

weekly worker



Corbyn's The Many slate is stunningly unimpressive, stuffed full of careerists, acolytes and the slightly deranged

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Conference 2026: paradox of change and continuity

LETTERS



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

Dual membership

In her article in last week's edition covering the Your Party central executive committee elections, Carla Roberts said: "Now every Tom, Dick and Harry has convinced themselves that their name must absolutely be on the ballot paper" ('Off to a bumpy start' January 15). And, speaking on behalf of the *Weekly Worker*, she called on "any socialists who are standing as 'independents' to withdraw their candidacy and to get behind the GL [Grassroots Left] slate". As one of the aforementioned 'Toms', I'd like to reply.

I'm fairly sure that most of the people nominating themselves will indeed be men. And I'm sure that Carla's use of the 'TD&H' idiom was just a readily available, if somewhat derogatory, way of saying 'lots of people'. But the overlooking of the Henriettas, Thomasinas and Ricardas says something, I think, about the *Weekly Worker* mindset.

The essence of Carla's article was that, despite the fact that the formation of the GL slate was a secretive affair - a behind-closed-doors stitch-up - and that, in its launch, it cynically and dishonestly tried to give the impression that Jeremy Corbyn and others were all in favour of it, we should nevertheless all vote for its candidates, because they are committed to allowing dual party membership.

The driving force behind GL seems to be the Democratic Socialists of Your Party, who have, among other things, produced a draft constitution for adoption by Your Party. It's a very lawyerly collection of rules. Its essential attraction for dual-party membership holders is that national conference shall be sovereign and that voting at this conference will be done solely by delegates elected by local branches.

Carla, very correctly, points out that Corbyn and those around him don't want a collective leadership, nor dual party membership and they want the membership's input to be restricted, as far as possible, to voting on proposals and alternatives emanating from the leader's office. That's a travesty of democracy and a transparent power play by those standing to gain by such an arrangement.

However, Carla and others seem oblivious to the dangers attendant in having conference decisions made by delegates from branches. The *Weekly Worker* frequently derides the notion of decisions being made by the 'atomised membership'. I would remind the enthusiasts for elected delegates that the much derided 'individuals at home' voted for collective leadership and dual-party membership. But I don't need to remind them - they know that already! It's just that they want to say, 'Thanks for that, you've done your bit - now leave the rest to us'.

I voted for dual-party membership and in my self-nomination I said that "the current leadership of Your Party are trying to subvert that by saying that members who are also members of other parties can pay subs and vote, but cannot stand for election". But we mustn't close our eyes to the dangers inherent in dual membership, when combined with decision-making by branch delegates. We all know what will happen: the various groups and sects will hold their pre-meetings; their members will then attend to present their group's agreed line, motion or delegate list. They will all be trying to win a majority in the

branch to their position and, over time, it will get easier and easier to obtain that majority - not because of their powers of persuasion, but because most people will stop going, having become sick and tired of listening to 'activists' bringing up 'points of order' and suchlike in an effort to get one over on the other factions and thereby obtain a thumbs-up, when back in the company of their comrades of the one true faith.

How many times does history have to repeat itself as farce? Dual membership, combined with 'all power to branch delegates' will inevitably hollow out the branches. Indeed the DSYD draft constitution seems to have already envisaged such an eventuality. Article IX, section 6 states that the number of delegates from each branch will be apportioned according to the branch's paid-up membership, but, if the branch is unable to field its allotted quota, those that do go can card-vote the whole lot.

We must face up to things. The vast majority of dual membership holders are decent, well-meaning people, who will find themselves behaving like parasites. And, like parasites, they will kill the host. By all means, be members of two political parties, turn up at YP branch meetings, get elected as conference delegates and present your group's point of view, but do not seek to substitute yourself for the 'atomised membership' (aka 'the working class'). Conference should be sovereign, with the membership making the final decisions.

Tom Conwell
Email

Bolshevik Caucus

I am standing for the CEC (South-East region) on behalf of the Bolshevik Caucus of Your Party. Our full platform and other materials can be found at bolshevikcaucus.substack.com. I ask readers of the *Weekly Worker* who are members in the region to consider endorsing and voting for me.

We are a distinct tendency within the party, arguing that socialism can only be achieved with the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the British state that defends it. We must defend ourselves against the state repression that occurs whenever we make the slightest progress, and will intensify a thousandfold if we get anywhere near a revolutionary seizure of power by the working class. A genuinely socialist party must fight all forms of oppression, especially defending those such as immigrants and trans people, who are currently under heavy fire. We oppose imperialist and Zionist attacks and invasions and call for the defeat of British imperialism.

Above all, YP must be a workers' party. This means a hard no to so-called 'progressive' alliances with the Greens or other capitalist parties. It means we start with what the working class needs, not with what is 'realistic' or politically expedient, and we fight for these demands, while making it clear that they will never be secure unless the working class takes state power.

Members must run YP. This means funds and data to the branches, and it means accepting all socialists into the party, whatever their other affiliations, to openly debate our differences on the way forward, while working together in practical campaigns. The CEC candidates who have been barred from standing must be immediately reinstated.

The *Weekly Worker* has endorsed the slate of the Grassroots Left, associated with Zarah Sultana and the Democratic Socialists, whose platform includes many supportable points missing from the material of

other candidates. However, the GL programme is inadequate on some key political questions.

For instance, while it advocates "a clear programme of anti-imperialism", the only substantive points on this are to reject "collusion with Israel" and the call for Britain's withdrawal from Nato, which implies that Britain will somehow become less imperialist outside the bounds of that military alliance. Instead it is necessary to explicitly call for the defeat of British imperialism and oppose the presence of British troops overseas, including in the north of Ireland. We advocate fighting within the trade unions to block the manufacture and transportation of weapons, whether to Israel or Ukraine. We denounce the imperialists' targeting of China, where we call for domestic political revolution - not to restore capitalism, but to put the working class in power.

The GL programme says that Your Party should not share governmental power except on the basis of a socialist programme, but the criteria for that is unclear. We would hope it excludes an electoral deal or power-sharing with the Greens, but, given that GL endorses Michael Lavelette, who is in a coalition with the Greens in the official opposition on Lancashire County Council, this is far from certain. And, while saying that the party should "participate in national government", the platform does not explain that the capitalist state cannot be used to bring about socialism, which requires replacing parliament, the police and the military with democratic organs of working-class rule.

Democratic demands are important, but programme is crucial in the building of a party. In the south-east, where I am standing, there is only one candidate (Max Shanly) who has committed to the GL programme, while GL endorses a candidate from the Platform for a Democratic Party, whose programme the *Weekly Worker* recently described as "politically very conservative" and "unambitious" ('Left gets itself organised', January 8). I invite your readers in the south-east to read our platform on our substack and make their decisions on who to endorse and vote for.

Barbara Duke
Oxford

The Many

Like some 800 other interested parties, I had the opportunity to attend the online launch of 'The Many', the Your Party CEC election slate, though I am informed they are making a diligent effort to brand it as a 'team'.

The slate, supposedly formed by several YP insiders who were thoroughly dissatisfied with the outcomes of the founding conference (which they themselves organised), approached Corbyn with their ideas of how to get the party 'back on track'. The core aims being, above all else, fixing 'structural issues' and restoring the "original vision of Your Party": that is, a solely Corbyn-led movement with dual membership banned ("loyalty directly to Your Party"), which will rerun the 2019 Labour campaign ad infinitum. The founding conference was apparently, despite their attempts at a managed 'democracy' with artificially restricted choices, a derailment, still falling short of results satisfactory to them. This group of HQ staffers, the Independent Alliance MPs and assorted courtiers, drawn from the Corbyn side-projects like the Peace and Justice and Collective, will tidy up the resulting mess and make every effort to reverse the outcomes of the founding conference that have so regrettably gotten us off track.

The presentation, introduced by

Jenn Forbes (fresh off her awful chairing of the founding conference and now standing in the South-West), swiftly led to introducing the first of four candidates, who all spoke in turn about little else than their personal backgrounds, while making vague platitudes about the importance of trade unions, justice, speaking out about Palestine and 'stopping the far right'. Your Party, the role of its CEC or really any policy positions at all were conspicuously absent.

The attendees in the Zoom chat, aside from one or two familiar faces diligently spamming the slate's official line, repeatedly expressed bewilderment at its existence and purpose, questioned the exclusion of Zarah Sultana and boredom or frustration at the total absence of concrete politics or proposals from any of the speakers. It would not be an exaggeration to say that someone watching would walk away an hour later knowing just as little about what The Many was or had to offer than they did going in.

The closest thing to politics in the whole event was the brief Q&A at the end, in which three pre-screened questions, submitted by an opaque form, were read out and answered by the speakers. The first question asked: "How can we make sure YP doesn't become Labour 2.0 and does politics differently?" Jenn Forbes gave a very telling answer by recounting her experience as a Labour candidate in 2019 and claiming that Corbynism effectively failed only because of the "enemy within". Therefore the solution is a party totally loyal to and supportive of Corbyn. Besides the obvious futility of trying to rerun Corbynist 'left populism', when the Greens are already doing it, this completely refuses to engage with political shortcomings of left populism, as seen in cases where similar candidates did win or entered government. What would stop the Labour of 2019 or a YP in that mould from repeating the betrayals of Syriza and Podemos?

The implication of who the "enemy within" might be is also telling. In Labour 1.0 it was the Labour right who undermined Corbyn; in YP it will apparently be the YP left, who must be

purged, lest they do the same. Corbyn, who during his section spoke at length about the importance of respect, doesn't seem to think it should go both ways. The renewed expulsions and witch-hunt - cynically barring candidates under dual membership rules forced on a membership that firmly opposed anything of the sort - showcase remarkable contempt for ordinary members. Also a fear that in a fair contest the slate pitched by an interim leadership that is out of touch and out of step with the membership, and at conference was frequently booed, won't do well enough to force through the sort of politics they view as the 'horizon of possibility'.

The second question was one we're all asking and concerned with: member data and when branches will get access to it. The thankless task of answering it was hoisted cruelly on the shoulders of Louise Regan, the well-liked trade unionist, Palestine Solidarity Campaign chair and probably the best and strongest candidate on the slate besides Corbyn himself. She read off a woeful and waffling script that avoided the question entirely, eliciting substantial displeasure and frustration from the chat. Much as with Jenn Forbes and Laura Smith at the founding conference, I have to imagine the Corbyn/Murphy tendency of designating otherwise popular and well-known figures in their camp as 'sin-eaters' to set down unpopular party lines that must be burning through a fair bit of goodwill on all sides.

The final question was a fairly insubstantial one, addressing how to win and engage the youth vote - possibly an issue, when having to compete with the more lively and youthful Greens under Polanski. The question was answered by Ismail Uddin, a young councillor and PSC activist, arguing that the key to reaching young people was in addressing the cost of living and taking a firm stance on global issues like Palestine or Sudan, as well as better social media comms.

As uninspiring, disappointing and dull as the event was to most attending, if the chat was anything to go by, I do think it carries valuable lessons for

Online Communist Forum



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the Grassroots Left in how to conduct itself better, treat members with respect and address their real concerns - as opposed to endless platitudes intended to assuage concerns, treating members like naughty schoolchildren - and pave the way for overriding member democracy with fake smiles and the toxic positivity that The Many are inheriting from the Labour Party they’ve clearly not fully left themselves.

The left can show a real contrast to this and present a truly different way of doing politics than the establishment parties by treating members like the peers they are - as rational, reasoning adults, capable of concrete policy discussion, interested and invested in shaping the party they are a member of, rather than leaving it to a ‘team’ that will deliver a 2017 nostalgia trip.

Here are some mild suggestions for a similar launch event, but done right: ■ Be forthright about the slate and how it came together. The gatekeeping of member data, resulting difficulty of building branches and regional constituencies has made it difficult to know who is planning to stand outside of gossip, but, where candidates across the country have been able to come together with a shared commitment to a common platform to stand on, it should be recognised as a lucky break, not a sinister stitch-up.

■ Politics, not personalities. Grassroots Left candidates shouldn’t spend more than 30 seconds talking about their background. What members want to know is what they will do if elected to leadership, so should talk policy and principles, and bring the Grassroots Left platform front and centre - with candidates being free, of course, to bring up their own policies going beyond the shared platform.

■ The left needs to raise the level of strategic debate for everyone and argue openly that, had Corbyn won in 2017 or 2019, it would’ve been a catastrophe and not gotten us to socialism. We need to think bigger and smarter about what it will need to take power and implement a socialist programme (and trust members to be able to think strategically), rather than running on the left-populist/popular-front hamster wheel because it’s a ‘simple idea’.

■ The Grassroots Left has endorsed Jeremy Corbyn for one of the public officeholder seats on the CEC. It

should invite him to their meetings for him to express his own thoughts on its platform and take questions from members.

■ A real meeting with a real Q&A. A presentation with pre-screened questions is boring, stage-managed and choreographed. Those on the left should resist the impulse to control-freakery and let members speak as they would in any real democratic meeting.

■ Give honest and concrete answers, not waffle. The Many embarrassingly dodged the data question they posed to themselves, frustrating attendees. The Grassroots Left doesn’t have party membership data, but it should address and clear up the allegations around Zarah Sultan’s supposed control over data and pin the blame for branches not getting their data where it belongs. If it were in our power, we would give the data to the branches today, or at least use it to inform members about their local branches. The left should call members to action, insist branches demand that HQ emails all members in their area, informing them about branches’ existence and meetings, provide links to branch WhatsApps, etc.

■ The left should acknowledge that all parties have a left and a right (some might even be so lucky as to have a centre). Real unity is bottom-up, not top-down, and can only be achieved through democracy and open, pluralist discussion by the membership, in full-view of everyone in and outside the party. The left can only succeed if members aren’t afraid to put their politics out in the open, not left waiting for the leadership to tell us what the party line is after they’re already in power.

■ The left should organise and publicise open hustings in regions for all candidates, whether from either slate or independent, so members can hear from all sides and make informed decisions. We want every candidate and every member to read the Grassroots Left platform and have an opinion of it - better yet, endorse it and vote for and support candidates standing on it.

