth of algae (phytoplankton), which during their life-cycle absorb carbon. With their death they sink to the bottom where their carbon is locked away in the silt and mud. Incidentally I have written elsewhere about the range of techno-fixes: electric vehicles, nuclear power, hydrogen, biofuel and carbon capture and sequestration.⁷ But, here, in this article, I shall concentrate on SRM.

Legit research

Nowadays, the SRM techno-fix is enthusiastically pushed by the billionaire class: Bill Gates, Elon Musk, George Soros, Peter Thiel, Richard Branson and Dustin Moskovitz. Organisations such as the Environmental Defense Fund, Degrees Initiative, Quadrature Climate Foundation and the Alliance for Just Deliberation on Solar Geoengineering exist to promote their SRM agenda. Governments in the US, China, Russia and the UK provide backing for SRM research too.



Total solar eclipse

It was, for example, recently announced that the UK’s Advanced Research and Invention Agency (Aria) will fund £56.8 million worth of experimental projects with a view to studying “climate-manipulating technologies” that could potentially restore the planet to health.⁸

This, remember, under a Labour government which, at least in the form of Ed Miliband, continues to parade before the world its - legally binding - commitment to reaching net zero by 2050 (Climate Change Act 2008). A political consensus nowadays derided by Nigel Farage and Reform UK and which is being rapidly walked away from by Kemi Badenoch and the Tories. And, of course, where the Tories go, Sir Keir will probably follow: triangulation more than suggests such a course. Former Labour prime minister Sir Tony Blair has perhaps already given the game away, when he declared that existing global approaches to tackling climate change “aren’t working”⁹ (although it was later claimed that his modestly named Tony Blair Institute for Global Change supports the 2050 target¹⁰).

True, in objective terms £56.8 million is a pittance. However, it sends an unmistakable message: geoengineering is a legit area of research, because it holds out, if not a solution, at least the possibility of mitigation, when it comes to human-induced climate change.

There are five Aria research categories: studying ways to thicken ice sheets; assessing whether marine clouds could be brightened to offset damage to coral reefs; understanding how cirrus clouds warm the climate; theoretical work on whether a sunshade deployed in space could cool portions of Earth’s surface; looking at whether millions of tons of sulphur dioxide particles could be seeded into the stratosphere in order to mimic the cooling effect of volcanoes by reflecting solar radiation back into space - the latter option being first suggested in the early 1960s by the Soviet Union’s (and at that time the world’s) leading climatologist, Mikhail Budyko.

He issued a number of warnings about the inevitability of accelerated global climate change due to the burning of fossil fuels on an unprecedented scale. Although anthropogenic climate change had

long been recognised, “what was new was the discovery of major climate feedback, such as the melting of Arctic ice and the disruption of the albedo effect, as reflective white ice was replaced with blue seawater, increasing the amount of solar radiation absorbed by the planet and ratcheting up global average temperature”.¹¹

Back in 1974, Budyko suggested the possibility of sending up specially modified high-flying aircraft, which would release sulphur particles (forming sulphate aerosols) into the stratosphere. By mimicking the effect of major volcanic eruptions, solar radiation would be diminished. An idea which the Dutch Nobel laureate, Paul Crutzen, famously explored in a 2006 Climatic Change paper.¹²

By the way, the climate impact of volcanic eruptions is nowadays an accepted scientific fact. Eg, after perhaps a thousand years of dormancy, Indonesia’s Mount Tambora started to rumble and then exploded in April 1815. Huge amounts of ash and aerosols plumed up into the atmosphere and darkened the sun - 1816 was famously the ‘year without summer’. Global average temperatures are thought to have dropped by 3°C (there were dreadful crop failures in Europe and North America and all manner of social consequences).¹³

While Crutzen deployed the term, ‘geoengineering’, he never actually advocated such a course. Presumably he knew better. Despite that, his work spawned a veritable swarm of research institutes, global networks, conferences, computer simulations, government consultations and feasibility studies such as Aria ... and many, not least Bill Gates, are gagging to put geoengineering into practice on a planetary scale. After all, geoengineering cannot be really tested on the micro-scale proposed by Aria. To deliver reliable results, geoengineering has to tangibly effect the land, the sea and the skies. Either way, there is a lot of money sloshing around to promote researchers and university departments, buy up climate publications and establish an army of well-funded advocacy groups.

By using whole fleets of planes to seed the upper atmosphere with sulphur particles the claim is that

solar radiation will be reflected back into outer space and reduce temperatures on Earth by a few fractions of a degree. A stop-gap which would give capitalism enough time to come to the rescue with the green technologies needed to wean the system away from fossil fuels.

Probably the likes of Gates and Soros are motivated by a genuine desire to prevent civilisational collapse. But there are, of course, those who see a good business opportunity when it presents itself.

Eg, Stardust, the Israel-US start-up led by CEO and co-founder Yanai Yedvab, a former deputy chief scientist at the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, the agency which oversees the country’s clandestine nuclear programme. Stardust’s prospective clients seem to be governments. As the climate crisis goes from one tipping point to another, the belief is that governments will have no choice but to opt for geoengineering. Stardust would “sell them the tools” needed to meet their climate goals.¹⁴

Faulty logic

As might be expected, there is a huge number of scientific and scientifically informed critics. A couple of examples will, though, suffice.

