

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Karl Marx and the contemporary
art of how to and how not to
write a communist programme**

- Letters and debate
- Starmer in disarray
- Rise of middle classes
- Iran-Israel 12-day war

No 1545 July 3 2025

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10



**WELL DONE KNEECAP ...
AND BOB VYLAN TOO**

Photo: Raph Pour-Hashemi

LETTERS



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

Green left

Carla Roberts has provided us with another useful update on the yet-to-be-declared Corbyn party ('Privileged information leaks' June 26). Her earlier report from the We Demand Change event in Sheffield ('Everyone wants to join' May 22) made me think that one reason for the delay in Corbyn declaring a new party is the current leadership contest in the Green Party of England and Wales. The hope may be that a left-led Green Party would be willing to engage in non-aggression pacts with various groups of independent ex-Labour councillors.

Zack Polanski, running as the left candidate, is viewed as a credible enough threat for supporters of the rightwing ticket in the Green leadership contest. Unlikely as it may sound, the Green right is fearful of entryism by the left groups, with many of the same complaints about Corbyn's supporters in Labour now being made about Polanski's backers.

Grumbling from the old guard in the Greens centres on an alleged attempt to capture the party and turn it away from a concern for the climate and conservation - which can have a non-threatening, cross-class electoral appeal - towards the rhetoric of the ex-Labour left, which is more eager to make an appeal on the basis of class. The Greens have attracted leftists for a long time, with a particular spike in membership after Starmer replaced Corbyn as Labour leader, and it hasn't impeded a growth in the party's electoral representation. The substance of the complaint is therefore that more leftwing members will mean inner-party competition for positions.

Polanski describes his politics as 'eco-populism' and he has been recruiting eagerly, using his position as deputy leader over recent years and now his leadership campaign - people who join the Greens before July 31 will get a vote in the leadership contest. Polanski's team are suggesting that the party's four MPs could be joined by a dozen or more defectors from Labour if he wins.

The House magazine has reported that suspended Labour MPs have been in talks with the Greens about joining: "Zarah Sultana and Apsana Begum are seen as the most likely candidates for defection, particularly if Polanski wins" (May 17). Given that the other MP alleged by *The House* to have considered this move, Richard Burgon, has since regained the Labour whip, it may be that the threat to defect to the Greens will instead be used as a bargaining chip by the Labour left MPs, allowing members of the Socialist Campaign Group to retain the whip and therefore their potential vote for a soft-left leadership candidate to replace Starmer.

The makings of a broad and informal alliance of the left are clear to see: Corbyn, Burgon and Polanski have all appeared on the platform at events of the Socialist Workers Party's 'We Demand Change' front. It appears that the new generation of SWP leaders has reached the conclusion that consistent electoral work is necessary. Their current argument that a number of points of unity should form the basis of the endorsement of candidates is a sign they realise that a programme is required to hold representatives to account.

This realisation may soon dawn on the Green left if its leadership

candidate is victorious: the party's current programme, 'Policies for a sustainable society', is a lengthy list of stances the party takes, lacking a clear perspective of how these reforms are to be implemented, and it is no longer published on their website for all to read.

The return in October of The World Transformed festival, now separate from Labour's conference, may offer an opportunity to reflect on Corbynism in Labour, this tendency resurfacing in the Greens, and the question of a new party and its programme. But what's needed is an annual delegate conference, open to the whole of the left, to forge a formal socialist alliance - if not yet a mass communist party - out of the fragmented groups.

Ansell Eade
email

Not party time

In my letter of May 1 I asked why it is that the CPGB's political priority was "forging unity between itself and two or three micro-political sects in the belief that it can create a new Marxist party". I described this as "the political equivalent of rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic" and accused you of having "next to nothing to say about building a left that can begin to address the political situation as it is". Your "main priority is in building another left sect".

I accused you of turning your backs on the living political struggle in favour of an irrelevant unity project. It didn't surprise me that no-one in the CPGB wished to engage with my argument, because to do so would raise too many uncomfortable questions. But today I learn that Talking About Socialism (the name itself speaks volumes!) has broken off unity talks with you. Have you learnt anything from this debacle? It would seem not, as you are now imploring them to reconsider - all two or three of them.

We are living through the first live-streamed genocide in history. International law - the framework of western imperialist morality since World War II - lies in tatters. The Israeli settler-colonial state has lost any shred of justification for its existence and the holocaust/anti-Semitism card has been well and truly played - coupled with the fact that Zionist militarism has suffered a defeat at the hands of the Iranian state. We also face, for the first time ever, the prospect of a far-right government in Britain.

What is the CPGB's response to all this? To pursue doggedly unity talks with completely irrelevant micro-sects. Perhaps a few observations are in order. We have had working class quiescence for some 40 years. No strike since the miners' of 1984-85 has challenged state power. At the same time we have seen the growth of a mass Palestine solidarity movement.

This week sees Yvette Cooper introducing the proscription on Palestine Action. From Friday it will be illegal to support it. Palestine Solidarity Campaign has just announced that it will comply with the proscription. This is meeting fierce resistance from the activist layers of the movement. What is the CPGB's response? Nothing, because, of course, it plays no part in the Palestine solidarity movement.

The struggle against British imperialism and its support for the Zionist regime and the United States is the class struggle of our times. Key questions such as defiance of the law raise themselves, yet the CPGB is more concerned with creating a mass communist party.

Let us be clear. We do not live in revolutionary times or even pre-revolutionary times. Our first and foremost task is preventing a far-right government and rebuilding the left. We have a Labour Party government which is simply a continuation of the previous Tory government.

The distinctions between reformism and revolutionary socialism are theoretical abstractions today, when the need to defend democratic gains won in past ages, such as freedom of speech, are all too obvious. Yet the CPGB insists, like the ostrich, on burying its head in the sand and believing that unity between sects will somehow affect the balance of power.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Kautsky crisis

In 'Completely different foundations' (June 26), Mike Macnair describes "the SPD's 'orthodox' theory of the inevitable collapse of capitalism". In fact the orthodox centre of the German Social Democratic Party had no such theory, though Luxemburg (not in the orthodox centre, but on the left) sought to develop one. Elsewhere in 'Anti-Bernstein' Kautsky explicitly disavows such a theory and attributes it to a fiction of Bernstein's.

Further, Lenin did not believe in such a theory either, and in his positive 1899 review of Kautsky's work he recognises the centrality of that question to the debate, writing: "Kautsky deals with the so-called *Zusammenbruchstheorie*, the theory of collapse, of the sudden crash of west European capitalism, a crash that Marx allegedly believed to be inevitable and connected with a gigantic economic crisis. Kautsky says and proves that Marx and Engels never propounded a special *Zusammenbruchstheorie*, that they did not connect a *Zusammenbruch* [collapse] necessarily with an economic crisis. This is a distortion chargeable to their opponents, who expound Marx's theory one-sidedly, tearing out of context odd passages from different writings in order thus triumphantly to refute the 'one-sidedness' and 'crudeness' of the theory."

Those interested in the evolution of Kautsky's views on crisis and collapse would do well to read as well his *Theories of crises and Finance capital and crises*. A broad overview of the debates on this topic in the Second International is given in the initial section of Simon Clarke's very good *Marx's theory of crisis*.

Gary Levi
email

Socialism ASAP

Adam Buick of the Socialist Party of Great Britain comments: "With regard to rejecting 'all notions of transition', the SPGB position is that, once there is a majority of workers who are determined to establish socialism (a precondition for its establishment), capitalist ownership of the means of production can be abolished - and socialism (as the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production established, aka communism) - fairly rapidly after that majority has won control of political power and democratised it. There need be no period of working class administration of capitalism" (Letters, June 26).

I cannot see how anyone can reasonably dispute the point Adam is making here. Assuming you have a majority supporting socialism (aka communism), what else is possibly needed for it to be implemented? The

only other fundamental precondition I can think of (and one that, indeed, would need to be met for socialism to happen) is developing the technological capacity to produce enough to satisfy the reasonable needs of the population.

But that capacity has been around for decades, if not more! Engels was alluding to this way back in the 1880s. People's needs remain unmet - not because we are somehow lacking in the technological infrastructure required to meet their needs (we already, for instance, produce more than enough food to adequately satisfy the dietary requirements of the entire global population). On the contrary, people's needs continue to remain unmet for the simple reason that capitalism continues to exist. It's as glaringly simple and as straightforward as that.

Consequently, it is not particularly logical to argue that workers need to institute some kind of transitional social arrangement that still retains capitalism (our present-day buying-and-selling system) on the pretext that this is needed to "further develop the forces of production" before socialism can be implemented. That overlooks why human needs are unmet today, which has everything to do with economics and nothing to do with the level of technological development as such.

Not only is that argument illogical: it also overlooks something else - namely, the already enormous and steadily growing structural waste that is built into capitalism. This entails the diversion of more and more resources - human and material - away from socially useful production into socially useless and even downright harmful production (like armaments). Think, for example, of all those occupations involved in one way or another with handling money (all of which would no longer be needed in a socialist society and would completely disappear). Conservatively speaking, we could easily double socially useful output (or, alternatively, halve the working week), once such a society is established, without putting any additional strain on our already overstressed environment.

So where is the need to implement some so-called "transitional programme", following the capture of political power by a socialist-minded working class majority? Why retain capitalism (which is what such a programme implies), even if we might comfort ourselves with the pretence that, some sunny day in the future, we will eventually get round to phasing it out? There is no justification whatsoever for such an approach that I can discern. On the contrary, what is needed is to get rid of capitalism and its class divisions ASAP.

Robin Cox
email

Haste makes chaos

In footnote 1 of his article, 'Completely different foundations' (June 26), comrade Mike Macnair attributes to me the assertion that "the transition from capitalism to a planned economy will be a complex and difficult process of trial and error".

May I give a more accurate formulation of my view? The claim I was trying to make is that the transition from a *market economy* to a planned one will be a complex and difficult process. The point is that, while capitalism operates via a market economy, the converse is not true: a market economy need not be capitalist. The road from capitalism to communism must clearly involve *both* the abolition of capitalism *and*

a transition from a market economy to a planned global economy. It is the latter that is by far the more complex and difficult.

Capitalism is essentially based on the extraction of surplus value by exploitation of wage labour. Under extreme democracy, the political rule of the working class, the abolition of capitalism is *relatively* the simpler task. It would involve expropriation of major firms, taxation of all firms, establishing workers' control of production, transforming small firms into cooperatives, and so on.

This will still leave in place a *non-capitalist* economy functioning to a considerable extent via the market, in which money-based supply and demand regulate the flow of commodity-products, nationally and globally. This is no longer capitalism, nor yet fully fledged communism.

The transition from this market economy to a democratically planned, communist, global economy is far more complex than many socialists realise. And it cannot be achieved in a hurry: haste would make waste and chaos.

Moshé Machover
email

First phase links

To attribute the fallacy of state socialism to Marx, the following line of reasoning is often employed:

■ The state arose alongside the division of labour; therefore, it will disappear alongside it.

■ Marx acknowledged the persistence of the division of labour in the first phase of communist society.

■ Therefore, if the division of labour persists in the first phase of communist society, the state must persist as well.

The first and second propositions are both correct. However, the conclusion drawn from them is false. While the division of labour does persist in the first phase of communist society, the state does not.

This reasoning attempts to establish a logical link between the first two propositions via the term, 'division of labour'. Had the term carried the same meaning in both instances, the link would have been valid and the conclusion compelling. However, the term is used in different senses in each proposition. The argument, therefore, rests on a semantic fallacy - an instance of equating apples with oranges - and is consequently mistaken in both its logic and its conclusion.

In its conventional sense, 'division of labour' refers to the allocation of distinct tasks among producers within the labour process. This is the meaning intended in the second proposition. Cooperation and division of labour among producers are intrinsic to the labour process and fundamental to its operation.

Marxist theory, however, employs the concept of division of labour not only in this straightforward technical sense, but, more importantly, in a specific and critical sense. In the first proposition, division of labour denotes the deep historical and social fragmentation that the theory identifies with alienated human activity.

The division of labour, in this sense, is a manifestation of alienated activity that fragments society into classes. It simultaneously isolates individuals, while binding them through mutual dependence on one another's labour products. Marx connects this socially fragmenting form of the division of labour - which governs people - to exchange in the following way: "Exchange and division of labour reciprocally condition one another. Since

everyone works for himself, but his product is nothing for him, each must, of course, exchange, not only in order to take part in the general productive capacity, but also in order to transform his own product into his own subsistence. Exchange, when mediated by exchange value and money, presupposes the all-round dependence of the producers on one another, together with the total isolation of their private interests from one another, as well as a division of social labour whose unity and mutual complementarity exist in the form of a natural relation, as it were, external to the individuals and independent of them” (*Grundrisse*, 1857-58).

Marx, in the passage below, illustrates direct social labour in a communal society through the example of a peasant family that produces use values for its own needs. The combined labour-power of individual family members is naturally considered to belong to the family as a whole. Consequently, every labour activity carried out by family members constitutes part of the family’s collective labour - that is, direct social labour:

“For an example of labour in common or directly associated labour, we have no occasion to go back to that spontaneously developed form, which we find on the threshold of the history of all civilised races. We have one close at hand in the patriarchal industries of a peasant family that produces corn, cattle, yarn, linen and clothing for home use. These different articles are, as regards the family, so many products of its labour, but as between themselves, they are not commodities. The different kinds of labour, such as tillage, cattle tending, spinning, weaving and making clothes, which result in the various products, are in themselves, and such as they are, direct social functions, because functions of the family, which, just as much as a society based on the production of commodities, possesses a spontaneously developed system of division of labour. The distribution of the work within the family, and the regulation of the labour-time of the several members, depend, as well as upon differences of age and sex, upon natural conditions varying with the seasons. The labour-power of each individual, by its very nature, operates in this case merely as a definite portion of the whole labour-power of the family, and therefore the measure of the expenditure of individual labour-power by its duration appears here by its very nature as a social character of their labour” (*Capital* Vol 1).

