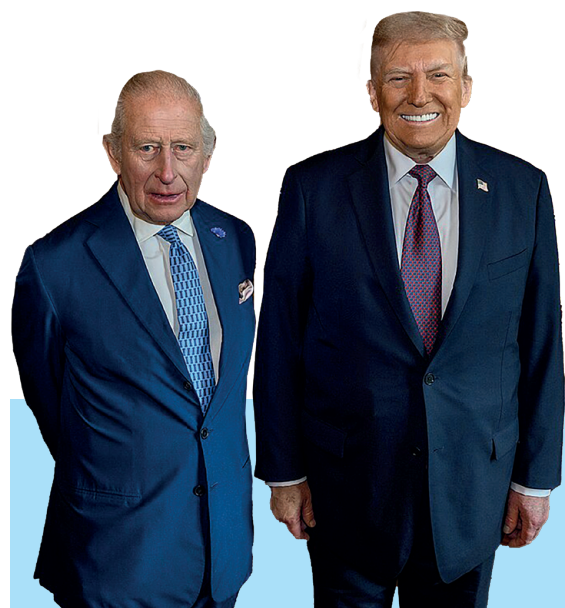


A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly worker



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# LETTERS



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

## Tony Cliff's lie

In his article, 'No popular front with greens' (September 18), Jack Conrad lambastes Tony Cliff for having the rule, "Do not read the 'sectarian literature' of rival organisations". Conrad scrupulously supports his argument with page references to Cliff's autobiography, *A world to win*.

There's just one problem: Cliff was not telling the truth. He did in fact read the far-left press - I have seen him doing so. As Conrad rightly points out, until 1968 Healy's Socialist Labour League was bigger than the International Socialists and for a time was our main rival in the Labour Party's Young Socialists. And in 1968 Cliff was enthusiastic to organise a fusion of IS and the International Marxist Group - presumably he had read up what their ideas were.

When I read the manuscript of Cliff's autobiography, I told him he should cut that sentence above, because it was untrue. He didn't take my advice. He was anxious that his followers should not get immersed in disputes between small groups. As he often did, he overstated his position for emphasis.

Of course, Cliff can be criticised for untruthfulness, but we all have our faults. After all, Lenin used to tell sexist mother-in-law jokes. Presumably we don't imitate him in that.

**Ian Birchall**

North London

## Gaza Italia

It surprised not a few international spectators that it was Italy, of all countries, that staged one of the first political mass strikes demanding an end to the genocide in Gaza and denouncing its government's complicity. Italy, where political cynicism is high and voter turnout in general elections spectacularly low? Italy, where, since the collapse of the post-war political system in the 1990s, not a single party even claims to represent the working class - and where the majority of blue-collar voters now opt for the far right?

What is often ignored is that the Italians' political (or anti-political) attitudes are not rooted in indifference. In a mental and attitudinal sense, if not materially, the 'global south' begins here. Italians across the spectrum feel justified resentment towards the EU and the US - a sense of being left out, if not just screwed over, amplified especially after the Eurozone crises and comparable to national sentiment in Greece. With declining real wages and considerably higher unemployment, compared to Germany, France, Netherlands, or the UK, Italians feel peripheral in the global economic order, despite living in an industrialised G7 country. Consequently, many intuitively identify with the struggles of countries in the global south. Opposition to western imperialism's latest wars, whether in Ukraine or Palestine, is almost as likely to be voiced by the average rightwinger as leftwinger - regardless of the policies of parliamentary leaders.

But let's not overstate the case. This Monday's mass action (that rare occurrence - a political general strike) was no spontaneous outbreak of general resentment. It followed two years of genocide, tracked in real time on television and the internet. Moreover, it was called and chiefly organised by the most advanced section of the Italian proletariat: the Unione Sindacale di Base (USB), an ideologically communist 'grassroots

union' founded in 2010 from a merger of both communist and syndicalist predecessors.

Now, the USB is not unimportant - it had 250,000 members at its foundation and has grown since - and has some leverage in public transport, among agricultural workers in the south, in public healthcare, and in logistics and transportation labour. The workers who refused arms deliveries to both Israel and Ukraine in the past years were USB-organised port and airport labourers, and it was USB-organised port workers in Genoa who first launched the idea of a general strike for Gaza. The USB, however, remains far smaller than the mainstream unions - the CGIL, CISL and UIL. The CGIL, closely linked to the Democratic Party (PD), occasionally postures left to pacify its rank and file. It was approached by the USB to co-organise Monday's strike, but declined - instead calling for a two-hour walkout (four hours for metalworkers) the Friday before.

But article 40 of the Italian constitution guarantees all workers the right to strike, regardless of union membership. On Monday, workers of all unions (and none) joined the mass walkout - so many that even the USB was overwhelmed. Estimates for Bologna alone, where I live, vary wildly from 10,000 participants (according to the police) to 100,000 (according to the Marxist-Leninist militant network, Rete dei Comunisti). Demonstrations blocked public transport, regional trains and even part of the motorway. Bologna's Democratic Party mayor, who had only recently publicly denounced local pro-Palestine protestors as "anti-Semites" for passing near a synagogue (not even directly, but supposedly close enough to drive fear into the Jewish community) found himself compelled to hoist a Palestine flag from the town hall to express his new-found solidarity with the victims of genocide.

Similar scenes were seen in at least 65 other cities across Italy, involving hundreds of thousands. The motto was 'Let's block everything', and this was achieved to a possibly unprecedented degree. The Italian bourgeois press largely depicted the strike as if its sole demand was recognition of the state of Palestine - that belated empty gesture by those with hands soaked in the blood of the genocide, such as Keir Starmer, and echoed in a motion tabled by Democratic Party delegates in Bologna's local administration the morning after the strike. In reality, the strike demanded much more: a free Palestine, military protection for the global aid flotilla, an end to arms shipments and to military cooperation with Israel, and a halt to Italy's complicity in foreign conflicts through trade or military agreements in general.

Local labour struggles, like those of Genoa port workers, were linked to opposition to European and western militarisation. The strike demonstrated the capacity of grassroots unions to organise mass action outside mainstream channels and the intrinsic internationalism of working class interests: "Drop the weapons, raise the wages" was emblazoned on every USB steward's hi-visibility jacket, including mine, linking the impoverishment of those who still have work to the wars at our doors.

Contropiano, the paper of the aforementioned Rete dei Comunisti network, suspects that "something of enormous political significance happened, which probably marks the beginning of the end of social passivity". Understandably, the main concern now is how to maintain momentum beyond momentary

demonstrations or a single 24-hour strike. Demonstrations, after all, are fleeting: the biggest mass protest in British history in 2003 did not stop the Iraq war - because our side had no power. Likewise, even if the Democratic Party liberals now make pro-Palestine noises, while having no governmental responsibility, Giorgia Meloni's government shows no intention of veering off the White House script.

The missing ingredient is a genuine Communist Party. Italy, like the UK, has no such thing, despite various outfits claiming the name. In both countries, there are groups that recognise this absence as a key problem, though their strategies for addressing it differ. In the UK, the CPGB views unifying the existing Marxist left, currently scattered among the proverbial 57 varieties, as the first step. In Italy, Rete dei Comunisti pursues cadre activity on three interconnected fronts: the social front (class struggle in workplaces and communities); the political front (unifying fragmented struggles into a coherent project of revolutionary transformation); and the ideological front (analysis, theoretical education and propaganda). Over time, it is expected that objective circumstances and subjective efforts will bring these fronts together, paving the way for a new synthesis - a genuine Communist Party emerging organically as a logical step and a necessity. The September 22 political general strike is seen as an early vindication of this approach: "It is increasingly impossible to separate the economic and labour aspects, as trade unions typically do, from the political, social and human dimensions," Contropiano notes.

The left press worldwide has been justifiably enthusiastic about the strike, and no doubt British organisations will try to copy and paste the success, just as they have called for action to 'bring Taksim Square' or the Arab Spring to Britain. True, international coordination of struggles like the Italian strike would be a huge step forward. What value is there, after all, in certain British socialist organisations' much-flaunted trade union links, if they are not already pushing these unions towards internationalist political action in this instance? Whether straightforward imitation attempts will bear fruit is another matter, of course, as circumstances in the UK are vastly different.

I would, in any case, urge readers of the Weekly Worker - especially the younger among them, whose practical experience may be limited, and who might benefit from teaching themselves discipline and tactical thinking - to get directly involved in organising Palestine solidarity action.

I will leave them with the most emotive moment of Monday's strike from my personal point of view. Acting as a steward in the cordon walking ahead of the Bologna demonstration, we marched to the outskirts to occupy the ring road and part of the A14 motorway late in the day. Turning around, I saw thousands upon thousands pouring onto the motorway behind us, like a biblical exodus, as the sun set and 'Io ero Sandokan' - a 1974 song about the Italian partisan struggle - played on our van's sound system.

It was cinematic - a moment I will never forget.

**Maciej Zurowski**

Bologna

## YP ad hoc

The recent, second, meeting of Redcar and Cleveland Your Party, with approximately 20 attending, reflected the civil war presently raging inside

the party. Both wings of the secret leadership factions were clearly not held in the same esteem as previously.

The overall situation was therefore ambiguous, it not being clear what our transitional organisation - a local socialist network of YP supporters - should be focused on. Plans for social media output were discussed and a new steering group was agreed, with the addition of two comrades onto a pre-existing ad-hoc body. A further team of three comrades were tasked with arranging a benefit gig with Joe Solo, a well-known singer-songwriter and committed socialist activist, who had agreed to perform locally.

A further agreement was made around supporting the 'Newcastle Unites' anti-fascist demonstration organised for Saturday September 27 to oppose a mobilisation by conveniently born-again Christian Tommy Robinson and born-again far-right Ukip leader Nick Tenconi (who doubles up as the UK mouthpiece of the rightwing Turning Point thinktank - in the news recently following the assassination of their fascism-lite 'influencer', Charlie Kirk).

The meeting formally supported the dozen organisations behind the protest - as opposed to the Stand Up to Racism static protest in the city centre. Of interest was the fact that the Teesside SUtR branch seems to be refusing to take guidance from the hapless mothership!

**Paul Cooper**

Redcar and Cleveland

## YP steps

Thank you, Carla Roberts, for your informative article, 'Straight from Momentum playbook' (September 18).

You say, that the political statement is to be drafted by the "Independent Alliance MPs and the team around the MPs". My impression is that the bulk of Your Party subscribers is composed of those from the left of old Labour, either recently or formerly disillusioned by Blair and Starmer - essentially socialists, which the Independent Alliance are not. These MPs have noticeably had little to say in political debates over recent months.

Then we have the first-time voters - this time added to by dropping the voting age to 16. They are there to be won. Both Jeremy and Zarah know how to enthrone them. We need to mount a drive in voter registration - an ideal task for new recruits. Previously, many young people would join the movement and gain experience through constituency and workplace activity. Too often, the pattern these days has been for university graduates to be recruited into supporting office roles - research, dealing with correspondence, speech writing - who may then be sponsored as a 'safe pair of hands' to be dropped into vacant constituencies, but with no local roots or experience of a world outside party politics.

Such insider Labour candidates will not win over the cohort of voters who had previously lacked a political home, and have largely stopped voting - this as a result of careerist MPs and party apparatchiks increasingly distanced from traditional trade unionist and community activists.

A cosmopolitan liberal elite, often absorbed by identity politics, have become the party insiders - the very people who lost the Red Wall. We don't want to fall into that trap again. They will not win support at the doorstep, they will not enthrone hustings meetings, they will certainly not find the support of the more dedicated Marxists among us. Being directed by low profile Independent Alliance MPs will not put fire in the bellies of those who are the natural

bread and butter of our potential activists and voters,

I have no doubt that Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana could sit down with a scrap of paper and draw up a political statement in an hour or two. It is not rocket science. Just their names were sufficient to draw in 800,000 subscribers. They must swallow their pride and get stuck in. We all know most of what will be in there: restore benefit cuts, impose a wealth tax, close tax havens and tax loopholes, raise corporation tax, nationalise rail, mail and utilities, organise the mass building of council housing, expand green energy - especially cutting electricity bills - take action to reduce domestic violence and rape, abolish the House of Lords, reform the electoral system, prosecute those responsible for corruption and pollution. Most of that was in the 2017 and 2019 manifestos, which had more mass appeal than the 2024 manifesto.

We can refine these points and prioritise them in our consultative meetings. We do not need the MPs to control this for us. We will have more conferences before the 2029 general election to twiddle with organisational issues. What we need now is a framework to get us ready for the elections in May, and an agreed leader to draw us all together. No more delays and infighting!

**Alan Faith**

Cumbria

## YP network

Sheffield supporters of Your Party have agreed the following emergency resolution:

1. We urge the national leadership of Your Party to:
  - (a) Have Zarah Sultana and Jeremy Corbyn publicly meet to discuss their perspectives for the new party in front of an audience of representatives of YP proto-branches who are free to ask questions.
  - (b) Publish all agreed structures, processes and decision-making protocols.
  - (c) Drop all proposed legal action, and request a withdrawal of the complaint to the Information Commissioners Office.
2. We also urge all those who are active around Your Party to:
  - (a) Build a national network of Your Party groups, to fight for a new mass socialist party, fighting first for:
    - (i) The creation of a membership structure;
    - (ii) The creation of official branches.
  - (b) To do this irrespective of the outcome of the current breakdown in relations at the top of Your Party.

**Tina Becker**

Sheffield

## YP SWP

On September 11 Lambeth had its first Your Party meeting, where 150 people attended. The organisers - mostly from the local Corbyn supporters and trade unions - included some SWP members. A speaker talked about organising a left alternative locally and an open discussion followed. Then the meeting split into smaller groups to discuss different topics, including the democratic structure of the new party. There was a very positive atmosphere and much networking going on. The meeting agreed to set up a committee and have open monthly meetings, the next one scheduled for October 9. Meanwhile, during the weeks before the event, the initial organising committee was amazed to hear that the SWP had organised their own meeting for the following day and had secured Zarah Sultana and Andrew Feinstein to speak - without telling anyone! It was in a venue capable of holding several hundred



people and was a well-attended rally with standing room, only. An overflow hall was also used, where some actual discussion took place.

However, any good will was swiftly eroded, when the SWP announced from the stage that a Lambeth Your Party meeting would be held on September 25 (a proposal voted down by a meeting of 150 people the night before in favour of October 9). Since then the SWP has been using the announcement-only WhatsApp group and email list garnered by the Sultana rally to promote its meetings - and removing anyone who raises the already existing, widely supported initiatives in the borough.

The SWP's insulting behaviour showed contempt for the local organisers and revealed its own sectarian nature, in that it is clearly determined to control proceedings. However, I think the main local organisation will stand firm and proceed to formulate democratic structures going forward.

**Linda Beiden**  
Lambeth

## Carbon economism

Once again, the climate lobby and their middle class commentators and *Guardian* readers want the working class to pay the price for their 'net zero' fantasies. They churn out endless warnings about tipping points and doomsday models, while ignoring the simple fact that we still need oil and gas - not just for energy, but as feedstock for plastics, chemicals, medicines and materials that modern life depends on. You can't build hospitals, homes or even wind turbines without it.