Rafal B
Plymouth

Members’ rights

On January 14, the ‘Republic Your Party’ platform agreed to seek support of YP members in the central

executive committee elections. We agreed to stand five candidates - one each in the East Midlands, East of England and London, and two for the North West. Chris Williamson, the former Labour MP for Derby North, was endorsed as our candidate for the East Midlands.

On January 17, Chris received notification that he is “ineligible to stand for election to the CEC”. This is because “members of other national political parties shall not be permitted to stand for election”. Chris is a member of Your Party and the Workers Party of Britain.

Republic YP is appealing to all YP members, regardless of any platform or faction, to unite in defence of party democracy, equal rights for all members and our right to vote on candidates of our choice. The issue here is democracy, not whether comrades agree or disagree with Chris, support or oppose the Workers Party, or agree with Republic YP or not. It is that any YP member in the East Midlands must have the right to stand for office and all members must have the right to vote for or against that candidate.

Democracy relies on the good sense and judgment of the rank-and-file YP members. If they think that Chris’s membership of the Workers Party should exclude him from the CEC, they will *vote* accordingly. If they support the Republic YP Platform and have confidence in Chris’s political record, or some combination of both, they will vote for him.

This raises some fundamental democratic questions. First, it implies there are two categories of members - some with full rights and others with restricted rights. Second, it was the expressed will of conference not to bar membership to those presently members of other left socialist parties. Third, if there are exceptions to dual membership, it is for the elected CEC leadership to determine.

The fundamental democratic principle is that every member of YP should have to right to stand for election and only members voting in the election will decide which candidate is elected to the CEC. The outcome cannot be predetermined or influenced by unelected officials.

Republic YP is being denied the right to choose Chris to represent our platform in the CEC elections. An official is determining that we must choose somebody else or have no candidate in the East Midlands at all. This has echoes of the treatment of Jeremy Corbyn, when Labour Party members in Islington were told they could not choose him as their candidate because of some ruling ‘from above’. Republic YP is seeking assurances that this decision is being applied to all slates and candidates without discrimination.

The new democratically elected CEC should determine whether members of other left parties are barred from membership in line with the decision of the Liverpool conference. Until then, every member of YP must be allowed to stand for election. Members in each region must be free to vote for the candidate of their choice.

Conference decided that dual membership is accepted. It will be for the newly elected CEC to decide how this will be applied and if there are exceptions. They will be held accountable for their decisions. It is not for unelected leaders or officials to make decisions that change the possible outcome of the CEC election. The unelected provisional leadership has no mandate to alter the election and impact on the democratic will of the sovereign members. The outcome of the CEC election must be determined solely by member’s

votes. This was the spirit and intention of the majority of members at the Liverpool conference. It is not for this to be interpreted by unelected officials through some formulations to exclude members from their democratic rights.

Once the CEC is elected, this committee alone - answerable to the membership and the next conference - should determine which left parties are eligible for dual membership in the future. Meanwhile every member of Your Party must have equal rights to stand for elected office.

Chris Williamson is a member and he must have the same democratic rights as any other member.

Republic Your Party
email

Hypocrisy

The foreign secretary’s statement on the protests in Iran is typical of ministerial reasoning: a mixture of half-truths, falsehood, omissions and hypocrisy of the most reckless and brazen sort.

That the people of Iran deserve the warmest support of the British people in the struggle for liberty and democratic rights is, of course, true. But it is evident that liberty and democracy are not the objects of the British governing class: liberty they assail and decry at home; democracy they are indifferent to abroad, unless some mischievous state refuses to bend to the will of our American masters, whose arrogant and drunken lead we infallibly follow.

The Iranian government is repressive, says Yvette Cooper: it has pursued “a brutal and relentless crackdown on its own people” and “the United Kingdom therefore condemns in the strongest terms the horrendous and brutal killing of Iranian protesters and we demand that the Iranian authorities respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of their citizens”. The repression, indeed, is odious and undeniable; but one cannot help doubting Mrs Cooper’s ‘love of freedom’. She is, after all, known for her own repression of Palestine activists as home secretary.

Next we have talk of “Iran’s destabilising actions towards its neighbours” and its “malign global impact”. Here, too, we cannot but notice that one of the government’s chief allies in the region, Israel, has wreaked more havoc and destruction in the last two years or so than Iran could ever hope to inflict. Israel stands accused of genocide: it has already been convicted by numerous rights organisations and experts in the field; and, through all this time, it never occurred to Cooper or her predecessors to condemn Israel’s ravage of Gaza - much less to end the military, economic and diplomatic ties which have made our rulers complicit in one of the most detestable crimes of our age.

The estimates of the number of dead in Iran, as appalling as they are, do not approach the tens of thousands who have been violently killed by Israeli forces. If our memory is capable of reaching as far back as the illegal invasion of Iraq, for which the right honourable Mrs Cooper voted, we will recall that at least hundreds of thousands were killed owing to the war and its aftermath. In the calculation of “malign global impact”, I venture to say that the United States and its servants will be found to have produced far more misery and death than Cooper attributes to Iran.

The foreign secretary then comes to sanctions: “this government”, we are told, has “imposed over 220 Iran sanctions designations since coming into office, and we back strong sanctions enforcement ... the UK will bring forward legislation to implement full and further sanctions and sectoral

measures”, which will target “finance, energy, transport, software and other significant industries”.

But at the beginning of her speech, Mrs Cooper herself observed that the protests were initiated “following a plunge in the value of the country’s currency”: the economic hardships to which ordinary Iranians have been exposed are not the sole result of western sanctions, but there is no doubt that sanctions have often caused or seriously aggravated their sufferings. Alena Douhan, the UN special rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures, concluded in 2022 that sanctions on Iranian banks and numerous companies “have led to reduced state revenues and growing poverty and have exacerbated existing socioeconomic inequalities, resulting in insufficient resources to guarantee the basic needs of low-income people and other vulnerable groups”.

The foreign secretary, however, is incapable of perceiving the relation of the sanctions, which she strongly advocates, to the deprivation and want which afflict the Iranian people. Only two reasons are supplied in defence of further sanctions. The first is Iranian human rights violations. It is most curious that such an assertion is not immediately met by the laughter and mockery, or contempt and scorn, of the whole House of Commons. I have already pointed out that Israel’s genocide has killed tens of thousands: no wide-ranging British sanctions have been imposed.

But let us now consider those close British allies which are only separated from Iran by a journey across the Persian Gulf. Iran is a despotism - so are they. Iran represses protestors - so do they. Iranian prisons are filled with dissidents - so are theirs. But we do not sanction those Arab states; for our spirit of generosity and forgiveness is wonderfully increased, when the state in question submits to the same American supremacy that long ago became a religion among our parliamentary representatives.

Second, Mrs Cooper complains of Iran’s violations of its nuclear commitments. If such commitments have been violated, it is unclear to me what rule of justice says that nuclear-armed states have a moral warrant to punish other states for attempting to acquire the same arms that they already possess: our politicians never stop lauding our own nuclear weapons as a source of security, yet they will nonetheless profess support for punishing those states which try to emulate us!

Winding up her remarks, Mrs Cooper said that it is “clear that the Iranian regime is trying to paint the protests as the result of foreign influence and instigation ... This is nothing but lies and propaganda”. Although it is true that the Iranian government has a clear interest in exaggerating the extent of foreign interference, it is utterly foolish to suppose that other powers - namely Israel and the United States - are not doing their best to exploit the protests for their own purposes. Anyone who has read a little history knows this. The Mossad itself has announced to Iranian demonstrators that “We are with you in the field.”

Iranians have a great many justified grievances, but the intervention of malicious ruling classes will be of no service in remedying them. Instead, let the socialist movement in this country and around the world grant its support to those elements of the Iranian opposition who share our ideals. This path is very hard - but, in the end, it will do more good.

Talal Hangari
London

Fighting fund

Ten days to go!

As I write, there are exactly 10 days left to reach our monthly £2,750 fighting fund target. But, thanks to some excellent donations in what was a pretty good week, we are less than one grand away from getting there!

Let’s start with the two brilliant *three-figure* contributions from comrades SK and PM, followed by £75 from MM and £40 from TR. Then there was comrade OG, who this month made two donations totalling £46 within a few days! Other standing orders/bank transfers came from TW and GB (£25 each), DR (£20), IS (£17) and JL, AM and KJ (£10 each).

Three other comrades clicked on that PayPal button on our website - thanks to KS (£50), BW (£8) and GP (£5). And, finally, comrades PB (£15) and Hussein (£5) both handed cash to a *Weekly Worker* comrade.

So all that came to £842 in just seven days, taking our running

total for January up to £1,853. In other words, we still need another £900 before the end of the month, but I’m really confident that we’re going to get there! I know only too well how much the *Weekly Worker* is appreciated for its highly valuable and unique role in campaigning for a single, democratic-centralist, principled Marxist party, uniting not only comrades from the dozens of small revolutionary groups, but millions of workers (employed or not).

For more details of how to join the other contributors helping us out, go to the web address below, where you’ll see all the options. We need you! ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are
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SWP CONFERENCE

As you were

Despite belatedly dumping the ‘gang of four’ over the 2013 rape scandal, the popular frontist politics remains. So does the lack of openness and obsession with secrecy. **Paul Demarty** looks at the paradox of change and continuity

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novel *The leopard* is best known outside literary circles for the bowdlerised phrase, “everything must change, so that everything can stay the same”. This is not quite the original view of Tancredi, Lampedusa’s ambitious Sicilian noble, who hopes to profit from the *risorgimento* by signing up with Victor Emmanuel and Garibaldi. “Unless we ourselves take a hand now,” he warns his uncle, the hero of the novel, “they’ll foist a republic on us. If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.”

As expected, things have changed - to a point - at the top of the Socialist Workers Party, at its recent conference. Late in the day, four names were removed from the outgoing central committee’s recommended slate, and these were not small fry. Alex Callinicos, Charlie Kimber, Weyman Bennett and Mark Thomas were all veterans of the leading body, and prominent public figures associated with it. Unfortunately for them, this association was double-edged, for they were also in positions of responsibility when the SWP fell into crisis over accusations of rape against Martin Smith in 2013, and played an active role in suppressing the revolt over the resulting cover-up.

We discussed this change at the top when it was announced,¹ and will not rehearse all that again here. We note that, in the post-conference bulletin just sent to SWP members, an even more detailed rationale is offered than they got in December. The fate of the ‘gang of four’ is once more tied to their role in 2013. The bulletin notes that it was:

... a mistake for some comrades to place loyalty to the party leadership or the accused ahead of thinking collectively how best to apply and develop a Marxist approach to women’s oppression and to the culture, norms and procedures required of our organisation. Developing a stronger approach on those questions would have involved addressing issues such as imbalances of seniority, power and age, which have been widely debated in recent struggles.

In order to ram home the point, the authors of this bulletin also provide links to the SWP’s new procedures, which - as we have noted several times - have a distinctly local-government flavour to them, as befits an organisation sometimes nicknamed the ‘Social Worker Party’. Nonetheless, it is at least evidence of *some* seriousness in relation to the 2013 disaster, which was badly missing at the time under the leadership of Callinicos, Kimber and company.

In fact, more was changed at the conference than the mere names of the people at the top. A motion was passed changing the method of election to the central committee. Previously, this was done strictly according to a slate system. The outgoing CC would propose a slate to be elected at conference. Contesting the election meant coming up with a complete alternative slate of candidates, which was all but impossible (only in the chaos of 2013 itself, so far as we



Big problems ... and not only with the old leadership

remember, has there been a contested CC election).

But now, any comrade able to obtain 20 nominations can stand, and if there are additional candidates, conference delegates will “vote for as many candidates as they like up to the number on the [CC’s] recommended slate, with those elected being the ones with the highest votes up to the number given by the size of the recommended CC slate”. This is a marked improvement on the old system, though many other defects in the SWP’s organisational structure and culture remain unaddressed. It is also a backhanded acknowledgement that the old norms were proven decisively not to be fit for purpose by the apparent impregnability of the positions of the old guard.

Cloak and dagger

Those lucky enough to be SWP members were apprised of all this (as are those, like us, interested enough to obtain the ‘eyes only’ pre- and post-conference bulletins, which in reality are accessible on Google Drive to anyone with the links, which are circulated widely). Readers of *Socialist Worker* might be a little flummoxed, however. A small box-out on the CC leadership reads, in its entirety (omitting the list of names):

Delegates at the SWP conference elected the central committee (CC), which leads the organisation on a day-to-day basis ... Four long-standing members of the outgoing CC did not restand. The changes to the CC are part of the outgoing leadership’s efforts to renew the organisation more generally.

Ahead of voting for the CC, a session discussed the political lessons of the 2013 crisis, when the party failed two women who raised complaints of sexual misconduct.²

This is so uninformative it is almost comical. The resignations are part of “general” efforts at renewal - nothing to see here. Delegates *also* discussed the 2013 crisis. What is the connection? We are not told, but, of course, anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear knows very well why this peculiar non-sequitur is here.

The ultimate irony is that the SWP’s settling of accounts with its old leadership is clearly part of an effort to, as it were, renew the organisation’s *public image* “more generally”. The SWP issued a public apology in 2024. It has continued to face opprobrium in the wider movement on account of the sins of 2013, particularly in important sites of intervention like Your Party. This is even explicitly acknowledged in the internal bulletin, with almost disarming humility:

We do not believe their departure from the leadership will prevent criticism of the SWP. But we think it will make clearer to those we seek to work alongside in the struggle, and those joining the SWP, that we recognise and have learnt from our mistakes, that our apology is sincere, and that we as an organisation have sought, and will continue to seek, to change.