Using the example of the family, Marx makes the following observation about the division of labour in the communal labour activity of the future: “The distribution of the work within the family and the regulation of the labour-time of the several members depend as well upon differences of age and sex as upon natural conditions varying with the seasons.” Here, the division of labour, in its literal sense, refers to the allocation of various tasks among communal producers within the labour process.

The division of labour that fragments capitalist society through alienated activity is one thing; the distribution of tasks among communal individuals in the production process of a communal society is quite another.

Alienated activity has fragmented society into classes, isolating individuals and confining them to specific segments of labour through which they earn their livelihood. This reflects the reality created by

the social division of labour, which dissects society into isolated entities.

By overcoming this fragmentation of activity and restoring it as a unified whole under the control of the associated producers, the socialist/communist revolution seeks to abolish the social division of labour - the very mechanism that fractures society and sustains its rigid structures. It is not the functional distribution of tasks within production that is to be eliminated, but the social division of labour that perpetuates societal disintegration.

In the first phase of communal society, individuals have freed themselves from the domination of dehumanising social relations and the social division of labour that fragments society. However, they have not yet transcended the limitations of their own productive capacities. At this phase, the productive forces are not yet sufficiently developed to permit free movement between communal tasks - particularly between mental and physical labour. As a result, individuals remain subject to a functional division of labour within the production process, shaped by the constraints of their individual capabilities.

In this first phase, subordination does not stem from the isolated individual’s submission to the social division of labour, as in capitalism. Rather, it arises from the communal individual’s subjection - within the production process - to the unequal productive capacities with which they are naturally endowed.

As the productive forces of communal labour advance, the necessity of submitting to the functional division of labour imposed by these limitations will gradually diminish. The multifaceted development of communal individuals in the later phases of communal society will enable them to undertake a variety of communal tasks, without erasing the inherent distinctiveness of each. As communal needs diversify, so too will the forms of labour. In response, the communal will shall continue to allocate labour rationally across a range of evolving tasks.

Usuf Zamir
Union of Turkish Progressives in Britain

Spart defence

Ian Spencer’s article, ‘Carnival of the oppressed’ (June 26) featured a picture of the Spartacist League’s contingent at the June 21 pro-Palestine mass demonstration in London with a caption reading: “Some want to defend, not Iran, but the theocratic regime”. The article also claimed that our contingent flew the Iranian flag “because of a warped version of anti-imperialism”. This is a demagogic and dishonest polemic.

Our contingent, whose main banner read “Stop the Zionist bloodbath! Stand with Iran and Palestine”, together with placards calling on trade unions to defend Iran, did not fly the Iranian flag. What happened was that our unambiguous stand against imperialism attracted multiple Iranian people who took our leaflets, marched with us, chanted our slogans and waved their flag - something we welcomed. This is what the photo in the *Weekly Worker* shows. As Iran was being bombed by the US and Israel, the CPGB’s denunciation of those waving the Iranian flag in a London anti-war demo is the kind of thing one would expect to see in the tabloid press, not in a so-called Marxist newspaper.

Furthermore, if Ian Spencer had bothered to actually read what the Spartacist League says on Iran, he would have quickly realised that we do not support the Iranian clerical

regime. Here is what our comrades in the US wrote the day after the US bombing: “Many cite the reactionary character of the Iranian regime as an excuse to pull back from the defence of Iran against the US oligarchy - by far the most reactionary force out there. The Iranian regime does deserve to be ended - not by the much bigger US sponsors of ‘state terrorism’, but by Iran’s working and toiling masses” (‘Defend Iran against US/Israel!’ *Workers Vanguard* supplement, June 22). While the CPGB denounces our straightforward and principled line, its own position is a confused mish-mash, which refuses to say openly ‘*Defend Iran*’. Rather, the CPGB insists on the need to defend the *peoples* of Iran. The implication of such insistence is that the Iranian defence forces and military - that is, those who are actively fighting the US and Israeli aggression - are fair game, as opposed to ‘the people’. This is a complete capitulation to imperialism, comrades.

Just look at what happened in Iraq or Libya. The imperialists brought down the regimes in order to subjugate the people, laying waste to both countries. Does this mean that Marxists supported those regimes? No. However, it *does* mean that Marxists had to *take a side with* the regime’s forces against the imperialist aggressor. The same is true for Iran today. In contrast, standing with the “Iranian people” is a meaningless phrase which everyone can utter. Netanyahu and Trump claim to be for the Iranian people. So does the ayatollah. So does Keir Starmer, Jeremy Corbyn and the far left. What draws a clear class line is to call for the *defence of Iran* against imperialism.

This is not only essential in Britain, but is also key to building a revolutionary movement in Iran against the regime itself. No Iranian worker is going to follow so-called communists who defend “the people”, but who *refuse* to take a side in the war and *help* the armed forces defend the country against imperialism. Any conscious worker would see this as treachery, no different than that of the monarchists and liberals. Such a stance discredits communists and only strengthens the authority of the mullahs. The only way communists can aspire to lead the Iranian masses and turn them against the reactionary regime is if they place themselves on the front lines of the struggle to defend Iran against the US and Israel, putting forward a revolutionary strategy against that of the mullahs.

As far as we know, our contingent at the June 21 demonstration was the *only one* on the British left which marched under the straightforward call to *defend Iran*. Most other left groups either ignored the question or else limited themselves to pacifist platitudes (“No war with Iran” or “Hands off Iran”). Such pacifist slogans remain perfectly compatible with liberals and Labourites, whose politics dominate the pro-Palestine demonstrations. Yet Ian Spencer uncritically praised the demonstration and, of all the contingents present, the only one he deemed objectionable was ours! This is quite telling.

This all goes to show that the main concern driving your position is *not* to take the strongest stance against the imperialist rulers, but rather to not offend the opinion of petty-bourgeois liberals and Labourites, who might accuse you of softness on the regime.

Comrades, communist unity will be forged in the struggle against the pacifists and Labourite lackeys who dominate the British left. Not through demagogic and false polemics against those who oppose them.

Vincent David
Spartacist League

ACTION

Marxism 2025

Thursday July 3 to Sunday July 6: SWP annual school and festival of socialist ideas, Protein Studios, 31 New Inn Yard, London EC2. Over 100 sessions, including debates, workshops and a culture tent. Tickets: day £22.38 (£11.55), full event £49.46 (£33.22). Organised by Socialist Workers Party: socialistworker.co.uk/marxismfestival.

Preparing to take on Starmer and the bosses

Saturday July 5, 11am to 4.30pm: Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigners share experiences and discuss the way forward. Registration £10. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/events/2891800431005086.

Sanctions now: no more F-35s for genocide

Saturday July 5, 1pm: North-west regional protest, BAE Systems Samlesbury factory, main entrance, Myerscough Smithy Road, Blackburn BB2. Here they make rear fuselages for F-35 fighter jets. End F-35 production and demand BAE stop profiting from murder. Organised by Blackburn4Palestine: www.instagram.com/blackburn4palestine.

Implement Unite’s Palestine solidarity policy

Monday July 7, 8.30am: Lobby of Unite’s policy conference, Brighton Centre, King’s Road, Brighton BN1. Demand the union’s leadership mobilises opposition to Israeli genocide. Organised by unite4palestine: www.facebook.com/groups/417559151135494.

Defend the right to protest

Monday July 7, 9am: Protest outside City of London Magistrates Court, 1 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4. Defend Chris Nineham (StWC) and Ben Jamal (PSC), who are charged with public order offences at the January 18 Palestine protest. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/24527.

Solidarity with Birmingham bin strikers

Wednesday July 9, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1 and online. Hear dispute updates from a striker and a Unite organiser, then discuss how to build support. Organised by Manchester Trades Council: www.facebook.com/events/30248171731496987.

CPGB draft programmes of 1924 and 1939

Thursday July 10, 6.30pm: Online discussion in the series, ‘Building a Communist Party: past attempts and future prospects’. Speakers: Mike Macnair and Lawrence Parker. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

End Rolls Royce complicity in genocide

Friday July 11, 6pm: Protest outside Rolls Royce HQ, 90 York Way, London N1. Rolls-Royce helps construct the F-35 fighter jets that Israel uses to bombard Gaza. Organised by London Campaign Against Arms Trade: www.facebook.com/events/1426141325065956.

Durham Miners Gala

Saturday July 12, 8am to 4pm: Rally and labour movement festival, The Racecourse, Green Lane, Old Elvet, Durham DH1. With over 50 brass bands and more than 100 trade union banners. Organised by Durham Miners Association: www.facebook.com/events/608746718196219.

Free Palestine: BDS at 20

Saturday July 12, 10.15am to 4.30pm: Conference, Central Hall Westminster, Storey’s Gate, London SW1. How to escalate the targeted boycott campaigns, win further divestment from councils and universities, and step up the call for sanctions on Israel. Registration £13 (£7). Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/conference-free-palestine-bds-at-20.

Lewisham council - divest now

Wednesday July 16, 6.30pm: Protest outside Lewisham Town Hall, 1 Catford Road, London SE6. Demand Lewisham council divests its pension fund from companies complicit in Israel’s genocide. Organised by Lewisham Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/protest-lewisham-council-divest-now.

Tolpuddle Martyrs festival

Friday July 18 to Sunday July 20: Annual commemoration festival, Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum, Dorchester Road, Tolpuddle DT2. Tickets £65. Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs: www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk/festival.

National march for Palestine

Saturday July 19, 12 noon: National demonstration, central London, venue to be announced. End the genocide. Stop arming Israel. Stop starving Gaza. Organised by Palestine Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/704938092301398.

Birmingham bin strike megapicket II

Friday July 25, 6am: Solidarity action on five picket lines across Birmingham. Support bin workers facing pay cuts of up to £8,000. Free Thursday night accommodation. Organised by Strike Map: actionnetwork.org/events/megapicketii-25-july-2025.

Troublemakers at work

Saturday July 26, 9.30am to 4.45pm: Conference, Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1. Rank-and-file workers discuss how to organise in unions and build strength to win disputes. Registration £15 (£5). Organised by Troublemakers At Work: troublemakersat.work/conference-2025.

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.

GLASTONBURY

Well done Kneecap and Bob Vylan

Stand for solidarity, stand for unrestricted free speech. Anne McShane denounces the witch-hunting of brave artists who have dared use their music to protest against Israeli genocide in Gaza

British rightwing media, the Labour government and the police have united once again to punish those who protest against Israeli genocide. Kneecap has now been joined by the punk rap duo, Bob Vylan, as the object of screaming headlines from the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and *The Daily Telegraph*. Simultaneously Labour ministers demand action and the police are reportedly investigating footage and preparing various criminal charges.

Back in May I wrote that Kneecap was facing a possible axing from the Glastonbury line-up. Politicians had been demanding their cancellation.¹ Leader of the Commons, Lucy Powell, declared she would boycott the festival if the band was allowed to play. Her threat failed spectacularly. Michael Eavis, founder of the festival, refused to be pushed around, stating that people who did not agree with the politics at Glastonbury “can go somewhere else”. The BBC showed no such courage, announcing in advance that it would *not* livestream Kneecap.

Bob Vylan then took the fight to livestream. Appearing on the West Holts stage just before Kneecap, they chanted: “Death, death to the IDF”. Thousands responded enthusiastically, loudly protesting against the genocidal Israeli military, the starvation, the murder of more than 80,000 Gazans and the systemic displacement of the population as a whole.

IDF hated

It is little wonder that the IDF is hated - we are all witnesses to its murderous operations. Now it boasts that Hamas is militarily dead and that it directly controls 75% of Gaza ... and yet the slaughter continues. The IDF works hand in glove with the macabre entity known as the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, whose ‘aid’ depots the UN has described as death traps. The US-backed GHF forces starving people, including the elderly and infirm, to walk miles into militarised zones and fight with each other over aid boxes. Solidarity among Palestinians dissolves in the scramble for food. Then the IDF opens fire on the desperate throng. With no ambulances available many are left to bleed to death outside GHF depots. Thousands return to their families with serious wounds and little, if any, food. None of this is news - even the Israeli press itself has carried reports from individual soldiers being told to shoot Gazan civilians whose only crime is that they are starving.

The IDF commits atrocities every day, every hour. On June 30 a warplane bombed a crowded seaside café - Al Baqa. It had survived 20 months of war to provide food and allow Gazans to charge their phones. It was a popular gathering point for families. More than 24 people were killed outright, including children, and many more injured. Malak A Tantesh, reporting from Gaza for *The Guardian*, wrote of how “witnesses described seeing a dead four-year-old child, an elderly man with both legs severed and many others with severe injuries. Photographs showed pools of blood and flesh amid shattered concrete columns and roofing, as well as a deep crater suggesting the use of a powerful weapon by Israel.” The images of survivors lying on the floor of Nasser Hospital were disturbing for yet another reason - they were all emaciated. Injured people are already seriously unwell. They have been denied food and water by the Israeli blockade.



Bob Vylan: heroes, not criminals

The Zionist state is consciously starving Palestinians to death on a mass scale. Unicef reported on June 19 that the “number of malnourished children in the Gaza Strip is rising at an alarming rate, with 5,119 children between six months and five years of age admitted for treatment for acute malnutrition in May alone”.² This

represents a nearly 50% increase from the 3,444 children admitted in April 2025 and a 150% increase from February, when a ceasefire was in effect and aid was entering the Gaza Strip in significant quantities. Of the 5,119 children admitted in May, 636 children have severe acute malnutrition (SAM), the most lethal form of malnutrition. These children need consistent, supervised treatment, safe water and medical care to survive - all of which are increasingly scarce in Gaza today.

Gaza is now the hungriest place on earth.