When Kemi Badenoch (I am not a fan) talks about expanding oil and gas in the North Sea, that's not just "drill, baby, drill" posturing: it's jobs, it's money in the pocket, it's food on the table for ordinary families. More production means more employment, and prosperity for ordinary families. Once working people achieve a decent standard of living, they have the security to actually care about the environment more. Poverty doesn't make people green: it makes them desperate.

But the reality at the moment is a lot worse for the last industrial workers of the UK. Up to 1,000 North Sea jobs are being wiped out every single month, sacrificed at the altar of net zero. Some estimates place that loss even higher, citing windfall taxes and stalled projects - Offshore Energies UK has warned of 35,000 jobs at risk and £12 billion in lost tax receipts, but we are not ignorant to the job losses of the past when it suited the oil companies. Harbour Energy alone cut 250 jobs, citing punitive taxation, while others in Aberdeen follow suit. The major chemical company, Ineos, has just pulled out of the North Sea, up to £3 billion being redirected towards the USA, Grangemouth and Lynsey oil refinery.

So the alternative to domestic production is not some clean, green utopia. It's simply more imports of oil, gas and coal - only this time we let other countries pump, mine and refine it, while we pat ourselves on the back for being 'pollution-free'. In reality, we're just offshoring both the jobs and the emissions, outsourcing production abroad and congratulating ourselves on being guileless and green. They tell us to 'follow the science', while offering only a deception: Britain pretends to be clean, while others do the dirty work in our name. That isn't environmentalism - it's hypocrisy, and it places Britain's working class on the chopping block.

I need to be clear: the so-called 'climate emergency' has become less about science now and more about

control. It's a political tool, designed to terrify young people into obedience with constant apocalyptic messaging, feeding them extreme anxiety, and killing debate. Step outside the narrative and you're branded a heretic. Dale Vince, the green industrialist and self-declared saviour of the world, went even further, openly saying that "climate denial" should be made a criminal offence. Prison for disagreement? That's not science - that's authoritarianism (all hail our saviour).

The arrogance of pretending Britain can stop global warming, while producing less than 1% of global emissions, is absurd. Over in China and India, they are building fossil fuel plants every single week. Do the climate crusaders seriously believe shutting down British industry will change the climate? All it does is throw our workers on the scrapheap, while exporting jobs abroad - just as they did with the heroic miners, who fought tooth and nail against the UK establishment, only to see their industry destroyed and communities plunged into despair and other parts into a police state.

What we're witnessing is class warfare in disguise. Middle class elites - and, yes, they are elites who can afford green virtue-signalling. They don't worry about mass redundancies or where the next wage is coming from. For the rest of us, 'net zero' means job zero. And now, on top of that, we're told to cheer, as our industries collapse and we become dependent on imported fossil fuels - a strategy that serves the global market, but not the British worker. You stand against the proletariat and with its class enemies. No wonder the working class are confused as to who stands with us these days.

The workers - the people who actually *do* stuff - say 'Drill, build and raise living standards'. Prosperous workers can defend both their livelihoods and their environment. But there's no green future without jobs first. We refuse to be the eggs smashed for someone else's net-zero omelette.

**Kyle Griffiths**  
Offshore shop steward

## Energy fascism

In reply to Eibhlin McColgan (Letters, September 18), Tommy Robinson has done the left a favour in my view. He obviously sees himself as the leader of British fascism, although more *Il Duce* than *Führer*. If there is no fascist movement, obviously there would be no need for an opposition. Robinson is seeking to become the pole of attraction for fascism in Britain, and so the left should get down to building the opposite pole of attraction.

What is needed is a mass anti-fascist movement open to any person, group or party opposed to fascism. Initially, an anti-fascist movement is a defensive operation, unlike the struggle for power by the organised working class. Ultra-left sectarians confuse defensive struggles with the struggle for power of the working class, and therefore seek to exclude non-socialists from the anti-fascist movement. But the distinction between defensive and offensive struggle is the most important that a revolutionary can make. If you are a revolutionary and you want to exclude democrats and liberals from the anti-fascist movement, it means you don't understand the difference. By the way, the leaders of Christianity in Britain have already condemned the Tommy Robinson movement for carrying the cross and misrepresenting what Christianity teaches. In other words, the churches oppose him.

We need to build a mass anti-fascist movement which exposes the stupidity and racist nature of the far

right. In Britain, for instance, Tommy Robinson and people who think like him want us to take up a hostile, disrespectful attitude to Islam. Please will someone tell Tommy and the far right that North Sea oil is almost over, the wells are almost depleted. On the other hand, the Islamic nations control about 60% of the global oil supply. In other words, it is the Islamic nations which are keeping Britain afloat, not the other way round.

What do you think would happen if Britain started disrespecting the Islamic people and their religion, rather than showing tolerance? Tommy, wake up: your fascist movement can potentially do a lot of harm to Britain. The last thing we want is for the Islamic nations to put up our oil prices - or, worse, cut off our supplies.

The new British fascism is based on energy ignorance and does not understand that today it is mostly the Islamic nations which are keeping Britain afloat through oil supplies. So my message to Tommy and the far right is, 'Do Britain a favour and pipe down'. The fascist leadership of the old British National Party once turned up at an oil depletion conference. They must have learned the reality about oil supplies, because not long afterwards the BNP went into decline.

British fascism is seeking to build itself up on two foundations: Islamophobia and anti-immigration. This is happening on the continent as well, but not only are the new British fascists dangerously ignorant about Britain's energy situation: they, like the media, feed people an incorrect view about immigration into Britain. We are daily presented with a picture of an endless flood of people coming into Britain. But the truth about immigration is the opposite of what we are being told. Why is the Tory media lying to the British public about immigration?

In the year ending in December 2024, an estimated 517,000 people emigrated from the UK, according to provisional figures from the Office for National Statistics. Net migration into the UK in 2024 was around 431,000. Most of the people leaving are skilled workers, and we need to ask what is going to happen if we don't replace them. The lies about immigration are being orchestrated by the Tory press to discredit Labour, so that they lose the next election. It's all about getting Labour out. The result is that British fascists and Reform UK also benefit from the Tory press lies and distortion about immigration.

The task of the left is to get together and build a mass anti-fascist movement to oppose the fascists and expose the lies.

**Tony Clark**  
For Democratic Socialism

## Local role

I found Mike Macnair's article, where he concludes it with a discussion on the role of the media, very interesting ('Endless embarrassments', September 18). I particularly like his emphasis on the role of advertising in keeping the national and local press in business.

For the last 32 years I have had over a thousand letters published in the local press. During that time I was following the advice of former Communist Party MP, Phil Piratin, who, when he was circulation manager of the *Daily Worker* in the 1950s, told CPGB members to write regularly to their local newspapers.

Those thousand letters of mine have covered local, national and international politics. However, a change in editorial policy by the editor of the *Fenland Citizen* this spring means that I can only comment on local issues. There is no evidence that

this change came from above. The problem was that correspondents were commentating almost every week on the failings of the Starmer-led Labour government: now letters are just complaints about potholes and our Tory MP, Steve Barclay.

The internet has hit local papers badly, with the loss of advertising revenue. For example, there are now large parts of Yorkshire where there are no local newspapers. But those that continue to exist are 'fighting back': they are again doing reports of county, district, town and parish council meetings.

Whilst young people are no longer brought up to read hard copies of newspapers, they are subscribing to online editions like ducks taking to water. Mike Macnair is therefore correct in explaining the important role of an independent national and local press in holding capitalist (and socialist) governments to account.

**John Smith**  
Cambridgeshire

## Boat murder

On September 2, the day after US drones had attacked a boat off the coast of Venezuela, Donald Trump announced in a post: "Be warned - if you are transporting drugs that can kill Americans, we are hunting you". As seems to be normal for Trump, no evidence of drugs was produced nor was there proof that the boat was heading for the US - hundreds of kilometres away.

There is a good article on this event on *The Intercept* website (September 15) by Nick Turse: 'Pentagon barred senior house staffers from briefing on Venezuela boat strike', with a subheading, "A former Pentagon official says, 'US forces went out and committed murder' in the drone strike off the coast of Venezuela".

The article contains quotes from several apparently knowledgeable people, alleging that this strike was murder under both US and international law. If they were drug smugglers, they could have been arrested. This was apparently exacerbated, when it was seen that some onboard had survived, by drones returning to finish them off - 11 people in all.

This reminds me of a book I read

fairly recently, *No god but gain: the untold story of Cuban slavery, the Monroe Doctrine and the making of the United States* by Stephen Chambers (London 2017). In 1808 the USA made slave trading illegal. The poor souls in the south had to rely on their slaves to produce children for them. But Cuba was different. Because it was 'owned' by Spain, trading was OK: slaves could be worked to death and be replaced, relatively cheaply, by new ones from Africa.

Plantations, and therefore slaves, along with the trading, was financed by bankers and other financiers in the *northern states* of the USA - who would have thought it? Large amounts of money were made, in particular from sugar. There was a problem though: slave trading was illegal for the USA in theory, and it was also made illegal by the UK.

At that time neither the Spanish nor the American navy were anything like as powerful as that of Britain and one fear that the Americans had was that the British might grab Cuba from a weakening Spain. This didn't happen, but in 1823 the Monroe Doctrine was established by the US.

In effect this was saying, 'It's all ours!' The US wasn't strong enough then to enforce this and, as Chambers points out, they did things like making public their naval campaign to defeat slave trading and piracy in the area - just joking, of course.

The US has moved to a position where it can enforce the doctrine and has shown it many times: in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Panama, Nicaragua ... and currently with its policies against Cuba and Venezuela.

Trump has now ramped up the doctrine, 'It's all ours! And we can do what we like'. A lot of Americans appeal to the courts - and good luck to them. But it now seems that open, public murder is fine - what are you going to do about it? And Trump goes on from provocation to provocation, carefree and caring less.

Most US capital is shoulder to shoulder and most European leaders are, like Starmer, on their knees in worship. It's going to take a mass communist party to take on him and his criminal mob.

**Jim Nelson**  
email

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## TRUMP

# All the king's men

Behind all the talk of the 'special relationship', there is radical subordination. What about Trump, the man? Not only was his already huge ego fed, flattered and further inflated: there are the mid-terms and maybe even a third term, writes **Eddie Ford**

**D**onald Trump made history last week. As Sir Keir Starmer obsequiously emphasised when he made the original invitation before the media, no other world leader has made more than one official state visit to Britain before.

From Trump's point of view, his huge ego was fed, flattered and further inflated with all the totally over-the-top flummery, as it was meant to be. As for Starmer, there was just relief that he got away with it with no cock-ups. No doubt he was delighted by the fact that at their joint press conference the US president lent credence to the longstanding claim, so vital to the British establishment, that the 'special relationship' sees the UK as America's first partner in defence, spying and now artificial intelligence.

Trump was described as being on "his best low-wattage behaviour" and not disagreeing with his host about much - except Starmer's decision to recognise a Palestinian state (a token gesture, as things stand) - and the only moment when he appeared to be teetering away from diplomacy was when he advised Starmer to use the military to stop small boats crossing the Channel (leaving aside the Online Safety Act that continues to be a source of tension between Washington and London).<sup>1</sup>

Of course, it is not only about Trump's ego - it is also about the folks back home, especially the Republican electorate. If you are living in Britain and do not meet many ordinary Americans, you run the risk of forgetting that from their point of view Britain is 'quaint' - full of royals, castles and old houses. By contrast, America is a very 'new' country - and we are not just talking in pure age terms of a few hundreds of years. The nature of American cities, for example, is a near endless cycle of building and rebuilding. Creative destruction.

So Trump got what he wanted, with a king and a queen, dukes and duchesses, gilded carriages, soldiers dressed up in bearskins and all manner of pomp and circumstance. As for the wider point of view of Britain PLC, the visit could be a boon for tourism. OK, the American dollar is not what it used to be: nonetheless there will surely be massively increased numbers visiting Windsor Castle, Chequers, etc.

Politically Trump will have an eye on the mid-term elections, but also, perhaps, on a third term for himself - sod the constitution, sod the woke lawyers and far-left 'lunatics'. You cannot rule it out.

## Anglosphere

What is particularly noticeable, of course, about the second official visit, compared to the first, was that central London was not touched. The last time Trump went down Whitehall and into Downing Street, there was a big crowd of tens of thousands protesting. Trump could not have missed them. This time parliament was in recess and protests a lot smaller, the Met estimating some 5,000. Protestors from the Stop Trump Coalition, a group of unions and charities, carried signs with slogans such as 'No to racism' and 'Stop arming Israel'. Also, the Socialist Party in England and Wales has to be praised for taking the initiative in trying to organise a school strike by students, even if it did not really catch on.<sup>2</sup>

A more high profile - if hardly



The Donald arrives and is met and greeted

mass - protest, was the giant image of Donald Trump and Jeffrey Epstein projected onto Windsor Castle by the 'Led By Donkeys' collective, all while a soundtrack questioning the relationship between the two men was played on a speaker. For the sin of being off-message and potentially making the US president feel a bit awkward, four people were arrested under the Orwellian charge of "unauthorised projection".

Other than that, Trump was essentially shielded from the public. He flew in by Air Force One to Stansted, then later was whisked off by Marine One to Windsor Castle for the state banquet - and then to Chequers, also by helicopter.

Interestingly, someone else who was sitting down to the lavish dinner that night was Rupert Murdoch - a familiar face on such occasions - who was, a little while ago, being sued for \$10 billion by the US president. Murdoch is, of course, the owner of *The Wall Street Journal*, which published an article reporting on a suggestive birthday card given to Jeffrey Epstein in the shape of a naked woman bearing what purports to be Trump's signature.<sup>3</sup> Trump has, of course, denied it, but the *WSJ* insists that it is telling the truth and has filed for the judge to toss the charges. Either way, having pumped up the Epstein scandal for all its worth in order to victimise the Democrats, Trump is now the victim ... and, needless to say, he doesn't like it.

As for Starmer, he got away with his own Epstein scandal, that is the sacking of Peter Mandelson. How deep Trump's own involvement with Epstein goes is purely a matter of conjecture - this writer has no more idea than anyone else - but you cannot say it is anything other than an acute embarrassment. Whether or not Trump signed a particular birthday card is entirely a moot point - but he *could have*, which is the real point.

The fact that cannot be denied, as it is on open historical record, is that they both 'inhabited the same world' - and, quite frankly, what top politician in the US did not inhabit the same world as Epstein? Bill Clinton certainly flew on Epstein's private jet, the so-called 'Lolita express'.

When it comes to all those speeches at Windsor, most are, of course, pre-written by teams of advisors, and that includes Charles III's politicians too. Not that we should dismiss out of hand everything that was said. Trump's stuff about how "we must continue to stand for the values and the people of the English-speaking world", is something, of course, that Winston Churchill himself pushed (he was Anglo-American). Since the late 19th century there was much talk, from politicians but also writers of literature, of two 'great nations' coming together to 'civilise the world'. HG Wells saw America and the British Commonwealth forming the core of his 'New World Order'.