I must admit that, once I had read both that and the Delphic *Socialist Worker* box-out, I was reduced to screaming in frustration at my computer screen, ‘No, comrades: it will not make anything ‘clearer’ if you don’t tell anyone!’ But I cannot believe that this staggering inconsistency is intentional. For my money, it is merely evidence of how bone-deep the SWP’s instinct for secrecy runs. The ‘not in front of the children’ attitude absurdly asserts itself even in communications that only have any real meaning for the

‘children’. This attitude clearly does not leave the building along with the ‘gang of four’ (who, of course, remain members, with Callinicos turning in his regular column on schedule in the same issue of *Socialist Worker*). It is fortunate, at least, that they are so bad at actually enforcing that secrecy.

Same old

With the changes out of the way, everything else - in true Lampedusan fashion - looks to stay the same. The central task of the SWP, as they see it, is to resist the rise of the far right. This is a familiar emphasis, particularly in recent years, where the SWP has sometimes seemed almost to disappear entirely into its flagship front organisation, Stand Up to Racism.

Having failed to stop the onward march of the right through one front organisation, the SWP now seems to think that perhaps two will work. The new outfit is called Together, and it is not clear from the agreed conference document exactly what distinguishes the two. Together seems, on the face of it, more driven by celebrities than politicians and union leaders. If you’re not sold on the need to stop Reform and Tommy Robinson by Diane Abbott and Matt Wrack, perhaps Paloma Faith will do the job. That would make it, roughly, the Rock Against Racism to SUtR’s Anti-Nazi League.

Yet, of course, the document reminds us, there is already Love Music, Hate Racism as well; and another newcomer, Women Against the Far Right, designed to confront the far right’s exploitation of the grooming gangs scandal. Front organisations multiply in the SWP’s basement, like puppies at a dodgy dog-breeding outfit.

The centrepiece of all this is a March 28 demonstration called in

the name of Together. That date is mentioned no less than 16 times in the course of the post-conference bulletin, in several different documents. A counter-demonstration to Robinson’s crew in May is also touted, but, apart from that, one would almost think the end of days was due on March 29, for all that the rest of the year figures in the discussion.

Keeping all these fronts going will require “a bigger and more confident SWP” (I’ll say ...). Much of the rest of the bulletin focuses on the recruitment and cadre-isation of recruits. A recurrent theme is the need to achieve a higher level of general education and dissemination of the basics of Marxist theory - which is, of course, perfectly salutary in itself. Yet Marxist theory comes in the end from a man who, in his youth, demanded “ruthless criticism of everything that exists”. And among those existents to be criticised, surely, must be SUtR, and Together, and the great crowd of lesser bodies orbiting the SWP sun.

Over the years, we have often had cause to criticise the SWP’s catastrophism, when it comes to the rise of the right. That is plainly not the order of the day at present. The hour of the SWP’s stopped clock looks to have come. Not only are we threatened by an electoral victory for the far right - whether in the form of Reform or a Tory Party that finally gets its act together in order sufficiently to steal Reform’s clothes: we are threatened by a global shift towards ultra-chauvinist reaction. In America, at present, we have some indications of what that could mean in practice for us.

It is thus more essential than ever that we confront the fact that the multiplication of anti-racist broad fronts has *failed* to meaningfully obstruct the development of this situation. We need fresh thinking on this matter, which must include serious assessments of the history of the struggle. That is the only worthwhile objective of political education - to create sharper minds, who will all the more pitilessly evaluate our past efforts. The SWP instead uses its perpetual sense of emergency to terminate thought, to bury its activist core in busy work, mobilising a largely passive membership, while the big brains of the CC do the real ‘thinking’, as deemed necessary.

Education in this set-up consists of learning about the impeccable perspicacity of SWP leaders past and present, with the singular regrettable exception of its pre-Martin Smith disputes procedures. The group’s general recent history of stagnation, interrupted by the success of the anti-war movement in the early 2000s and the disaster of 2013, is rendered invisible, and consequently SWP activists are disarmed in political practice.

It is to be hoped that ordinary members cop on to this reality, and facing up to past mistakes becomes more of a habit •

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Notes

1. ‘Too little, too late’ *Weekly Worker* December 18 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1566/too-little-too-late.
2. socialistworker.co.uk/news/swp-conference-2026-resisting-the-right-building-the-left.

YOUR PARTY

Yet another witch-hunt

Corbyn's The Many list is stuffed full of careerists, acolytes and the slightly deranged. Meanwhile, using all the Labour Party techniques, left candidates are being barred from standing. A bad omen, warns **Carla Roberts**

A week after the Grassroots Left launched its slate of candidates for Your Party's central executive committee, Jeremy Corbyn launched the leadership faction's slate, The Many.

There has been a rather laughable attempt to present it as entirely independent of Your Party HQ and perhaps there really are a couple of candidates there who are *not* key players in the Corbyn clique. Hannah Hawkins, for example, seems like a *nice* person and has spoken out publicly against the attempt to bar at least Ian Spencer from standing in the North East region.¹ She is, however, keeping quiet about all the other disqualifications.

The most prominent person on the slate, apart from Corbyn himself, is Louise Regan, an executive member of the National Education Union - and she sticks out like a sore thumb. She is generally of the left, has spoken out against the witch-hunt in the Labour Party and was herself suspended.² We hear that she was flattered onto the slate by Corbyn and did not feel she could say no. Well, she should have.

She has now aligned herself with a slate that is made up chiefly of Corbyn acolytes and yes-sayers. There are careerist councillors and the two leftover MPs of the Independent Alliance, Ayoub Khan and Shockat Adam. There are also a few unpleasant witch-hunters: Jenn Forbes (South West), for example, was one of the more nasty chairs at the launch conference in Liverpool, where she revelled in treating members like children. Chelley Ryan (South East) is an unhinged Corbynite, who spends much of her day ranting on Twitter against dual membership and the left generally.³ There is also the eccentric anti-vaxxer, Terry Deans, in the South West⁴ and the unashamed Welsh nationalist, Maria Donnellan.⁵

A rather embarrassing list, all in all, that shows how tainted Corbyn has become - we know of numerous candidates who were approached by Corbyn's right-hand woman, Karie Murphy, but who said 'no, thanks'. The better ones applied to be on the Grassroots Left slate, while others preferred to stand as independents. This is really saying something: they would rather go solo than make use of the Corbyn slate's ability to access the funds and database of YP, as well as whatever is left of Corbyn's 'good name' (not much, clearly).

The iconography and the colour scheme of The Many are a rather obvious nod to the Labour Party and also Momentum - in fact, it looks as if they have used the same designer. That surely is no unfortunate mistake, as some on the left seem to think, but an attempt to connect to the 'good old times', when our Jeremy was the undisputed hero of the left.

Corbyn's role

Alas, no such luck. Many people are certainly now making the link to the Labour Party - the witch-hunt in the Labour Party, that is. There can be absolutely no doubt any more that Corbyn, the victim of one of the biggest stitch-ups in British history, has turned witch-hunter himself.

In a speech in Bradford last week, he promised to campaign against collective leadership and dual membership⁶ - as is his right, of course. What is *not* his right, however, is using Your Party machinery



HQ: Purges and Pinkertons

(firmly under the control of Murphy) to expel members of the Socialist Workers Party, ban various attendees from the YP launch conference - and now disbar candidates.

We should remember that, unfortunately, Corbyn has form: As leader of the Labour Party, he entirely capitulated to the orchestrated smear campaign equating anti-Zionism and opposition to Israel with anti-Semitism. In a futile attempt to appease the right, he threw many of his own allies to the wolves. His appointed general secretary, Jennie Formby, went out of her way to publicly smear Chris Williamson, Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth and Tony Greenstein, amongst others, to deliver evidence that Corbyn was 'taking anti-Semitism seriously'. Unsurprisingly, this did not stop the right - it strengthened it! This purge came to a logical climax when Corbyn himself was eventually suspended and then expelled from the Labour Party.

It is worse today. This time, the witch-hunt was started by him. Despite what some of his most die-hard loyalist followers might think, Karie Murphy is not some kind of evil puppeteer, controlling the naive and good-hearted Corbyn. This is his doing and he could easily stop it. But he does not want trouble-makers in his party: he wants to build an undemocratic election machine like Momentum. Online referendums, sortition, assemblies without voting rights, branches without any access to data - this is all part of this attempt to gut Your Party of any real democracy and any real life.

As we go to press, we know of at least a dozen candidates who have been barred from standing in the CEC elections. As in the Labour witch-hunt, there will be many more victims, some of whom will have decided not to publicise the fact or indeed will not fight against it. As an aside, Barbara Dorn of the International Bolshevik Tendency, who is standing in London, has *not* been barred. Perhaps too small a fish to fry. Michael Lavalette too, a member of Counterfire, seems to have escaped the cull and his candidacy was never challenged, we understand. Good for him, but the application of the rules is clearly inconsistent - and thereby unjust.

Altogether, 386 candidates are standing across the nine English regions, Scotland and Wales. Clearly everybody and their auntie has thrown their hat in the ring. Perhaps if the Grassroots Left slate

had been more transparent about its negotiations - the only place you could find out about it is the *Weekly Worker* - we might have avoided some of the extra competition from 'independent' socialists. The vast number of candidates presents a potential problem for the GL candidates, thanks to the undemocratic requirement to gather 75 nominations - not much of a problem if you have access to the full database, but a serious disadvantage for the left.

Among those we *know* have been barred are:

■ Dave Nellist, former Labour MP and veteran member of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, who is standing for a regional seat in the West Midlands.

■ April Ashley, another SPEW member standing in London, was also barred. SPEW had repeatedly written to Your Party HQ asking for "clarification" on the rules⁷ - but has not received a reply. The comrades are appealing the decision.

■ Ian Drummond, who is standing for the single Scottish seat. He suspects he might have been barred because he stated in his nomination statement that he is a member of Roger Silverman's Campaign for a Mass Workers' Party ... which is, as it says on the tin, not a party!

■ Ruth Cashman, member of the pro-imperialist and pro-Zionist Alliance for Workers' Liberty, standing in London.

■ Chris Williamson, who is standing in the East Midlands. In a rather amusing twist, it turns out he was actually *expelled* in the first wave of the witch-hunt, at the eve of the Liverpool launch conference - for being "a member of the SWP". Anybody even vaguely familiar with the British left will have laughed out loud. Williamson is famously a leading member of George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain - very much on the other side of the left milieu and not just over the 'trans question'. The massive levels of bureaucracy and micro-management at HQ clearly do not protect those running the show from making stupid mistakes.

It gets weirder. After Williamson pointed out the mistake, HQ did in fact reinstate him and he was allowed to attend launch conference as a sortitioned attendee! Which is, to put it mildly, another strange decision: unlike the SWP, the WPB *does* stand in elections under its own name and is indeed registered with the electoral commission - those were the reasons

given to explain the barring of SWP members from conference. Rational decision-making is often the first thing that goes in a witch-hunt.

■ A number of independent candidates like Deborah Foulkes and Raj Gill, who is standing in London. He believes his bar might have to do with his former brief membership of the WPB.

■ Ian Spencer, standing in the North East on the Grassroots Left slate. After GL went all out to protest against his and all other disbarments, he was reinstated after 24 hours. The comrade's chances of getting the required 75 endorsements will have massively increased thanks to his temporary ban! Ruth Cashman, Ian Drummond and Raj Gill too were readmitted a few hours later. HQ seems to have operated on the basis 'ban first, ask questions later'.

The Many

All of those barred seem to have received the same letter, informing them that they are "ineligible to stand for election to the CEC" because of "item 2 in the CEC election rules" - a bureaucrat's dream. Yes, conference voted for the most democratic 'option', when it came to the proposed ban on the left - but, as we warned, it is still a ban:

For the avoidance of doubt, members of other national political parties shall not be permitted to stand for election. Per the constitutional amendment passed at Your Party's founding conference, dual membership of Your Party and any other national political party is not permitted until the CEC approves specific national political parties as aligning with the party's values, before ratification by conference.

The letter is signed by "Andrew Jordan, Returning Officer". As an aside, we wonder how he was chosen? Is he really the "suitably neutral" person promised in the CEC election rules?⁸ A quick Google search shows that he is the YP nomination officer and at the founding conference was in fact the appointed chair of the standing orders committee (the committee that ruled any challenges and amendments out of order and made sure that conference was stopped from exercising its sovereignty). You can't get much more neutral than that!

His copy-and-paste letter does not go into any troublesome detail about, for example, which "national political party" the candidate is supposed to be a member of. Comrade Drummond, for example (now reinstated), has been wondering if maybe HQ thought he might be a member of the Workers Party of Britain, because he once was "a member of Respect and argued in favour of George Galloway being allowed to join the Labour Party". How can members prove a negative? This is a clear violation of any kind of natural justice or due process.

There is also, for that matter, no definition of what constitutes such a party. Standing in elections? Being registered with the electoral commission? Having the word 'party' in the name? And if a campaign for a party is classified as a party, what about the Peace and Justice Project? Or the Independent Alliance of MPs? Or the Transform Party for that matter?

Actually, we hear that, yes, even

members of Transform, a lukewarm nothing of an organisation, were approached by Jordan (a former member himself) - this time on the phone - to clarify if they were still members (turns out the organisation was recently dissolved anyway). Funnily enough, in a meeting of the YP Connections Network on November 6, Karie Murphy *explicitly ruled out* Transform from the kind of treatment she had in mind for members of the "Marxist sects" ("I think we should absolutely have Transform in"), as opposed to groups like the SWP, SPEW, etc: "You may feel that it's a great idea to have them all on board, and I personally feel that it's not." So a clear example of double standards.

The barring of candidates - clearly orchestrated by the people behind The Many's slate - will have done serious damage to its electoral chances. But, considering that voting takes place online, via atomised clicks on a keyboard, it is possible that many YP members simply will not be aware of the shenanigans. And, as HQ firmly controls the database, the left cannot openly contact them either. An utter charade. The full CEC should be elected democratically and transparently at annual conference, by elected delegates from the branches rather in depoliticised beauty contests.

It remains to be seen if HQ is able to manipulate the majority of members sufficiently to get a majority of their slate onto the CEC. There can be no doubt that, in that case, Your Party would be lost as any kind of useful vehicle for the working class. Such a CEC would start off no doubt by declaring all left groups ineligible for YP membership. A party that starts with a witch-hunt is doomed to fail. It might hang on for a couple of years, but its days would soon be numbered. This election is therefore a very much last chance saloon for Your Party.

