

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**There are still those on the left
who take it for granted that the
working class produces everything**

- Letters and debate
- Syria bloodbath
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No 1548 July 24 2025

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**Polls show
yet-to-be-formed
'Corbyn party'
neck and neck
with Labour**

LETTERS



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

Plus one

I think it is Robin Cox who appears (deliberately?) confused and confusing about the necessary conditions for the transition to socialism and communism.

On the question of ‘50% plus one’, I could easily quote from a number of SPGB publications over a good many years, where it is stated this is indeed all that is required to democratically establish socialism. Robin chooses to skate over significant debates within the SPGB over time, where the question of a 50%-plus versus “an overwhelming majority” has indeed been a major source of contention.

As an aside, assuming 50% plus one *did* vote for SPGB candidates and gave them a majority in the House of Commons, what would such a parliamentary majority actually *do*? (Of course, the current electoral system can give parliamentary majorities on much lower percentages). Would it refuse to legislate to formally establish socialism (the SPGB’s parliamentary road) until such an “overwhelming majority” had been formed? Or allow the capitalist minority parties to continue to govern instead? Or would it, as the majority parliamentary party, take office and... do what?

While I would be interested in how the SPGB would approach such a conundrum, it is, of course, complete fantasy - it ain’t going to happen in real life. Has the SPGB never come across Marx’s classic observation that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas of society”? Could this be one of the basic reasons why socialist and communist ideas have really struggled to take hold in anything like a significant part of the working class under advanced capitalism?

Robin plays with words and concepts, when he claims it was bad old Lenin who “invented” a distinction between socialism and communism. No, Marx and Engels clearly saw the need for a period of transition after the working class “has raised itself to the position of ruling class” (*Manifesto of the Communist Party*), then takes radical measures to socialise and transform the means of production and distribution. Marx, of course, famously stated in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*: “Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period, in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat” (DoP).

So Robin’s shock-horror at (a) the concept of the working class becoming *the ruling class* and (b) ruling via a new form of a *state* - the DoP - are clearly contrary to two of the basic concepts of Marxism itself. What Lenin did was to adopt the common terminology and practice and use the word ‘socialism’ to describe the initial phase - ie, immediately after the working class has taken power - and ‘communism’ to describe the fully developed society, where the need for money, the state, etc had all disappeared. Nothing untoward or controversial here.

Robin then accuses me of “misrepresenting Marx’s labour voucher scheme” (I didn’t even mention it!) and then later states the SPGB accepts the need for some

form of rationing in the early stages of socialist society and *disagrees* with Marx’s voucher scheme!

A monetary system in such a stage of socialism would be nothing other than a means of effecting such rationing, rewarding those who work and also ensuring those who can’t work also have access to basic goods and services. Money does not equal capitalism. Money would simply be a common measure of value and a means of exchange and enable people to access the choice of goods and services they need. Or does the SPGB envisage some form of ration card system, where everyone has specific amounts and types of meats, fruit, vegetables, milk, etc?

Robin bizarrely asserts I “am inadvertently advocating a form of capitalism in this transitional phase”. No, I *explicitly* stated I was *not* advocating the continuation of capitalist society and the working class in power would move rapidly to socialise the main means of production and distribution, subject to the democratic planning of society. So in what *possible* sense is the great majority of the working class still subject to “an exploitative, class-based society”?

Robin (and the SPGB) breathtakingly ignores the threat posed by a recently deposed capitalist class and all of its supporters, especially those who had occupied the upper echelons of the state apparatus, who under capitalism had acquired immense wealth, privileges and power. Do Robin and the SPGB *seriously* expect overthrown classes to just ‘accept’ a vote for socialism in the House of Commons and passively *allow* all their vast wealth, privilege and power to simply vanish into thin air? Possible, but hardly likely. In any case, exceptionally foolish to count on it.

The working class state (the dictatorship of the proletariat) would surely, as a minimum, want sufficient force available to at least *deter* the overthrown classes from recalcitrant actions, and, if necessary, to actively prevent or neutralise them.

I knew Robin would quote the Food and Agriculture Organisation comment about “sufficient per capita calorific values being currently produced globally”. The FAO uses this to demonstrate that the world *currently* has the *potential* to ensure people do not go hungry. For the SPGB to think this means we can simply *redistribute* all these *existing* calorific values over eight billion people is ludicrous. A high proportion of those current calorific values are either simply not in a form which are consumable or are geared to the market demands of the richer populations of the ‘advanced’ capitalist countries.

Is the SPGB *really* suggesting the peoples in the ‘advanced’ capitalist countries should as part of worldwide socialism have their own calorific intakes radically reduced to just above subsistence levels? That would be simply incredible and might, at the very least, create some reaction and opposition to socialism itself.

To properly meet the essential needs of those 733 million who the FAO class as “hungry” would require wholesale cultivation and conversion of land where those people actually are for appropriate food crops with the right types of nutritional values. (One of the reasons why so much existing food is wasted is having to transport it over unfeasibly long distances).

This would require *years* of development of the land and of the new crops themselves to achieve full nutritional productivity

and availability. This is *not* an argument *against* such essential measures: simply that we need to be practical and realistic as to what is actually required and the potential timeframes.

I note Robin completely ignored the point about how long full communist consciousness might become widespread in the population: eg, choosing to work for the common good (with no direct material reward or benefit) and people only accessing the goods and services they need on a responsible basis: ie, the essential preconditions for a full communist society.

In my view, such advanced and responsible communist consciousness can only come about after a relatively lengthy period in which socially useful goods and services have been produced in relative abundance for some time and people have complete confidence that this is indeed the stable society of the future.

I do believe in the inherent goodness of human beings and the positivity of human nature, but we have to recognise hundreds of years of capitalist and thousands of years of class-divided society have caused negative ideas, values and behaviours to be deeply ingrained into the mass of people. Indeed they are often necessary to survive in modern society. The notion these would magically disappear immediately after the SPGB won a general election is utter fantasy. It may only be generations born and brought up under conditions of full socialism - ie, full material abundance - who may acquire the consciousness required for a genuinely full communist society.

Bluntly, if you aren’t serious about the concept of a transition *out of* capitalism, or the concrete tasks

which need to be completed to *effect that transition*, you are not serious about *breaking with* capitalism, and not serious about achieving socialism and communism.

Andrew Northall
email

Reformists and us

Jim Nelson says: “What is needed? The end of capitalism. How can this be done? By the efforts of the organised working class. How can the working class be organised? By the building of a mass Communist Party” (July 10).

Likewise Martin Greenfield argues that “Classical Marxism and a genuine communist programme does offer a framework and strategy for addressing the immediate concerns of the working class and connecting this to the battle for working class state power ... winning the working class to an understanding it needs its own party to take state power. Only a Marxist programme offers that possibility.”

Both Nelson and Greenfield suffer from the same problem: they completely ignore the situation as it is in Britain and Europe.

Greenfield recalls the “Great Miners’ Strike”, but forgets to mention that it is 40 years now since that strike. In that time the working class has been at an all-time low. There hasn’t been a single strike that has challenged state power or anything like it. Why? Because the organised working class has become atomised: the big battalions, such as the miners and dockers, have disappeared. The working class itself has moved to the right and is more likely to support Reform UK than the left. That is one of the lessons of the Brexit vote, on which the CPGB took an abstentionist position on the most ludicrous of bases.

Of course, you can construct a Marxist programme. The problem is getting any workers to take it up. Union organisation has disintegrated and the unions are predominantly in the hands of the right, who abjure anything approaching a confrontation with the state. Workers in service industries, such as hotels and catering, have been unable to achieve and maintain even a basic level of union organisation.

These are real problems which aren’t wished away by the incantation of magic words like “Marxist programme”. Marxists start from where we are, not where we would like to be. The political pendulum has swung to the right in society, which is why we have Reform, not the left, challenging for power. The question is how we move that pendulum back again.

It is noticeable that, no sooner had Zara Sultana announced her resignation and her determination to lead a new party with Jeremy Corbyn, that the party, which isn’t even in existence, registered 10% in the polls - climbing to 15% now, on a level with Starmer’s Labour Party. Of course, you can dismiss this as irrelevant and concentrate on allying with a handful of socialists in Talking About Socialism, RS21 and Prometheus. Good luck to you, but you will be utterly irrelevant to that change in society that you talk about.

At the moment the CPGB is content to sit on the sidelines, with articles from Carla Roberts taking pot shots at Collective and others rather than having anything substantive to say. It is clear that Corbyn’s response to Sultana is lukewarm. He would prefer not to form a left party, but instead engage in his favourite pastime of making speeches to demonstrations and parliament.

Jim Nelson counterposes moving

Critical Marxist thinker

Virginia (Ginny) MacFadyen, 1943-2025

Born Virginia Daum in New York, Ginny MacFadyen was from an early age involved in socialist politics. Her father, Martin Daum, had been a soap-box orator in defence of the anarchists, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, at their trial for murder in the late 1920s. Martin and Esther Daum lived in Moscow for several years in the 1930s. They believed they were “building socialism”, but left the USSR when Stalin’s purges started targeting foreign communists.

At the age of 13, Virginia participated in sit-ins at lunch counters in New York. This was in solidarity with young black people in the segregated southern states. She was later active in the civil rights movement, being for a time secretary to civil rights leader Bayard Rustin. Virginia’s marriage to Gavin MacFadyen, a leading civil rights activist, was conducted by the socialist and civil rights campaigner, AJ Muste. He was a qualified pastor, but agreed to perform their marriage ceremony with no reference to god! Virginia and Gavin had one son, Michael.

Virginia was a member of the Independent Socialist Club, founded by comrades who had broken with Max Shachtman’s Independent Socialist League when Shachtman supported the US invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. The leaders of the Independent Socialist Club were Hal Draper and Sy Landy.

When she and Gavin moved to London, Virginia became a member of the International Socialists (which later became the Socialist Workers Party). When in 2003 Gavin, along with others, founded the Centre for Investigative Journalism, Virginia gave active assistance to the campaign, which is still carrying out effective work.

In later life Virginia continued to be a committed socialist. She attended demonstrations in London against austerity and in support of Palestine. She embarked on a detailed study of the economics of slavery, and its role in the cotton industry, carrying out research at the British Library and making sure she was up to date with all new publications on the topic. She also maintained an interest in cinema and would seek out new films to see with her friends, often offering insightful critical comments.

Virginia was always interested in Marxist study. She attended many talks and meetings by Marxist theorists. She was part of a study group on the works of Kan’ichi Kuroda, leading theorist of the Japan Revolutionary Communist League, and over several years contributed to a joint message by Marxists in Britain to the annual Anti-War Assembly co-organised by the JRCL. Virginia attended a *Capital* Reading Group that a few of us organised in Peckham, south London, and later *Capital* Reading Groups led by

Alfredo Saad Filho and Andrew Higginbottom.

In her last years Virginia found it easier to attend events online and often discussed politics with friends by phone. She attended the CPGB Online Communist Forum webinars and often the Why Marx? education lectures. Virginia continued despite her advanced years to attend the meetings on Zoom for the discussions on *Capital* organised by Andy Higginbottom, which were attended by comrades from India, Sri Lanka and Taiwan, and produced lively debates.

Virginia was always critical of what she saw as a tendency by leftwing groups to have simplistic interpretations of current affairs. On Ukraine, she felt that the fighting could not be considered as a proxy war between the USA and Russia, and she criticised those on the left who presented it as such; and regretted the lack of coverage in leftwing papers of the socialist and working class movements inside Ukraine. Likewise with Syria, where she felt that some left groups wrongly defended president Bashar al-Assad with little mention of the independent socialist groups there.

We have lost a critical Marxist thinker and good friend, and a much-loved mother and sister. Our thoughts are especially with Michael.

Pam Blakelock, Walter Daum
and Jim Smith

forward to regaining what we had. But resisting the current repression, the banning of organisations and the attack on free speech is part and parcel of moving forward. There are many other things we can do. Marxists and reformists co-existing inside a new party may be an uncomfortable experience for many. The capitalist system won't collapse by obtaining representation in parliament, but a strategy of doing nothing other than talking to the fragments of the left won't achieve anything either.

We have a mass movement in this country over Palestine, which is quickly learning the nature of the British state, as have past movements such as Black Lives Matter. If the working class is to be re-energised and politicised, then we have to bring all those activists and those who detest this system together.

Instead the CPGB concentrates on endless debates about dead Bolsheviks, whose revolution occurred in a society that barely resembles present-day capitalism, where the working class was in a small minority amongst a sea of peasants.

Marx and Engels described the working class as the gravediggers of capitalism, but to date that hasn't worked out. The question is why?

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

From scrap to state

Lenin transplants the state into the first phase of communist society as follows: "In its first phase ... communism *cannot* as yet be fully mature economically and entirely free from traditions or vestiges of capitalism. Hence the interesting phenomenon that communism in its first phase retains 'the narrow horizon of *bourgeois* law'. Of course, bourgeois law in regard to the distribution of *consumer* goods inevitably presupposes the existence of the *bourgeois state*, for law is nothing without an apparatus capable of *enforcing* the observance of the rules of law. It follows that under communism there remains for a time not only bourgeois law, but even the bourgeois state, without the bourgeoisie! ... And Marx did not arbitrarily insert a scrap of 'bourgeois' law into communism" (*State and revolution* 1917).

Let us analyse this line of reasoning step by step:

1. In the first phase of communist society, there exists "bourgeois law in regard to the distribution of *consumer* goods."
2. The existence of bourgeois law "inevitably presupposes the existence of the *bourgeois state*".
3. Why does the existence of bourgeois law in the first phase of communist society presuppose the existence of the bourgeois state?
4. Because law, in itself, has no power of enforcement, there must be "an apparatus capable of *enforcing* the observance of the rules of law".
5. Conclusion: according to Lenin, in the first phase of communist society, there exists a "bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie" - as a coercive apparatus!