## Vassal

There has certainly been constant reference to a special relationship since Churchill first coined the term in 1946 ... and it is not all guff. After all, there is the 'Five Eyes Alliance' that unites the Anglosphere - US, Canada, Britain, New Zealand, Australia - at the top of the imperialist pecking order. This is all too real and it is not only about who spies on who, and who shares what with who. Having said that, it would be wrong to exaggerate what the special relationship actually is - since 1956 and the Suez debacle we are talking about a relationship of *radical subordination*.

The fact of the matter is that, especially when it comes to the City and the financial sector as a whole, Britain very much relies on the US - that is the ABC of world politics and it absolutely matters in British domestic politics. It is, for example, perfectly

correct to make demands like 'Don't send arms to Israel', 'Break off diplomatic relations with Israel', and so on. But you need to be clear-headed and accept that by raising such slogans you are immediately in confrontation with the US, and it will respond appropriately. If you look back at relatively recent history, it is not for nothing, for example, that Charles de Gaulle kept saying '*Non!*' to British membership of what was then the Common Market.<sup>4</sup> He feared, quite rightly, that the UK would act as a Trojan horse for US imperialism within the European project.

There was a carefully prearranged economic package that was very much for Starmer's benefit - the US and UK promising to boost financial ties, including by exploring closer alignment of their capital markets. Hence the US private equity company, Blackstone, pledged to invest £100 billion in British assets over the next decade as part of a broader \$500 billion investment push across Europe.

Meanwhile US officials said there would be at least \$10 billion of investment deals in the technology sector, an agreement on nuclear cooperation and an exploration of "how the deep connections between our leading financial hubs can be maintained into the future". And Trump brought with his delegation leading figures from Big Tech, including OpenAI's Sam Altman and chipmaker Nvidia's Jensen Huang, while companies such as Rolls-Royce, GSK and Microsoft attended a business roundtable at Chequers. All this was aimed at boosting UK pretensions of being an AI superpower.

It is important to put this into context, it goes without saying. First of all, a lot of it is not new - rather already preexisting deals and proposals - but, when it comes to countries and global trade, it is in reality not a huge amount. Britain

apparently has particular expertise in the field of AI and this American investment is a mixed bag - some of it involves *taking over* existing British companies, whilst other parts seem to be about investing in existing British companies, but there also appears to be a large element of investment purely for American companies. It is not a straightforward job to decipher these announcements, but a press release talked about "directly" creating 7,600 British jobs - interpret it any way you can.

Nick Clegg - former Tory deputy prime minister and also Meta's former president of global affairs - has a point when he says that the multibillion-dollar transatlantic tech deal, heralded with great fanfare by both governments, represents "sloppy seconds from Silicon Valley" - essentially "mutton dressed as lamb" that would make the country even *more* reliant on US tech firms.<sup>5</sup> He has declared that the relationship between the UK and the US tech sector was "all one-way traffic" and warned that Britain was being "defanged" by simply fostering a greater reliance on the US tech sector. Clegg concludes that the UK is a kind of "vassal state technologically" - the moment British companies start developing any scale or ambition, to use his terms, "they have to go to California", because this country just does not have the necessary growth capital ●

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## Notes

1. theguardian.com/us-news/2025/sep/18/starmer-trump-state-visit-influence-ukraine-gaza.
2. socialistparty.org.uk/articles/142584/10-09-2025/17-september-youth-walkout-against-trump.
3. snopes.com/news/2025/09/09/trump-letter-epstein-nude-woman.
4. news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/27/newsid\_4187000/4187714.stm.
5. theguardian.com/politics/2025/sep/17/nick-clegg-multibillion-dollar-transatlantic-tech-agreement-sloppy-seconds-from-silicon-valley.



## USA

# Saint Charlie and Trump's crusade

America's right is unleashing a wave of repression which began with its own version of 'cancel culture', but inevitably now includes the left. Paul Demarty calls for organisational preparedness and an uncompromising defence of free speech

**M**ere hours after the shooting of Charlie Kirk on September 10, it was clear that the American right had a mind to make a martyr out of the victim, and that this impulse reached all the way up to the White House.

The zone has truly been flooded with sentimental guff about how splendid the fellow was, but I use the word 'martyr' advisedly - there is already a cult of Kirk's literal sanctity brewing, and a corresponding denunciation of his critics as literally demonic. Andrew Kolvet, a spokesman for Kirk's 'Turning Point USA' outfit, claimed that a miracle had taken place - that the bullet *should* have gone right through Kirk's neck, possibly harming others - it did not, for Kirk's body had suddenly assumed supernatural toughness. This succeeded in energising Kirk's evangelical followers, and also in inadvertently convincing various leftists of a number of fatuous conspiracy theories about his death (which will not detain us further).

With sanctification, however, comes the need for vengeance against the 'demons' who killed him. Since Kirk met his unhappy fate, the right has broadly succeeded in maintaining a pitch of wild hysteria. This rage has spread out in all kinds of strange, unfocused directions. A website appeared - 'CharliesMurderers.com' - that gathered personal information on individuals deemed by the mob to have celebrated Kirk's death (though the worst 'crime' most had committed was merely to mention Kirk's odious politics, or protest at the idea that the left somehow has a *worse* record of direct political violence in American life than the right).

By the time the site was forced to rebrand hastily, and then apparently disappeared altogether, many luckless individuals had already been sacked. Most were just random service industry functionaries (an Office Depot employee who refused to photocopy fliers for a Kirk vigil springs to mind), but some bigger fish were reeled in. Karen Attiah - an op-ed writer for *The Washington Post* - was sacked for a series of Bluesky posts (Bluesky being the Twitter clone that has become a refuge - and echo-chamber - for those who can no longer tolerate the atmosphere on the website now called X). These were hardly intemperate, certainly by the usual standards of internet-poisoned Bluesky power users. They did include one misleading quotation from Kirk, but the idea that this amounts to violent or unacceptable rhetoric is absurd. Nonetheless, Attiah is out of a job.

The biggest scalp was yet to come: Jimmy Kimmel - a legend of that peculiarly American TV format, the late-night talk show. On September 15, Kimmel's opening monologue poked fun at the Make America Great Again reaction to Kirk's death, highlighting in particular a widely mocked interview with Donald Trump himself, in which he responded to a question about his feelings after Kirk's death by changing the subject immediately to the vulgar ballroom he is having bolted on to the White House. After a flood of complaints, Kimmel's broadcaster, ABC - ultimately owned by the Walt Disney corporation - suspended the production of his show.

The proximate cause of Kimmel's downfall, however, was surely that among those calling for his head was one Brendan Carr, a Trump flunky



With his Charlie Kirk sycophant

appointed to head up the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which regulates, among other things, broadcast licences. Carr made it abundantly clear that it was within his power to make life hell for ABC (and local stations that syndicate shows like *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*) and within days the corporate overlords had capitulated. As of this writing, Disney has reversed course and reinstated Kimmel. No such luck, however, for Attiah or the various complete nobodies caught up in this witch-hunt.

Meanwhile, on September 22 this little crusade finally washed up on the shores of the left proper, with Trump's announcement that Antifa - a loose network of anarchistic 'anti-fascists' - had been designated a domestic terrorist organisation. It is quite possible that other organisations will follow.

## Woke right

Many have noted the peculiar similarity of these recent controversies to the internet mob actions of left-liberals that peaked between roughly 2017 and 2022 - the thing they called 'cancel culture'. Though there are important differences, which we will come to, the comparison is not wholly unfair. Indeed, for those of us on the left who fought against this degenerate tendency at the time, the similarities in detail are uncanny. We hear, as we heard from the old 'woke' mobs, that free speech does not mean the right not to be fired for your speech. We hear from attorney general Pam Bondi, another incompetent bootlicker, that "there's free speech and then there's hate speech", and that the first amendment does not protect "violent" speech.

The arguments advanced, in fact, so *exactly* repeat those of the old intersectionalists that I have sometimes wondered if this is satire - a deliberate attempt to throw the language of the left back in its face (I do not *think* this is what is going on). The midwits of the American right are capable of such satire in principle, but not of resisting boastfulness about how clever they are to be doing it. No such boasts are in evidence. Instead, by

means of their cynicism and goldfish memories for everything other than grudges, the right has succeeded in inventing cancel culture again - from 'first principles'.

The difference is that, with one significant exception, the various liberal moral crusades never had the *full coercive force of the state* behind them. (The exception is, of course, the various curtailments of personal liberty entailed by the Covid-19 pandemic.) No chairman of the FCC threatened to interfere with the licensing of Fox News. No attorney general or law enforcement director promised to deport people for objecting to the veneration of (the equivalent, I suppose) George Floyd.

The *complicity* of sections of the state and private bureaucracies in the speech controls of the 'Great Awakening' was bad enough on its own. But the present development is a dangerous additional step change. We have, in this paper, tended to give short shrift to the idea that the Trump regime is fascist. That assessment has not changed, but we must state again that we do not, by such reticence, intend to give the impression that there is therefore nothing to worry about. McCarthyism was not fascist either - nor the nativist hysteria that saw Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti framed and executed in the 1920s. Neither were there matters of indifference for the left.

It cannot be long until the assault on the 'commanding heights' of the media gives way to a wave of general repression against the organised left, which the Trump regime is only too pleased to blame for the death of Kirk.

It is now most probable that Tyler Robinson, the accused, was motivated - if indeed he is guilty - by broadly leftwing opposition to Kirk's ideas. No evidence has emerged whatsoever - despite the desperate fishing of a million conservative muckrakers and a weaponised law-enforcement apparatus - of any association with existing left organisations (or semi-organisations like Antifa). This will not stop the purge, of course: it is the view of the rightwing hysterics that the Democratic Socialists of America

- or indeed the Democrats themselves - have so poisoned the atmosphere of discussion with their denunciations of Trump that it is quite inevitable that violence will ensue (the exact mirror image, again, of the liberal bogeyman, 'stochastic terrorism' ...).

As I noted last week, the generous wording of the US constitution first amendment is not much of a shield here, when it is plain that Trump's only real interest in state power is its exploitation in favour of his own pecuniary interests - and *against* those who fail to show him sufficient respect. It is a good thing that many on the American left - from our own rough co-thinkers in the Marxist Unity Group DSA caucus to social democratic intellectuals like Osita Nwanevu - have begun to take seriously questions of democratic functioning and the limitations of the US constitution. It seems likely, unfortunately, that a *practical* lesson in the deficiencies of American 'democracy' is getting underway.

## Loyalty

That is no reason for despair, of course. Even the best-entrenched dictators have limited power: they must at least command the loyalty of their auxiliaries, which requires either principled support or bribery; and bribery must be paid for by appropriations from the broader population (who are not separable easily from the military/police anyway).

Though the costs are often grim, dictators tend to fall in the end. Bans and proscriptions can be counterproductive - the anti-socialist laws of the Bismarck regime not only failed to prevent the rise of German social democracy, but gave that movement *increased* prestige internationally, which in turn made future bans all but ineffective. The success of the Bolsheviks (and Mensheviks, for that matter) operating under tsarist autocracy needs no further elaboration.

Yet there is work to be done. Establishing media institutions is essential to work undertaken in conditions of repression - from

publicising individual cases of victimisation to organising resistance. We live in, to put it mildly, a very different media environment to the predecessors mentioned. With the printing press, there was a significant barrier to entry into the media, but, supposing you could meet it, you could achieve full 'vertical integration': a party print shop would print a party paper that would be distributed - perhaps illicitly, and across international borders - by party cadre to ordinary party members at the far end. In some respects, the same holds for radio or even TV (since one could always make 'pirate' broadcasts).

Today, of course, most media is consumed via the internet, which is an altogether different thing. The fixed capital is totally centralised under the control of monopoly capital, with the result that it is extremely cheap and easy to get your voice out there, but entirely impossible to 'vertically integrate' in this way. At the end of the day, all the fibre-optic cables belong to companies like Cisco, and almost all the servers belong to tech giants like Amazon - whose economic model is entirely dependent on state largesse. Trump attracts scandal by openly doing his carrot-and-stick act through the FCC and FTC (Federal Trade Commission), but it is quite certainly the case that Democrat presidents do the same thing more discreetly.

There is likely no silver bullet here - organisations facing repression will have to be pragmatic and quick on their feet to maintain their reach and connections to the cadre. In the long run, the left should experiment with developing as much of its own infrastructure as possible, but we are where we are.

It should, lastly, be obvious that leftwing support for, or compliance with, the last wave of 'cancel culture' was a catastrophic error. (By 'compliance', I mean refusal to denounce openly the suppression of reactionary views by public and private institutions.) The attempt to enforce liberal nostrums by means of taboos entirely failed to stop the rise of the authoritarian, chauvinist right; support, passive or active, for these efforts has destroyed the left's credibility as an *alternative* to liberalism.

The interest of the left in free speech is, as I have argued previously,<sup>1</sup> more profound than the traditional liberal argument that there is something like a 'marketplace of ideas', in which the best ideas will win out by way of some kind of quasi-Darwinian struggle. So long as bourgeois ideology has its hold on our minds, any such evolutionary process will be systematically distorted; it is not only the case that holding open the space for free speech is essential to socialist struggle, but - reciprocally - also that the victory of socialism is necessary to realise free speech in its fullness as a public good. To disavow free speech for some category of enemies - racists, fascists, Terfs, whatever - is merely to ensure that the cycle of irrationalism, liberal and revanchist, continues; and, sooner or later, the chauvinist right will get its turn.

Credibility as a defender of political freedom is hard-won and easily lost. We must start to rebuild it now ●

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## Notes

1. 'A curse on free speech' *Weekly Worker* November 9 2023: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1466/a-curse-on-free-speech](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1466/a-curse-on-free-speech).



## POLEMIC

# Paved with good intentions

Informed by a pamphlet written by the Pacific Collective (Marxist-Leninist), Jaques de Fouw explains how to build communist unity through a watered down minimal programme and opening up to opportunist groups

**R**ecently I was able to attend the Communist University 2025 in London. I thank the CPGB for their effort in hosting this event, which had interesting talks and lectures, even in light of the late change in the event's theme and content. The originally intended theme was, of course, the fusion talks between the CPGB, Talking About Socialism (TAS) and the Prometheus Unity Faction (PUF), which sadly failed in the period leading up to the university.

I accompanied the members of the Dutch group, Communist Platform (CP), which is aligned with the CPGB ideologically. Although I myself am not part of CP, I have been involved in the Revolutionaire Socialistische Partij (RSP, formerly de Socialisten) and ROOD (youth wing of the RSP) in the Netherlands since shortly before its involuntary birth as an independent party. As such I hope to provide a perspective from a sympathetic, but external, ideological standpoint on the questions of fusion, communist unity and party-building.

Since our inception, the RSP has, under the ideological leadership of CP, tried to implement the ideas set out by Mike Macnair in his book, *Revolutionary strategy*. Our unity project has led to some success, but has also revealed new and unforeseen problems. I hope I can provide some insights I have obtained from these experiences and the subsequent research I have done for new ways forward. Some of these lessons are, in my opinion, also applicable in the current situation in the UK.