Victimisation

Bob Vylan is to be congratulated for calling out the genocidal IDF. But predictably the duo has been victimised for speaking the truth. The band’s US visas for their forthcoming tour in October have been revoked,

with US deputy secretary of state Christopher Landau declaring on X that “foreigners who glorify violence and hatred are not welcome visitors to our country”. Of course, that does not stop Netanyahu travelling there next week and being given a warm welcome at the White House. Imperialist doublespeak twists the ordinary meaning of “violence”. Outspoken musicians who fight with their words are a greater danger than the genocidal prime minister of the Israeli state.

The British media have twisted things even further, with the claim that Bob Vylan was calling for death to Jewish people. In a radio interview on a local station in Cork this week I was actually asked about the consequent safety of the small Jewish population of the city! Of course, it is absolute nonsense to equate the IDF with the entire global Jewish population (many of whom are ardent anti-Zionists). But truth does not stand in the way of a witch-hunt against those who dare speak out.

Bob Vylan is now being investigated by the Avon and Somerset police on ‘public order’ allegations. Meanwhile, Kneecap is again facing police scrutiny, arising out of their Glastonbury appearance. One of them referred to the huge protest outside Westminster magistrates court in support of band

member Liam Og O’hAinidh (Mo Chara), when he was in court on June 18. Jokingly he called for “a riot” in his support when he is next in court on August 20 - before quickly clarifying: “No riots, just love and support - and support for Palestine.” Despite this clarification the criminal investigation proceeds! Clearly this is about intimidation and not any actual offence.

BBC chiefs are in big trouble for live-streaming Bob Vylan. Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis fumed on X: “This is a time of national shame. The airing of vile Jew-hatred at Glastonbury and the BBC’s belated and mishandled response, brings confidence in our national broadcaster’s ability to treat anti-Semitism seriously to a new low.” The BBC duly hung its head in shame, stating that the “anti-Semitic sentiments expressed by Bob Vylan were utterly unacceptable and have no place on our airwaves”. Doubtless there will be investigations and perhaps resignations.

Meanwhile Bob Vylan clarified: “We are not for the death of Jews, Arabs or any other race or group of people. We are for the dismantling of a violent military machine!” They added: “We are a distraction from the story, and whatever sanctions we receive will be a distraction.” Of course, this was ignored. Once again,

truth is just an irritating detail to be brushed aside.

The Israeli state and its backers in Washington, London and Europe are united in silencing criticism of the deliberate eradication of a people - a holocaust. Gaza is now a death camp. The British government continues to approve the shipment of parts to the IDF for its F-35 fighter jets. Palestine Action, which sprayed red paint over two RAF planes at Brize Norton air base, are lined up to be banned under terrorism legislation. This putting them on a par with al-Qaeda.

The *Daily Mail* obligingly leads the attack on Bob Vylan for leading the “sick chant” on the IDF, when “crowds waved Palestine flags and joined the call for the deaths of Israeli soldiers”. *The Sun* chimes in: “Such is the level of violence and hatred in their lyrics that they have been considered ‘too extreme’ for the band to be officially signed by a major record label, so they trade under their own, which is called Ghost Theatre.”

Bob Vylan are known for using their music to speak out against racism, homophobia and toxic masculinity. They won the best alternative music act at the Moby Awards in 2022. Glastonbury 2025 saw them hitting the big time, but their brave stance has cost them dearly. It is, of course, their fans that are really feared - the hundreds of thousands of young people who have been politicised firstly by Kneecap and now Bob Vylan, and who could become part of a strong oppositional culture internationally.

Left talk

It is excellent that *Socialist Worker* and the *Morning Star* have come out strongly against the witch-hunt. The *Star*’s editorial on June 30 warned of “how fast our democratic rights are being dismantled”. It mocked the BBC for falling over itself to make amends for Bob Vylan’s attack on the IDF - “Anyone who thinks Vylan’s chants are more ‘appalling’ (the PM’s term) than the government’s continuing supply of arms and intelligence to facilitate mass murder has their priorities wrong.”³ *Socialist Worker*’s editorial of July 1 agreed that freedom of expression is under unprecedented attack: “If the Labour government gets away with it, it will only embolden it to attack the whole movement. The whole Palestine solidarity movement has to stand against the banning of Palestine Action, defend Kneecap and Bob Vylan and stay on the front foot.”⁴ It called out: “Everyone should campaign in their workplaces and campuses against the crackdown and attempts to shut down discussions about direct action or support for Palestine Action.”

Of course, *unrestricted* freedom of expression is essential. The working class needs it like ‘light and air’ to develop its ideas, its cohesion, the strength needed to overthrow this sick, sick society. That means, however, tolerating voices and views we very much disagree with and even find repugnant ... something the left needs to fully take on board ●

Notes

1. ‘Saying it loud and clear’ *Weekly Worker* May 15: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1538/saying-it-loud-and-clear.
2. www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-5000-children-diagnosed-malnutrition-gaza-strip-may.
3. momingstaronline.co.uk/article/glastonbury-furore-shows-how-fast-our-freedoms-are-being-dismantled.
4. socialistworker.co.uk/sw-view/resist-crackdown-on-palestine-movement.

BENEFITS

Another fine mess

One year in and the Labour government is unpopular, divided and looking incompetent. Strange, given the huge majority and the careful selection process. **Ian Spencer** wonders who will get the blame

Sir Keir Starmer has performed yet another humiliating climbdown - this time, of course, following the threat by more than 120 Labour backbenchers to vote against the government. He still only managed to get his thoroughly gutted welfare bill through the House of Commons with a 75 majority. Most of the rebels see no chance of promotion, fear that their precious careers will come to a sad end at the next election - that and they simply consider the legislation callous.

After all, the department of work and pensions' own impact assessment of the proposed welfare cuts was that it would push a further 250,000, including 50,000 children, into relative poverty. Moreover, 3.2 million were set to lose on average £1,720 per year by 2029-30.¹

With back-tracking on welfare, winter fuel payments, grooming gangs and even the 'Island of strangers' speech, the Labour government is starting to look incompetent, as well as cruel.

The original welfare bill included proposals to restrict eligibility for personal independence payments (PIP) and cut the health-related element of universal credit (UC health). The changes to PIP would have led to 800,000 people losing an average of £4,500 a year, while those affecting UC health meant that 2.3 million people would lose an average of £500 per year (730,000 would lose £3,000 per year).

Impact assessment

The Health Foundation, in its impact assessment of the proposed reforms, pointed out that mental and physical health are likely to worsen as a direct result. About 85% of all disability- and health-related recipients report having a mental health condition and about 30% have musculoskeletal disease. Under the proposed reforms three quarters of people receiving the daily living component of PIP, with arthritis, back or chronic pain, and almost half of those with anxiety and depression, were at risk of losing their PIP. Given that about 20% of PIP recipients are in work, this would certainly have made it harder for people to manage their ability to engage with work and participate in society - a critical determinant of wellbeing.²

Work and pensions secretary Liz Kendall said that the changes would "help people stay in work" and "get back to work more quickly".³ I suppose the assumption is that hunger and being worried sick about how to pay bills is a powerful incentive to take any job. However, the most likely outcome is missed meals, reliance on food banks and, for some, an early death.

For example, a recent study by the London School of Economics has shown that austerity measures by the UK government after 2010 had a significant impact on mortality and life expectancy.⁴ The authors estimate that cuts in health expenditure and welfare reduced life expectancy by two to five months, which led to a three-year setback in life expectancy progress between 2010 and 2019. "This is the equivalent to about 190,000 excess deaths, or three percent of all deaths." The authors go on to conclude that the "costs of austerity significantly exceeded the benefits derived from reduced public expenditure."



Then it was smiles, now it is tears

The welfare retreat means that most of those currently receiving PIP will continue to receive it, but the austerity measure will apply to new claimants, creating a two-tier system. Similarly, the government also reversed its plans to freeze UC health, and the payments will now rise in line with inflation for existing recipients. Because of the U-turn, only a mere 150,000 will be pushed into relative poverty.⁵ Moreover, the 'savings' will now only be £2 billion a year rather than the £5 billion originally projected.

Personal independence payments were introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Social Security (Personal Independence Payment) Regulations 2013 to replace the disability living allowance. DLA was done away with, because the then Tory government felt that the poor were finding it too easy to claim, and not least because doctors, with an eye on the health and wellbeing of the chronically sick, understood that alleviating poverty might prove helpful. Instead of doctors making the decision as to who gets the benefit, a PIP assessor (usually some other health professional, such as a nurse) makes the decision, using a pre-set algorithm and very little discretion.

One of the consequences of the transition from DLA to PIP was a rise in drug-related mortality, which has increased substantially since 2012. A study published in *Social Science and Medicine* showed that "each £100 per capita budget reduction was associated with an increase in drug-related death rates of 3.30 per 100,000 population".⁶

The then work and pensions secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, famously had his expenses credit card suspended because of the amount he had racked up at taxpayers' expense, while advocating cutting benefits to the poorest in society. At the time, another MP who had her expenses credit card frozen was his then shadow counterpart - one Rachel Reeves, the now increasingly unpopular chancellor of the exchequer.⁷

The shambolic turnaround suggests they had learned nothing from attempts to cut pensioners' winter fuel allowance, which was introduced as a universal benefit by Labour chancellor Gordon Brown in 1997. In July 2024 Reeves announced that it would only be given to those in receipt of pension

credit or other means-tested benefits. The aim was to save £1.4 billion, reducing the cost of the scheme to £0.5 billion. However, after the climbdown the savings dropped to £450 million. A further consequence was that more pensioners claimed pension credit and a further 100,000 were awarded. Given that each annual pension credit claim costs around £3,900 a year, the total cost of these new claims could be around £234 million. That additional cost would offset around half of the £450 million savings claimed by the government for its latest changes to winter fuel eligibility. In practice, pensioners with an income of over £35,000 now have the benefit clawed back by HM Revenue and Customs.⁸ Rachel Reeves has made a point of saying that she would live or die by balancing the books.⁹ I wonder which it will be? No wonder the poor woman is shedding tears.

Of course, other U-turns are available - such as Keir Starmer's decision to hold a national inquiry into grooming gangs, after accusing those calling for one of jumping on a far-right bandwagon. He commissioned Dame Louise Casey to write a report to "double-check" the issue. "That, to me, is a practical, common-sense way of doing politics," he told the BBC's political editor, Chris Mason.¹⁰

Absurdity

How did Starmer and Reeves end up in this mess in the first place? Thanks to the absurdity of the British first-past-the-post electoral system, in the general election of July 4 2024, Labour ended up with two-thirds of the seats based on a third of the votes (34%)! It had a majority of 174 and wasted no time imposing discipline on the 'class of 24' - in particular, the rump of what passes for a left wing. Seven MPs were suspended from the parliamentary Labour Party for refusing to support a Tory-inspired two-child benefit cap.

The Labour leadership seems remote from (if not contemptuous of) its backbenchers and was taken by surprise by the scale of this latest rebellion. Attempts by MPs to talk to Starmer or Reeves were fobbed off with presentations and charts from officials showing the growing size of the welfare budget and the increasing numbers of people on PIP.¹¹

Labour came to office in the aftermath of the mini-budget by Liz Truss, delivered by hapless

Conservative chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng in September 2022. Seizing on the reaction of the City of London as a rationale for their mantra of 'balancing the books', Reeves and Starmer decided on a strategy of blaming everything on the 'fiscal black hole' left by the last Tory administration, to impose austerity on the poor (and largesse on the arms industry - the government committed itself to spending five percent of gross domestic product on defence by 2035).

However, by the time of the 2025 local council elections on May 1, with no sense of irony, Reform UK took 677 council seats, while Labour only managed 98 - down by 187. Labour also lost the Runcorn and Helsby parliamentary by-election to Reform. Nigel Farage's party seemed to be the big threat to the intake of hand-picked Labour candidates - their opportunism outshone only by their sense of self-preservation.

Starmer quickly adapted to the perceived threat. On May 12, he gave a press conference, in which he promised a significant fall in net immigration by the end of the parliament and talked about the "incalculable damage" done to society by immigration. He even stated that "we risk becoming an island of strangers", drawing on the infamous 'rivers of blood' speech by Enoch Powell in 1968, when he talked of white people becoming "strangers in their own country".

By June 27, Starmer said that he "wouldn't have used those words if I had known they were or even would be interpreted as an echo of Powell. I had no idea - and my speech writers didn't know either." Were they ignorant or incompetent? Starmer didn't say, although he added: "But that particular phrase - no, it wasn't right. I'll give you the honest truth: I deeply regret using it."¹²

But there is more, not least of which is the sinister figure of Morgan McSweeney. In an echo of Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson's diptych, McSweeney and Starmer seem to be joined at the hip. McSweeney is Starmer's chief of staff at Number 10 and credited by many commentators as being the architect of the shift to the right in the Labour Party after Jeremy Corbyn's defeat.

McSweeney was instrumental in managing the constant briefing of journalists around accusations of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party and is known for his visceral

hatred of the left. He is said to be incensed by the stories of 'grooming gangs', replete as they are with racist overtones.¹³ It does not seem too much of a stretch to imagine that he played a part in Starmer's acceptance of the political expediency of having an enquiry into grooming gangs to head off Reform UK in the aftermath of Labour's drubbing at the local council elections.

The question is whether McSweeney was also responsible for the Enoch Powell allusions in Starmer's speech and whether Starmer was 'taking one for the team', when he claimed ignorance of the significance of his use of Powellite language. McSweeney, who spent some of his formative years on an Israeli kibbutz, became a central figure of the shadowy Labour Together, founded by John Clarke, a former Blue Labour director, and with its initial undeclared funding from Nevsky Capital founder Martin Taylor and from Trevor Chinn, who was awarded the Israeli 'presidential medal of honour' by Izaac Herzog in November 2024, for his service to the state of Israel.¹⁴

Morgan monster

By 2017 McSweeney had taken over as director of Labour Together, responsible to a board, which included Steve Reed, Lisa Nandy, Jon Cruddas and Chinn. Labour Together made extensive use of polling and focus groups to develop a strategy to select their candidate for the leadership of the Labour Party, finally alighting on Keir Starmer.

