

# weekly worker



**Murdoch's press rails against the  
bloated state apparatus and turns  
what is a half-truth into a big lie**

- Letters and debate
- Australia social media ban
- Your Party's left slate
- Iran's splits and protests

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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# LETTERS



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

## Anti-war YP

It is very important that Your Party has a clear anti-imperialist, anti-war position. It is obvious that imperialism is becoming more aggressive and the ruling class media machine is trying to win people to the idea of war on Russia and China.

If any such war starts, we will come under tremendous pressure to support it. Look what happened to the left in World War I. The socialist parties said they would organise a general strike against any such conflict, but, in reality, the mass parties politically collapsed and supported their own ruling class and the mass slaughter.

We should not attempt to fudge our position in opposing the war in Ukraine. The ruling class is aiming to escalate that war in the hope that they can get out of their economic crisis by defeating and plundering Russia and then China. We should give no support to this war. To do so would be the kiss of death to any real socialist party. To support this war is to become a cheerleader for imperialism and transform YP into just another pro-capitalist controlled show. And the British state will be using its agents and supporters to try and do just that.

We need open debate to ensure we don't just become another pro-establishment, fake socialist party, dominated and led by a bunch of careerists - a Labour Party mark two. The biggest mistake the anti-imperialist forces in YP can make is to try and fudge over differences on war and peace by supporting a party so broad that it includes those who support Britain going to war to defend its imperialist interests in Ukraine or anywhere else.

I suggest that local YP branches pass motions calling for (1) withdrawal of the UK from Nato; (2) an end to all UK military and financial support to the Kiev regime; (3) a democratic solution to the national conflict, recognising the rights of the people of Donbas and Crimea to self-determination; (4) For the unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers in the struggle against capitalism and imperialism and for a new socialist and democratic Soviet Union.

**Sandy McBurney**  
Glasgow

## Culture bloc YP

The cultural plans hatched at Communist University last August for a 'Diderot Gesellschaft' - an international gathering of radical artists, writers, scientists, academics and more, as described in my *Weekly Worker* article ('Learning to play our way' July 24 2025) - have moved on apace. This emulates Bertolt Brecht's attempts at the same and retains the name, as that emphasises its international origins (and sounds like an early-80s post-punk band, which is no bad thing!).

At the *Historical Materialism* conference in London in November 2025 (HM25) we performed an outdoor agitprop-style sketch, combining some of Diderot's play, *Jacques and his master*, with scenes from Brecht's Refugee conversations, which he acknowledged was inspired by that play. This sketch was created with Phoebe von Held, who has developed much work on Diderot and Brecht, including the book, *Alienation and theatricality: Diderot after Brecht*.

That same evening (Friday November 7), we did a 90-minute live radio broadcast on the London art radio station, Resonance FM, for the show *Bad punk*. As well as the sketches, the programme was a tribute to the recently and tragically passed music artist, Keith McIvor, with whom I had collaborated on several projects over the years. I'm sure that Keith would have become a key figure in our Diderot Gesellschaft and will always be an inspiration and contributor through the work he has left us. Just such an example is the way he utilised the now legendary anti-fascist song, 'Bella Ciao', and this opened the radio broadcast. It's incredible how this song still resonates so strongly - most recently as sung by children in Gaza (just search 'Bella ciao Gaza' on Instagram).

As to radio, I'm indebted to our founder member, Darko Suvin, for guiding me towards Fredric Jameson's comments on Brecht's understanding and use of the medium in his book *Brecht and method*: "Brecht's modernism - and the very modernism of his moment of history in general - is bound up with radio, and demands the acknowledgement of its formal uniqueness as a medium, of its fundamental properties as a specific art in its own right: a form in which the antithesis of words and music no longer holds, but a new symbiosis of these two formerly separate dimensions is effectuated and rehearsed."

The ways in which radio and voice recording have extended now through digital technology offers huge possibilities for exploration and will be core work in our Diderot Gesellschaft.

The most inspiring event for me at HM25 was the launch of the 'performance workbook' of Thomas Müntzer: *Dramatic depiction of the German Peasants' War of 1525* - a play by Berta Lask. The event included readings from the play, giving a flavour of what must have been an extraordinary event that took place on May 31 1925 during a festival held by the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in the Saxon town of Eisleben to mark the 400th anniversary of the German Peasants' War. A play by Berta Lask was performed in the open air by 150 amateur actors with around 15,000 spectators.

As editor and translator Sam Dolbear states in his preface, "In the play, Lask poses a basic question: 'What would Thomas Müntzer see if he woke up today?' A list accrues: climate breakdown, imperialism, gendered oppression, earthquakes, genocide, impending fascism. Capitalism didn't dig its own grave. Rather, the dead oppressors of previous centuries have been resurrected, planted in new bodies, toolled with new modes of bondage, within uneven spatial domination and temporal disjunction."

It was a huge irony to me that just before that event I'd said to my son that I thought I was going to have to keep coming back to London to develop the work I needed to do, because the left in Scotland is still so nationalistic. I then discovered that many of the key players in the Müntzer event reside in Glasgow and indeed an exhibition of 1920s agitprop theatre entitled *Their theatre and ours* by radical artist Joey Simon was ongoing. In fact at the Glasgow launch of the book in early December I played Thomas Müntzer!

The other major area I've been looking towards lately is cultural activity within Your Party. The Liverpool travesty of a conference

in November had no cultural elements to it whatsoever, until the very closing minutes - by which time I had already had to leave. I had begun discussions with comrades in other parts of the country about the possibilities of a YP cultural bloc, but it was hard to summon enthusiasm until we knew the outcome of Liverpool. As it turned out, it became apparent that implosion wasn't on the immediate agenda and we'd live to fight another day.

A Scottish conference was on the agenda though, and ideas for cultural input there immediately started to take shape. Even before embarking on the train back to Scotland I had agreed with comrade Tommy Martin of the North Edinburgh and Leith YP proto-branch, and member of the organising committee (OC) of the conference to take place in Dundee over a weekend in early 2026, that I'd propose a social event for the Saturday night and an exhibition about Dundee radicalism with the legendary Timex strike of the early 90s in pride of place. Here is the basic framework I drew up that Tommy presented to the OC:

"For some time I've been exploring the idea of a YP culture bloc, and the Scottish Conference in Dundee and the coming election campaign offers the perfect means to get this going. On the Saturday evening at conference I could curate and produce a social event featuring music, spoken word and other live acts. There could also be an exhibition through the weekend, featuring radical connections with Dundee, including the Timex strike and historical events like the 'Tree of Liberty', which I was involved in with radical artist Ruth Ewan

"I'd also hope to involve Dundee-based folklorist Erin Farley, who is one of the contributors to the Diderot Gesellschaft - hopefully, such an international gathering of radical artists, scientists and academics could have a fruitful relationship with YP.

"The Dundee conference could also see the launch of a May elections cultural campaign that develops directly with branches and coordinates larger-scale events, particularly around the May Day weekend. There could be a YP agitprop radical roadshow touring constituencies and countering the far-right through cultural means. A street theatre culture could be built in the coming months, with agitprop local groups and scripts adaptable to local conditions. I'm more than willing to take on the task of developing and coordinating all this and have experience in the field, having established the Workers Theatre Movement in the late 80s/early 90s."

I also mentioned this in emails calling for volunteers to conference and to left members also on that OC. Most recently I was told by Jim Monaghan that he had proposed to Owen Wright, who appears to be leading the organising of conference and is based in Dundee, that I should be given responsibility and support for producing such cultural activities. I've not heard a single thing back yet, but the conference is a perfect opportunity to launch a YP cultural bloc and this will go ahead, whether it's part of the official proceedings or not.

Its centrepiece will be another agitprop theatre sketch that has direct connections with the Workers Theatre Movement we ran in the late 1980s. We had found inspiration in what had taken place across the international communist movement in agitprop theatre and there was a particular sketch performed then

called *Meerut*. It was a call for solidarity with jailed trade unionists in India and was performed on the streets behind wooden banner poles representing prison bars.

Our WTM updated the sketch to a call for solidarity with Irish republican prisoners and honouring the 10 dead hunger strikers. We called it 'Twenty years', as the Labour left had a campaign running entitled 'Time to go', as if it wasn't always this and a Labour government that sent the troops in. Today the despicable treatment by the Labour government of the Palestine Action hunger strikers on remand certainly warrants a rewrite of that sketch.

Discussions with comrades in Hackney and Haringey proto-branches are also ongoing towards a cultural bloc and meetings on this will be widely posted as taking place soon.

**Tam Dean Burn**  
Glasgow

## Coprophilia

Viktor Semyonovich Abakumov was executed on December 19 1954. He was a high-level Soviet security official, who from 1943 to 1946 was head of military counter-intelligence in the USSR's People's Commissariat of Defence, (SMERSH) and from 1946 to 1951 minister of state security.

Colonel-General Abakumov was a high-calibre, professional and effective intelligence officer, and under his leadership SMERSH successfully wiped out very many western intelligence operations against the USSR and 'turned' many others. However, he fell victim to the paranoia of the last years of Stalin's life, and the post-Stalin factional fighting between Beria, Malenkov and Khrushchev (and, after the removal and elimination of Beria, between Malenkov and Khrushchev).

Abakumov was initially removed from office and arrested in 1951 by Beria on fabricated charges of failing to investigate the 'Doctors' Plot', which he did not believe really existed. In fact, it was Beria who had organised resistance to the impending purge signalled by the Doctors' Plot, believing with good reason that he himself, his power bases and the social groups backing him were going to be among the targets. After Stalin's death, Beria accused Abakumov and others of carrying out a number of criminal operations, including assassinations.

Despite the fall of Beria in June 1953, Abakumov remained in prison, and was accused of being an accomplice in Beria's own crimes (despite having opposed and bypassed him direct to Stalin), and of falsifying the 'Leningrad Affair' in the late 1940s, which was actually conducted by Malenkov and Beria. The Leningrad Affair was in fact real - the Leningrad party under Zhdanov had increasingly become a rival centre of power to Moscow and was pursuing a number of 'liberal' policies in the region, contrary to party policy.

However, Beria and Malenkov used the Leningrad purge to strengthen their own positions and that of the government and state against the party. Ironically, Beria and Malenkov attempted to implement very similar 'liberal' policies immediately after the death of Stalin, until they were outmanoeuvred and ousted by then head of the party, Khrushchev. (Khrushchev had in fact replaced Malenkov as senior secretary to the Communist Party just two weeks after Stalin's death, and was confirmed as first secretary in

September 1953.) Abakumov and five others were charged in 1954 for falsifying the 'Leningrad Affair' and, among others, found guilty and executed by firing squad shortly afterwards.

In the ferocious faction fighting between 1953 and 1955, top Soviet leaders were not only jostling for power, but for their very survival, and using different figures and events in the security, intelligence and military apparatus to further their cases. It ultimately suited both Malenkov and Khrushchev, although they were bitter rivals, to have Abakumov eliminated.

The post-Stalin faction fighting was, of course, about powerful individuals jockeying for position (indeed survival), but ultimately this was a reflection of powerful interest groups in Soviet society struggling and competing for influence and dominance. The changes in top personnel in the party, the state, government and in the economy, brought about by the Yezhovshchina ('Great Purge') between 1937 and 1938, along with the massive destruction brought about by the Great Patriotic War, had severely weakened the leading role of the Communist Party in favour of the security apparatus in particular, plus the state and government machineries more generally. Stalin had in fact retired as Communist Party general secretary and abolished the post after the 19th Party Congress in October 1952, seemingly indicating the growing importance of the government and state.

The ultimate triumph of Khrushchev as overall leader of the Soviet Union fundamentally represented the re-establishment of the leading role of the Communist Party in Soviet society - including over the government machinery and the security and intelligence services.

Abakumov was certainly no saint and as a professional intelligence officer and in military intelligence 'wet affairs' he could not but help get his hands dirty (it was his job to identify enemy agents, interrogate them, turn them if possible, ultimately to eliminate them), and inevitably was seen to be supporting one or other of the leaders and factions or acting against the interests of others.

But all the evidence suggests Abakumov was completely loyal to the Soviet power and to leadership headed by Stalin, and fundamentally he was a highly effective, if ruthless, top intelligence and counter-intelligence officer. His case has never been reviewed or re-investigated and he has never been formally 'rehabilitated'.

That is deeply ironic, when one considers the outright backstabbers and traitors who were 'rehabilitated' in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.

**Andrew Northall**

Kettering

## Didn't win?

Henry Kissinger didn't win the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize, as Eddie Ford stated ('Keeping Donald happy' October 16 2025): it was a joint award with Le Duc Tho, the veteran Vietnamese communist, who was his negotiation counterpart.

Le Duc Tho refused the prize, saying, "Peace has not yet been established in Vietnam". Indeed Vietnam suffered two years more war. But peace was not a relevant consideration for the US official, so he trousered his half-award and postured with it for the rest of his life.

**John Spencer**

email

## USA

# Hands off Venezuela!

Trump is revealing the stark truth of how world politics really works - 'might is right'. Pleas for a return to 'international law' are as pathetic as they are delusional. The working class must become a global power in its own right, says **Eddie Ford**

It is fair to say that we were expecting something big to happen, with the huge military build-up in the Caribbean. However, what we were not expecting - who was? - was Trump's sheer *audacity* that began around 2am local time on Saturday January 3, when military strikes hit Caracas and other locations.<sup>1</sup> It was undoubtedly a brilliant military success, if reports are right, and there is no reason to dispute them: not a single US service person was killed and only one helicopter was seemingly hit by gunfire, but could continue to fly - though Venezuelan officials said at least 40 people died during the attack and the Cuban government said that 32 of its military were killed.

But, of course, there was the abduction of president Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores - even if that impartial arbiter of truth, the BBC, has 'banned' its journalists from using the word "kidnapped", with the guidelines saying "captured" instead, to "ensure clarity and consistency" (even if Trump himself has said that "kidnapped" is "not a bad term").<sup>2</sup> Maduro and Flores were flown to New York City to face utterly absurd charges - as does their son, Nicolas Guerra, and other officials in absentia - in a Manhattan federal court with all the hallmarks of a show trial. Amongst other things, they are charged with "narco-terrorism conspiracy", which we are supposed to believe was funded by the proceeds of the oil industry, and - now wait for this - "possession of machine guns", which seems like a wise idea if you are the head of a South American state facing concerted threats from a belligerent US president.<sup>3</sup>

Naturally, they pleaded not guilty to the 92-years-old district judge, Alvin Hellerstein - who apparently is "old school" and "doesn't give a shit what anyone thinks about him"<sup>4</sup> - with Maduro in particular calmly saying he was a "completely innocent" and "decent man", and a "prisoner of war", which a lot of people will think is a fairly accurate statement.<sup>5</sup> Trump, of course, has a different perspective. He justifies the operation as a "law-enforcement action" with military support - you could almost call it a special military operation - which, as US president, he has "inherent constitutional authority" to undertake.