To start, Macnair and the CPGB are correct in their identification of splitting over the smallest things as a major issue in the Marxist left - something which has to be solved, if there is to be any hope of a unified communist force. To this end, Macnair proposes unity on the basis of agreement or acceptance of a party programme as the basis of unity, rejecting splits over other positions. In this, he correctly found a step in the right direction in advocating a sort of unity based in a more basic strategic and tactical agreement, rather than enforcing theoretical unity on a great many or all topics, which contrasts with what many contemporary Trotskyist and Marxist-Leninist groups tend to do.

It is regrettable that the fusion project between the CPGB, TAS and PUF failed, especially in the light of the recent developments of the new Corbyn-Sultana party, which has the potential to dislodge the increasingly unpopular Tory-Labour political status quo. All three communist organisations, as well as other groups present in the talks, have expressed the intention of becoming politically active within this new party, and to try and perform political interventions. Tight or tighter cooperation would certainly help all of the groups in making a bigger impact. The talks between these three groups' leaderships and their attempt at forming a new party programme on which to base their unity did not succeed, though they all seem to express the sentiment that they would be willing to try again if a new approach can be found.

In the Netherlands we have tried and to some extent succeeded in



**Pacific Collective (Marxist-Leninist) were inspired by Mao Zedong, Lin Biao and the Cultural Revolution. We can learn from anyone, but ...**

implementing this idea of a broader unity, based on a programme, by forming our new unity project on acceptance of the party programme, open faction rights and a rejection of theoretical unity. In my experience, programmatic unity and open faction rights has

not been enough to stop the very issue it sought to prevent. We have experienced several minor splits with those with whom we sought to unify, and unity in action has not materialised in any meaningful capacity either.

To try and understand our

situation and find a way forward, I have searched for and read old literature from western communists in the mid to late 20th century, who were already largely dealing with similar fragmentation and party-building difficulties. Amongst these, I found the book, *From*

*circles to party*, by the Pacific Collective (1979) particularly insightful. This book highly informs my current thinking on party forming, party functioning and how to build agreement and unity among communists. It does this by fully deconstructing, and then reconstructing, these core concepts from the ground up.

I think their lessons are sorely needed to underpin our future attempts forward, and to this end I have written a 40-page summary article which makes the book more approachable and easier to understand for a modern (and inexperienced) audience, and which connects the main topics to the current situation in the western left, with a specific section dedicated to Macnair. I will apply a few of the lessons from this book to the failed fusion of our British comrades, and I hope that those who are interested will take the time to read my article on my blog ([jaquesdefouw.wordpress.com](http://jaquesdefouw.wordpress.com)), and/or the original on [marxists.org](http://marxists.org).

## Ukraine example

Macnair was correct in seeking unity on a more limited set of points, but a more fundamental understanding of theoretical unity and democratic centralism, and how to get to them, is needed and is missing in our parties and our current approach. The party programme itself is a form of theoretical unity. In fact, many things within it have an implicit element of theoretical unity, despite us not being necessarily aware of it. The party programme is merely the easiest case to identify. Despite our rejection of 'theoretical unity' in favour of 'democratic centralism', theoretical unity exists in some capacity in everything a political party does. Any resolution our parties adopt, any position we take, and collective action we agree to and enforce using democratic centralism, has an element of theoretical unity in it.

Let us use an example from the Netherlands: our position on the war in Ukraine. The RSP adopted a resolution on the war declaring it to be an inter-imperialist conflict between Russia and the west. Subsequently, a Trotskyist organisation - Socialistische Alternatieve Politiek (SAP), part of the Fourth International - which was active within the RSP, split from it. Why? It had adopted the view that Ukraine was fighting a war for national self-determination, and as such needed to be supported militarily. Now, the rationale, following the ideas of Macnair and CP, is that this is merely one position, and you can disagree on it: you just have to advocate and defend the agreed party line to the outside world, while you can continue to discuss it internally - democratic centralism. The rationale is that you should simply try to convince others of your position, using your faction rights and right to publish.

A nice idea, but it is clear that it is not working. People are not staying in organisations operating on this basis, despite them having more freedom of opinion than most classic Marxist-Leninist and Trotskyist parties. This is because these people are forced to promote and openly defend the official position - one they clearly



disagree with, one which has far-reaching tactical implications for practical work. If you say that you agree with the ‘inter-imperialist’ position, it logically follows that the party should take part in protests, strikes and direct action against any efforts by our own government(s) to fuel their side of the war. However, if you agree with the ‘self-determination’ position, it follows that you ought to form a sort of national front with your national bourgeoisie, or some temporary alliance, in order to defend the Ukrainians and their state. With the RSP adopting the position of the inter-imperialist conflict by majority vote, it mandated all members to engage in ideological - but, more importantly, practical - political work on the basis of this position.

Following the formula found in Macnair’s work and engaged in by both CP and the CPGB, we would expect the Trotskyist SAP to remain in the organisation, subject themselves to the majority decision through democratic centralism, enact the decisions, and meanwhile use their rights to fight for their point of view. Instead of this, they left. Why did they choose to leave? And was this good or bad? If our goal is to have unity among communists, how can we reconcile this with these kinds of splits? Why would this be a valid reason to split, while other reasons are not? But if we say that it was not a valid reason, we have to accept that the split still happened. Are we really going to delude ourselves by clinging to what we wish reality was, as opposed to what the practical results of our own approach are?

With the goal of communist unity in mind, there is no real difference between enforcing theoretical unity on a position, then purging those who do not fall in line, with adopting a strategically and tactically far-reaching, rather fundamental position, enforcing compliance in all the practical work that follows from it, and having a ‘natural’ split follow as a result. This framework is clearly not working, and is not giving us a method towards unity that works, so what are we doing wrong?

One of the main insights the book provides is that having splits or purges on political grounds - ie, enforcing theoretical unity - is not necessarily bad. They can be a good thing if applied correctly. How do we determine how and when to apply this principle? The authors of *From circles to party* point out that there are two types of positions: those which have been proved in practice; or through very thorough, political statistical research. These positions are discussed and established in highly publicised, thorough, easy to understand polemics, reports and statistical research, such that any communist who is honest in their convictions has had the ability to follow the topic to such a degree that denying it would be like denying the earth is round, denying it is a betrayal of the working class. And then there are those positions which have not been proved in that manner.

Theoretical unity can and should only be enforced on this first category of positions during our time of widespread ideological immaturity and confusion. Once a position is proved beyond any doubt and has been shown to all comrades in such a comprehensive manner, it must be enforced as theoretical unity. Some things can already be determined to be demonstrated as irrefutable in this way. At the time of writing, it is a betrayal of humanity to still support

Zionism. Everyone on the left has been able to see, without a shadow of a doubt, the genocidal horrors inflicted on the Palestinians. This must be a point of theoretical unity, and disagreement with this is grounds for expulsion from any communist, socialist and Marxist party, since coherent collective action cannot be taken without this common understanding of reality.

But can it be said that all communists have been able to see, without a shadow of a doubt, that the war in Ukraine is an inter-imperialist war? Has there been definitive thorough statistical proof of the imperialist nature of Russia, by Lenin’s definitions and others? And has this information been shown to all communists, especially those in our own organisations, in a comprehensive manner? Has it been shown, in a comprehensive manner, irrefutably, that support for Ukraine by the west is a proxy for imperialist goals? Has the nature of the Ukrainian state been demonstrated well enough? Do the people in our organisations even know what Lenin wrote on imperialism? I do not think so. Why else would there be such vast differences in the interpretation of this war among communists worldwide? Surely we must do better than just roll out the old ‘they are revisionists’ or ‘they are opportunists’ card to explain away the fact that astronomical numbers of communists disagree with our perspective. Even our own communists have not been able to truly understand this topic.

Yet despite all this, the RSP forced this position onto its organisation through majority vote. And subsequently a wing of our young organisation left, and ties with prominent peace movement figures got severed.

## No different?

What we did is no different from the sectarianism we seek to escape from. Adoption of this position was enforcing implicit theoretical unity on the topic of the Ukraine war, due to its implications for practical work. It was no abstract theoretical position of no consequence. Nor was it a democratic centralist agreement of secondary nature: ie, implementational details within a larger ideologically coherent strategy, which can be accepted by the minority as a compromise or on the prospect of disproving the majority opinion in practice. It was no small detail which could simply be accepted in the face of broad strategic and tactical agreement. It was, like many of the things we do, an unconscious enforcement of theoretical unity of a position which has not been proven to our own movement and our own communists.

The RSP currently has a very narrow base of theoretical unity - a very narrow base on which we can build collective practical work. If we take the lack of engagement with the party programme and the open opposition to the programme’s content and form itself as a prominent tendency, we must say that our only basis of unity are a few negative positions: We oppose capitalism. We oppose theoretical unity. We oppose Nato. We oppose Zionism. We are not the Socialist Party.

Consequently, we can see that the only real successes the RSP and its youth wing have are in collective action on this basis. An anti-Nato campaign during the summit in the Hague. A protest for re-socialisation of public transport. Protests against Zionism and ‘for Palestine’. Other attempts on different topics have not yielded

large-scale collective effort on the part of its membership. The lack of conscious effort to build true, organic unity, through proving - in research, theory and practice - positions and analyses, is holding back the organisation from taking further steps. At the same time, (unconscious) premature enforcement of theoretical unity is what is driving away our own members.

Which brings us back to the UK. Jack Conrad mentioned during one of his talks or comments that he wonders why comrades seem to be able to cooperate fine in a broad-front organisation with other groups, but unity as communists in a party does not seem to work out. This insight about theoretical unity explains precisely why. Macnair was most of the way there, when he pointed out that a more limited unity programme could be the way forward. What distinguishes communist parties from broad fronts is the level of (implicit) theoretical unity. Were TAS, the PUF and the CPGB to cooperate within the Corbyn-Sultana party as a broad front, it would suffice to outline a short tactical agreement.

To list just a few possibilities: 1. Push for democratic structures, so that Corbyn cannot wield the bureaucracy against the members. 2. Push for factional rights to protect the ability of communists to operate within it. 3. Collectively make and enact ideological proposals on topics which help to progress the general politics of the party towards anti-capitalism and away from social democracy.

These could be points of unity in a broad front in the Corbyn-Sultana party. Your theoretical unity would be around agreement on anti-capitalism, anti-bureaucracy and faction rights.

But a full blown Communist Party necessarily has a higher degree of implicit theoretical unity than a broad front. For a fully functioning communist (vanguard) party that is capable of taking power in the UK or elsewhere in the world, you need an analysis of the USSR, of China, of the weak points of capitalism, and many more topics. We do not currently have any agreement on that whatsoever among communists. Most communists, especially those born after the fall of the Berlin Wall, have not been able to sufficiently engage in depth with these topics. Dare I say, I do not think there is any definitely proved position on most things which are of strategic and tactical importance to the communist movement.

But what do we do? We enforce positions on these topics anyway within our organisations. Even when we try to build fusion projects. Based on my very limited insight into the talks between the CPGB, TAS and PUF, it seems that one of the factors behind the failed talks was the fact that some positions were non-negotiable, which made forming a common programme impossible.

Two of the topics of disagreement between TAS and the CPGB were the nature of the transition between capitalism and communism (TAS taking a classical Trotskyist position on socialism vs communism, and the CPGB taking a more traditional Marxist-Leninist position) and the class character of the UK - Jack Conrad took the position of the UK having a definite middle class of well-to-do wage labourers, among which barristers (lawyers, not those who work in a bar - a necessary clarification for me and most of the Dutch comrades!) were specifically controversial, in addition to small

shopkeepers. TAS seemed not to align with this view fully.

These are both excellent examples of premature enforcement of theoretical unity. The transition from capitalism to communism is, quite frankly, a long way off. The exact nature of the speed, nature and institutional character of this transition are impossible to determine right now. No Marxist, communist, socialist or degenerated workers’ state (or whatever else you want to call it) is a model for the transition of a highly developed imperialist country to communism. The nature of this transition was not clear ahead of time in Russia either, and many of the characteristics of what happened lie in how the proletarian and self-organised proletarian political structures developed at the time in the run-up to the revolution.

This topic, while interesting and of importance, is not something which should prevent unity now, because it has little to no impact on any of the practical work of communists in the west. The true way forward on that topic can only be found by extensive *collective* research and then *testing it out in practice*. Macnair correctly pointed out that unity of communists needs to be on a narrower basis, and this subject is at this moment simply not one of the points on which communists need or can have unity. As such, it cannot be enforced through theoretical unity in a party programme at this time.

The exact class nature of the UK is similarly not a topic on which theoretical unity can be enforced. Much more statistical research needs to be done to clearly map out which segments of the population fall into particular jobs and categories. Perhaps Jack Conrad has already conducted this research, but, if not, a full statistical analysis of the class composition of an entire country is a difficult task which should be undertaken by all communists together.

Then, with this irrefutable statistical data in hand, we need to transform it into insight. Do barristers actually respond positively to the ideas which Jack Conrad says they might sympathise with? Are small business owners indeed charmed by the proposed ideas to win them over? These things can only be found out by

testing out slogans, researching responses, and in depth reporting. So, as we cannot enforce theoretical unity on this point yet, it should not be in a party programme meant to serve as a basis of the unity of all Marxists.

## Real unity

This research, these tests, this building of revolutionary theory can best be done if all communists join up to do it collectively. And it is only worth doing if all communists are able and obliged to engage with the results of the research, of the trials and errors.

I would once more like to highlight the point Tina Becker made about opening up the editorial board of the *Weekly Worker*, so that it may serve as the organising organ of communists within the Corbyn-Sultana party. This idea - or some other collective organ open to and run by the many Marxist organisations active in this field - is exactly what can elevate the work of communists from uncoordinated, bickering cliques into a more cohesive force. Marxists will want to and be forced to engage with both this organ and members of other organisations and their ideas.

By focussing this organ on the topics which constitute obstacles for the Marxists in that moment, real unity through real experience can be built, and it will additionally provide a place for new leadership to develop the skills it needs to lead a larger party, as well as cultivate the trust among Marxists needed for those enacting the coordination and mental labour in their stead, so they may do more practical work.

While a united Communist Party is the ultimate goal - the ultimate tool for the proletariat - we must face reality and see that such levels of unity are not yet possible. We should seek not to think merely in terms of ‘broad front’ versus ‘full-blown party’, as there are many more forms and levels of possible unity in-between.

I hope this insight can serve and inspire some of you. If this way of thinking resonates or interests you, I hope you will take the time to read my full summary on my website ([jaquesdefouw.wordpress.com](http://jaquesdefouw.wordpress.com)), and perhaps after that the full book, *From circles to party*, on [marxists.org](http://marxists.org) ●

## Fighting fund

# Urgent help

**T**o all readers and supporters of the *Weekly Worker*: we urgently need your help to raise the necessary money to reach our £2,750 monthly target for September. At the moment - with only six days left to get there - our running total stands at just £1,791. In other words, we still need just under another thousand!

Yes, that’s asking a lot, but I know it can be done. For instance, I’m sure that quite a few comrades were thinking of making a donation this past week, but never quite got round to it. Well, now’s the time to do the necessary!

While two comrades - SK and PM - donated *three-figure* sums over the last seven days, the problem is that only *five* others also made a contribution by bank transfer or standing order - thank you, comrades GB (£25), RN and DR (£20 each), TT (£10) and DS (£4). On top of that comrades KS and GD both played their part by clicking on that PayPal button

on our website, contributing £50 each.