A fascinating kind of logic: a truly inspired transition - from distributing consumer goods to requiring a coercive apparatus!

Lenin's assertion that "law is nothing without an apparatus capable of *enforcing* the observance of the rules of law" holds true within the framework of existing class society. In such societies, law cannot function without the coercive backing of the state apparatus. However, Lenin extends this proposition beyond its proper context, applying it to the first phase of communist society - a

phase which, by definition, is meant to be free of class, the state and domination.

The existence of the state signals that people remain subject to alien social relations. Where the state exists, society is fragmented and divided into classes; the direct producers are not freely associated - that is, they are not united in a communal form.

The rules laid down by law serve to reinforce the domination of the commodity, value, money and capital. The state - explicitly defined as "an apparatus capable of *enforcing* the observance of the rules of law" - is an institution of domination and, as such, has no place in any phase of communist society.

To justify his invention of a "bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie", which he transplants into the first phase of communist society, Lenin distorts Marx as follows: "Marx did not arbitrarily insert a scrap of 'bourgeois' law into communism." Yet in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx never uses the term "bourgeois law" in his analysis of communist society. He refers only to "bourgeois right".

Bourgeois law is a superstructural institution that arises from capitalist relations and is backed by the coercive power of the state. Bourgeois right, by contrast, refers to a norm of equal entitlement that conceals real inequality. As a normative principle, bourgeois right does not, in itself, imply the existence of law as an institutionalised form of domination, nor of a state apparatus to enforce it.

Lenin first substituted "bourgeois law" for Marx's concept of bourgeois right, then leapt from this mere "scrap of bourgeois law" to the state itself - thereby transplanting a *bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie* into the first phase of communist society. Through this manoeuvre - which imports an instrument of domination from the existing world into the communist future - Lenin fundamentally distorts Marx's theory.

Let us now take a closer look at what Marx means by "bourgeois right". According to Marx, in the first phase of communist society, the distribution of means of consumption among able-bodied individuals will be determined by their labour contribution, because communal productivity will not yet have reached a level sufficient for distribution based on individual needs.

In this phase, each individual producer contributes *social labour* to society in a specific form. After deductions are made for social funds, the producer receives an equivalent amount of *social labour* in another form - namely, as means of consumption: "Hence, *equal right* here is still in principle - *bourgeois right* ... The right of the producers is *proportional* to the labour they supply; the equality consists in the fact that measurement is made with an *equal standard*, labour" (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*).

In the first phase of communist society, the right of producers to access means of consumption is equal, insofar as a uniform standard is applied to all: the labour-time each contributes to the collective social workday. The application of a uniform standard to all - that is, equal rights - remains, in principle, a *bourgeois right*. By this, Marx refers to a form of equality that, by its very nature, entails inequality, as will be elaborated below.

In pre-capitalist societies, where relations of personal dependency prevailed, slaves and serfs were directly dependent on property

owners. The state formally recognised these personal relations of dependence, thereby legitimising inequality among individuals. In bourgeois society, by contrast, personal dependency is replaced by objective forms of dependence: individuals are no longer directly dependent on one another. In the eyes of the law, however, everyone is considered equal.

Bourgeois society is one in which commodity exchange becomes generalised, permeating every aspect of life. In principle, commodities of equal value are exchanged. The spread of commodity exchange fosters a nominal equality among isolated individuals, who relate to one another through commodities.

However, in bourgeois society, legal equality among individuals does not translate into real equality. Bourgeois law establishes a purely formal and nominal equality, while in reality individuals remain unequal in their ownership of the means of production.

For the first time in history, bourgeois society established the nominal equality of individuals despite their actual class inequality. This gave rise to the concept of bourgeois right - an equality that, by its very nature, entails inequality. In the first phase of communist society, the inequality inherent in bourgeois right does not arise from *class divisions*, as it does under capitalism, but from *the differing productive capacities and consumption needs of individual communal members*.

In this context, the right of communal individuals capable of work to receive a share of the means of consumption proportional to their labour contribution gives rise to inequality. Those who are able to work longer hours are entitled to receive more. While class inequality no longer exists, individual inequality emerges from differing levels of entitlement. And, even where entitlements are equal, inequality persists due to the varying needs of individuals.

Faced with the persistence of inequality among communal members in the first phase of communist society, some are quick to jump to a foolish conclusion: that commodity relations, value, money and markets must therefore remain in operation - and that the law of value must continue to govern social production.

This is not merely a mistake: it reflects a fundamental confusion. It collapses two entirely different kinds of inequality into one. The variation in productive capacity and consumption needs among communal individuals has nothing in common with the entrenched social inequalities produced by the exploitative, dehumanising relations of capitalist society.

While individuals in capitalist society are indeed unequal in their productive capacities and consumption needs, the capitalist relations embodied in the law of value do not arise from these individual differences. Instead, they are rooted in the fractured structure of society itself and in the alienation of labour that defines the capitalist mode of production.

Inequality in capitalist society arises primarily from the social inequalities created by individuals' alienated activity. A socialist or communist revolution cannot eliminate individual differences in productive capacities and needs - but it will abolish alienated labour and the social inequalities it generates.

Yusuf Zamir
Union of Turkish Progressives

ACTION

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.

Big Ride for Palestine

Cycling events in seven cities. The Big Ride combines cycling with practical solidarity and raising awareness of the Palestine genocide. **July 26:** Bristol; **August 2:** Birmingham and Manchester; **August 9:** London and Sheffield; **August 16:** Newcastle. Organised by The Big Ride for Palestine: www.thebigride4palestine.com/big-ride-2025.

Stop the far right in Epping

Sunday July 27, 4pm: Counter-protest, venue to be confirmed. Stop the far-right attacks on refugees housed in The Bell Hotel, Epping CM16. Fascist Tommy Robinson will be present, inciting racists and fascists to rampage again against the refugees. Organised by Stand up to Racism: www.facebook.com/StandUTR.

Trump, imperialism and the Middle East

National speaking tour with holocaust survivor Stephen Kapos and other prominent anti-war activists. **Tuesday July 29, 7pm:** Main Hall, 112 Deepdale Road, Preston PR1. **Wednesday July 30, 6.30pm:** Casa Bar, 29 Hope Street, Liverpool L1. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Defend the right to protest

Thursday July 31, 9am: Protest outside Westminster Magistrates Court, 181 Marylebone Road, London NW1. Stand in solidarity with Stop the War chair Alex Kenny and CND general secretary Sophie Bolt. Both face charges following the peaceful Palestine protest on January 18. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Imperialisms old and new - a world of war

Thursday July 31, 7pm: Public meeting, Hopes and Beams, Broad Street, Crewe CW1. Speaker: Chris Nineham. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

The racist pogrom - one year on

Sunday August 3, 7pm: Public meeting, Middlesbrough Methodist Hub, 54 Borough Road, Middlesbrough TS1. Marking a year since the racist and Islamophobic pogrom in Middlesbrough. To share experiences and discuss how to build the movement to counter the far right. Organised by Stand Up to Racism Teesside: www.facebook.com/events/600642592759467.

What is communicated by fiction?

Thursday August 21, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Oxford Town Hall, St Aldate's, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc/status/1945206657723625806.

Glasgow Living Rent manifesto

Saturday August 30, 10am: Open meeting, Ibrox Parish Church, 65 Clifford Street, Glasgow G51. Discuss renters' demands ahead of the 2026 Holyrood elections. Topics include more and better social housing and more affordability and quality in the private sector. Organised by Living Rent: www.livingrent.org/open_meeting_on_living_rent_manifesto_glasgow.

Resist the world's worst arms fair

September 1 to 12: 12 days of protest outside the DSEI arms fair, Excel Exhibition Centre, Western Gateway, London E16. Business is booming for the arms industry. Thousands of exhibitors will be dealing in equipment to cause untold death and destruction. Join the discussions, training and actions - themed events every day. Organised by Stop the Arms Fair: caat.org.uk/events/stopdsei2025.

Stand up for choice

Saturday September 6, 2pm: Counter-protest. Assemble at the Millicent Fawcett statue, Parliament Square, London SW1. Oppose anti-abortion groups and stand up for the right to choose. Organised by Abortion Rights: www.facebook.com/Abortionrightsuk.

Remember Burston Strike School

Sunday September 7, 10.30am to 4pm: Rally, Diss Road, Burston, Norfolk IP22. Commemorate the longest strike in history. Free entry. Organised by Unite the Union and the TUC: burstonstrikeschool.wordpress.com/2025-rally.

Lobby the TUC

Sunday September 7, 1pm: TUC rally, Old Ship Hotel, 32-38 Kings Road, Brighton BN1. Urge the TUC to call a national demonstration against Starmer's cuts. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/ShopStewardsNetwork.

Wigan Diggers festival

Saturday September 13, 11.15am to 9.30pm: Open-air, free festival, The Wiend, Wigan WN1. Commemorating Gerard Winstanley and the 17th century Diggers movement with music and political stalls. Organised by Wigan Diggers Festival: www.facebook.com/events/1178446303737306.

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.

LEFT

In for the long haul

Polls showing the yet-to-be-formed 'Corbyn party' neck and neck with Labour have caused great excitement. But we must squarely face the obstacles confronting the working class, argues **Paul Demarty**

Though its long gestation has been troubled, there are some positive signs for the putative Labour Party breakaway to be led by Jeremy Corbyn.

Opinion polls, for a start, have been generally favourable, with the 'Jeremy Corbyn Party' - as pollsters are calling it - tending to grab double-figure vote shares. One poll even had it level-pegging with the rump Labour Party, though even this would seem to play out rather as Reform UK's high vote did in 2024 - rather than delivering a large contingent of 'JCP' MPs, it would gobble up Labour votes to ensure a drubbing for Sir Keir Starmer and friends.

This reflects something quite obvious, which is that the government is deeply unpopular, including among its own voters. The latter are spinning off in many directions - some to the right and the beckoning embrace of Reform, others to the Greens and Liberal Democrats, and a healthy share to the hoped-for JCP. So far as a grand plan seems to exist among Starmer's circle, it is to set up a direct contest between Labour and Reform, such that these voters will return, no matter what assaults Labour conducts on the welfare state, and no matter how deep its complicity with the Gaza genocide. In the meantime, as off-year polls and by-elections roll around, it is a good time to be a third party.

The general excitement on the left about this project is thus understandable, and to the above we could add the overall sense that something, finally, is *moving*. That said, there is a need for a reality check here. We should consider, first of all, the fate of various previous splits, to the left and right, from the Labour Party.

History

The first illustration would be the Independent Labour Party, which broke away from Labour in 1932. Having done so, it never again returned more than a handful of MPs, though it continued to stand on its own ticket as late as the 1960s. Eventually, it was renamed 'Independent Labour Publications', and under that name continued for a time as a ginger group back inside the Labour fold.

The ILP was no mere fringe organisation. It was formed in 1893, out of seriously embedded local organisations, especially in London and Scotland. It could fairly be credited - if that is the word - with the foundation of the Labour Party itself, being the principal political force dedicated to the overthrow of the 'Lib-Lab' politics that preceded it, in which working class and trade union candidates would typically stand as Liberals. It had some tens of thousands of members on its own account, and, along with the Fabians and later communist sympathisers, constituted one of the main intellectual currents in Labour: staunchly socialist, pacifist and Marxist-influenced. Yet its split with Labour, under the very severe provocation of Labour's austerity government in the depths of the great depression, inflicted a slow but mortal wound.

By the time the ILP departed in 1932, there had already been the split to the right, named National Labour - those Labour MPs who joined the national government, led by former ILP leader and serving prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald.



Labour Representation Committee leaders, 1906. Left to right: Arthur Henderson, GN Barnes, Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden, Will Crooks, Keir Hardie, John Hodge, James O'Grady and David Shackleton

National Labour never even bothered founding itself as a party, but stood candidates in the 1935 election, its returns dropping from 20 to eight. With the outbreak of World War II, elections were delayed, and by the time of the 1945 election, the rump of National Labour saw the writing on the wall, and wound up.

We can now fast-forward to the early 1980s, when there was a real upsurge on the Labour left around the technocrat-turned-socialist icon, Tony Benn. This greatly disturbed MPs on the right of the party. Soft-left compromise candidate Michael Foot had been elected leader, with rightwing warhorse Denis Healey as his deputy. Benn opened a challenge to Healey's position, forcing an election in 1981. Healey's high-handedness with some of his 'natural' supporters led four current and former MPs - David Owen, Roy Jenkins, Shirley Williams and Bill Rodgers - to break away to form the Social Democratic Party.

The SDP had considerable success in its early days. It polled highly, and gained the support of a certain constituency - especially of salaried professionals, alarmed alike by the new-right extremism of Thatcher and the autarkic-pacifist leftism of the Bennites. It secured the defections of dozens of Labour MPs (and one Tory).

The people behind the SDP were no fools, and knew that agreements with other parties would be essential to securing electoral success. So the SDP formed an alliance with the Liberals, not too long after this great historic party had returned parliamentary fractions famously small enough to fit in a London taxi. The SDP bubble effectively burst at this moment, and the rationale of the party was radically diminished after Neil Kinnock took over the Labour leadership and began a rightward ratchet in its politics that would be all but uninterrupted until the 2010s.

The end result was the Liberal Democrats, and in a sense this is some kind of success story: the Lib Dems enjoyed greater success than either of its component parts had done for

some time. Yet there was little enough distinctively 'SDP' about the fused party; it was a larger, rejuvenated Liberal party with its remaining connection to the heritage of the labour movement all but severed. There remains a rump SDP today - David Owen took a small remnant to form it - and its politics have lately galloped dramatically to the socially conservative right, without any obvious success following on from this shift.