## Transition

Trump also took people by surprise at a press conference held after Operation Absolute Resolve - at which he also described Cuba as a "failing nation" that would find it harder to survive without heavily subsidised Venezuelan oil and suggested that the US might need to 'address' the situation there. But he went on to make the incendiary remark that the US would "run" Venezuela for the foreseeable future - "until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition".<sup>6</sup>

He compounded the surprise when the question was posed of the opposition leader, María Machado. She has previously called for US military intervention in Venezuela because the country had already been "invaded" by "Iranian agents, and terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, who operate together with the regime". Furthermore, she told Fox News that she praised Trump's "courageous vision" by forcibly



**Delcy Rodríguez: too early to say if she conspired**

removing Maduro from power and vowed to return to Venezuela as soon as possible, wanting the transition to "move forward" as in "free and fair elections we will win over 90% of the votes".<sup>7</sup>

But he dismissed her as not having enough "support within, or the respect within, the country" - therefore she would find it "very tough" to lead Venezuela (Machado later said that she had not spoken to Trump since October 10, when it was announced that she had won the Nobel peace prize and was congratulated by the US president). Trump did not even discuss former presidential candidate, Edmundo González, who had western media sources predicting that he would win by a "wide margin" in 2024. Having been barred from running, he invited Machado to run. Indeed, Trump made it quite clear the day after Operation Absolute Resolve that early elections were not the priority for him, as Venezuela is a "dead country right now" which needs to be fixed.

Rather, according to Trump, there would be "big investments by the oil companies to bring back the infrastructure" in Venezuela, with companies "ready to go".

And on January 7 the US president said in a post online that the country will be "turning over" \$2 billion worth of Venezuelan crude to the United States and that this oil will be "sold at its market price".<sup>8</sup> He added that the oil will be taken from ships and sent directly to US ports, and supplying the trapped crude to the US could initially require reallocating cargoes originally bound for China, which has often replaced the US in Latin America as the main trading partner, or main conduit of investment - something that is certainly the case when it comes to Venezuela.

So in that sense you could argue that the military strikes against Venezuela was a 'war for oil', as many on the left insist, but not because the US wants the oil for itself - it is, after all, the world's largest producer - but because it wants to exert *control* over oil as part of the US attempt to reboot its global hegemony, China being its only

strategic rival. Trump has also made it explicit that he wants the new president in Caracas, Delcy Rodríguez, to give the US and private companies "total access" to Venezuela's oil industry, and some are suggesting that the deal - if that is what it is - indicates the Venezuelan government is complying with Trump's demands.

This has reignited an awful lot of speculation, particularly amongst the left, about the events of January 3 being some sort of 'inside job' - that is, a quid pro quo with Rodríguez when she was vice-president that if she allowed the US to get Maduro, then she will agree to act as a satrap for Trump. Of course, it is possible, however we do not have sufficient information at the moment to make a judgement. So far, there is no reason to come to such a conclusion. Either way, what we have is not regime change, but regime decapitation. A situation totally unlike Iraq, where the US disbanded the army and completely 'de-Ba'athified' its bureaucracy, creating the conditions for the rise of Islamic State.<sup>9</sup>

But Rodríguez, so far, has struck a defiant tone, saying that Maduro is still the legitimate president and declaring in a televised address this week that "no external agent governs Venezuela", describing the kidnapping of Maduro (sorry, BBC editors) as a "terrible military aggression" and a "criminal attack" whose "absolutely illegal outcome" is "in violation of international law" - which sounds like a rebuttal to Trump's claim that after the removal of Maduro, the US would be "in charge" of Venezuela.

Trump, however, or so it appears, thinks that she will bow to Washington, believing that she is "essentially willing to do what we think is necessary to make Venezuela great again", in the almost inevitable words of the US president.

There is talk in Washington of a 'Trump doctrine' echoing the Monroe Doctrine of 1828, which started off opposing European colonialism in the western hemisphere and proclaiming America's 'manifest destiny'. Having said that, it was very much a *rhetorical*

could do so almost effortlessly by sponsoring some sort of political party or movement in a country that has a population of only just under 60,000, especially as it already has well-established military bases there.

Trump has been discussing "a range of options", including the use of the military to acquire Greenland, because the US "needed" the country as a "national security priority". This alarmed Danish prime minister Mette Frederiksen, who warned that any US attack on Greenland would spell the end of Nato.<sup>11</sup> Telling you where things are heading, a day after the US strikes against Venezuela, Katie Miller - wife of one of Trump's senior aides - posted on social media a map of Greenland in the colours of the American flag, alongside the word, "Soon". And Stephen Miller himself, when asked whether America would rule out using force to annex it, responded by saying that "nobody's going to fight the US over the future of Greenland" - which is surely true, whether it means the end of Nato or not (highly unlikely given that the US intends to radically deepen the subordination of its allies).

In this way, Trump is relentlessly stripping away not just the facade of 'international law' and the post-World War II international architecture of multilateralism and a 'rules-based order' - instead revealing the stark truth of how world politics really works: 'might is right'. Trump has therefore taken us back to a 19th century-type world of *naked* plunder and military conquest. This is also, crucially, about the US competition with China - being the only country in the world that presents a genuine, full-spectrum challenge, even if much weaker by comparison.

The US is not going to grant China its 'legitimate' sphere of influence: eg, the South China Sea and Taiwan. That is utter nonsense. Trump is no isolationist, nor does he eschew - except in pre-election rhetoric - wars and foreign adventures. Trump wants hegemony not just over the western hemisphere, but the entire globe - though, in an attempt to cleave Russia away from China, he seems keen on a greater Russia, which includes Crimea and the whole of the Donbas.

How should we respond? Not by hand-ringing pleas for a return to the norms of 'international law' (always a delusion). No, the working class needs once again to become a great power it is own right. A class that opposes the wars of its own ruling class and is ready to take state power and begin the global transition from capitalism to communism •

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## Notes

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## MEDIA

# How not to overcome anxiety and depression

Australia has taken the lead with its social media ban on under-16s. France, Britain, Spain and other European countries are considering following suit. How should we respond? Don't fall for the hype, says **Scott Evans**

**A** little over two weeks before Christmas, Australia's gift to its kids and adolescents was to strip them of their social media accounts and ban them from creating new ones.

Before addressing the story and some questions around the effects of social media on young people today, it is important to be clear from the outset that any observational study or experience faces a glaring problem, when comes to grappling with rates of depression, anxiety and other related symptoms in the adult and youth populations: and that is, of course, the great recession (2007-09) and the long hangover since, including austerity. Unavoidably then, I am leaning heavily on my own personal feeling on the matter, so one should grab the nearest pile of salt and give it a good pinch!

The Online Safety Amendment, as it is amending the earlier Online Safety Act, is intended to prevent young people from engaging with any platform which allows open-ended social interaction and posting.<sup>1</sup> The complete list at the time of writing seems to be: Facebook, Instagram (and hence Threads), TikTok, Snapchat, X (Twitter), YouTube, Reddit, Twitch and Kick. Understandably for practicality's sake, these are only large platforms, though nothing would prevent banning something like, say, small political forums. It is not intended to stop kids *watching* public YouTube videos, does not ban platforms like Discord (for now) and does not touch cesspits like 4chan (which, as the reader may well know, has no real account system).

The tech workarounds are trivial. Because the legislation does not make presenting government ID a requirement, platforms must provide at least one other way of working out the age of its users: a selfie to estimate age, or by analysing user behaviour on the platform. In terms of facial analysis, the workaround is both obvious and amusing: simply hold up a decent photo of your parent, Anthony Albanese, or whoever. Regarding behaviour, that is no doubt harder to work around, but obviously not foolproof either. I doubt these companies will expend much effort bothering to enter into an open-close loophole arms race with such users.

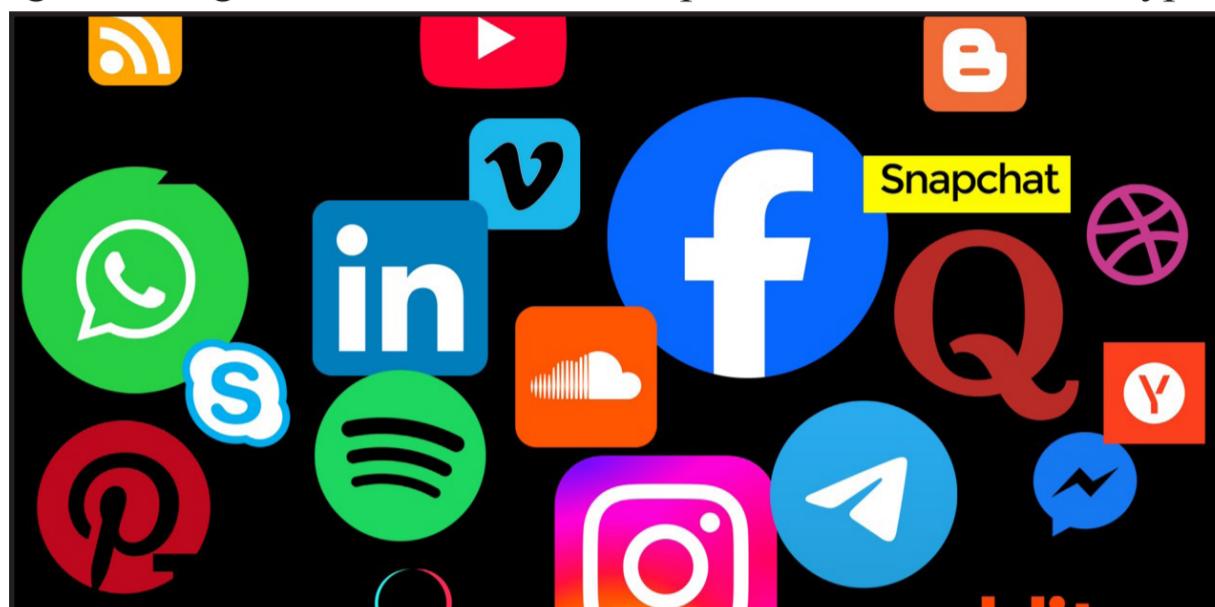
For those who do not particularly care about remaining plugged in to a particular social media ecosystem like TikTok, but just want to use it as a way to follow friends, keep up with news, switch off and shitpost all on the one website, they can simply turn to platforms not included in the ban. At least some TikTok refugees, following their American counterparts, may have turned to the Chinese alternative, REDNote.

Finally, there are VPNs and Tor. One simply has to reroute one's internet traffic through a country without these restrictive laws for a website to agree to serve you up its content and normal user registration form. The government could still ban traffic through known VPN servers, but that would be a much more difficult sell to the broad population.

### Motivation

However, the trouble with merely pointing these technical hurdles out and saying little else is that it fails to engage with the underlying motivations for and consequences of the ban.

Ask any young person who spends a lot of time on microblogging platforms like X or scrolling through short-form video (SFV) content like



**Ban, ban, ban ... if they can**

Instagram reels, and, if they are old enough to introspect and conscientious enough to care, more likely than not they will tell you that they want to reduce their screen time (meaning, specifically, time spent staring at their phone). The internet is replete with advice on reducing screen time, from moving to physical calendars and to-do lists, app lock timers, minimising which apps are allowed to prod you with notifications, addressing email only on one's laptop or desktop, to the more extreme end of going smartphone-free (to a 'dumbphone') or engaging in a 'digital detox'.

Two instructive terms: the omnidirectional brooding caused by 'doomscrolling' X or TikTok or whatever it happens to be, consuming an endless stream of negative news, and this or that hot-take or rage-bait from your political peer (or, these days, some random neo-Nazi); and 'brainrot', low-effort and low-value online content, particularly on SFV apps, that is nevertheless enough to keep you engaged by tapping into an increasingly self-destructive need for novelty and escape from reality, which the SFV apps' algorithms are more than happy to feed.

These are not words invented by and used by the older to sneer at the younger about how they choose to spend their free time. These are words they will use themselves to describe these activities, though often in a self-aware, ironic way, and not often in a way which implies any willingness to be doing something else.

This is why we should not reduce the whole thing to a moral panic over what the kids are up to, like that of comic books, horror films, heavy metal or TV (though, to be honest, I don't think 'idiot box' is an entirely unreasonable epithet to throw at most TVs running 200-channel linear programming). Many younger people are unhappy with the lifestyle they find themselves with too.

SFV content, much more so than doomscrolling X, locks one into a kind of diffuse - as opposed to focused - attention. This is exactly the kind of state all these platforms want you in. Yes, they want you to stay on the platform; the longer you're there, the more content and data you generate for them, and the more ads you see. But even better is if you do not even think about whether you want to remain on the platform for the next 20 minutes or - again even better - two hours. A state of 'zombie scrolling' is ideal. These platforms turn your phone by *design* into a novelty generation machine, ready to engage in a relentless assault on your executive function<sup>2</sup> - our capacity

for focus, self-discipline, working memory, emotional regulation, and so on - whenever you feel yourself sitting alone with your own thoughts long enough to feel uncomfortable.

Flame wars and pile-ons have, I would suggest, also created a greater tendency to self-censor in some younger people. Having handfuls of faceless, enraged strangers screaming at you from the other end of an undersea cable triggers a maladaptive fight-or-flight response, which will - whether one just witnessed it or especially if one experienced it - make you think twice before sharing an opinion you think may provoke such a reaction (unless that is your whole shtick or you have developed a very thick skin).

### Atomisation

Another effect of social media is its capacity for *reinforcing* social atomisation.<sup>3</sup> I do not myself believe that social media, or the internet in general, causes atomisation. Many other things can do that: having to

move far away for a new job, needing to find a new place when your landlord kicks you out, poor socialisation thanks to grade-factory schooling, falling into addiction and becoming separated from family and friends, 'work from home', the gig economy, a lack of third places, a generalised 'friendship recession',<sup>4</sup> and so on. Indeed, the Covid lockdowns by their very nature caused a huge amount of social atomisation - in theory temporary, but which has persisted through poorer socialisation of youth in key developmental phases, and through work from home.

Of course, there is an endless list of positive things one can do on the internet, including on its social component. Much of this is banal. But, to pick an important example, the opportunity the internet provides for finding your niche is a wonderful thing and completely without precedent. Want to learn to set up a single-board microcontroller like an Arduino to only let people in your room who know a secret knock? There are online communities to help you do that. Personally, a sparsely populated peer support and chat forum for LGBT youth was an absolute lifeline for me, growing up in a small town. The Aussie ban does not, as yet, target such spaces; in any case, the old forum archipelago days are long gone, now that the internet is much more centralised, with the closest mainstream alternative probably being Discord.