In other words, only nine readers found the time, energy or desire to help us out. So now thing have got to change drastically by next Tuesday, September 30. Please make a transfer or use PayPal to make sure we receive your donation by then. Either that or hand some cash to a comrade of ours if you know one!

I know that quite a number of comrades pay a standing order near the end of the month, but, on their own, those won’t be enough to see us home. Please play your part - see the details below to check how you can! ●

**Robbie Rix**

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



## YOUR PARTY

# Civil war continues

Stay well clear of efforts to 'save' Your Party's launch conference by a self-appointed clique intent on staging their own coup, says **Carla Roberts**. Instead rely on members, branches, STV elections and democracy

It is difficult to keep up with the latest twists and turns in the saga that is Your Party. It looks like a shaky peace has been brokered between team Sultana and camp Corbyn, with Zarah Sultana withdrawing her daft legal threat for defamation and getting behind the 'official' membership launch that team Corbyn announced on the morning of September 24. Yes, it took her pretty much all day, but at 7pm, she announced: "I'm a member of Your Party - and if you haven't joined yet, you should too. For those who joined the previous system, data and membership will be migrated across in due course."

That probably explains why Sultana also just *re-enabled* the separate membership portal that she unilaterally launched on September 18 and then took down. Corbyn's public complaint that Sultana's email was "unauthorised"<sup>2</sup> has serious legal consequences. Such allegations of a breach of the Data Protection Act cannot be withdrawn, even if you wanted to, which is why camp Corbyn quickly referred their complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office: "Failure to notify" the ICO carries a possible fine of "up to £8.7 million" - not quite as high as for the kind of "serious breach" Sultana had been accused of, which carries a "maximum fine of £17.5 million".<sup>3</sup> It is unclear if Sultana herself or the company, MOU (which holds the membership fees), would be liable for any fine and if any potential rowing back by Corbyn would make any difference. Perhaps by relaunching the portal she wants to show 'evidence' that she did no worse than Corbyn, who has now also broken the existing 'agreement', according to which all six MPs are required to 'sign off' on the membership scheme. Be that as it may, two membership portals, both pointing to the same website, but with money flowing in different directions, is not exactly a good look.

## Local party

And what about Corbyn's email, which states: "To join, you must be over 16, resident in the UK, and you cannot be a member of another political party"? What exactly is meant by this? After all, Corbyn has encouraged the setting up of tiny little local parties everywhere - his trusted comrade, Pamela Fitzpatrick, for example, launched her Harrow-based party, *Arise*<sup>4</sup>; then there is Jamie Driscoll's party, *Majority UK*, and former Momentum boss Alan Gibbons has made the Liverpool Community Independents into a party, too.<sup>5</sup> Or are 'local parties' allowed?

Is this perhaps an attempt to keep the organised left out? We know that Corbyn's right-hand woman, Karie Murphy, is very keen to keep the "Marxist sects" at arms length. Or perhaps it is just meant as a way to avoid Green Party or Labour Party members joining? Activists up and down the country were also quick to ask - will that ban include membership of Sultana's Your Party? Over 20,000 had joined that one.

What an absolute mess - and over what exactly? There are now some real political differences emerging. Sultana complained that she had been frozen out by a "sexist boys' club" - ie, the other five MPs of the Independent Alliance. However, the real power behind the throne is no 'boy' - it is Karie Murphy, who also happens to be the partner of Len McCluskey,

former general secretary of Unite. She tightly controls the nascent structures of Your Party. Sultana's accusation is a reflection of the identity politics rife on university campuses. But she is also rather rapidly moving away from the kind of Labourism (loyalty to the constitution) epitomised by Corbyn.

At a meeting in Sheffield on the evening of September 24, she said: "Yes of course we must get rid of the monarchy, I am a republican." Later she stressed that, "the main difference between us and the Greens is that we are a class-based party, we recognise the power of the working class. We identify as a socialist party and proudly so. We are not pro-Nato, they are." She also stressed that "we are an anti-Zionist party". Corbyn might not agree with that one, but the 400 people in Sheffield certainly did.

She also apologised "for my role in the recent fights. I am sorry about the role I have played. But democracy is not something we can compromise on - when the train has left the station it is very difficult to turn it back. If we don't democratise the party, how will we be able to democratise society?"

When pressed from the floor on how she would do that, she explained that "these fights we've had, they were all about democracy and empowering the grassroots members. I am critical of sortition, but now it has been announced, we have to make it as democratic as possible. And yes, I'm in favour of members and branches putting forward motions and amendments and that regional meetings should be autonomous and able to vote." She also disagreed with the apparent proposed ban on dual membership: "I don't agree with that; I think we need to unify the left. You have a voice, use your voice. We have to show that we are fighting for democracy, we are fighting to unify the left." Good.

Later however she explained that she also "pushed for 'one member one vote' at conference and it is very important that we got that one through." We would argue that she is in danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater by supporting OMOV - which is the most democratic decision-making mechanism locally and in smaller meetings, but turns into its opposite when it is applied to making national conference decisions by, say, 800,000 members. It isolates and atomises comrades who are watching and voting at home. Such a system clearly favours a bureaucracy which chooses the options, how they are presented, who gets to speak, etc.

Yes, Sultana is somewhat better than Corbyn, but we should be careful not to put our trust in either.

## 'Our Party'

At least the new-found, if somewhat shaky, peace should have blown out of the water the opaque initiative by 'Our Party',<sup>6</sup> which has for some unfathomable reason gathered the support not just of *Novara Media* and professional turncoat Owen Jones, but also quite a few socialists, including some of the people involved in the Ken Loach-fronted Platform for a Democratic Party,<sup>7</sup> members of RS21, the Democratic Socialist Platform in YP<sup>8</sup> and leading members of Jewish Voice for Labour.

'Our Party' got surprisingly quickly out of the starting blocks (its website was registered in August). The day after the Corbyn-Sultana fallout, it launched an open, unsigned



**Zarah Sultana: talking left, but ... sortition?**

letter, proposing that a mysterious "handover team" should take over the entire data, all social media, all funds and every company associated with Your Party - in order to start a new membership drive and organise the election of a "founding stewards' committee", which would be "mandated to organise the party's founding conference and the process leading up to it, as previously laid out in Your Party communications".<sup>10</sup> There is nothing quite like proposing to overcome a lack of democracy and secrecy with, well, a lack of democracy and secrecy - no wonder many described it as a coup.

The main organiser, Josh Virasami, tried his best to explain his motives in an interview with *Novara Media*<sup>11</sup> and during a networking Zoom meeting of YP branches.<sup>12</sup> And this is where things actually got interesting - not because of Our Party's misguided proposals (see below), but because it turns out that Virasami has been sitting on the "executive team of Your Party" for "several months" - a team that has been operating in total secrecy and without any kind of accountability. "I got brought in as a social movement person. I got carried along and got invited to do stuff, which is how I ended up on the executive team."

We learn that: "Your Party was stewarded by about 20 people on this executive team, made up from a diversity of grassroots social movements, prominent candidates, former trade union secretaries, current and former mayors. But somewhere along the line these 20 people suddenly became the six MPs."

Virasami has become the first person on that 'team' to answer questions publicly - and only because he just resigned from it (or perhaps he 'was resigned'). He did not say a peep when he was part of the top

bureaucracy - in fact, he still supports the same bureaucratic methods. He explains that he was in charge of organising the regional conferences, to which "I had already recruited 12,000 facilitators" (ie, people who answered the YP email), which are to be "trained" by Roger Hallam's Assemble. These are going to be "great fun events", with "horizontal breakout rooms of 10-12 people each". Crucially, they will have - as we feared - no decision-making powers. He breathlessly explained:

These breakout meetings would be able to discuss and hear amendments to the four documents submitted by YP nationally and the facilitators in each of these meetings would take copious amounts of notes. All the notes would then be collated and sent to the composing process, including all comments and amendments made on the documents via the online members' portal. Members will be able to see all tracked changes on those documents.

He admitted that "the democratic process, however, is the brief of Karie Murphy and James Schneider" and that he did not know "how they would be able to go through what will be thousands and thousands of pages of notes". We can take a very good guess though: they won't. Most suggestions will end up in the bin.

Murphy played a huge role in Corbyn's self-defeat over the anti-Semitism smear campaign and Schneider helped Jon Lansman shut down all democratic structures in Momentum. The fact that Corbyn is happy for these two to be put in charge of the 'democratic process' really says it all.

Schneider has, incidentally, just

resigned his role in Your Party, because he was so fed up with the ongoing civil war - a setback for Murphy, who has used him to try and rebuild all the bridges that she burns down. He was also supposed to write the draft constitution for YP - perhaps he has already done that (or perhaps somebody should check if Jon Lansman is available ...!).

## Member's party

Corbyn's email of September 24 states that the launch conference has been booked to take place on November 29 and 30 in Liverpool - and it will be even worse than anticipated: "A total of 13,000 members will debate and amend the party's founding documents in person across two days, with 6,500 attending each day." In other words, the randomly chosen participants cannot even properly participate in the whole conference. What a joke.

This is our main problem with 'Our Party' proposals. Yes, they want to hold an election to the conference arrangements committee, but otherwise, "we just want that to implement that roadmap. We just want to deliver that conference - that's all this is." Virasami's motives are clear enough - he wants to become the saviour of Your Party, as leader of "a third pole in the YP leadership, which has been active for some time".

What is less clear is why any socialist would think it is a good idea to support Virasami's plans. It is understandable why Zarah Sultana supports them - she has been frozen out and is entirely powerless. But there is absolutely no chance of Corbyn's advisors giving up power.

Instead of trying to save current plans, we should be arguing for democratic structures and a launch conference that empowers members: branches should elect regional committees and national conference delegates through a simple and straightforward STV system ●

## Notes

1. [x.com/zarahsultana/status/1970910474402398527](https://x.com/zarahsultana/status/1970910474402398527).
2. [x.com/jeremycorbyn/status/1968663293314097545/photo/1](https://x.com/jeremycorbyn/status/1968663293314097545/photo/1).
3. [ico.org.uk](https://ico.org.uk).
4. [harrowmonitoringgroup.uk/2025/08/28/new-political-party-arise-launched-in-harrow](https://harrowmonitoringgroup.uk/2025/08/28/new-political-party-arise-launched-in-harrow).
5. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverpool\\_Community\\_Independents](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverpool_Community_Independents).
6. [www.ourparty.org.uk/#openletter](https://www.ourparty.org.uk/#openletter).
7. [docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSiOR22eJ7yQcbljDicGpaNEZNrlxcuqrhSWOw0TsQ6Cip0-A/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSiOR22eJ7yQcbljDicGpaNEZNrlxcuqrhSWOw0TsQ6Cip0-A/viewform).
8. [linktr.ee/DemSocsYP](https://linktr.ee/DemSocsYP).
9. It took five days before Our Party published the proposed names of the proposed handover team: Sarah Woolley (general secretary, Bakers and Allied Food Workers Union), Kate Hudson ("former general secretary of CND" and still co-leader of Left Unity), Jeanine Hourani (Palestinian Youth Movement), Imran Khan KC and Louise Regan (National Education Union campaigner).
10. [www.ourparty.org.uk/#openletter](https://www.ourparty.org.uk/#openletter).
11. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0avABb2U8Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0avABb2U8Y).
12. [docs.google.com/document/d/1XbQFJqlec6epph4Zv34tDjbxGLHJxTqnVEgugX0Mz8k/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XbQFJqlec6epph4Zv34tDjbxGLHJxTqnVEgugX0Mz8k/edit?tab=t.0).

Friday September 26 6:30pm

### Online debate:

**How should the founding conference of Your Party should be run?**

- Roger Hallam (Assemble)
- Max Shanly (Democratic Socialists)
- Tina Becker (Why Marx?)

[bit.ly/YPLaunchConference](https://bit.ly/YPLaunchConference)



# ORWELL



George Orwell (the tall one) and Eileen O'Shaughnessy (kneeling) with members of the ILP unit on the Aragon front, March 13 1937

## The road from Eton College

Seventy-five years after George Orwell's death **Paul Flowers** examines how *1984* caused deep unease on the left and how it was seized by the right as a means of fighting the cold war. This is the fifth in a series of seven articles

**B**y the closing stages of World War II, George Orwell had a fairly comprehensive notion that the world was facing a collectivist, *étatisé* future, which would be ruled in a totalitarian manner, if some form of libertarian, socialist society were not established. One major influence upon him was James Burnham, who, in two books, *The managerial revolution* and *The Machiavellians*, published in 1942 and 1943, articulated and expanded upon many of the ideas about collectivism, totalitarianism and the intelligentsia's quest for power that Orwell had been developing over the previous few years.<sup>1</sup>

Burnham had broken from the Trotskyist movement in the USA after he had concluded that the Soviet Union represented a new form of society, which was neither capitalist nor socialist, and which, moreover, was the precursor of similar societies across the world, with Nazi Germany and the 'New Deal' USA being developing examples. Promoting this gloomy prognosis in *The managerial revolution*, Burnham gave up on any idea of socialism. The basis of his theory was that the capitalist classes were being challenged by managerial and technical strata, who would increase their control over society and eventually seize power. Managerial societies were almost by definition totalitarian, and they would coalesce around three rival super-states.<sup>2</sup>

In the subsequent work, Burnham claimed that the guiding principles of political struggles were Machiavellian: in other words, that the main object was to obtain and then to maintain

power, and that one must interpret political programmes and declarations in that light. In the age of the struggle between the dying capitalist class and the new, aspiring managerial elite, a real democracy was unattainable, and the rising managerial class would appeal to the masses under fraudulent democratic slogans, mobilising them as its strike force against the existing capitalist rulers.<sup>3</sup>

As the war turned to peace, Orwell asserted that humanity was facing "the prospect of two or three monstrous super-states" armed with atomic weapons - each one "self-contained", isolated from each other, "at once unconquerable and in a permanent state of 'cold war' with its neighbours".<sup>4</sup> A little earlier, he had insisted that the majority of intellectuals in Britain were "perfectly ready for dictatorial methods, secret police, systematic falsifications of history, etc".<sup>5</sup> Orwell faced the post-war world with some trepidation - the heady atmosphere of *The lion and the unicorn* had faded into something less optimistic.

The world had changed considerably by the time *1984* was published in June 1949. The wartime 'Big Three' alliance was a fading memory, as the world was divided into two camps, separated by what had become known as the 'Iron Curtain'. Stalinism appeared to many to be an irresistible, malignant, expansionist movement, clamping down upon rival political forces with an iron hand, and the Stalinist takeover in Czechoslovakia in 1948 in particular intensified anti-

Soviet sentiments. In the west, the process of deradicalisation within the intellectual milieu was accelerated. Not a few succumbed to the cold war atmosphere, whilst others drifted into despair.<sup>6</sup> With the bifurcated world reflected in an oppressive intellectual conformity in both the east and the west, there seemed to be little room in which a libertarian socialist such as Orwell could manoeuvre.<sup>7</sup>

### Totalitarianism

*1984* became a best seller, surpassing even *Animal farm's* prodigious sales by a wide mark.<sup>8</sup> The vision of a world divided up amongst three vast super-states - all ruled by vicious totalitarian regimes, which suppressed all civil liberties and intellectual life, watched every move of their subjects and continually rewrote their own histories; in the book, the plight of Winston Smith, with his almost solitary revolt against the system and his breaking by the sinister O'Brien into total submission and repentance, struck a ready chord with large numbers of people.