Raymond Pierrehumbert, professor of planetary physics at Oxford university, and Michael Mann, distinguished professor at the University of Pennsylvania, jointly savage the SRM idea. “In essence,” they say, “we have broken the climate by releasing gigatonnes of fossil-fuel carbon dioxide, and solar geoengineering proposes to ‘fix’ it by breaking a very different part of the climate system.”¹⁵

Elizabeth Kolbert, a Pulitzer prize-winning author, pinpoints the faulty logic of the would-be SRM geoengineers: “If control is the problem, then, by the logic of the Anthropocene, still more control must be the solution.”¹⁶ In effect, the modern geoengineers want to treat greenhouse gas emissions in the same way as the Victorian engineer Joseph Bazalgette dealt with London’s sewage crisis following the notorious 1858 ‘great stink’ - so bad was the smell emanating from the Thames that there was talk of suspending parliament and moving it to Oxford or St Albans. Not insignificantly, Bill Gates proudly says in his recent(ish) book: “I think more like an engineer than a political scientist, and I don’t have a solution to the politics of climate change.”¹⁷

Of course, the climate system is vastly more complex than the River Thames: everything is connected to everything else. Physics, biology, chemistry, human society and political economy form an interconnected and interacting whole. So, in all probability, if one (or a number) of the SRM pseudo-solutions for climate change was implemented, it would, surely, let loose a Pandora’s box of demons.

For example, there is the danger that the results of SRM geoengineering might well prove to be irreversible. After all carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases such as methane continue to accumulate in the atmosphere. Hence, if the SRM programme of seeding the upper atmosphere is finally ended, there exists the

distinct possibility of a temperature spike, which would be “two to four times larger” than would otherwise have been the case.¹⁸ So not inconceivably geoengineering could trigger a climate crisis far worse than the one already given a ‘code red’ by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Geoengineering would, almost certainly, if all initially goes well, serve as an ideological smokescreen. Governments might well seize upon geoengineering as a way to stop temperatures rising to 4°C or 5°C. And, saved from the immediate prospect of climate catastrophe, big business carries on as before, emitting more and more greenhouse gases, as it furiously pursues its overriding objective: M-C-M’.

Hence, the 2050 goal of net zero lies abandoned and temperatures stabilise at 2.5°C or 3°C. Meanwhile, though, there is more and more carbon in the atmosphere, rainfall is reduced, the seas become ever more acidic, the recovery of the ozone layer is slowed or reversed and the loss of biodiversity continues apace (as warned by the editors of *Scientific American* back in 2008).¹⁹ In short, geoengineering does nothing to bring the planet back to good health. On the contrary, mother Earth gets sicker and sicker.

Rival national interests represent another obvious problem. What would China do if the US unilaterally placed a giant sunshade above its territory in near space? Surely, diplomatic protest would be swiftly joined by military action in what would be seen as an act of war. Because China is a big power both economically and militarily, that is very much the expectation. According to the academics, David Keith, Peter Irvine and Joshua Horton, *supporters* of SRM geoengineering: “Military action to stop SRM deployment by a powerful state would likely only be launched by another powerful state or states, potentially triggering a systemic war.”²⁰

With the same thought in mind, what would Russia do if the US starts seeding the upper atmosphere with sulphur dioxide and stops the Arctic melting that promises to bring vast new economic opportunities in Siberia, including a summer, ice-free, northern shipping route joining the Baltic to the Pacific by 2035? One option would be to go for what Keith, Irvine and Horton call counter-measures or ‘counter-geoengineering’ against what can all too easily be seen as an American attempt to stop Russia taking legitimate advantage of the *opportunities* presented by global warming. Would Russia sit idly by, as the US acted to ‘save the world’? Or would it rapidly increase its emissions of greenhouse gases as a counter-measure?

There would, in short, have to be an agreement between the big powers over any use of SRM technology - not inconceivable, but far from guaranteed.

What about the smaller powers? Would they be consulted? Would they be able to exercise a veto? What would Myanmar, Brazil or Zaire do if American parked a giant sunshade over their territory? What about seeding the upper atmosphere

in a way that shifted existing weather patterns and led to their still verdant tropical forests turning into desert? Certainly without clear international agreements, “there’s a real risk that powerful nations - or even wealthy individuals - could go it alone, deploying geoengineering to serve their own interests”.²¹

Such dangers are known knowns. But, there are unknowns. Surveying the sorry results of past efforts to ‘solve nature’s problems’, Michael and Joyce Huesmann argue, not unreasonably, that humans cannot “substantially modify natural world systems without creating unanticipated and undesirable consequences”.²²

Accelerationists

There are too those on the ‘left’ who advocate techno-fixes: ie, accelerationists such as Nick Land, Paul Mason, Alex Williams, Nick Smicek, Aaron Bastani and Leigh Phillips (a list of ‘lefts’ which includes not a few ‘former lefts’ now). Instead of recognising the inherent limits of nature, they urge us to identify with what technological-industrial world capitalism has created and ‘embrace our Frankenstein monsters’.

This, predictably, includes geoengineering. Peter Frase, author of *Four futures: life after capitalism* (2016), proposes that the left should retake the so-called Promethean idea of mastering the world. His “grand future” includes “terraforming our own planet, reconstructing it into something that can continue to support us and at least some of the other living creatures that currently exist - in other words, making an entirely new nature”. In the name of recognising that “we are, and have been for a long time, the manipulators and managers of nature”, he calls for us to accept that geoengineering is inevitable. If we do not do that, “the bourgeoisie will simply carry out their work without us”.²³

Naturally, that sort of approach leads the accelerationists into ridiculing those who warn against geoengineering and its unintended consequences. There is much talk of ‘doom-mongers’, ‘Luddism’ and ‘technophobia’. Instead, technology is held out as the means of overcoming climate change, third-world poverty, scarcity, etc, etc. Technology is even credited with a miraculous ability to deliver “fully automated luxury communism”.²⁴

It is not that we dismiss technology. Nothing of the kind. But we do not delude ourselves that technology is an autonomous driver of human progress. Capitalists certainly use technology, in all manner of forms, as a commodity in order to sell to us the latest ‘must haves’. Technology is also used to spy on us, as a weapon to oppress us and as a way to weaken us by replacing human labour with dead labour (and thereby stopping or breaking our trade union organisations).