If there is any 'moral panic' component to this ban, it is a delayed reaction to the atomising effects of

lockdown, *combined with* the negative reinforcing dynamic of social media.

Or - a proposition for which I have no evidence, but which certainly does feel *truthy* - the ruling class and its administrators have suffered one of their semi-regular frights over their ability to manufacture consent with respect to Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza.

What is acute for them therefore is that adolescents on social media are being fed misinformation by "China bots" or "Russia bots" or whatever, and in order to maintain control over their children's socialisation into and acceptance of liberal-democratic capitalism and Nato/Aukus geopolitical priors, they need to be kept away from foreign media influence, whose biggest vector in relation to young people is social media. Certainly this is a potential motivation, although, as with the enforceability point, one should not stop at merely imputing sinister motivations when discussing the legislation.

Hillary Clinton recently opined: "Smart, well-educated, young people from our own country, from around the world, where were they getting their information? They were getting their information from social media, particularly TikTok." She continued: "That is where they were learning about what happened on October 7, what happened in the days, weeks and months to follow. That's a serious problem. It's a serious problem for democracy, whether it's Israel or the United States, and it's a serious problem for our young people."<sup>5</sup>

### Problem

I do not think it can be said that concern over 'cyberbullying' - bullying which follows people home, thanks to instant online communication - is particularly acute at the moment, given worries about this have been chronic in society the past two decades. We will never be free of widespread bullying, while we have a society which systematically produces in its population significant inequality, broken personalities and broken homes.

Clearly much of this is a problem for parents who love their children.<sup>6</sup> But my guess - and that is all it is - is that more persuasive for pushing it as high up in the rankings of issues considered by lawmakers will be the consent-manufacturing angle, as well as perceived potential effects of this on national productivity.

In reality, the ban will not be effective, will not address any of the underlying issues and provides an unfortunate precedent for greater crackdown in the future, having

convinced the Australian public of its virtues.<sup>7</sup> As with any self-destructive pastime or addiction (and there are many), social media consumed in an unhealthy way comes with particular social maladies that are unique to it, and we have to learn to adapt to those new and particular social maladies, but the fundamental drivers are deeper.

To really address these issues, one would instead have to confront existing social atomisation; eliminate the addicting and/or zombifying designs at the heart of modern-day social media<sup>8</sup> by *at minimum* making content recommendation algorithms transparent and able to be swapped out by users; educate young people on safe and healthy engagement with the online world; and from the first breath of life aim to provide a truly nourishing education for kids, which puts producing well-rounded human beings capable of pursuit of a full life rather than producing market-ready labour-power.

We as communists should make a start on this by developing our own comrades' ability to read and write long-form content, discuss healthy ways to engage with mass social media<sup>9</sup> and develop our own independent online media ecosystems (perhaps using something like Matrix,<sup>10</sup> as the French and German governments have with Tchap, BundesMessenger, and openDesk).

A strong communist political movement in this country would, just through doing what is required to fulfil its historic mission, inevitably also bring people together and break down atomisation ●

### Notes

1. [classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/bill/osammab2024419](https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/bill/osammab2024419).

2. See 'Feeds, feelings and focus: a systematic review and meta-analysis examining the cognitive and mental health correlates of short-form video use': [pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/41231585](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/41231585). Note this is correlation and, as we all know, not necessarily causation. For a more sceptical view see 'The great rewiring: is social media really behind an epidemic of teenage mental illness?' ([www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00902-2](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00902-2)).

3. This is obviously just my own view, based on my own direct and observed experience, having gone through my teens in the late noughties/early 2010s. I have not done a meta-analysis or systematic review of the evidence, nor could I.

4. [www.happiness.hks.harvard.edu/february-2025-issue/the-friendship-recession-the-lost-art-of-connecting](https://www.happiness.hks.harvard.edu/february-2025-issue/the-friendship-recession-the-lost-art-of-connecting).

5. [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/hillary-clinton-gaza-israel-tiktok-b2877089.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/hillary-clinton-gaza-israel-tiktok-b2877089.html).

6. And political organisations which want healthy, committed, rhetorically gifted, disciplined comrades! You will struggle to be as effective a communist as you could be if you do not pay some attention to working on yourself.

7. 77% of Australians - substantially up from when it was first announced - back the ban (although only 29% of parents say they will bother to fully enforce it with their kids, another 53% will do so partially). See [www.theguardian.com/media/2024/nov/28/australia-passes-world-first-law-banning-under-16s-from-social-media-despite-safety-concerns](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2024/nov/28/australia-passes-world-first-law-banning-under-16s-from-social-media-despite-safety-concerns). See also [www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/national-pride-albanese-hails-teen-social-ban-but-parents-may-not-force-kids-to-follow-the-law-20251207-p5nlio.html](https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/national-pride-albanese-hails-teen-social-ban-but-parents-may-not-force-kids-to-follow-the-law-20251207-p5nlio.html).

8. I do not think that mass social media like X is worth wasting much mental energy on trying to preserve or replicate as an important political space - though, of course, we should continue engaging with it to promote our writing and activity as a matter of necessary work. In general, I tend to go along with what Adam Curtis said on this back in 2019 (too long to quote here): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZypbVJ16Jk&t=2068s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZypbVJ16Jk&t=2068s). See also [www.ft.com/content/a0724dd9-0346-4df3-80f5-d6572c93a863](https://www.ft.com/content/a0724dd9-0346-4df3-80f5-d6572c93a863).

9. By 'mass' I mean many-to-many communication, like the Twitter timeline, or a large (say, 150+) WhatsApp group. You could call blogs - and I suppose the individual Twitter profile - one-to-many, with a many-to-one tacked on the bottom (a comments section), and smaller forums and messaging groups few-to-few.

10. [element.io/en/case-studies/tchap](https://element.io/en/case-studies/tchap) - see also other case studies and matrix.org.

## ECONOMY

# Involution and plan

China's 15th five-year plan is big on artificial intelligence. It will be diffused into every sector of the economy. Meanwhile, because it does not follow the 'western model', **Michael Roberts** argues, the country can plan investments and sustain high growth rates

During his New Year's Eve broadcast, China's communist leader Xi Jinping praised the country's advances in key sectors. Images ranging from humanoid robots performing kung fu to new hydropower projects rolled on the screen as he spoke. He also announced that the National People's Congress would discuss the country's new five-year plan<sup>1</sup> at its upcoming legislative session in March.<sup>2</sup>

China's 15th five-year plan is all about artificial intelligence. The 14th plan (2021-25), which has just ended, focused on the "dual circulation" strategy (domestic and foreign trade): ie, driving economic growth not just through exports, but also through investment in the domestic economy - particularly aiming at self-dependence in technology. The new plan will continue that drive for technological independence, but this time through the diffusion of AI into industrial processes, consumer products, healthcare, education and digital government. The plan is that by 2030 AI is expected to be as widespread as electricity or the internet - and so a big driver of economic growth. The government talks of China becoming an "intelligent society" by 2035 as a result.

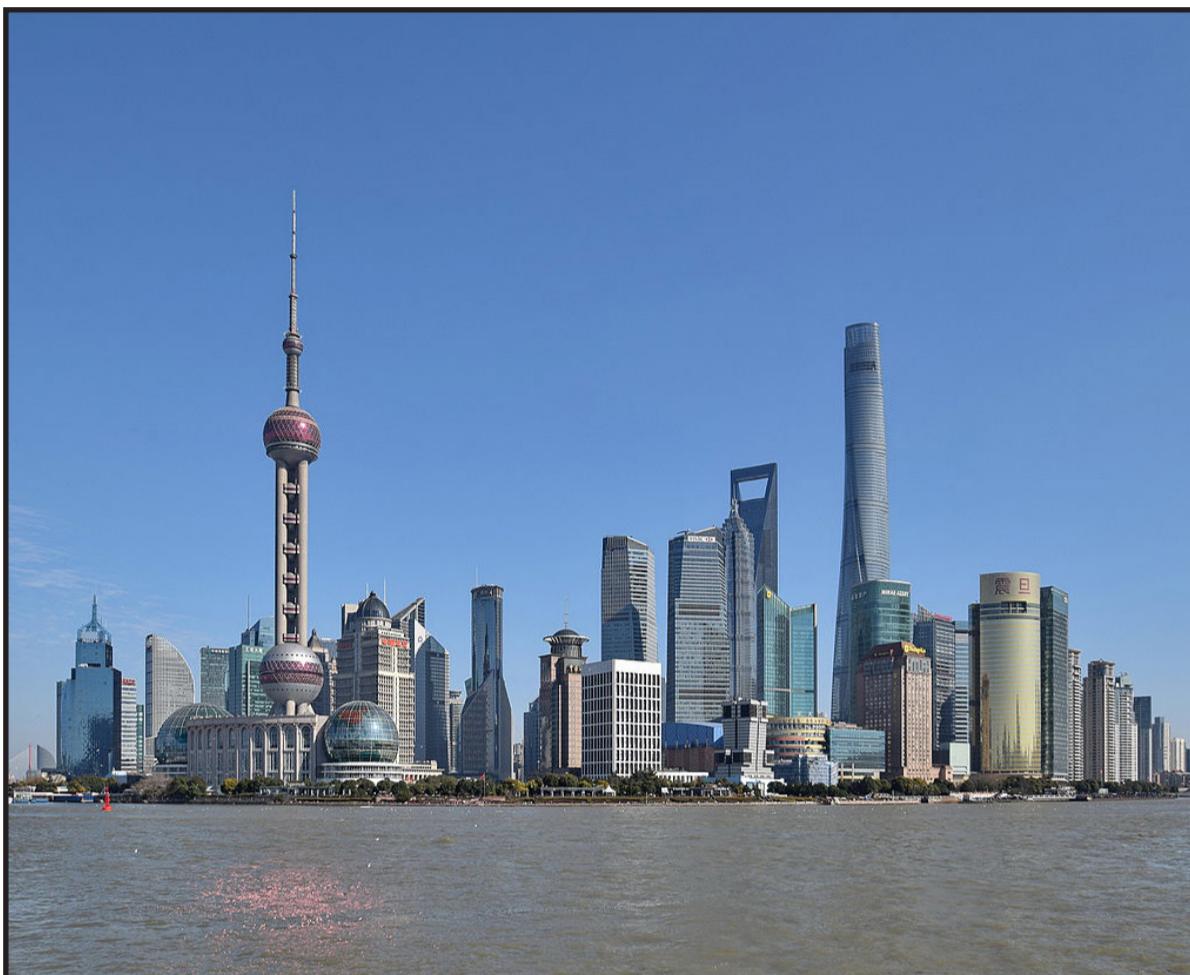
It seems that its leaders are even more committed to making AI succeed than those heading the major economies of the west, where there are sceptical voices about what it can deliver in terms of new discoveries, higher productivity and profitability. To me, the difference is that in China there is a plan to meet key targets in technology that will boost the whole economy, etc, while in the major capitalist economies all the AI eggs are in a basket owned by the privately owned AI hyperscalers and the 'Magnificent Seven' giant tech media companies - and for them, of course, profitability is key, not technological outcomes.

So China enters the Year of the Donkey in 2026 with a new five-year plan, having achieved mostly what it set out to do in the previous plan. It looks set to achieve 5% real GDP growth in 2025 and, while that growth is no longer in double digits, it is still growing twice as fast as the US economy, which managed 2.5% in 2025, at best, while the rest of the G7 economies struggled to expand by more than 1%.

According to the *South China Morning Post* - often a strong critic of China's success - 86% of the 250 targets set in the previous national plan were met or exceeded. Depending on how you measure it,<sup>3</sup> China's GDP is close to surpassing that of the US and will, at current rates of growth, do so by the end of this new five-year plan.

China's western critics say that if you compare nominal GDP growth, which includes inflation, then US nominal GDP rose 5% in 2025, as much as China's rate. This shows that China is in a deflationary spiral that is weakening consumer spending and lowering investment growth. Many western mainstream economists argue that 'moderate' inflation is good for an economy. If there is deflation (falling prices), then consumers may spend less on goods and services, and save their money in the hope that prices will fall further, and so economic growth will slow.

Sure, hyper or accelerating inflation is bad news, because



Shanghai: China's financial hub

people's living standards will dive, the argument goes. But what is good for capitalist enterprises is 'moderate and steady' inflation to give them room to raise prices to maintain profits. This argument should apply to China too. But it does not apply to average households in the US, Europe and now Japan, which face unending rises in the price of essential goods, while in China prices are steady and even falling.

### China watcher

Why are prices not rising in China? Apparently, it is all to do with 'involution'. Veteran 'China watcher' and American economist Stephen Roach explains that persistent deflation in prices in China reflects involution (in Chinese: 'neijuan'), referring to price reduction arising from disorderly, overly-aggressive competition in several key industries. Prices are falling because competition among producers of vehicles, solar panels, batteries, etc is too strong. And yet we are always told in mainstream economics that competition is good.

According to Roach and other western observers, including many on the left, without greater consumer demand, the Chinese economy remains at risk of falling into a Japanese-like quagmire of falling prices and rising debt. Like Japan during the late 1980s and early 1990s, China's mounting debts suggest the possibility of a prolonged balance sheet recession (the spectre of 'Japanification'). In a new study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, economists Scott Davis and Brendan Kelly argue that "there's mounting evidence of 'zombie lending' in China, banks rolling over bad loans to unprofitable firms and allowing the status quo to continue rather than recognise losses." They assert:

... the current experience in China mirrors that of Japan in the

1980s and 1990s. Rapid growth in private-sector debt - also fuelled by domestic savings - was followed by the appearance of zombie lending. In Japan, that zombie lending led to the inefficient allocation of capital and decreased productivity, especially in sectors shielded from foreign competition.

And International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva pivots towards the 'Japanification' risk, urging Beijing to let unviable property developers fail, if necessary: "We have been urging more attention for closure on this problem," Georgieva explained. "We call them 'zombie firms'. Let the zombies go away."

This is an interesting policy proposal for China, considering that in the global financial crash of 2008, the IMF and western governments opted for bailing out the banks and sustaining quantitative easing to drip-feed unprofitable 'zombie' companies that are still crawling along today. Apparently, it is one policy for the capitalist economies of the west and another for China.

The property slump has been severe in China. It is no bad thing, however, for property prices to fall sharply, so that housing becomes more affordable. The solution from here must be an expansion of public housing, not more private development. It is true that China's debt leverage ratios have surged in past decades, but they are manageable, especially as most of the debt is concentrated in local government sectors and so can be bailed out by central government. And China has a state banking system, state-owned companies and massive foreign exchange reserves to cover any losses.