*1984* was an immediate success, as it keyed into the consciousness of the cold war. As Isaac Deutscher put it a few years after the book's release, "The novel has served as a sort of an ideological super-weapon in the cold war. As in no other book or document, the convulsive fear of communism, which has swept the west since the end of the Second World War, has been reflected and focused in *1984*."<sup>9</sup>

The American liberal, Lionel Trilling, found the book chilling because the society depicted in it

was "substantially little more than an extension into the near future of the present structure and policy of Stalinism", that not only existed in the eastern bloc, but potentially in the west. The lesson was clear: there could be no appeasement of Stalinism: "Otherwise we shall go on playing Winston Smith, falling sooner or later into the hands of the O'Briens of the east, who will break our bones until we scream with love for Big Brother."<sup>10</sup> The American socialist, Irving Howe, stated that *1984* reflected the "apocalyptic situation" facing humanity - either socialism or totalitarianism, as depicted in the book.<sup>11</sup>

*1984* caused quite a stir on the left. For the Stalinists, it merely confirmed what they already thought about Orwell.<sup>12</sup> Most leftwing opponents of Stalinism had welcomed *Homage to Catalonia*, as it was a strong leftwing work, which brought out both the revolutionary factors of the Spanish Civil War and the counterrevolutionary nature of Stalinism. Their response to *Animal farm* varied. Some saw it as a vindication of Trotsky, whilst others saw it as an expression of the idea that revolutions inevitably lead to the rise of a new elite. *1984* was widely seen on the left as a deeply pessimistic and depressing work. Some thought that Orwell was stating that the fight for a better future was hopeless - this was certainly the view of Deutscher, who stated that it was "a document of dark disillusionment - not only with Stalinism, but with every form and shade of socialism"<sup>13</sup> - whilst others, notwithstanding their discomfort with

the book, did not think that he had given up on socialism.<sup>14</sup>

Although Orwell had not visited either Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, some commentators have pointed out that he had managed to grasp many of the features of a totalitarian society.<sup>15</sup> In fact, *1984* was drawn from a number of different influences, both within and without the totalitarian countries.<sup>16</sup>

Firstly, many of the features of the Oceania superstate were based upon Orwell's personal observations. The proles are reminiscent of the most lumpenised and degraded workers in *The road to Wigan Pier*. The mores of Oceanian society are clearly based upon his memories of his days at a minor public school: "Virtue consisted in winning; it consisted in being bigger, stronger, handsomer, richer, more popular, more elegant, more unscrupulous than other people - in dominating them, bullying them, making them suffer pain, making them look foolish, getting the better of them in every way."<sup>17</sup>

Much of the day-to-day dreariness and information manipulation of Oceanian life are an exaggerated extrapolation of Orwell's experiences in wartime London and of the insidious censorship at the BBC and Ministry of Information in the 1940s.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, we have seen that Orwell had read several worthwhile accounts of Soviet society. Quite a few of Eugene Lyons' observations reappear in Orwell's novel, with two striking examples being the poster used during the attempt to complete the first five-year plan in four years:



# ORWELL

“2+2=5”, which Orwell turned from a witty propaganda slogan into a sinister symbol of Smith’s abject defeat at the hands of the Oceanian regime; and the UP telegram, which looks just like an example of newspeak.<sup>19</sup>

Thirdly, there was a rich vein of utopian and dystopian novels from which he could draw. Orwell had read Jack London’s *The iron heel* and Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, and was well acquainted with the works of Aldous Huxley and HG Wells.<sup>20</sup>

Fourthly, some of the features of *1984* were redolent of the more dramatic writings of Burnham and Arthur Koestler, which Orwell had elsewhere criticised for being too pessimistic. He wrote that Burnham’s vision of a “huge, invincible, everlasting slave empire” would either never be established or would not endure, because slavery was “no longer a stable basis for human society”, and so the Soviet regime would either “democratise itself” or it would perish,<sup>21</sup> yet in *1984* the three totalitarian states stretched off into an indefinite future. Similarly, Orwell wrote off Koestler’s “without education of the masses, no social progress; without social progress, no education of the masses” as a “pessimistic conclusion”,<sup>22</sup> only to have Smith sadly conclude about the proles: “Until they have become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious.”<sup>23</sup>

Orwell’s conceptions about social strata re-emerge in *1984*. Despite their degraded condition, the proles are the sole repository of human decency: “The proles had stayed human ... They were not loyal to a party or a country or an idea: they were loyal to one another.”<sup>24</sup> And, confirming his worst fears about them, the pre-revolutionary middle strata had become the ruling elite of Oceania, which was composed, in the words of Goldstein’s ‘book’, “for the most part of bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, trade union organisers, publicity experts, sociologists, teachers, journalists and professional politicians ... whose origins lay in the salaried middle class and the upper grades of the working class”, and who “had been shaped and brought together by the barren world of monopoly industry and centralised government”.<sup>25</sup>

And this leads us to a possible further influence - Max Nomad, the follower of Jan Wacław Machajski, the Polish revolutionary who considered that socialism constituted the accession to power of a new exploiting class of intellectuals. In an article first published in 1937, Nomad referred to the “neo-bourgeois” pretenders for political power, listing “office-holders, teachers, professional men, technicians, clergymen, commercial and financial experts, journalists, writers, artists, politicians, professional revolutionists and agitators, trade union organisers and so on”.<sup>26</sup> The similarity to Orwell’s rogues’ gallery is striking. Furthermore, Nomad and Orwell agreed that these contenders for power key into the dissatisfaction of the lower orders in order to use them as their assault troops against the existing ruling elite, and thus facilitate their own route to power.

Many factors in *1984* remain unexplained or unexplored. The revolution itself - surely an epochal event - hardly exists in the narrative beyond a few fragmentary childhood memories on Smith’s part that barely go beyond the hardships caused by social dislocation, or in Goldstein’s ‘Book’, or for that matter in the propaganda put out by ‘Ingsoc’ (‘English Socialism’ - the British equivalents of the Russian soviets, factory committees, strikes, demonstrations, mass meetings and street-corner speeches and discussions - the lively democratic reality of 1917). All are conspicuous by their absence.<sup>27</sup>

How we get from the revolution

to the situation in *1984* remains a mystery. How did the party establish itself as a ruling elite? Why did the proles permit it to do so? Why did the British revolution become a super-Stalinist dystopia? Smith’s journey from a homeless waif to an ‘Outer Party’ member and ‘Minitrue’ (‘Ministry of Truth’) clerk is not traced; it is as if great chunks of his own memory have been eradicated. Of course, a novel is not necessarily an historical treatise and the lacunae emphasise the party’s control of the historical record, but they also serve to give the impression that the ‘Ingsoc’ regime in ‘Airstrip One’ (Britain) was the inevitable result of the revolution, that no other outcome was possible - an impression reinforced by the bald, unexplained assertion in Goldstein’s ‘Book’ that “the aim of establishing liberty and equality was more and more openly abandoned” in “each variant of socialism that appeared from about 1900 onwards”.<sup>28</sup> Other questions come to mind: for example, if the proles were, comparatively speaking, free, why did anyone join the Outer Party, seeing that the existence of its members was pretty miserable and in material terms little (if any) better than that of the proles?<sup>29</sup>

*1984* should not be viewed as Orwell’s political testament. The novel is indeed deeply pessimistic, as Smith is not merely defeated, but is mentally eviscerated to the degree that he accepts without question the legitimacy of the regime, thereby symbolising the all-powerful nature of the Oceanian state, yet Orwell’s non-fiction writing is more optimistic. The total dystopia of *1984* was not a certainty; he replied to a critic by declaring: “I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily *will* arrive, but I believe ... that something resembling it *could* arrive.” Moreover, it was not a description of the Soviet regime, as Oceania had only been “partly realised” in the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup> Considering also that, as we have seen, he believed in the possibility of the democratisation of the Soviet regime, his vision of the future was not so gloomy as his last novel suggested.<sup>31</sup>

## Criticism

Needless to say, *1984* has provoked a vast industry of acclaim and criticism.<sup>32</sup> The pessimism expressed in it has been explained, often by leftwing writers, as resulting from Orwell’s political demoralisation. Paul O’Flinn claimed that his lack of any coherent political philosophy had caused him by the late 1940s to be “liable to be gusted along by the cold war hurricane” - a victim of a “potentially revolutionary” approach, which “thrashes around in despair, looking for and failing to find a base”.<sup>33</sup>

Michael Maddison stated that Orwell was dismayed by the decline of the working class as an actor on the historical stage, as “in the decade from 1939 to 1949 no revolutionary wave broke over the surface of politics”. And so: “‘They’ - the bureaucrats and power politicians - were able to change the face of the world, and in the process trampled on ‘us’; such would be a condensation of Orwell’s views.”<sup>34</sup>

Alex Zwerdling stated that it would be wrong to say that Orwell had abandoned socialism, but his inability to answer the questions that he raised about it “eventually ... brought himself to the edge of despair”.<sup>35</sup> Opinions have differed sharply over what Smith’s hopes in the proles represented in Orwell’s thinking - between those who detected optimism on the author’s part despite the fact that the proles lived on in a slumber and Smith’s opposition was crushed,<sup>36</sup> and those who claimed there is nothing in the text to justify claiming a “prole victory” or the idea of “democratic invincibility”.<sup>37</sup>

Conservative analysts have seen *1984* as a sign that Orwell was moving away from socialism. Dennis O’Keefe stated that the conservative claim on the book is strong: it is “explicitly anti-socialist, converging with the work of a number of writers ... in the view that socialism is essentially the hypertrophy of the state”, and implicitly accepting that capitalism is the only system that can guarantee the liberty of the individual.<sup>38</sup> Others, such as Robert de Camara, have scoffed at the notion that Orwell was looking at totalitarian tendencies in western countries.<sup>39</sup> Norman Podhoretz asserted that Orwell would have been amongst those leftists of the late 1940s who were to slide across to conservatism.<sup>40</sup>

## Left response

Orwell’s critics in the ‘official communist’ movement shared the conservatives’ view that *1984* is a pro-capitalist work. Leslie Morton stated in 1952 that Orwell played upon “the lowest fears and prejudices engendered by bourgeois society”: “His object is not to argue a case, but to induce an irrational conviction in the minds of his readers that any attempt to realise socialism must lead to a world of corruption, torture and insecurity.”<sup>41</sup>

Leftwing assessments often have concentrated upon the sinister activities of the capitalist state - phone-tapping, visual surveillance, computer details on individuals, news and language manipulation, etc - to show the present-day relevance of *1984*.<sup>42</sup> This upset rightwing commentators Paul Johnson and John McEwan, who poured scorn on the equation of the western states’ covert operations and Oceania’s Thought Police and telescreens.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, it is worth noting that, however general the surveillance was under Stalinism, it is only under modern capitalism that the technology exists that could reach anywhere near that required to carry it out to the level achieved in Oceania. If anything, Stalinism was marked by its *inability* to achieve consistent technological advance.

Although Robert Conquest countered the left’s arguments by stating that the totalitarian society portrayed in Oceania was based upon the Soviet Union, and that it came into being through the overthrow of capitalism, rather than through its development,<sup>44</sup> it is clear that Orwell was concerned about the trends towards totalitarianism within society *as a whole*. He hit out hardest at Stalinism because it represented to him the furthest development of the trend. But state censorship and self-censorship in wartime Britain nonetheless worried him greatly. As he wrote in 1944,

The MoI [Ministry of Information] does not, of course, dictate a party line or issue an *index expurgatorius*. It merely ‘advises’. Publishers take manuscripts to the MoI, and the MoI ‘suggests’ that this or that is undesirable, or premature, or ‘would serve no good purpose’. And though there is no definite prohibition, no clear statement that this or that must not be printed, official policy is never flouted. Circus dogs jump when the trainer cracks his whip, but the really well-trained dog is the one that turns his somersault when there is no whip.<sup>45</sup>

Orwell was not referring to Stalinism here: rather he was addressing the nascent totalitarian behaviour within the official structures of Britain which was not enforced by fear or fiat, nor commanded by a party line dictated from Moscow, but was voluntarily adhered to by those concerned. As we have seen, Orwell’s ideas for Oceania were drawn not only from people’s observations of totalitarian

societies, but from tendencies within Britain and, by extension, of liberal democracies in general. It was not just the uncritical support shown during the war for one particular totalitarian state - the Soviet Union - that perturbed him; more important was the mindset of ideological conformity and closed dogmatic thinking that underpinned both this example of state-worship and the surreptitious censorship and guidance exercised at that time by the British state.

Orwell aimed many barbs at leftwing intellectuals who should have known better than to have supported Stalinism - indeed, he attacked Stalinism so heavily *because* he was a leftwinger - but the right has no justification to claim his heritage. However, it did lay claim to it and continues to do so, and one reason for that lies in the structure of *1984*. Taken by itself, the novel can easily be interpreted as an anti-socialist work. Taken in conjunction with his other writings, the story is quite different, and another, far more positive interpretation is possible. It seems to me that Orwell wrote *1984* not merely in order to warn against a possible Stalinist dystopia, but also (and perhaps more importantly) to show the degree of surveillance, degradation, manipulation and oppression that is required to destroy the autonomy of the individual, to forestall the elaboration of critical thought and to eradicate the possibility of collective action, and thereby prevent any challenge to a ruling elite and to rule out any transformation of society.

On that basis it is clear that, so long as society did not descend into the depths of Oceania, the future for Orwell was not so bleak. There was a way out: hope *did* lie with the proles, with the working class. And even if, as he admitted, the prospects for socialism during the late 1940s were slim,<sup>46</sup> he never repudiated his belief in it.

Orwell was fascinated - obsessed even - by the question of the exercising of power. We have seen how he viewed the radical intelligentsia as power-seeking would-be totalitarians and that he saw their appreciation of the Soviet Union as proof of their quest to exercise overarching power. A prominent feature of *1984* is the Inner Party’s obsessive quest for power for its own sake. O’Brien tells Smith:

The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness: only power, pure power ... The German Nazis and the Russian communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognise their own motives ... Power is not a means: it is an end ... The object of power is power.<sup>47</sup>

Orwell had little argument with Burnham on this question, as he basically accepted his basic proposition that intellectuals become involved in politics merely in order to seize and to exercise power, and only disagreed with him over the possibility of the durability of the totalitarian future, which they both felt power-seeking intellectuals were hoping to bring into being.

Deutscher, who worked with Orwell during the war, explained that he was “at heart ... a simple-minded anarchist” for whom “any political movement forfeited its *raison d’être* the moment it acquired a *raison d’état*”: “To analyse a complicated social background, to try and unravel tangles of political motives, calculations, fears and suspicions, and to discern the compulsion of circumstances behind *their* action was beyond him. Generalisations about social forces, social trends and historic

inevitably made him bristle with suspicion.”