We could finally mention the leftwing splits from Labour in the Tony Blair years - first of all, the Socialist Labour Party formed by Arthur Scargill. For all Scargill's credibility gained during the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85, this organisation never achieved more than trivial election returns and certainly never returned an MP to parliament. The Respect coalition, formed by George Galloway with the Socialist Workers Party after he was expelled from Labour, at least succeeded in electing Galloway in Bethnal Green and Bow in 2005, and again in Bradford in 2012, along with clutches of councillors in London and Birmingham. Yet it slowly dissolved under the pressure of fallings-out between its major players and never succeeded in truly breaking the mould of British politics, as all these breakaways intended.

If we ask *why* this should be such a litany of failure, we arrive first of all at the practical matter of this country's electoral system, which exerts brutal punishment on smaller parties. When the Tories warned the Reform-curious last year that big votes for Nigel Farage's party would result merely in a larger Labour majority, they were proven spectacularly correct by events. The SDP recognised this early, and therefore was able to funnel its energies in effect into creating a larger, more effective Liberal Party.

Unsurprisingly, many enthused by the Corbyn project are already talking about stand-down agreements with the Greens. If we take the objective merely to be to maximise electoral returns in 2029, that is a quite sensible idea. Yet the SDP is something of a

cautionary tale here. The result, in the end, of the stand-down agreement with the Liberals was - as we have said - effectively to create a larger Liberal Party. The *distinctive* SDP political brand - something with clear historical connections to the labour movement - more or less disappeared.

That is not to be wondered at, since *Labour's* connection, despite its total political subordination to capital, survives because it is based on a social reality, not a mere idea: the link that *really* exists to wider organisations of that movement - primarily the trade unions, but also the cooperatives. The SDP took dozens of MPs from Foot, but no significant contingents of this wider movement. For all the wishful thinking going on in relation to Unite, there is no serious chance of Corbyn and co doing any better. The bureaucratic leadership of the unions prefers to be inside the tent, pissing out. It wants a link to the government, not a heroic stand in opposition. Indeed, unions like Unite and the GMB prefer to support the warfare state in the name of their members' jobs, and in the past consistently acted to blunt Corbyn's instinctive pacifism during his Labour leadership.

Obstacles

So there are two major obstacles to the short-term success of any Corbyn party - or indeed any other breakaway of whatever type. The first is the constitutional machinery of British politics as such, which is precisely designed to protect the ship of state from any insurgent challengers. There is the 'first past the post' electoral system, but we could also mention the regulatory functions of the monarchy and judiciary, and many other things besides. The second is that the labour movement is under the control of a conservative, bureaucratic caste (and this caste is discreetly *supported* by the machinery of the state).

It follows that the immediate tasks of a serious, insurgent left political force are to *delegitimise* that constitutional regime, and to prise control of the labour movement from that bureaucratic caste. A handful

of parliamentary seats *may* follow, and if they do, are to be welcomed and exploited for all they are worth, to wreak merry havoc in the enemy camp. (The only thing worse than parliamentary cretinism is *anti-parliamentary* cretinism.) Yet that is not the major point, because the obstacles to our success are not purely contingent accidents, but immediately have to do with the very mechanisms by which the bourgeoisie rules.

For an insurgent left political force to do any such thing, however, imposes certain limits on its *political* character. It cannot, in short, take up the politics of Corbynism, as it existed between 2015 and 2019, which amounted to an attempt to deliver a Labour government on a social democratic manifesto *within* the existing constitutional set-up, and with the *support* of the labour bureaucracy. To acknowledge the reality of the obstacles to power is immediately to adopt revolutionary rather than reformist (we should say, more precisely, constitutional-loyalist) politics. Whether what emerges from the interminable game of chicken that is the 'Jeremy Corbyn Party' formation process is a loose network of local campaigns or a centralised party is immaterial here, except inasmuch as only a centralised party *could* have the required political character.

So even leftwing interventions in the JCP debate have their blind spots. Max Shanly has made a few waves with his intervention on the pro-party side, but envisages his party organising "socialists/anti-capitalists of all stripes - both reformists and revolutionaries".¹ Yet the historical record here is clear - wherever revolutionaries achieve victory in struggles in such parties, the result is the split of the reformists. This is no surprise, since the political character of reformism consists precisely in its subordination to the existing constitution and the labour bureaucracy.

Ironically, it is the *right* which has had more 'revolutionary elan' in recent years, according to my definition (obviously it is not the labour bureaucracy that is relevant here, but the traditional hierarchy of conservative politics). Reform UK has succeeded precisely because it is able to cast today's Britain as a "foreign land", to quote William Hague many years ago - the 'yookay', as they call it. There is a contradiction here: Reform proposes tearing up the status quo essentially in the name of a more profound, esoteric status quo underlying it - in this respect similar to those traditionalist Catholics who have spent several years denouncing the pope in the name of papal supremacy. Yet the success of the radical right nonetheless demonstrates the need for opponents of the status quo to be all in.

In short, the party we need is not some gimmicky attempt to sneak into the corridors of power, but one capable of a real assault on the basic centres of political power - in short, a *communist* party. Our attitude to the Corbyn party - should it ever exist - must be based on this perspective.

Our politics is based on the fact that we must be in it for the long haul ●

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Notes

1. medium.com/@maxshanly/building-from-below-2f9a47fe5ce6.

MIDDLE EAST

Fragmenting Syria

Israel's intervention in Syria to protect the Druze minority is part of an ambitious geostrategic plan to redraw borders and extend its influence to the Euphrates and into Iraq, says **Yassamine Mather**

We have witnessed a deadly resurgence of violence in southern Syria, particularly in the Druze-majority province of Suwayda. With over 1,000 killed and more than 128,000 displaced within weeks, the conflict highlights the region's volatile geopolitics, involving Israel, Turkey, Kurdish actors and a weakened Syrian government.

Historically autonomous and politically cautious, Syria's Druze community remained relatively insulated throughout the Syrian civil war. However, in July 2025, tensions erupted between local Druze militias and Sunni Bedouin groups. The Damascus government responded with a heavy-handed crackdown, prompting allegations of indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary detentions and human rights abuses. Far from restoring order, the intervention has alienated Druze communities, intensifying demands for protection and autonomy.

Israel responded by launching airstrikes on Syrian military targets near Suwayda city. Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed these were 'humanitarian interventions' to protect the Druze, while, of course, critics, including within the US administration, condemned them as destabilising and opportunistic.

The attacks coincided with mounting speculation around Israel's proposed David's Corridor - not infrastructure, like China's Belt and Road project, more a military route and a joining together of potential, regional proxies such as the Kurds and Druze. This 'peripheral alliance' strategy would extend Israel's influence from its newly acquired Golan buffer zone through to Suwayda in the south and all the way to the Euphrates and the Kurdish-held regions in north-east Syria. Something, if it were achieved, which would facilitate intervention in Iraq's already fractious politics. Israeli advocates frame the corridor as protection for minorities and enhanced security logistics. In reality it is a blueprint for a Greater Israel and permanently fragmenting Syria. Note, the non-binding Knesset 71:13 vote to annex the West Bank. Gaza will, of course, be next.

Turkey has positioned itself as both mediator and antagonist. Ankara facilitated a temporary ceasefire after Israeli strikes on Damascus and held talks with Druze leaders. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, however, denounced Israel's actions as expansionist, warning that any corridor strengthening Kurdish autonomy near Turkey's southern border would be unacceptable. Turkey's stance reflects its broader regional strategy: to block Kurdish independence, assert regional leadership and limit both Israeli and Iranian influence.

There is little mention of the other party to this conflict: Syria's Bedouins. They are traditionally nomadic or semi-nomadic Arab tribes, primarily inhabiting the steppe and desert regions (Badia) of central and southern Syria, including areas around Homs, Hama, Palmyra and extending towards the Jordanian and Iraqi borders. Organised into powerful, kinship-based tribes (eg, Fadl, Hadidiyin, Bani Khaled, Mawali), they are led by sheikhs. Historically they rely on herding



Al-Sharaa atop Mount Qasioun, overlooking the fall of Damascus

(camels, sheep, goats) and seasonal migration; for pasture and water. However, many have settled due to urbanisation, drought and state policies, though tribal identity remains strong. Culturally, they emphasise values like hospitality, courage, tribal honour and independence. They adhere to Sunni Islam and have historically acted as guides, transporters and sometimes military auxiliaries due to their desert expertise, playing complex roles in modern Syrian politics and the ongoing conflict.

Competition

Conflict between Bedouin tribes and the Druze occurred primarily in the 19th and early-to-mid 20th centuries, driven by several factors. Land and water were at the core though: Bedouins needed seasonal grazing lands and water sources on the plains and foothills surrounding Jabal al-Druze, the Druze mountain. Meanwhile Druze farmers needed the self-same water sources, plains and foothills for settled agriculture (wheat, olive groves, orchids, etc).

Bedouin pastoralism (especially during droughts) sometimes involved grazing on Druze lands or raiding villages for supplies - viewed by Druze as theft and trespassing, and leading to armed defence and retaliation.

During the Ottoman era, the authorities often played groups off against each other, sometimes employing Bedouin tribes (like the Fadl) to assert control or collect taxes from the independent Druze tribes. This turned Bedouins into instruments of state pressure against the Druze, who guarded their mountain autonomy jealously. Powerful Bedouin confederations controlling surrounding plains were seen as a threat to this autonomy, as well as barriers to trade routes. Ambitious tribal sheikhs and Druze leaders sometimes sought to expand influence or settle scores through warfare.

Historically, cycles of raiding and retaliation have created deep-seated mistrust and vendettas, which flared up over minor incidents. Key historical clashes include numerous 19th century clashes, often involving major Bedouin confederations (like the Fadl under Sheikh Diab) and Druze forces defending their periphery. The Battle of al-Kafr (1910) was a major, bloody engagement, where Druze forces decisively defeated a large Bedouin (Fadl tribe) army attempting to penetrate Jabal al-Druze, significantly curtailing Bedouin influence in core Druze areas for decades.

During the French mandate (1920-46), both groups participated in revolts (eg, the 'Great Syrian Revolt', 1925-27), but tensions and occasional clashes persisted, sometimes manipulated by French 'divide and rule' tactics. Post-independence tensions decreased significantly under the centralising Ba'athist state (from 1963), which suppressed tribal/sectarian autonomy, disarmed populations, imposed authority and implemented economic changes reducing direct competition.

However, severe droughts before and during the Syrian civil war increased competition for scarce water and grazing. While drawn into different sides of the conflict, direct, sustained Bedouin-Druze fighting was not a major feature until 2025, with the Druze focused on defending their heartland and Bedouins involved across central/eastern Syria.

The transitional Syrian government under president Ahmed al-Sharaa, nominally supported by both the US and Russia, is clearly part of the problem due to its own connections with Jihadi groups and inability to control sectarian violence in the south. Suwayda now represents a flash point for different visions of Syria's future: centralised governance versus autonomy; national unity versus ethnic fragmentation. The fate of the Druze community may become a bellwether for whether Syria descends further into partition or finds a path to inclusive political resolution.

Much has been written about Druze leader Hikmat al-Hijri and his role. Born in 1965 in Venezuela to a Druze religious family, al-Hijri returned to Syria for religious training, eventually assuming spiritual leadership over Syria's Druze. Raised conservatively, he became the 'Sheikh al-Aql' (the community's highest authority) in 2012. Like many clerics under the Ba'ath regime, al-Hijri initially avoided overt politics, focusing on spiritual and social affairs. However, escalating violence in Syria, including Islamic State attacks on Suwayda, gradually drew him into national debates.

He began openly criticising the Assad regime's failure to defend Druze areas and he advocated autonomy in Suwayda. He rejected forced conscription of Druze men into Assad's army (causing significant losses) and resisted incursions by foreign militias and government forces into Druze territory. Under his influence, Druze militias gained *de facto* control

of local security. While many rallied around him, some accused al-Hijri of authoritarian tendencies and insufficient commitment to democratic reforms.

A turning point came in 2021 with a reportedly insulting phone call by a Syrian army general, sparking mass protests, which were violently suppressed by the regime's forces. Al-Hijri's relationship with Damascus deteriorated sharply. Though he initially praised Bashar al-Assad in 2012 as "the hope of the nation", he later opposed the Syrian dictator. However, he is no fan of the current Damascus government led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, denouncing its actions as extremist and likening its atrocities to IS crimes.

In a notable break from Syrian political orthodoxy, al-Hijri told *The Washington Post* that Israel is "not an enemy", criticising decades of anti-Israel rhetoric he believes did nothing for ordinary Syrians. His call for international intervention to protect civilians further estranged him from both the regime and various opposition factions.

Al-Hijri's position remains contested within the Druze hierarchy. Contrasting his statements, two other 'Sheikh al-Aqls', Hammoud Hannawi and Yusuf al-Jarboua, released a joint statement emphasising loyalty to Syria's unity and rejecting secessionist rhetoric. This reflects an internal divide - between those demanding autonomy/ neutrality in Syria's fragmented landscape and those committed to a united Syrian nation.

Kurdish territory

The proposed David's Corridor has serious implications for Syrian Kurds. Here a general comment is necessary regarding the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and its affiliates. Criticism of the PKK and its Syrian allies has never centred on their armed struggle or on giving up arms, but rather their lack of strategy and constant pragmatism, bordering on opportunism. They have aligned themselves with various reactionary states, depending on momentary requirements - at times with Iran's Islamic Republic against Turkey, or with the US against Assad and jihadists.