We urge readers and supporters to get actively involved in the Grassroots Left. Join the WhatsApp Community⁹ to discuss local and regional activity and endorse/vote for the following candidates:

London: Anahita Zardoshti and Mel Mullings.
South East: Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi and Max Shanly.
North West: Haifa Alkhanashli and Chloe Braddock.
South West: Mark Gage and Candi Williams.
Yorkshire: Sophie Wilson and Chris Saltmarsh.
West Midlands: Megan Clarke and Graham Jones.
East of England: Ricardo la Torre and Solma Ahmed.
East Midlands: Anwarul Khan and Anjona Roy.
North East: Ian Spencer and Myra Shoko.
Public office holders: Zarah Sultana MP, Cllr Grace Lewis, Cllr Michael Lavalette, Jeremy Corbyn MP. ●

Notes

1. x.com/HRHawkinsNE.
2. www.crowdjustice.com/case/jvl-suspended-lp-officers.
3. x.com/chelleryn99.
4. docs.google.com/document/d/1ezGpP0tK1CMHjmHhQb_pFD0z2EpfaHGYaFOu7Qkxg/edit.
5. www.themany.uk/candidates.
6. x.com/WokeratiMarty/status/2010024452587962572.
7. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/146872/14-01-2026/letter-to-your-party-from-the-socialist-party.
8. www.yourparty.uk/cec-elections-rules.
9. chat.whatsapp.com/G7CPGOeBIFKt9RH5ZR3FO.

OUR HISTORY



On strike: Tyldesley miners outside their hall in 1926

Approaches to the General Strike

Class was pitted against class. The question of state power was posed. Anyone serious about achieving socialism in Britain must painstakingly and critically study the May 3-12 1926 General Strike. Marking the centenary, **Jack Conrad** begins a series of articles

These articles have their origins in the 1984-85 miners' Great Strike and then the miners' 1992 last stand. Polemical arrows were - no surprise - shot in the direction of the Socialist Workers Party and Militant Tendency (now Socialist Party in England and Wales, Revolutionary Communist Party and Socialist Alternative). Though, naturally, the far more important 'official' CPGB provided the main object of critique, not least because it was a *real* party - a part, the vanguard, of the working class. And, of course, the CPGB was historically the British section of the Communist (Third) International with its organic connections with Bolshevism and the Socialist (Second) International.

Anyway, in 1986 the SWP's founder-leader, Tony Cliff, (and son) wrote a dreadful study of the May 1926 general strike.¹ However, having argued against any kind of call for a general strike throughout the 1970s and 80s, the SWP did a complete U-turn in the 1990s. In fact, it raised, Lazarus-like, the old 'TUC, get off your knees - call the general strike' slogan (the Workers Revolutionary Party coined the slogan in 1976 and you will still find their *News Line* repeating it daily as an article of faith).

The SWP's adopted slogan sounded radical. In reality it rang hollow. Making the TUC pivotal let the SWP off the hook. The TUC general council could be relied upon not to call *the* (or any other) general strike. The TUC was - and still is - essentially the same creature it was in 1926. General secretary Norman Willis was from the exact same mould as TUC general secretary Walter Citrine. What of Ron Todd, Ken Gill and Bob Crow? The left 'firebrands' of their day. Were they really any different from trade union bureaucrats, such as George Hicks, AA Purcell and Alonzo Swales, who provided a left face for the monumental act of betrayal in 1926? The only honest answer is 'no'. And yet, if the pronouncements of *Socialist Worker* in the early 1990s were to be believed, reformists right and left could be pushed, pressurised and persuaded into becoming agents of revolution.

Evidently, the SWP of the early 1990s was well to the right of the 1926 CPGB that Tony Cliff so easily

disparaged. When the SWP called for *the* general strike, it made no reference to the necessity of councils of action, a workers' militia, high politics, subverting the army, let alone fighting for an alternative centre of working class leadership and initiative, which could not only rival the TUC, but the government itself.

For those SWPers who might be tempted to dismiss such talk as wild leftism, that was what Chris Harman, albeit inadequately, was arguing for in *Socialist Worker Review* back in 1985:

Once the point is reached where the slogan of the general strike is correct, you have to be ready to supplement it with other slogans that begin to cope with the question of power - demands about how the strike is organised (strike committees, workers' councils), with how the strike defends itself (flying pickets, mass pickets, workers' defence guards) and with how it takes the offensive against the state (organising within the army and the police).²

Of course, as already noted, during the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85 (and before that in 1972 with the Pentonville five) the SWP was arguing *against* the call for a general strike. Despite the fact that it was both possible and necessary. Harman was trying to excuse the SWP's evident timidity and scare its rank and file with the implications of the general strike slogan - not equip them tactically, strategically and programmatically.

The Tories were better servants of *their* class. Much better. They did everything they could in 1984-85 to prevent other workers joining the miners' Great Strike (the longest mass strike in British history). They bent over backwards to buy off the Militant-led Liverpool council, a railway strike and two national dock strikes. In its own way the SWP complemented them. It bent over backwards to rubbish the demand for a general strike.

If the idea of *really* taking a step along the road to revolution was not enough to scare the SWP rank and file, there was always the labour bureaucracy to reassure them. A general strike was impossible because "the Labour Party leadership and the

TUC general council have sabotaged the movement in solidarity with the miners".³ Undoubtedly true.

What changed?

Did the TUC undergo a sudden conversion between 1984-85 and 1992? Were objective circumstances so much more auspicious? 'No', 'no' and 'no' again. Either way, one would have thought that the decision to launch the call for a general strike would have been done with an extensive article by one of the SWP's main thinkers, maybe Tony Cliff, Chris Harman or Alex Callinicos. More than that, this would have been followed by an open debate, with, inevitably, some branches and individual comrades staying loyal to the old line. But, no, on the contrary, it was done without debate. Then, as now, the SWP had neither programme nor democracy.

Militant did at least defend its call for a 24-hour strike with a short article by Peter Taaffe.⁴ 'Why a 24-hour general strike?' marked a significant left turn. Previously Militant had stuck to its version of the parliamentary road to socialism, enshrined in the periodically re-issued programmatic pamphlet, *Militant: What we stand for*, authored by none other than Taaffe himself. For a moment in October 1992 socialism was no longer reliant on waiting for the next general election and gaining a Labour government committed to a "socialist programme". Instead comrade Taaffe argued that a TUC-called 24-hour general strike *could*, "as the appetite grows with the eating", lay the basis for dual power and finally socialism through transforming organs of working class struggle into organs of working class state power.

Nevertheless comrade Taaffe's method remained highly schematic. We argued that the retreat imposed on the Tory government by the miners should have been used to *prepare* for a general strike which "united all sectional struggles", welding all into one around the fight to smash the Tories' anti-trade union laws.⁵ Militant, by contrast, doggedly stuck to its one-stage-at-a-time call for a 24-hour general strike. Taaffe admitted that in itself it would be unlikely to stop the government in its tracks or force a reversal of its pit closure programme. He also honestly admitted the danger that the TUC would "sanction" a 24-

hour general strike only "as a means of the working class letting off steam".

So comrade Taaffe needed some deft centrist footwork to justify the claim that the "best slogan to prepare the working class for further battles is a 24-hour general strike". Self-evidently a 24-hour general strike could only be a protest action. What begins on midnight and says it will end on the following midnight lacks any internal dynamic in and of itself. Taaffe disagreed. It would be a "political earthquake", after which things would never be "the same again". Furthermore, he promised, a successful 24-hour general strike would be "a powerful warning", and "could fuse the working class together in opposition not just to the government, but to capitalism itself".

How could comrade Taaffe make such a claim for an unofficial one-day holiday? The reasoning was faultless, if formal. "Failure to retreat on the part of the government and ruling class would lay the ground for more decisive action." First, it would seem, a *series* of 24-hour general strikes. Finally though, "an all-out general strike", which "poses the issue of the working class taking power". As can be seen, Taaffe treated working class action, up to and including "taking power", as a series of punishments to be inflicted upon the government if it refuses to back down.

Practical

This stagism is defended in terms of practicality. Hence Militant's case against an open-ended general strike in 1992 was founded on the contention that it would "not at this stage be supported by the great mass of the working class". That may well have been true. But surely it was also the case that support for a 24-hour general strike would "not at this stage" have been supported by the *great mass* of the working class.

Marxists base their slogans on the concrete. By that we do not mean acting as a barometer. On the contrary, we fight for what is necessary. That involves actively linking the present with the future, the now with what needs to be. Of course, we 'enquire' - through discussions, through moving trade union resolutions, through standing in elections - into what the "great mass of the working class" thinks. But we do not meekly accept

the popular verdict. We develop a dialogue, which - given the right conditions - can produce a mass movement, making what is necessary into a material force.

Militant's method, if it were consistent, should see it lowering its sights to the point where its slogans meet the statistical average. That would lead it to bourgeois acceptability and absurdity: a one-hour strike, a one-minute silence? When did the great mass of the working class refuse to pay the poll tax? The highest estimate is that around a third of them did. Yet Militant's slogan was 'Don't pay'. When did the great mass indicate their willingness to vote for its Militant parliamentary candidates? In the April 1992 election all three Militant comrades, including two sitting MPs, lost. Do the great mass of the working class support socialism? Unfortunately not. That has never stopped Militant advocating socialism, albeit, usually, of a reformist variety.

As with the SWP, nowhere in Taaffe's 'Why a 24-hour general strike?' article, was the *idea* of insurrection mentioned. The necessity of the workers arming themselves, the inevitability of violence, was completely ignored. Yet Taaffe admitted that the "very essence" of a general strike, which was meant to flow from his 24-hour protest, "poses the issue of the working class taking power, establishing its own democratic workers' government and state, and organising a socialist, planned economy".

An indefinite general strike is diametrically opposite to a 24-hour Grand Old Duke of York affair, where the TUC safely marches us from Hyde Park to Parliament Square. Government ministers could not shrug it off. Nor could the stock exchange and currency dealers view developments with equanimity. A 24-hour general strike is great as a protest, as a means to demonstrate our strength and as means of organising. Without that, the day after will be the same as the day before ... and maybe herald not revolution, but counterrevolution in one form or another (not least fascism). Moreover, by its very nature a reformist-dominated TUC would do everything in its power to keep things within the well-established conduits of protest politics and through to a quick compromise.

Those on the left who raise the perspective for a general strike, even if it is to be initiated by 24-hour protests, have a duty to link it with the measures needed to defend and take it forward, given the right circumstances, to insurrectionary conclusions. That Taaffe did not is no aberration. In *Militant: What we stand for* he dismisses the “cry” that Militant “would establish a socialist Britain by violence” as a “red herring”. According to him, “It is the capitalists, not the working class or the Marxists, who have always attempted by violence to overturn the results of elections that threaten their position.”⁶ True, but what about a dual-power situation, brought about by a general strike, defended by a well-organised workers’ militia, that has caused profound divisions in the enemy’s state machine?

Remember, the October revolution saw the Bolsheviks, having already won a clear majority in the workers’ and soldiers’ soviets. However, their insurrection was *followed* by the approval won in the peasant soviets (representing the overwhelming mass of the population). Again that was *followed* by elections to the Constituent Assembly.

The fact of the matter is that Militant’s 1992 *Why a 24-hour general strike?* was not about junking the constitutional and parliamentary illusions of the 1990 *Militant: What we stand for*. What took place in 1992 was a left turn within the *framework* of centrism. We have no difficulty whatsoever in proving the point. One week, *one edition* after Taaffe was waxing lyrical about workers’ councils being a “new potential government power”, his paper’s “message to the Tories” was for a “general election now!”⁵ Soon its slogan “For a 24-hour general strike” was being given equal prominence to the slogan, “Force a general election”⁶.

Without doubt *if* the general strike Militant says it wanted actually happened and actually proceeded to the point of dual power, then any left organisation calling for a general election would probably be making a big mistake ... unless we had already won “the great mass of the working class” (the great majority in a country like Britain).

Otherwise the ruling class would attempt to turn a general election into a means of negatively resolving a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situation by turning to the middle classes and the backward, non-activated sections of the working class, outnumbering those who have arrived at revolutionary consciousness and conclusions. That is why the general strike as a tactic must be considered as part and parcel of a strategy of winning “the great mass of the working class”. To achieve that end, high politics - in other words, constitutional demands - are surely vital.

Strikes and more

We shall finish this - the first, introductory article - by touching upon pre-capitalist strikes before turning to the economic and political struggles of the modern, industrial working class.

Sketchy though it may be, pre-class societies provide us with tantalising evidence of what might be called strikes. Chris Knight, the radical anthropologist, suggests that some 200,000 years ago, presumably in Africa, there was a successful female sex strike.⁷ A general act of menstrual solidarity, supported by brothers and sons, which, he says, overthrew alpha male domination and paved the way for an original communism, maintained by a militant egalitarianism. This new social order revolved around a moon-governed cycle of sex strike and big game hunting with the full moon, and cooking, feasting and partying with the dark moon. Original communism allowed for the flowering of human

culture that we know happened during the palaeolithic. The massive explosion of mining red ochre bearing witness to the human revolution (red ochre symbolising life and death: it is used to paint the body in ceremonies and burial rituals).

And, though it is completely non-historic (maybe pacifist invention?), Aristophanes’ play *Lysistrata* speaks for itself - no wonder it was banned by the Greek colonels regime in 1967. It has a storyline with a similar collective action, a sex strike, this time by the wives of the Athenian citizenry during the Peloponnesian war with Sparta. Surely this was more than a farcical idea designed to get belly laughs from the all-male audiences at the Theatre of Dionysus: for sexual gratification they had ready access to prostitutes or *hetairai* courtesans. Every fiction has a grain of truth. Who knows, perhaps in this case some dim memory of the female-led human revolution and the subsequent “world historical defeat of the female sex” that happened with the emergence of class society (Engels).⁸

There were also class strikes (though, it should be pointed out that the women in the ancient world could, quite legitimately, be called a ‘sex class’ because of their oppressed and exploited position). Scraps of papyrus discovered at Oxyrhynchus reveal how the pyramid-builders in Egypt unitedly downed chisel and mallet on repeated occasions to petition for improved rations and living conditions in the necropolis. It is also known that exhausted state slaves of Athens struck and occupied the silver mines of Laurium in 135-133 BC.⁹ The cradle of western civilisation had them walled in and left to starve.