Without a system of investigation, Orwell was forced ultimately “to adopt and to cling to the oldest, the most banal, the most abstract and the most barren of all generalisations ... ‘sadistic power worship’”.<sup>48</sup> The conflicts amongst a vast array of social forces were reduced to the banality of a conspiracy theory. Not surprisingly, Deutscher considered Orwell to be a fanatic who wanted easy answers - a harsh, but not unfair, characterisation.

## State power

Power, however, is very rarely an object in and of itself (dictators are little different to democrats in this respect). Although state power was projected both in Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union through the personal leadership of an authoritarian party, pure power was neither the desire of Hitler and Stalin, nor the reality of their rule, however much their personal caprices actually affected society.

Both saw themselves as the living embodiment of a quest. Hitler saw his task as rebuilding and extending a mythical Germany, and in that he did not deviate. Stalin started as a proletarian revolutionary and, through the process of gaining power in an isolated, backward state, came to personify a new nationalist ruling elite building a new Russia - although, for reasons we will discuss, he continued to use the egalitarian language of the Russian Revolution. Power had a purpose, and this purpose was shared throughout the ranks of the Nazi and Soviet bureaucracies.

Orwell considered that totalitarian ideologies were essentially instrumental: the ideologies that existed within the three superstates in *1984* were presented as conscious fabrications drawn up by would-be elites as justification for their quest to seize and then to exercise power. However, this was not the case in Hitler’s Germany: Nazi ideology was in most respects an exaggerated development of existing German nationalist ideas, which appealed to many members of the intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie, who felt alienated from the liberal-democratic Weimar republic. Nazi ideology was a product of bourgeois society, albeit a particularly malignant one, springing from capitalist social relations and reflecting them at a particularly febrile juncture.

Ideology in the Soviet Union was, however, a different matter, and here there was a definite question of artifice. Marxism is the anti-elitist philosophy *par excellence*: it shows that a genuinely egalitarian future - a society without a ruling elite - is eminently possible. The October Revolution was fought under the banner of Marxism; the Bolsheviks saw it as the first blow of a world socialist revolution. However, by the 1930s, having been isolated in a backward, war-ravaged country, the Soviet Communist Party had mutated into an elite, ruling over a hierarchical, non-capitalist socio-economic formation, with Marxism as the putative state ideology. This contradiction is explained by the fact that, so long as the elite rested upon the foundations laid by the October Revolution - that is, so long as capitalism was not restored - it was obliged to use the language of 1917: what sort of ideology could emerge out of a society that was not only neither capitalist nor socialist, but did not constitute a new mode of production?<sup>49</sup>

On the surface, the classic totalitarian regimes were extremely ideological. Ordinary life was politicised to a much greater degree than under a parliamentary democracy. But the politicisation of everyday life in a totalitarian system quickly leads to its opposite - the destruction of politics



- particularly in Stalinist countries, in which the ideology has little relationship with reality. Ideology and politics become a meaningless ritual.

Latter-day Stalinist societies were marked by a deep-running cynicism. Although as late as the Brezhnev era leading bureaucrats enthused publicly over the wonders of Soviet-style ‘socialism’, their heart had long gone out of it. By the 1980s (not 60 years since the launch of the first five-year plan, and not 40 years since the Sovietisation of eastern Europe) the Soviet bloc bureaucracies were seriously considering going over to the market - a process which would necessitate their rejecting an ideology in which they only expressed themselves, rather than believed, and adopting one in which they could really believe.<sup>50</sup>

Pro-Soviet

Orwell’s assumptions about the supposed totalitarian ambitions of Britain’s radical intellectuals were greatly exaggerated. Was it *really* the case, as he asserted, that the bulk of the intelligentsia in Britain was “perfectly ready for dictatorial methods, secret police, systematic falsifications of history, etc”<sup>751</sup> Some of Orwell’s critics have convincingly argued that he exaggerated the influence of Stalinism upon Britain’s intellectuals.<sup>52</sup> Also, Orwell’s concentration upon power-seeking had led him away from taking into account other, less sinister reasons for the interest shown by many radical intellectuals in the Soviet Union: for example, the idea that Soviet state welfare and economic policies might have some practical application in Britain.

Certainly by the late 1940s Orwell was kicking at an open door: it is remarkable just how rapidly pro-Soviet sentiments faded away, once hostilities ceased. Official Britain, with Labour in government, quickly adopted a hostile stance towards Moscow. The already waning credibility the Soviet elite enjoyed amongst leftwingers in the Labour Party was stripped away in response to its new round of repressive actions in the Soviet Union and the clampdown in its new domain in eastern Europe. The group of actual pro-Soviet Labour MPs who so worried Orwell and were expelled from the party numbered a mere four.<sup>53</sup> The pre-war and wartime allure of Soviet welfare schemes and economic administration rapidly faded, once the Labour government’s programme of reforms and the revival of British capitalism led to a steady amelioration of the onerous conditions of the 1930s. By the time that *1984* appeared, few outside the declining CPGB and the shrivelled fellow-travelling scene adhered to an unblemished vision of Stalinism.

And then - as if to confirm Orwell’s more optimistic prognoses and to spite *1984* with its unending totalitarian future - within three years of Orwell’s death Stalin had himself died and his successors had initiated a far-reaching process of reform, which loosened to some extent the cultural straitjacket, considerably reduced the level of state coercion, and largely wound up the prison camp system.<sup>54</sup> Then, in 1956, Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’, with its denunciations of Stalin, dealt a blow to the Soviet myth, from which it never recovered amongst the ‘official communists’.<sup>55</sup> Stalin’s successors did not introduce a liberal democracy, let alone a socialist democracy: repression and censorship remained prominent features of the regime, but they nonetheless steered Soviet reality to some degree away from the dystopia presented in *1984* - not ever closer to it.

Finally, to confound all those who saw the Stalinist system, whether positively or negatively, as a durable socio-economic formation, a workers’ paradise or a louring

menace to the west, the events of 1989-91 demonstrated that the whole Stalinist edifice had reached the end of the road. In his introduction to the Ukrainian edition of *Animal farm*, Orwell pointed out that many readers had assumed that the final scene was intended to show that the pigs and humans - that is, the Soviet and western elites - had become reconciled. This, he added, was not the intention: he meant the book “to end on a loud note of discord”.<sup>56</sup> That is ironic, as events have shown this misinterpretation to be a more accurate portrayal of the fate of Stalinism - the practical and ideological adoption of the capitalist market by the former Soviet bloc elites - than the centuries of endless war amongst three identical Stalinist states portrayed in *1984*.

Although Orwell greatly exaggerated the degree of pro-Soviet sentiments amongst intellectuals, his concerns about the broader trends of nascent totalitarian behaviour in society - most notably the voluntary acceptance of ideological conformity and closed dogmatic thinking - were nonetheless pertinent and indeed still remain relevant. State-worshipping of totalitarian countries sporadically recurred over the ensuing decades, with a number of radical intellectuals making fools of themselves, pursuing their Stalinist Mecca variously in Mao’s China, Hoxha’s Albania and even Pol Pot’s Cambodia. More importantly, considerable numbers of erstwhile pro-Soviet intellectuals forsook their obeisance to Moscow merely to sign up to the western side in the cold war, as the ‘new civilisation’ became ‘the god that failed’, and the Soviet Union became seen as an unrelenting totalitarian threat to western civilisation.

Orwell did not view the substitution of one orthodoxy for another as anything positive - “Nothing is gained by teaching a parrot a new word”<sup>757</sup> - and he lashed out at what he called the “smelly little orthodoxies” of his time.<sup>58</sup> So why should the cold war orthodoxy - an intellectual mindset that was immeasurably more pervasive amongst western intellectuals than the transitory pro-Soviet sentiments of the popular front days and World War II (and, let us remember, one whose basis was undermined by the events of 1989-91, with the collapse of the entire Soviet bloc and the elites’ jettisoning with indecent haste their long-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist ideology) - have been exempt? ●

Notes

1. J Burnham *The managerial revolution* London 1942; J Burnham *The Machiavellians: defenders of freedom* London 1943. For Burnham’s influence on Orwell, see in particular Michael Maddison’s ‘1984: a Burnhamite fantasy?’ *Political Quarterly* January-March 1961; and W Steinhoff *George Orwell and the origins of ‘1984’* Ann Arbor 1975.  
2. J Burnham *The managerial revolution* pp145-74. For a convincing early debunking of Burnham’s theory of managerialism, see C Wright Mills ‘A Marx for the manager’ *Power Politics and People* New York 1963.  
3. J Burnham *The Machiavellians*, pp64-89.  
4. G Orwell ‘You and the atom bomb’ *Collected essays, journalism and letters* (*CEJL*) Vol 4, Hamondsworth 1984, pp25-26.  
5. G Orwell ‘Letter to HJ Willmetts’ *CEJL* Vol 3, p178.  
6. The process of deradicalisation had started in the late 1930s, and was intimately connected with the phenomenon of Stalinism. Bidding farewell to the socialist movement, the US radical, Max Eastman, concluded that the totalitarian state was “the political form natural to a collectivised economy” (M Eastman *Stalin’s Russia and the crisis in socialism* London 1940, p156). Borkenau took the same view: see F Borkenau *The totalitarian enemy* London 1940, p239.  
7. For descriptions of the process of intellectual demoralisation in Britain and the USA, see R Hewison *In anger: culture in the cold war, 1945-60* London 1988, pp24-33; A Wald *The New York intellectuals: the rise and decline of the anti-Stalinist left from the 1930s to the 1980s* Chapel Hill 1987. Indicative of this was the fate of *Horizon*, Britain’s leading non-partisan radical cultural-political review, which petered out in 1949.  
8. By the mid-1950s, *1984* had sold 1.2 million copies in the USA, plus 596,000 copies of an abridged version, whilst sales of the paperback

in Britain ran into the hundreds of thousands (J Rodden *The politics of literary reputation: the making and claiming of ‘St George’ Orwell* New York 1989, p46.  
9. I Deutscher *Heretics and renegades* London 1955, p35.  
10. *Partisan Review* July 1949.  
11. *New International* November-December 1950.  
12. This was particularly the case in the USA, where his previous books were practically unknown, and where *1984* was immediately championed by the radical right. Howard Keylor, who was in the Communist Party of the USA at the time, told me that Orwell was seen as “one of the ideologues of the extreme anti-communists”. Mike Jones informed me of the hostility he noted towards Orwell in the CPGB in the early 1960s, and David Gorman told me that when he was a lad his father actually tried to confiscate his copy of *Homage to Catalonia!*  
13. I Deutscher *Heretics and renegades* p44.  
14. Thanks to John Archer, Don Bateman, Ray Challinor, Baruch Hirson, Harry Ratner and Charlie Van Gelderen for their ideas and reminiscences. Bateman, a member of the ILP, told me that the only ILP members who were antipathetic to Orwell were the handful of Stalinists who remained in the party. Archer told me that he and his comrades in the Trotskyist movement were always very critical of Orwell, although other Trotskyists to whom I have spoken were less critical of him, at least until *1984*.  
15. Masha Karp, who had read a clandestine copy of the novel in her hometown of Leningrad, and Czesław Miłosz both emphasised this: see M Karp *George Orwell and Russia* London, 2023, ppvii-x, 234-48; C Miłosz *The captive mind* Hamondsworth 1980, p42. For a detailed account of the impact of Orwell’s two last novels in the Soviet bloc, see J Rodden *Scenes from an afterlife: the legacy of George Orwell* Wilmington 2003.  
16. Orwell was also deeply suspicious of Roman Catholicism, which he saw as essentially totalitarian. For the Catholic imagery in *1984*, see P Siegel *Revolution and the twentieth-century novel* New York 1979, pp159-60.  
17. G Orwell ‘Such, such were the joys’ *CEJL* Vol 4, p411. See also J Rose, ‘Eric Blair’s school days’, in J Rose (ed) *The revised Orwell* East Lansing 1992, pp75-96.  
18. For the way in which wartime censorship influenced *1984*, see WJ West *The larger evils - 1984: the truth behind the satire* Edinburgh 1992.  
19. E Lyons *Assignment in utopia* London 1938, pp240, 338. Newspeak was also based upon Esperanto, to which Orwell had a lifelong aversion.  
20. Orwell first acquired a copy of *We* in 1946. Deutscher reckoned that much of *1984* was lifted from *We*, but Crick disagreed, arguing that Orwell had started on his book long before he read *We*: see I Deutscher *Heretics and renegades* pp36ff; B Crick *George Orwell: a life* Hamondsworth 1982, pp387-88, 629. For other possible influences, see J Rose ‘The invisible sources of *1984*’, in J Rose (ed) *The revised Orwell* East Lansing 1992, pp131-47.  
21. G Orwell *James Burnham and the managerial revolution* London 1946, p19.  
22. G Orwell ‘Arthur Koestler’ *Dickins, Dali and others* New York 1946, p197.  
23. G Orwell *1984* Hamondsworth 1969, p60.  
24. *Ibid* p135.  
25. *Ibid* pp164-65. Elsewhere, Orwell pointed to “scientists, technicians, teachers, journalists, broadcasters, bureaucrats, professional politicians: in general, middling people who ... are hungry for more power and more prestige”, and who see in the Soviet Union “a system which eliminates the upper class, keeps the working class in its place, and hands unlimited power to people very similar to themselves”: G Orwell *James Burnham and the managerial revolution* p18.  
26. M Nomad ‘Masters - old and new’, in VF Calverton (ed) *The making of society: an outline of sociology* New York 1937, p882. For Machajski, see M Shatz *Jan Wacław Machajski: as radical critic of the Russian intelligentsia and socialism* Pittsburgh 1989.  
27. I thank Mike Belbin for pointing out the absence in *1984* of any significant reference to the revolution that put the lngsoc regime into power.  
28. G Orwell *1984* p163.  
29. Goldstein’s ‘Book’ states that the inner party’s members live in a “different world from a member of the outer party” and that the latter has “a similar advantage” in comparison with the proles: G Orwell *1984* p155. Not only does the latter assertion jar with the descriptions of the similar living conditions of the members of the outer party and the proles, but it is obvious that the proles were not subject to the intrusive state surveillance, regimented life and interminable propaganda campaigns that outer party members were obliged to endure, and therefore in some respects were in a rather less unenviable situation.  
30. G Orwell ‘Letter to Francis Henson’ *CEJL* Vol 4, p564.  
31. Orwell was certainly less pessimistic than his friend, Borkenau, who in 1949 insisted that the Soviet Union faced a future of “terror without end, of hostility towards everything human, of horrors that carry no remedy and which can be cured only *ferro et igni*”: see F Borkenau ‘Stalin im Schafspelz’ *Der Monat* No14, 1949 (thanks to Mike Jones for the translation).  
32. Rodden provides an excellent account of the Orwell industry *The politics of literary reputation*.