Concerning Israel's David's Corridor, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and their broader umbrella group, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), have become (either willing or unintentional) actors in any plan involving north-eastern Syria - especially the David's Corridor. Originating from the PYD (Democratic Union Party), the Syrian offshoot of the PKK, the YPG rapidly gained territory early in the Syrian civil war. Becoming the USA's main ground partner in the anti-IS campaign, particularly during the Siege of Kobane (2014-15), the YPG/SDF benefited from US and allied airstrikes, aid and weapon drops.

This support enabled the YPG to consolidate control over oil-rich, strategically vital areas east of the Euphrates. Despite ongoing tensions with the Assad regime, tactical coordination occurred post-2019 to resist Turkish incursions. The US maintains a limited military presence

and continues funding the SDF, while France and other EU actors offer mild political backing.

The David's Corridor - though officially unconfirmed - would create a logistical arc bypassing Iranian-controlled areas, facilitating energy trade, intelligence-sharing and potential military positioning.

Would the YPG entertain cooperation? The answer is probably yes. It has consistently prioritised strategic survival. Israeli support could enhance Kurdish leverage against Turkey and Damascus. However, an overt partnership carries significant risks: Arab SDF members might resist, and the alliance would likely provoke a backlash from Iran, Hezbollah and the Syrian regime. Russia and even the US may disapprove of an open Israeli alignment.

Given Israel's historic support for Kurdish autonomy as a wedge against rival states, cooperation remains plausible - but would likely be indirect or covert. Should the David's Corridor progress, the YPG/SDF might calculate that discreet cooperation serves their goals, provided it does not jeopardise internal cohesion or external alliances.

Fall of Assad

Bashar al-Assad's eventual fall was, in many ways, good news. For over a decade, his regime had been synonymous with brutal repression, sectarian war and mass displacement. His removal ended one of the most violent chapters in Syria's modern history. However, for those who saw this moment as the dawn of a new Arab Spring - a resurgence of democratic, grassroots uprisings - this hope was quickly dashed.

The reality is that Assad's fall did not result from popular mobilisation or a democratic uprising, but from cynical regional power politics. The actors driving regime change - notably Turkey and the United Arab Emirates - are themselves authoritarian regimes with no interest in fostering genuine democracy in Syria or the region.

Turkey's role has been driven by imperial nostalgia and domestic politics. Erdoğan's government used the Syrian war to extend influence across northern Syria, render hopeless Kurdish armed resistance and perhaps secure a new electoral partner.

The UAE represents the counterrevolutionary camp's opposite pole: an authoritarian monarchy obsessed with stamping out political Islam and popular revolt. Its involvement in Syria is aimed at balancing Iranian influence, supporting authoritarian stability and containing any revolutionary spillover threatening the Gulf monarchies. The UAE's 'stability' means rule by the iron fist without any meaningful popular participation.

In this context, regime change becomes a mechanism for replacing one form of authoritarian rule with another - tailored to regional powers' interests, not Syrians' needs. It is a reshuffling of elites, not a dismantling of repression.

Therefore Assad's downfall has not transformed conditions for genuine revolutionary forces from below - those capable of resisting both domestic tyranny and foreign manipulation ●

POLEMIC

Nature's goods and services

Despite talking about protecting the natural world and condemning capitalism for bringing about climate catastrophe, there are still those on the left who take it for granted that the working class produces everything.

Jack Conrad spells out the ABCs of Marxism

For years, for decades, *Socialist Worker* carried this 'What we stand for' formulation: "Workers create all the wealth under capitalism. A new society can only be constructed when they collectively seize control of that wealth and plan its production and distribution according to need" (Proposition one). And, no surprise, the Socialist Workers Party's dozen or two imitators and clones - organised in the International Socialist Tendency - loyally, crassly, present their own version of the bullshit.

Five examples:

1. In the United States the now liquidated International Socialist Organization: "Workers create society's wealth, but have no control over its production and distribution. A socialist society can only be built when workers collectively take control of that wealth and democratically plan its production and distribution, according to present and future human needs instead of profit."¹

2. Its diminutive IST rump, Marx 21, likewise declares: "We believe that workers create all the wealth under capitalism, which is a system run by a tiny, wealthy elite. A new society can only be constructed when we, the workers, collectively seize control of that wealth and plan production and distribution according to human need."²

3. Up north, in Canada, the International Socialists have: "Capitalist monopolies control the Earth's resources, but workers everywhere actually create the wealth."³

4. Down under, in Australia, there is Solidarity: "Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over production or distribution."⁴

5. Then, finally, in terms of our brief IST survey, we have Workers' Democracy in Poland (formerly Socialist Solidarity). In line with the others, we are told: "While workers create social wealth, they have no control over the production and distribution of goods. In pursuit of increasing profits, global capitalism, cultivated by corporations backed by the power of the strongest and richest countries in the world, leads to a progressive stratification of income."⁵

When it comes to the SWP itself, one can safely presume that our repeated polemics eventually had an unacknowledged effect. A few years ago there was a forced tweak. 'What we fight for' now reads: "Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used."

Draft and daft

Pitiably, 'For a communist future', the draft programme written by comrades Nick Wrack and Edmund Potts, for Talking About Socialism, echoes not our repeated polemics, but the bullshit. Of course, this is not due to any loyalty to the IST tradition. The ideological antecedents of TAS lie more in the Militant Tendency tradition (now Socialist Party in England and Wales, Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Alternative and the Revolutionary Communist Party).

True, TAS recently committed itself to building a mass Communist Party in Great Britain, an aim which we fully share, not least when it



Nature, not labour, prime source of wealth

came to Forging Communist Unity and a *binding* fusion conference (regrettably, a perspective almost instantly abandoned by TAS when faced with the prospect of being in a minority).

However, the purpose of this article is not to deal with the irresponsible refusal of TAS to even keep on talking. Instead, my purpose is to critique the TAS version of the SWP-IST bullshit.

Let us see what the comrades write about climate change and nature in their draft programme. Clause 22 says the capitalist system "destroys the natural world around us, creating a climate catastrophe." Clause 47 repeats these exact same words: capitalism "destroys the natural world around us, creating a climate catastrophe." Clause 40 reads in full: "Capitalism needs profit and doesn't care about the consequences. It plunders the earth for raw materials and pumps out deadly pollutants into the atmosphere and waters, without consideration of the consequences. It degrades and destroys the natural environment. It causes the climate crisis which affects us all." And clause 23 declares: "We want to protect the natural world for the sake of generations to come."⁶

Apart from the daft repetition and complete absence of concrete, immediate, demands, there is nothing objectionable here from the Marxist point of view. No, the problem lies with clauses 17, 56 and 57. Clause 17: "The working class does all the work. It produces all the goods and provides all the services." The 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."

In mitigation, it should be said that despite having a whole history of active involvement on the left, Nick Wrack and Ed Potts, the two leading TAS comrades, have no history whatsoever of championing, working towards, let alone drafting, a Communist Party programme. Therefore, experienced comrades with no principled programmatic experience. Put another way, their

draft programme has its origins *entirely* in their negative factional response to our CPGB *Draft programme* within the context of the FCU process. It should be added, however, that 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.

With that in mind, it is vital to point out that *nature* is nowhere to be found in the clauses about goods and services: ie, wealth. Admittedly, for those unacquainted with the ABCs of Marxism the Wrack-Potts formulations might appear perfectly acceptable. Yes, they are superficially anti-capitalist and apparently militantly pro-worker. But there are two standout problems.

Firstly, the TAS statements are simply wrong. Workers do not create all goods and services (ie, wealth) under capitalism. Secondly, they treat workers merely as wage-slaves, the producers of goods and services - not feeling, thinking, emotional human beings - a mirror image of capitalist political economy.

Let us discuss wealth. To do that we have to go back to basics. Every reader will know Marx's formula: M-C-M': M standing for 'money', C for 'commodity', and the vital 'for the extra, the surplus, the profit made at the end of each circuit. However, in the embryonic form of mercantile capitalism, the secret of making something out of nothing is *not to be found* in workers and their labour: no, it is to be found in the existence of distinct 'world economies'. A 'world economy' being an economically autonomous geographical zone, whose internal links give it "a certain organic unity" (Ferdinand Braudel).⁷

The merchants' ships, wagons and pack animals join and exploit each separate 'world economy'. Eg, Muslim Arab traders bought cheap in India and China and sold dear to Christendom (Byzantium and the feudal kingdoms, principalities and city-states of Europe). Merchants parasitically acted as intermediaries between such spaces. Mark-ups on spices, silks and ceramics were fabulous - way beyond the cost of transport. There were no socially

determining capitalist relations of production. Unequal exchange was the key to the merchant's wealth and capital accumulation.

Under fully developed capitalism surplus value derives, yes, from the surplus labour performed by workers during the process of production. Hence this (extended) formula for the circuit of money: M-C ... P ... C'-M'.

Through repeated enclosure acts, state terrorism and relentless market competition, the direct producers are separated from the means of production. Peasants and petty artisans fall into the ranks of the proletariat and have to present themselves daily, weekly, monthly for hire. It is that or destitution, hunger and eventual starvation.

Yet on average, we can assume, for the sake of the argument, that capital purchases labour-power at a 'fair' market price. As sellers of that commodity - labour-power - workers receive back its full worth. Again on average; again for the sake of the argument. Wages then buy the means of subsistence necessary for the production and reproduction of the worker as a wage-slave. Only as a human being are they robbed.

Capital, as an entity in its own right, has no concern for the worker. Capital, because it is only interested in self-expansion, would compel workers to work for 24 hours a day and seven days a week if such a feat were physically possible. Nor has capital, again as capital, any concern for the commodity created by the combination of labour-power, the instruments of labour and raw materials - albeit brought together under its auspices. The resulting commodity could be of the highest possible quality or complete rubbish. But, as long as it sells, and sells at a profit, that is what counts. Hence, for capital, wealth comes in the form of value, surplus value and, above all, money. In other words, exchange value.

Of course, for capitalists, *as individuals*, wealth also comes in the form of use values. Despite the myths of Max Weber and the so-called Protestant work ethic, no-one should imagine them living an ascetic, self-denying existence. Especially given this - the second gilded age - they have never had it so good.

The super-rich indulge themselves ... and often to extraordinary excess. Private islands, premier football clubs, instantly recognisable art works, superyachts, rocketing off into near space and flitting from one palatial residence to another.⁸ Even philanthropy and charity-mongering is a form of extravagant consumption, by which the elite feed their already grossly overinflated egos (and divert attention away from the grubby side of their businesses). Think Bill Gates, George Soros, Warren Buffet and Michael Bloomberg.⁹

When it comes to more commonplace CEOs, they consider corporate jets, chauffeur-driven cars, English butlers, Filipino maids, Saville Row suits, vintage wines, trophy wives and the right to grope female employees as perks of the job (yes, most are male, sociopathic and aggressively self-entitled¹⁰). Meantime, nearly half the world's population live on less than \$6.85 per person, per day¹¹ and a third have no access to safe drinking water.¹²

Either way, while for capital wealth is self-expanding money or value, for the human being wealth is

use value - what fulfils some desire, what gives pleasure, what is useful. Because use value so obviously relies on subjective judgement, Marx quite correctly gave the widest possible definition. Whether needs arise from the "stomach or from fancy" makes no difference.¹³

Use value is therefore not just about physical needs: it encompasses the imagination too. Indeed, a use value may be purely imaginary. Its essence is to be found in the human being rather than the "goods and services" themselves. The consumer determines use value (ie, utility).

Expanded

Obviously use values are bought on the market for money and come in the form of commodities produced through a capitalist process based on the exploitation of labour. However, capital not only has an interest, a drive, to exploit labour and maximise surplus labour: in pursuit of profit, capital also seeks to maximise sales and therefore to expand consumption.

Capitalists, in what Marx called department I, sell raw materials and the instruments of labour to other capitalists: steel, electricity, machine tools, computer chips, etc. Capitalists in department II sell the means of consumption to other capitalists ... and to workers too (food, clothing, housing, drink, package holidays, TV subscriptions, smart phones, music concerts, etc). While the individual capitalist, the particular capital, attempts to minimise the wages of the workers they employ, capital as many capitals, capital as a system, pushes and promotes all manner of novel wants and artificial needs.

Hence celebrity endorsements, influencers and the huge advertising sector, which works day and night to transform the "luxury goods of the aristocracy into the necessities of everyday life".¹⁴ That and the class struggle, conducted by workers themselves, combine to constantly overcome the barrier represented by the limited purchasing power of the working class. Part of what the working class produces is therefore sold back to the working class ... and historically on an ever-increasing scale.

That way, workers manage to partially develop themselves as human beings. Not that their needs are ever fully met. There is a steady stream of the latest must-haves. Capital, capital accumulation and the lifestyles of the rich list always run far ahead. The lot of the working class therefore remains one of relative impoverishment and "chronic dissatisfaction" (Thorstein Veblen).¹⁵

Workers and capitalists alike consume use values that come in the form of commodities and from the sphere of capitalist relations of production and the exploitation of wage labour (there are, though we shall not explore it here, non-commodity use values, such as domestic labour - cleaning, cooking, looking after the kids, maintaining the car, putting up shelves, decorating, etc).

Doubtless, once again workers and capitalists alike also consume some commodities that, directly or indirectly, come from small-scale enterprises. Family farms, pop-up restaurants, fish 'n' chips shops, curry houses, craft breweries, self-employed plumbers, electricians and taxi drivers, partnerships of

accountants, solicitors and doctors, etc - all produce use values and therefore, by definition, goods and services (ie, wealth) too. With that in mind - and there are millions of them in Britain alone¹⁶ - it is surely an elementary error to baldly state that the “working class ... is the class that produces everything and delivers all the services we rely on”.

In theoretical terms, forgetting, passing over, the middle classes is a mote - a mere speck of dust in the eye. There exists a beam, however.