In the corporate feudal town apprentices and journeymen, with the coordination provided by their well-established societies, could win real advances. Nevertheless their strikes were little more than small acts of indiscipline within a highly fragmented, workshop-based, patriarchal system of craft production. Other guild masters regarded them as not much more than a family squabble and an irritating example that others might follow. Writing about pre-industrial England, Edward Thompson makes the telling point that the “insubordination of the poor was an inconvenience; it was not a menace”.¹⁰

The main *collective* form of class struggle employed by those below in ancient and feudal times was not the strike. From Spartacus to Wat Tyler, from Jesus of Nazareth to Thomas Müntzer, the popular classes punctured the supposedly seamless fabric of official society with utopian and sometimes despairing revolt - riot in the city, *jacquerie* in the countryside. Such uprisings could on occasion force upon the upper classes conditions which they regarded as onerous - not the least of which was democracy. However, for all their rights, the Athenian peasant-citizen, the Roman plebeian, the Icelandic yeoman farmer existed in a subordinate position within an oligarchical, slave-owning system.

There was always the danger of the aristocrats of birth or wealth regaining their unrestricted rule. The mob gets drunk quickly and just as quickly loses cohesion. Because of economic geography the peasant is dispersed to begin with. So, even when united revolt overcomes the tyranny of distance, the moment of collective triumph over the manor or town is never permanent. Peasants are pulled back to helpless separation by the irresistible need to plant and harvest. The rulers deserved to fail. But, even when the ruled successfully revolted, they could not provide a viable economic alternative which abolished the reproduction of class relations.

The nascent bourgeoisie - economically a powerful class within

the womb of dissolving feudalism - introduced a dynamic element into the never-ending cycle of primitive revolt. When money *did not* serve them better, when there seemed no other way, the bourgeoisie was quite prepared to smash, terrorise and overturn. To perform such a political act the bourgeoisie needed a universal philosophy of emancipation. To remove kingly, aristocratic and church barriers to their developing economic order the bourgeoisie formed itself into a class of liberators. It not only put men of action - Oldenbarneveltdt, Cromwell, Washington, Robespierre, Garibaldi - at the head of the *popular* movement: it used preachers, poets and pamphleteers - Calvin, Voltaire, Milton, Paine - as the “enchanter’s wand” to inspire the masses with promises of heaven on earth.

Hence the classic form of the *bourgeois revolution* was the barricade, behind which stood the people who had been won to believe they were fighting for *liberté, fraternité and égalité* or - given different times and countries - something equivalent. But, whatever dreams were spinning in their heads, objectively, while they remained under bourgeois hegemony, the participants fought not for the rights of man, but public debt and a home market fit for capitalist accumulation.

Haunting the rise of bourgeoisiedom and the consolidation of the capitalist state - whether monarchical or plutocratic - was the ever-present threat of popular democracy. Levellers and *sans culottes* wanted a political system that would have greatly curbed the power of capital. However, the greatest threat to capitalism was its own creation - the modern proletariat. Sucked into factories, mines and mills by the never-ending and most elementary needs of capital, dispossessed peasants, desperate day labourers, ruined artisans - and their wives and children - were transformed not only into a class of labourers, but a *self-making class* because of a common struggle *against capital*.

The Marx-Engels team were emphatic that individuals become a class only to the extent “they have to carry on a common battle with another class”.¹¹ For workers then, it was not only material conditions of everyday life - housing, education, leisure and work - which moulded them into a class. It was the war against capital: beginning with combinations to limit competition between themselves as otherwise atomised sellers of labour-power. Thompson considers that our working class was formed through self-making economic, political and cultural struggle between the years 1780 and 1832; by which time “most English (sic) working people came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers”.¹²

Marx and Engels were perhaps the first to grasp the *universal* nature of this new class. Other socialists and communists banked on the sectional interests of independent artisans, skilled craftsmen and small farmers. The likes of Henri de St Simon, Charles Fourier and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon came out with various utopian schemes, designed to defend and restore their position. By contrast Marx and Engels looked to the *proletariat as a whole* and the objective movement of history. Because of its lack of property and relationship to other classes, the *proletariat as a whole* has an interest beyond merely improving its own immediate lot.

Economic

Those who own no means of production other than their ability to work have a ready and for them a self-evident weapon at hand to achieve their immediate ends, no matter how limited. The collective withdrawal

of labour-power. That does not mean that, once a strike begins, there is a pre-set mechanism, which operates to take workers up an inexorable series of organisational, political and ideological steps, ending in final liberation.

In and of itself, what Marx called in his pamphlet, *Value, price and profit*, the “incessant struggle” in the workplaces can only be a matter of resistance to the encroachments of capital.¹³ No different, in essence, then to the resistance of artisans, slaves, peasants and journeymen of previous times. That produced pitying concern and offers of benign help from some aristocratic and bourgeois quarters. The working class had yet to constitute itself as a militant class. But, once it had, the real movement began to develop its own momentum and capability for qualitative self-development.¹⁴

When it came to this *real movement*, both Marx and Engels stressed the relationship and yet at the same time the difference between economic and political struggles. The strike to compel a particular employer or a particular group of employers to up wages or reduce hours is and will remain a purely economic struggle, and therefore a containable movement of the underclass. On the other hand, the movement to force through a general wage increase or a general limitation on the working day is *political*, in that it has as its objective the enforcement of *general* interests. General interests unite the working class against the capitalist class ... and the “struggle of class against class is a political struggle”, which contains within it the seeds of a new social order.¹⁵ It is not an either-or situation. Through, or out of, the *training* provided by *separate* economic struggles the conditions are provided for a *political* movement, in which the working class struggles against the state. So a dialectical relationship.

Having been cleaved into separate categories by the rise of capitalism, economics and politics thereby come together again in the working class (the class that can become both the subject and object of history). After even the first few steps, the *generalised* economic struggle *can* take on new dimensions. Met by the forces of the employer and the state’s laws and courts, fighting in an integrated economy, where scabs can easily be brought in, police employed and production transferred, workers are predisposed to and actively search out the totalising world view of Marxism: ie, their own self-knowing, scientific theory. Through these politics the working class can put itself in the leadership of all those who are oppressed.

Even on the lowest level, the cooperation, discipline and primacy of need over profit means that within themselves strikes contain a kernel of both proletarian economics and proletarian state power. As I have said, that does not mean there is an A-to-B course from the trade union strike against the employer to the socialist order. Nevertheless, as we will see, the generalised strike poses a challenge to the system itself. May 1926 being a classic case in point.

Of course, the political movement of the working class comes about because there has already been a certain degree of previous economic development. Capitalism does our groundwork. With the further concentration and centralisation of production, workers thereby come to possess a huge, latent, economic and therefore political, power. One point, one area, one branch of production relies on and is connected with another in a mosaic of national and global interdependence. Strikes affect the immediate employers. They also, if they are *generalised*, even in symbolic form - eg, May

Day and International Working Women’s Day - bind the working class together as a future ruling class: a ruling class that, uniquely, has a vital interest in abolishing all classes, including itself.

Without that there can only be a new form of domination. So, except temporarily, the working class has no interest in a new form of rule, a new form of “political power”.¹⁶ Whether or not politics ceases thereafter is a moot point. What we can say is that the politics of state power - therefore democracy, if we mean by that a form of the state - will “wither away” (Engels).¹⁷

Planned articles

We shall see later, in the next article, that Engels, in particular, took responsibility for combating illusions in the Chartist general strike *strategy*. We shall then, in another article, deal with the opportunist attempt to misuse the polemics of Marx and Engels against the anarchists to distort their whole theory of the class struggle. Having done that, we shall go on to show, during the 1905 revolution in Russia, how Lenin and the Bolsheviks learnt from the masses and *combined* the general strike *as a tactic* with the perspective of insurrection. We shall then examine Rosa Luxemburg and ask what significance there was in the different way she approached the question of the general strike, compared to Lenin.

Our second tranche of articles will deal with the historic conditions which led to the 1926 General Strike itself. Beginning with Britain as the workshop of the world, we trace Britain’s relative decline and the sustained challenge presented by the working class, from the great industrial unrest that began in 1910 and which lasted till August 1914. The platonic threat of the general strike slogan could not prevent the outbreak of world war. But world war produced the conditions for the general strike - conditions which persisted from the end of World War I to the actuality of May 1926.

These articles will show the creativity of the masses and the treachery of the labour and trade union bureaucracy. We shall in particular attempt to separate myth from reality, when it comes to the record of the CPGB, in order to present our own considered assessments and criticisms ●

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REFORM UK

March to the right

Robert Jenrick's defection, Reform UK's consistent lead in opinion polls and talk of Nigel Farage being the next prime minister - all pose urgent challenges for the left. Going ever broader, tailing celebrities, joining a Stop Reform coalition will not do, writes **Eddie Ford**

Recent developments with the Tory Party and Reform UK clearly indicate that something big is happening in British politics.

This was fairly dramatically highlighted by the defection on January 15 of former Conservative shadow minister Robert Jenrick, albeit a move he was bounced into when Kemi Badenoch posted a video saying she had "clear, irrefutable evidence" that he was plotting secretly to join Nigel Farage's party "in a way designed to be as damaging as possible" to the Tories, and hence had to be dismissed. She later told the BBC that "it is not a blow to lose someone who lies to his colleagues" and even said that "this has been a good day" because "bad people are leaving my party", so the Reform leader had been doing her "spring cleaning". Others have labelled Jenrick a "spy", due to the suspicion that he will pass on details of Tory strategy to his new colleagues.¹

Apparently, he had started having conversations with Reform in September and these were being fed back to Badenoch by a "mole" in his team - it being reported subsequently that Jenrick had left "lying around" a printed copy of his full resignation speech and a media plan for defection "like something from *The thick of it*". The plan referred to him as "the new sheriff in town" and "the biggest defection story" Reform has ever had - which is true enough.

Jenrick, having no intention of resigning his seat and forcing a by-election in his Newark constituency, then appeared at a slightly chaotic press conference with a grinning Nigel Farage by his side, at which he delivered a tirade against his old party and former colleagues - declaring that the Conservatives had "broken" the country, "betrayed its voters" and were "rotten". Of course, he himself had served as housing secretary and immigration minister under "rotten" Conservative governments led by Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak.

Defections

Of course, he called on more Tories to follow him into Reform. But only days before, on seeing the defection of former Tory chancellor Nadhim Zahawi, Jenrick, attempting irony, had thanked Badenoch for expelling her former Tory leadership rival and helping "realign the centre-right of British politics". Later, writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, Jenrick called on readers to "join the movement" as "the future of the country is on the line", going on to tell the BBC that he wants to "unite the right".

Then, a few days later, Andrew Rosindell, Conservative MP for Romford since 2001 and shadow foreign office minister, announced on X that he was also defecting to Reform. He cited the Chagos deal as the main reason for his move - though it had been mooted under the Tories.

Farage, naturally, greeted Rosindell as a "great patriot" and denounced Tory "lies and hypocrisy over the Chagos Islands betrayal". This happened to coincide, of course, with Donald Trump suddenly calling the UK government's Chagos plan an act of "great stupidity" - though he initially supported it - and another national security reason why



Speaking at CPAC conference in Maryland, USA

Greenland must be 'acquired' by the US.

So Rosindell became the third sitting Tory MP, after Jenrick and Danny Kruger, to switch to Farage's party. Reform UK now has seven MPs, and has been leading in the opinion polls consistently for many months. A recent Ipsos survey has it on 33%, with Labour on 18% and the Tories on 16%.² There is no rational reason to expect the defections will not continue.

Indeed, at the Jenrick press conference, Nigel Farage stated that a "well-known Labour figure" will defect to the party shortly - with the name of Kate Hoey strongly rumoured. A former Labour MP, she is a fox-hunting enthusiast, a Brexit campaigner and has sat as a non-affiliated peer since 2020 - merely telling Sky News she had not been a Labour member for more than eight years and is "not sure I'm that well-known". Whether Hoey or some other "well-known Labour figure" ends up jumping to Reform, it would not be in the slightest bit surprising, as politics is moving ever more to the right.

Unpredictability

It is not easy to find suitable analogies with the current situation. The formation of the Social Democratic Party, a rightwing split from Labour in 1990 which included David Owen, Shirely Williams and Roy Jenkins, was quite a significant event in its day, seeming to promise a major realignment. But it does not really cut it as a historical comparison, because that concerned the so-called centre in politics. In fact the SDP was a flash in the pan and soon disappeared

in a merger with the Liberal Party. Nonetheless, though Owen, Williams and Jenkins failed in their stated objective of "breaking the mould" of British politics, they did help shift the Labour Party to the right and prepare the ground for Tony Blair and his counter-reformation.

Clearly that could easily be the case with Reform. We have speculated about a possible Tory-Reform pact or even the formation a Tory-Reform Party. However, what is obviously going on with Reform is part of a much larger phenomenon: Le Pen, Meloni, Modi, Putin, etc, etc. Above all, though, there is Donald Trump and his attempt to reboot US global hegemony (Trumpism has nothing to do with US isolationism and allowing other great powers to have their own, legitimate, spheres of influence). Mark Carney is probably right when he said at Davos that we are seeing a "rupture" with the rules-based system, and the old world order is "not coming back".³

While Tory Party obituaries are doubtless premature, the standard pattern in British politics is that the main opposition party *should* be riding high in the opinion polls and winning parliamentary and local council by-elections. But that is not happening - both of the *historically established* parties are incredibly unpopular today.