33. P O’Flinn ‘Rereading *1984* in 1984’, in P Flewers (ed) *George Orwell: enigmatic socialist* London 2005, p61.  
34. Maddison ‘1984: a Burnhamite fantasy?’ *Political Quarterly* January-March 1961, pp78-79.  
35. A Zwerdling *Orwell and the left* New Haven 1978, pp4, 37.  
36. P Foot *Words as weapons* London 1990, pp272-73.  
37. P Reilly *1984: past, present and future* Boston 1989, pp126-27.  
38. *Salisbury Review* April 1985. See also A Eckstein ‘George Orwell’s second thoughts on capitalism’, in J Rose (ed) *The revised Orwell* East Lansing 1992, pp191-205.  
39. *National Review* May 13 1983.  
40. N Podhoretz ‘If Orwell were alive today’, in B Oldsey and J Browne (eds) *Critical essays on George Orwell* Boston 1986, pp19-30. For a critical response to this type of argument, see G Beadle ‘George Orwell and the neo-conservatives’ *Dissent* Winter 1984; P Flewers ‘Review essay’ *George Orwell Studies* 9:2, 2025.  
41. AL Morton *The English utopia* London 1978, p274.  
42. See P Siegel *Revolution and the twentieth-century novel* pp168-70; P Lashmar ‘Information as power’ in P Chilton and C Aubrey (eds) *1984 in 1984: autonomy, control and communication* London 1983, pp79-88; W Russel Gray ‘1984 and the massaging of the media’, in C Wemyss and A Ugrinsky (eds) *George Orwell* Westport 1987, pp111-16.  
43. *Spectator* January 7 1984; *Spectator* January 14 1984.  
44. R Conquest ‘Orwell: 1984’, *tyrants and typewriters: communiques in the struggle for truth* London 1989, p88.  
45. G Orwell ‘As I please’ July 1944 *CEJL* Vol 3, p212.  
46. G Orwell ‘Towards European unity’ *CEJL* Vol 4, p423.  
47. G Orwell *1984* pp211-12.  
48. I Deutscher *Heretics and renegades* pp47-48.  
49. See L Trotsky ‘Does the Soviet government still follow the principles adopted 20 years ago?’ *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1937-1938* New York 1976, p126. Were the Soviet Union either state capitalist or a new form of *étatisé* class society - analyses which Orwell endorsed at different junctures - the elite would eventually have adopted some sort of capitalist ideology, or one that reflected the social relations of bureaucratic collectivism.  
50. There have been occasional upsurges in seemingly ideologically charged activism in Stalinist countries, such as the Cultural Revolution in China, but even that was only a decade and a half after the establishment of the regime, and merely represented the use of radical phraseology by one section of the Chinese bureaucracy to mobilise amongst the population against another section: P’eng Shu-tse *The Chinese Communist Party in power* New York, 1980, pp282, 433; see also I Deutscher *The cultural revolution in China* Nottingham 1969.  
51. G Orwell, Letter to HJ Willmetts *CEJL* Vol 3, p178.  
52. For example, George Woodcock claimed that those influenced by ‘official communism’ “had always been a minority”: G Woodcock *The crystal spirit: a study of George Orwell* Hamondsworth 1970, p198. Robert Hewison stated that, notwithstanding the relegitimisation of the Soviet Union after June 1941, there had been a steady drift away from the ‘official’ communist movement on the part of British intellectuals since 1939, because of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the “slow seep” of information about the realities of Stalinism: R Hewison *In anger* pp25-26.  
53. In 1946, Orwell had estimated their number as 20 or 30: G Orwell ‘London letter to *Partisan Review*’ May 1946 *CEJL* Vol 4, p221.  
54. Years later, Raymond Aron, a leading protagonist of the totalitarian school, admitted that the novel referred “rather to 1951-52 than to 1984”: R Aron *Democracy and totalitarianism* London 1968, p226. See also C Brinton *The anatomy of revolution* New York 1956, p249; G Woodcock *Orwell’s message: 1984 and the present* Madeira Place 1984, pp143-47.  
55. Although entrenched ideas did take some shifting: Orwell no doubt would have been amused by the fact that the critical attitude towards Stalin that grew amongst ‘official communists’ after 1956 still required to be sparked off *ex-cathedra* and not by any local initiative.  
56. G Orwell ‘Author’s preface to the Ukrainian edition of *Animal Farm*’ *CEJL* Vol 3, p459.  
57. G Orwell ‘Annotations to Randall Swingler, “The right to free expression”’, G Orwell *Collected Works* Vol 18, London 1998, p443.  
58. G Orwell ‘Charles Dickens’ *Dickens, Dali and others* p75.

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What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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# weekly Worker

**Rational investigation,  
objective facts  
and science itself  
are being  
abandoned**

## Destruction of reason

Trump's announcement that paracetamol causes autism is just the latest in a long line of smoke-and-mirror operations. The intention is, argues **Ian Spencer**, to distract from the real issues

**Y**ou would have thought that, in announcing to the world that there is a link between one of the most widely used medicines and autism, Trump would at least learn how to pronounce 'acetaminophen' (paracetamol in the UK, usually tylenol in the US). But neither he nor his health secretary, Robert F Kennedy Jr, are any more concerned about appearing foolish than they are about scientific consensus.

With some help, Trump finally managed to pronounce the word on the fourth attempt and then went on to say that the US Food and Drug Administration would be immediately informing physicians that tylenol in pregnancy is "associated with a very increased risk of autism" in the foetus and - in case that was not alarming enough - he got his point across by saying "so taking tylenol is ... not good".

Trump then conceded that women with a very high fever, who could not "tough it out" could, on a doctor's advice, take tylenol. As if to then deliver the scientific *coup de gras*, he went on to confidently assert that there are certain groups of people, such as the Amish, who do not take vaccines or pills, and they have no autism. Then, turning to Kennedy for back up, Trump said, "Bobby wants to be very careful what he says, and he should, but I'm not so careful with what I say."<sup>1</sup>

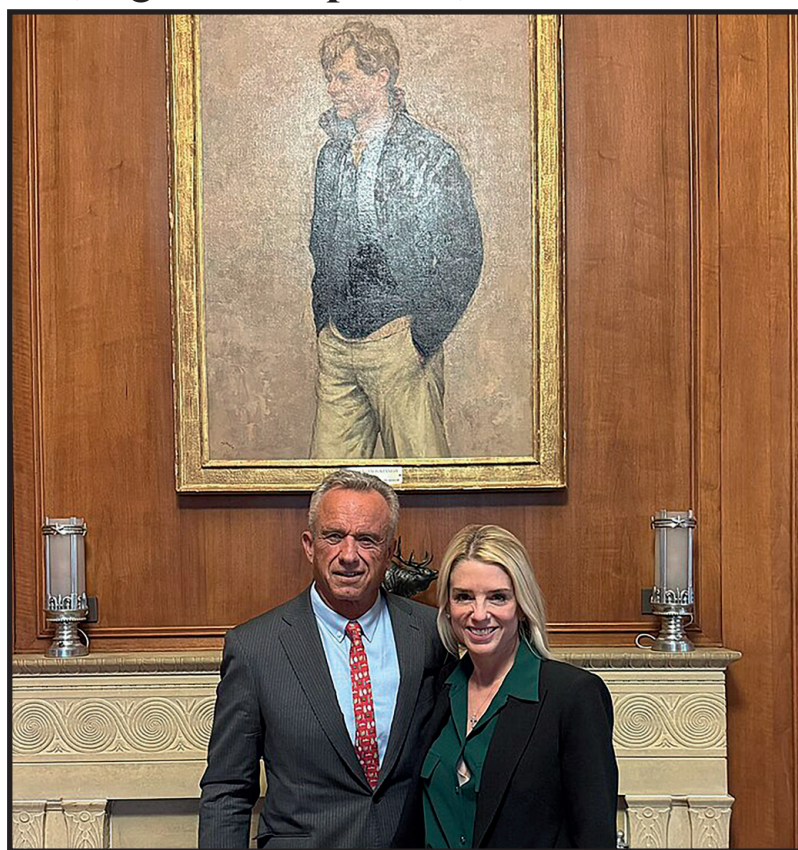
I am not sure whether I was more surprised by learning that there was a link between paracetamol and autism or that Bobby Kennedy wants to be careful with what he says! After all, on September 5 the manufacturers of tylenol, Kenvue, had seen a large fall in their share price on earlier announcements by Kennedy that he was investigating a link between the drug and autism.<sup>2</sup>

US federal funding for autism research and programmes comes primarily from the National Institutes of Health, which spends over \$300 million annually on research and is coordinated by the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee. However, recent reports from May and September indicate significant funding cuts and the imposition of a new 'Autism Data Science Initiative' under the current administration.

Beyond direct research funding, individuals with autism in the US may also be eligible for federal benefits like Supplemental Security Income. It should then come as no surprise that the subject of autism is treated by the Trump administration in terms of a 'rising tide' or 'epidemic', which Trump has described as "meteoric".

### Charlatans

There is, of course, nothing new in charlatans confidently asserting that there is a link between vaccination and autism. Andrew Wakefield was struck off the UK medical register for what is regarded as one of the most damaging medical hoaxes of the last 100 years. In 2010, *The Lancet* retracted Wakefield's 1998 paper, which



**RFK and Pam Bondi in front of a portrait of his dad, Bobby**

asserted that there was a link between the combined mumps, measles and rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism. The journal's editor in chief described Wakefield's article as "utterly false" and asserted that *The Lancet* had been deceived. Not only did Wakefield carry out highly questionable research to support his fraudulent claims, but he also covered up his financial interest in administering separate vaccinations.<sup>3</sup>

### MMR panic

Since the original Wakefield hoax, there have been numerous, large-scale, reputable studies that have dismissed the association between MMR and autism.<sup>4</sup> However, it can be shown that the resultant crisis of confidence in vaccination caused unnecessary deaths and disability from epidemics of diseases which had largely been conquered by the introduction of MMR. However, anti-vaxxers still cite Wakefield's work, and Trump and Kennedy continue to repeat the lie of the link between vaccines and autism.

Similarly, with acetaminophen, the bigger, the more reputable the study, the weaker the association between it and autism. A Swedish study drawing on data from 2.5 million children found no reliable association. A Japanese study with data from 200,000 children found no evidence of a causal link.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, we know that there is evidence that fever, because of an immune response to infection, may have a harmful effect on the foetus. So, far from being a causal factor in neurological damage, acetaminophen may be providing a safe way of mitigating such harm.<sup>6</sup> But, of course, the fact that women take acetaminophen when they have

a fever is enough to create a spurious correlation, which can be exploited by those whose real aim is to restrict access to medicines or provide a cover for cuts in support for those with autism.

We have, of course, been here before. Neither Trump nor Kennedy have ever let the facts get in the way of a headline-grabbing press conference. Trump had no qualms in blaming the Wuhan Institute of Virology for Covid, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Kennedy has made wild claims, either unsupported or fully refuted by reputable evidence, and this has taken a bewildering variety of forms.

In 2022, at an anti-vax demonstration in Washington DC, Kennedy made an unfavourable comparison between Anthony Fauci, the former chief medical advisor to the US president from 2021-22, and the Nazi doctor, Joseph Mengele, in the context of an attack on the recommendation for US citizens to be vaccinated against Covid.

As always, it is worth following the money. An Associated Press investigation revealed that Kennedy's anti-vaccine charity, called Children's Health Defense, saw its revenue double in 2020 to \$6.8 million, as the coronavirus pandemic took hold.<sup>7</sup>

On November 20 2024, Kennedy expressed his scepticism that HIV is the causal agent of AIDS. Instead, he attributed the disease to the recreational use of 'poppers' - the drug, amyl nitrate, known to be widely used in the gay community and beyond.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, Kennedy was simply drawing on yet another wholly discredited charlatan, Peter Duesberg, a one-time professor of biology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Duesberg made his name from path-breaking work on the development of cancer, but later put forward the (now refuted) hypothesis that HIV is a harmless virus and did not cause AIDS.<sup>9</sup> Instead, he attributed the disease to the use of recreational drugs. In the late 1980s and early 1990s this was latched onto by those wishing to resist calls to spend money on AIDS research and drugs such as azidothymidine. Duesberg also went on to provide scientific credibility to Thabo Mbeki's refusal to support the use of anti-retroviral therapy in South Africa and is therefore partly responsible for thousands of deaths. Now, as we know, anti-retroviral therapy has transformed the outcome of what was once an invariably fatal disease.

Robert F Kennedy's tenuous grasp of facts came under intense scrutiny during the Senate Finance Committee meeting on September 4, where Senator Maria Cantwell labelled the health secretary a "charlatan" and criticised his decisions to limit the availability of Covid vaccines to those over 65 and who were at high risk owing to underlying health conditions.

Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, a Democrat, said that RFK Jr has "elevated conspiracy theorists" and "crackpots" in his short tenure as health secretary. He went on to say that Kennedy's priority is to take vaccines away from Americans.<sup>10</sup>

Kennedy was criticised during the senate hearing, during which he stated that he did not know how many Americans died from Covid. It is widely accepted that by 2023 there were over 104 million confirmed or presumptive instances of Covid in the USA and over one million deaths from among those cases.<sup>11</sup> But it seemed that the Secretary of Health and Human Services did not have that information at his fingertips.

Kennedy went on to say that "no-one really knows" how many died, because "there was so much data chaos coming out of the CDC" (Centre for Disease Control), which is now overseen by him. The CDC's own data is that 1,231,440 Americans died of Covid between January 2020 and August 2025.

### Attacks and cuts

The anger in the Senate hearing also focused on the political interference at the CDC, which has included the firing of every panel member charged with recommending vaccines, along with a total of 600 employees. Kennedy also dismissed its director, Susan Monarez, after less than a month in office, reportedly because she refused to commit to firing career agency officials and backing his advisors if they recommended limiting vaccine access.

Kennedy justified her dismissal to the Senate hearing on the basis that the CDC "failed miserably during Covid", during which Trump was president in his first term of office, and for which, Kennedy argues, Trump deserves a Nobel Prize!

On September 17, Susan Monarez - along with Debra Houry, the chief medical officer, who resigned after a decade at the CDC - got the opportunity to reply, at a meeting of the Senate health, labour and pensions committee. Both expressed concern about the restriction of vaccines without rigorous review.

### Lost lives

Monarez said: "The stakes are not theoretical. We already have seen the largest measles outbreak in more than 30 years, which claimed the lives of two children. If vaccine protections are weakened, preventable diseases will return." The pair said that the prospect of future pandemics is what keeps them up at night and expressed scepticism that the US would be prepared.

The pattern of attacks on the working class finds its most graphic expression in war, with massive profits for arms manufacturers. As a result, workers continue to face huge attacks on living standards to pay for the weapons. Similarly, reductions in healthcare expenditure, public health measures, education and housing will all be targets to finance rising defence budgets in the drive to war.

The cuts - whether to the World Health Organisation, which played such a crucial role in the AIDS and Covid pandemics, or to funding for the care of those with autism - are being justified with reference to conspiracy theories, which are as bizarre as they are refutable by rigorous science.

This is why reason itself is under attack. Scientists who retain their integrity are dismissed. Charlatans are elevated and placed in charge of agencies who are supposed to be 'promoting public health'. Competing assertions, confidently made by those in power, are given credibility by the bourgeois press, loyal to their masters. The damage done by Wakefield and Duesberg was amplified by the media and people paid for it with their lives. The same is true regarding Trump and RFK Jr. They, along with the class they represent, are the real guilty parties ●

### Notes

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