First paragraph

In his *Critique of the Gotha programme* (1875) Marx is quite explicit: “Labour is not the source of all wealth.”¹⁷ There is nature too. Marx writes here against the first paragraph of the draft programme of what was to become the German Social Democratic Party. It has a strangely familiar ring: “Labour is the source of all wealth and culture and, since useful labour is possible only in society and through society, the proceeds of labour belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society.” A ghostly anticipation of the TAS statement: “the working class ... is the class that produces everything and delivers all the services we rely on”.

Some necessary background. The Gotha unity congress in 1875 represented an *unprincipled* unification, joining together Lassallean state socialists and the Eisenachers - the followers of Marx, led by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht. Marx supported unity, but not unity which involved weakening the programme. Note, the Lassalleans, not least because of their dictatorial internal regime, were in steep decline: their trade unions broke away and various splits joined the Eisenachers.

However, the Eisenachers did make unwarranted programmatic concessions: eg, “producer associations assisted by the state” ... Not in itself a disaster, but the central role accorded to the state and state aid nostrums left the door ajar for a “Bonapartist state-socialist workers’ party” (Engels).¹⁸

It should be added that Marx was probably eager, primed, itching to write his *Critique* due to Mikhail Bakunin. In his *Statism and anarchy* (1873) the founder of modern anarchism portrayed Marx as a German nationalist and an “authoritarian” worshipper of state power. Not only that: Marx was said to have been responsible for the programme and every step taken by the Eisenachers since day one. Eg, “The supreme objective of all his efforts, as is proclaimed to us by the fundamental statutes of his party in Germany, is the establishment of the great People’s State (*Volksstaat*)”.¹⁹

As a canny political infighter Marx chose to point the finger of blame at Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-64). Lassalle was the real German nationalist and worshipper of state power. He had secretly offered to do a deal with Otto von Bismarck. That way, the Bismarck state would have gotten its “own bodyguard proletariat to keep the political activity of the bourgeoisie in check”.²⁰

Marx, therefore, credited Lassalle with being the spiritual father of the draft *Gotha programme*, including the above-quoted first paragraph. Unfair, perhaps - Lassalle was dead, killed in a silly duel over a love affair. More to the point, Marx’s own pupils - ie, August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht - were quite capable of making elementary blunders, such as overlooking nature, all by themselves. No help, no prompting from Lassalle and his state socialists was needed. But, by blaming Lassalle, Marx was able to

give his comrades an escape route - a route which, if taken, would simultaneously save their blushes and draw a clear line of demarcation against Lassallean state socialism. Sad to say, Marx went largely unheeded: “Labour is the source of all wealth”, “all other classes” are a “reactionary body”, the “iron law of wages” and other such Lassallean shibboleths remain.²¹

Not that past SWP leaders - eg, Tony Cliff, Duncan Hallas, Chris Harman, John Rees, Lindsey German and Martin Smith - were cribbing from Lassalle ... or Bebel, or Liebknecht for that matter. That much is obvious. No, as with our Nick Wrack and Ed Potts today, we have a clear case of historical reflux, opportunism recurring, economism spontaneously regenerating - as it inevitably does, given the material conditions of capitalism and the oppressed position of the working class.

Incidentally, economism needs defining at this point - that is, if we are going to have an informed discussion. Economism is, in essence, a bourgeois-influenced outlook, which restricts, narrows down the horizons of the working class to mere trade unionism ... that or, more commonly, it simply denies or belittles the role of high politics and democracy in the struggle for socialism. And, sadly, the SWP and the likes of TAS are hardly alone.

Economism is the dominant outlook of the contemporary left. Not, of course, that economism denies politics altogether. The problem is that, when the economic left takes up politics, it is not the politics of the working class - ie, orthodox Marxism - no, instead it is the politics of other classes and other ideological trends which they promote: left social democracy, pacifism, greenism, feminism, black separatism, petty nationalism, identity politics, intersectionalism, etc.

Primary source

Anyway, back to Marx. In 1875, he savaged the “hollow phrases” in the draft *Gotha programme* about “useful labour” and all members of society having an “equal right” to society’s wealth. There is useless labour - labour that fails to produce the intended result. People are not equal, etc, etc.

More to the point, at least when it comes to our main concern here, there is nature. Marx wrote this: “Nature is just as much the source of wealth, of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour-power.” Marx goes on to explain that “insofar as man from the outset behaves towards nature” - what he calls the “primary source of all instruments and objects of labour” - as an “owner, treats her as belonging to him, his labour becomes the source of use values, therefore also of wealth.”

That, of course, is to fall under the spell of an anthropocentric delusion, from which, inevitably, all sorts of harmful, unintended consequences follow. Note, the TAS draft programme stupidly, arrogantly, promises that in the future “everyone will share *ownership* of the world’s resources” (my emphasis).

Socialism, as the first phase of communism, does not raise the working class to the position where it exercises “ownership” over the planet and its natural resources. Such a suggestion merely mimics the fallacies associated with capitalism - as witnessed under bureaucratic socialism - and brings disappointment, ecological degradation and nature’s certain revenge. Humanity can only aspire to be the *custodian* of nature.

The same nature-labour formula occurs again and again in Marx’s writings. Eg, in *Capital*, Marx approvingly quotes William Petty: “Labour is its father and the earth its mother.”²² Leave aside the gendered language - which I find deeply unproblematic, given the primacy rightly given to the female sex and in turn nature - what must be grasped is the two-sided source of wealth. Sunshine and water, air and soil, plants and animals - all are ‘gifts from nature’.

Human beings too are part of nature and, just like every other living thing, rely on nature in order to survive. However, humanity applies itself to nature, although in the process of production we often rely on the direct actions of nature. Eg, though a natural product, wheat is selected, sown and harvested by labour; yet it germinates in the soil and needs both rain and sunshine if it is to grow and duly ripen.

So the two forms of wealth conjoin. Yet, despite that, for the laws of capital, what gives the wheat *value* is not what is supplied by nature. That has *use value*, but not value. Value derives from the application of labour-power alone.

There is another - a spiritual, or artistic - dimension to the use value of nature that should never be underestimated:

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar:
I love not man the less, but Nature more.
(George Gordon, Lord Byron *Childe Harold’s pilgrimage* - 1812)

Leave aside enduring memories of Sunday morning outings to Ashridge Forest with my mum, dad, sister and slightly crazy pet dog, holidays in the Scottish highlands, lone treks in the mid-winter Lake District and touring the Malabar coast in southwestern India. Just looking out over London from my bedroom window each morning and seeing the sunrise, the bright blue sky, the gathering storm clouds, even the drab grey and mists, inspires me. Walking on Hampstead Heath, picking blackberries, glimpsing the occasional urban fox, following the nesting swans and the progress of their cygnets, the cormorants drying their outstretched wings, the swirling, whirling, ever-changing patterns of migrating starlings, the lime-green flash of squawking parakeets, the evening caa-caaing of gathering crows and rooks - all that brings me joy. Turning from my computer to admire the sunset, as I work in my office, humbles me too. In the big scheme of things I’m insignificant, I’m transient, I’m just a little bit of nature.

Sorry are those who do not feel such emotions. They are impoverished. So, surely, wealth cannot be limited to the products of human activity alone. Wealth must include every form of consumption which produces human beings in one respect or another.

Michael Lebowitz rightly considers this of particular significance: “Marx’s identification of nature as a source of wealth is critical in identifying a concept of wealth that goes beyond capital’s perspective.”²³ Capital, as we have argued, has but one interest - self-expansion. Capital has no intrinsic concern either for the worker ... or nature. And, especially over the last 150 years, and increasingly so, capitalist exploitation of nature has resulted in destruction on a huge

scale. Countless species of flora and fauna have already been driven to extinction. Instead of cherishing nature, there is greed, plunder and wanton disregard.

The working class presents the only viable alternative to the destructive reproduction of capital. First, as a countervailing force within capitalism - one which has its own logic, pulling against that of capital. The political economy of the working class brings with it not only higher wages and shorter hours. It is also responsible for health services, social security systems, pensions, universal primary and secondary education ... and measures that democratise access to the countryside: eg, the right to roam that came out of the 1932 mass trespass movement and Kinder Scout. Wealth, for the working class, is not merely about the accumulation and consumption of an ever greater range of commodities. Besides being *of* capitalism, the working class is uniquely *opposed* to capitalism.

The political economy of the working class more than challenges capital. It points beyond capital - to the total reorganisation of society and, with that, the ending of humanity’s strained, brutalised, crisis-ridden relationship with nature.

Marx was amongst the first to theorise human dependence on nature and the fact that humanity and nature coevolve. He warned, however, that the capitalist process of production is also a “process of destruction”, because it “tears asunder ... disturbs the circulation of matter between man and the soil ... therefore violates the conditions necessary for lasting fertility”.²⁴

The “enormous waste” under capitalism outraged Marx. The by-products of industry, agriculture and human consumption are squandered and lead to pollution of the air and contamination of streams, rivers and lakes. *Capital* volume three contains a section entitled ‘Utilisation of the extractions of production’. Here Marx outlines his commitment to the scientific “reduction” and “reemployment” of waste.²⁵

John Bellamy Foster - basing himself solidly on Marx’s considerable writings on ecology - highlights the “metabolic rift” between nature and the human part of nature brought about by capitalism.²⁶ A system which produces for the sake of production, which accumulates for the sake of accumulation, which crowds vast numbers into polluted, soulless, crime-ridden concrete jungles and simultaneously denudes nature with deforestation, cattle ranching, ever bigger farms, monocrops and, as passionately exposed by Rachel Carson back in the early 1960s, metes out chemical death to “birds, mammals, fishes, and indeed practically every form of wildlife”.²⁷

The Marx-Engels team wanted to re-establish an intimate connection between town and country, agriculture and industry, and rationally redistribute the population. In short they wanted to heal the “metabolic rift” between nature and the human part of nature.

Short-termism

Doubtless, while this goal is today a matter of extreme urgency, not least given the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and its “code red” warning about the world approaching a tipping point - it is hard to imagine the capitalist class, with its endemic short-termism and manic fixation on profits, willingly going along with the far-reaching measures that are needed to avert ecobarbarism. Under the conditions of socialism and working class rule, where the law of the plan has replaced the law of value, that would surely be another matter.

Our aim should be not only to put a stop to destruction and preserve what remains. Of course, the great rain forests of Congo, Indonesia, Peru, Columbia and Brazil must be safeguarded. So too the much depleted life in the oceans and seas. However, more can be done. The riches of nature should be restored and, where possible, enhanced. Grouse moors and upland sheep farming are obvious prime targets for rewilding in a Britain with its “deeply concerning” low levels of biodiversity (Natural History Museum report).²⁸ Wolves should sing once again in a green and pleasant land.

But we can think really big. Mesopotamia - now dry and dusty - can be remade into the lush habitat it was in pre-Sumerian times. The Sahara in Africa and Rajputana in India were home to a wonderful variety of fauna and flora only 5,000 years ago. The parched interior of Australia too. With sufficient resources and careful management they can bloom once again.

The aim of such projects would be restoration, not maximising production and churning out an endless flood of commodities. Hardly the Marxist version of abundance. On the contrary, the communist social order has every reason to rationally economise and minimise all necessary inputs.

In place of capitalism’s squandermania there comes the human being, who is rich in human needs. However, these needs are satisfied not merely by the supply of “goods and services”: they are first and foremost satisfied through the medley of human interconnections and a readjusted and sustainable relationship with nature ●

Notes

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7. F Braudel *Civilization and capitalism* Vol 3, Berkeley CA 1992, p22.
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9. See R Lambin, J Roberts and R Srender (eds) *Handbook on philanthropy and social policy* Cheltenham 2025.
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25. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, Moscow 1971, p101.
26. JB Foster *Marx’s ecology: materialism and nature* New York NY 2000, piv.
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FCU

The road needs illumination

Minimum demands and clear principles are vital. Mike Macnair responds to those who think that the working class can dispense with the minimum programme

Last week¹ I responded to Peter Kennedy's June 15 article, 'Socialisms have prevented communism',² but also made *limited* reference to Nick Wrack's June 11 'Communist unity - a change is needed'.³ This week I focus more on comrade Wrack's arguments, in particular in relation to the need for a minimum programme. Just as last week I also referred to *some* of comrade Wrack's arguments in order to clarify my reply to comrade Kennedy, so this week I will also refer to *some* of comrade Kennedy's arguments in order to clarify my reply to comrade Wrack.

I said last week: "Paradoxically, the articles by comrades Kennedy and Wrack might in some ways have opened the way to narrowing the points of difference - if the [Talking About Socialism] comrades had not voted to break off the talks."

In both cases, the aspect that might have opened the way to narrowing the points of difference is the recognition of a process of transition from capitalism to communism that has *already begun under capitalist rule*. That is, that what we need to overthrow is not 'pure' capitalism, but a capitalism that has already been heavily modified in response both to the rise of the proletariat and to problems resulting from capitalism's internal decline.

Education

The flip side of this point is that there are substantial tasks of development of the workers' movement *under capitalist rule* that are necessary in order for the question of the overthrow to be posed. Comrade Kennedy, for example, argues in 'Differentiating socialism and communism' that:

The level of productive forces and related science and technology, coupled to the size and power of the working class, and, more crucially, the heightened level of political consciousness among workers implied by such intensification of class power, mean the transition [after the working class takes political power - MM] will be rapid rather than prolonged. It also seems improbable that highly politicised and educated workers will have any truck with specialist management and bureaucratic functionaries running state affairs, and it seems much more realistic to assume that they will be replaced by workers and/or brought under the democratic control of workers, where their existing specialisms will be utilised for the common good.⁴

With UK union density at 22% in 2024, and the present *degradation* of education that has been running since Margaret Thatcher's government,⁵ we have a long way to go in this country to get to the "highly politicised and educated workers" of comrade Kennedy's argument.