And China is not stagnating like Japan. Take productivity growth. Even though China's growth in labour productivity has slowed in the last two decades, it is still more than

four times higher than in the US and six times higher than in Japan. Why has China succeeded in avoiding slumps, including during the great recession and the pandemic? Why has it motored ahead with unprecedented growth rates in such a large economy, while other large so-called emerging economies like Brazil or even India have failed to close the gap with the major advanced capitalist economies?

### State sector

It is because, although China has a large capitalist sector, mainly based on consumer goods and services, it also has the largest state sector in any major economy, covering finance and key manufacturing and industrial sectors - plus a national plan guiding and directing both state enterprises and the private sector on where to invest and what to produce. Any slump in its private sector is compensated for by increased investment and production in the state sector - profit does not rule: social objectives do. The Chinese state owns a slight majority (55%) of the total capital of all companies.

But western mainstream argument, echoed by some on the Marxist left, continues: China must end its high investment strategy, reduce its export expansion and revert to boosting domestic consumption, just as the major economies of the west have done. Sonali Jain-Chandra, a top IMF 'China economist', argues that the key is to accelerate "reforms to rebalance demand toward consumption and further open the service sector, which can promote sustainable growth and help create jobs". While "China's economic development over the last several decades has been remarkable", it has "relied too much on investment, as opposed to consumption," says Jain-Chandra.<sup>4</sup>

But has a consumer-led strategy worked well for the major western economies? Anyway, it is not true that China's economy is growing at the

expense of household consumption. A low consumption-to-GDP ratio does not necessarily mean low consumption growth. China's consumption growth has been way faster than the consumer-led economies of the west. A recent study by Richard Baldwin, found that China may have operated an export-led model up to 2006, but since then domestic sales have boomed, so that its exports-to-GDP ratio has actually fallen: "Chinese consumption of Chinese manufactured goods has grown faster than Chinese production for almost two decades. Far from being unable to absorb the production, Chinese domestic consumption of made-in-China goods has grown much faster than the output of China's manufacturing sector."<sup>5</sup>

### Faster growth

So much for 'over-capacity' or 'involution'. Private *consumption* growth in China has been much faster than in the major economies, precisely because of faster *economic* growth, driven by faster *investment* growth. I repeat what I have previously argued: investment leads consumption over time - not vice versa, as mainstream economics thinks about economies.

Yes, China's goods-trade surplus with the rest of the world is large, reaching \$1 trillion. But it also runs a \$100 million deficit in services trade, and its overall current account surplus as a share of GDP is no higher than that of Japan and Germany, at about 4%-5%. Contrary to accusations of China's "mercantilist determination to sell but not to buy",<sup>6</sup> the country has remained the world's second-largest importer for 16 consecutive years.

The real problem for the major economies of the west is that China is increasingly outcompeting them in advanced industrial sectors. Between 2005 and 2025, growth in Chinese output per hour worked has dwarfed anywhere else, though it is still behind the US and the major capitalist economies in the *level* of productivity.

The irony is that the mainstream economists in the west continually tell us that China's economy is slowing to a crawl, heading for Japanese-style stagnation and may even crash in a debt-fuelled spiral. And yet they also tell us that China has 'too much' capacity and is suffering from 'involution', causing falling prices and flooding world markets with cheap goods that threaten the market shares of the major economies.

So China must reverse its policy of high investment in manufacturing and become a consumer-led economy. But if China is heading for stagnation and/or collapse, then surely the western economic model will triumph, will it not? ●

Michael Roberts blogs at [thenextrecession.wordpress.com](http://thenextrecession.wordpress.com)

### Notes

1. See [apnews.com/article/china-communist-party-fourth-plenum-five-year-plan-9596d3180c06497f42b45a9a4fff6ab9](http://apnews.com/article/china-communist-party-fourth-plenum-five-year-plan-9596d3180c06497f42b45a9a4fff6ab9).

2. I commented on this back in March 2025: [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/03/08/two-sessions-china](http://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/03/08/two-sessions-china).

3. See [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/03/08/two-sessions-china](http://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/03/08/two-sessions-china).

4. [www.imf.org/en/news/articles/2024/08/02/cf-chinas-service-sector-is-an-underutilized-driver-of-economic-growth](http://www.imf.org/en/news/articles/2024/08/02/cf-chinas-service-sector-is-an-underutilized-driver-of-economic-growth).

5. [www.linkedin.com/pulse/fact-checking-rana-foroohars-operated-piece-richard-baldwin-hdce](http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/fact-checking-rana-foroohars-operated-piece-richard-baldwin-hdce).

6. [www.reddit.com/r/europe/comments/1p72rgn/china\\_is\\_making\\_trade\\_impossible](http://www.reddit.com/r/europe/comments/1p72rgn/china_is_making_trade_impossible).

## YOUR PARTY

# Left gets itself organised

**Carla Roberts** excoriates the ‘Christmas referendum’ and welcomes the positive role of Zarah Sultana in the formation of the Grassroots Left Slate. There is, though, the little question of our MPs and other elected representatives living on an average skilled workers’ wage

**N**ominations opened on January 5 for those who wish to stand for the central executive committee of Your Party. Despite what the launch ‘conference’ in Liverpool on November 29-30 ‘agreed’ (both terms are used very lightly), the process has *not* been overseen by a ‘members’ oversight committee’. Remember, five YP members were supposed to be chosen by sortition to temporarily ‘act as caretakers, executing the democratic wishes of the party, as voted on by members in the founding conference’. This committee was dreamed up by the Corbyn clique in response to an emergency motion proposed by the Socialist Unity Platform, which called on conference to elect a small group of ‘returning officers’ to take at least the CEC election out of the hands of Karie Murphy, Corbyn’s enforcer.

HQ came up with its alternative, which was never intended to be more than smoke and mirrors. A committee chosen by sortition - ie, made up of people who would have been entirely unprepared and inexperienced - would have left those *really* running things firmly in charge. HQ has decided to not even bother with the smoke and mirrors. After all, just because it has been agreed at ‘conference’ does not mean you actually have to implement it, right? Murphy and co are showing their political origins in the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, where the will of rank-and-file members is routinely sidelined or simply disregarded.

The same attitude was very much apparent in the surprise referendum that lucky Your Party members were invited to participate in on December 23 (two days before Christmas Day - the best time for this kind of thing!). In an effort to keep it light and amusing, we were told by email: “There are nine widely-accepted English regions. However, the constitution also says there will be 16 seats for ordinary members on the CEC. Nine into 16 doesn’t go! There is also a requirement for the ordinary member seats to be balanced by gender. The mathematically-minded will have already clocked that  $2 \times 9 = 18$ .”

Oh how we laughed. Those funny rascals at HQ clearly just made a minor error when presenting conference with the proposal of 16 ‘ordinary’ members of the CEC. That happens when you are busy. How could we not simply vote ‘yes’ to the harmless question: “Do you support expanding the number of ordinary-member CEC seats to 18, so each English region has two seats with gender balance?” It is just a technicality, right?

Wrong. On the most basic level, it *is*, of course, a minor issue. But the whole charade really does reveal everything that is wrong with the way HQ operates. The constitution - next to the programme the most important document a party has - has now been changed via online referendum, in the most nonchalant way imaginable. This might well set a precedent - well, now we’ve done it before, why can’t we do it on something more important? One could well imagine, for example, an online vote about which organisations and parties should be allowed onto the white list of those for whom ‘dual membership’ with YP is allowed. Green Party - tick. Left groups - ahem.

Also, many members will have been surprised to realise that conference had ‘voted’ to elect the

CEC by regions - ie, federally. This was hidden in one of the ‘options’ members were actually allowed to vote on via their phone/laptop - the question was never even discussed in Liverpool. Option A stated: “The CEC shall elect ordinary members by English regions, with reserved elected member seats for Wales and Scotland likewise.” Option B read: “The CEC shall elect ordinary members from across England without regional differentiation, with reserved elected members for Wales and Scotland.”

The SUP quite rightly recommended a vote for option B,<sup>1</sup> but option A won with 58.6%. We suspect many members simply voted for A, because, frankly, it comes first in what looks like two boring technical options. This is, of course, one of the many tricks on how to manipulate online votes. Plus, there was no discussion, no context, no opposition. Now we are stuck with a federally elected CEC, in which two candidates per region are elected onto the national leadership. We would have much preferred a *national election*, which would have made it much easier to choose a CEC based on the candidates’ politics. It would have allowed for a proper clash of ideas.

To make matters worse, to have two seats per English region quite obviously creates a very skewed CEC: When the YP website *accidentally* showed where members live, we could see that there are over 8,000 members in London and just 1,800 in the North East - yet each region gets to elect two members.

As every candidate has to gather 75 “endorsements” from YP members living in their region (and every member can only endorse two candidates),<sup>2</sup> this is no small feat - especially as the membership data remains firmly in the hands of HQ. In this context, it is interesting to look at the number of members participating in the Christmas referendum (in which, unsurprisingly, ‘yes’ won with 89.15% of the vote): “Only active full members with verified identities could vote on this,” we read on our YP phone app. “The total number of members that fit these criteria was 24,459. Turnout was 41.07%, therefore 10,046 people.” Haven’t we been told elsewhere that Your Party is supposed to have “over 55,000 members”? And even that is not a huge amount, considering that over 800,000 expressed an ‘interest’ in joining - but it is a lot better than 24,459 “active, full members”.

Finding 75 regional endorsements under these conditions will create difficulties for most candidates, especially outside of London - which is, of course, why HQ demands it: another bureaucratic hurdle that disenfranchises rank and file members. This has, however, increased the pressure on the left to come together and stand on a united slate.

### Grassroots slate

Still, it almost did not happen. There were a number of false starts, including the rather drawn-out negotiations between the Democratic Socialists, the Democratic Bloc and a couple of smaller groups that had previously come together at The World Transformed conference to agree on a hotchpotch of a mini-programme. This was negotiated by consensus and therefore left out anything controversial. Weeks went by while these groups argued over



**Zarah Sultana: no unprincipled coalition**

whether there should be *open* or *closed* “primaries” to choose joint candidates - both entirely stupid ways to go about it, as we have argued previously. They are beauty contests which favour ‘celebrities’ and those with a big mouth, rather than candidates with, say, the most pertinent experience or solid political viewpoints. Those talks eventually imploded, when the Democratic Bloc walked out after the majority of groups finally came out against *open primaries*, in which basically anybody could have voted for their favourite left candidates - including members and supporters of Reform, presumably.

DSYP and the smaller groups continued and were just about to launch the *closed primaries* for their ‘Grassroots slate’ (in which only their members could have voted - though that would have opened up another can of worms, seeing as none of groups involved actually have proper membership structures!), when the Socialist Unity Platform made a more serious, last-ditch attempt to bring the whole of the active left together.

It approached Ken Loach’s Platform for a Democratic Party, which agreed to jointly reach out to organisations across the left - successfully so. A number of Zoom meetings were held over the Christmas period, with representatives from the Platform and SUP, Counterfire, the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Alternative, as well as the Democratic Bloc, DSYP and their small TWT groups (Trans Liberation Group, Eco-Socialist Horizon, Greater Manchester Left Caucus and Organising for Popular Power). Zarah Sultana also agreed to participate. The Socialist Party in England and Wales unfortunately did not engage, while the Revolutionary Communist Party (formerly Socialist Appeal) seems to have withdrawn from Your Party altogether.

The meetings, however, seriously struggled to agree on a joint political platform. The TWT comrades presented their very detailed, five-page programme, which they had prepared for their own campaign. While much of it is politically supportable, it is way too detailed, with plans to establish this and that commission (see below). It was simply inappropriate for the task at hand and all other groups opposed it.

After some back and forth, SUP presented a slightly extended version of the ‘Sheffield Demands’, which the TWT groups eventually accepted as basis for further negotiations, making a number of amendments. However, this was not acceptable to

the comrades from the Platform for a Democratic Party (PFDP), who presented their own proposal. This was certainly short, but politically very conservative, with calls for the “rule of international law” and to “replace the failing United Nations with a democratic international organisation in which no state has a veto and with a peace-keeping force empowered to impose the judgements of its courts”. Still a “den of thieves” (Lenin) then, if such an organisation would be run by each country’s ruling class. There were no takers from among the participating organisations. Neither did any other group jump on Counterfire’s draft five points, which are similarly unambitious.

### Programme

It really looked like things would fall apart - but then Zarah Sultana stepped in. She drafted a two-page political platform (with “input” from the DSYP’s Max Shanly).<sup>4</sup> In my view, it is generally good. As time was running out, this was eagerly welcomed and quickly agreed by all participating organisations, without any opposition. Of course, we can quibble with this and that formulation (see below), but overall it really is a breath of fresh air politically and stands heads above the ‘lowest common denominator’ politics which that type of unity effort usually produces.

Not only is it good in terms of its commitment to socialism and democracy in Your Party, but also because it talks about the need to fight for the democratisation of wider society and includes the demand for the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. It crucially also spells out that Your Party should focus on being an opposition party that “only participates in national government alone or in coalition on the basis of a socialist programme actively supported by a majority of the population” (point 8).

This is an important formulation that tries to stop Your Party falling into the trap that many socialist organisations across Europe have continuously stepped into over the decades: in the hope of ‘harm reduction’ or making things ‘a little bit better’, they are lured into taking government positions - and end up managing capitalism and shafting the working class in the process. Syriza in Greece, Rifondazione Comunista in Italy and Podemos in Spain are just some of the more prominent recent examples.

This is also becoming a very pertinent and ‘live’ question in

Britain, considering that there is a real possibility of Reform UK becoming the strongest party at the next general election. Zack Polanski has already indicated that he would be happy for the Greens to go into an anti-Reform coalition government with a Labour Party run by Andy Burnham - the same Andy Burnham incidentally who famously used his final speech as MP in 2016 to attack the then Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn over his refusal to support tougher immigration controls.<sup>5</sup> We presume Polanski would have no great trouble compromising with Burnham over issues like that, for ‘the greater good’. Now what if that coalition was missing a couple of MPs for a working majority - and what if YP MPs sought to further their careers by accepting a couple of governmental appointments? Should they?

Point 8 in the Grassroots Left Slate platform says ‘no, they should not’. Quite right too. Our party should only agree to participate in any government coalition if that coalition agrees to a implement a full socialist programme - and only under conditions where a majority of the population supports it. Socialism, after all, cannot be implemented by an act of parliament: it has to result from the active will of the organised majority.