While comparisons between Dominic Cummings and Morgan McSweeney may seem commonplace, they do share some central characteristics. They are both seen as the architects of the success of those who are, formally, their political masters. They both seem completely contemptuous of junior MPs and the wider electorate, and apparently self-confident to the point of hubris.

Both are committed to ensure that the poor are made to pay for the destructive actions of the rich and both have a limited life span. The only question is: who will go first - Dr Frankenstein or his monster? My guess is the monster ●

Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdjxygjr9ro.
2. www.health.org.uk/features-and-opinion/blogs/welfare-reforms-risk-damaging-health-and-efforts-to-boost-employment.
3. www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/welfare-cuts-will-push-250000-people-into-poverty-dwp-impact-assessment-finds.
4. eprints.lse.ac.uk/123915.
5. www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2025/jun/30/welfare-bill-keir-starmer-liz-kendall-rebels-labour-latest-politics-live-news.
6. www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953621005578.
7. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ian-duncan-smith-s-expenses-credit-card-is-suspended-after-he-runs-up-ps1-000-debt-to-taxpayer-10357601.html.
8. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c79eg2x5qno.
9. www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jun/09/reeves-struggles-explain-genius-labour-winter-fuel-payment-u-turn.
10. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvg1xje9wzlo.
11. www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jun/29/they-didnt-think-wed-have-the-guts-how-labour-rebels-forced-the-governments-welfare-u-turn.
12. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj3rxrg2pnjo.
13. www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMtvEjof4Ac.
14. www.jewishnews.co.uk/sir-trevor-chinn-awarded-israeli-medal-of-honour.

REVIEW

Rising middle classes?

Dan Evans **A nation of shopkeepers: the unstoppable rise of the petty bourgeoisie** Repeater Books, 325pp, £10.99



Last week we printed Ben Lewis's translation of Karl Kautsky writing in 1899 on how Marxists should analyse the 'new middle class' in imperial Germany.¹ Dan Evans's book offers a 2023 attempt to address a slightly broader issue. The middle class/es, including the 'classic' petty-bourgeoisie of small businesses, are, in his view, rising rather than declining; and how this should be analysed in Marxist terms. As well as using early 21st century British data and impressions, Evans uses 1970s attempts to analyse the employed middle class - in particular the Marxist (or Marxist) versions of Nicos Poulantzas and of John and Barbara Ehrenreich.

Comrade Evans begins with a certain amount of personal history, of growing up in a family and locality intermediate between the working class and (employed) middle class. Since his argument is that today's left is middle class and fails to understand the working class, I should, I guess, respond with an open avowal of my own class background: I am of more unambiguously (perhaps 'upper') middle-class family background, with my father and both my grandfathers regular army officers, and was educated at private boarding schools and Oxford University. I am one of those 1970s student leftists who dropped out and went to work in factories - in my case two years on a car assembly line, and nine months a bit later in a tin can factory. Afterwards, my family and educational background meant that I was let back in to university and to professional middle class existence, and I ended up teaching law in universities until retirement.

Lawyers are an *old* professional middle class group (going back to the 1200s in England) and law teachers as old (going back to 1100s Bologna); army officers as an 'employed middle class' group go

back to the New Model Army of the 1640s-50s and its successors.²

It is worth, however, ending this 'confession' with an old joke about the Sino-Soviet split. Nikita Khrushchev says to Zhou Enlai: "Comrade Zhou, there is a fundamental difference between us: I am the son of a poor peasant, and you are the son of a mandarin." Zhou Enlai replies: "Yes, Comrade Khrushchev, but we have something fundamental in common: we are both traitors to our fathers' classes."

It is probably not the original point of the joke, but there is something important to be drawn from it: not all political differences are class differences, and seeing them automatically as class differences produces merely the 'trashing' of opponents and consequent endless splintering of the 1970s western Maoist movement. Equally, the argument that the 'true' representatives of the working class are socially conservative trade union officials, as opposed to the 'intellectual' left, goes back to the debates in the German SPD around 1900, in which Kautsky was intervening.

Comrade Evans' argument is at the end of the day for the left to take a different path to that which it has taken in the recent past: more clearly in his November 2024 *New Socialist* article, 'Is the working class back?', than in the book, though the outline of the argument is present in the conclusion (pp273-302).³ The characterisation of the policy he opposes as an aspect of the Bourdieuvian 'habitus' of the 'new petty-bourgeoisie' has the same function as the class characterisations of opponent positions by 1970s western Maoists or by 20th century conservative trade union officials.

Honoré Daumier 'The first class carriage' (1864)

Dan Evans is worth reading not because he provides answers, but because he poses questions



As it happens, I agree with *part* of comrade Evans' diagnosis of the problems of the left (but not with other parts). But the class characterisation has to be treated with caution. The book needs to be used primarily for descriptive, rather than prescriptive, purposes: it has things to tell us about the prominence of both the 'classic' petty bourgeoisie and the employed middle classes, in late 20th/early 21st century Britain.

Traditional

The first chapter of the book is a "potted history of the petty bourgeoisie". Evans is professionally a sociologist, not a historian, and his "potted history" rests on quite limited historical depth: Ellen Meiksins Wood representing the 'political Marxist' school of the theory of the origins of capitalism, Christopher Hill on the Levellers, and otherwise generally a 'short chronology' interpretation, which starts in the 19th century. The effect of this is to spin the narrative towards the non-decline of the petty producer class and to make the 'formal subsumption of labour to capital' - that is, the 'putting-out system', in which merchant-financiers controlled household production - disappear. The effect is, by shortening the transition from feudalism to capitalism, to downplay the sheer scale of household-scale production in feudalism and the degree of proletarianisation involved in the rise of capitalism.

Though Evans does flag the fact that Marx's and Engels' writings certainly did not ignore the petty bourgeoisie and also remarked on tendencies within capital to *increase* intermediate strata (pp142-44), the 'Marxological' aspect of Evans' argument is weakened by failure to use Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* (Vol II: *The politics of*

social classes),⁴ which is really indispensable for an accurate assessment of their arguments.

Chapter 2, 'Superstar tradesmen: the return of the traditional petty bourgeoisie', is the most solid of the book. Self-employment, Evans argues, has risen from 7% of the British workforce in 1945, and 8% in 1975, to 14% of the workforce in 2019.⁵ (The 1945 figure is from a 2019 ONS study, which in fact shows sharp falls during World War I and II, with self-employment continuing limited during the cold war, but returning to 1909 levels by 1988, with further rises since then reaching slightly above 1861 levels in 2019.⁶)

Evans notes that these are *smaller* businesses than in the past, with 'self-employed with employees' having fallen from 4% of the workforce in 1975 to 2% in 2020. Of course, a business large enough to have employees is, since the 1980s, much more likely to be formally incorporated: banks demand incorporation in order to obtain priority of floating charges, over the revenue and the employees as preferred creditors in insolvency, and, meanwhile, employing people requires increasing levels of bureaucracy, which both incentivises *ad hoc* subcontracting arrangements rather than employing people and, if you are to employ people, makes the bureaucracy of incorporation *proportionately* less onerous. Self-employment figures thus probably understate the number of small businesses.⁷

As Evans points out, quite a lot of the 'solo self-employed' are actually cases of 'sham self-employment' (p89). But he argues that the persistence of small business is *more extensively* a matter of fractionating supply chains with a view to the political advantage of capital. (The claim that there are actual economic

efficiency gains is merely an appearance created by tinkering with the legal regime to incentivise subcontracting, and by ignoring, in particular, the advertising, legal and other ‘transaction costs’.)

From displaying the growth of self-employment relative to the cold war period, Evans proceeds to the ‘ethnography’ of the classic petty bourgeoisie, and its general condition of precarity and clinging to status at the expense of income. That said, he also points out that quite a lot of the growth of self-employment results from “push factors”: that is, that people are forced into self-employment by the absence of employment opportunities or of non-shit jobs.

New PMC

Chapter 3, ‘The new petty bourgeoisie and class analysis (or, why we are not the working class)’ turns to the employed middle classes. Here, there is much less in the way of hard numbers, and some tendency to use declining union density as a ‘proxy’ for class structure (pp134-35). It is worth noting that the Trotskyists’ 1938 *Transitional programme* contained the statement: “Trade unions, even the most powerful, embrace no more than 20% to 25% of the working class and, at that, predominantly the more skilled and better paid layers.”⁸

“Professionals,” comrade Evans tells us, “are now the single biggest occupation group in British society, consisting of 5.7 million people or 21% of the workforce, while managers constitute nearly 10%, or nearly 3.5 million people across all categories (larger than the skilled working class)” (p135). These are seriously slippery categories. Nurses, for example, are professionals - but better characterised as skilled workers. ‘Facilities manager’, as described by an apprenticeship definition, is again a role which need not actually involve managing subordinates.⁹

Comrade Evans’ solution to this problem of indeterminacy is to deploy the arguments of left Eurocommunist and Althusserian theorist Nicos Poulantzas (from 1971, translated into English in 1978) and

of US Democratic Socialists John and Barbara Ehrenreich (from 1977). Poulantzas’s argument is that the new middle class is part of the petty bourgeoisie, because its precarity leads it to individualism, to try to climb the greasy pole to avoid falling into the proletariat. In contrast, the Ehrenreichs defined the “professional-managerial class” (PMC) very broadly in terms of a function in relation to the “reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist social relations”, so that nurses and teachers are also PMC members.

Neither of these approaches actually solves the indeterminacy problem. As far as Poulantzas is concerned, the problem is that, with the end of the cold war, there has been a new creation of precarity, affecting what are on any terms working class jobs: for a single example, it became transparent during Covid that the BMW Cowley car factory has a small permanent core workforce and a substantially larger group of insecure ‘agency workers’. No doubt that is the case much more widely. The end of ‘full employment’ has created an *underclass*, into which ordinary workers are at risk of falling ... and Evans’ chapter 2 actually displays some of the dynamics. To say, then, that “the working class is collectivist because it is a static class” would have been wildly unrealistic before 1948 - and became wildly unrealistic after the 1990s.

As far as the Ehrenreichs are concerned, the role of the “reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist social relations” is far too broad to be analytically useful.¹⁰ It is played, for example, by every parent ... And the “dull compulsion of economic relations” as self-reproducing capitalist social relations is wholly omitted - unsurprisingly, given that these 1970s authors were writing in a regime of *highly regulated* capitalism as a mode of organising concessions to workers in the ‘global north’ designed to make the ‘Soviet bloc’ unattractive. “Petty domination”, which comrade Evans uses as a device to ‘cash’ the Ehrenreichs’ approach (pp161-65) is equally over-broad, potentially

catching the whole of sexism, racism, queer-bashing and so on, and just low-level bullying.

Chapter 4, ‘The educational elevator: education in the modern class structure and the creation of the new petty bourgeoisie’, represents comrade Evans’ critical move in making the separation between the working class and the “new petty bourgeoisie”. The argument is essentially that formal education is the separator (as Kautsky argued, though, of course, comrade Evans is unlikely to have come across this bit of Kautsky). The sorting, he argues, already takes place at school. I felt strong echoes of Pink Floyd’s 1979 *Another brick in the wall* here:

We don’t need no education
We don’t need no thought control
No dark sarcasm in the classroom
Teacher, leave them kids alone
Hey, teacher, leave them kids alone
All in all, it’s just another brick in the wall
All in all, you’re just another brick in the wall

Very 1970s (as also are comrade Evans’ reliance on Poulantzas, the Ehrenreichs, Andre Gorz, and so on). The idea that formal education separates the working class from the new middle class is in Kautsky about credentialism - and hence leads to proletarianisation of the new middle class, as the credentials get devalued. In Evans it is about his theory that the working class is collectivist, because it is socially immobile (having no further to fall) - and open to the same objections.

In addition, the idea that this is the line of separation between the working class and the middle class is to ignore the whole history of worker-autodidacts and of workers’ education efforts, and the campaigns of the workers’ movement to *demand* free education in the later 19th century and the first half of the 20th. Comrade Evans appears here to have swallowed a slave-mentality response to the phenomenon of class oppression and thus made the *acceptance* of subordination in the social order into the marker of being a proletarian.

Back to the point made earlier - that missing from comrade Evans’ comments on Marx is Hal Draper on the politics of social classes. Among other things comrade Evans would have got from using Draper is the perception that classes are *inherently* fuzzy categories, and the fuzziness of the petty bourgeoisie is matched by that of the proletariat. The *central case* of a proletarian is one who, having no property, is forced to work for wages. But proletarians can have some limited property - in particular, skilled workers possess *informal* intellectual property rights - and thus overlap potentially with both the ‘classic’ petty bourgeoisie and with the employed middle class.

This fuzziness does not mean (contrary to the left against which comrade Evans is polemicising) that there is *no* employed middle class, with all of the employees being proletarians. The problem is that failure to recognise the overlaps produces unhelpful sharp edges - in particular in relation to white-collar and public-sector trade unionism.

Petty rentiers

The last substantive section of the book before the conclusion is chapter 5: ‘Housing and the class structure: a nation of landlords’. Here comrade Evans is engaged in a *largely* justified polemic against those leftists who argue that the main class divide is between homeowners and landlords, on the one side, and those (chiefly the young) who have to rent, on the other. The

capsule sketch of “housing and the class structure throughout history” (pp230-37) has the problem, as with that of the history of the petty bourgeoisie, of effectively starting with the 19th century.¹¹ Beyond this, the chapter is an almost entirely valid negative critique of the thesis that freehold-mortgage tenure makes you middle class.