Similarly, comrade Wrack argues:

A decisive imposition by the majority working class of its own class interests on society as a whole, which is comprised mainly of itself, would represent the interests of all in society except for the capitalists. The middle class will see that its interests, too, are protected and improved by this act. Of course, it is not automatic. We have to win the argument. I



Without lights to guide us we walk in the dark

believe that argument can be won, largely in advance of the working class coming to power ...

The organised working class, through its own organisations, including the mass communist party, will have to have prepared *in advance* how it will approach the questions of organising production, distribution, keeping data, how to use the latest computer technology, how to cooperate with workers in other countries, how to operate the ports, the railways, the factories and the farms.

While we cannot set out now a blueprint for the future, a mass communist party will have in its ranks and be able to call on every sort of expert, scientist, computer programmer and much more. The working class *now* ensures that the trains run, using complicated technology, that containers are unloaded from the ships, using complicated technology, that bread and milk is delivered to your local supermarket or corner shop, using complicated technology. This can only improve with the working class *democratically* planning and *directly* running everything.

Again, this argument supposes a *lot* of change from the present situation before the question of power is posed. We are talking, here, about a communist party of millions (and not any sort of small 'revolutionary party' cog driving a larger mass-movement wheel). That - a communist party of millions - is an aim *shared* between the CPGB and TAS.

Capitalist rule

But it tells us, again, that we have a long way to go *under capitalist rule* to get there; and that it involves the reversal of the current dynamics, which display both a drift of the left to the right and deepening fragmentation.⁶

The case for the minimum programme is partly for a programme that can project the overthrow of capitalist *political* rule and can orient immediate policy if capitalist political rule is overthrown without either the prior economic marginalisation of the middle classes ('classic' petty bourgeoisie of the self-employed and micro-businesses; employed managerial and bureaucratic middle class; petty rentier class) or that the proletariat becomes so strong that the middle classes are politically a null factor.

But it is also, and as importantly, a case for a programme that can orient working class policy under capitalist rule. That is, for the conditions that necessarily exist, assuming the (partial) truth of comrades Kennedy's and Wrack's own arguments for the strengthening of the proletariat relative to the middle classes under capitalism.

Jack Conrad at an Online Communist Forum meeting said: "My fear is that what they [TAS] will produce is something at least along the lines of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. This is a maximalist programme that rejects all notions of reform, all notions of transition between capitalism with capitalist state power and communism." Comrade Wrack responds to this in the first place by quoting TAS's statement, 'Who we are and the ideas that guide us', where it says:

So long as the working class is not yet able to win power for itself, a socialist/communist party would support and actively participate in working class campaigns to defend past gains, to improve living standards and extend democratic rights. But any reforms will only be partial and temporary, so long as capitalism continues.

And a little later in the article, he says that "Communists must fight for all reforms, to improve the position of the working class in society. But we fight against reformism as a political strategy."

Comrades Wrack and Potts' 'Draft programme v 20' is largely an explanation of what is wrong with capitalism, followed by 'motherhood and apple pie' stories about what could happen if the working class takes over. The subhead, 'The communist future, and what we fight for now' (clauses 89-95), has the same approach, clause 95 saying: "We fight for any and all improvements in the here and now. But we always make clear that only a fundamental change in society will be able to solve society's problems."

The question posed is, then - *what* reforms? The problem is that the governments, the Labour Party, and so on, commonly *present* as "improving living standards" or "improvements in the here and now" changes which, while having an *appearance* of an immediately ameliorating effect, strategically *weaken* the position of the proletariat as a class and increase dependence

on the capitalist state.

For a simple example, in relation to housing, council house building programmes and rent control are measures that strengthen the working class as a class and weaken the (large and small) rentier classes. In contrast, housing benefit, though it offers an immediate amelioration of living standards, is actually a subsidy to the rentier classes (and to employers) out of taxpayer funds and spreads working class financial dependency on the state.

Another example. The regime of the Trade Disputes Act 1906 (as reinstated by the 1945 Labour government by getting rid of Tory 'reforms' introduced in 1927) strengthened working class collective action by limiting judicial intervention in strikes. The judicialised system planned by Labour's *In place of strife* in 1969 and implemented by the Tory Industrial Relations Act 1971 offered a 'carrot' in the form of industrial tribunals (today's employment tribunals) but also a large stick, which, however, was effectively defeated by the 'Free the five' struggle in 1972. Labour's Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1974 then *appeared* as a reform making major concessions to the trade unions, but in fact preserved most of the 1969-71 scheme and actually radically *weakened* the trade unions by centralising power in the hands of the bureaucracy and maintaining judicial power (which was then exploited to the hilt under Thatcher). The "improvements in the here and now" represented by the tribunal system have actually *reduced* the frequency of reinstatement after victimisation relative to the pre-1971 regime.

There are many other examples. The same is true of "extending democratic rights", posed at this level of generality. Referendums are *held out* as extending democratic rights - but are actually instruments of fraud, as we saw in 2011, 2014 and 2016. Directly elected mayors, and so on, are *held out* as extending democratic rights, but actually reduce available choices to voters. And so on.

Sectional

A related issue of fundamental importance is the difference between the common interests of the working class as a class, on the one hand, and *sectional* interests, on the other.

Sharon Graham supports UK arms expenditure - in the *sectional* interests of Unite members working

in the arms industry: "Once rockets are up, who cares where they come down? That's not my department, says Wernher von Braun" (Tom Lehrer). In reality, of course, the immediate impact of arms spending will be cuts on health and social welfare, which will impact on even well-paid arms industry workers by way of their aged parents or in the event that they are in accidents or fall seriously ill; and the *end outcome* of UK rearmament as part of the US-led war drive will most probably be bombs falling on UK cities.

This particular example of sectional politics is not one that is attractive to the far left. But 'Lexit' - the idea that Brexit could 'restore British democracy' and open the road to a *British* 'alternative economic strategy' - was a view held not only by the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain, but also by the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales, among others. It is just as sectionalist (any *actual* improvements from a 'Lexit' policy would have been at the expense of French, German and so on workers) and just as deluded: the *actual* result of Brexit was continuing British economic decline, increased immediate dependence on the USA and, contrary to the claims of the Brexiteers, a massive *increase* in *legal* net immigration (explicitly with a view to holding down wages under the Tories' visa policy), which has to be covered up by media screaming about 'small boats'.

Popular fronts

Equally, 'intersectionalism' as such - the attempt to construct a series of single-issue popular fronts with big capital and the human rights departments round race, sex, gender, sexuality, etc discrimination - has been very popular among the far left. It issued in the USA in 'Vote Clinton, get Trump' in 2016 and 'Vote Harris, get Trump' in 2024. And as a result it produced the appointment of extreme-right Supreme Court justices in 2016-20, and the actual overthrow of *Roe v Wade* in 2022 in *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organisation* - and since January 2025 an accelerating series of white-supremacist, male-supremacist and police-supremacist decisions.

In the UK, the pursuit of a sectional agenda of 'improvements in the here and now' for trans people as a group distinct from non-binary people, intersex people, and so on, through the 'gender recognition policy' in alliance with Theresa May and then with Nicola Sturgeon, and, going along with that, the speech-policing agenda, set out to claim an indefensible salient and opened the way for the counteroffensive of the Christianist right wing round this issue.

I argued back in 2007 that the line of the Third Congress of Comintern on the party question and on tactics, which lay behind the 'transitional method' and 'transitional demands', amounted to the idea that "the party has to lead the masses, as it were by the nose, through linking their defence of their immediate interests to the idea that the conscious minority of communists should rule".⁷ But this is the *theory*. What happens in *practice* is that, by tail-ending ideas that are popular among broad masses, *the left* is led by the nose *by the capitalists' parties and their media*. Karl Marx, in fact, already made the point in his November 1871 letter to Friedrich Bolte:

Where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organisation to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power - ie, the political power of the ruling classes - it must at any rate be trained for this by continual agitation against and a hostile attitude towards the policy of the ruling classes. Otherwise it will remain a plaything in their hands, as the September revolution in France showed, and as is also proved up to a certain point by the game messrs Gladstone and co are bringing off in England even up to the present time.⁸

Recent experience has confirmed and reconfirmed the point.

Comintern

In these respects, the case for the minimum programme has a (perhaps paradoxical) common element with the case for ‘transitional’ programmes and demands at the 1922 Fourth Congress of Comintern. In the debate at that Congress, Nikolai Bukharin argued that the draft programmes of Comintern and of the communist parties should not include immediate demands, which should instead be part of “an action programme, which takes up purely tactical questions and can be changed as often as necessary - perhaps every two weeks”. He argued that including immediate issues was “an expression of comrades’ opportunist attitude” and that supporters “wanted to set down in the programme this defensive stance in which the proletariat finds itself, thereby ruling out an offensive”.⁹ His substantive argument, that immediate demands should not be included in the programme, but left to general agitation, is close to comrade Wrack’s argument.

August Thalheimer, in contrast, argued that this separation would precisely tend to promote opportunism, and had done so in the revisionism debate around 1900. Thus:

What I am saying is that the specific disagreement between us and the reform-socialists is not the fact that we put demands for reforms, demands for a stage, or whatever you want to call them,

into a *chambre séparée* [separate room] and keep them outside our programme. Rather, the difference is that we link transitional demands and slogans very tightly with our principles and goals. This linkage is, of course, no guarantee in itself, any more than having a good map guarantees that I will not lose my way ...

... The danger lies in the roads that lead from a given starting point to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

If we leave large parts of this road without illumination, there is a danger that in the dark patches (*Interjections: ‘Bukharin’*) many errors will be made ...¹⁰

He went on to quote at length from Lenin’s defence of the minimum programme against Bukharin in early October 1917.¹¹

I argued in my article last week that it is “inconsistent with ... scientific socialism, to cling to the texts of Marx, or those of the first four congresses of Comintern, as a dogma without regard to the actual defeat of the Russian Revolution or the various other experiences of failed leftist reform projects and failed revolutions”.

That does not mean that we should ignore these texts or aim to start from scratch in some way. ‘Forget the history’ is the political equivalent of, on an individual level, seeking to get Alzheimer’s, or volunteering for some sort of brain damage that wipes out both your existing memories and your ability to form new ones.

Rather, we need to be aware of the texts, which if nothing else are the story of where the left’s ideas came from; but then to make use of the ideas in them, having regard to how far they are confirmed and how far falsified, with the benefit of hindsight.

In the case of the Fourth Congress debate on ‘transitional demands’, it seems clear that Thalheimer’s argument is more persuasive than Bukharin’s, which is at the end of the day hand-waving. But the idea that linkage to economic *socialisation* was enough to make demands ‘transitional’, to illuminate the “roads that lead from a given starting point to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat”, was mistaken. The Trotskyists have made

serious attempts to make sense of the approach, and have repeatedly collapsed either into dogmatic repetition of the specific demands of the 1938 programme, or into “action programmes” of the sort Bukharin argued for. With the latter come tail-ending mass beliefs and as a result being made a plaything by the pro-capitalist parties and media.

As to *why* this is the case, the answer is - I think - that downplaying political democracy in favour of socialisation fails. It fails in the first place because - as the experience of the former ‘socialist bloc’ countries demonstrates - planning without political democracy fails, because the managers lie in order to keep their jobs and the result is ‘garbage in, garbage out’. Every child is taught in school that this failure is the result of planning *as such*; so that it is illusory to imagine that the passage of time since 1991 will erase the problem.

It fails, secondly but equally importantly, because bureaucratic-managerial control of workers’ organisations is demobilising, and as a result hands power to the capitalist class. This is *as much* true of the bureaucratic-managerial control of left groups as it is of Unite; the *mode* is merely different, as among the left groups bureaucratic-managerial control forces splintering and blocks unification.

Confession?

Comrade Wrack says of our argument that ‘socialism is not a mode of production’:

Mike Macnair accepts that it is unorthodox. Mike is correct. It is unique and idiosyncratic. It is a confession of faith. It is designed to make the CPGB different. It is its *point of difference*, to justify its separation from all the other Marxist groups which it criticises. It is nothing but an ‘article of faith’, to use a CPGB term. It makes the CPGB a confessional sect ...

I made the first point against this claim last week. The characterisation of ‘socialism’ as what succeeds capitalism was the normal view of the left wing of the Second International and is, in fact, commonplace among ‘official communists’. It is not, then, a *point of difference* of the CPGB with the large majority of the left, but only with the Trotskyists, and in particular with those Trotskyists who insist on ‘socialism = the higher stage of communism’ as a point of dogma.

Pursuing this idea, I pointed out in the May 29 article, ‘Questions of communism’, that the dogma that ‘socialism = the higher stage of communism’ arises because the Russian oppositions of the 1920s found it impossible to defend the view that there could be no *dictatorship of the proletariat and socialist construction* in a single country - which was what the ‘socialism in one country’ debate was originally about. Hence they displaced ‘socialism’ onto fully-developed communism. In doing so the Trotskyists *de facto* accepted ‘socialism in one country’ (SIOC)/national roads.

Comrade Wrack is outraged that we think TAS’s perspective is one of national revolution. He quotes extensively from an excellent posting of his own back in 2016. But even within that posting he writes:

This is not to argue that there has to be a single simultaneous revolutionary act of the working class across Europe at the same time, though that would certainly be the best development if it could be achieved. The working class may well enter into battle against the different national bourgeoisie at different stages,

but the need to see that there is a broader struggle beyond national boundaries is an essential prerequisite for a successful socialist transformation.