As a rather amusing aside, at an SUP organising meeting on January 3 which endorsed the platform, comrade Richard Brenner (formerly of Workers Power) started off by strongly criticising it - and particularly point 8 - as being “full of weird *Weekly Worker* obsessions”. He was thinking of running for the CEC, he said, but could not possibly stand on such a dumb platform. He had obviously missed the bit about Zarah Sultana having drafted it. Once that was pointed out to him, he quickly backtracked, explaining how he must have gotten out of bed on the wrong side. It was rather entertaining.

We suspect a number of groups who voted in favour of the platform have, deep down, similar feelings about it. Now that Zarah Sultana has proposed it, they have to agree, even if they do not really get it. Of course, we do not believe that either Sultana or Max Shanly have a “weird *Weekly Worker* obsession”. The platform is pretty much a reflection of the orthodox Marxism of the Second International, including its opposition and open criticism of the participation of socialist leader Alexandre Millerand in Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau’s cabinet of “republican defence”. Unfortunately, this tradition, which included Lenin and the Bolsheviks, has been entirely dismissed by much of the left in Britain in favour of their particular (and often rather skewed) version of ‘Trotskyism’, which downplays or entirely ignores the fight for democracy and, indeed, the entire minimum-maximum programme.

This platform therefore represents a small step forward - not just organisationally, in terms of bringing the left together, but also politically for the left in Britain.

### No commissions

Concretely, the platform incorporates pretty much all of the ‘Sheffield Demands’<sup>6</sup> and many of the good bits from the TWT platform, while leaving out some of their more wacky proposals. There is no mention of the TWT demand to set up elected local “socialist in-office committees”,

which are supposed to keep local councillors in check, with an elected "council convenor" who would act as "public spokesperson, registered leader, and whip for the council group". That does not exactly translate as 'party republic' to us.

In our view, there is no need for such extra layers of bureaucracy that could easily be stuffed and manipulated by said councillors, for example. No, elected office holders, including MPs, should be held accountable (and should be recallable) by branches, regions, executive committee, etc.

The TWT programme also proposed that a "democracy commission appointed by the CEC in order to review the founding process and suggest improvements to the party structures" should "include sortitioned members". Why on earth would socialists fight for sortition, on any level? We have been told by DSYP comrades that this was only included because the constitution agreed after the Liverpool conference includes, under point 3b: "In the party's first year, the CEC shall establish two working groups - one aimed at thoroughly establishing all the party's structures, especially its regional structures, and the other at finalising all its core documents. These working groups shall consist of members selected by sortition who shall report to the CEC."

Apparently, the TWT formulation that the commission should "include sortitioned members" is supposed to be a clever trick to allow at least *some* members to be appointed by the CEC too. No, it is not clever, comrades: it is pretty daft - and entirely unnecessary.

We all know how undemocratic 'conference' was, with members and branches having absolutely no meaningful opportunity to move motions or amendments - only those that HQ was happy with were allowed to go through. We did not even have the chance to discuss this particular section of the constitution, let alone move amendments to it. Our CEC members are under absolutely no obligation to implement any of this nonsense - in fact, we should very much demand that they do not.

Generally, we also do not think that is a good idea to 'outsource' democracy to a particular commission. That all sounds very much like Momentum and the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn to us. Remember his 'Democracy Review'? Many motions to Labour Party conference were ruled out of order, because the issues were supposed to be dealt with by the said 'review' - which, of course, never happened.

No, it is the members and branches who should be able to present proposals on how to democratise the party - at its highest, sovereign event: the party's conference, which should solely be made up of democratically elected delegates. Genuine socialists on the CEC should do all they can to *facilitate* this, not circumvent it with this or that commission. The democracy commission is unfortunately still in the programme of the Grassroots Left Slate, but at least the 'sortition' bit has gone. These are, though, minor quibbles with what is generally a good platform.

## Workers' wage

But there is one serious problem, and it concerns an omission. Both the 'Sheffield Demands' and the TWT programme featured prominently the demand for MPs to receive the equivalent of a skilled workers' wage. Obviously, we do not want those who view being an MP as a career choice and who want to make a mint. Current MPs do not just enjoy a healthy salary of £93,904 - they can claim accommodation costs and other expenses on pretty much anything vaguely relating to their role.

The workers' wage formulation did

not make it into the platform, however. Zarah Sultana, unlike Labour MP Nadia Whittome, for example, does not take a workers' wage. When she was re-elected in 2025, Whittome adjusted her pay from £35,000 to £41,000 per annum, in line with rising wages. There is a lot to be criticised about Whittome, particularly her backing for the risible Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, which has recently become too noxious even for the Alliance for Workers' Liberty - but she has that point right. Dave Nellist too only took a workers' wage when he represented the constituency of Coventry South in the 80s - the same constituency that is now represented by Zarah Sultana.

We should certainly raise the issue with her. The Socialist Unity Platform has decided to ask all CEC candidates three questions, including this pertinent one: "Will you campaign for all MPs and all public officeholders to receive no more than the average wage of a skilled worker, with the rest being donated to the party?"<sup>8</sup>

## Candidates

A fair amount of horse trading went on in the run up to the January 4 meeting, which decided on a list of candidates for the Grassroots Left Slate - see below. Salma Yaqoob and Andrew Feinstein were both linked with the slate until literally the day of the meeting, when they both confirmed they would not run after all, both for personal reasons. A shame, but they both remain in support, we understand. Most organisations involved got at least one of their members or supporters on the slate, with the DSYP and Zarah Sultana each having five of their chosen candidates/members elected.

While Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi was chosen as a candidate for the South East, the second candidate from the Platform for a Democratic Party, Mike Forster, lost out in Yorkshire to Chris Saltmarsh - whose campaign, Eco-Socialist Horizon, is part of the TWT group - by one vote. All other votes were pretty decisive and close to unanimous, thanks to said horse trading. We are particularly pleased about the inclusion of Ian Spencer, a regular contributor to the *Weekly Worker*, who is standing in the North East and who was proposed by the Socialist Unity Platform. The full list of names will be published at the campaign's launch on Sunday January 11.

In a strange turn of events, the Democratic Bloc of Mish Rahman has ended up without a single candidate on the slate. Only a month ago, it was DemBloc member Andrew Hedges who had convinced Zarah Sultana to back 'open primaries' to choose a set of candidates as part of the TWT process, presenting her and others with detailed plans on how this should be done. The Democratic Bloc has spent a lot of money, time and effort producing snazzy leaflets at numerous party events up and down the country, including the many regional assemblies. It made quite a splash at launch conference too. It has collated a database and has run an enviable social media campaign. But it looks like that has now all gone up in smoke.

Rahman himself has just decided not to stand for the CEC - there are rumours that he has given up on YP altogether and is looking at the Green Party instead. It is fair to say that DemBloc has not made any friends when trying to negotiate a joint left slate, with its insistence on consensus decision-making, political opportunism and huffily walking out whenever it did not get its way. It walked out of the TWT negotiations, then the SUP meetings and now the Grassroots Left Slate.

The official reason its representative gave is that the slate was not "neutral"

enough and too closely associated with Zarah Sultana. That seems odd, seeing as the DemBloc very much courted her until very recently, and even described itself as "the Zarah Sultana faction". It also tried to get some candidates elected to the Grassroots Left Slate, but failed rather decisively. We suspect that is the real reason for its departure.

Another group that walked out, just after the programme was agreed, is 'Organising for Popular Power', which used to take part in the TWT talks. Its leading member is Josh Virasami, who (like Mish Rahman) was a member of Karie Murphy's secretive Organising Group, before it was closed down last year. He was put in charge of running regional assemblies, but was apparently 'let go' rather abruptly for reasons unknown. He then launched the ill-fated campaign, 'Our Party', which wanted to take the organisation of the launch conference out of HQ's hands - but run it on exactly the same basis - ie, with participants chosen by sortition. An entirely dumb idea that was also executed rather badly and secretly - no wonder it never got more than a few thousand people to sign up to it. We do not think the departure of either group will leave a particularly big gap.

There have been more serious problems, which we hope will be temporary. They are chiefly down to the different political programmatic outlooks of the groups involved, which we described above. But this comes with something of a cultural clash too: On the one side, there are the more well-established organisations and individuals who have been around the left for decades and, on the other side, the relative newcomers, DSYP and Zarah Sultana. It would be too easy to put this down simply to a generational clash, but there are certainly different methods and styles on display, when it comes to negotiation and organisation.

We will have to guard against the slate taking on board too much of the kind of managerialism seen in Momentum. We need to make sure that this slate actually does what it preaches: organise democratically, openly and transparently: calls for confidentiality and secrecy, when it comes to the negotiations, for example, have to be firmly rejected. Otherwise we are creating something that is, in reality, rather different to the ideal of a 'party republic of equals' we claim to want to build.

We hope that all these problems (which come with a fair amount of mutual suspicion) can be overcome and we are sure that joint campaigning will play some role in positively resolving these. The stakes are just too high. Should this slate fall apart, there is a good chance that hardly any left wingers will make it on to the CEC. Which in turn would jeopardise the whole of Your Party. Unless it is seriously and radically democratised and adopts a radical socialist programme, it has absolutely no chance of becoming the political alternative the working class in Britain so desperately needs.

## Notes

1. [docs.google.com/document/d/1kgVicp7Pst95MN1-xTvu-sriiM8BMVEAfDBYjLS-E](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kgVicp7Pst95MN1-xTvu-sriiM8BMVEAfDBYjLS-E).
2. [www.yourparty.uk/cec-elections-rules](https://www.yourparty.uk/cec-elections-rules).
3. [x.com/thisisyourparty/status/2006376618525126955](https://x.com/thisisyourparty/status/2006376618525126955).
4. [docs.google.com/document/d/1WMFzE-4G9wSoG3s2og4t2\\_9xdUnBKoySKjkzDyL9yc](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WMFzE-4G9wSoG3s2og4t2_9xdUnBKoySKjkzDyL9yc).
5. [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/andy-burnham-joins-labour-mps-criticising-jeremy-corbyn-s-refusal-to-accept-eu-immigration-restrictions-a7334956.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/andy-burnham-joins-labour-mps-criticising-jeremy-corbyn-s-refusal-to-accept-eu-immigration-restrictions-a7334956.html).
6. [docs.google.com/document/d/1bMMvEvtt\\_ybmumx3mHpKUkEdewEaawL47nmN4tZE8M](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bMMvEvtt_ybmumx3mHpKUkEdewEaawL47nmN4tZE8M).
7. [docs.google.com/document/d/1gM8WXJ6\\_e5-BUGPeYEXDqSSbtX-1Ijh4dOfTpcmSHdy](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gM8WXJ6_e5-BUGPeYEXDqSSbtX-1Ijh4dOfTpcmSHdy).
8. [docs.google.com/document/d/1uUUD6YZH43a7YcICVG61PX2sN8R1rWII5oYnL\\_WEPM](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uUUD6YZH43a7YcICVG61PX2sN8R1rWII5oYnL_WEPM).

# CEC elections

Political platform agreed by Democratic Socialists, Platform for a Democratic Party, Socialist Unity Platform, SWP, Counterfire, Democratic Bloc, Socialist Alternative, Trans Liberation Group, Greater Manchester Left Caucus, Eco-Socialist Horizon and Zarah Sultana

a majority of the population. The monarchy, House of Lords and 'first past the post' voting system must be abolished.

9. For a truly democratic socialist party, a democracy commission and democratic sovereign conference will take place: Over the first six months after their election, the CEC will appoint a democracy commission, to review the founding process and suggest improvements to the party structures. The first annual conference will be held within six months, with structures to enable it to be sovereign over the party's future direction.

10. For a member-led CEC: All members of the CEC shall operate as political equals. This slate commits to not permitting any councillors or MPs to hold positions in the elected officers group. The CEC will elect a parliamentary convenor to be the public spokesperson and whip of the parliamentary group of MPs, intending to formalise this role by amendment in the 2026 conference. The CEC must commit to meet at least monthly, to ensure the body remains able to provide effective political leadership.

11. For bottom-up organised sections and a rank-and-file movement that is the engine of the party. Grassroots members will be supported to build oppression-based organised sections from the bottom up. This includes facilitating a youth and student conference to establish meaningfully democratic and autonomous structures for a youth and student section and make constitutional recommendations (eg, a youth place on the CEC) and appoint a rank-and-file workers' movement commission to develop the party's relationship with the trade union movement. All elected members of this slate will sit on an advisory committee with representatives of all the grassroots factions supporting this platform. The committee will meet monthly to hold elected members to account.

12. For a party of the whole left: We stand for a party of the whole left with freedom for members to organise into factions, tendencies and platforms. This means opposing any ban on dual membership or proscriptions against members based on political views or affiliations.

13. For a party that does not see Scotland and Wales as afterthoughts, but respects their autonomy to self-organise: The CEC will rebuild broken relationships with members in Wales and Scotland, giving them access to funding, data and resources, to enable them to choose how they want to engage in the 2026 elections. They will have sufficient resources and access to data to hold democratic conferences to decide their local structures and level of autonomy from the party.

14. For an open and transparent party. Decisions of all party bodies, from local branch to national executive, to be open to scrutiny by the members; for an independent audit of party finances; for a disciplinary process based on natural justice, with an appeals procedure agreed by the membership.

15. For a party that is led by its members, not MPs, and to deliver the next stage of maximum member democracy.

## MEDIA

# Old corruption revived

The latest right-populist smear tag is the 'stakeholder state', writes **Mike Macnair**. Fronted by Paul Ovenden, the Murdoch press rails against the bloated state apparatus and turns what is a half-truth into a big lie



The *Times* on January 2 introduced us to a new far-right smear tag for liberals, to add to or replace 'Remoaners', 'the Blob', and 'elites' that somehow do not include the ultra-rich and their representatives. The new one is the 'stakeholder state'.<sup>1</sup>

The project of *The Times* in promoting this idea as a smear-tag is multi-faceted. It is firstly to promote the press barons' own monopoly of political voice and the rights of *commercial* lobbyists, as opposed to others. Secondly and ideologically, it is to promote shareholder/creditor sovereignty in corporations, as opposed to the conception that a broader group of 'stakeholders' has legitimate interests to be considered in decision-making. More conjuncturally, for *The Times* to big up this proposal from Paul Ovenden is to offer assistance to the political rehabilitation of Ovenden after he lost his job as an adviser to Keir Starmer in September 2025, when his 2017 rugby-song-style 'jokes' about Diane Abbott became the object of press attention.<sup>2</sup>

This last is the least important aspect of the story, but still worth mentioning. Ovenden was as a student (History and English, Southampton), a sports journo, and

in 2014-17 worked as a press officer for the Labour Party. In this capacity he was a party to chats on Labour's messaging system that displayed the worst features of student-political culture and - the Diane Abbott 'jokes' - gross sexism.<sup>4</sup>

In 2017-20 he moved into the private lobbying industry, working at least in 2019-20 at InHouse Communications, which lobbied/provided PR services for a range of clients, including various booze firms, Barclays and Lloyds Bank, the 'Love to Rent' rental agency and the Independent Schools' Council.<sup>5</sup> He was rehired by Labour as director of communications in June 2020, becoming a spad for Starmer as prime minister in July 2024, and quietly promoted to 'director of strategy' in January 2025.<sup>6</sup>

Sexism remains a theme in Ovenden's *Times* piece on the 'stakeholder state', where he complains that the state 'has got bigger and bigger, while simultaneously and systematically *emasculating itself*' (emphasis added). Why should state ineffectiveness be linked to lack of masculinity?