Nonetheless, polls can be deceptive and will probably go this way and that over the next three or four years. Then there is the first-past-the-post system. After all, the massive Labour majority under Keir Starmer was achieved with a *smaller* share of the vote than Jeremy Corbyn gained in 2019. Certainly what

Morgan McSweeney is banking on is stampeding voters, left, right and centre, into the Labour fold precisely because of the Reform threat.

The SWP's latest Together celebrity popular front wonderfully plays into that narrative (Reform supposedly equalling some kind of "new form of fascism"⁴). Indeed, it is not inconceivable that Your Party MPs - if any survive the next general election - could be tempted into a Labour-led Stop Reform coalition government (perhaps along with the Zak Polanski's Greens and the Scots and Welsh nats).

Ruined

Anyway, there is no denying that Jenrick's defection is a real feather in Farage's cap. Nonetheless, the more defections they get from the Tory Party, not only of councillors, but especially of shadow ministers and leading former ministers, the more Reform comes to look like the Tory Party - and the more Reform will then be associated with 14 years of Tory (mis)rule.

We have had a comical situation where Kemi Badenoch and other Tories cannot entirely make up their minds as to whether Britain is 'ruined' or not, because that poses the awkward question: if it is, who caused that? At the moment, the Tory leader is arguing - not entirely convincingly - that Britain is *not* "broken": rather it faces "challenges" and its "best days are ahead" (unlike her "miserabilist" opponents on the right).⁵

However, the increasingly overriding rightwing narrative has it that the country is broken or ruined, or at least highly damaged. The

trouble with this is, you cannot then ignore the years of Tory government and the role of Tory defectors now in Reform, like Nadine Dorris and Nadhim Zahawi, or Robert Jenrick for that matter. They applauded Boris Johnson, and thus have their share of responsibility for the 'Boris wave' that saw a significant or 'uncontrolled' increase in immigration, following the implementation of new post-Brexit visa rules. In turn, the more possible it is that Reform becomes a Conservative Party mark two.

Nigel Farage is aware of this, of course, writing in the *Telegraph* that Reform was "not a rescue charity for every panicky Tory MP" and that any potential defectors would have to be prepared to admit publicly that the previous Conservative government "broke the country".⁶ Reform exists, he says, to become a *new* force in British politics, not a home for failed Tories.

Therefore, Farage declares in his article, his party will not accept any more defectors *after* the May 7 local elections, in order to dispel the illusions of any Conservative MP who "still clings to the hope that their party can recover and waits until May 8 to try to leave the sinking ship". If so, "they do not understand how rapidly things are changing out in the country", he writes, as Reform has "no interest in rescuing political failures": Farage is only interested in defectors who "truly believe in Reform's fundamental values of family, community and country".

Communists can imagine Nigel Farage as prime minister or a Reform government emerging after the next general election, even if we get immediately hit by all the obstacles to such a scenario. As we have pointed out before, opinion polls are not a prediction of the future - they are a snapshot of where we are now, and things can change very rapidly. Margaret Thatcher was facing a landslide defeat before the Falklands War, but afterwards she was hailed as virtually the new Winston Churchill and won the 1983 election with a majority of 144 seats, marking one of the most decisive election victories in post-war Britain. Then there are Donald Trump's disastrously low poll ratings, which are the second worst in US polling history, when it comes to a sitting US president - the worst, of course, being the *first* Trump presidency.

We are not saying for a minute that this is what a general election will look like. Regardless though, it is still worth thinking about the possibilities that might be confronting us in the not-too-distant future ●

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ECONOMY

Confused and confusing

‘Bring back Keynes’ is the motto, but with some extra emphasis on ‘state capacity’. But, whether it be the Washington Consensus or the London Consensus, bourgeois economists remain at a loss, says **Michael Roberts**

The Washington Consensus was a set of 10 economic policy prescriptions considered in the 1980s and 1990s to constitute the ‘standard’ reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries by Washington DC multilateral institutions, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The Washington Consensus term was first used in 1989 and was the foundation for global policies designed to promote ‘free markets’, both domestically and globally, as well as reducing the role of the state through privatisation and ‘deregulation’ of labour and financial markets: keep government spending and deficits down and let the market do its thing. In effect, the Washington Consensus was a set of economic guidelines for what was eventually called ‘neoliberal’ economics.

The neoliberal consensus came to dominate economic policy because of the apparent failure of post-war Keynesian macro-management in the 1970s, as economic growth foundered and inflation and unemployment rose. The cause of this failure is disputed within mainstream economics: the Keynesians say it was because the economic policy makers changed ‘the rules of the game’;¹ the neoliberals and monetarists said it was because government macro-management distorted the market and just made volatility worse.

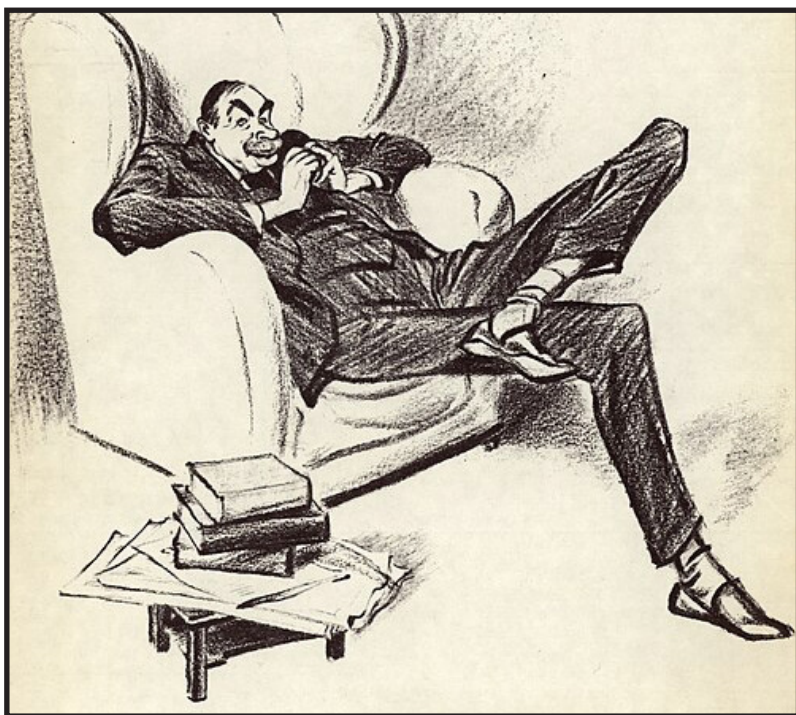
Something had to be done to revive capitalist economies and a change of economic policy was necessary. Away with expensive government spending and interference with markets, crush trade unions, privatise state assets and shift investment to the cheap labour areas of the global south. The successful implementation of these policies during the 1980s allowed profitability to recover somewhat; and so mainstream economics became convinced of the Washington Consensus.

But Marx’s law of profitability again began to exert its pressure on capital. By the end of the 20th century, profitability began to fall again and in 2008-09 there was a global financial crash and the great recession. This exposed the failure of neoliberal policies and the Washington Consensus. Globalisation came shuddering to a halt and the major economies entered a long depression² of low growth in gross domestic product, investment, inflation and employment. It was time for the mainstream to reconsider its economic *Zeitgeist*.

First, there was an attempt to revise the Washington Consensus by the US state department under president Joe Biden. Free trade and capital flows, and ‘no government intervention’, were to be replaced with an ‘industrial strategy’, where governments intervened to subsidise and tax capitalist companies, so that national objectives were met. There would be more trade and capital controls, more public investment and more taxation of the rich. It would be ‘every nation for itself’ - no global pacts, but regional and bilateral agreements; no free movement, but nationally controlled capital and labour. And, around that, new military alliances to impose this new consensus.

Rivals

This revised Washington Consensus was put on hold with Biden’s replacement by Trump in 2025. The Trumpist approach was instead



Maynard Keynes, caricatured by David Low in 1934

enshrined in the recent National Security Strategy document,³ which opened up a whole new ballgame - at least for the US. The Trumpist worldview has generated a new economic approach, so-called ‘geonomics’.⁴ As economics is to be ruled by political moves and the wider class interests of capital have been replaced by the separate political interests of cliques, mainstream economics need a new approach: ie, geonomics.

But now along comes a rival London Consensus, as it is portentously called by a group of economists at the heart of the mainstream, the London School of Economics. From 2023, this consensus was developed by over 50 of the world’s leading economists and policy experts at the LSE. In 2025 they published ‘The London Consensus: economic principles for the 21st century’.⁵

So how does the London Consensus differ from the neoliberal Washington Consensus? In the introductory chapter to the LSE book, the editors, Tim Besley and Andrés Velasco, spell it out. The very first line of the introduction tells the reader the direction of the new consensus - back to Keynes! The editors quote Keynes’s well-known epigram: ‘It is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.’ This implies that getting policies right will get economies right. Actually, Keynes’s idealist view is wrong. It is precisely ‘vested interests’ (or the economic interests of the ruling class) that drives ideas. Keynesian macro-management gave way to neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus in the 1980s because Keynesian policies were no longer working for the interests of capital: ie, profitability was falling. Now neoliberalism has been exposed too and so new ideas for the interests of capital must emerge.

That the authors of the London Consensus fail to see this is revealed by their next comment: ‘There is no ‘grand designer’ charting the evolutionary course of the world, where trial and error shape change. So does luck: societies have yet to prevent happenstance from determining their destiny.’ So what happens in economies is just random chance: there are no general laws that can provide guidelines to changes and trends in economies; all we can do is react to changing circumstances.

And what are these changing

circumstances in the 21st century that have driven gaping holes into the ideas of the Washington Consensus? The LSE authorstellus: ‘... new challenges are easy to list: climate change, loss of biodiversity, pandemics, assorted inequalities, the unwanted effects of tech, a fragmenting world economy, populism and polarisation, war on the European continent, waning support for liberal democracy in many countries’. Yes, quite a lot - indeed, what has been called a polycrisis for capitalism.

Mainstream

So what changes should mainstream economics make to adjust, change and replace the Washington Consensus with the London Consensus? The authors aim to maintain a market-based economy, but alongside more egalitarianism. The Washington Consensus concentrated on the former: the London Consensus wants to add the latter.

First, some things need to be restored: in particular, globalisation. According to the authors, globalisation created many good things for the world’s population: ‘... it is hard to argue against the proposition that the huge drops in global poverty that followed were due, at least in part, to greater economic openness.’ Really? All empirical studies show that global poverty levels (however you measure them) fell after the 1990s, almost exclusively because of the leap forward in per capita income in the most populous country in the world, China.

Another insufficiently appreciated aspect of globalisation, according to the authors, is how ‘rents’ are distributed. But what are these ‘rents’? This is clearly the Keynesian view of ‘imperfect markets’ and monopolies. You see, ‘profits’ are OK (the word ‘profit’ is used only once throughout the introductory chapter), but ‘rents’ are not. Rents are assumed to be ‘pure profits’: ie, income extracted through monopoly. This is the cause of inequality and efficiency, our LSE experts think: profit as value appropriated by capital through the exploitation of labour and redistributed through competition among capitals is accepted. And yet profit is by far the largest proportion of surplus value gained by capital.

Even concentrating just on ‘rents’, as the LSE authors do, raises a problem. Rents cannot easily be taxed, it seems:

“There are technical issues around identifying and measuring rents rather than normal returns [‘normal returns’ are what the authors mean by ‘profits’]. The task is especially difficult in a world of creative destruction, where profits motivate innovation.” Indeed! Here the authors refer to the ‘creative destruction’ growth ‘paradigm’, for which Philippe Aghion and John Van Reenen have just received the so-called Nobel economics prize.⁶

The LSE authors conclude from this that: “Innovation rents” (in reality, profits) are necessary for growth, but they can turn into monopoly rents, which are bad. So we do not want to tax profits (ie, ‘innovative rents’); only ‘pure profits’ (ie, rents). But we may have to tax attempts to monopolise innovation and create rents. So this is complicated. “If the system limits competition and fails to tax rents, that is sure to undermine faith in the market system.” But taxing wealth is not a way out of this conundrum. That is because “wealth is hard to measure and often portable across borders. Without a level of global cooperation that is unrealistic today, wealth taxes are unlikely to raise much larger revenues.”

Maybe the answer is not trying to redistribute ‘rents’ to productive uses through taxation, but intervening directly into the productive process. The authors go on: “... relying on the market for most allocation decisions is often right, when considering private production”. But “not all economic and social ills can or should be corrected by post-production redistribution. Some need to be corrected before or during production, in what some are now calling ‘pre-distribution’.” And they quote former International Monetary Fund chief economist Olivier Blanchard from his contribution to the LSE volume that “it may be that more direct intervention in the market process, rather than the redistribution process, is needed”.

This tentative hint towards common ownership of private capital and state investment is quickly dismissed, however. So public ownership of key sectors to direct economies is not part of the London Consensus - no surprise there: after all, our authors are followers of Keynes, not Marx. But, being followers of Keynes, they argue for increased “state capacity”. What does that mean? It means using the state to support the market economy, it seems. “Contrary to the mythical libertarian ideal of the small state, creating a functional market economy requires an array of market-supporting institutions, both legal and regulatory. A market does not develop in many countries because the state is too incompetent and weak.”

But the authors do not advocate a leading investment role for the state in capitalist economies. For them, state capacity means:

revenue-raising capacity to pay, without excessive recourse to debt, for the things government does; legal-administrative capacity, to provide a stable framework, in which private agents can take decisions - especially investment decisions, which involve parting with resources today in exchange for an uncertain return in the future; and delivery-capacity - not just to design policies, but to implement them effectively.

So this is really little different from Keynesian macro-management of the post-war period: “Government

plays the role of insurer of last resort, given that private markets cannot provide insurance. The second policy is for government to become a market-maker of last resort, helping to prop up financial markets that freeze at times of macroeconomic stress.” So, bail out any mess caused by the capitalist sector. And “fiscal policy must be prudent (and reduce net debt) in good times. So the new activism is far from a call for ‘anything goes’, when it comes to fiscal policy: on the contrary, it requires substantial fiscal prudence, and the institutions that make that prudence possible.” Thus the macro-management of budgets.