Missing from the accounts of the accelerationists is any notion that, in order to restore humanity’s metabolic relationship with nature, overcome global inequality and realise a society based on the principle of “each according to their need”, it is first necessary to organise the working class into a revolutionary party.

Class politics is ever so passé for the accelerationists, ever so 20th-century. For them it is relentless economic growth and encouraging the forward march of technology. That, not working class self-activity, is what undermines capitalism and holds out the prospect of human freedom. Through supercomputers, through embracing automation, through whizz-bang space rockets, through mining asteroids, through following the “leading-edge” political vanguard of Alexis Tsipras and Pablo Iglesias, we are promised a 10-hour working week, more equality and all manner of tawdry luxury commodities - yes, taken from an article that is over five years old.²⁵

The whole, almost instantly dated, utterly banal, ‘left’ accelerationist programme clearly owes far more to Eduard Bernstein, HG Wells and Isaac Asimov than Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Not that orthodox(ish) Marxism can be entirely excused. Here is what Leon Trotsky, still near the pinnacle of political power in 1924, wrote about refashioning nature:

The present distribution of mountains and rivers, of fields, of meadows, of steppes, of forests and of seashores cannot be considered final. Man has already made changes in the map of nature that are not few nor insignificant. But they are mere pupils’ practice in comparison with what is coming. Faith merely promises to move

mountains; but technology, which takes nothing ‘on faith’, is actually able to cut down mountains and move them. Up to now this was done for industrial purposes (mines) or for railways (tunnels); in the future this will be done on an immeasurably larger scale, according to a general industrial and artistic plan. Man will occupy himself with re-registering mountains and rivers, and will earnestly and repeatedly make improvements in nature. In the end, he will have rebuilt the Earth - if not in his own image, at least according to his own taste. We have not the slightest fear that this taste will be bad.²⁶

Trotsky was hardly alone in promoting such a thoughtless, blasé, so-called Promethean, approach to nature in the early 20th century. Not that you will find anything like that in the writings of Lenin or Bukharin. In point of fact they showed some real appreciation of the need to respect and protect nature.²⁷ Nonetheless, what Trotsky wrote was very much of its time. After all, what Trotsky preached about nature, Joseph Stalin put into practice - not in order to realise some global artistic grand design: rather, more mundanely, to provide the state (and in due course, its citizens) with more and more use-values.

Stalin

However, this could not be achieved with genuine socialist planning, which relies on the active participation, the positive control, of the associated producers. The bureaucratic elite pursued the interests of the state (along with its own narrow self-interest).²⁸ As a result, the post-1928 Soviet Union proved to be a malfunctioning society. It was not a mode of (re) production, but an ectopic social formation.

Attempting to overcome the irrationalities, the chronic low productivity, the massive waste, the authorities - first and foremost Stalin - turned to all manner of techno-fixes. Surely an object lesson for the ‘left’ accelerationists, when it comes to climate change.

Leave aside the radioactive waste littered over Kazakhstan, the open-cast mining, the oil spills and the ruinous industrial practices which caused choking air pollution, poisoned rivers and killed lakes. Let us focus on agriculture. One can see why Marx argued that what is needed for rational agriculture is either the “small farmer living by his own labour or the control of associated producers”.²⁹ Expropriating the peasants through forced collectivisation in the late 1920s and early 1930s caused agricultural production to crash. The cities went hungry. The countryside starved. Millions died.

However, joining together the country’s peasant farms even without the necessary tractors and combines meant that the regime would never again be held to ransom by the richer peasants, the kulaks. Throughout the 1920s they had held back grain, when prices were considered too low. The state had to respond, either by increasing prices (and thereby denying industry, the army, etc) or by sending out special armed detachments to seize grain supplies.

But collectivisation merely collectivised primitiveness. The peasants were, to all intents and purposes, re-enslaved. They were state helots. When tractors and combines eventually came on stream, productivity remained notoriously low. Collective farm members had to be allocated individual plots to

grow fruit and vegetables for their own consumption and for sale in special, private, markets established in the towns and cities. Despite lacking machinery, productivity on the individual plots was far higher than on the *kolkhozi* and *sovkhozi*.

As one of many techno-fixes, in the second half of the 1940s Stalin proposed his ‘Great Plan for the Transformation of Nature’ - a super-ambitious response to the 1946 drought, which in 1947 left an estimated half to one million dead. Huge bands of land were to be forested in the southern steppe to provide a network of shelterbelts. Rivers feeding into the Aral Sea were to be diverted - once the world’s fourth largest lake, it has now virtually disappeared. Irrigation canals, reservoirs and countless ponds were going to upgrade the thin soils. Trofim Lysenko’s “elite strains of seed”, so went the presumption, would ensure fabulously high yields.

Lysenko, of course, contemptuously dismissed the Mendelian theory of gene inheritance as an example of “metaphysics and idealism”.³⁰ Instead he upheld a neo-Lamarckian doctrine of crops passing on environmentally acquired characteristics, such as cold resistance and drought resistance.

This was vigorously opposed in Britain by the CPGB’s scientific superstar, JBS Haldane (much to the chagrin of the official leadership faction).³¹ Haldane was famously one of the originators of the Darwinian-Mendelian synthesis³² and eventually resigned from the CPGB in 1950. A great loss.