Routine sexism in the transmission culture between student sports, journos and lobby hacks would, of course, be a reason for the Murdoch

**Under capitalism a large majority is partially dependent on the family as an economic institution. 'Neoliberalism' and 'austerity' both increase that dependence. Hence leftwing purity-politics, no-platforming people who hold illusions in familial politics, simply fails to achieve its objective. In fact it strengthens the patriarchalist-conservative right**

press to seek to rehabilitate Ovenden. Routine workplace-culture sexism has, after all, been one of Rupert Murdoch's populist selling points ever since he told the new editor of his recently acquired *Sun* newspaper in 1969 that 'I want a tearaway paper with lots of tits in it'.<sup>7</sup> Rehabilitating Ovenden is, then, not about forgiveness for youthful indiscretions,<sup>8</sup> but about *presently promoting* male-supremacist workplace and political culture.

The plausibility of this rehabilitation is part of the general political project of right-populism: to bring lower and middle class support in behind big capital on the basis of common values of nation, tradition and patriarchy - expressed at every level from grand-scale promotion of traditional religion, through witch-hunting trans people, down to the lowest grade of promoting what, in the case of the police, gets called 'canteen culture'.

I have argued before, but it is still worth repeating, that under capitalism a large majority is partially dependent on the family as an economic institution; and 'neoliberalism' and 'austerity' both increase this dependence, as well as on religious charities (not only in the form of poverty relief, but also religious schools). The result

is inevitably mass attachment to the family. Hence leftwing purity-politics no-platforming people who hold illusions in familial politics simply fails to achieve its objective, and in fact strengthens the patriarchalist-conservative right.<sup>9</sup> It is the left's 'people's frontist' alliance with 'democratic capital' in the form of the human resources departments, and so on, which have given mass appeal to the actual political promotion of male-supremacist politics as a form of right-populism by the Murdoch press along with the Trumpites (among others).

## Shareholders

The question posed by the substance of Ovenden's argument, and *The Times*'s decision to promote it, is what on earth is *meant* by 'the stakeholder state'? Ovenden's account is deeply imprecise and unclear about why the word 'stakeholder' should be used at all:

The Stakeholder State [original capitals] is not one single phenomenon. It is the gradual but decisive shift of politics and power away from voters and towards groups with the time, money and institutional access to make themselves too

important to ignore. In this state, the government rows with muffled oars to appease a coalition of campaign groups, regulators, litigators, trade bodies and organisations. It isn't a grand conspiracy. Rather, it is a morbid symptom of a state that has got bigger and bigger, while simultaneously and systematically emasculating itself. Once you start noticing it, you see it everywhere: in the democratic powers handed to arms-length bodies or the many small government departments too powerless or captured to resist lobbying. The Stakeholder State ferments between the NGO and the campaign group, the celebrity letter-writing campaign and the activist lawyer. It is given voice by political podcasts, where everyone agrees, and canonised via a corrupted honours system.

If it were not for the use of the word "stakeholder", and the spin expressed by "morbid symptom" and "emasculating", this would just be a description of normal bourgeois politics of the sort one can find in 'Politics 101' textbooks. In this respect it would be a half-truth (a point to which we will return).

"Stakeholder" is also spin, but of an indirect character. Where it comes from is developments in academic views on the law relating to the duties of directors of corporations (in English law companies). Traditional law took it that the directors owe 'fiduciary duties' to the "stockholders" (in English law the shareholders); that is, to place the shareholders' interests first.<sup>10</sup> The 'stakeholder' idea was that the directors should take account of the interests of 'stakeholders' - "those groups who have a stake in the actions of the corporation" - or, in an older, but narrower version from 1963, "those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist".<sup>11</sup>

In the 1970s-80s the theory of duties to a broader conception of "stakeholders", including creditors, employees and so on, became quite fashionable;<sup>12</sup> to the point that in the UK a *pretence* of duties towards employees was introduced by the Companies Act 1980, section 46, and included in the Companies Act 1985,

section 309. It was extended to other 'stakeholders' in the Companies Act 2006, section 172, calling on directors to consider:

- (a) the likely consequences of any decision in the long term;
- (b) the interests of the company's employees;
- (c) the need to foster the company's business relationships with suppliers, customers and others;
- (d) the impact of the company's operations on the community and the environment;
- (e) the desirability of the company maintaining a reputation for high standards of business conduct; and
- (f) the need to act fairly as between members of the company.

The effect of this extension is dilution. But the duty to employees was always a pretence, because it was owed to *the company* (which is controlled by the directors and shareholders) and the section 172 duty lists the stakeholders *below* the primary duty to "promote the success of the company for the benefit of its members [shareholders] as a whole".<sup>13</sup>

The alternative to 'stakeholder' theory in corporate/company law is 'shareholder primacy': that is, that directors/management decisions should be exclusively focused on profits for the benefit of the shareholders.<sup>14</sup> This is the actual underlying idea of UK company law.

When, therefore, Ovenden and *The Times* talk negatively of the "stakeholder state", what they impliedly counterpose to it is the *shareholder primacy state*. It is not totally unreasonable to say that company directors should put profits first and not have regard to the interests of workers, creditors and so on. After all, the point of most companies is to make a profit; and if their decisions with a view to profit create 'negative externalities' (bad results for other people or the public generally), the law and the state *should* be able to set limits on companies' conduct.

I italicise 'should' here because, in reality, the routine sale and denial of justice through the 'free market in legal services', together

with commercial lobbying for deregulation, and so on ... But to argue for a 'shareholder primacy state' (against a 'stakeholder state') is to argue for closing off all the avenues for anything other than corporate/commercial interests to be considered in politics; that is, to make the state *completely* and not merely *predominantly* corrupt.

What Ovenden counts as 'stakeholders' should in principle include commercial lobbyists, and the *legal* representatives of business. In which case, of course, he should include *himself* as a former lobbyist (and quite likely a lobbyist again, after his ejection from government last September). But his list - "campaign groups, regulators, litigators, trade bodies and organisations" pointedly does *not* include commercial lobbyists - or the advertising-funded press.

### Monopoly

*The Times* editorial too is not directed against commercial lobbyists, legal representations on behalf of business or the advertising-funded press (itself). Rather, the problem is claimed to be "an administrative class that stretches from deep within Whitehall into various charities and pressure groups ... going against the will of the country" and "a backroom bureaucracy using its power to nudge ministers and hapless civil servants towards whatever outcome seems to suit the zeitgeist".

The example we are given by Ovenden is the case of Alaa abd el-Fattah, who is currently the object of a Tory press and Zionist campaign for the revocation of his citizenship. (He was accepted to be a British citizen, on the basis of his mother's British birth, while in arbitrary detention in Egypt.)

What is missing is that the campaign around el-Fattah was a matter of *British diplomatic policy* on 'democracy' and 'human rights'. It is, of course, true that there was always a contradiction between this policy and US and British support for the regime of Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Egypt. There is also a contradiction between US and British support for the state of Israel, which has been waging aggressive war since the beginning of settlement activity in the occupied territories, has engaged in assassination, collective punishment and so on, and British and US commitments to the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal after World War II, to article 2 of the UN Charter, and to the International Declaration of Human Rights and European Convention of Human Rights. This contradiction is *now* being resolved in favour of US repudiation of the post-1945 global settlement, and a return to open colonialism, gunboat diplomacy and 'might is right'. Before 2025 the contradiction was held.

What Ovenden and *The Times* are seeking is that that UK should join the Trump administration in openly repudiating the post-war settlement. The "stakeholders" or "backroom bureaucracy" are being blamed for failing to accept *Trumpism* quickly enough.

In making this demand, *The Times* - using Ovenden as a convenient instrument - is seeking a monopoly of political speech for the advertising-funded media, commercial and US or undisclosed-funded lobbyists and think tanks (like 'Policy Exchange').<sup>15</sup> It is only those *outside* this charmed circle whose interventions are to be taken as illegitimate.

In this, *The Times* pursues the same policy that the Murdoch press has pursued in its decades-long campaign against the BBC and against public-service broadcasting

more generally.<sup>16</sup> It is not that the BBC is *actually* biased to the left: it is merely not *sufficiently* biased to conservatism. The object is, again, to secure a monopoly for commercial control of political speech; as I put it above, to make the state completely and not merely predominantly corrupt.

### Fraud

Back in 2010, commenting on the then general election campaign, I made the point that

All capitalist elections have to be largely governed by fraud: who would vote for the Bankers Atlanticist New Labour Party, Bankers Atlanticist Conservative Party or Bankers Atlanticist Liberal Democratic Party, if given their right names? Even before universal suffrage, who would have voted for the Landlords and Bankers Imperialist Whig (Liberal) Party or the Landlords and Bankers Imperialist Tory (Conservative) Party? The capitalist class is a small minority in society, and it can only rule in elections by winning support from the lower orders for parties which it controls through machineries of corruption.

A large part of the con man's trick is to reduce the information available to the mark. The primary fraudulent misrepresentations are expected to crowd out other information, less attractively presented, which might conflict with them; but also pressure is put on to 'close the deal' before the mark has had an opportunity to rethink.

Electoral fraud works in the same way. The primary fraudulent misrepresentations are broadcast by paid advertising and the state and advertising-funded media, crowding out other messages (indeed, the phenomena of junk mail, billboard advertising and flyposting for clubs and gigs themselves work to drown out all forms of political communication not backed by advertising agencies or the mass media). The role of the advertising-funded mass media is, in fact, central to corruption and sleaze, because the only way (within the rules of the game) that politicians can hope to counter the biases of the mass media and behind them the advertisers, is to buy commercial advertising, which demands donations from the rich, which in turn demands the policy pay-off to the donors.

Meanwhile, elections happen once every five years, and the campaign is short. The message from both the media and the main parties is that the job of elections is to choose a government. So don't waste your vote - or your thinking time - on fringe parties. Close the deal! Political action in local government elections and the internal life of parties, which can provide some degree of political life outside the 'government election season', is as far as possible closed down: by FPTP, which results in big-party control of councils and 'rotten boroughs'; by the enormous expansion of judicial review (why fight for council policies, when the lawyers will tell you what to do anyhow?); and, in the Labour Party, by bureaucratic intervention from the central apparatus, backed up if necessary by the trade union bureaucracy.

Only in general elections are the voters to be allowed to make 'real choices'. Close the deal! Close the deal now!<sup>17</sup>

It is in this context that there is a *half*

*truth* in Ovenden's argument. This half-truth is that it is a reality that there has been a "gradual but decisive shift of politics and power away from voters and towards groups with the time, money and institutional access to make themselves too important to ignore". What is false and misleading is the *absence* in Ovenden's narrative of a series of institutional steps taken to reduce the power of voters *for the benefit of business corporations and the wealthy*.

The existence of 'stakeholderism' reflects the fact that by expanding judicial review of local government, by anti-union legislation, by media and legal interventions in the Labour Party, Bankers Atlanticist Conservative Party or Bankers Atlanticist Liberal Democratic Party, if given their right names? Even before universal suffrage, who would have voted for the Landlords and Bankers Imperialist Whig (Liberal) Party or the Landlords and Bankers Imperialist Tory (Conservative) Party? The capitalist class is a small minority in society, and it can only rule in elections by winning support from the lower orders for parties which it controls through machineries of corruption.

To overcome this problem what is needed is an independent workers' political voice, capable of combatting the long-running, persistent campaigns of the Murdoch, Harmsworth, etc, press. The left today is failing even to try to do this job, because it is dominated by people who imagine that sufficiently clever 'media management' - or the atomised interventions of individuals on 'social media', blogs and so on - can do it.

*The Times*'s Ovenden story is yet another sign that it is essential to begin to overcome this problem ●

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### Notes

1. P Ovenden 'Fattah has shone a light on the supremacy of the stakeholder state' (Leader 'Stakeholder state', p23).

2. For rugby songs style see rugby-songs.co.uk/rugbysonglyrics.

3. 'Senior Starmer adviser quits over offensives Diane Abbott messages' *The Guardian* September 15 2025; see also x.com/ShehabKhan/status/1967590269446193396/photo/1.

4. Student sports journo: *Wessex Scene* March 24 2008. Press officer and chats: P Holder *The fraud* London 2025, pp222-27 has more of the context than the x posting.

5. *Public Affairs Board Register* for December 1 2019 to February 28 2020: www.praa.global/system/files/paragraphs/cw\_file/2025-05/PAB-Register-1-December-2019-28-February20201-i-1.pdf.

6. "Quietly" because googling the appointment only produces material produced at the time of his resignation.

7. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rupert\_Murdoch.

8. See, for example, S Tsantsekidou 'In defence of Paul Ovenden': unherd.com/newsroom/in-defence-of-paul-ovenden (September 17 2025).

9. 'Communism and trans liberation' *Weekly Worker* November 17 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1561/communism-and-trans-liberation.

10. The technical position in English law is that the directors' fiduciary duties were owed to *the company itself*, not the shareholders, with the shareholders having merely the right to appoint and dismiss the directors. The effect is practically the same.

11. RE Freeman and DL Reed, 'Stockholders and stakeholders: a new perspective on corporate governance' *California Management Review* Vol 25 pp88-106 (1983).

12. The development down to that date was discussed by Freeman and Reed (see note 11).

13. For a recent discussion, see C Villiers, 'Bridging the gap between labour law and company law: Wedderburn's legacy: an appreciation' *Industrial Law Journal* Vol 54 (2025), pp278-323.

14. A convenient short discussion is on Wikipedia: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shareholder\_primacy; this, however, understates the relative weight of shareholder primacy arguments in law. See, for example, RJ Rhee *Minnesota Law Review* Vol 102 (2018), pp1951-2017 for US law; D Collison et al, *Shareholder primacy in UK corporate law*: strathprints.strath.ac.uk/32336/1/Shareholder\_Primacy\_in\_UK\_Corporate\_Law.doc.

15. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Policy\_Exchange.