What about the finance sector? How do we avoid another global financial crash as in 2008? Apparently,

... market-determined credit allocation remains a goal in the London Consensus. But we place a great deal more emphasis on regulation to prevent lending booms and busts. Creating an institutional environment for micro and macroprudential regulation is now the name of the game, for central bankers and banking supervisors across the world.

Classic response

Here we have the classic mainstream response to the 2008 crash: more regulation (but not too much, in case it blocks credit for capitalist enterprises).

The irony here is that, at the apex of the 2008 crash, the then queen of the UK visited the LSE and greeted the assembled experts with the question, ‘Why did you not see this happening?’⁷ The LSE experts were nonplussed and only issued a response in a letter a few days later. What was the cause of the financial collapse, according to the authors of the London Consensus? They reckon that “the benign economic circumstances that preceded it allowed for the build-up of imbalances in the financial sector - a phenomenon that illustrates how the financial sector can itself be an important source of shocks, and how proper financial regulation is an essential component of policies to keep the economy stable”.

Apparently, too much deregulation of speculative finance was the cause of the 2008 crash and “the lesson from all of this is a renewed emphasis on both macroprudential and competition policy in finance, both to reduce volatility and to create fairer economic structures”.

The London Consensus authors return to the maxim of their hero, Keynes - namely that ideas drive economic interests, not vice versa. To this theme, the authors argue that the biggest difference between the Washington Consensus and their London Consensus is that now ‘it is politics, stupid!’ that matters, not economics ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/03/02/changing-the-rules-or-changing-the-game.
2. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/12/22/visiting-the-theory-of-long-depressions.
3. See www.brookings.edu/articles/breaking-down-trumps-2025-national-security-strategy.
4. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/05/13/geonomics-nationalism-and-trade.
5. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/lse-022-chapter1.pdf.
6. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/10/24/depression-and-creative-destruction.
7. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/12/03/why-real-world-economics-matters.

AGGREGATE

At home and abroad

Our first members' aggregate of the year discussed both developments in Your Party and the mass movement in Iran. We are living in challenging times and the left is programmatically ill-equipped. **Mike Monitor** reports



Comrade Carla Roberts introduced the first session of the January 18 aggregate on Your Party and its left. She noted that elections to the central executive committee are now in progress and “everybody has thrown his or her hat in the ring”.

Should mainly Corbyn supporters get elected to the CEC, the result will be that YP will be merely something like Momentum - decision-making by referendums and an alienated membership. Corbyn has publicly announced that he will be campaigning to overturn the November founding conference decisions for collective leadership and for allowing dual membership (with CEC permission). Symptomatically, some people who had been invited to be on the Corbyn slate (but had not agreed) had been asked to sign up to banning Socialist Workers Party members. And witch-hunting will not stop there. Chris Williamson (former Labour MP, more recently of George Galloway's Workers Party) attempted to stand for the CEC on Steve Freeman's 'Republic Your Party' platform, but has been blocked on the basis of dual membership. Dave Nellist of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, also a former Labour MP, also wants to stand; SPEW has sought clarification of their members' eligibility to stand, reported comrade Roberts, but has so far received no reply.

Corbyn's The Many slate appears to be having difficulty in obtaining support other than from sycophants, with several well-known activists refusing to sign up. The conduct of the founding conference dismayed many who are opposed to the SWP and its methods.

Zara Sultana has characterised Corbyn's desire to fight to overturn conference decisions for collective leadership and dual membership as an “affront to democracy”. We do not agree. People should have the right to

fight for whatever decisions they think are right to be taken *by a conference* (not by using a referendum). The founding conference decisions were a series of choices between practically unamendable alternatives, selected by the bureaucratic apparatus. The decision for collective leadership is good; the version of dual membership which was adopted is a ‘soft’ means of banning the left. What is needed is to start again with a proper open discussion in local branches and a genuinely democratic conference of elected delegates.

The Grassroots Left slate has been a valuable initiative, continued comrade Roberts, but not that great. Salma Yaqoob and Andrew Feinstein withdrew at a late stage (Yaqoob for family reasons). Its platform on paper is quite good and better than Counterfire's anodyne waffle proposals; the commitment to non-participation in government without a socialist programme is good, especially since the next general election may result in pressure for a ‘Stop Reform’ coalition; so too are demands for abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. On the other hand, the call for MPs to take only a workers' wage is absent; Zarah Sultana's reason for not including it in the platform is evasive.

How well the slate can do is open to question. The requirement for 75 endorsements may effectively prevent GL candidates getting on the ballot, especially given the large number of slates and of ‘independents’ standing. It is also not clear what *form* of single transferable vote will be used - some forms limit the choices.

The negotiations for the creation of the GL slate have lacked transparency and openness. While such negotiations can be privately conducted, they do need subsequently to be reported. The attempts to enact ‘professionalism’ and create a ‘big reveal’ form part of the same problematic news-

Liverpool was not democratic. Nonetheless, Zarah Sultana has characterised Corbyn's wish to overturn the votes for collective leadership and dual membership as an “affront to democracy”. We disagree. Members should have the right to fight against whatever they think is wrong - through a democratic conference, not a rigged referendum

management political culture as the Corbyn side. In this case, the result is demobilising - supporters are left waiting for a formal announcement, while the first website for the slate was amateurish (the relaunched one is much better: grassrootsleft.org). The result has been some unproductive discussions within the platform, mainly about control rather than politics. Zarah Sultana lacks a clear base, except a *de facto* alliance with Democratic Socialists of Your Party, which is a shaky organisation that has been unable so far to stop a number of its own members from standing against the slate. The GL has agreed to admit a number of small organisations to come on board, including the Yorkshire-based Social Justice Party, Workers Power and the Sheffield Left. This may be a road to a longer-lasting left platform in YP.

Discussion

Jack Conrad indicated broad agreement with comrade Roberts' introduction. He did, however, have the impression that the wind had gone out of the sails of Your Party. The referendum to change the CEC numbers got 90% support, but on a low turnout (as with Momentum's plebiscites). A YP petition against US action in Venezuela, which one might expect to be popular, has not reached 20,000 signatures.

An ordinary person being treated as a child by the regional assemblies would be likely to give up on the whole thing, continued comrade Conrad. On the Grassroots Left slate, negotiating top-down is fine, so long as you report openly what is going on - which we are doing (and which has been our policy throughout our existence: light on the scene is essential to democracy). For example, the CPGB PCC has discussed inviting the Democratic Socialists of Your Party to co-sponsor this year's Communist University.

Ken Salt argued that, given the

wind had gone out of YP's sails, the question posed was: at what point do we give up on this project? Would it not be better to put effort into talking to Green Party activists? The latest voting intention poll showed YP at 0.6%, he said, so there is some risk that clinging to the project would mean that the discredit attached to YP could rub off on us.

In my contribution I agreed that the wind seemed to have gone out of YP's sails. It is important not to raise hopes unduly: eg, ‘If only we defeat the Corbyn wing in the CEC elections’ ... This is a highly managed process; and if the Corbyn wing lost practical control, they would walk. The CPGB's project is to unite the *far* left on a principled basis, irrespective of the involvement of the ‘official’ left (MPs, trade union officials, and so on). But the bulk of the far left are only willing to unite if they can have some part of the ‘official’ left on board. This is the same reason why we engage in YP, rather than - as Anti-Capitalist Resistance argue - orienting towards the Greens.

Next up was John Miller, who reported developments in YP Scotland. The HQ bureaucracy is promoting Scots nationalism, with (for example) Jim Monaghan complaining of “English factions”. But the proto-leadership of YP in Scotland is just as much engaged in control-freakery. The Scots supporters of DSYP are out-and-out nationalists, he said.

Stan Kelsey made the point that our involvement in YP, as with previous attempts to create broad-left parties, is tactical. The only principle is that we *should* intervene; the benefit is in getting to closer quarters with the rest of the left. Farzad Kamangar reinforced that point. On the other hand, she thought that we should not hold out too much hope of a return of the left in the Labour Party. We should be cautious about relying on polls to conclude that the wind had gone out of

YP’s sails: they are very much short-term information.

Comrade Roberts, coming back in, agreed on the issue of getting more in touch with the rest of the left. We should also recognise that both the DSYF and Socialist Unity Platform have adopted formulations which are “*Weekly Worker*-adjacent”. We should not underestimate our own influence, and it is worth continuing and deepening our involvement. If the Corbyn wing lost and walked, that would not be the end of the project; a lot of ‘shine’ has come off Corbyn in this process. She agreed with the idea of inviting DSYF to co-sponsor Communist University. On the Greens, she thought that Polanski had merely seized an opportunity, and the party could easily shift to the right and decline in size once again.

Jack Conrad then intervened again to state that the idea of turning to the Green Party is mistaken; it is clearly a petty-bourgeois party. Politics is currently very much froth rather than coffee: the left shifts from one project to another and learns no lessons, or only negative ones: atomising clicktivism, sortition, and so on. In relation to the future of the Grassroots Left platform, we should wait for the outcome of the CEC elections. He agreed that quite a lot of the DSYF platform is close to our politics, but how far its comrades really grasp the actual ideas, as opposed to somebody having copy-pasted bits of them, is another question. The Marxist Unity Caucus in RS21 has similarly borrowed some of our ideas, but is not even willing to talk to us. The left in a YP without Corbyn would blow up, he continued: neither SPEW nor the SWP are ever willing to collaborate with other leftwingers without being in control.

Comrade Roberts responded to the debate, agreeing that no doubt there are some people in the Greens who think they are Marxist, but it is not a working class party, or a socialist party, or one that seeks to overcome capitalism. The Marxist Unity Caucus in RS21 seems in danger of imploding, and RS21 itself is barely hanging on, unable to decide whether to work in YP or not. The Grassroots Left slate is actually holding together because of Zarah Sultana; but she too could be tempted by the Greens. It is impossible to wage an effective campaign without self-activity in the ranks, concluded comrade Roberts.

In sum, the meeting agreed that we should support efforts to strengthen the Grassroots Left slate.

Iran protests

Guest speaker, comrade Yassamine Mather introduced the second session, on the current political crisis in Iran. She said that it is necessary to begin with developments in the world over the last three weeks and the initiatives of the Trump administration. The abduction of Nicolás Maduro from Venezuela might have involved a deal with sections of the regime, but might not. Donald Trump now claims that the US is “overseeing” Venezuela. The purpose of the operation is plainly not to acquire Venezuelan oil because the US is short of oil, but to acquire *control*, and Trump has met with oil company executives to this end.

Comrade Mather noted that the administration has not only withdrawn the US from climate treaties and from numerous international agencies, but has demanded that Denmark surrender Greenland to US annexation - backed up by the imposition of tariffs for disagreement. Then there is the threat of litigation against JP Morgan, the BBC and Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell; and, most recently, the ‘Gaza Plan’ for a Trump-controlled board to manage the ruins.

Against this background, Trump has made a series of contradictory statements about whether he will or

will not embark on a new bombing campaign against Iran in connection with the recent protests and their violent repression. Comrade Mather noted that Mike Macnair has previously argued that the global situation is analogous to the later 19th century decline of the British empire. This can be overstated, but some of Trump’s latest adventures might tend to precipitate US geopolitical decline - although this is not to be immediately expected.

But among the reasons we have to place Iran in this context are the widespread illusions held, by those opposed to the Iranian regime, in international organisations, international law, ‘human rights’ and the ‘international community’ (‘Why isn’t the international community supporting us?’). People who think this way should look at Gaza: the USA has supported genocide (under Joe Biden as much as Trump) and the rest of the ‘international community’ is paralysed. Yet what the international left can do is very limited, said comrade Kamangar.

A lot of current commentary on the crisis in Iran is drawing on ‘realist’ international relations professor John Mearsheimer’s ‘four stages of regime change’: first, cripple the economy through sanctions and manipulate exchange rates; this promotes corruption, which in turn leads to protests; encourage the protests and make them more violent, using *agents provocateurs*; the regime will respond with repression; the last stage is military action to overthrow the regime, which has by now lost all legitimacy. This scenario does match what has been going on. Trump claims the Islamic Republic is about to execute 800 people (which would cross his ‘red line’). And he says, ‘Keep on protesting: help is on its way’...

The situation is also characterised by the total dominance of fake news promoted by the Iranian government, by Mossad, by the latter’s allies in Iran, and so on, continued comrade Mather. For example, a video of what appeared to be a very large protest in Iran, with people burning cars, turned out to be lifted from footage of 2020 riots in Los Angeles.

Why has the USA not yet taken military action? It may still be coming: the US is moving forces; it has withdrawn people from Qatar. But this may be psychological warfare to keep the regime on tenterhooks. On the other hand, it may be that the US assessment of the risks of action has prevented action. This is not about the military strength of the Islamic Republic, but rather that the US administration could not identify clear objectives for military action, and that its lesser allies in the Middle East (ie, lesser than Israel - Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey) were opposed to such action. Thus, for example, in northern Iran demo footage showed plenty of anti-Pahlavi slogans; some no doubt genuine mass sentiment, some perhaps Turkish political intervention.

Further, given the level of terror, a US attack might lead to increased support in Iran for the government, as it did in response to the Israel-US Twelve Day War against Iran. That may not happen, but the government *has* been able to mobilise significant demonstrations. Trump is very much aware of the failure of Jimmy Carter’s 1980 attempt at a military rescue of US diplomats. Moreover, the protests have led to no obvious cracks in the Islamic Republic’s security apparatus, in particular the Revolutionary Guards. The US clearly has been negotiating with office-holders in Iran, although - again - it is hard to tell how many of these stories are disinformation. There is no reason to suppose that Khamenei will accept a ‘cold transition’.