Lysenkoism had been elevated into official doctrine in the Soviet Union. Those who disagreed were viciously denounced, dismissed from academic posts and often ended up in the gulag. That or they were simply shot. The message was clear: politics, not scientific facts - certainly not nature - was in command. In 1948, Lysenko made his notorious speech to the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences. He rhetorically asked: “What is the attitude of the central committee of the party to my report?” He answers: “the central committee has examined my report and approves of it (Stormy applause. Ovation. All rise).” The “most chilling passage in all the literature of the 20th century science”, writes Stephen Jay Gould.³³

The Great Plan ended in complete failure. The trees were of the wrong kind, went untended and died. The crops were of the wrong kind too, and froze or wilted. Topsoils were quickly exhausted and were washed away by rain or blown away on the winds (they contained, of course, the highest concentrates of organic matter and microorganisms). All negative and unintended consequences.

Stalin’s approach was continued by his successors. Their techno-fixes failed too, they could not save the Soviet Union and it finally collapsed in December 1991.

However, to support a billionaire-backed version of the Great Plan, albeit in the name of accelerating some kind of socialism or communism - when nowadays the world faces runaway climate change, when there is the distinct danger of civilisational collapse - well, that is to serve capitalism as useful idiots ●

Notes

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24. A Bastani *Fully automated luxury communism* London 2019.
25. www.vice.com/en/article/luxury-communism-933.
26. L Trotsky *Literature and art* - see: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lit_rev/ch08.htm.
27. Under Lenin, Soviet Russia stood for the “most audacious approach to nature conservancy in the 20th century”. Although he wanted to massively increase the country’s productive potential, he thought that nature had to be preserved and protected. Agencies were instructed to set aside vast swathes of land, where commercial development, including tourism, would be banned. These ‘zapovedniki’, or natural preserves, were intended for nothing but ecological study. Scientists sought to understand natural biological processes better through these “living laboratories”. This would serve pure science and it would also have some ultimate value for Soviet society’s ability to interact with nature in a rational manner. For example, natural pest elimination processes could be adapted to agriculture (L Proeyct ‘Ecology in the former Soviet Union’ - www.columbia.edu/~lnp3/mydocs/ecology/ussr_ecology.htm).
- As for Bukharin, although there is an element of triumphalism in his writings on nature, the fifth chapter of his *Historical materialism* (1925), begins with this pertinent observation: “Human society is unthinkable without its environment. Nature is the source of foodstuffs for human society, thus determining the latter’s living conditions. But nothing could be more incorrect than to regard nature from the teleological point of view: man, the lord of creation, with nature created for his use, and all things adapted to human needs. As a matter of fact, nature often falls upon the ‘lord of creation’ in such a savage manner that he is obliged to admit her superiority” (N Bukharin *Historical materialism: a system of sociology* Mansfield Centre CT 2013, p104).
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29. K Marx *Capital* Vol III, Moscow 1971, p121.
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Online Communist Forum



Sunday June 1 5pm
Israel is genocidal and the US and UK are complicit - political report from CPGB’s Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be
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CLIMATE RECORDS

No quick return

Billionaires, the rich, the upper sections of the middle classes, are disproportionately responsible for the degradation of the ecosystem. However, even if we put an end to capitalism tomorrow it would still take generations to restore the damage already done, argues **Eddie Ford**

There is a phrase commonly attributed to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, though popularised during the French Revolution: “When the people shall have nothing more to eat, they will eat the rich”.¹ Maybe we will: we have to follow that advice if we want to save the planet from ecological destruction.

While we have always known that the wealthy are responsible for the emission of large amounts of greenhouse gases, directly linking that inequality into responsibility for climate breakdown is another question. But now a paper in *Nature Climate Change* details how the wealthiest 10% are responsible for two-thirds of global warming since 1990 by new research that attempts to specifically *quantify* how much that inequality in emissions feeds into climate breakdown - the writers call it a shift from carbon accounting toward climate accountability.² In order to get the result, researchers fed wealth-based greenhouse gas emissions inequality assessments into climate modelling frameworks, allowing them to systematically attribute the changes in global temperatures and the frequency of extreme weather events that have taken place between 1990 and 2019.

Hence this practically means that, by subtracting the emissions of the wealthiest, you can then work out the changes to the climate and frequency of extreme weather events that would have taken place without them. By comparing those with the changes that have actually occurred, that enables you to calculate a lot more exactly their responsibility for the crisis the world finds itself in today. We know that in 2020 the global mean temperature was 0.61°C higher than 1990 and the journal found that about 65% of that increase could be attributed to emissions from the richest 10% across the globe - a group the researchers defined as including all those earning more than £42,980 (£36,472) a year.

Alpha

The wealthier you are, the more responsibility you will bear - which is a statistical judgement, of course, not a moralistic one, as we are dealing with a *system* that nobody controls. Production for the sake of production, accumulation for the sake of accumulation - the alpha and omega of capitalism. Anyway, the richest 1% - defined for the purposes of study as those with annual incomes of £147,200 - are responsible for 20% of global warming, and the richest 0.1% (that is, the 800,000 or so people in the world who ‘earn’ more than £537,770 annually) are responsible for 8%. In this way, the authors of the study concluded that the wealthiest 10% contributed 6.5 times more to global warming than the average, with the top 1% and 0.1% contributing 20 and 76 times more respectively. Even more starkly, the 50 richest billionaires produce more carbon emissions in under three hours than average British person does in their entire lifetime.

To put it another way, if everyone had only emitted like the bottom 50% of the global population, there would have been minimal global warming since 1990. Conversely, if we could all become ‘winners’ and emit the



Extreme weather events: one after the other

same as the top 10%, the temperature increase would have been an almost completely unsurvivable 12.2°C. Importantly, the study emphasised that emissions embedded in financial portfolios - not just personal consumption - are those that have driven global warming. However, the paper in *Nature Climate Change* stops short of calling for *system* change, of course. Rather, in the opinion of one of the paper’s authors, Carl-Friedrich Schleussner, head of the Integrated Climate Impacts Research Group, owners of capital could be held accountable through progressive taxes on wealth and carbon-intensive investments - a wealth tax which he considers as more equitable than broad carbon taxes, which tend to fall on those with less broad shoulders!