16. Googling "Murdoch press campaigns against BBC" produces 388,000 hits ...

17. 'From an instrument of deception' *Weekly Worker* April 28 2010: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/815/from-an-instrument-of-deception; there is further argument in 'Sleaze is back', July 20 2006: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/634/sleaze-is-back.

## Fighting fund Success!

No doubt some readers will have noticed a slight lack of confidence on my part when I reported on the state of play regarding the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund for December in our last issue three weeks ago. I noted that we still needed to raise another £1,200 in the last two weeks of 2025 to reach our monthly £2,750 target.

Well, I'm happy to tell you that we not only reached that target, but ate into the November shortfall too! We actually raised no less than £1,390 in that final fortnight, taking our December total up to £2,981. Well done, everyone!

No fewer than six readers made *three-figure* donations - thank you, comrades SK, PM, BK, LM, JC and AN. Talking of comrade JC, he topped up that first excellent contribution with another £70 a couple of days later, while comrades MN (£30), GB and BH (£25 each), RN, GR and AB (£20) all made their donations via bank transfer/standing order, as did SD, TT, AR, JM, JD and MD with their smaller, but still highly valued

payments. On top of that, comrades KS, JB and DB (£50 each), as well as EM (£25), contributed via PayPal.

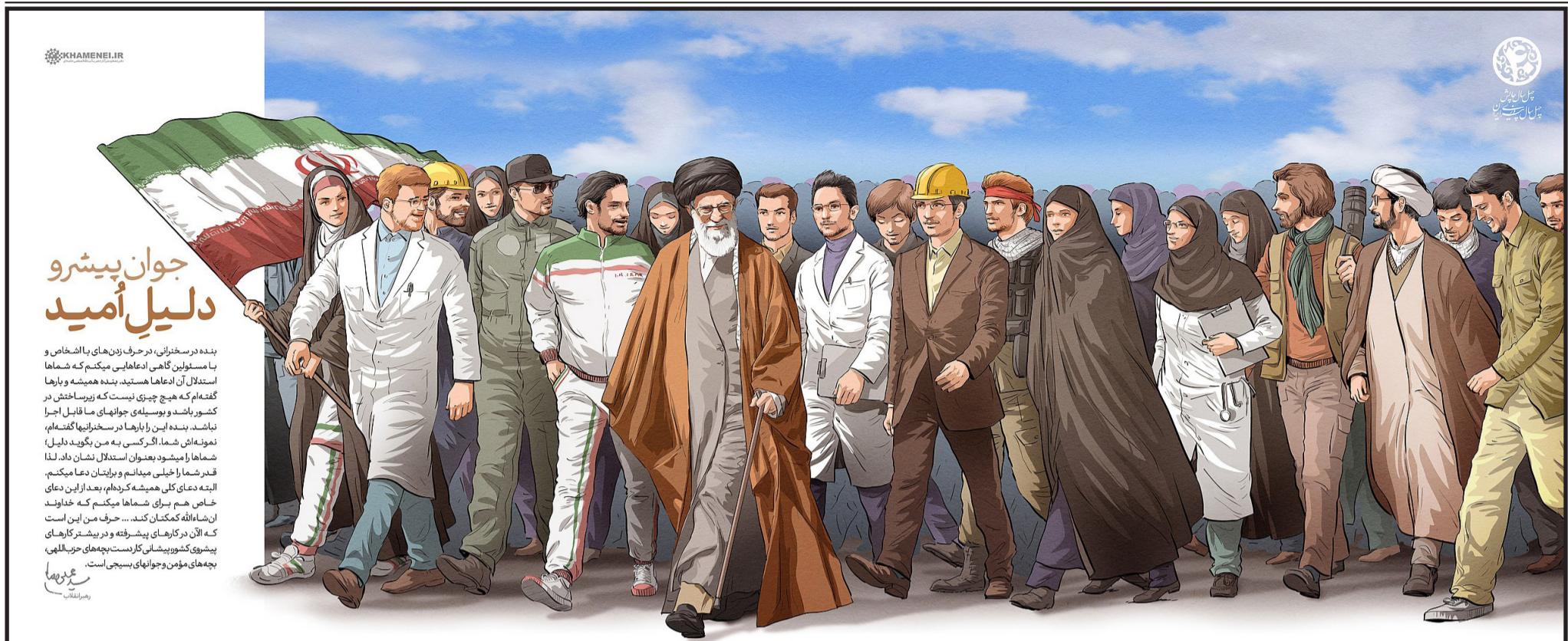
So success in December, but what about January? Well, I can tell you that after exactly one week, as I write, £585 has already come our way. Thanks go to comrades AC (£100!), LC (£50), FK (£41), BO (£35), MM (£31), CG (£30), TG and RG (£25), PR (£24), II, DL, MT and SJ (£20), plus comrades AN, BG, CP, DI, MM, RM, RP, RD, SM, JM, JN, MH, NL and GP for their donations under £20.

That means we start the month with nearly £600 already in the kitty, but let's hope we follow up on December with another success this month! Please do your best to help the *Weekly Worker* continue playing its essential role. We depend on your support! ●

**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)

It is in this context that there is a *half*



# Divided regime, divided opposition

Faced with a currency crisis, asphyxiating sanctions, soaring inflation and mass protests, the Islamic Republic also has Trump, who says the US is “locked, loaded and ready to go”. However, **Yassamine Mather** warns: the left is weak, divided and often hopelessly compromised

**B**eginning on December 28, with Tehran’s shopkeepers and bazaar merchants closing their businesses and marching in the streets, the recent protests have once again exposed the deep divisions within the regime. The immediate trigger was the sharp fall of Iran’s currency, the rial, to an historic low and rapidly rising inflation, which made basic goods increasingly unaffordable for large sections of the population. Although no longer headline news in the western media, protests have spread to at least 27 of the country’s 31 provinces.

Compared to December 2024, the rial has lost a substantial portion of its value against the US dollar. This reflected a year of accelerating currency instability rather than a sudden or unexpected shock. The prolonged decline sharply increased the cost of imported goods and raw materials, which are central to the functioning of the bazaar economy and to the circulation of everyday commodities.

A significant political aspect of the initial protests is that the bazaar has historically been a key social and economic ally of the Shia clergy and the Islamic Republic. It played a crucial role both in the 1979 revolution and in the consolidation of the post-revolutionary state. The regime’s loss of bazaar support therefore marks an important political turning point. However, given the bazaar’s structural dependence on imports and its vulnerability to currency fluctuations, as well as the continuous depreciation of the rial over the preceding months, such protests were inevitable rather than exceptional.

Within about two days, demonstrations spread beyond Tehran to other parts of the country. Ordinary residents, workers, small traders and shopkeepers joined in. As a result, this developed into one of the largest protest waves since the ‘Women, Life, Freedom’ protests of 2022-23, although the number of demonstrators in most cases has been fewer than on previous occasions.

Protests quickly took on a broader political significance. Slogans criticising the government and the supreme leader, as well as demands for systemic political change, spread rapidly. These echoed themes and demands from earlier protest

movements, showing a continuity of grievances rather than a purely spontaneous outburst.

By December 30, the protests had extended to university campuses. Students at several universities took to the streets or organised solidarity rallies. Their participation injected renewed youth mobilisation and political energy. Students were drawn into the movement not only because they are directly affected by inflation, unemployment and declining living standards, but also because universities have historically functioned as key centres of political activism and opposition.

## Resistance

The government’s initial response is a significant departure from its handling of previous waves of unrest. This shift reflected not only tactical manoeuvre by the state, but also changing class pressures within Iranian society. Unlike earlier protest cycles, when state media largely denied or ignored the demonstrations, official newspapers and broadcasters acknowledged them, albeit in a tightly managed and selective manner.

This shows that the regime recognises that effective information control has become virtually impossible. Workers, students and small traders now routinely access protest footage through social media platforms, encrypted messaging services and foreign-based satellite television. Denial of information and free speech no longer suppresses unrest: instead, it risks further delegitimising the state in the eyes of broad social layers.

Alongside this limited media recognition, the government pursued a strategy of class-differentiated concessions. Measures such as the appointment of a new central bank governor and promises of dialogue were not aimed at the population as a whole. Instead, they were carefully targeted at the bazaar - long a core social base.

Not that the mass were ignored. Members of the Majles (Iran’s parliament) proposed increasing the minimum wage by more than 40%. The government also announced that state financial assistance and the use of purchasing cards - allowing access to government-run stores - would

**The government has pursued a strategy of class-differentiated concessions.**

**Measures such as the appointment of a new central bank governor and promises of dialogue were not aimed at the population as a whole. Instead, they were carefully targeted at the bazaar - long a core social base**

be expanded. The administration reportedly deposited four months’ worth of this assistance into the accounts of heads of households. The promised reforms have two key parts: (1) partially converting huge hidden subsidies into direct cash transfers to poor households; and (2) tackling corruption. However, it carries a high risk of inflation and, if mismanaged, it could actually worsen the structural imbalances it aims to correct.

On January 6, speaking at a government ceremony, president Massoud Pezeshkian stated: “It is the banks that are causing inflation ... the parliament and the government are responsible for these problems ... I repeat, it is not the fault of one person. We all brought the country to this point together. We are to blame. That is, you are to blame, me, and the parliament.”

From a class perspective, the bazaar’s participation was driven less by ideological opposition to the regime than by material pressures. The bazaar’s structural dependence on imported goods, raw materials, and currency stability made it particularly vulnerable to the prolonged depreciation of the rial. The regime’s concessions temporarily restored this alliance, and protest activity by the bazaar has largely subsided.

However, this partial stabilisation clearly highlights the limits of the government’s strategy. Popular anger extends far beyond the parameters of the bazaar. The deepest sources of unrest lie among working class households, precarious labourers, unemployed youth, students and the urban poor. For these groups, inflation, wage erosion and housing costs are not episodic shocks, but permanent conditions.

Protests have continued across the country, often becoming more scattered, less coordinated, yet more intense. In terms of confrontation with the protesters, the government has pursued a two-part strategy: while adopting a more conciliatory approach toward the most powerful bazaar and business groups, it has relied on repression to control those accused of participating in “riots”. This has included deploying security forces, using tear gas and making a large number of arrests.

On January 3 Iran’s supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, addressed a

public gathering, acknowledging that protesters’ economic concerns were valid, while simultaneously warning of the “hand of the enemy” behind the unrest. This approach reflects a government attempting to hold together its core social base rather than addressing the structural causes of crisis. That said, the scale of foreign intervention should not be underestimated. This includes both Mossad-funded Persian-language satellite television stations and those operating inside the country.

On the same day, former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo tweeted: “Happy New Year to every Iranian in the streets. Also to every Mossad agent walking beside them.” This came just one day after Donald Trump issued a statement warning Iran that the United States would intervene if Iranian forces violently suppressed peaceful demonstrators. He stated: “If Iran shoots and violently kills peaceful protesters ... the United States of America will come to their rescue. We are locked, loaded and ready to go.”

## Mossad and CIA

While the Iranian government often exaggerates foreign interference in domestic protests, it would be naive to deny that Mossad and the CIA have repeatedly attempted to infiltrate protest movements. Reportedly, some individuals killed during the unrest were members of the government-affiliated Basij militia. A revealing statement came from Sima Shine, former director of the Iran Department at Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies, who criticised Israeli and US officials: “We are exposing ourselves and have confirmed the narrative that the riots in Iran are the work of the Mossad and the CIA!”

Sections of the British press reproduced Israeli propaganda with little scrutiny. *The Sunday Times* (January 4) and *The Independent* (January 6) repeated claims - originally circulated by the *Times of Israel* - that ayatollah Khamenei planned to flee to Moscow if unrest intensified.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to attribute the continuation of protests primarily to foreign intervention. The deeper cause is a profound crisis of trust, created by years of economic

mismanagement, corruption and systemic privilege for regime-connected elites. While international sanctions have worsened economic conditions, they are not the primary source of popular anger. The core issue remains the unequal distribution of burdens: working and poor classes bear the costs, while well-connected groups are protected.

That said, recurring currency devaluations are indeed uniquely shaped by US sanctions. Typically, a currency crisis emerges when a country exhausts its foreign reserves and can no longer finance imports. Yet Iran's Central Bank holds reserves exceeding \$120 billion. The problem is not the absence of reserves, but their inaccessibility. Most of these funds are frozen in foreign bank accounts due to US secondary sanctions, even when held in non-dollar currencies.

## Economy

According to International Monetary Fund estimates, only around 25% of Iran's reserves are readily accessible - a figure that is likely an overestimate. In 2024, Iran's total imports amounted to approximately \$72 billion. Imports have risen sharply in recent years, while reserves remain frozen, exerting sustained pressure on the rial. If Iran were able to access its reserves under normal conditions - something that would require a political détente with the US - its reserve-to-import ratio would approach 20:1, compared to a global average of around 9:1.

This has two major implications. First, from the standpoint of foreign-exchange management, Iran is facing an imposed crisis. While protesters' demands extend far beyond currency values, many political crises are downstream from the collapse of purchasing power, caused by currency devaluation and inflation. This erosion affects not only household consumption, but also the state's ability to maintain welfare spending and invest in the future.

Second, there is very little the Central Bank can do to address the crisis without access to reserves. Attempts to unify exchange rates,

regulate the foreign exchange market or improve currency allocation cannot overcome financial isolation. Iran is attempting to manage a large, complex and thoroughly globalised economy with severely constrained liquidity.

For many years, Iran has operated with multiple exchange rates - a system that has deeply damaged the economy and entrenched class inequality. There is an official or preferential rate, supposedly reserved for essential imports, such as food and medicine, alongside a much higher market rate faced by ordinary people, small businesses and most producers. This means that the same dollar buys less for ordinary citizens than for those with privileged state access. This gap is not accidental: it is a political mechanism for allocating privilege.

Entities with access to cheap dollars typically include companies linked to the regime's Revolutionary Guards, religious foundations, regime-connected traders and import cartels. When these groups receive dollars at the official rate, they can import goods cheaply, while selling them at prices based on the market rate, generating enormous markups that consumers ultimately pay for.

In other cases, importers declare shipments of essential goods, but bring in lower-quality substitutes and pocket the difference, or they fail to import altogether and instead sell the cheap dollars on the informal market for an instant profit. This is rent extraction created and sustained by state policy.

Ordinary people lose even when goods are officially described as subsidised. In practice, prices follow the market exchange rate rather than the official one. Inflation rises, wages fall behind, shortages emerge and subsidies flow upward to well-connected groups rather than downward to the poor. This is why hoarding, artificial scarcity and black markets are widespread.

Sanctions intensify this system rather than correcting it. By reducing the overall supply of foreign currency,

sanctions increase the value of political connections and exemptions. As a result, only groups with political protection, smuggling networks and security backing can operate. Small importers, independent traders and ordinary manufacturers are pushed out.