We now know that it is clear that thousands were killed. Supreme

leader Ali Khamenei has admitted it, but blames *agents provocateurs*. Unusually, figures in Mossad and the Israeli establishment are openly claiming that their own agents were at work in the protest movement. Why they should adopt this unusual position is unclear. Suppose the killings are by Mossad *agents provocateurs*: in this case, by blaming them Khamenei is announcing his own regime’s incapacity to defend the country’s subjects against foreign intervention.

It is probable, continued comrade Mather, that a good many deaths are merely the result of the chaos unleashed. It is worth noting - given the widespread left illusion that the chaos will somehow produce workers’ councils, as if from outer space - that the movement could well suffer defeat.

The government’s closure of the internet has worsened the economic situation, especially for the poor, because of widespread dependence on precarious forms of work organised through IT. It has also facilitated the dominance of fake news, since it prevents forces on the ground contradicting it.

There is now acute hardship in Iran due to inflation - prices are comparable to those in the UK, but wages are far below welfare benefits in Britain - and there is evidence of actual food shortages, as occurred in World War II. In this context, the mass protests are quite genuine. The economic difficulties have sanctions at their root; but these are exacerbated by the extent of corruption. This crisis *may* be the beginning of the end of the Islamic Republic, said comrade Mather. But it may not. The regime has shown considerable ability to reinvent itself in a series of past crises.

That *some* protestors are clearly willing to support the restoration of the Pahlavi monarchy is a sign of desperation, but clearly Israeli and British claims massively exaggerate this support. Trump and the US administration, on the other hand, judge that Pahlavi is not that popular.

In terms of the implications of the crisis for the Middle East more generally, the image of Iran in the Arab street is partly fake. Iran did initially support Hezbollah in Lebanon, helping it build a social base through charities. But Hezbollah long since became self-funding, based on the Lebanese capitalist diaspora. As for Hamas, it is basically funded by Qatar. ‘Iranian funding of Hamas’ is a fiction created by the USA.

Nonetheless, the defeats of the Islamic Republic will be a blow in Israel’s psychological warfare against the Palestinians. We have to recognise this - but also avoid the double standards of those who have promoted an illusion of an ‘anti-imperialist camp’ which includes the Islamic Republic, concluded comrade Mather.

Debate

Jack Conrad made the point that from our point of view, as much as from the USA’s, what is missing is any alternative to the regime. There is no sign of a split in the regime. The US no doubt *could* kill Khamenei, but is being advised not to. In 1979 there were alternatives: the left, which was significant; and Khomeini in Paris, linked to a base of support through the mosques. The BBC has been reporting that “the Iranian people came out in response to a call from the Crown Prince” - but when pressed, its commentators say there is not much support for him. *Socialist Worker* says “express your rage”, and that the answer is on the streets. But what then, after you’ve been shot? Especially if you don’t have a *strategy* to break up the armed forces?

Comrade Salt reminded us that in the previous Sunday’s Online Communist Forum Moshé Machover referred, in connection with

Venezuela, to “regime capture” as an alternative to “regime change”. But wouldn’t such a project in Iran require an extraordinary level of mental gymnastics from Islamic Republic leaders, he asked, and are there any indications in this direction?

Comrade Mather, coming back, said that the Islamic Republic is ‘democratic’ only for its own supporters; there are elections and the Majlis, with real debates. But the supreme leader does indirect messaging about who he supports, and the Council of Guardians (which expresses the supreme leader’s ideas) blocked Ali Larijani from standing for president in 2024, for example.

The US no doubt could kill Khamenei, but the result would most probably be a political vacuum. Reza Pahlavi is not a serious person, as incoherent in Farsi as in English. Unable to hold onto his own supporters, and not offering to create a broad coalition, instead he merely promises ‘revenge’. The demonstrations started while he was on holiday and he later attempted to jump on the bandwagon. The 1979 slogan of the left, “Bread, freedom, equality”, has been heard again; but it would be foolish to claim that the left had major influence on the recent protests.

Comrade Salt asked what strategic response was possible to sanctions, as in the case of Venezuela? Could China find a way of outwitting them? Jack Conrad and I both responded on the sanctions question. In essence, they are a form of siege warfare. Their availability means two things: that we have to aim to take power on a continental scale, sufficient to hold out under sanctions *for a time* (as was true of the USSR); second, that we have to have a universalist project, which can potentially reach into and split the *US* armed forces, as the anti-Vietnam war movement began to do. I added, contrary to comrade Salt, that allying with the USA would not involve mental gymnastics for Islamic Republic leaders; they did so in the Iran-Contra affair in 1981-86 and in the US invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. The obstacle is that *the USA* has difficulty in agreeing to anything short of the overthrow of the Islamic Republic, because it needs revenge for 1979-80.

Comrade Mather, summing up, agreed that the only approach to sanctions is to aim for power on a continental scale, and for a political project which can split the US state. The idea that China represents an alternative can be seen to be illusory from China’s failure to come to the aid of Venezuela. Though the Chinese are toying with the idea of international transactions using the renminbi currency, they are still dependent on the hardware infrastructure of Swift, which is US-controlled. In fact their *interest* is primarily in national self-reliance - reflected in the effort to build Chinese AI.

For the USA, ‘Make America Great Again’ is at least in part about recovering from US defeats in the 1970s. That means visible victory over Iran. Israel, on the other hand, supports Pahlavi because of its pre-1979 relations with his father - and to put the Pahlavis back in post would be a major psychological-warfare victory over the Palestinians ●

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

**Working class
politics are
key**

A fog of misinformation

Shutting down the internet has been hugely costly for ordinary people and allowed lies to flourish as never before. **Yassamine Mather** exposes the false narratives and finds hope in the largely ignored working class

Before we can discuss what is actually happening in Iran, we need to clear away the mountain of misinformation - fake news, recycled footage, deliberate lies, and AI-generated or AI-enhanced fabrications - that currently dominates coverage.

The near-total shutdown of the internet is designed to prevent news of protests and repression from circulating. Even though we are not currently seeing huge, nationwide, mass protests, the authorities remain deeply fearful.

In this vacuum, misinformation has flourished. Viral videos have circulated, claiming to show protestors successfully attacking police vehicles, only for close inspection to reveal visual inconsistencies that expose them as fake. Reports have emerged alleging that Indian nationals among the protestors had been arrested - claims so widespread that the Iranian ambassador was forced to publicly deny them in the Indian media. Inflated death tolls, far beyond what is plausible, have also been widely shared.

There have even been allegations of chemical weapons use by security forces, supported by recycled footage from earlier protests in Iran or from entirely different contexts. Clips from 2022 demonstrations, protests in the United States, and even footage of the Los Angeles riots have been repackaged and presented as supposedly taking place in Tehran. The scale of this misinformation is extraordinary.

Alongside this, a flood of pro-Pahlavi content has appeared online. Some of this, in my view, has been actively promoted by Israel's Mossad and at least encouraged by European state institutions. Interestingly, Trump has not fully embraced this narrative - perhaps because he understands more about the limitations of the former shah's son than some European policymakers. On X, I quoted in Persian a comrade who told me last Sunday how surprised he was that, after living in the US for decades, Reza Pahlavi's English was so poor. The tweet went viral and, as I write, has had 208,000 viewers!¹

Poor English is the least of his problems. In a recent video he appears to know next to nothing about the Middle East, referring to Saddam Hussein invading Iraq! American comedian John Stewart has done us a favour by adding his own commentary.²

The climate of misinformation, combined with reports of mass casualties, has fed a renewed wave of regime-change theories. Commentators such as John Mearsheimer have outlined supposed stages of regime change, framing recent events as part of a CIA-Mossad strategy that will eventually culminate in US military intervention.

There is some truth in parts of this framework. Iran has faced severe sanctions, currency manipulation



B2s could easily take out the supreme leader: but then what?

and economic warfare. There have been protests, and there is evidence that provocateurs have played a role in escalating violence. But this does not amount to a coherent path toward regime change.

Sanctions are central to understanding Iran's current crisis. They not only target oil exports: they also effectively block Iran from participating in, for example, Swift (the international banking system). As a result, Iran struggles to sell its oil or receive foreign currency payments. Although it does sell oil to China, it does so at a steep discount. Oil tankers cannot be insured through normal channels, forcing Iran into complex and costly logistical arrangements. Payments are often not made in dollars or euros, but are held in Chinese banks in yuan, or settled through barter. This money does not circulate through Iran's wider economy.

The beneficiaries of this system are not ordinary Iranians, but state-linked oligarchs, private elites and institutions such as the Revolutionary Guards. The result is deepening poverty, inequality and economic instability for the majority of the population.

Iran's foreign assets remain frozen in western countries, preventing the state from stabilising its currency. Foreign direct investment has collapsed. Contrary to earlier assumptions, the most recent currency crisis was not a gradual decline, but a sudden fall of around 30%, triggered in part by developments in the UAE. Dubai functions as a key external hub for Iranian currency exchange and, when confidence collapsed there, the sudden fall became inevitable.

Economic protests

It is misleading to claim that the protests were purely economic at first and only later became political due to foreign interference. In a dictatorship, economic protests always become political. The Iranian state was simultaneously negotiating, repressing and attempting to contain unrest.

Claims that protests were sparked by calls from Reza Pahlavi are

simply not credible. Even Pahlavi himself has now distanced himself from that nonsense, denying that he called on people to take to the streets. Nonetheless, global media outlets - including the BBC and its wider echo chamber - continue to promote this narrative.

Foreign agents

There is evidence of some external involvement. Israeli officials and media have proudly claimed covert activity inside Iran, and credible reports suggest that armed, organised individuals played a role in escalating violence on specific nights. But these actors were not leading a revolutionary movement. They functioned as provocateurs within much larger, popular protests.

I heard a first-hand account of one protestor, telling me that the section of a demonstration she was on was shot at from behind - in other words, from inside the demonstration. A relative told me he witnessed shooting of the protestors by security forces, but what has made him sleepless is the beheading of someone who appeared to be a fellow protestor. Clearly it was not just the Islamic Republic's security services who were killing the demonstrators. The Palestinian Authority's ambassador to Iran, Salam Al-Zawawi, was hospitalised after an attack on her residence during protests in northern Tehran. It is difficult to imagine anti-government protestors targeting her. This has all the hallmarks of Mossad.

What is left after the protests is anger - not just against the regime, but also those who were telling Iranians to protest, as 'help' in the form of military intervention was on its way: ie, Trump, Netanyahu and Pahlavi.

We now know that thousands have been killed. Based on available and relatively reliable information, the toll likely exceeds 4,000. Supreme leader Ali Khamenei himself has acknowledged that the number of deaths runs into the thousands, even as he attempts to shift blame onto foreign agents.

I would argue that, if there is any truth in this claim, this admission means that after nearly

half a century in power the Islamic Republic is incapable of preventing mass infiltration by foreign agents - or many citizens are willing to collaborate with them. This represents a devastating indictment of the Islamic Republic. A state that cannot protect its own citizens from foreign agents cannot plausibly claim to be in control of the country.

Meanwhile, the ongoing internet shutdown has intensified fear and uncertainty, both inside Iran and across the diaspora. Families cannot contact their loved ones. Journalists, doctors and emergency workers are unable to function effectively. Everyday systems - from education and healthcare to traffic enforcement and banking - depend on internet access.

The economic consequences are severe. Large sections of Iran's workforce survive through precarious and gig-based employment. When the internet shuts down, these workers lose all income, not just part of it. Hunger, anxiety and poverty deepen. Attempts to bypass the shutdown through satellite services such as Starlink have largely failed due to state jamming and the cost involved.

In recent days, some shops have reopened, but consumer activity remains extremely low and cash dispensing machines do not function. Interviews - while uneven in reliability - consistently point to despair and hopelessness. This is not surprising.

External media had raised expectations of imminent regime collapse and foreign support. But when repression returned with full force, the psychological impact was devastating. This sense of loss can be more damaging than the conditions that existed before the protests began. The *Financial Times* on January 18 reported from a busy square in eastern Tehran:

... the shoppers and commuters that typically fill this bustling commercial hub of eastern Tehran have been replaced by black-clad riot police. At least one masked sniper is visible, perched on top of one of the armoured vehicles that now dot the square. At the

centre of the scene is the charred shell of a municipal bus, burned down in the protests that tore through Iran this month. Draped across its blackened remnants is a banner bearing a blunt message reminding citizens of the cost of the unrest: "This was paid for with your taxes."³

Rooted organisation

Despite repeated threats and contradictory statements from Donald Trump, direct US military intervention has not materialised. Claims that Trump personally prevented mass executions are implausible.

Several factors explain this restraint: the strategic risks of regional war, pressure from US allies, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and fears of wider instability. Turkey, pursuing its own rivalry with Israel and regional ambitions, positioned itself firmly against any Pahlavi restoration, while seeking to bolster its pro-Palestinian credentials.

There was also no consensus on who would replace the Islamic Republic. Reza Pahlavi lacks credibility, organisational capacity and popular support inside Iran. Even within the limited field of the bourgeois opposition, he is arguably the least viable option. Rumours that the US was negotiating with Iranian regime 'reformists' seem well founded. But these figures lack the support of the Revolutionary Guards, who remain firmly loyal to the supreme leader.

Appeals to international human rights institutions will not deliver liberation for Iran. The same global order that issues UN resolutions and ICC rulings has done nothing to stop genocide in Gaza. Associating Iranian protests with Netanyahu or western intervention only discredits them further. The Iranian people face two enemies: a brutal internal dictatorship and a predatory external imperialism. Aligning their struggle with either is disastrous.

The most important - and most ignored - voices in this crisis are those of Iran's working class. Oil workers, bus drivers, sugarcane workers and other organised labour groups have issued statements and leaflets that are clear, principled and consistent. They reject the shah's son, oppose foreign intervention and stand against the Islamic Republic.

These voices point toward the only viable path forward: independent working class struggle rooted inside Iranian society itself. Everything else - media speculation, regime-change fantasies and external 'saviours' - lead only to defeat. That is the reality we must confront •

Notes

1. x.com/yassaminem/status/2012991600104730790.
2. x.com/i/status/20135346499873885
3. www.ft.com/content/941878e6-a33d-44b7-9f04-fb4e9b117a78.