That said, there *is* here a missing term: the petty rentier class. It is certainly *true* that the long-term logic of the Tories’ reforms to housing law will be the creation of a new petty landlord class, like that of the 18th and ‘long 19th’ centuries. But equally important as a component of the middle classes is the restoration of a class which lives off *small* capital investments through one or another sort of investment scheme. The major component of this class is the retired recipients of private pensions. This class is largely concentrated in the countryside and at seaside towns. It is probably *more* strongly Tory-voting than the working petty bourgeoisie or employed middle class.

The petty rentier class is part of the key to understanding the gradation between the employed middle class proper, and skilled workers. Members of the employed middle class proper are more able to parlay their collective skill monopolies into investment assets.

Chapter 5, the conclusions, argues that the modern left (Corbynism, etc) is based on a section of the “new petty bourgeoisie” (ex-students). Not a new story, since it was told to the far left by ‘official communists’ and the Labour and trade union right in the 1960s-70s. With Corbynism defeated, Labour is dominated by the PMC - within which the trade union bureaucracy becomes invisible. The left identifies itself with this hated class through speech norms and identity politics. The first half of this point (speech norms) is true; the second - ‘identity politics’ - involves fictionally identifying the conservative trade union bureaucracy as the ‘true representative’ of the working class, and erasing the anti-racism and advocacy of women’s emancipation of the mass parties of the Second and Third Internationals.

Comrade Evans argues for turning instead to an alliance of the traditional petty bourgeoisie and the working class against the PMC. But then we arrive at this:

To achieve it, ‘politics’ must be moved away from parliamentarism and back to workplaces and communities, so workers themselves can lead it rather than professional politicians and leftist celebrities. It therefore has to involve a break with Labourism and electoralism ...

It turns out, then, that the solution is to be ... Cliffism!

In the 2024 *New Socialist* article, the solution looks rather more like the Eurocommunists’ *New Times* - understandably, given the 1970s Eurocommunist theorists on whom comrade Evans has relied for the purposes of analysis.

I said at the outset that Evans could be used for his descriptive work, but not for his prescriptions. I should add that, as I said about Kautsky last week, Evans’ book is completely characterised by methodological nationalism. In the last chapter this shifts into *actual* nationalism - a ‘Lexiteering’, which was, in fact, the common position of a lot of the organised far left. The descriptive work is still useful, however, for seeing the reality of the significance of the middle classes in today’s Britain ●

Mike Macnair

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. ‘Completely different foundations’ *Weekly Worker* June 26: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1544/completely-different-foundations.
2. M Macnair, ‘Doing war differently’ *Weekly Worker* May 28 2015: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1060/doing-war-differently: what came before the New Model Army was the idea of aristocrats as ‘natural commanders’.
3. newsocialist.org.uk/is-the-working-class-back.
4. New York 1978.
5. Evans (p88) cites G Giupponi and X Xu *What does the rise of self-employment tell us about the UK labour market?* London 2021 (table on p5).
6. www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/compendium/economicreview/april2019/long-term-trends-in-employment-1861-to-2018#employment-and-self-employed-workers.
7. Between 2010 and 2024 “the number of sole proprietorships (an unincorporated business run by one self-employed person) increased by 323,000 (12%) and the number of companies increased by 793,000 (62%)” (www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2024/business-population-estimates-for-the-uk-and-regions-2024-statistical-release).
8. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tp-text.htm#tu.
9. skillsengland.education.gov.uk/apprenticeships/st0484-v1-3.
10. On the PMC, compare the debate in M Macnair, ‘American “Blue Labour”?’ *Weekly Worker* April 15 2021 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1343/american-blue-labour), F de Haan, ‘Appeals of class society’, May 20 2021 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1348/appeals-of-class-society), M Macnair, ‘Centrality of class’ June 3 2021 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1350/centrality-of-class-mike-macnair-replies-to-foppe-), P Demarty, ‘Manufacturing consensus’, September 2 2021 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1361/manufacturing-consensus), F de Haan, ‘Addressing the central issues’, September 30 2021 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1365/addressing-the-central-issues), F de Haan, ‘On capitalism and class rule: moving beyond the “PMC debate”’ *Cosmonaut* February 9 2024 (cosmonautmag.com/2024/02/on-capitalism-and-class-rule-moving-beyond-the-pmc-debate).
11. Some references to the earlier history in ‘Stunts, problems and solutions’ *Weekly Worker* May 5 2022 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1394/stunts-problems-and-solutions).

Fighting fund Success!

Congratulations to all those comrades who helped us out at the end of June by collectively contributing no less than £715 in just four days! Brilliant!

Because of that, we just squeezed past that £2,750 monthly target on the very last day. To be precise, our total for the month was £2,790. Topping the lot in generosity was DH with his excellent £125, while comrade JM was not that far behind - his *two* donations came to £99. Other bank transfers/standing orders came from JC (£70), RL (£60), BK (£50), MW (£30), JT (£25), PW and AB (£20 each), IS, JD and MD (£10) and finally DS (£4).

On top of that six comrades played their part by using PayPal - thanks to MM (£60), JB and DB (£50), PE (£7) and finally DI and TR (£5 each). Finally comrade Hassan did the usual - he handed a £5 note to one of our team. All good stuff!

So it was a close call, but the important thing is we reached our new £2,750 target once again. Thanks to one and all. But the question is now, can we keep this up in July? Well, with just two days of the month

gone, we already have £286 in the kitty.

As I write, 14 comrades have already contributed either by standing order or one-off bank transfer. Thanks to LC (£50), BO (£35), MM (£31), DL, MT, II and SJ (£20), CP (£16), BG and AN (£15 each), RM (£13), MM (£11), and finally DI and CH (£10 each).

But now, of course, we have to make sure that we reach that target once again in July. Since we increased it by £500 in April, we’ve exceeded it twice and were just £3 short in May. It just shows how much the role of the *Weekly Worker* in fighting for what we really need - a principled, democratic-centralist Marxist Party, bringing together members of all the current sects on a principled basis - is so much appreciated.

Please show your appreciation too! ●

Robbie Rix

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

IRAN

Looking back at the 12-day war

People rallied in defence of the country, not the regime. They complain about the lack of preparation, the incompetence and the shortages. Meanwhile, says **Yassamine Mather**, the foreign media remains clueless

As we enter the second week of a fragile ceasefire between Iran and US-Israeli aggressors, the G7 foreign ministers have issued a joint statement, calling for the immediate “resumption of negotiations, resulting in a comprehensive, verifiable and durable agreement that addresses Iran’s nuclear programme”. This is in the context of negotiations between Iran and the US that have been ongoing for a few months.

Contradicting the G7’s call, Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi stated in an interview with CBS that he does not expect talks between Iran and the US to restart any time soon. There are good reasons for this reluctance. Iranian officials believe they were duped by the Trump administration - while US special envoy Steve Witkoff was talking to them in Oman and Rome, Israel was preparing for war and the US administration was well aware of this. Of course, Trump’s narrative is that he had given a 60-day ultimatum to Iran and the Israeli attack took place on the 61st day!

Irrespective of such squabbles, no-one can doubt the cooperation between the US and its regional ally, Israel, regarding the execution and timing of the Israeli attack.

As damaging as the war was for Iran, it could have lasted longer and become far worse. On the last night before the ceasefire, many feared the worst - until it became clear that Iran’s attack on US bases in Qatar had been meticulously choreographed. Not only was a warning issued, but the US military was also informed in advance, allowing civilians and personnel to evacuate targeted bases.

While some missiles penetrated Israel’s defences, the main conclusion at the end of the 12-day war is that Iran’s air defence capabilities have been damaged considerably. If another attack occurs, Iran’s ability to defend itself will be significantly diminished.

When it comes to nuclear installations, Trump insists Iran’s nuclear programme is now destroyed. If that is correct, the US and Israel will need new excuses for another war. Of course, no-one in their right mind should think the current conflict was about nuclear enrichment. However, if we assume that was the case, as the media keep telling us, and if Trump is correct that Iran’s nuclear programme has been “obliterated”, what is there to discuss? On the other hand, the International Atomic Energy Agency and leaked documents from the CIA contradict the repeated claims of ‘obliteration’ made by Trump and his ministers.

The IAEA claims Iran is months away from restoring its pre-war nuclear capacity. Some speculate centrifuges were moved, as radiation levels remain undetectable. Satellite imagery confirms surface damage, but the full extent is unclear.

Strategic outcome

Inside Iran we are witnessing a nationalist surge, with huge crowds gathering in Tehran for rallies. After rumours about his death or illness, Khamenei appeared in a pre-recorded speech from a bunker, obviously signalling heightened security concerns.

Both Israel and Iran accuse each other of espionage. However, evidence suggests the location of many Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders and scientists assassinated by Israeli drones was



Friday of anger: new wave of nationalism

pinpointed by electronic detection (eg, hacked phones) rather than human spies. The government’s internet shutdown worsened the crisis, cutting off access to warnings and foreign communication.

For the past two weeks, many Iranians have been torn between conflicting feelings: a duty to protect their homeland versus a profound aversion to the ruling regime. Yet for the moment they have united not to defend the government, but their country, and to ensure mutual support. Reports describe a strong sense of solidarity that has arisen among the populace.

People in rural communities have opened their homes to those escaping the bombing of urban centres. Some shopkeepers have offered essential items below standard prices, and neighbours have checked in on each other to see if assistance is needed.

Nonetheless, many citizens recognise that Israel was aiming for regime change - an outcome also sought by numerous Iranians. Still, the majority of Iranians differentiate between internally driven change and that which is orchestrated and enforced externally.

As tensions escalated during the latest round of conflict, Iranian civilians found themselves caught between external threats and internal unpreparedness. One of the starkest expressions of this came in a widespread public outcry over the absence of any basic civil defence infrastructure. Social media were flooded with posts asking, “Why are there no bomb shelters in Tehran?” and “Where are the sirens to warn us?” - questions that reflected decades of neglect in public safety planning. The government’s response was inadequate: officials half-heartedly pointed to Tehran’s metro system as a potential shelter network, yet many of these stations remained locked at night, lacked water or ventilation systems, and had no trained personnel for emergencies.

Adding to the chaos were cyberattacks and widespread internet disruptions, including what appeared to be deliberate blackouts. Multiple banks experienced brief outages and were rumoured to be hacked, prompting panic-driven bank runs in several cities. The Central Bank of Iran issued vague statements urging calm and denying systemic risk, but their reassurances - phrased in boilerplate language like “The situation is under full control” - only fuelled public scepticism.

The panic has been further

intensified by external pressure. Donald Trump’s ominous social media warning to - “Leave Tehran now” - was widely interpreted as a signal of impending US military action. The Iranian government was thrust into a lose-lose dilemma: ordering evacuations would signal internal instability and validate foreign threats, while maintaining the status quo risked civilian lives. They chose silence - a decision that led to confusion and fear. Rumours swirled across Tehran and other major cities about potential bombings, drone strikes, and targeted attacks - none of which were officially addressed.

Deeper crisis

This paralysis of the state highlighted a deeper crisis of legitimacy. Decades of economic mismanagement, sanctions and repression had already completely eroded public trust. The recent failure to protect civilians - not just from foreign threats, but from the consequences of the state’s own opacity - amplified the sense of abandonment. As one Iranian journalist put it bluntly, “The government can shoot protesters, but it can’t protect its own people from a drone strike or a blackout.”

Writing in *New Lines*, Asef Bayat summed up what many of us have heard from friends and relatives in the last few days:

Many of Tehran’s residents sought refuge in nearby towns and villages or in the northern provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran along the Caspian Sea, leaving behind their homes, jobs and everyday routines. But most stayed. Not only because they could not afford to leave, but because they felt a responsibility to protect their city ... During the two-week war with Israel, stories of resilience, mutual care and quiet heroism abounded once again ...

A woman posted on social media that she refused to leave Tehran - but offered to help the elderly and sick, to bring groceries or simply call to check in. Many joined her. When someone posted a plea for medicine, dozens responded. A car mechanic rode his motorbike across the city, helping stranded drivers on their way to safety. And a restaurant in Shahryar - my old rural district outside Tehran - announced it would serve free meals to a thousand people every night for as long as the war continued.¹

They say truth is the first victim of war; we could say that is also the case when conflict continues after a ceasefire. In the case of the US-Israel war against Iran you have the additional complexity of media outlets financed and therefore managed by warring regimes.

We had little expectation when it came to the state media in Iran or the Mossad-financed, Persian-speaking media. However, in some ways they are less of a danger, as their commentary is so obviously biased - no-one in their right mind takes them seriously. The real danger comes from media outlets claiming to be impartial, including the BBC World Service, financed by the British government’s foreign office.

Here I am not talking of David Lammy, who is clearly incapable of making head or tail of things when it comes to the complexities of a Middle Eastern war. I am talking about seasoned experts, professional civil servants with expertise on the Middle East. Here the message they want to spread comes across with more subtlety, repeated by editors and journalists who might repeat the ‘line’ either in complete ignorance, or because their jobs and indeed the continued operation of their channel depend on following it.

The US agenda is to downgrade and weaken Iran, in order to counter Iran’s Islamic Republic’s gains on the Arab street. So in the days immediately after the ceasefire, BBC World Service was giving lots of coverage to two stories. Firstly, relatives of BBC Persian staff are facing intimidation in Iran. I am sure they are, but there is nothing new here; those of us who opposed the Islamic Republic as members of leftwing organisations are very familiar with such stories - it isn’t exactly news. Of course, some of those BBC Persian staff were collaborating with Islamic Republic media outlets when threats against some leftwing activists in exile started in the 1980s (I can’t remember any of them expressing any concern).