Consequently, factions within the state become the primary gatekeepers for currency, licences and trade routes. Economic power becomes increasingly centralised, commerce becomes militarised and normal economic activity is criminalised. This explains why sanctions enrich institutions such as the Revolutionary Guards, while workers and salaried employees grow poorer.

Last week, Iran's so-called 'reformist' president, Massoud Pezeshkian, announced plans to abolish the system of subsidised and preferential foreign-exchange rates. He argued that the multi-tiered currency structure encourages corruption and rent-seeking, and fails to protect ordinary citizens.

Under the proposed reform, the state would discontinue offering dollars at artificially low rates that had previously been allocated for specific imports to privileged groups. The stated goal is a transition toward a unified, market-determined exchange rate. The proposal has been opposed by powerful military and financial factions within the regime. Even if the government succeeds in abolishing the official exchange rate, this reform may reduce one channel of corruption, but will not address the deeper structural problems. Prices may rise immediately, inflation may spike, and workers and pensioners are likely to suffer first.

Over time, the same privileged groups can retain control through other mechanisms, such as import licences, state contracts, smuggling routes, preferential credit and access to foreign currency abroad. The form of privilege changes, but the underlying structures remain intact.

## International

Venezuela was considered Iran's primary gateway to Latin America, serving as a base for influence, sanctions evasion, and logistical cover for oil exports. The kidnapping of president Nicolás Maduro - an allied, defiant leader - could embolden anti-government protesters and expose the regime's vulnerabilities. In addition to the disruption of joint 'shadow fleet' oil operations with Venezuela will inevitably tighten the sanctions pressure, reducing its revenues at a time of a major economic crisis. For Iran's leadership, the core unsettling message is that the US might be willing to take direct, decapitating military action against a regime it views as hostile, regardless of geographic distance.

Meanwhile, the Iranian opposition is in a lamentable state. The exiled left has little support inside the country, while opposition forces operating within Iran remain divided, ineffective and often vacillate between reformism and abstract calls for revolutionary change.

In response to sanctions and frozen reserves, sections of the so-called left - including some who were among the most ardent supporters of the Soviet Union in the 1980s - now echo former foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. They call for negotiations with the US, an end to "defying the hegemon" and even the abandonment of slogans opposing the Zionist state. It is difficult to understand what kind of left would propose such capitulation after two years of genocide in Palestine, especially given recent examples of imperial aggression in Venezuela.

On the opposite side are those who advocate full confrontation with the US and complete reliance on China

and the Brics bloc. This too is an illusion. China has its own strategic interests and has shown no willingness to jeopardise them for Iran's sake. Even regarding the genocide of the Palestinians, the Chinese leadership has limited itself largely to rhetorical gestures.

As Promise Li explains in a *Jacobin* article,<sup>2</sup> while the United States remains Israel's primary military backer, Israel also receives crucial support from China through deep economic, military and technological ties.

Meanwhile, two Persian-language satellite TV channels - Iran International and Manoto - both linked to Israeli intelligence via funding, manipulated protest footage by altering the slogans being chanted. Demonstrators originally shouted: "No to dictators - whether Shah or Rahbar [Khamenei]". In broadcast versions, the audio was replaced to make it sound as though crowds were chanting "Javid Shah" ("Long live the shah").

Western media outlets, including *The Independent* and the BBC, initially repeated these doctored clips without verification. Iranian social-media users quickly circulated original footage alongside the manipulated versions, exposing the deception and severely undermining the credibility of these outlets.

## Class response

Among working class activists, there is a clear awareness of the need to continue struggles against the capitalist state, while remaining vigilant against US and Israeli intervention. This perspective is reflected in a statement by imprisoned trade unionist Reza Shahabi: "The main purpose of my comments has been to emphasise the necessity of defending independent workers", leftist and socialist movements ... confronting warmongering, anti-worker and fascist forces is a vital and urgent part of the class struggle."

Before the nationwide unrest, several sector-specific labour protests took place:

■ Workers at Hamadan's Rad Steel Complex walked off the job after gas supplies were cut amid freezing conditions.

■ Industrial workers in Kavar (Fars province) staged strikes over unpaid wages and insecure contracts.

■ Retirees, medical staff and municipal workers held rallies in Tehran, Kermanshah, Rasht and Shush demanding wage justice.

These protests were explicitly economic, focusing on unpaid wages, inflation, energy cuts and deteriorating working conditions. While the international media emphasise bazaar closures and political slogans, labour struggles remain a central (but underreported) dimension of the unrest.

The left, however, remains weak and divided, failing to offer a coherent strategy beyond abstract calls for regime overthrow. In the absence of a revolutionary alternative rooted in working class organisation, it is difficult to be optimistic about the trajectory of the current situation. ●

## Notes

1. www.bbc.com/persian/live/clym7k4mv30t.
2. jacobin.com/2023/10/china-israel-repression-military-trade-palestine-technology.

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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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## Online Communist Forum



Sunday January 11 5pm

### Trump's Greater America is no chimera: political report from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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# Man of his times?

The ascendancy of a young, sexless neo-Nazi with legions of internet fans has caused a political crisis in the American right. What explains the rise of Nick Fuentes and his 'Groypers'? **Paul Demarty** investigates

It is a little over four months since the assassination of Charlie Kirk. In the days after, the American right seemed to have achieved unprecedented unity, as if gearing itself up for a generalised political purge of US government and civil society.

As I write, something like that kind of unity is observable, in the wake of the abduction of Nicolás Maduro from Venezuela. There is something for everyone: neocons, *gusanos*, right libertarians, racial chauvinists, religious zealots ... and I suppose if you're stupid enough to believe that Donald Trump can stop the flow of drugs into the US, you're probably also stupid enough to believe that they are coming from Venezuela.

In between these two events, however, things have hardly been peaches and cream in the conservative movement; and at the centre of the problems has been a certain Nicholas J Fuentes - and, of course, the ghost of Kirk.

## Groyper war

Fuentes is, it is fair to say, an odd bird. He is not an old-fashioned political operative, but a media figure; and he is not a bow-tied Fox News correspondent either. He is a 'streamer' - someone who builds his audience by interminably ranting at them live, over an internet video feed. The streaming platforms were largely built as an extension of the video games industry, Twitch being the most famous, allowing large audiences to watch players in action and listen to their running commentary; but political streaming is a big deal, both among rightists of the Fuentes stamp and leftists, of whom the best known is probably Hasan Piker.

As befits its origins as a gaming phenomenon, the audience for political streaming skews young and male. It is thus prone to a certain adolescent exuberance in its content. Fuentes first found fame as an influencer within the 'incel' community - "involuntary celibates", who have constructed an elaborate identity structure around their failure to achieve carnal relations with women. The community is roughly divided between those who attempt to rectify this situation through cynical manipulation of what they take to be the basic relation between the sexes (what used to be called 'pickup artistry'), and those who accept what they take to be their fate (the 'black-pilled').

Fuentes targeted the latter. He offered a deeply misogynistic account, according to which sex with women is inherently debasing and degrading for men. It is, he said memorably, even gayer than having sex with a man (not that he is in favour of that sort of thing either!). As time went on, more ingredients got added to the stew. Extreme white nationalism, traditionalist Catholicism, theocracy and, most infamously, a thoroughgoing anti-Semitism, up to and including holocaust denial and open admiration



**Nick Fuentes: notorious**

for Adolf Hitler.

This is a rather spicy mixture even by the standards of the Trumpified American right, and his supporters have traditionally been marginalised even from the edgier post-2016 scene. They have resisted such marginalisation ferociously, culminating in the so-called 'Groyper War' in 2019 (Fuentes' fans call themselves 'Groypers', after a portly cartoon frog who serves as their mascot). When Charlie Kirk's outfit, Turning Point USA, expelled Ashley St Clair for appearing in a photograph with Fuentes and other online-right oddballs, his supporters engaged in a prolonged campaign of disruption of TP USA events over several months. Fuentes and Kirk never buried the hatchet and, when the latter was murdered, there was much initial speculation that it could have been the work of a lone Groyper.

## Shifting sands

Kirk's shooting in Utah, however, began a series of events that would change the ideological balance of forces in this strange demimonde. Almost immediately, speculation began about the identity of the killer and, when Tyler Robinson was arrested, about the 'real' killer. In particular, rumours began to circulate that Kirk - in public, a down-the-line Zionist - had privately started to distance himself from the state of Israel.

Candace Owens - another far-right influencer increasingly in the grip of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories (and, frankly, perhaps of paranoid delusions) - began to retail an elaborate tale of Kirk's assassination that involved the mainstream right, the intelligence agencies of Israel and France (she is involved in a court case with the Macrons over her allegations that Brigitte Macron is a transsexual), and even Kirk's wife, Erica. Recently Owens has decided that there is, too, a communist cult involved, whose members communicate via coded references to bees. Although she has been somewhat marginalised in this milieu, she was close to Kirk, who seems to have been a good mediator

and played an important role in cohering the different ideologues of the far right, Fuentes excepted.

Another figure *hinting* at Israeli involvement in Kirk's death is Tucker Carlson, formerly the bow-tied Fox News guy *par excellence*, but today an independent operator. It is sometimes difficult to determine what this man's real views are. (Despite being a public supporter of Trump, we know from documents released in the Dominion voting machines lawsuit that he privately holds him in contempt.) But he has positioned himself as the acceptable face of modern American white nationalism, and is noted for interviewing people outside the pale, such as pro-Nazi historian Darryl Cooper and, most sensationally, Vladimir Putin. He has also become a major and highly articulate critic of Israel.

On October 27, Carlson posted a two-hour-plus interview with Fuentes. This was a major breach in the *cordon sanitaire* around the Groypers, and moves were immediately afoot to put Carlson out to pasture. But these failed. He immediately received support from the Heritage Foundation, the spinal core of the conservative movement going back to the Reagan days. This caused an almighty ruckus, and followed on from the leak of a series of Telegram chat logs between members of the Young Republicans, including some elected officials, in which rather Fuentesian views of race and Hitler were expressed.

Taken together, these two events provided a picture of the drift of the American right. It is first of all clear from the Telegram leaks that the traditional organisations of the American right have absorbed many individuals fundamentally shaped by post-Trump, racist paleo-conservatism. For a long time, there was something of a bright line between the new Trump-focused organisations and stodgy old suit-and-tie outfits like the Young Republicans, but the latter's New York chapter had already been effectively annexed by the new right, and the infection seems to have spread. If even the Heritage Foundation cannot take decisive

action here, clearly the terrain has changed.

Secondly, it is clear that the question of Israel is a source of grievous division among the Republicans and further right, as it is among Democrats. Issue polling now finds drastically reduced support for Israel among Republican voters, sometimes with pluralities in favour of suspending such support. Among the white nationalist and paleocon circles served by Carlson and Fuentes, the exertions made by rightwing lawmakers in favour of a foreign state are a direct insult to the idea of 'America first' - such individuals are taken to be foreign agents of Israel or, for Fuentes, Owens and co, puppets of international Jewry. The effective truce between Democrat and Republican elites on foreign policy is cracking apart at the base on both sides.

## Bush years

Underlying this confusion on the right is the disruptive effect the Trump ascendancy has had on its institutional structure. Though the George W Bush years saw drastic expansion of the power of the executive, that executive had more than one power centre, with representatives of neoconservatism, religious reaction and hyper-neoliberalism vying for influence. Long-standing operatives like Karl Rove and Dick Cheney could mediate between them, and between the executive as a whole and its donor base. Relatively centralised rightwing media and civil society institutions - most especially churches - could form a coherent phalanx around the executive.

On his way to the presidency, however, Trump drove a freight train right through all this stuff. Though he had, in his first term, plenty of establishment Republicans in his cabinet, remaining in place was a function of total loyalty to Trump as an individual. By the time of the 2024 primaries, such loyalty had become a prerequisite for any Republican seeking national office. The consequence was that Trump was completely unassailable in his own primary.

There was now a far more 'Bonapartist' structure in place: the big man at the top, supported by various institutions characterised by, again, absolute personal loyalty. Trump's tendency to reward people in proportion to perceived loyalty, and his mercurial character (and plausible senescence), means that political shifts are often chaotic. The chokehold of traditional conservative media has been broken, though the alt-media operations are ultimately outlets for the same billionaire money as everyone else. At the base, Americans are more atomised than ever, and capillary mechanisms of political organisation are withering. (The typical religious profile of a 2024 Trump voter was a Christian who does not go to church.)

The result is inevitably a great confusion of ideas - some whimsical,

some earnest, some callously malicious. Above all, though, they are spectacular and oddly untethered from reality; they come and go easily. Who, today, believes in Pizzagate? Who, this time next year, will remember Candace Owens' bee cult?

Underlying this, ultimately, is the problem of relative US decline, which has played out in the usual fashion with deindustrialisation, rampant inequality between individuals and also between localities, and a series of attempts to reassert global military-strategic dominance with decidedly mixed results. The benefits of living in the 'greatest country on earth' are no longer obvious. Successive administrations have failed to disengage from the Middle East and Europe, pursuant to the long-heralded pivot to Asia. Trump's national security strategy clearly paved the way for the Venezuelan escapade of last week, but the immediate consequence seems to be even greater overstretch.

Who can get this done, if not Trump? Even if he powers through the constitutional barriers to a third term, the man will die, eventually. What will come next? The generally chaotic state of the American political class looks unpropitious for some party of Young Turks to emerge, but *someone* will have to sit in the newly-gilded Oval Office in the end.

As far as Fuentes goes, it is notable that he fairly quickly expressed reservations about the Venezuela operation, telling his million-plus Twitter followers on January 3 that it "initially seemed like a solid operation to cleanly, bloodlessly and quickly remove Maduro from power last night". But, he continued, "this new policy of 'running Venezuela' with US soldiers sounds like a massive over-commitment. I have zero confidence in nation-building. Big mistake." Carlson is also cagey about the whole thing.

If things do go south in Caracas, then Trump and his outriders will face opposition from the right as well as the left. It would thus be wrong to take too much heart from the death of his ludicrous self-image as a 'peace president'; the benefits of anti-war sentiment are not just going to land automatically in the lap of the left. Freed from the ties of loyalty to Trump, a more coherent far right could sell, once more, a programme of isolationism and internal purging - as has happened, from time to time, at least back to the 'Know-Nothings' of the 1850s.

Of course, should we actually end up with a president Fuentes or Carlson, they shall be driven by the same underlying social tectonics into foolish and destructive military adventures in due course. Only a socialist left - armed with an internationalist foreign policy opposed to its own state - has the potential to restrain, and ultimately destroy, the largest apparatus of murder ever assembled. ●