And in the ‘Communist Unity’ article he goes on to say:

... in my opinion a revolution anywhere in the world would inspire and provoke revolutions elsewhere, just as happened in 1848 and 1917. Again, we cannot look at things as they are now, but as they must be if the working class is on the verge of assuming power in any advanced economic country.

The way in which the SIOC issue was posed in our Forging Communist Unity discussions was that CPGB comrades made the point that, even if the middle classes are marginal in the UK (which we doubt), they are certainly not marginal in continental Europe. A *European* programme would therefore need a minimum programme, taking account of the need to reject forced collectivisation. And revolution in the UK on its own would *not* “inspire and provoke revolutions elsewhere”, since in the absence of *immediate* spread to continental Europe it would merely produce mass starvation.

In this context, comrade Wrack’s second passage, saying that “we cannot look at things as they are now, but as they must be if the working class is on the verge of assuming power in any advanced economic country”, is true - the question of power will not be posed in the UK in the absence of a general crisis in Europe, and probably a *global* crisis of US world hegemony like the 1914-45 death agony of British world hegemony. But it is hand-waving. The death agony of US world hegemony would not dissolve the problem of the middle classes. If comrade Wrack’s imagined future is *to dissolve the problem of the middle classes as a strategic and programmatic problem*, it is to put off the question of power to the indefinite and probably never-to-arrive future.

The second point is that comrade Wrack and other TAS comrades argue that the CPGB is heretical and sectarian (or ‘Stalinist’, meaning ‘official communist’) in failing to define what replaces capitalism as Karl Marx’s “first phase of communism” in *The critique of the Gotha programme*: that is, general nationalisation, plus payment in ‘labour tokens’ that do not circulate and are therefore not money.

I am happy to say that this is not ‘orthodox’ in the sense of imagining that everyone after Marx went wrong (as ‘New Left’ authors and today’s ‘Marxist-humanists’ like Peter Hudis have argued). I said above that we could not treat the classic texts as dogma, but have to consider how far they have been confirmed or falsified by subsequent events. I personally have argued *specifically* about this particular schema of Marx’s that it is for a *developmental communism*, which is to incentivise workers to work more hours (to get more labour tokens and hence more consumer goods). And that the natural limits of which we are all now aware as a result of human-induced climate change and so on mean that such an incentive scheme is positively undesirable.

Meanwhile, on the other hand, the principle of distribution according to need is dominant in public health and education services at least, and should be in housing, and enormous unemployment and under-employment (but not mass starvation) means that “labour is life’s prime want”. So that Marx’s radical separation of the lower and higher phases of communism is superseded

in the light of developments since 1875.¹²

We have put forward in the *Draft programme*, section 5,¹³ a conception of the transition that is *consistent* with what I have argued - but also consistent with a lot of other people’s arguments. What it is not consistent with is the arguments of ‘New Left’ Trotskyists or of ‘Marxist-humanists’.

Do we insist on this as a sect marker that is the ground for us refusing to collaborate with others? No. Our *Draft programme* is a *draft*. We are perfectly willing to work as a minority in a broader group, and have done so repeatedly. We insist merely on the right to *put forward* our *Draft programme* as a possible basis for the programme of a broader group or new party; and on majority voting.

It is our insistence on open polemical engagement, and on majority voting, as opposed to private diplomatic agreements, which are the real targets of comrade Wrack’s polemic and (I think) the real ground of TAS’s decision to break off the FCU talks ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1547/cold-war-economism.
2. Slightly different text at talkingaboutsocialism.org/a-reply-to-mike-macnairs-questions-of-communism (June 2), since the *Weekly Worker* version is edited for our style guidelines. The TAS text also has extensive comments.
3. talkingaboutsocialism.org/communist-unity-a-change-is-needed.
4. talkingaboutsocialism.org/differentiating-socialism-and-communism.
5. For union density, see www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2024/trade-union-membership-uk-1995-to-2024-statistical-bulletin. For education, P Kennedy, ‘Struggles in the cathedral’ *Weekly Worker* March 6 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1528/struggles-in-the-cathedral). Compare this with my article, ‘What kind of education?’ (May 4 2017): weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1153/what-kind-of-education. Consider also the points about education and class made by Dan Evans in his *A nation of shopkeepers* London 2023 (chapter 4); though I have criticised in my review of the book his use of the issue as a way of defining the boundary between the employed middle class and skilled working class (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1545/rising-middle-classes), the development of an anti-education culture in sections of the British working class (sedulously promoted by the Tory media) is a real phenomenon.
6. Comrade Wrack’s point also radically understates the complexity of the planning task (a point made by Moshé Machover orally and in a recent letter - July 3) and the extent to which under capitalist class rule information essential to successful planning is actively concealed, both by commercial secrecy and the construction of official statistics on the basis of marginalist economic theory; so that planning in *advance* of the overthrow of capitalist political rule is more problematic than might appear, even for a communist party of millions.
7. ‘Spontaneity and Marxist theory’ *Weekly Worker* September 5 2007 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/687/spontaneity-and-marxist-theory).
8. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71_11_23.htm. The “September revolution in France” refers to the fall of the regime of Napoleon III in September 1870, when some ‘left’ radicals were included in the republican provisional government to give it a spurious appearance of political breadth. The “game messrs Gladstone and co are bringing off in England even up to the present time” was the Liberals holding themselves out as backers of the workers, most immediately through the Trade Union Act 1871, which attempted to legalise trade unions.
9. J Riddell (ed) *Toward the united front: proceedings of the fourth congress of the Communist International*, 1922 Leiden 2012.
10. *Ibid*. Similar arguments were made by Khristo Kabakchiev from the Bulgarian CP and the Russian delegation came down on the side of ‘transitional demands’, producing a resolution which was then passed. (It should be noted that Thalheimer here uses “socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat” as synonyms ...)
11. *CW* Vol 26, pp170-73.
12. ‘Socialism will not require industrialisation’ *Weekly Worker* May 14 2015 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1058/socialism-will-not-require-industrialisation). See also ‘Transition and abundance’, September 1 2010 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/831/transition-and-abundance).
13. communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/5-transition-to-communism.

COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

Learning to play our way

An opportunity for all to take an active role and be part of a unique audience for political learning. **Tam Dean Burn** looks forward to the cultural programme at CU 2025

In the late 1930s, whilst in exile from Nazism, the German communist writer and theatre-maker, Bertolt Brecht, and his close comrade, Walter Benjamin, attempted to create an international collective of radical artists, writers and intellectuals. They wanted such a collaboration to produce politically engaged, experimental and socially critical work in opposition to the rising fascist aesthetics and capitalist cultural production.

They took inspiration from Denis Diderot, the 18th century French writer and philosopher, and his editorship of the *Encyclopédie* - a sort of Wikipedia of the day, but with the point being to *change* the world, not just understand it. Diderot saw this as a collective means to democratise knowledge and challenge authoritarian structures.

In honour, Brecht and Benjamin named their enterprise the Diderot *Gesellschaft* ('society') and put a great deal of theoretical work into it - some of which still awaits translation into English. Unfortunately, however, because of the conditions of exile and the outbreak of war they did not manage to create such a gathering and Benjamin died tragically in 1940 - committing suicide on the France-Spain border when he thought he was about to fall into fascist hands and all that would entail for a renowned communist cultural figure such as himself.

Brecht's post-war Berliner Ensemble in the German Democratic Republic gave him and his comrades the means to explore in practice a lot of what he and Benjamin had theorised, but, of course, it was impossible to collectivise this internationally due to the cold war and bureaucratic-socialist censorship.

In 1970 a group of cultural academics, mainly based in the United States, formed the International Brecht Society and went on to produce a range of symposia and yearbooks on many aspects of Brecht's work. These gatherings of academics and theatre-makers laid claim



Paul Klee 'Angelus Novus' (1920)

to the mantle of the Diderot *Gesellschaft* and explored many of its resonances over the next 50 years or so.

But in 2022 a major rift developed in the IBS, after it was announced that the first symposium following the Covid

lockdown would take place in Tel Aviv University and be organised by Israeli academics. The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel and many Palestinian theatre companies sent IBS an open letter demanding the symposium be moved from Tel Aviv.¹ Scores of IBS members did likewise.

But the symposium did go ahead, and so many members resigned: the IBS had taken sides with apartheid and ethnic cleansing, forfeiting any right to claim the inheritance of Bertolt Brecht and the Diderot *Gesellschaft*. The issue of Israel/Palestine proved yet again to be the acid test for connivance, collusion and complicity with imperialism - the IBS failed that test and has made no attempt since to recover its credibility.

Today, just like the burning need for a mass Communist Party operating on an international scale, a genuinely radical, interdisciplinary, artistic exchange such as the Diderot *Gesellschaft* is ever more vital to resist today's rising fascist aesthetics and to create alternatives to capitalist cultural production (whether state-funded or not) - and Communist University offers a great opportunity to start an exploration towards forging such a united cultural front.

The evening CU cultural programme comes under

that the pedagogy involved came from all those participating, not just from some teacher or leader on high.

CU offers the opportunity for all attending to take an active role and be part of a unique audience for political learning and tools for change. Each evening a new potential production will be seeded, starting with Brecht's poeticisation of the *Communist manifesto*, translated and adapted by the eminent Marxist professor, Darko Suvin. As comrade Suvin says in his accompanying essay to the poem, "it constitutes an updating for the age in which the bourgeoisie reaches for world wars in response to economic crises of its system".²

When I told him of the plan to follow his and Brecht's hopes for it to be read aloud (that will happen in sections every day at CU), he replied: "I do believe Brecht is probably the main single body of work we have to ferry over into this dark age for help. To begin each day of your summer enterprise with a reading from the *manifesto* is a wonderful idea."

Another related issue to the IBS scandal was the discovery - by some of the very academics who organised the Israeli symposium - that Brecht's play, *The exception and the rule*, had its world premiere in a kibbutz near Haifa in 1938. The ramifications of this - even more obviously in the harsh genocidal light of today - are wide-ranging and I asked Esther Leslie, professor of political aesthetics at Birkbeck University, if she would be interested in exploring this. I have long admired comrade Leslie's deep knowledge of that era - particularly her invaluable work and militant stance on Benjamin and Brecht. She has become central to the planning and hopes for 'Learning Play'. *The exception and the rule* is one of Brecht's *Lehrstücke* and we will begin work on that on the second night of CU, exploring a new translation that comrade Leslie is working on.

Summer Offensive Halfway there

Our Summer Offensive progresses. This is a period of intense fundraising conducted by members and supporters of our organisation every year. Comrades take initiatives to raise funds, and contact sympathisers and even people on the most distant periphery of the party for donations.

The principle is an important one. We are able to pursue an independent political line because we work to raise funds, rather than depending on subsidies from the trade union bureaucracy, or from 'socialist' or 'anti-imperialist' states, which would inevitably come with political strings attached. Our Summer Offensive supports our ability to publish, to distribute literature on demonstrations and

at public events, and initiatives like Communist University. This year we are also concerned to assist with the recently increased costs of printing and posting the *Weekly Worker*.

At our May aggregate, we set a target of £20,000, and pledges made at the aggregate already covered half of this amount. We are making progress - just under halfway there at £9,315, with quite a lot of pledged funds still to come in. But time is marching on, and the SO ends at the end of Communist University on August 7. We need to get there!

If you support our ideas and want to help us reach an even wider audience, why not visit communistparty.co.uk/donate and contribute to the Summer Offensive today? ●

Tim Browning

Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 27 5pm
Hunger Games made real - 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

A vital aspect of Walter Benjamin’s work, much researched by Leslie, is his ‘Angel of history’ - featured in the ninth of his theses on the *Concept of history*. It was inspired by Paul Klee’s painting, ‘Angelus Novus’, which Benjamin describes as looking as though ...

he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where *we* see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair [*verweilen*: a reference to Goethe’s Faust], to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise: it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress is *this* storm.³

This feels ripe for performance and will be the focus of the ‘Learning Play’ session on Saturday August 3. We will collage it with another theatricalised avenging angel, ‘Divine Correction’, whom

I played in David Lyndsay’s 15th century epic Scots play, *Ane satyre of the Thrie Estaites*⁴ and the angelic musical presence in the Nectarine No9 album, *Saint Jack*.⁵

Next up will be the author of this letter of complaint, laying out why that IBS Tel Aviv symposium should have been cancelled:

Don’t take part in this Brecht-washing of racism, oppression, inequality, injustice and deprivation of the freedom of speech. In present-day Israel, those who protest oppression are shot. Those who resist military occupation are shot. Even those who don’t resist are abused, humiliated, beaten, kidnapped, tortured, killed, their bodies then confiscated; their land is stolen, their water is stolen, their heritage is bombed - they are Palestinians. The CFP [Call for Papers] does not mention them even once. The CFP does not contain the word, ‘Palestinian’. Please don’t take part in a conference on oppression where the oppressed have already been erased.

The letter came from Norwegian playwright Finn Iunker, who authored a play entitled *Voices from Israel*, based on verbatim statements by Israel Defence Forces soldiers. He has also written extensively on Brecht and Benjamin, and we are delighted he will be joining us at ‘Learning Play’. We will have a reading of his *Play alter native* - written in

English for children and once described as “Brecht without Brecht”. I am indebted to comrade Iunker for introducing me to Brecht’s Diderot *Gesellschaft* and he too is keen to begin exploring the possibilities for such a gathering of radical art forces now.

I have been to many Zoom meetings of the Radical Anthropology Group and was very soon in awe of their deep understanding of original communism and how we became human. It should be noted that the CPGB stands pretty much alone on the left in understanding the importance of RAG’s work - Chris Knight has been a regular presenter at CU. I have had several discussions with Chris and Camilla Power on how to develop cultural work together, and now we will get that ball rolling with a ‘Learning Play’ session on how to make radical pantomime. We will be looking at the very ancient roots of that theatrical form with particular focus on the ‘Jack and the beanstalk’ story and touching on other such attempts as the radical 7:84 Theatre Company’s production, *Trembling giant*, and the ‘Jack’ stories in Scottish traveller tales.