The second story repeated endlessly is that the Islamic Republic will kill hundreds of political prisoners as revenge for the war. I am sure it is capable of such atrocities, but so far there is no sign of it. So why are you propagating this story? It might not happen, as this regime is keen to survive and such an action would be suicidal at this stage.

So far it is the Israeli air force that, far from ‘saving’ Iran’s political

prisoners, has managed to kill them. On June 23 airstrikes targeted Tehran’s Evin prison - known for housing political prisoners and foreign nationals. The attack resulted in at least 71 fatalities, including staff, nearby civilians, as well as prisoners and visiting family members. We know of two female political prisoners killed.

Regime change

It is quite clear that, after this new wave of nationalism, regime-change candidates relying on foreign military intervention are facing a humiliating defeat. According to one former ally of Reza Pahlavi (the ex-shah’s son), who remains an ardent supporter of Israeli Zionism, the 12-day war “has delayed regime change by 15 years”. She blames Israel’s timing of the attack and the fact that it was not coordinated with the opposition for its failure.

In the meantime, Reza Pahlavi, whose campaign in support of the IDF burst like a balloon in the first hours of the war, continues to meet rightwing politicians in Europe - Nigel Farage being the latest in a long list.

Last week, more as an exercise and for the sake of deluded reporters in the Persian-speaking exiled media, I asked several AI tools if “Reza Pahlavi was a serious alternative for regime change in Iran”, asking them to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Elon Musk’s X, ChatGPT and DeepSeek all came out with a straightforward ‘No’, with the response on DeepSeek reading: “Reza Pahlavi lacks the consolidated support, viable movement and internal influence necessary to be considered a serious, practical alternative for regime change at this time.”

For the time being, the ceasefire is holding; however, in Iran most people are expecting new air raids. The regime has survived, but it has been weakened by 12 days of relentless bombing. Iran’s airspace is even more vulnerable than it was before. True, Iranians have rallied to support their country, but they have not changed their mind about this unpopular, corrupt regime.

Questions also remain about the economic cost of punitive sanctions imposed by the US and its allies regarding the country’s nuclear and ballistic programmes, and about the regime’s inability to defend its population.

Few in Iran believe the government propaganda that its forces were ‘victorious’ in this war. Internal conflicts continue within the many factions of the regime, with each group blaming opponents for the failures during the war. Meanwhile, the ‘reformist’ president, Masoud Pezeshkian, and his cabinet are keen to pursue a policy of tolerance of social behaviour to maintain ‘national unity’ (hardliners want a return to the ‘good old days’ of the Raisi presidency, imposing strict restrictions on social and political life).

Meanwhile, the left in exile is as lost as ever, continuing to predict imminent collapse of the regime without presenting a coherent programme for the working class.

In the midst of all this uncertainty we also have to see what Trump and Netanyahu will do to further degrade the Islamic regime ●

Notes

1. newlinesmag.com/first-person/the-spirit-of-tehran.

FCU



Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo 'The Fourth Estate' (1901)

One step back

Marx provided many lessons of how to draft programmes. However, they were not only about building unity around concrete aims: they were also about drawing clear lines of demarcation, says **Jack Conrad**

On June 24 we received a curt message signed by Nick Wrack and Ed Potts informing us that their organisation, Talking About Socialism, had agreed this thoroughly retrograde, rather sad, resolution on Forging Communist Unity at a members' aggregate.

Here it is in full: "This meeting believes that there is no prospect of achieving any worthwhile or meaningful unity with the CPGB from the current FCU process and therefore agrees to withdraw from the FCU process forthwith. We will instead concentrate on developing TAS and finding other potential partners in building communist unity." The two comrades add that "TAS will therefore not be sending representatives to any future meeting of FCU."

We wish the comrades well in their attempt to build TAS and finding other potential partners. However, *real, existing partners* will ask why no explanation of the TAS bail-out was provided, why no alternative collective route forward was suggested, why no internal disagreements were admitted. If you wish to be treated seriously, you would surely expect something of the kind.

After all, just a few short weeks before the TAS split announcement, the comrades reassuringly told us that they would be taking a *temporary* 'step back' from *fusion talks* in order to give themselves the time needed to draft a programme for the Communist Party in Great Britain that we in the CPGB, TAS and *Prometheus* are all formally committed to build. That is why, note, we all call ourselves *partyists*. We were due to reconvene on July 6 on Zoom at our usual time of 10am.

Now it seems some want to talk the talk, but not walk the walk ... except to walk away. More than a pity. Comrade Cat Rylance of *Prometheus* wrote in reply:

I believe this to be a profound mistake. The project we are

arguing for is bigger than any of our small parts and the result of this now is not only that we have lost the opportunity FCU represented, that disheartenment will replace hope and interest, but that actually collectively we have now done serious damage to the project of programmatic unity we are supposed to be arguing is achievable. This will only give ammunition to those on the left who seek to convince others that arguments for communist unity are a waste of time, we can't even achieve it in our ranks, etc. I'm unsure what 'continuing to pursue communist unity with others' in this context means.

Our sentiments exactly. Hence the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB agreed the following letter to TAS:

Comrades, your announcement, breaking off talks between TAS, the CPGB and the pro-party faction of *Prometheus* is something that we deeply regret. We still have before us a great opportunity to take forward what is our joint project of forging a mass Communist Party in Great Britain.

You, however, have set this project back by your decision to walk away from what we always envisaged as a highly promising, but *prolonged*, process.

The CPGB is and remains committed to talks, debates and, crucially, the perspective of fusion in the struggle for a mass Communist Party. Our door remains open.

We would, therefore, ask you to reconsider your decision to break from FCU. We would ask you to invite a member of the CPGB's PCC to speak at a TAS membership meeting - an invitation that ought to include the pro-party faction of *Prometheus* too. This is, remember a tripartite

process that also reaches into RS21 and, in fact, considerably beyond. Good communists here in Britain, and internationally, are closely following our debates and efforts to achieve organisational unity.

If you seriously believe that the CPGB has behaved in an underhand, reprehensible or unprincipled manner, that is something that ought to be openly addressed. We are certainly ready to account for our commitment to robust and open polemics.

We therefore issue our own invitation. Provide a speaker for one of our regular Online Communist Forums. You will be given as much time as you feel you need.

TAS surely has nothing to lose. Together our cause has everything to gain.

I attended the June 30 TAS Zoom meeting, where comrade Wrack defended the decision to walk. I was granted a grand three minutes to put the CPGB case. Needless to say, I urged patience and stressed that we always envisaged a prolonged process. Comrade Wrack got 10 times longer ... 15 times longer if you count his reply. Not my idea of a serious approach, when it comes to dealing with differences between *organisations*. Everyone apart from comrades Wrack and Potts were treated as atomised, three-minute individuals by the hectoring chair, Soraya Lawrence. She cut off and cut off again and again what were important contributions. Evidence of an unhealthy political culture for any *serious* communist.

Comrade Wrack boasted that FCU was initiated by TAS. True, instead of jointly participating in some education course, he proposed fusion talks. And, he should have had the honesty to add that we were delighted. But, no, he simply went on to complain about the CPGB culture of robust debate. Yes, we have critiqued the existing left from the

point of view of orthodox Marxism, the reformism, the broad frontism, the nationalism, the tailism, the economism, the social-imperialism. We have even looked at TAS articles, statements and proposals ... and found them wanting too.

Did he really expect us to abandon Marxist orthodoxy for the sake of some give-and-take rotten compromise? We are proud of our culture of open polemic too. We began with that culture as an act of *disciplined rebellion* back in November 1981 with the first edition of *The Leninist*. We shall continue to defend, uphold and practice open polemic as a matter of the highest principle.

Speaking bitterness

Comrade Wrack bitterly complains that it is all abuse, lies and misrepresentation. In the name of not putting off others, promoting unity and winning recruits, he demands moderation, politeness and being acceptable ... to himself. The comrade refuses to address the substantive politics. Maybe he can't.

During the TAS Zoom meeting, inevitably, the CPGB, either in whole or part, was called all sorts of 'horrible names' by comrade Wrack and his closest lieutenants: 'Kautskyite', 'Stalinist', 'anti-Marxist', etc, etc. Presumably this is moderation, politeness and being acceptable in the topsy-turvy world of TAS.

For myself, I don't give a damn. Of course, I reject the accusations, but we expect them ... and more. It is the norm, when it comes to politics. Nor can we expect to benefit from the plusses of polemics without accepting the minuses.

When there is a serious point being made, we will give a serious reply ... sometimes calmly, sometimes with fire and passion. That is the writer's prerogative. When there is a silly point being made we might give a serious reply ... or we might dismiss it with a contemptuous laugh or launch a sustained campaign of

mockery. Once again, the writer's prerogative.

Our opponents will hide, conceal, mask their economism, diplomatic compromising or simply mistaken politics by insisting that criticism of them is nothing but abuse, lies and misrepresentation. After all, the left, the workers' movement in general, is dominated by a dull, complacent, mind-numbing opportunist common sense. We do everything we can to awake, shock, unsettle ... expose the shortcomings, the absurdities, the endless cycle of tried and tested failures. We encourage critical thought and foment open rebellion. We should expect, therefore, all manner of demands for polite language, claims that we are habitual liars, even accusations that we are police agents.

Frankly, we have not the least interest in cosy deals with the forces of opportunism. When we were in the 'official' CPGB, Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Alliance, Respect, Left Unity and the Labour Left Alliance, it was for purposes of war. Not peace. While comrade Wrack snuggled up to John Rees and the SWP, George Galloway and Salma Yaqoob, we fought and fought again.

Understandably, our opponents - the 'official communists', the economists, the reformists, the centrists of all stripes, those in, or close to, the labour and trade union bureaucracy, want to silence us. They plead for 'safe spaces' and a limit, a curb or a ban on impolite, disloyal and disrespectful language: ie, robust criticism. Even under threat of expulsion, even subjected to violent assault, we have never abided by any such restrictions. That, after all, is why *The Leninist* and after it the *Weekly Worker* exist ... we are free to openly speak our mind.

Do comrades Wrack-Potts really think that we would abandon our party responsibilities, our party name, our party programme, our party culture ... for the sake of what? The promise of unprincipled

FCU

political unity with rank opportunists on the existing left. That was never going to happen. On the other hand, principled *organisational* unity based on a solid programme - unity where majorities exercise majority rights, where minorities struggle to become a majority, but, meanwhile, accept majority votes - that is something else. That is indeed what we have argued for. Without such a democratic approach there can be no worthwhile or meaningful communist unity, that is for sure.

Doubtless, after the falling away of RS21 and the *Prometheus* non-talks faction, comrades Wrack and Potts slowly came to the realisation that they would constitute a small minority at a fusion conference. Doubtless too they feared members of TAS being won to take our *Draft programme* as the starting point for section-by-section debate and amendment. Moreover, as a minority they would have to live with majority decisions, when it comes to electing leadership bodies and appointments to responsible positions ... intolerable.

Hence they chose to start an irresponsible squabble about abuse, lies and misrepresentation. Painting themselves innocent victims excuses breaking from FCU talks and saved them from the humiliation of being a minority. But without minorities accepting their position as a minority - albeit with the opportunity to become a majority - we are doomed to go nowhere.

That is why we would urge TAS members to think again.

Programme

Actually we welcomed comrades Wrack-Potts giving themselves some time out. Venturing into the unexplored - for them - realm of drawing up, debating, amending and agreeing a draft *communist* programme could have had positive results. Most of the left shows not the least understanding of the centrality of programme.

Not that I was naive about the prospects. As we have consistently emphasised, the communist programme is no pious wish list or a factional declaration, let alone a hastily written 'motherhood and apple pie' concoction designed to bring about the unity of disparate elements.

Hence, when it comes to our *Draft programme*, we deal with the nature of the historical period, set out key principles, map out the long-term strategic approach and establish the immediate demands needed to organise the working class into a ruling class. A mass Communist Party, we argue, grows out of the programme. Not the other way round.

Comrades Wrack and Potts, had assured us that they now reject Leon Trotsky's 1938 *Transitional programme* and the whole so-called 'transitional method'. Clearly, however, that does not include *all* TAS members. No less to the point, given the two drafts which the comrades have managed to produce, it is clear that their heroic labours have been in vain. Chances are that they will not even serve to maintain the fragile unity of TAS itself.

No aim of forming a mass Communist Party, no accounting for past failures, no account of capitalist development, no account of capitalist decline, no global strategy, no mention of Europe, no mention of America, no concrete immediate demands around hours and working conditions, housing, pensioners, education, youth, crime and prison. No commitment to free speech. No commitment to proportional representation. No commitment to disestablishing the Church of England and secularism.

No commitment to a unicameral popular assembly. Nothing about the specifics of women's oppression. No acknowledgment of gay and trans people. No federal solution, when it comes to the national question in Scotland and Wales and no demand for the reunification of Ireland. No unambiguous call for the abolition of the standing army and the police and their replacement by a people's militia. No perspective of overthrowing the labour and trade union bureaucracy, etc.

Besides that there is a litany of highly dubious formulations - eg, clause 12: "We reject the idea that the authoritarian, undemocratic regimes that existed in the former Soviet Union and similar states, or that exist today in China or North Korea, were, or are, in any way communist or a transition towards real communism. We oppose all forms of dictatorial rule."¹

Did the October 1917 Revolution have nothing to do with real communism? Was the Bolshevik realisation of 'All power to the soviets' undemocratic? Was the Bolshevik decision to rule as a *political minority* after Brest-Litovsk, in the expectation of revolution in Europe, indefensible? Was the founding of the USSR unrelated to the goal of eventually achieving real communism?