But all calls upon the super-rich are resisted, of course. Last year, Brazil - as host of the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro - pushed for a 2% tax on the net worth of individuals with more than \$1 billion in assets. Although the various leaders agreed fine words about the need to “engage cooperatively to ensure that ultra-high-net-worth individuals are effectively taxed”, there has been absolutely no action taken. More like a greenwashing exercise, just as we have had one climate conference after the other with plenty of worthy resolutions, but almost next to nothing more concrete. There is a yawning gap between what they say and what they actually do, and it is ever worse when it comes to supplying finance to the so-called underdeveloped world - that often takes the form of crippling loans or onerous conditions.

Warning

Meanwhile, the Copernicus Climate Change Services funded by the European Union has recorded the second warmest March globally and, even more seriously, the lowest Arctic winter sea ice - based on a dataset

using *billions* of measurements from satellites, ships, aircraft and weather stations around the world.³

So we find average surface air temperature in March of 14.06°C, which is 0.65°C above the 1991-2020 average and 1.60°C above the pre-industrial level. This was the 20th month in the last 21 for which the global average surface air temperature was more than 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level. In the last 12 months it was 0.71°C above the 1991-2020 average, and 1.59°C above the pre-industrial level. As for the average temperature over European land for March 2025, it was 2.41°C above the 1991-2020 average. Indeed, temperatures were predominantly above average across the continent, with the largest warmth anomalies recorded over eastern Europe and south-west Russia.

But it was also a month with contrasting rainfall extremes across Europe, with many areas experiencing their driest March on record and others their wettest for at least the past 47 years. Extreme weather looks here to stay.

The average sea surface temperature (SST) for March 2025 was 20.96°C - the second-highest on record for the month and 0.12°C below the March 2024 record - SSTs remained unusually high in many ocean basins and seas. Ominously, Arctic sea ice reached its lowest monthly extent for March in the 47-year satellite record at 6% below average - marking the fourth consecutive month in which the sea ice extent has set a record low for the time of year. Yet, as Arctic sea ice also reached its annual maximum extent in March, the month marked the lowest annual maximum ever recorded for the region - sea ice concentrations were below average in most ocean sectors outside the central Arctic Ocean. It is a similar story for Antarctic sea ice, though not quite as bad - it recorded its fourth lowest monthly extent for March.

In other words, global temperatures remained abnormally high in March - which also marked the end of Australia’s hottest 12-month period in the continent’s recorded history - and unfortunately we appear to be entering a new norm. Last year, of course, was the hottest on record and the first calendar year with temperatures above the 1.5°C critical limit set by the 2016 Paris Accords. While this does not signal a permanent breach, which scientists say is measured over *decades*, it sends a clear warning to humanity that we are approaching the point of no return much faster than expected. Using our favourite metaphor of an oil tanker, it cannot be quickly turned around - but it is accelerating faster towards disaster.

Shocking

Latest data from the World Meteorological Organization estimates an 80% chance that global temperatures will break at least one annual heat record in the next five years and, for the first time ever, also indicated a small likelihood of about 1% that *before 2030* the world could experience a year that is 2°C hotter than the pre-industrial era - a possibility their scientists described as “shocking”.⁴

This is coming after the hottest 10 years ever measured, which has been a decade of disaster for human health, national economies and natural landscapes. The WMO update, which synthesises short-term weather observations and long-term climate projections from numerous members and institutes, further states that there is a 70% chance that five-year average warming for 2025-29 will be more than 1.5°C over pre-industrial levels - not to mention reporting an 86% likelihood that 1.5°C would be passed in at least one of the next five years (up from 40% in their 2020 report). As much as ‘net zero’ sceptics like Donald Trump and Nigel Farage

would prefer to stick their head in the sand, the very fact that 2°C is even considered a possibility in such a short time shows how rapidly the planet is warming. Yes, it would seem to require a convergence of multiple warming factors, but it was previously considered impossible in a five-year timeframe.

According to the new WMO study, Arctic winters are predicted to warm 3.5 times faster than the global average, partly because sea ice is melting - which means snow falls directly into the ocean rather than forming a layer on the surface to reflect the sun’s heat back into space. The Amazon rainforest is forecast to suffer more droughts, while south Asia, the Sahel and northern Europe, including the UK, will see more rain - and this year is likely to be one of the three warmest years on record.

These reports should act as a clarion call for communists. The working class has to be organised into mass communist parties and readied for power internationally. Clearly the protest politics of the likes of Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion have already met their limits, and any ideas of a national road are an illusion that is at the very best self-defeating. The planet we will inherit will be much impoverished, even if we do look forward to enriching human relationships, seeing the arts flourish and making genuine advances in the sciences.

Thanks to capitalism, it will take generations to restore the natural conditions which we humans depend upon for our existence ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

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Fighting fund

Don't let us down

With just three days remaining in May, we’re still £200 short of our £2,750 monthly fighting fund target. In other words, please help us out if you can, as soon as you read this!

Over the last week we certainly got lots of support from our readers. A total of £775 came our way from a variety of comrades. Thanks in particular go to LM, JC and TT for their *three-figure* donations. Other bank transfers/standing orders came from RL (£60), AG (£50), JT (£25), AB (£20), TT (£10), AR (£5) and SD (£4).

Then there were quite a few PayPal contributions - from JB, TB and DB (£50 each), JC (£32), GP and DI (£5 each), while comrade MB added £14 to his resubscription cheque, and comrade Hassan handed his usual fiver to one of our team.

All that came to £775, shooting our May running total up to £2,567. So, to be precise,

we still need £183 in just three days. The problem is, though, will enough comrades read this column in time to get us the cash before the deadline? Many subscribers won’t get their paper delivered until May 31, which is a Saturday - that means they’ll need to use PayPal, so we get it on time. But, if you read this online on Thursday or Friday, then a bank transfer would still do the trick!

Either way, please play your part if you can. For more details of how, please click on the link below. The *Weekly Worker* depends on your support to continue its essential role, so please don’t let us down! ●

Robbie Rix

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CPGB

Trans rights and open polemic

We are obliged to fight opportunism in all its varieties. To avoid that fight is a form of opportunism in itself. Ian Spencer reports on the May 25 aggregate

We in the CPGB are distinguished by our culture of open debate and forthright polemic. We also stand in solidarity with transgender people - unlike some on the left, such as the *Morning Star*'s CPB/YCL and Counterfire. They supported the recent UK supreme court decision that a woman is defined by biological sex (part of a conservative backlash against trans people). The latest membership aggregate opened with a discussion led by Mike Macnair, who presented draft theses on communism and trans liberation.¹

The importance of this issue is seen in the context of attempts to split trans people from the wider gender liberation movement. We are in a period of the transition from capitalism to socialism. In a situation where the working class has already taken power, there would be things we could put in place before the full realisation of a communist society, which would not insist on compulsory binary gender identity.

Prison

Stan Keable later raised the question of whether there should be compulsory gender segregation of prisons and other facilities. But comrade Macnair pointed out that such segregation was a feature of late 18th and early 19th century prison reform movements, and women constitute a small part of the total prison population. As communists we take the view that prison should be a last resort. It may also be the case that women themselves may demand separate prisons as safe spaces.

The formulation that 'gender is socially constructed, but sex is biological' was discussed by comrade Macnair, who pointed out that the social conception of gender is also grounded in biological sex and the social construction of gender is at a deep level in society.

Even in the ancient world and the Middle Ages there were gender rules, though very different from those of the present - the transition to capitalism has changed gender relations. One of the difficulties of seeing gender as wholly the product of social construction is that it leads to an alliance with liberal human relations management.

The critique of feminists, such as Judith Butler, with her attempt to efface gender binary division, is that the underlying oppression is an embodied one. Similarly, Michel Foucault was hostile to Marxism on the basis that culture is dominant and economic production is secondary.

By contrast, the labour theory of value is grounded in biology, because it advances the view that the capitalist class cannot force down the cost of labour-power below the reproduction cost of labour (in a closed capitalist society). The proponents of marginal utility theory posit that unemployment is a choice, and from that point of view the claim that culture constructs biology is anti-emancipatory. The Marxist perspective is concerned with emancipation as the realisation of what it is to be truly human.

Debate

The aggregate was then open to debate from the floor. Comrade Farzad Kamangar, who chaired the meeting, made the point that it is important to distance ourselves from intersectionalism, because it creates the conditions in which the proletariat is divorced from what the

class experiences. She made the point that the theses on trans liberation are written for communists rather than an attempt to attract trans people as members.

Comrade Carla Roberts welcomed the theses put forward in the *Weekly Worker* and comrade Macnair's presentation, which clarified things further. She raised the question of whether the backlash against trans people was part of the general move to the right and a culture war aimed at splitting the left.

It was notable, for example that the *Morning Star*'s CPB had come out in support of the supreme court ruling. This is a move which can be seen as a way of pushing in the direction of male supremacy. Comrade Roberts stressed the historical specificity of gender relations, as we have seen in anthropological studies of original communist society. She went on to criticise 'no-platforming' as a tactic, on the grounds that it is one which is often used against the left.

Australian supporter Martin Greenfield spoke in support of the theses, given that there is not a deep collective knowledge of theory on this issue. The right is using trans rights to divide the working class and that did not necessarily start with the Tories. He posed the question of why this is about self-identity. For example, we do not normally self-identify our ethnicity, although some have tried to do so, particularly in the context of Australia, where it can form the basis for state support on the basis of Aboriginal heritage. After all, we understand that 'race' does not exist outside a history of a construct tied to imperialism and exploitation.

Comrade Greenfield went on to argue that it is essential to defend communities and support the idea of a diversity of gender. This stands in contrast to the old Militant organisation, which once opposed gay rights.

Jim Nelson drew an analogy between the use of 'anti-Semitism' and the way it was used to attack Jeremy Corbyn. It was used because it was *effective* - and now the attack on trans rights is being used in a similar way, as part of a wider attack on what is portrayed as the 'left'.

The importance of social constructionism and its critique is important to have in the theses, argued Scott Evans - after all, there is the question of the impact on the medical decision of whether someone gets treatment for gender dysphoria.

The question of how one sees oneself, is of course a matter of personal choice, said Peter Manson. However, there may need to be constraints on young people, who may want to transition early in life, where gender identity may not be wholly fixed. The gender segregation of spaces can be important - for example, in mental health hospitals. However, in other areas there can be a degree of flexibility.

While the trans issue is being used to attack the left, it is worth remembering how far we have come, I argued. It is not so long since section 28 of the Local Government Act was used to attack gay and lesbian family relations. Subsequently, it was a Tory government that legalised gay marriage. Gender segregation was a feature of mental health hospitals from their inception, but more recently there has been a trend to re-enforce this, as some patients can be highly vulnerable.

Jack Conrad expressed some scepticism about the labour theory of value ruling out wages dropping below the level of subsistence. The comrade also took up a number of arguments. Historically, there have always been people unhappy with their gender. However, this current attack on trans people has been created by the conservative media as part of a rightwing "defence of the family". The call for 'traditional values' is being used as a means of dividing the working class. Comrade Conrad pointed out that, for all the progress of recent decades, it could all be easily undermined - or indeed reversed.