I am also delighted that a working relationship with the eminent climate scientist and activist, Bill McGuire, will begin at ‘Learning Play’. Bill has long been using cultural means to get his stark, crucial messages across about the impending climate catastrophe and what needs to be

done about it. Alongside books like *Hothouse earth*, he has written *Skyseed*, a novel about the dangers of geo-engineering climate ‘solutions’, and several short stories, as well as sketches performed with comedians. We will be exploring these on August 6, when Bill will also give a daytime power point presentation in the main CU programme.

So, all in all, a packed programme, part of the full timetable reproduced below. All this will hopefully offer much stimulation and seize the opportunity to begin forging a much needed radical international cultural front ●

Notes

- 1. bdsmovement.net/news/palestinian-performing-arts-network-international-brecht-society-move-symposium-from-apartheid.
- 2. darkosuv.in.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ds-manifesto-transl.-1-19.pdf.
- 3. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm.
- 4. stagingthescottishcourt.brunel.ac.uk/filmed-performances/asatireofthreestates/scene-5-of-12-lines-1580-1909/index.html.
- 5. www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_lq0UyGwbEdv-PaLO2jVZMVErFniKl0Kxo.

Sign up to CPGB news



bit.ly/CPGBbulletin

Communist University

Jointly organised by CPGB, TAS and *Prometheus*

Venue: International Student House, 229 Great Portland Street, London W1 (nearest tube: Great Portland Street)

Cost: All sessions, including accommodation: £250 (£150 unwaged)
Weekend, including one night's accommodation: £60 (£30)
Full day: £10 (£5) Single session: £5 (£3)

If you cannot attend in person, join us online - Zoom webinar registration link for all sessions:
us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_QtdT4ipeR5qbWU52mA_5PA

CU is different from the run-of-the-mill schools put on by other left groups.
Plenty of time is allocated to contributions from the floor.
Controversial debate is positively welcomed and, needless to say, there are no three-minute time limits

Date	10am to 12 noon	1.30pm to 3.30pm	4pm to 6pm	6.30pm to 8pm
Thursday July 31	Registration from 12 noon	Opening roundtable Forging Communist Unity	Rida Vaquas War, peace and communist strategy	Darko Suvin Bertolt Brecht’s version of <i>The communist manifesto</i>
Friday August 1	Michael Roberts The world economy with Trump	Marc Mulholland Class analysis and social transformation	Ed Potts, Yassamine Mather and Archie Woodrow Debate: nationalism, anti-colonial struggles and strategy	Esther Leslie Bertolt Brecht’s <i>The exception and the rule</i>
Saturday August 2	David Broder Far-right uses of a ‘workerist’ identity politics, and their roots in Labourism	Nick Wrack Envisioning the communist future	Ted Reese The transition to fully automated communism and the role of abundance	Esther Leslie Walter Benjamin’s <i>Angel of history</i>
Sunday August 3	Moshé Machover and Yassamine Mather Anti-imperialism and the Middle East	Cat Rylance and Joe Carman How do we take the project of a Communist Party forward?	Debate: how to build a healthy communist culture	7pm: CPGB Summer Offensive meal - tickets: £25 (£15)
Monday August 4	Peter Kennedy The difference between socialism and communism	Debate: the transition	Roundtable Experiences of our international allies	Finn Iunker <i>Play alter native</i>
Tuesday August 5	Lawrence Parker Can we distance ourselves from Stalinism?	Understanding the global rightwing surge	Chris Knight Revisiting historical communist visions	Chris Knight, Camilla Power, et al. Radical pantomime
Wednesday August 6	Roxy Hall and Mike Macnair Transgender rights, justice and social change	Ian Wright The macro-dynamics of the law of value	Bill McGuire The climate crisis and eco-socialist futures	Bill McGuire and Tam Dean Burn Culture against climate catastrophe
Thursday August 7	Ian Spencer Health and social care work	1pm: Concluding roundtable Building a mass Communist Party	Followed by: Evaluation of Communist University	For the latest updates visit communistuniversity.uk

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.

weekly worker

**Epstein and Trump
were friends ...
so were many
rich and powerful
people**

Desperation and delusion

Trump is determined to put the genie back in the bottle. He fed the conspiracy theory around Jeffrey Epstein, now it is the turn of the Democrats. Eddie Ford urges the left not to get sucked in

In a hole of Donald Trump's own making, the Republican majority in the House of Representatives announced that they would call it quits and head home a day early for the annual five-week summer recess. In this way, it seems, they hoped to circumvent desperate Democratic Party efforts to force a vote on the release of the so-called Jeffrey Epstein files - like repeatedly attaching amendments to totally unrelated legislation, so that Republicans felt compelled to vote them down.

Of course, this just fuels conspiracy theories across the board - what are they trying to cover up? At a press conference defending the decision to cut short the session, house speaker Mike Johnson said that Congress must be careful in calling for the release of documents related to the case for fear of "retraumatizing" his victims, arguing that "there's no purpose for Congress to push an administration to do something that they're already doing".

He meant that Trump has directed his attorney general, Pam Bondi, to release grand jury testimony in the prosecution of Jeffrey Epstein for sex trafficking, although that is expected to be only a fraction of the case's documents - the president citing "the ridiculous amount of publicity" given to his former friend and New York financier, who officially died from suicide in his jail cell in 2019.

But Tucker Carlson, who acted as a gateway drug for generally crazy and far-right ideas on his Fox talk show and then podcasts - stressing that he "loves personally" Donald Trump and has campaigned "with and for the president" - has severely criticised the White House's dismissive attitude to the Epstein story. He has compared it to what he describes as the 'sneering liberal establishment' that Trump campaigned against, saying the left would dismiss critics "out of hand" as "not worth listening to" - now the Trump administration was doing the same, he argued.¹ For him that is really at the heart of why "the Epstein thing is so distressing": the fact that the US government he voted for has "refused to take my question seriously".

The story took a turn last week when *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Trump contributed to a "bawdy" winking letter, including a doodle of a nude woman, to a sort of Festschrift that Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein's girlfriend, had compiled in 2003 for his 50th birthday - which Trump has totally denied and is now suing for libel. And then an artist, Maria Farmer, who first accused Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell of sexual assault almost three decades ago, has told *The New York Times* that she had urged law enforcement officials back then to investigate powerful people in their orbit - including a person "worthy of attention", Donald Trump, because of an "unsettling" encounter



Ghislaine Maxwell, Jeffrey Epstein and Bill Clinton in 1993

with him late one night in 1995 in Epstein's offices.

Typically, having a gut instinct about how to frame a story, he is trying to turn these developments to his favour - as evidence of a media smear campaign against him by the forces of the establishment. Yet it is an open question as to whether that will be enough to satisfy Tucker Carlson and some within his Maga base. Yet, as we saw with the bombing of Iran, which seemed to contradict his 'America first' principles of not getting involved in overseas wars over countries about which we know very little, they were never going anywhere else - as Trump is well aware. Elon Musk's proposed America Party is a non-starter, especially as many within the Maga firmament, like Steve Bannon and Ben Shapiro, regard him as despicable, "illegal" immigrant and globalist. They will stick with Donald.

Conspiracy

If you live by the sword, you die by the sword - or at least, get caught up in a backlash which is difficult to contain. The Epstein conspiracy, to use a term, is something that has been fed by Trump to his base, along with other theories to foster a cult around himself - which we can see on full display at his political rallies and the eco-system of social media, talk shows, podcasts, etc. Many of Trump's fervent supporters believe that Epstein was killed, so that he could not reveal a "client list" implicating other powerful men.

Trump has fanned the theory, of course, by insinuating that the Clintons were linked to Epstein's death and some of the president's own officials had promoted such expectations, including Pam Bondi herself, who only in February told Fox News that Epstein's client list was "sitting on my desk right now to review". Kash Patel, before he became the actual director of the FBI, claimed that the agency was keeping Epstein's "black list"; and the charming Donald Trump junior, one of the president's five children,

accused the Biden administration of keeping the list secret to protect paedophiles - JD Vance made similar claims.

Deep state

As one prominent journalist has noted, Epstein has "become the Ark of the Covenant in the cosmology of rightwing conspiracies", which will reveal the ultimate secrets of deep state paedophiles and other nefarious activities.² A poll in 2021 found that about a quarter of Republicans believed that "the government, media and financial worlds in the US are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping paedophiles, who run a global child-sex-trafficking operation". In that sense, the Epstein files were an easy road to travel from 'Pizzagate' (the QAnon predecessor conspiracy theory that Hillary Clinton and other prominent Democrats held child sex slaves in the basement of the Comet Ping Pong Washington pizza parlour) - hence a leaked email from some of Hillary Clinton's campaign staffers contained code words for paedophilia, human trafficking and satanic ritual abuse.

In 2020 an NBC journalist described QAnon as "this theory that Democrats are a satanic paedophile ring and that you are the saviour of that" - to which Trump replied, after saying several times that he did not know about it, "they are very strongly against paedophilia" and "I agree with that".³ And, of course, apart from their ideological use, the ever-changing conspiracy theories have been turned into a reliable cash cow by various rightwing media - the classic example being the unhinged Alex Jones and his *Infowars* website, which sells a vast array of merchandise.

However, the truth is a lot more prosaic. The term, 'Epstein list', or 'Epstein files', has become conflated, sometimes intentionally by both his supporters and detractors, with a supposed 'client list' - even though the US Department of Justice and the FBI jointly concluded that there was no such list. A DoJ memo from

July this year stated that there was "no credible evidence" that Epstein blackmailed prominent individuals as part of his actions, and indeed the services he provided were less remarkable than people had made out. The court documents and flight logs, some of which have been publicly released, have already named various prominent individuals as having travelled with Epstein, or been in contact with him - no deeply held secret. Others mentioned in the 'Epstein files' include Prince Andrew, Bill Clinton, New Mexico governor Bill Richardson, lawyer Alan Dershowitz, Michael Jackson and Stephen Hawking - not all partners in crime with Jeffrey Epstein (unless you believe that the conspiracy is on a truly vast and sinister scale!).

But now Trump is struggling to put the genie back in the bottle, especially as it is on record that he and Epstein had been close friends, if not part of a mutual admiration society. As the president said in a 2002 interview, Epstein was "a terrific guy" and "a lot of fun to be with", and "likes beautiful women as much as I do, and many of them are on the younger side", while Epstein described himself as "Donald's closest friend for 10 years" - which is only to be expected, as he cultivated an elite social circle that included numerous politicians and celebrities. Touching upon a truth, in a post on Truth Social, the president declared that, even if the court gave its "full and unwavering support" in releasing *all* the court documents and files on Epstein, "nothing will be good enough for the troublemakers and radical left lunatics making the request".

It is certainly the case that Trump's grooming of his followers cannot be completely undone like Frankenstein's monster, but it is equally the case that the Democrats, or 'the left' in America, have regularly engaged in conspiracism of their own - arguably on a par with the theories of Maga or QAnon lunatics, because it is so cynically *self-serving*. This was shown by the fact that Jamie Raskin and 15 other House Democrats signed a letter to Pam Bondi, accusing her of withholding documents, so as to protect Trump from potentially damaging disclosures. They cited Elon Musk's earlier post to X accusing Trump of being "in the Epstein files" - as if this was anything unusual or sinister, as very many others were mentioned in the documents, given the deceased man's extensive social circles.⁴

Clearly the Democrats thought they could get political advantage out of making such dark insinuations linking Epstein's crimes to the name of Donald Trump - but that all came to a temporary end when Mike Johnson put the house into recess.

Manchurian

Clearly this is a story of desperation and delusion, with people believing what they want to believe and that the truth can go to hell. While anything is possible, as with JFK and

Lee Harvey Oswald, the most likely explanation is that provided by the authorities - Jeffrey Epstein killed himself while in his cell, as he would have known the terrible fate that awaited him because of the prison regime and the treatment he would receive from fellow inmates. But in the case of the Democrats, we have been there before - remember the Steele Dossier?⁵

Published in 2017, it was compiled about Donald Trump's presidential campaign the year before by counterintelligence specialist Christopher Steele, presented as an unfinished 35-page compilation of "unverified and potentially unverifiable" memos that were considered by Steele to be "raw intelligence - not established facts, but a starting point for further investigation". Full of urinating prostitutes and "pee tape" rumours, this implausible document essentially portrayed Trump as a Manchurian candidate - outlining a "well developed conspiracy of cooperation" between Trump's presidential campaign and the Kremlin. Moscow allegedly supported and assisted Trump for at least five years", dating back to the time when he was the host of *The Apprentice*, and handed him "a flow of intelligence", including on "political rivals". Furthermore, it claimed that Vladimir Putin personally ordered a Russian election interference operation codenamed *Project Lakhta* and actually installed Trump in the White House - all of which the Democrats eagerly lapped up. In other words, they peddled a xenophobic, McCarthyite conspiracy theory of their own, but slightly more believable, simply because it did not involve drinking the adrenochrome-rich blood of children in a Satanic ritual under a pizzeria.

These allegations continued to regularly resurface, implying that Putin somehow had a 'hold' over Trump, particularly after the outbreak of the Ukraine war in February 2022 - suggesting that the US president was a Russian asset or a 'patsy' for the Kremlin, rather than the more straightforward explanation that he was trying to reverse the decline of US imperialism by ditching long-established foreign policy objectives and practices. Perhaps that is succeeding - witness the way European leaders are scrambling to pay tribute to US imperialism by agreeing to ramp up war/defence spending to 5% on Nato, which Trump has described as a "big win" •

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Notes

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