In our *Draft programme* we celebrate October 1917 not least for inspiring the formation of parties such as the CPGB. We go on to state that the "October Revolution marked the beginning of the present epoch": the epoch of the "revolutionary transition from capitalism to communism". We explain how the "capitalist class was determined that there should be no more Octobers". How the "asphyxiating isolation" of the workers' state led to the "counterrevolution within the revolution" in the late 1920s and eventually the 1989-91 counterrevolution within the counterrevolution.²

Do we really want to reject the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', as advocated by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels? The Marx-Engels team opposed the dictatorship of kings and tsars, they opposed military dictatorships, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and Bonapartist dictatorships too. They also opposed schemes for an educative dictatorship associated with revolutionaries such as 'Gracchus' Babeuf and Auguste Blanqui. However, they celebrated the Paris Commune as the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. Indeed they unproblematically took the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as a mere synonym for the rule of the working class. They bracketed it with the democratic republic.

Marx and Engels were keen to associate themselves with the achievements of the Commune in implementing *real* democracy. Elections, recallability, limits on official salaries, popular militia, etc. Engels, therefore, attacked the "social democratic, philistine" - ie, rightwing SDP Reichstag deputies - who were "filled with wholesome terror at the phrase: dictatorship of the proletariat".³ They were mortified when Engels published Marx's views on the democratic republic and working class rule. There was an unseemly rush to the safety of constitutional loyalism. The SDP refused point blank to include the demand for the democratic republic in the draft *Erfurt programme*. They feared another anti-socialist state ban.

It was Eduard Bernstein who, following Engels' death, wanted the SDP to distance itself from the terrible phrase: it "is so antiquated", he wrote, "that it is only to be reconciled with reality by stripping

the words 'dictatorship' of its actual meaning and attaching to it some kind of weakened interpretation".⁴ He rejected class dictatorship of any kind and wanted the SDP committed to the parliamentary road to socialism. Naturally too, he counterposed 'democracy' and 'dictatorship'.

Comrades Wrack and Potts write fully in the spirit of Bernstein's revisionism and the social democratic philistine. We, on the other hand, stand fully in the tradition of Marx and Engels. Our *Draft programme* again: "The socialist state, the rule of the working class (or proletarian dictatorship) is needed in the first place to overcome capitalist resistance. Though this can involve draconian measures, it must be emphasised that as the rule of a large majority the socialist state is characterised by the fullest flowering of democracy."⁵

Both comrades Wrack and Potts are trained lawyers. Being exact with words is part of their profession. So we must take it that they mean what they say and say what they mean. It is not sloppiness.

Another example - clause 17: "The working class does all the work. It produces all the goods and provides all the services." The exact same claim is repeated in clause 56: "The working class ... is the class that produces everything and delivers all the services we rely on." And clause 57 too: "Nothing is produced or delivered without the working class doing it."

Do the middle classes, including the petty bourgeoisie, not work? Do they not produce goods and services? So, yes, the worth of what the TAS leadership duo can draft is hardly impressive.

Perhaps the comrades are thoroughly ashamed of their two drafts. They ought to be. Perhaps that explains why they finally decided to throw in the towel when they did. Maybe they could not bear the shame of having to publicly defend such revisionist muddle. Who knows. They certainly do not possess thick skins. So I would expect the charge of revisionism will be added to the list of abuse, lies and misrepresentation. Either way, it is clear that drafting a *worthwhile* communist programme is beyond the capabilities of a couple of lawyers writing in between demanding court cases.

After all, despite having a whole history of active involvement on the left, the leading TAS comrades have no history whatsoever of championing the need for, working towards, let alone drafting a Communist Party programme. So we are dealing with experienced comrades with *no* principled programmatic experience. Put another way, their draft programme has its origins *entirely* in their narrow-minded factional response to our CPGB *Draft programme* within the context of FCU.

French lessons

True, Marx could dictate the whole of the maximum section of the *Programme of the French Workers' Party* almost without stopping to take breath. But he was a genius ... and moreover he had decades of prior programmatic experience dating back to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and the *Programme of the Communist Party in Germany* (1848). More than that, he wrote the general rules and most important declarations, statements and resolutions of the First International.

But, when it came to the *Programme of the French Workers' Party*, there was more to it than the brilliance of Marx and his vast experience. Let us provide a little background.

The left and the workers' movement in France had been slowly reviving in the aftermath of the defeat of the 1871 Paris Commune and this led to the French Workers' Congress of 1879. A hugely significant event in the history of the workers' movement in France, crucially because it voted strongly in favour of the formation of an independent workers' party, along with universal suffrage, women's equality and the necessity of collectivising the means of production.

Understandably, Paul Lafargue and Jules Guesde sought out Marx's help and advice in preparation for national legislative elections in 1881.⁶ Lafargue, of course, was a well-known socialist and through his marriage to Laura Marx was Karl Marx's son-in-law. As for Guesde, though prone to "revolutionary phrase-mongering" (Marx), becoming one of the 'intransigent' opponents of the 'possibilist' reformists, he was certainly the joint author of the minimum section of the programme.

The *Programme of the French Workers' Party* had nothing to do with some lowest-common-denominator unity-mongering. A widespread misconception. On the contrary, the foundation of the French Workers' Party and its *Marxist* programme effectively marked the eclipse of Jacobinism, Blanquism, Bakuninism and Proudhonism - schools of thought which had previously dominated socialism in France. Marxist politics was on the rise and opponents on the left furiously denounced what they instantly branded as the 'London programme'. Why? Because there was an implicit rejection of elitist socialism, putschist socialism and cooperative socialism. The French Workers' Party would use elections and the struggle for democratic and economic reform demands to build a powerful organisation and gain mass influence ... the vital foundations of working class state power.

No less to the point, the minimum section of the *Programme of the French Workers' Party* was a year in preparation ... Marx drew up a 101-point questionnaire for working class readers of Benoît Malon's paper, *La Revue socialiste*, and 25,000 copies of *Enquête Ouvrière* ('Workers' Inquiry') were circulated. It formed the basis for similar initiatives in other countries.⁷ The aim was to find information about the living and working conditions in France that would inform the drafting of demands. Guesde toured the country to organise local and regional groups and found that workers were particularly concerned with greater social and civil rights.

Following the tour, Guesde and Lafargue travelled to London to meet up with Marx and Engels. They got together in the front room of 122 Regent's Park Road. Engels' house. That was in May of 1880 ... and, of course, their draft programme was debated and agreed by the delegates of the November 1880 founding congress of the French Workers' Party meeting in Le Havre.

What comrades Wrack and Potts have produced owes nothing to the approach or the method of the *Programme of the French Workers' Party*. Nor the 1891 Erfurt programme of social democracy in Germany, nor the programme of the Russian Social Democratic Party agreed at the 1903 2nd Congress. Such programmes mapped out a coherent strategy and drew clear lines of demarcation *against* other trends on the left. In Germany it was primarily against the Lassalleans; in Russia, the economists, the revisionists and the Bundists.

In fact, as I feared, comrades Wrack and Potts have done little more than produce a soft-focus, banal, incoherent parody of the maximalism of the Socialist Party of Great Britain's 'What we stand for'.⁸ The TAS duo hate my coming out with any such a description. It is one of those 'bad words' they cite to excuse their break with FCU. Pathetic. The comrades plead that they do not reject reforms *per se* - indeed they don't. Nor for that matter does the SPGB.⁹ No, what we have is bog-standard condemnations of capitalism, combined with the promise that everything will be fine and dandy once we overthrow capitalist rule. Actual demands are, however, either notable by their absence - that or they amount to empty platitudes.

Their whole approach is, yes, motivated by "diplomacy" (Nick Wrack). The attempt to find some middling course acceptable to the existing, non-'official communist', left. That means avoiding sharpness, viewing clarity as a problem and in effect compromising with today's economism, strikism and broad frontism.

Did anyone really expect us to back such an approach? If they did, they know nothing of the CPGB. We will brook no watering down, no trading away of principles, no blurring of differences with opportunism.

No ultimatums

Despite the TAS accusations, we have not issued ultimatums. On the contrary, we have consistently said our *Draft programme* is open to debate and clause-by-clause amendment. But we must be allowed to present it for consideration. True, we have rejected out of hand the proposal that we put our *Draft programme* aside, begin again from scratch and write an entirely new programme, along with TAS and the pro-talks wing of *Prometheus*, over perhaps a month or two. The very suggestion is a giveaway. The comrades have absolutely no experience in writing a *communist* programme.

And why trade in the real thing for a poor imitation? I am reminded of the early 2000s 'Sculptor' advert, where a young Indian man decides to convert his Hindustan Ambassador into a Peugeot 206. To the background beat of the Bhangra Knights playing 'Husan', we see him using a sledgehammer, even an elephant, to reshape the Ambassador. There follows a celebratory drive with friends in the newly formed replica, and admiring looks. But the end result is an obvious joke. We were meant to laugh ... and buy a 206 (Peugeot's supermini, its best selling car of all time and on many occasions an industry prize winner and rally champion).

The communist programme is no joke and should not be treated as one. We need the best we can get. For certain, nothing serious would have come from such a presumably three-way commission (as proposed by the pro-talk faction of *Prometheus*). Anyone who suggests otherwise is simply kidding themselves. Programmes, if they are going to be worthwhile, are based on long preparation, firm principles and clear perspectives. Not diplomatic haggling and trade-offs.

Neither TAS nor the pro-talks *Prometheus* faction has any sort of *consistent* political record (except eclecticism). Leave aside the pre-history of tailing the SWP in the Socialist Alliance and Respect and the semi-anarchist Anti-Capitalist Initiative. Neither of the two organisations have a history of treating the programme question as central.

Where are the critiques of the programmeless SWP, the reformism of the Communist Party of Britain's *British road to socialism*, the Labourism of *Militant: what we stand for*, the economism of the 1938 *Transitional programme* or the maximalism of the SPGB? As I have written before, maybe that work has been done. But, if it has, such work remains a secret 'locked with seven seals'. Not unreasonably, I reckon that such necessary preparatory programmatic work remains undone. Programme for the comrades constitutes an afterthought ... brought about solely by engagement with the CPGB.

By contrast, as an organisation, programme has always been central for our project. We began the *preliminary* process of working towards a *party* programme in the early 1980s by critiquing the 'official communist' Alternative Economic Strategy.¹⁰ James Marshall then dissected the 1978 *BRS* in *The Leninist* No4.¹¹ From these foundations we went on to tackle the Eurocommunists' *Manifesto for new times* and Peter Taaffe's *Militant: what we stand for*.

The 4th conference of the Leninists of the CPGB, meeting in December 1989, agreed to begin the work on drafting a programme in the "form of a proposal to the congress of a reformed CPGB". That preparatory work took book form in 1991 with *Which road?* There were two concluding appendixes. Appendix one, 'The communist programme', dealt with the necessity of a programme and its architecture. Appendix two, 'Outline of a draft programme', sketched out first thoughts and provided the bare bones.

However, having meticulously prepared a draft programme, not least using cell meetings and weekly seminars to draw up and debate every section and every clause, we finalised our *Draft programme* in 1995.

Since then we have done some updating and fine-tuning ... the second edition came off the press in 2011 and the latest - the third - edition, in 2023. Needless to say though, our *Draft programme* was never intended to be some confession of faith for a small

group of communist militants. No, our *Draft programme* was intended from the first to be our submission to a "refoundation congress of the CPGB" - an organisation which, despite its "early limitations and later failures", was "undoubtedly the highest achievement of the workers' movement in Britain".¹²

With this in mind, the idea that CPGB representatives in FCU would, or could, abandon our *Draft programme* was never on. Rightly, if they did anything like that, they would be subject to immediate recall by the next CPGB membership aggregate.

We have no fear of being in a minority. If sufficiently important principles were involved, we would reserve the right to constitute ourselves an open faction in a fused organisation. But we envisage winning a majority through argument and persuasion.

We would insist on every delegate to a unity conference agreeing to be bound by the results. We would insist too on existing *group* discipline being ended, ours included. Consultation, discussion, coordination - yes, but nothing more. So no binding mandates.

With that in mind, we have to rely on persuasion, education and political understanding within our ranks too. We have no wish to sire a Menshevik wing that looks for the middle course of compromise and conciliation. An ever present danger. But we are prepared to risk it. If the present members of the PCC found themselves heading a minority, we would have no intention of walking. As long as proceedings are fully, unambiguously democratic, we will accept, if we must, being a minority ... and fight, perhaps as a public faction, to become a majority.

Our differences

As we have already illustrated, the TAS Wrack-Potts leadership have differences with us over the middle classes. We think that many of them work. We also think that many of them produce useful goods and services such as building repairs, driving taxis, growing food ... providing legal advice and defending us in criminal trials.

The question of the transition from capitalism to communism

is closely related. Is there going to be a relatively long period of working class rule, albeit through a semi-state, over: (1) the tiny class of progressively expropriated capitalists and (2) the not so tiny middle classes? We say 'yes'. This lower phase of communism, which we, following Lenin's *State and revolution*, call socialism, therefore begins, as with the capitalism of more or less what we have today: eg, commodity production, wage labour, money and a market. It ends, however, with the final withering away of classes, the state and the realisation of the 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs' principle of full, or higher, communism.

By the bye, comrades Wrack and Potts make a great song and dance about taking our cue from Lenin. They say he misread Marx. In fact, he simply followed mainstream Second International orthodoxy after Marx's 'Critique of the Gotha programme' was first published in 1891. Social democrats, including Kautsky, Plekhanov, Lenin and Trotsky, "commonly" or "usually called" the first phase of communism "socialism".¹³

We need not get into the extraordinary complexities about how to scientifically characterise Soviet Russia - such a discussion does not belong here. Suffice to say, what matters when it comes to programme is not semantics, but substance. We advocate progressively expropriating the capitalist class. The commanding heights will probably be taken over at a stroke, as one of the first measures. However, not medium and small businesses. There will be strict employment laws, strong trade unions, workplace committees ... but also commodity production and money. That means class struggle from below, but with the huge advantage of working class state power. There will too, surely have to be class struggle from both below and above against any tendencies towards bureaucratic self-serving, even rule.