He went on to argue that our species is divided by sex and class. We are not just individuals seeking equality - a liberal argument. Women are an oppressed sex, and it is wholly legitimate to demand safe spaces for women, as well as measures to address women's oppression, without conceding to feminist arguments.

In summary, comrade Macnair concluded that this is an area that needs theoretical work. Trans rights have become an issue, because, now that gains have been made on gay rights and the principle of gender equality, it has become the basis of a rightwing counterattack, without raising the question of class. There have been attempts to treat social class as a question of discrimination. Class, however, is different because of the possibility of transforming society by the call for the abolition of class in its entirety in a socialist society. By contrast, for liberals, trans rights can be the 'next good cause' and struggle can be portrayed in terms of a broad front of 'oppressed minorities', distinct from class struggle.

Conservatives tried something similar on gay rights, when they campaigned around Section 28, arguing for 'family values' - which came unstuck after it was revealed that several Tory MPs had high-profile affairs and were mired in 'sleaze'. An important defining moment in the gay movement was the high-profile support of lesbians and gays for the miners, which broke down some of the more entrenched prejudice in the labour movement.

It was agreed that there would be further discussion on this whole question and so comrade Macnair's draft theses were not put to the vote.

Our culture

Current discussions on forging communist unity between the CPGB, Talking about Socialism and part of the editorial board of *Prometheus* have raised the question of our party's internal culture. Comrade Conrad led on this second half of the aggregate with a fulsome defence of open debate.

Whatever the outcome of the fusion process, he said, it has been a positive step, because it has forced *Prometheus* and TAS to address the programme question, illustrating differences with the CPGB. Attitudes to the middle class and the nature and duration of the transition from capitalism have been among the most prominent. This is a process that comrade Conrad argued should be as "short as possible but as long as necessary".

However, we are up against a society where bourgeois ideas dominate. Commodity fetishism exerts an influence on class consciousness. In addition, the ruling

class controls the media and the education system. Moreover, we are not only leading a struggle against bourgeois ideas; we are also against those on the left with a trade union and opportunist consciousness. This needs to be an open fight. Those in *Prometheus* and TAS who complain about frank and open polemic are arguing for concessions to their political positions, which are often mistaken - for example, on the Ukraine war. Those in *Prometheus* who are also members of Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century are in an organisation that supported the Nato proxy war against Russia. Since then RS21 has disaffiliated from the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, but we have had no explanation of who did and who still does support social-imperialism.

Language

Comrade Conrad went on to say that using terms like 'useful idiots' is perfectly acceptable and those who object to such usage are often just as pejorative. Comrade Roberts agreed that we have a good culture and we defend it in polemics with TAS and *Prometheus*. However, she made the point that we use different language in different situations - for example, when dealing with relatively inexperienced comrades. Language can be used tactically to achieve different objectives. To do otherwise is to give ammunition to our opponents.

Comrade Kamangar argued that people who challenge our culture are in fact, usually opposed to our politics. That real political differences exist between RS21 and the CPGB is clear, according to comrade Macnair. What counts as 'insulting language' is subjective. While there was no open political debate in RS21, their position on the Ukraine war has changed. Thomas West made the point that we can avoid *ad hominem* insults because what is at stake are the ideas, not personalities. Crucially, it is important to expose ideas that are wrong.

In summary, comrade Conrad pointed out that in We Demand Change there are already attempts to restrict debate, to effectively enforce a 'code of conduct' on the language used - not to make things more comradely, but to shut down discussion on crucial political differences. In the current climate the CPGB conducts its activity through the existing left. It is important to have robust debate, while encouraging new members.

The CPGB and *Weekly Worker* attempt to educate members, supporters and readers. It is important that we criticise those on the left who conciliate with social-imperialists - that is part of our fundamental duty ●

Notes

1. 'Communism and trans liberation': weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1536/communism-and-trans-liberation.

Sign up to CPGB news



bit.ly/CPGBbulletin

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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Kurdish entanglements

Laying down arms and dissolving the PKK has been hailed by some optimists as a 'victory'. **Yassamine Mather** strongly disagrees and instead sees the defeat of the Kurdish people both in Turkey and Syria

In the years ahead, Trump's May 2025 visit to the Middle East will be best remembered for a photo that captured a striking moment: he was standing between Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman (widely held responsible for the brutal murder and dismemberment of journalist Jamal Khashoggi) and Syria's new 'interim' president, Ahmad al-Sharaa (a former jihadi commander who, until only months earlier, featured on the US 'terrorist' list). Of course, if you think this is strange, remember that "it took 20 years, trillions of dollars and four US presidents to replace the Taliban with the Taliban".¹

In the Middle East, al-Sharaa's political and ideological roots, combined with Turkey's open backing of his regime, have created new regional realities, forcing Israel and other actors to reassess their positions concerning Syria. Here there are indications of an increasing rivalry between Turkey and Israel. Though the two governments have not yet clashed directly on Syrian territory or elsewhere, their diverging interests appear to be steering them towards behind-the-scenes contests.

The new Syrian president is a Sunni with an Islamist political and ideological background. He was a good choice from the point of view of Turkey, which has been an active supporter of the Syrian opposition factions since the civil war erupted in 2011. As soon as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham came to power in Damascus, Turkey threw its weight behind the new regime. Although the Israeli government played a significant role in the overthrow of the Assad regime and had some previous cooperation with HTS, it is wary of al-Sharaa. It considers him a potential risk, especially given his jihadist past and regional affiliations.

Israeli ops

Israel has intensified its ground operations in southern Syria in recent months, while simultaneously carrying out air strikes across the country - targeting areas from Latakia and Homs to the outskirts of Damascus. Israel claims its attacks are meant to stop weapons from reaching Syria's new government, even though HTS has shown no signs of seeking conflict with Israel.

Ultimately Israel aims to occupy and control southern Syria. By intensifying ground incursions and targeting Syrian government and allied forces, the Zionist state is trying to establish a *de facto* buffer zone, claiming such a move is necessary to "protect its northern border". At the same time, Israel is seeking to deepen its security arrangements with Turkey beyond existing understandings - and with Russia, as part of a broader strategy to share responsibilities in Syria. For Israel, one concern is that Turkey's growing military presence, especially its control of airspace, could limit Israel's operational



Memorable photo

freedom, particularly in confronting Iranian influence.

That might explain why Israel's posture toward Turkey has fluctuated between cooperation and confrontation, indicating a level of ambivalence about whether their interests align or diverge. Turkey's intervention in Syria has never made a claim of extending Turkish-style 'democratic Islamism': instead it is more concerned with its 'Kurdish question'.

Historically, Turkey has cultivated good relationships with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, while keeping close ties with the United States and NATO to compete with Israel as a regional power. Meanwhile, Israel has strengthened ties with the Kurds - particularly amid tensions between Damascus and the Syrian Democratic Forces - and has also reached out to Syria's Druze community (so far unsuccessfully).

Such engagements are not just tactical: they reflect a deeper commitment to gain new, long-standing regional partners, especially at a time when the Zionist state faces charges of genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

No doubt Turkey and Israel have different visions for Syria's future. Israel aims to integrate Syria into the Abraham Accords and normalise its status in line with its security and diplomatic goals. Turkey envisages a unified Islamic Syria ideologically

aligned with Ankara - a vision Israel views as a threat. To counter this, it is likely to empower ethnic and sectarian minorities - not only to promote decentralisation, but to encourage fragmentation.

What are Turkey's other aims in Syria? On May 12, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has waged a four-decade-long insurgency against Turkey, announced its decision to lay down arms and dissolve the organisation. This development follows a February call from the group's imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan.

On May 15, Reuters reported that during a press conference at an informal meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Antalya, Turkish foreign minister Hakan Fidan stated that Ankara expects the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces - a PKK affiliate - to comply with agreements made with Damascus, particularly after the PKK announced its dissolution and disarmament. In fact, since the PKK's announcement, the SDF has moved towards integrating with Syrian state institutions. In March 2025, it reached an agreement with the government to integrate, though details are still being worked out. This agreement aims to bring the SDF, which controls much of north-eastern Syria, under the Syrian government's jurisdiction.

The SDF - a Kurdish-led alliance primarily composed of the People's

Protection Units (YPG) - alongside Arab, Assyrian and other militias, has been widely portrayed - especially in the western media - as a secular, democratic and progressive force. However, there are reasons to doubt that.

Eight reasons

1. While the SDF and its political wing, the Syrian Democratic Council, claim to support democratic confederalism, critics argue that this model is unevenly applied, especially outside majority-Kurdish areas. In Arab-majority areas like Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, critics - including Arab activists - have accused the SDF of Kurdish domination, marginalising local populations and failing to build truly representative governance. The appointment of councils and 'local governance' structures in some regions is often top-down, not genuinely democratic or popular.
2. This supposed 'democratic' organisation is still very much under the influence of a single permanent leader: namely Abdullah Öcalan.
3. The SDF has relied heavily on US military support, particularly during the campaign against Islamic State. This has made it strategically dependent on American interests, which can undermine claims of full autonomy or anti-imperialism. By acting as a proxy force for the US, against both IS and, indirectly, the Assad government and Iranian

influence, the SDF's role fits within broader US regional strategy, which has nothing to do with revolutionary politics, even though both IS and Iran are reactionary regional forces.

4. From a Marxist or anti-imperialist standpoint, the SDF's collaboration with US imperialism is often seen as deeply compromising, no matter how 'progressive' its internal policies might appear. The fetishisation of the Rojava region by some western leftist fans has led to a lack of critical engagement with these contradictions - especially the role of US military logistics, bases and intelligence support.

5. Arab populations in eastern Syria have accused the SDF of discrimination, arbitrary arrests and repression. Reports from human rights organisations and local activists have documented forced conscription, including of minors, in both Kurdish and Arab areas. Despite public commitments to end the practice, the SDF has been repeatedly accused of forcibly recruiting minors. An incident this month involved the abduction of 14-year-old Asaad Mustafa Ali by the Revolutionary Youth (Jwanen Shorshkar), an SDF-affiliated group. Another 2023 UN report highlighted that over half of the documented child recruitment cases in Syria occurred in SDF-controlled areas.²

6. While the leadership is multi-ethnic in appearance, real power is often seen as being concentrated in the hands of the Kurdish PYD/YPG cadre, which operate with their own ideological and military agenda.

7. In some areas, especially because of its post-IS campaigns, the SDF has been accused of population displacement, collective punishment and property confiscation. The destruction of Arab-majority villages and the limited return of displaced populations have led to accusations of ethnic engineering or demographic manipulation in favour of Kurdish control.

8. Arbitrary detentions and the suppression of dissent, when it comes to journalists as well as civilians. The Syrian Network for Human Rights reported over 2,600 arbitrary detentions in 2024. Furthermore, the SDF has been accused of suppressing dissenting voices, with the continued detention of people for expressing their opinions.³

The dissolution of the PKK and the SDF's agreement with the Syrian government are hailed by some optimists as a 'victory'. I strongly disagree with that assessment. In reality, the repeated strategic missteps of both organisations have once again resulted in a defeat - not only for the Kurdish people, but also for the broader left in the region ●

Notes

1. x.com/normfinkelstein.
2. syriaaccountability.org/one-year-after-banning-the-practice-the-sdf-is-still-recruiting-children.
3. snhr.org/blog/2025/01/04/snhrs-annual-report-on-arrests-detentions-in-syria.