There will certainly be planning. But even with quantum computers it will not be easy. There will be dangers of malfunction, miscalculation and even breakdown. Perhaps emergency measures will be needed. That will probably be the case while socialism is not yet a world system and a surviving capitalist mode of production exists alongside the emerging communist mode of production. However, in step with the the progress of the world revolution more and more goods and services will be supplied at token or no cost to meet their needs. People would be expected to consume responsibly, they would also be expected to contribute according to their abilities. We need, of course, to change people, as well as ownership and control over the means of production.

For the TAS duo, however, there has to be the immediate nationalisation, socialisation, of all small to medium-sized enterprises: corner newsagents, pubs, fish and chip shops, curry houses, alternative health set-ups, hairdressers, little businesses of every kind. A recipe, in our view, for handing over millions of people to the camp of counterrevolution. So, whereas we would strive to take things forward *voluntarily*, 'as fast as possible, but as slow as necessary', the TAS comrades insist on 'as fast as possible'. Without liquidating the petty bourgeoisie as a class and collectivising all SMEs (small and medium enterprises) workers in that sector will remain exploited, they say. True they will remain exploited, but, with a 'fast as possible' approach, the

danger is that we go down to bloody defeat.

The comrades are oblivious to all such dangers. They write, "wherever the working class comes to power first", it will "be an inspiration" to the "working class of the rest of the world, who will no doubt want to copy that achievement".¹⁴ Coming to power in one country would send out a powerful message. October 1917 inspired workers throughout the world. But the correct communist approach is to stress coordinated, simultaneous revolution. We envisage Europe as our decisive point of departure. That could well mean holding back, if possible, in one country, while others catch up. After all, an *isolated* revolution, not least in Britain, would face chaos and dire poverty ... hardly inspirational.

It is in this context, by the way, that we have raised the spectre of Pol Pot. We do not charge the TAS comrades of *wanting* to emulate the mass murder seen in Kampuchea. That would be unfounded and stupid. No, they have good intentions ... but the road to hell. But we do *warn* that their approach *unintentionally* points towards the horrible outcomes we have witnessed in Stalin's USSR, Mao's China, Kim's North Korea ... and Pol Pot's Kampuchea.

Production is global. We in Britain not only rely on huge imports of food, when it comes to industry (say, the car industry): there is likewise a reliance on imports. An isolated socialism in Britain could, for example, produce cars. But, without German or Japanese engines and gear boxes, TASmobiles would have to be horse-drawn.

On this 'as fast as possible' basis the TAS comrades unwarrantedly charge us with wanting to *limit* the revolution to the immediate programme, to achieving the federal republic: ie, the form we envisage for the rule of the working class. Obvious nonsense, as any objective, unjaundiced reading of our *Draft programme* will show. Here we emphatically state that communism, the realisation of human freedom and full individual and collective development is "what we want to achieve".¹⁵

We look forward to TAS returning to our discussions ●

Notes

1. 'For a communist future', version two.
2. CPGB *Draft programme* London 2025, pp6, 9, 10: communistparty.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Draft-Programme-Post-print-With-Cover-April-2025.pdf
3. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 27, London 1990, p191.
4. E Bernstein *Evolutionary socialism* New York NY 1961, p146.
5. CPGB *Draft programme* London 2025, p47.
6. L Derfler *Paul Lafargue and the founding of French Marxism, 1842-1882* Cambridge MASS 1991, pp184-85.
7. notesfrombelow.org/article/introduction-karl-marx-workers-inquiry.
8. www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/who-we-are.
9. A Buick, *Letters Weekly Worker* June 26 2022.
10. F Grafton 'The road from Thatcherism or the road from Marxism' *The Leninist* No1, Winter 1981-82.
11. J Marshall 'Some thoughts on the British road to socialism' *The Leninist* No4, April 1983.
12. CPGB *Draft programme* London 1995, p6.
13. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 25, Moscow 1977, p475.
14. 'For a communist future', version two.
15. CPGB *Draft programme* London 1995, p48.

Sign up to CPGB news

bit.ly/CPGBbulletin

Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 6 5pm

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

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

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

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

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.

The *Weekly Worker* is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode.en
ISSN 1351-0150.

weekly worker

DSA needs democratic centralism

After Mamdani's victory

We should celebrate the triumph of a DSA member in New York City's Democratic primary, argues **Paul Demarty**. But what this once again poses is the question of party control over representatives

There are many things worth celebrating about Zohran Mamdani's victory in the Democratic primary for the New York City mayoralty.

The most widespread, if also the most trivial, is sheer *Schadenfreude*. Faced with the tantrums of thousands of 'machine Democrats', Maga hysterics and Zionist agents, it would take, as Oscar Wilde said, a man with a heart of stone not to laugh.

As much as it was a victory for the 33-year-old Mamdani - a New York state representative long associated with the Democratic Socialists of America - this was a defeat for Andrew Cuomo, the presumptive nominee until the final days of the campaign. It was a defeat, likewise, for a complacent Democratic elite, who rallied behind the scandal-ridden former state governor, Cuomo; and for the serried ranks of smug centrist pundits, convinced that even the weak-tea redistributive measures on offer from Mamdani are too hair-raisingly radical ever to be swallowed by the American voter. The idea that leftwing candidates can be defeated by turning politics into a contest over loyalty to Israel has been smashed to pieces. (Jeremy Corbyn's strategy of constant capitulation on this point now looks, in retrospect, even more foolish.)

Smart

The reaction to Mamdani's victory, on closer examination, is two-sided. There are the end-of-the-world hysterics, to be sure, but there is also a great deal of quite genuine admiration of the way his campaign overturned apparently insuperable odds. This schizoid attitude is summed up best, perhaps, by the behaviour of Marjorie Taylor Greene - an infamously excitable ultra-Maga congresswoman, who praised Mamdani's 'smart' campaign, while sharing a meme of the Statue of Liberty draped in a burqa. Cuomo, conceding on election night, was gracious and complimentary. Mamdani had run a 'really smart and good and impactful campaign ... Tonight is his night. He deserved it. He won.'

The strange thing is that, if one looks at what all that 'smart' campaigning consisted of, there is nothing particularly original about it. He tapped into existing networks of activists, crucially the DSA (whose largest chapter by far is in NYC), put his shoes on and went out to talk to people. He had a handful of flagship policies, all of which were bread-and-butter stuff (free buses, a limited rent freeze, creating a municipal grocery chain to fight price gouging) and hardly ambitious even by the standards of American social democracy. He stuck to his script, even as the attacks on him got worse, often releasing ads that gently poked fun at his enemies (when, late in the campaign, someone threatened to blow up his car, his office released a deadpan statement to the effect that



Zohran Mamdani: moderate wing

he did not have a car).

Cuomo, bafflingly, did none of these things. He stood for nothing. He was even less to be seen on the campaign trail than Joe Biden last year (who at least had the excuse of being senile). He attempted to make the election about Israel, and failed. He seemed to have no idea what Democratic primary voters cared about, and even less interest in finding out.

Mamdani's personal strengths were of some importance here. He speaks very well - humorous, but not flippant; serious, but not portentous. He seems to have a natural gift for retail politics (which, in the end, is just an ability to look interested in the people talking to you). He is - let's be frank here - young, attractive and looks good in a suit, which contrasts pointedly with the Democratic Party's gerontocracy. Yet he is not some sort of *historic* political genius. The DSA, with its 50,000 to 100,000 members, must surely have a decent supply of such talent somewhere.

The essential feature of his success is the mobilisation that got his name out to millions of New Yorkers, which was possible only because in New York the DSA is capable of acting something like a *party*. Some 50,000 volunteers stumped for him - an extraordinary figure, larger than George Washington's continental army. The effect of such activism is visible in the shape of the vote, especially on the axis of age. In most American elections, older voters turn out in larger numbers than the young. In this Democratic primary, 18-34-year-olds dominated (three times as many 18-24s, the youngest bracket, turned out this time, compared to the last primary in 2021).

Running gauntlet

Can he succeed? Success, I think, would be measurable in this way: he goes on to win the actual mayoral poll; successfully implements his

key policies; avoids the acts of sabotage of his enemies; and wins re-election. This, I think, should be an uncontroversial measuring stick. It could surely be applied to any mayoral candidate of any political persuasion. It is also something of a gauntlet to run.

First, there is the general election. Mamdani will certainly face Republican candidate Curtis Sliwa, founder of the vigilante Guardian Angels gang and noted eccentric (he lives in a one-bedroom apartment with 19 cats!); and incumbent mayor Eric Adams.

Adams is a totally different kettle of fish - an ex-cop elected on a Democratic ticket, but at this point dependent on the patronage of Donald Trump, who is protecting him from prosecution for an enormous series of corruption allegations, centring on his relationship with the Turkish state, in a *quid pro quo* arrangement conditioned on Adams's cooperation with the Trump administration's immigration policy. As a political personality, Adams makes Sliwa look positively straight-laced: he is prone, in his speech, to non-sequiturs and bizarre digressions, rather like his new patron, and he is a serial fabulist. (In spite of everything, he is difficult to truly dislike - a not-particularly-holy fool.) Cuomo is also on the ballot, having already created a cut-out organisation to endorse him, though he may or may not put serious effort in, given the scale of his humiliation in the Democratic primary.

It is to be expected that rival candidates will want to get Mamdani on the defensive, and will hammer him on law-and-order issues. This plays to both Sliwa's and Adams's strengths, at least. Still, Adams is badly damaged by his various scandals and perceived subjection to Trump, and having three such competitors risks splitting the 'throw away the key' vote. All things being equal, Mamdani can probably win.

So can Mayor Zohran then implement his programme? There are good reasons for caution here too. New York has a relatively toothless mayoralty, whose decisions - particularly regarding fundraising - are hostage to the state government. To take one of his proposals: it is perfectly true that free buses are hardly unheard of in great cities, that America's largest bus service (for schools) is free, and even that the policy has already been piloted successfully in New York itself, thanks in part to Mamdani's activism in the state assembly. Yet getting *anything* done depends on the acquiescence in Albany, as we saw recently with governor Kathy Hochul's veto of a congestion charge.

Moreover, Mamdani's profile as a self-styled socialist makes him exceptionally vulnerable here, since the bipartisan political elite has every interest in crushing his mayoralty in the egg. When Britain came off the gold standard in 1931, Sidney Webb, who had been a minister in the previous Labour government, is said to have lamented, 'They never told us we could do that!' But there is a real sense in which Labour could *not* have done that, whereas the national government could. Capital is prepared to take a beating, so long as *its* agents are in charge, and not people of doubtful loyalty.

The possibilities for sabotage are extremely extensive. Trump has already threatened to revoke his citizenship and deport him. Failing that he could withdraw all federal funding from the city if Mamdani wins. He faces powerful lobbies opposed to him from within, including landlords and the police department (the NYPD significantly undermined Adams's predecessor - the liberal, Bill de Blasio - and will not be keen on losing the impunity it enjoys under the ex-cop, Adams).

Silence

Behind all these dangers is a common phenomenon - the capitalist state machine, in its particular American form. It is a reality that the social democratic wing of the DSA, of which Mamdani is a representative, meets with an awkward silence.

Mamdani carefully distanced himself from any slogans related to cutting the NYPD down to size (the brief popularity, after the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, of the slogan, 'Defund the police', has become exhibit A in the centrist-Democrat critique of their leftwing challengers, and 'sensible' politicians are expected to disown it ritually). If his platform is struck down by the state governor, exactly what is he planning to do? What *could* he do? He pitched himself to voters on the basis of a series of apparently common-sensical social reforms, and implicitly on the idea that these are in his gift. Certainly, if *Trump* attempts to crush him, Mamdani could plausibly (and not unfairly) blame the president for spitefully

punishing the residents of his home city, and strike a defiant pose. If it is taken apart by Albany under the influence of lobbyists, or by lawfare, what is his answer?

Marxists insist on the salience of this question of the state precisely because we confront it in situations like this. What the hell business is it of upstate conservatives - never mind the White House! - how much New York City charges for a bus fare? In a sane world - one governed by a functional and thoroughgoing democracy - the issue simply would not arise. It arises today because the state protects the owners of capital, and the owners of capital have an interest in the defeat of socialists *per se*, no matter how modest their concrete political programmes.

Constitution

In America, the state is organised according to the country's famous constitution, which - despite a few bright spots, like strong protection of the right of free speech, compared to other bourgeois states - bears all the signs of being what it is: a document cooked up by colonial elites, including many slaveowners, and designed to dilute the popular will in every way possible. That is the meaning, in the end, of the separation of powers, and also of the proliferation of executive power throughout the political structure (including, of course, the small fact that every city, town and even village has a mayor - a petty Trump with the right to lord it over their little fiefdom).

The two-party system is not explicitly written into the constitution - like good anti-democrats, most of the founders hoped to avoid the need for parties altogether. It is, however, the inevitable result of pervasive 'first past the post' elections, never mind the madness of the electoral college: what naturally 'falls out' of this structure are two 'parties' in the particular form of clique-ridden bureaucracies. The primary system tends to give the bourgeois media the final say on who is and is not an acceptable candidate for office, although the political careers of both Mamdani and Trump demonstrate that this power is not absolute, and at something of a low ebb in the present situation.

I said earlier that decisive in Mamdani's victory was the ability of the DSA to act like a party. It is not yet one for real, however, and it hovers shy of becoming one, preferring to combine local activism with cheerleading for the likes of Bernie Saunders and AOC.

It is incumbent on the serious partyist forces, like our friends in the Marxist Unity Group, to ensure that all elected representatives, not least Mamdani, are made fully accountable. They need to report to the DSA, be directed by the DSA and be recallable by the DSA. To use a phrase, that means democratic centralism in the DSA ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk