

# weekly **worker**



**Private property and war go hand-in-hand. Getting rid of war goes hand-in-hand with getting rid of private property**

- Letters and debate
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No 1577 March 19 2026

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

## **Nationalist defencism needs to become revolutionary defencism**



## LETTERS



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

## YP Scots split

Your Party in England and Wales is done for good. A project which many had viewed as a potential 'party of the whole left' - a mass socialist party of the likes of the former Social Democratic Party of Germany, of today's Democratic Socialists of America - has been killed, with finality, by the bureaucratic cult surrounding Jeremy Corbyn.

They completely outmanoeuvred, in quick succession, Zarah Sultana's early dissident bureaucrats in the MOU Operations faction, the Socialist Unity Platform at the inaugural conference, and the Grassroots Left slate in the central executive committee elections, where The Many won 65% of seats, even though they only had 38% of first-preference votes, due to the gerrymandered 'two-seat-per-region' mandate, in concordance with use of the obscure imperial system. Now they seek to make the party a sect like any other - except it's centred on Corbyn's personality.

In Scotland, however, the inaugural conference occurred under less intervention from the bureaucratic leadership of His Sect, under the aegis of a broadly democratic organising committee, elected from branches. It has permitted dual membership, and seems to be broadly more functional than the leadership down south. At its conference, it resolved to become organisationally independent from the English YP - as a sister party rather than a subservient branch.

The interim Scottish EC has, like everyone with a mind, been frustrated by the bureaucratic obstructionism and inaction of the TM-majority CEC. Additionally, unlike in England, the Scottish Greens have no Polanski, and I'm given to understand they retain their old milquetoast politics. With the Scottish Socialist Party dead, there still remains an open niche for a functional, pan-leftist, left-of-Labour party in Scotland.

The Scottish Your Party, to me, seems to be entirely capable of fulfilling that niche. Their only issue is headquarters - funding must pass through Karie Murphy before coming to them; that headquarters, not the Scottish party, in many ways controls their action simply due to reasons of money. This dynamic has already been experienced by the Scots, following the pathetic inaugural meeting.

The right thing for Your Party Scotland to do, therefore, is to secede. To formally sever all ties with headquarters, while it still has the chance, and to get started on the work of running in Holyrood, amongst many others. It should, ideally, rename itself at the next conference, and strive to reconstitute itself based on the ideal of a 'party republic'.

There remains only a small window during which this will work. Should it be squandered, YP Scotland will end up the same way as YP in England and Wales - nothing more than a bureaucratic corpse. Therefore, decisive action is imperative. The alternative would be unconscionable.

**David Rüper**  
email

## Provo YP

On March 12 the first meeting of a provisional grouping of Republic Your Party was held. The purpose is to continue building on our work around the central executive committee elections by preparing for a founding meeting of a membership-based Republic YP and the next stage of our agitation for a republican Your Party.

During the CEC elections RYP campaigned for: a democratic secular republic; the end of the union; an English parliament; autonomous YP parties in England, Scotland and Wales.

In addition, Republic YP: supported dual membership; opposed all exclusions and expulsions of dual members.

RYP wrote to Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana to seek dialogue with the joint leaders of YP over exclusions and expulsions. In the absence of any reply to our letter, RYP started a petition of members supporting our letter defending members rights and demanding dialogue instead of bureaucratic exclusions.

The initial membership of RYP Provisional is drawn from those who stood as CEC candidates or who RYP endorsed because of their support for our policies above.

RYP Provisional is a temporary organisation with limited aims until a founding meeting takes place and RYP members can conduct elections for any officers.

RYP Provisional has the right to coopt members, issue statements and conduct negotiations in its own name.

**Republic Your Party**  
email

## YP questions

YP membership officer Cassi Bellingham spoke at the Oxford proto-branch meeting on Tuesday March 17, reporting on CEC activity. A few points of note:

There was quite a bit of fear-mongering about the potential for obstruction caused by political disagreements. Presumably that is meant to justify the way TM steam-rolled GL at the most recent meeting.

In particular, they don't want to commit to any set cadence of CEC meetings out of fear this would be used by political opponents to cause problems if they ever need to change it.

Nonetheless, for the first while they expect the CEC to meet roughly every two weeks. Eventually they expect it might settle into a monthly schedule.

She seemed to indicate it would take a few months for branches to be set up. The first few would be slow but then they'd come quickly.

She said there is a very large file of complaints about badly-functioning proto-branches (people excluded, multiple competing branches claiming jurisdiction, etc).

They are kicking around various proposals for this but they don't want to publish anything yet, as it's too immature.

She suggested branches might correspond to borough or district council boundaries. Not quite sure how that is likely to work, given the move towards unitary authorities in much of the country. It would suggest they'll need to merge a bunch of branches down the line.

I asked what would happen if they can't meet quorum at the inaugural meeting. She suggested the whole notion of quorum for this is a hangover from an overly-bureaucratic Labour Party culture. If they have a number of inaugural meetings that fail to reach quorum then they'll do a referendum to change the constitution.

She said they want branches to work in a new way. She was quite vague about this, but mentioned community assemblies. She was saying how we don't just want to following the usual Labour procedures like electing a chair and a treasurer. (I'm not clear how a branch could function without those roles). There was an emphasis on action rather than debating and making decisions.

She said they want to move away from "old-school" branches where everyone spends too much time

"debating and deciding things" that they run out of time to plan getting out into the community. They are looking at "more like an assembly model", which is a strong implication that branches are going to be consulted but will not do very much "deciding". They plan to take proposals for this to the CEC on Sunday.

She said that they will set up a mass-mailing system that branch officers can use to contact members in their area. However, branches will apparently never be given access to the membership list. She said that "some candidates" were promising this in the election but this just isn't legal. She said the Electoral Commission's best practice is to only provide a mass-mailing platform.

I tried to find this best practice but it doesn't seem to exist and I don't think the Electoral Commission has anything to say on member data. I checked the ICO website but it doesn't mention anything about member data either. I'm pretty sure that whole argument is bullshit. Local union reps are able to access lists of members in their branch, after all, so I don't see why the same couldn't apply to political parties.

She made a lot of how the party is on thin ice legally with the ICO and the Electoral Commission, due to the issue with the two membership portals. This was used to justify the extreme caution HQ is taking around funds and data.

**Concerned member**  
Oxford

## Accessible Marx

I would like to concur with the letter by comrade Frank Kavanagh (March 5), where he decries the lack of Marxist education in the *Weekly Worker*. Writing with a Marxist lens can often be blustery or terse at the best of times, and Marxist writings are difficult to break into for the newly informed and even the experienced. We cannot make a patronising assumption that every reader is well seasoned, well versed and thoroughly educated in all of our terminology and theories.

It is a risky proposition and a dangerous one. Much like 'academese' language often used in the arts, we risk placing Marxist thought and analyses of current events into a preserve of intelligentsia - forgetting that it is a movement of the working classes and making Marxism inaccessible to those who are at the core of the class struggle.

Taking time out from busy modern lives and work, it would be wonderful to study Marxist thought more, but for some workers this is just not a possibility. Being a further education lecturer, my annual leave is at the mercy and will of my employer.

A focus on educational writings would be a step change and one, I suspect, that would be positively received all round. Otherwise we risk repeating the mistakes made in 1922 by trade unionists and, instead of galvanising the very workers whose chains we wish to break, leaving them in the dust.

**Aaron Swanick**  
Manchester

## Another Titanic

All over the internet Gary Stevenson - former trader and author of *The trading game* - makes a clarion call from his YouTube page to tax the rich and end inequality in society. He's hoping for five million subscribers as a form of petition to pressure the government to reduce the distress for the middle and working classes.

He sees wealth as assets, but the working class as victims, not the agency creating wealth that can decide a future for themselves. Ten years ago we heard the same from Thomas Piketty with his book, *Capital in the 21st century*, where he obfuscates

capital with inherited wealth with two complicated equations.

Marxists think differently about power and wealth, and how we can organise not just the national state, but also internationally. The rich will never voluntarily give up their status and power, but neither do they want to commit suicide by bringing the general public to the brink of revolution. Marx envisioned a society where "each according to their ability, each according to their need" contributes and, through an organised International, the working class of each country can organise worldwide.

Capitalists resort to looking at how technology has advanced to improve our lives and laugh at the failed 'communist' societies - shrilly explaining that people are far too self-indulgent and selfish for change and anyway charities fulfil the task of helping anyone dropping out of society.

The Communist Party's organisation must be based on democratic centralism - not the 'bureaucratic centralism' the rest of the left uses: the more the working class enters the party, the more democratic the party becomes.

Instead of pleading to bourgeoisie politicians for a wealth tax, like Stevenson does, or lying prostrate before the super-rich capitalists, we should identify the demographic of workers and students who take to our ideas - otherwise we'll be organising the deck chairs on the Titanic!

**Frank Kavanagh**  
email

## Weekly satire

The Labour government has issued a stern warning to energy companies that they must not do the thing that they have already been warned against doing for years. Companies are being politely urged not to resort to "profiteering" and "price gouging" over the US-Israeli war in Iran and subsequent supply issues in the Strait of Hormuz, despite their long-standing success in doing both without the help of a war.

On *Sunday with Laura Kuennsberg* the secretary of state for energy, security and net zero, 'Red Ed' Miliband, was presented with evidence suggesting that fleeing the public had in fact become the energy companies' core business model over the past few decades. Red Ed admitted that, although the energy market "hadn't been working well" for some time and that the government had indeed been "warning them" about it, he was sure that issuing another warning showed the government was "fighting for ordinary people".

Kuennsberg suggested that CEOs thought another warning was "inflammatory" - which, they noted, was hardly ideal language, when you're already pouring fuel on the fire, then acting surprised when the public gets a bit heated. Red Ed was quick to clarify that he and the chancellor were only issuing a "warning shot" - nothing more - and that it is far too early to commit to taking any action beyond the warning.

With people already struggling to meet energy costs - an estimated 6.1 million households are unable to afford heating, as of early 2026 - those reliant on heating oil saw suppliers double prices almost overnight, following the initial US/Israeli strikes on Iran. Industry insiders explained that, although the fuel currently on sale was purchased months ago at far lower prices, market realities mean prices must rise immediately. Any possible future reductions, however, would need to go through the appropriate procedures - a process expected to never materialise.

Labour officials confirmed they are continuing to keep a close eye on the situation, and will act decisively if the warnings fail to warn sufficiently. Until then, UK households can take comfort in knowing that while the country remains at the mercy of global markets' reliance of fossil fuels, the government has confirmed its warnings remain fully renewable.

**Carl Collins**  
email

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday March 22 5pm  
**US-Israel: what are their war aims?  
Political report from the CPGB's  
Provisional Central Committee and  
discussion**

Use this link to register:  
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A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)

# IRAN

# Peering through the fog of war

One leader after another is being assassinated. Apart from that, Trump's war aims remain contradictory and unclear. The regime is certainly not going to spontaneously collapse, argues **Yassamine Mather**

It is often said that truth is the first casualty of war. The events of the past few weeks have confirmed this once again.

I have been inundated with messages presenting completely contradictory claims. Some insist that Iran is on the brink of collapse - that the regime is finished. Others cite headlines from established outlets such as *Foreign Policy* and *The Guardian*, suggesting instead that the United States and Israel may be "biting off more than they can chew".

Both narratives should be treated with caution. The reality is that we simply do not know what is happening with any certainty. Both sides are highly secretive, and reliable information is scarce. Israel, for example, has imposed strict limits on reporting. There is virtually no independent verification of damage to its infrastructure, casualties or military outcomes. Even journalists on the ground in Israel - such as BBC correspondents - are forced into shelters by sirens and subsequently admit that they cannot confirm what targets have been hit and what raids intercepted.

The limited visual evidence available from Israeli cities - such as footage broadcast by *Al Jazeera* - does show damage to buildings, including what Iran claims are Mossad-related facilities, but whether these claims are accurate remains unclear. One conclusion, however, is unavoidable: the claim that Israel's Iron Dome has provided total protection is false. Meanwhile, discussions - reported in outlets such as *Haaretz* - about the potential use of nuclear weapons underline the dangerous pathways under consideration. While it is hoped that such options will remain hypothetical, their mere discussion reflects the severity of the strategic impasse.

At the same time, Iran's own reporting is selective and curated. It highlights damage within its territory - possibly to generate nationalism or stoke up anger. For example, the destruction of the Institute for Aeronautic Studies - a facility combining academic and military aerospace functions - has been widely shown.

Importantly, not all targets appear to be strictly military. Civilian areas and infrastructure - such as food depots - have also been struck. This suggests a broader strategy aimed at undermining morale and creating a sense of vulnerability among the population.

## Ambiguity

Both sides claim that the other is seeking a ceasefire, while presenting themselves as unwilling to concede. Whether this is bluffing or for real is impossible to determine.

Donald Trump's war objectives have been somewhat ambiguous, oscillating between limiting Iran's nuclear programme, getting an acceptable supreme leader, or forcing total surrender. Initial expectations from the US leadership appear to have been based on a flawed assumption: that the elimination of key figures would trigger collapse. Well, Ali Khamenei, Mohammad Pakpour, Gholamreza Soleimani, Ali Larjani, and now Esmail Khatib have been killed and, of course, the regime has not collapsed.

Some of Trump's statements suggest confusion. According to



Understandably Iranians are rallying to a nationalist defencism

various accounts, people such as Benjamin Netanyahu and Jared Kushner may have reinforced this expectation, presenting an image of widespread internal opposition and the readiness of unarmed civilians to overthrow the regime. But, in fact, so-called hardliners continue to strengthen their position in Tehran. That, and rising oil prices due to the partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz, are increasing domestic pressure on Trump to end the 'costly war'.

Within the Iranian regime there are certainly those who are determined to fight for as long as possible. Their perspective draws on the claim that after the 12-day war in June 2025 Israel sought a ceasefire, which Iran accepted, despite knowing that war would soon be restarted. In retrospect, many in the current leadership now appear to regret that decision. The ceasefire allowed Israel time to re-equip, foment internal unrest and gather intelligence in preparation for further strikes.

This line of reasoning seems to shape Iran's current posture. There is a growing perception within the regime that this must be a decisive confrontation - either the system survives and neutralises the threat, or it collapses entirely. What is rejected is a prolonged, cyclical conflict marked by temporary pauses and renewed escalation.

Some of the most significant effects of the war are psychological rather than purely military. The bombing of oil reserves near Tehran illustrates this clearly. Residents describe waking to skies darkened by smoke, with one observer likening it to a solar eclipse. Although rainfall later cleared the air, the immediate impact was profound. Religious narratives quickly emerged, interpreting the weather as divine intervention - showing how ideology can interact with wartime experience.

Similarly, the attack on Kharg Island, while directly targeting military facilities rather than oil production, exposed vulnerabilities in Iran's energy infrastructure. The island's proximity to Kish - a major destination for affluent Iranians - has heightened fears among those who had fled Tehran seeking safety. These developments demonstrate that the war is not only about destroying assets, but also about reshaping perceptions of security and stability across different social classes.

Reports suggesting widespread

support for Reza Pahlavi have clearly been exaggerated, in part due to coordinated online amplification. Even institutions such as the BBC acknowledge privately that they have been misled by such campaigns.

## Internal dynamics

However, the absence of support for opposition figures does not equate to support for the regime. Instead, what is emerging is a more complex phenomenon: a form of defensive nationalism. Recent statements by Trump - particularly those hinting at redrawing Iran's borders or employing racist generalisations about all Iranians - have had a counterproductive effect. Rather than weakening the regime, such rhetoric has pushed segments of the population to rally around the state, even if they remain politically opposed to it. This is visible in mass demonstrations, where participants avoid official slogans or symbols, but still mobilise against foreign aggression. It is also reflected in everyday acts, such as volunteering to donate blood, with reports of long queues in Tehran. In this sense, the war has generated a 'wartime society' dynamic, where national solidarity temporarily overrides internal divisions.

Despite the pressures of war, the state has managed - at least for now - to maintain a degree of economic stability. Prices have reportedly been kept under control, likely through coercive measures such as threats of arrest or intervention in markets. This is facilitated by the structure of Iran's political economy. Many of the individuals who profit from sanctions and market distortions are themselves connected to the ruling elite. This enables the regime to enforce discipline within its own networks.

The introduction of digital credit systems for essential goods represents another mechanism of control. These support systems are targeted at low-income households, though the criteria for eligibility remain opaque. Questions arise as to whether political loyalty or other forms of discrimination influence access. While these measures may stabilise conditions in the short term, their sustainability remains uncertain, as the war continues.

On the surface, speculation about leadership succession has been

clarified. However, many questions about the health and whereabouts of the new *Vali Faqih* (supreme leader) remain unanswered. The hurried selection reflects a desire to maintain continuity and avoid signalling weakness. Ali Khamenei reportedly left specific instructions not to appoint his son, mentioning, among other reasons, concerns about Mojtaba's "personal issues". However, the Council of Experts decided to avoid an appointment that might indicate a change in line - one that could be interpreted as a shift in political direction, thereby increasing factional tensions within the regime.

## Regional impact

The Strait of Hormuz remains a critical chokepoint - not only for oil exports, but also for the import of essential goods into Gulf states, such as Qatar, the UAE and Kuwait. Even without direct military action, the threat of disruption has significant consequences - particularly through increased insurance costs and logistical uncertainty. These countries are now forced to consider alternative supply routes, such as overland through Saudi Arabia: expensive but far from impossible.

Moreover, the war is reshaping the social and economic landscape of the area. Cities like Dubai and Doha, which functioned as safe havens for expatriates, investors and elites, are experiencing massive outflows. With airports disrupted and security concerns rising, many are reconsidering their presence in the region. This represents a deeper structural impact that may persist long after the conflict ends. Add to all this the political implications of the conflict.

Conspiracy theories suggesting that Iran deliberately targeted Gulf states to enhance its regional position overlook the reality of economic interdependence. Despite political tensions, Iran has relied heavily on networks in places like Dubai for financial transactions, including the conversion of funds into hard currency. Similarly, economic ties with Qatar have played a role in sustaining elements of the Iranian economy. The disruption of these relationships is therefore not due to strategic calculation, but an unintended consequence of war - illustrating how conflict can undermine the very systems that states depend upon. Jeremy Bowen, the BBC's international editor, summed up the political consequences on March 17:

The Gulf states are looking at the 'terrible mess' being left in the region and realising the Americans have no plan for what comes next. Their strategy was to stay close to Washington and, while that won't end overnight, they are now concluding they must diversify. This isn't just about trade anymore: it's a strategic pivot toward Beijing as a more stable partner that didn't just drag them into a war of choice (BBC World Service March 17).

## Future

Iran's political system is resilient, compared to others in the region. Rather than a centralised dictatorship based on a single leader, Iran operates as a 'multi-layered' system - a coalition of ideological, institutional and economic forces. Power is distributed across clerical bodies,

military organisations and economic networks. However, institutions such as the Guardian Council play a crucial role in maintaining control by vetting candidates and limiting political competition. This reduces the likelihood of internal challenges emerging through formal channels.

If state institutions form the skeleton of the system, the security apparatus constitutes its muscle, the IRGC playing more than a military role. It has extensive economic and political influence, supported by auxiliaries such as the Basij militia. Crucially, these forces have remained cohesive during periods of unrest. Their ideological commitment - rooted in notions of martyrdom and revolutionary duty - reinforces their loyalty.

Continuity is also built into the command structure. Successors are designated multiple levels down, ensuring that leadership losses do not disrupt operational capacity. Meanwhile, economic power is concentrated within state-affiliated institutions, including para-governmental trusts (*bonyads*) and IRGC-linked enterprises. These entities control large segments of the economy and distribute resources through patronage networks.

Such structures bind the ruling class to the *nezam* (governmental system), reducing the likelihood of elite defections. Even under sanctions, these networks have preserved the material interests of those within the system.

The ideological legacy of the revolution continues to shape the system. Religious, educational and bureaucratic institutions repeat and reinforce a shared worldview that sustains the regime - even though many within these institutions no longer believe in what they preach. This ideological infrastructure functions not only as a tool of control, but also as a source of cohesion and mobilisation.

Opposition to the Islamic Republic remains deeply fragmented. It includes reformists, monarchists, leftist groups, exile organisations and ethnic movements. Historical factors - such as the Iran-Iraq war and sustained repression - have prevented the development of unified political alternatives. Even major protest movements have lacked central leadership and have been met with severe crackdowns.

Most agree that three conditions are typically required for the collapse of such a regime - mass popular mobilisation, divisions within the ruling elite and large scale defections from within the security forces. The first condition has occurred repeatedly. There was the green movement in 2009, led by regime insiders Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. But they were successfully marginalised and put under long-term house arrest. The war could easily open up divisions at the top once again.

Nor should we forget that in February 1979, at the height of the revolution, the Shah's military machine began to disintegrate, allowing leftwing militants to gain access to arsenals. They handed out weapons to eager crowds. That can happen again, but such a development would rely on the left organising into a serious revolutionary party and winning leadership of the urban and rural working classes ●

## FREE SPEECH

# Don't give in to the big lie

Jeremy Corbyn got it wrong. So has Zohran Mamdani. We must oppose, not appease, media claims that opposition to Zionism is equivalent to anti-Semitism, writes Eddie Ford

Very often when you are scrolling the news on your phone, you can guess from the headline alone where it comes from and what lies it is going to tell. This is especially the case when it carries the phrase 'anti-Semitic' in the strapline.

So it was on March 14, with the *Daily Telegraph's* headline, in which Zarah Sultana was accused of "peddling anti-Semitic conspiracy theory".<sup>1</sup> Therefore we read that the co-founder of Your Party and its only officially registered MP is accused, by Labour Against Anti-Semitism, of "normalising anti-Semitic rhetoric in British political discourse" through social media posts. It submitted its complaint to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

Two of her posts on X contained the lines "Zionism is one of the greatest threats to humanity" and "they love killing kids" - which the *Telegraph* says was in response to an Al Jazeera news update about four children being among six people killed in an Israeli attack on the Lebanese town of Shmestar. Of course, Sultana could just as easily be referring to the deadly US Tomahawk missile strike on February 28 upon the Shajarah Tayyebah elementary school in southern Iran that killed at least 175 people, most of them children, for which there is clear video footage.<sup>2</sup> A "preliminary" US military investigation apparently determined that Washington was responsible for the attack, even if Donald Trump had crazily tried to blame Iran.<sup>3</sup>

Now, it might not be quite the language we would use, but you should certainly recognise the reality that comrade Sultana is pointing to, which is the relationship between the United States and Zionism, that sees Israel acting as a Rottweiler, or attack dog, for US imperialism. Certainly, if you are looking at the Middle East, and the possibility of a much wider and catastrophic conflagration, isn't Israel clearly a threat? It has not only started war after war, it possesses nuclear weapons. Not Iran. As far as we know, it has about 140 or more nuclear warheads, and the ability to deliver them - not just store them in some underground bunker. Its cruise missiles, aircraft and submarines can hit anywhere in the region.

OK, yes, "they love killing kids" is heightened language. But just look at the front page of the last *Weekly Worker*: We reproduced a picture of a young child buried under wreckage and rubble. It was designed to move your heart and make anyone say, *this is wrong*. From that basis, you can perfectly understand why Zarah Sultana posted "they love killing kids", in the same way that, during the Vietnam War, anti-war protestors chanted, "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?"<sup>4</sup> Not because they were deliberately targeted, but because - to use the infamous euphemism - they were *acceptable collateral damage*.

### Twisted

Continuing the grotesque lies, LAA claims that the content of comrade Sultana's X posts "employs the same rhetorical framework" as the blood libel and then alleges that "the historical context makes this particularly serious" - saying that the phrase, "threat to humanity" (which they translate as *Gefahr für die Menschheit*), appeared "repeatedly in Nazi anti-Semitic materials portraying



Nazi goons were ordered not to touch Zionists in 1930s

Jews as a malign force that must be eliminated for humanity's survival". They add, using twisted logic, that, "since the majority of British Jews identify as Zionists", Sultana's statement "effectively declares" that British Jews are one of the greatest threats to humanity.

You could almost write a whole article on that last statement alone, which invites us to believe that Zionism - and by extension the 'Jewish homeland' of Israel - represents the interests of British Jews, and indeed all Jews everywhere. Amongst the Jews of course, Hitler included the Bolsheviks, communists and socialists. In other words people like Zarah Sultana and you and me. We could also mention Winston Churchill talking about the good or national Jews, who are "loyal to the land of their adoption", and the bad or international Jews like Karl Marx, Gregory Zinoviev and Leon Trotsky, who are part of a "worldwide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation".<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, *Mein Kampf* only mentions Zionism twice. Hitler certainly distinguished between the *ideology* of Zionism and Jews. Not that he was sympathetic to Zionism. He wasn't. However, in the early years of the Nazi regime, many of Hitler's cronies were. Reinhard Heydrich, Alfred Rosenberg, Adolf Eichmann and Leopold von Mildenstein can be mentioned. They viewed the Zionists almost as co-thinkers. In fact, amidst the 1938 *Kristallnacht* pogrom, orders were issued not to attack Zionist organisations, offices, publishing houses, etc. They had to be allowed to continue pushing their message urging Jews to leave Germany in pursuit of their own *Blut und Boden* colonial project in Palestine.

So that *Telegraph* article by Camilla Turner, its Sunday political editor, is based on a lie. Like most mainstream journalists on this subject, she talks utter rubbish that is based on either pure cynicism or plain ignorance. In fact, the stuff about killing kids and blood libel was put out by mainstream or orthodox Christianity, which you can argue fairly easily was 'institutionally anti-Semitic' -

hence the notorious passage from the Gospel of Matthew *misdescribing* the events taking place in Pontius Pilate's court before the crucifixion of Jesus, which was meant to convey a certain message: it was the accursed Jews who murdered Jesus, not Pontius Pilate and the Roman oppressors! This is a 'Big Lie', as Joseph Goebbels would have understood it. But Camilla Turner never mentions any of this: rather she seeks to cast Zarah Sultana's disgust at mass slaughter as a thought crime.

She also does not mention Jeremy Corbyn's bumbling and criminal response to the slanderous witch-hunt inside the Labour Party equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, which has been correctly attacked by comrade Sultana. Monstrously, Corbyn tried to appease the right by throwing colleagues he had known for decades, like Ken Livingstone and Marc Wadsworth, under the bus - he *knew* perfectly well they were not anti-Semites. But they were expendable. That pathetic response to the accusations actually fed the witch-hunters' appetite for new victims.

### Genocide

Unfortunately, if not unexpectedly, Zohran Mamdani - the socialist mayor of New York - seems to be making the same mistake. That is, doing a Corbyn, when instead he should be doing a Sultana and not giving an inch to the Zionist campaign of lies and slander.

Endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America, Mamdani has found himself at the centre of a political firestorm started deliberately by several rightwing news outlets that reported on his wife, Rama Duwaji, and her past work. This was connected to the Palestinian-American activist and writer, Susan Abulhawa, author of the acclaimed novels, *Mornings in Jenin* and *The Blue between Sky and Water*, and founder of the children's organisation, Playgrounds for Palestine. This fire has led numerous people to question their previous support for the socialist mayor because of his perceived anti-Zionist credentials.<sup>6</sup>

Hence last week in the *Washington Free Beacon*, *New York Post* and similar rags, it was reported that

Duwaji - a freelance illustrator - had provided a picture for an "essay" that was part of a story collection from Gazan writers edited by Abulhawa, entitled *Every moment is a life: Gaza in the time of genocide*.<sup>7</sup> As it turned out, that piece was actually a short story written by a resident of Gaza displaced during Israel's genocidal war that detailed the difficulties and indignities of using a public, makeshift restroom in the war-torn city. Mamdani said that his wife had been commissioned by a third party and had never "engaged with or met with" Abulhawa, which the writer confirmed.

The issue came to light, almost inevitably, when these pro-Zionist papers dredged up past comments made by Abulhawa - whose parents were Palestinian refugees of the 1967 Six Day War. Shamelessly lying, the rightwing press attempted to make out that her scathing criticism of Zionism was meant to be a reference to *all* Jewish people, which she naturally denied - consistently maintaining that her comments were a "reflection" of the pain she felt as a Palestinian who has twice travelled to Gaza for aid work during Israel's genocidal war.

Writing for *The Electronic Intifada*, she described October 7 2023 as a "spectacular moment that shocked the world" - which is just a factual observation, but the Zionist and mainstream media now endlessly repeat it expecting us all to be appalled. Other remarks on social media that supposedly place her beyond the pale are: decrying "Jewish supremacist slaughter" and hoping that "these sons of Satan will taste what they meted to us"; warning of "Jewish supremacist ghouls" and "vampires"; calling one commentator a "Jewish supremacist cockroach"; and so on and so forth.

Again, this is not the language that a communist writer would deploy. But the sentiments are perfectly understandable. And, to point out the obvious: Israel is a Jewish supremacist state and Zionism is a Jewish supremacist ideology. But, regardless, Mamdani held a press conference saying his administration was "against bigotry of all forms", finding Abulhawa's rhetoric "patently

unacceptable" and "reprehensible". It goes without saying that offline and online, she has been relentlessly depicted as a crazy racist and anti-Semite.

However, in a calm and dignified video statement on X, Susan Abulhawa said she hoped to clear things up for "Mr Mamdani, for his supporters and detractors alike, for the reporters, for my readers, for my own friends, and for the public in general".<sup>8</sup> She pointed out that she was responding to a Zionist power structure and its proponents, from the perspective of a *Palestinian* who has experienced the ravages of that system, and added that Israel, which we are "constantly told" is the "only democracy in the region", has "destroyed, shattered and robbed my family of everything".

The Zionist state, she says, has "committed the genocide in full view of the world" with its "blood and gore" and "apocalyptic horror", and as a writer, she has attempted to honestly describe "the feelings" Palestinians have of "pain, rage, contempt or hatred, coupled with the impotence to make the suffering stop". As for Mamdani, she was not "mad" at him, but maybe a bit sad that he has "succumbed to forces that seek to pick away at you, at your talented, beautiful wife" and are "clawing harder with each apology or concession you make" - running the danger that "they will siphon your soul before you even realise it."

Very encouragingly, she has attracted strong support for her position - one person describing Mamdani as "stupid for apologising and explaining", as "nothing will ever be enough for Zionists anyway". Another pointed to Mamdani's very own account of being motivated to enter politics by the issue of Palestinian rights - therefore it was "fair to hold him to his word". Somebody else wisely urged the New York mayor to "forget what your aides are telling you", as "fear is not a sound basis for politics at this moment in history".

Reacting to Abulhawa's video, the verdict on X was even harsher, if anything. 'Captured by Ros' denounced Mamdani for being "just another liberal Zionist who has exploited the Palestinian cause for political advantage", and has "been a huge disappointment since he started to appease the Zionist mafia". Similarly, 'barryBDS' bluntly writes of Susan Abulhawa being "disgustingly thrown under the bus by liberal Zionist Mamdani".

The parallels with Jeremy Corbyn are unmistakable - weakness, dithering, fudging and trying to placate the right wing is the road to hell ●

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### Notes

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WAR

# Madmen versus Marx

Private property and war go hand-in-hand. Capitalism in turn has made wars ever bigger and ever more dangerous. How do we rescue human civilisation? Ted Reese outlines some of his answers

Colin Drumm, a relatively well known historian of money, recently claimed that Marxism cannot explain why 'Judeo-Christian' conservatives like Mike Huckabee "want to fulfil prophecy and bring on armageddon". He says: "The 'critique of capitalism' is not a very useful lens for understanding the world. It's long past time to accept this."<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, Marx's critique of capitalism cannot 'explain everything' on its own. It cannot, for instance, precisely explain why Judeo-Christian conservatives are culturally and neurologically habituated to beliefs they were brought up with from birth. Then again, it does explain why such beliefs came into being - the emergence of private property and the need of its owners to justify terror waged on people excluded from it. What it also does, more relevantly - which Drumm's 'Madmen of history' theory does not - is explain why such fanatics are more likely to carry out their threat in the near future than they were 10, 20 or 30 years ago.

War has been a permanent feature of the capitalist epoch because of, fairly obviously, competition between capitalists. Less obviously perhaps is the rising intensity of competition - thus war is driven by the nature of capital accumulation, which tends to become ever more challenging, as the system ages.<sup>2</sup>

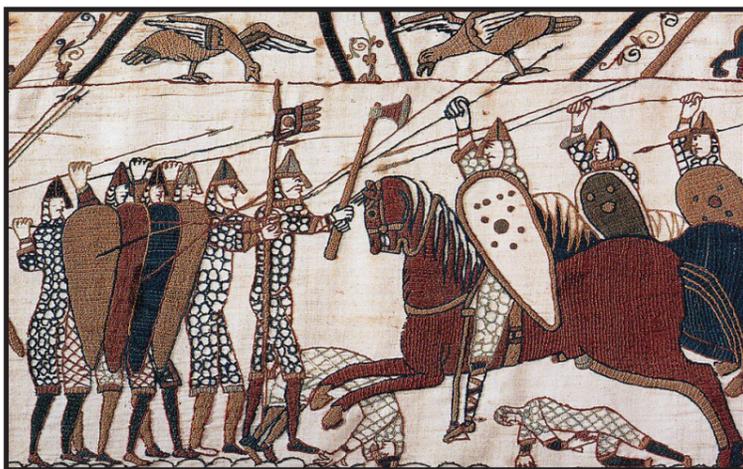
## Capital

Marxists have always pointed out that, as capital accumulates, the rate of profit tends to fall, since the innovation, acceleration and expansion of commodity production naturally devalues the average commodity - less labour time is required, producing less profit per commodity. The overall mass of accumulated profit tends to rise, but at a slowing rate. The general rate of profit therefore tends to decline historically ever closer towards zero.<sup>3</sup>

The dual character of the commodity makes capitalist crises inevitable. At certain points in the 'business cycle' there arises an underproduction of profit/exchange value, which is also expressed as an 'overaccumulation' or surplus of capital - capital that cannot be reinvested profitably. Capital itself fetters accumulation. Marx's identification of capitalism's inherent barrier to production and his contention that it tends to grow ever more formidable is again empirically provable today. The amount of capital sitting idle in US money market funds is now around \$8 trillion, for example - the size of the combined nominal gross domestic product of the UK and Germany - having risen steeply in the run-up to the last three major US recessions (and again, ominously, over the past three years).

Productive (commodity-producing) capitalist enterprises therefore slow down or reduce output - or are bankrupted, shut down and abandoned or sold off on the cheap. The devaluation of commodities subsequently devalues productive capital.

Before that subsequent devaluation, the growth of surplus capital and the slowdown of production increases relative scarcity and therefore inflation, raising the price of borrowing, investment, mergers and acquisitions. The devaluation of productive capital, though - expressed, for example, through cut-price sales and panic selling - then makes previously unaffordable capital affordable again, and at least some of the surplus



Bayeux Tapestry: 1066 and all that

money capital sitting on the sidelines finds new investment. Falling prices enable an acceleration in productive expansion and innovation.

The capitalist is compelled to find new investments - accumulate more capital - in order to offset the depreciation of his capital by raising productivity and his mass of profit; and fend off competition. Mergers and acquisitions, where two or more companies combine their capital into one - subsuming a competitor or enabling the defeat of a third - provide a kind of 'short cut' to accumulation and create economies of scale - a greater amount of production at a relatively lower cost. Like innovation, mergers accelerate during a recession, partly because surviving companies - riding out a crisis, thanks to their bigger cash reserves - can buy the capital from the bankrupted at bargain prices.

Amid falling prices, pioneers who cornered markets and secured the most customers by providing new/better/cheaper products see some rivals catch up; while new start-ups (often spin-offs from state research and development, with much lower overheads and greater flexibility and less bureaucracy) threaten to invent new market-leading products.

Domestic competition and the limited size of the domestic workforce compel capitalists to export surplus capital overseas - which often meets with resistance from local populations, national domestic capitalists or other multi/trans-national capitalist corporations. As the number of corporations and capitalist nations suffering from (rising) surplus capital grows, competition on the world market again intensifies. Taking over the capital of rivals, preferably ones that are definitively weaker, becomes increasingly necessary.

Another way to expand the ownership of capital when surplus capital cannot find a profitable outlet is to force countries to privatise their state/public industry, assets and funds. Look at imperialism's endeavours in Iraq, Libya and Ukraine, for example. For these reasons, the outbreak of war becomes more and more likely and their frequency tends to rise. Capitalists rely on the military power of the nation-state in which they are based, since nation-states can raise and/or redirect taxes - and borrow money on a scale individual capitalists or corporations cannot.

Drumm's desire to strip away socioeconomic context from the problem of saving humanity from madmen leaves us with the options of accepting annihilation or cutting off the head of the snake before allowing it to grow back bigger - the perpetual conundrum capitalist reformists

always leave behind for future generations to deal with. That option is no longer available.

Imperialism's extreme military power is not invincible and is in fact self-exhausting. The outlay on militaries and warmongering is increasingly expensive.<sup>4</sup> The expansion and devaluation of commodities also expands the money supply and devalues money, reducing its relative purchasing power - the US dollar has fallen by 98% since 1913 - and arms monopolists suffering from rising surplus capital tend to slow down production and innovation and therefore raise prices (private R&D in the US has become almost totally dependent on state facilities). Innovation also creates new needs and capacities, compelling the state to purchase an ever-greater range of weapons and equipment. Then there are inflation-meeting pay rises for personnel - perhaps inflation-busting, where the demand for skilled personnel rises and/or the supply of personnel falls short (problems commonly arising from the overworking and abandoning of personnel, and by capitalism's increasing inability to educate a sufficiently large skilled workforce).

## China

The US's nominal military spending keeps growing and yet its practical capacity is tending to shrink. Its stockpiles of munitions and critical materials - mostly supplied by China - are dwindling and its weapons and equipment are aging,<sup>5</sup> since modernisation is increasingly unaffordable (something that is only partially addressed by increasing taxation and indebtedness; and/or redirecting spending from other governmental departments - hence recent moves by Nato nations to turn military spending up to 5% of GDP - but which obviously offers very definite limits).

Younger capitalist states with lower surpluses of capital may therefore be more innovative - producing more advanced, decentralised, nimble and automated equipment for far less money - even if they cannot match the absolute output and destructive capacity of older capitalist powers, which rely on scorched-earth tactics to compensate for the unwieldiness of their centralised nature.

This unfolding dynamic ensures that US imperialism must decline and face being eclipsed in a similar fashion to previous fallen empires - China has more or less already usurped the US productively, if not quite militarily - but also that capitalism must be eclipsed by world communism, since the decentralisation of the means of consumption and destruction

empowers the working class to the eventual point at which its oppression is no longer enforceable.

War in and of itself slows down capital accumulation, in the sense that the capitalist state seizes value from capital and the public (through taxes) that might have been spent on productive capital and transfers it to unproductive, destructive armies.<sup>6</sup> Weapons manufacturers, who are increasingly dependent on government contracts, subsidies and facilities,<sup>7</sup> lobby for wars, since the demand for replenishment keeps state subsidies coming.

As rates of profit fall, private companies in general become increasingly dependent on subsidies, which means their 'business models' depend more and more on winning contracts that serve 'security and defence' (hence the rise of a particularly dystopian corporation like Palantir). The taxpayer and the tax base, which capital increasingly depends on, are therefore bled dryer and dryer - an unsustainable dynamic, which again ensures the eventual fall of capitalist states and empires.

The expense of prosecuting war needs to be offset by securing sufficient amounts of tribute - money, land, labour, factories, raw materials, value, etc. Rising debt-to-GDP - higher in the US since 2020 than at the end of World War II - suggests losses from the US's warmongering increasingly outweigh the gains, despite the privatisations and land grabs and the fact that war destroys and cheapens surplus capital, opening up space for new accumulation (aided by the commercialisation of military inventions for the consumer market). It was World War II's destruction that ended the Great Depression, not - as claimed by social democrats, Keynesians and proponents of Modern Monetary Theory - the state's military spending.

With the ongoing automation revolution, including digitalisation and artificial intelligence, all these tendencies are accelerating - and the arms race accelerated by war in turn accelerates the automation revolution. As mergers and bankruptcies accelerate, fewer capitalists relative to total capital remain, and competition therefore again tends to intensify, since the overall mass of profit is relatively smaller. In turn, the compulsion to expand production via mergers and innovation, rather than with existing technology, also intensifies.

The threat of world war and nuclear armageddon will therefore tend to grow - outcomes that would, for one thing, put the achievements of capitalism to waste.

But war's ability to regenerate capitalism is surely waning - not only because of the contemporary technical-economic dynamic (whereby automated production tends to diminish the profit incentive), but because a world war would probably destroy the habitability of the planet - either within a very short time frame or by accelerating global warming (itself a symptom of capitalist production, since capital needs to commodify nature at an ever-faster rate and non-renewable production - eg, fossil fuel - generates continual demand for capital, whereas renewable energy is built to last and its infinite capacity produces free and therefore unprofitable energy).

Only communism can preserve and advance the achievements of capitalism. Indeed, the automation revolution bringing about capital's

final devaluation necessitates a global communist economic system. That is, a singular, united economic system which ends competition and therefore makes war unnecessary.

The tendency for capital to merge naturally progresses towards a 'final merger', necessitating a publicly owned economy, since no exchange of ownership is required in a total monopoly.

## Transition

The 'tricky bit', to say the least, is getting from where we are now - a world that is almost entirely capitalist - to global communism, without a humanity-ending counterrevolution.

How do we encourage and stimulate the defection of the working class and, perhaps decisively, sections of the capitalist class - as anticipated by Marx in *The communist manifesto* - over to the side of the revolution? In my view, such efforts should include the following:

■ Firstly, agitation must explain the above: capitalism is war and increasingly war-hungry, meaning it is bound to take us ever closer to nuclear armageddon.

■ Secondly, agitation must explain and clearly illustrate, using compelling contemporary empirical data, capitalism's tendency towards a 'final merger', which must therefore be publicly owned (I will elaborate on this in a future article). This information must become widely known and understood.

■ Thirdly, we need highly-skilled, unflappable negotiators with a strong understanding of the science of behaviour change. Movements based on 'taxing the rich' will - like taking cigarettes away from smokers without any nicotine replacement therapy - only aggravate the warmongering aggression of the capitalist class (and alienate well-paid, skilled workers, who we very much need to convert), potentially maximising instead of minimising the devastation that capitalism threatens to unleash.

Instead, we must offer to buy out the capitalist class via long-term debt payments - something that has always played a role amid the ascendance of a new ruling class and social system. The (former) capitalists can keep their houses and personal belongings. We will even cancel their mortgages and personal debt (along with everyone else's). We just need to take the land and the banks, factories and mines, etc under state/public ownership ●

## Notes

1. x.com/drumm\_colin/status/1933905624095687119.
2. Contemporary evidence is beginning to indicate that war - like states - did not really exist before the emergence of private property. See R Ferguson, 'War is not part of human nature' *Scientific American* September 1 2018.
3. Deepankar Basu *et al* estimate that the 'world' rate of profit fell to below 12% in the 2010s.
4. Of a below-inflation \$6.1 billion defence funding increase in 2025, \$5.6 billion went towards rising personnel costs. In 1980, a new F-16 Fighting Falcon cost \$18.8 million. In 2024, the F-35A, a more advanced fighter, cost \$82.5 million.
5. The average age of the US air force's fighter inventory rose from 10 years in 1980 to 24 in 2017. Likewise, the bomber force increased from under 20 years to 39 years; and the tanker fleet from 20 to 38 years.
6. One reason for the post-World War I boom and the decline of US national debt was the return of military men to the productive workforce, whereas right now US military personnel are a relatively tiny part of the country's population and the debt is rapidly snowballing.
7. The UK think tank, *Common Wealth*, reported in July 2023 that BAE Systems pays just 14.35% of its own R&D costs and QinetiQ only 4.5%.

## OUR HISTORY

# Black Friday betrayal

Marking the centenary of the 1926 General Strike, **Jack Conrad** charts the delayed birth of the CPGB, the return of the Great Unrest, the collapse of the Triple Alliance and Lenin's thoughts on the councils of action

Meeting over July 31-August 1 1920, what became known as the CPGB's First Congress represented the culmination of a needlessly prolonged process of rapprochement. The aim was clear: emulate the Russian, the Bolshevik model. There had to be a revolution-making party.

Initially, two main organisations were involved: the somewhat bigger British Socialist Party and the somewhat smaller Scottish-based Socialist Labour Party. However, after the SLP membership - in a cynically arranged referendum - voted for unity, but against even the notion of considering Labour Party affiliation, its leadership majority expelled the leadership pro-unity minority. Fusion had to be on their terms and their terms alone.

Comrades such as Tom Bell, Arthur MacManus and William Paul proceeded to form themselves into the Communist Unity Group. Its April 1920 conference in Nottingham voted to fully commit to merger (there were 22 delegates). As for the SLP, it withdrew from negotiations and effectively committed suicide as an organisation (publication of *The Socialist* ceased in December 1922, though it formally wound up only in 1980!).<sup>1</sup>

Others, it should be stressed, rallied to the CPGB besides its BSP and CUG core components: ie, from the Independent Labour Party, Workers' Socialist Federation, Guild Communists and more than a good few local groups besides. Indeed, from the early 1920s onwards, the best, the most advanced, working class activists were to be found in the CPGB.

Nowadays, of course, most comrades on the left fail to see the significance of the CPGB and *how* it was formed. Not only is there the "the enormous condescension of posterity".<sup>2</sup> Some are positively hostile: eg, RS21's Vik Chechi-Ribeiro.<sup>3</sup> Ever ready to parrot Trotsky's rather shallow criticisms of the CPGB's shortcomings in 1926, they are sadly incapable of recognising that its formation and subsequent gravitational pull are actually highly relevant, when it comes to the debilitating problems we face today.

### Prehistory

Before 1920 what passed for the Marxist left in Britain was divided into rival confessional sects - they usually loathed each other with a passion, but only rarely, if ever, engaged in public polemics. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Each constituted their own little thought-world and tried to address the mass of the working class as if none of the others existed. Some were within the Labour Party, some without - the rump SLP and Sylvia Pankhurst's WSF making it into a *principle* to be without. Again, it sounds familiar. The BSP sort of (re)affiliated in 1916 - that after the wrongheaded decision to pull out of the Labour Party in 1900-01 (the Socialist Democratic Federation - ie, the early BSP - having two automatic seats on its national executive). Labour being, at the time, basically a united front of the entire organised working class.

All the ostensibly Marxist groups were, needless to say, organisationally weak, theoretically muddled and often laboured under autocratic leaders: eg, in the case of the BSP, Henry Meyer Hyndman. The Tony Cliff, the Gerry



**Liverpool 1911: the Great Unrest came back with a vengeance**

Healy, the Ted Grant, the Peter Taaffe of his day. Hyndman's Marxism was of the pedagogical kind: essentially he thought strikes were a diversion from the need to educate the masses in the ABCs of socialism (that even while his own comrades, such as Ben Tillett and Tom Mann, headed titanic industrial disputes). But - and it should be emphasised - being more than a competent writer, he made a good, logical and popular case for socialism: eg, *England for all* (1881).

Hyndman financed and *tried* to run the SDF/BSP as a personal fiefdom. In fact there was some considerable degree of genuine democracy and room for real debate. Branches had a wide degree of autonomy too. Nonetheless, Hyndman and his English nationalism dominated. True, he opposed the Boer war, but blamed it on "a gang of millionaire mine-owners, chiefly foreign Jews" (the cause of some considerable *open* criticism in the party's paper, *Justice*).<sup>4</sup>

With August 1914, however, he collapsed into the sort of social-imperialism that characterised the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Anti-Capitalist Resistance, RS21, Workers Power, etc, with the February 2022 Russo-Ukraine war. Hyndman lost control to the anti-war majority - organised around the unofficial paper, *The Call* - at the BSP's Easter 1916 conference ... only to walk. He formed the fittingly named National Socialist Party.

The merger of the BSP and CUG produced far more than the sum of its parts. Not in terms of the much exaggerated membership rolls, true. No, to date, the CPGB remains the highest organisational achievement of the working class movement in Britain (not least because of its affiliation to the Third International).

A salient fact that goes

unrecognised by the streets and strikes left. Typically their confessional sect is presented as *the* sole guardian of the flame and is therefore *the* party - even if only in embryo. Given our altogether dire circumstances, hope - the greatest of evils precisely because it perpetuates such nonsense - is found in the fundamentally false perspectives of Leon Trotsky's 1938 *Transitional programme*. The so-called 'transitional method' promises the small group that it will rise to glory tomorrow, if it fails this, that or the other mundane grievance, cause or movement with sufficient enthusiasm and energy today. Ironically, that excuses one irresponsible, and often entirely stupid, split after another ... and not only by micro groups, but lone individuals too (hence the innumerable sects of one who equally find hope in their commitment to the 'transitional method').

Netting the next batch of, usually fleeting, recruits becomes everything, the ultimate aim nothing. Over recent years that has given us cross-class popular fronts, such as Respect, Stand Up to Racism and the Campaign Against Climate Change. Conveyor belts all. Together being just the latest iteration. Then there are the Labour Party mark two projects: Tusc, Left Unity, Your Party.

Seriously committing to building a mass Communist Party, necessarily beginning with the strong foundations alone provided by an agreed minimum-maximum programme and politically going through the existing left to gain hegemony, seems crazily ambitious nowadays. Instead we have endless short-cut offers and the comfort zones of networkism, campaignism and localism. The result is sadly predictable. The left continues to decay and, in terms of consciousness, the working class is

increasingly declassified.

That the CPGB founding congress took place in 1920 was a great achievement, obviously. Arguably though, it could have happened a couple of years earlier. The first soundings had already been made in 1918. Unity was held up because of the petty delays imposed by the leaders of the SLP, WSF, the Shop Stewards' Committees, etc. Despite the urgings of Lenin and his comrades in Moscow, there was proprietorial foot-dragging, pig-headed sectarianism and a litany of "something nasty in the woodshed" complaints about this or that supposedly traumatic experience with the BSP.

Unity was put off time and time again. That mattered. After all, during the final year of World War I and the two years that followed, class struggles in Britain reached an intensity not witnessed since the days of Chartism. The 1910-14 Great Unrest burst back into life with a vengeance in 1918-20.

A Communist Party would have provided a tremendous boost. Had the CPGB been formed in 1918, it too would have been positively affected. Remember both the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks became mass organisations in 1905. The CPGB would have been forged in the heat and fire of a pre-revolutionary situation. Instead, almost from the outset, it had to cope with the hammer blows of reaction.

Individual CPGB members played an outstanding role in the Hands Off Russia campaign. Nonetheless, it has to be admitted, the CPGB's main contribution, in the shape of *The Communist*, was effectively limited to issuing a few revolutionary slogans and giving general advice. Even after the party's 2nd Congress in January 1921, which brought in the Communist Labour Party, Communist

Party (BSCI) and left members of the ILP, the content and style of party work remained propagandist: ie, capitalism=bad, soviets=good.<sup>5</sup>

Strategic thinking, mass agitation and organisation, organisation, organisation was urgently required. The party had to merge with the militant minority of the working class and establish deep social roots. More than possible.<sup>6</sup> The CPGB was certainly not held back due to antagonisms between comrades who came from different traditions. Former BSPers and former SLPers seem to have more or less painlessly fused together in the new, higher CPGB identity.<sup>7</sup> No, what held back the early CPGB was the common inheritance of economism.

Essentially that meant leaving trade union militants carrying on as trade union militants and a failure to unite the party around the centrality of winning the battle for democracy: ie, abolish the monarchy, republicanism, a popular militia in place of the standing army, separating church and state, supporting Irish freedom, self-determination for the British empire's colonies, cancelling German reparation payments, women's equal rights - and specific demands that would help secure working class leadership of the middle classes and strata.

The early CPGB's economism went largely uncorrected, not least because of the full-scale offensive launched by the government, bosses and bankers. Incidentally, this resulted in numerous arrests and prison sentences. A whole stratum of weak-willed trade union tops deserted the CPGB and thousands of paper members evaporated into thin air.<sup>8</sup>

### Gold standard

World War I and the abandonment of the gold standard showed that capitalism had entered its declining phase. Essential laws remained, but were overlaid by new determinates. The epoch was, concluded Lenin in his *Imperialism*, one of "transition from the capitalist system to a higher socio-economic order".<sup>9</sup> Free competition and money gave way to monopoly, militarism and organisation. In a perverted, negative way, capitalism anticipated the socialist future.

Total war demanded massive state intervention and the subordination of short-term profits to the *needs* of the military machine. Prices and returns were fixed by bureaucratic diktat. Gold reserves were freely used by the state to import strategically vital supplies. The link between gold and the currency had to be abandoned. Hard money became soft money.

In conditions of endemic shortage, inflation pushed prices skyward. At the same time, class peace at home was bought in return for allowing the growth of trade unions and giving basic living standard guarantees. Rationing and subsidies kept people alive. As the war dragged on, however, and bled Europe white, social antagonisms inevitably reached the point of explosion.

Ancient ruling houses were blown away: the Hohenzollerns, Romanovs, Hapsburgs. The Austro-Hungarian empire disintegrated. Borders were redrawn. Poland was born again. Economically, Europe was left a shadow of its former glory. Britain's industrial and banking supremacy dissolved and never returned. Foreign

assets had to be sold off to pay for the carnage. Sterling could no longer operate as the hub of the world economy. Germany was reduced from a creditor to a chronic debtor. France, which had been the world's lender, lost a staggering fortune with the overthrow of tsarism and the removal of Russia from the capitalist global system. Only the US managed to hang on to the gold standard.

Britain emerged from the war victorious. It too, however, had been transformed from a creditor into a debtor country. Economically, its decline was impossible to hide and was only partially offset by continued military strength and an extensive empire - a position paralleled by the US in the 21st century. Though it does not possess a formal empire, the US runs on a black hole of credit and relies on unmatched military power to ensure its global interests.

Besides being in hock to the US to the tune of £8 billion, Britain faced a drive by Germany - desperate to meet the huge reparations demanded under the Dawes plan - to flood the market with cheap manufactured goods and coal. All that, and a determination to put sterling back on the gold standard, meant collective capital was bent on imposing reduced wages, speed-ups, longer hours and welfare cuts. Indeed, re-establishing the gold standard - partially achieved in 1925 and finally abandoned in 1931 - was synonymous with attacking the working class and the attempt to re-impose the strict disciplines of peak capitalism.

## Carrot and stick

With all too recent memories of the Hands Off Russia campaign weighing heavily on minds, the ruling class employed both carrot and stick. The Welsh wizard, David Lloyd George, had been the main advocate of the carrot. Politically, the future of his Liberal Party hung on the doomed project of constructing some kind of radical bourgeois party as an alternative to Labour - ie, a leftist populist party. So the great war leader had to keep on promising a 'land fit for heroes'.

In February 1919 he persuaded the cabinet to finance a reconstruction programme by "giving a probably quite genuine description of the direct action threat within the labour movement". At £71 million it was, he claimed, "a cheap insurance against Bolshevism".<sup>10</sup> Again, in January 1920, Lloyd George played on fears of revolution to get his way for populist measures.

Thomas Jones, the deputy cabinet secretary, comments, in his well-known diary, that the "PM did a lot of unsuspected leg-pulling, as he does not believe in the imminence of the revolution". Clearly, though, he could never have gotten away with that "leg-pulling" unless working class militancy was actually perceived as a pressing threat.<sup>11</sup> After all, on a number of occasions - eg, January-February 1919, summer 1920 - the cabinet was preoccupied by the working class danger and negotiating political and economic concessions.

In this context, we can also quote Geoffrey Dawson, editor of *The Times*. Even before the end of World War I he was urging Lloyd George to call an early election, so as to "re-establish the authority of parliament against attempts to 'hold up' the country by unconstitutional methods". Discontent was "due to sheer Bolshevism and not any genuine industrial grievance".<sup>12</sup>

As explained above, British capitalism was in no position to keep on giving. Indeed it had to claw back what had been spent on anti-Bolshevik "insurance" and more. The Bank of England's imposition of deflation finally wrecked Lloyd George's reconstruction programme and forced him to take up the stick.

The first battle was with the miners.

On March 31 1921 they were locked out because of a refusal to accept swingeing wage cuts and an end to national pay bargaining. Naturally, the miners appealed for strike solidarity from their brothers and sisters in the Triple Alliance (rail and transport unions). However, against the threat of what would have amounted to a general strike the Lloyd George government was now determined to face down the enemy within.

Public opinion had already been prepared through a concerted £100,000 propaganda campaign, and free speech curbed. The cabinet issued "instructions" for the "systematic prosecution" of those making "seditious speeches". The new Emergency Powers Act was invoked. Troops were brought in from Ireland, Malta and Silesia. Machine-gun posts were installed at pit heads.

The National Union of Railwaymen and Transport Workers' Federation leaders crumbled. Bureaucratic sectionalism proved stronger than bureaucratic solidarity. On April 15 1921 JH Thomas, NUR general secretary, stood on the steps of Unity House and handed waiting reporters an announcement to the effect that there would be no Triple Alliance strike.

Black Friday, as it became known, had a shattering effect. The Triple Alliance had surrendered, before fighting its Waterloo. Criminally, the miners were deserted. After a bitter 11-week lockout, their Fed ignominiously surrendered. With the miners down, one section after another followed. Shipbuilders, engineers, boilermakers, seamen, cotton workers and agricultural workers all suffered wage reductions. There were accompanying gouging organisational losses too. Trade union membership, which had reached a record 8,340,000 in 1920, nearly halved to 4,250,000 in 1923.

A strategic defeat.

## Councils of action

Because we have already met them, because we are going to meet them again, it is more than worth repeating Lenin's 1920 comments about Britain's councils of action (specifically, its named Council of Action). Besides equating them with Russia's soviets, he brings out the elements of dual power, but, also, crucially, the complex relationship between Labourite officialdom and the insurgent communist minority. In other words, both Russia's soviets and Britain's councils of action contained within them elements of dual power too. After all, the Labourites, just like the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, could become the real power in the land without breaking with their unstated commitment to maintaining capitalism.

The specific background was, of course, Poland. Though the Red Army's offensive failed to rouse the workers of Warsaw into taking revolutionary action, though the Red Army was soon forced to beat a rapid retreat, Lenin had no hesitation in claiming a "great" victory. Winston Churchill's murderous demand that "Bolshevism ... be strangled in its cradle" remained frustrated.<sup>13</sup> The British government was compelled to advise Poland to sue for peace. Soviet Russia had been able to check imperialism's machinations through proletarian internationalism.

For Lenin, a consummate proletarian politician, the Russo-Polish war should not be viewed simply in military terms. There was far more to it than the advance or retreat of this or that army. It was within the higher field of politics that the Soviet republic had won its real victory: a "victory over the minds and hearts of the masses of the workers".<sup>14</sup> As Lenin was never tired of repeating, the proof of that could be seen all too clearly in the Council of Action in Britain -

though living on borrowed time, still the world's number one imperialist power.

Here are Lenin's two most interesting comments on the Council of Action. The first set of remarks were made in the course of his keynote speech delivered to the 9th Conference of the Russian Communist Party on September 22 1920. Lenin makes the point that, despite retreat from the "walls of Warsaw", the whole fight to save the revolution had had a "powerful effect on the revolutionary movement in Europe" - crucially Britain, where, with the Council of Action, the movement had been raised to "an unprecedented level". With hindsight some might suggest that Lenin was wildly optimistic. But that is to miss the point and fall into the trap of 'what happened had to happen' fatalism. Lenin was out to lead the masses in making history. He was not dealing in probabilities, but the *revolutionary* possibilities contained within a given situation. So the main point we should draw from what he had to say is the soviet-like features and *inner logic* of the Council of Action.

When the British government presented an ultimatum to us, it transpired that it would first have to consult the British workers. The latter, nine tenths of whose leaders are out-and-out Mensheviks, replied to the ultimatum by forming a Council of Action.

Alarmed by these developments, the British press raised a hullabaloo about what it called this 'duality of government'. It had every reason to say so. Britain found herself at the same stage of political relationships as Russia after February 1917, when the soviets were obliged to scrutinise every step taken by the bourgeois government. This Council of Action unites all workers, irrespective of party, just like our All-Russia Central Executive Committee of the period when Gotz, Dan and others were running things - a kind of association which runs parallel with the government, and in which the Mensheviks are forced to act in a semi-Bolshevik way.

Just as our Mensheviks finally got confounded and helped win over the masses to our side, the Mensheviks in the Council of Action have been forced by the inexorable course of events to clear the way to the Bolshevik revolution for the worker masses of Britain. According to testimony by competent persons, the British Mensheviks already consider themselves a government, and are prepared to replace the bourgeois government in the near future. This will be the next step in the general process of the British proletarian revolution.

Lenin extended these remarks on the Council of Action, and the "decisive turning point" it represented for Britain, during his speech to the leather workers' congress a week or so later, on October 2 1920. He was quite clearly wrong in thinking that the "old leaders of the British workers" had undergone some sort of a conversion to communism. But he was right to suggest they could play a centrist, Menshevik role, in the event of the Council of Action finding itself the real power in the land:

When the red troops approached the frontier of Poland, the Red Army's victorious advance created an unprecedented political crisis. The main feature of this crisis was that, when the British government threatened us with war, and told us that if we advanced any further they would fight us and send their warships against us, the British

workers declared that they would not permit this war. Let me tell you that Bolshevism is spreading among the British workers. However, the communists there are just as weak today as we were in March, April and May 1917, when we had one-tenth of the votes at conferences and congresses. At the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets in June 1917, we had no more than 13% of the votes. A similar situation exists in Great Britain: there the Bolsheviks are in an insignificant minority.

But the point is that the British Mensheviks have always been opposed to Bolshevism and direct revolution, and have favoured an alliance with the bourgeoisie. Today, however, the old leaders of the British workers have begun to waver and have changed their minds: they were opposed to the dictatorship of the working class, but now they have come over to our side. They have set up a Council of Action over there in Britain. This is a radical change in British politics. Alongside parliament, which in Great Britain is now elected by almost universal suffrage (since 1918), there has arisen a self-appointed Council of Action which relies on support from the workers' trade unions with a membership of over six million. When the government wanted to begin a war against Soviet Russia, the workers declared that they would not allow it, and said they would not let the French fight either, because the French depend upon British coal and, should this industry come to a standstill, it would be a severe blow to France.

I repeat, this was a tremendous turning point in British politics. Its significance to Great Britain is as great as the revolution of February 1917 was to us. The revolution of February 1917 overthrew tsarism and set up a bourgeois republic in Russia. There is no republic in Great Britain, but her thoroughly bourgeois monarchy has existed for many centuries. The workers can vote in the parliamentary elections, but all foreign policy is conducted outside parliament, for it is in the province of the cabinet. We have long known that the British government are waging an undercover war on Russia and are helping Yudenich, Kolchak and Denikin. We have often met with statements in the British press to the effect that Great Britain has no right to send a single soldier to Russia.

Who then voted for this measure? What act of parliament authorised war on Russia in the aid of Yudenich and Kolchak? There have been no such acts, and by actions like this Great Britain has violated her own constitution. What then is this Council of Action? Independently of parliament, this Council of Action has presented an ultimatum to the government on behalf of the workers. This is a step towards dictatorship [ie, showing the retreat from majority rule, the Communist Party, perhaps even its central committee - JC] and there is no other way out of the situation. This is taking place in Great Britain, which is an imperialist country with 400 or 500 million people enslaved in her colonies. She is a most important country, which rules the greater part of the population of the earth. The advance on Poland has led to such a turn of affairs that the British Mensheviks have entered into an alliance with the Russian Bolsheviks. That is what this offensive has done.

The whole of the British bourgeois press declared that the Councils of Action meant the

soviets. They were right. It did not call itself by that name, but actually that is what it was. It is the same kind of dual power as we had under Kerensky from March 1917 onwards: a time when the provisional government was considered the only government, but actually could do nothing of significance without the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies; a time when we said of the soviets, 'Take over all power'. A similar situation has now arisen in Britain, and the Mensheviks on this 'Council of Action' have been obliged to adopt an anti-constitutionalist course. This will give you some idea of what our war with Poland has meant.<sup>15</sup> ●

## Notes

1. Bizarrely, in my opinion, there are still those on the left who picture the SLP as "the most radically leftwing organisation of its time, with a very impressive record in industrial organising, as well as commitment to Marxism". Here I am quoting Counterfire's Alex Snowden ([www.counterfire.org/article/raising-the-red-flag-marxism-labourism-and-the-roots-of-british-communism-1884-1921-book-review](http://www.counterfire.org/article/raising-the-red-flag-marxism-labourism-and-the-roots-of-british-communism-1884-1921-book-review)). An old thesis dusted off by Ray Challinor in his vastly overrated *The origins of British Bolshevism* (1977). In truth, while the SLP contained many fine members, it was a De Leonist sect.
2. EP Thompson *The making of the English working class* Harmondsworth 1963, p13.
3. Eg, writing a review of Tony Collins' *Raising the red flag - an interesting, but left sectarian, account of the "roots of British communism" - RS21's Vik Chechi-Ribeiro writes: "Those advocating for 'a party' - ie, an organisation capable of realising the political independence of the working class - should not try to recreate the formation of the CPGB." The why goes completely unexplained, showing once again that RS21 is, in fact, an anti-party mélange* ([revsoc21.uk/2024/11/21/raising-the-red-flag](http://revsoc21.uk/2024/11/21/raising-the-red-flag)).
4. The likes of Theodore Rothstein launched scathing attacks on Hyndman's anti-Semitism. See M Crick *The history of the Social Democratic Federation* Keel 1994, p159.
5. The shortcomings of the young CPGB were pointed out by Lenin, in self-confessed "bad English", in his August 1921 note to Tom Bell: "I am afraid," said Lenin, "we have till now in England [he was referring to Britain - JC] few, very feeble propagandist societies for communism (inclusive the British Communist Party), but no really mass communist movement." His main solution was to "start a daily paper of the working class" - not as a business, but as "an economic and political tool of the masses in their struggle" (Quoted in A Hutt *The post-war history of the British working class* London 1937, pp72-73).
6. Not the view of James Hinton and Richard Hyman, writing back in mid-1970s, when they were either still in or close to the International Socialists (now SWP). They argued that the early CPGB should have been "concentrating on consolidating a small cadre" ... not the "illusory pursuit of growth at any cost" (*Trade unions and revolution* London 1975, p9). Needless to say, we can ignore the loaded phrase, "at any cost". Hinton and Hyman, like others from the IS tradition, very much admired the SLP.
7. J Mellroy and A Campbell 'The Socialist Labour Party and the leadership of early British communism' *Critique* Vol 48, No4, October 2020.
8. Among the trade union leaders who left were Albert Purcell (FTAT), George Hicks (Bricklayers), Alonzo Swales (AEU) and Arthur Cook (MFGB). As to party membership, James Klugmann, the 'official' antiquarian of the CPGB, estimates that in 1922 it was round about 3,000 (J Klugmann *History of the CPGB* Vol 1, London 1968, p198). Despite that, after the 2nd Congress in 1921, the CPGB reported to the Communist International a membership of 10,000. In his *Pioneering days* Tom Bell explains how this much-exaggerated figure was arrived at: "Our first census, after the Second Unity Conference, revealed no more than 2,000 to 2,500 members. I found that many names given to us as branches only existed on paper. Even when the Scottish Communist Labour Party came in, though they talked of 4,000 members, I doubt if they brought 200 into the party. It was the same when the 'left wing' of the ILP came over. They talked of tens of thousands; in point of fact, they too, only added one or two hundreds. But it was difficult to reach final conclusions: each section protested, insisting on its membership as given. That is why the figure of 10,000 got into the records of the CI as the membership of the CPGB in 1921" (Quoted in J Foster 'Imperialism and the labour aristocracy' in J Skelly (ed) *The general strike: 1926* London 1976, p197).
9. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 22, Moscow 1977, p266.
10. K Middlemas (ed) *Thomas Jones: Whitehall diary* Vol 1, Oxford 1969, p80.
11. *Ibid* p101.
12. J Wrench *Geoffrey Dawson and our times* London 1955, p159.
13. [winstonchurchill.hillsdale.edu/bolshevism](http://winstonchurchill.hillsdale.edu/bolshevism).
14. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 31, Moscow 1977, p272.
15. *Ibid* pp277, 306-08.

## POLEMIC

# Syndicalist quackery

Their understanding of who constitutes the working class is radically false. So is their strategy of industrial colonisation. **Mike Macnair** thinks that the Spartacists are trapped in a dumb orthodoxy

Two weeks ago we published comrade Vincent David's reply, 'Not a serious response', to my polemic, 'Beware of Sparts bearing gifts' (February 26). Last week we published Charlotte Bouchier of the Spartacist League of Australia (now the Spartacist Tendency of Communist Unity). Her article dealt with the conference of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation, which has recently renamed itself Communist Unity and accepted the SLA comrades into membership.<sup>1</sup>

This shares the false strategic conception of 'proletarianisation' through sending young members into industry with comrade David (but develops the argument less). It also opens a question which would be worth a separate discussion, whether 'Chinese-defencism' (analogous to the old 'Soviet-defencism') is a good guide to action for the working class. On this latter point I will only pose the question.

The original title for my February 26 piece was 'Spart traps'; the editorial team changed it to 'Beware of Sparts bearing gifts', which images the Sparts as a clever Ulysses offering the 'Trojan Horse', secretly full of Greek soldiers, to take Troy.<sup>2</sup> I make this point because my original title intended to carry the overtone, not merely that the Spartacists' proposal is a trap for Communist Unity, but also that the Spartacists *themselves* are trapped in a dumb Cannonite orthodoxy. And this is the same phenomenon as the Socialist Workers Party and its international co-thinkers, trapped in a dumb Cliffite orthodoxy, the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Revolutionary Communist Party and their international co-thinkers, trapped in dumb Grantite orthodoxies, and Anti-Capitalist Resistance, etc, trapped in a dumb Mandeliste orthodoxy (ultimately derived from the politics of the 1930s Molinier-Frank tendency's advocacy of diplomatic unity).

I begin with comrade David's general remarks about my polemic, which are, to be blunt, evasive. It is good to have agreement that polemic should be open and as sharp as necessary. I am equally happy to see comrade David repudiating his 1960s-70s 'rank and filist' formula that "What we mean is to really rebuild the unions, which are today completely hollowed out, by pushing and organising struggles for what workers need. Crucially, this must be done in constant struggle against the union bureaucracy."

Beyond that, I said quite specifically that the Spartacists' overstatement of the importance of the RCO-SLA fusion was analogous to the overstatement of the importance of the fusions of the SL in Britain in 1978 and 1981 with small tendencies won to Spartacism from the Workers Socialist League and International Marxist Group - and that this sort of overstatement was characteristic of Trotskyist *caudillos* more generally. It was mere speculation on my part that this sort of overstatement started with James P Cannon in 1946 (and I said so explicitly: "It is not quite clear to me where this tendency to 'official optimism' among Trotskyist caudillos like Moreno, Lambert, Varga, Robertson - and James P Cannon; and Ted Grant and Alan Woods - came from ..."). Comrade David focusses instead on the present-day Spartacists' *correct* judgment that global politics is moving rapidly to the right, in contrast



Failure, that is for sure

with Cannon's illusions in 1946 - and by doing so dodges giving any answer to my objection that the overstatement of the importance of the RCO-SLA fusion was *itself* Trot caudillo-talk.

Secondly, at the beginning of this recent argument is my letter of August 28 2025, which responded to two positive assessments of the Spartacists:

Comrade [David] Passerine writes: "Since the death of Jim Robertson, and the broad failure of their long-time strategy of going straight to the masses, the Spartacists globally have moved away from the sectarian positions they are most commonly known for." For his part, comrade [Ian] Spencer states: "There were interesting contributions from the Spartacist League, which nowadays is far more open to actual discussion with other groups."

I objected that the policy of the Spartacists in the 1970s-80s was not to go "straight to the masses", but (following Cannon in the 1930s) "to practise short-term raiding entry to destroy 'centrist obstacles', even if the result was not significant growth for the Trotskyists, rapidly pulling forces out."<sup>3</sup>

## Demagogic

Comrade Gabriel Perrault in his letter of September 5 2025, objected to these observations as "demagogic" and as irrelevant history - the latter point was also made by comrade David in his letter of February 19.<sup>4</sup> In response, in my February 26 article I *documented* both the inappropriate triumphalism of the SL(B) in relation to its small fusions in 1978 and 1981, its characterisation of the groups it had engaged with as 'centrist obstacles', and the 'raiding' character of the entry operations. I also gave a citation to blog comments, where various ex-Spartacists had discussed what *came* of these operations (nothing good).

I went on to explain why this paper carries extensive criticism (and self-criticism) of the past of the various left trends, including those from which our own members came. Self-criticism is not, in our view, a precondition for unity - but in George Santayana's tag, "those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it".

In relation to industrial colonisation, today's Spartacists are proposing to repeat a policy which failed for the Spartacists in the 1970s-80 (and offer no self-critical balance-sheet of *why* it failed). It failed for the US 'New Communist Movement' in the 1970s and failed for both the Mandeliste and Barnesite factions of the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International in the late 1970s to mid-1980s. Their 'offer' for 'this time is different' is merely that 'this time we *really* mean to fight the labour bureaucracy' - an 'offer' which has been made by all the Trotskyist groups which have endeavoured this policy, with the exception of the Barnesites, who were already in rapid transition to 'official communism' and its friendly approach to the labour bureaucracy.

In relation to the policy of 'raiding entry' to destroy 'centrist obstacles', the comrades are simply unwilling to answer. This is not a question like 'Have you stopped beating your wife? Answer yes or no!' - because I am not demanding a 'yes' or 'no': only an actual answer. It would be a perfectly defensible answer for the comrades to say, 'No, we weren't pursuing the policy of "raiding entry" to destroy "centrist obstacles" back then' (though they would need to provide documentary evidence to counter what I have cited). It would be an equally defensible answer to say, 'Yes, we were pursuing the policy of "raiding entry" to destroy "centrist obstacles" back then, but we have now broken with it, for the following reasons ...' This would be (from my point of view) a real step forward, since the Cannonite version of 'the revolutionary party' is in my opinion a major obstacle to an effective left and as such serves as an outwork of the fortifications of the capitalist class.

Or it would be a defensible answer to say: 'Actually, we think the policy of "raiding entry" to destroy "centrist obstacles" is correct.' This third option is not a bar to unity in practice, but it would imply that *long-term* unity is unlikely, since the Cannonites will be driven to cash their gains by making a premature split. Saying nothing, and evading the question (but claiming that the history is unimportant) actually carries with it *impliedly* an assertion of the third position.

'Behold, I make all things new' (Revelations xxi:5). It is a common

feature of Trotskyist argumentation to insist that their prolonged legacy of failure is to be disregarded, because the new, changed *objective situation* demands what turns out to be the old policy. The Spartacists' arguments, both in comrade David's and comrade Bouchier's versions, have this character. In both, the 'new situation' is the severe isolation of the far left from the 'industrial working class' - which is to be symptomatised by the rise of the far right.

Comrade David accuses me thus: "... rather than seriously dealing with what the Spartacist League says or does today, in 2026, he simply picks sentences and goes on autopilot by forcing them into his decades-old 'boxes'." This would be more plausible if comrade David himself were not arguing from "decades-old boxes". We will come back to the plausibility of his arguments about how the communist parties became mass parties (in my opinion untrue). But my article was directed, precisely, at his February 19 argument that "Every single communist party that went from a sect to a national force did so by organising workers and leading decisive sections of the proletariat in struggle." So comrade David relies on a view of the history of the movement to teach us lessons. He just wants to *exclude from* the history of the movement the practical failures of the far left - including the Spartacists - in the 1960s-90s.

The comrades' argument for the 'new situation' pastes together two elements, one of which is new and the other old. The *new* element is big capital's abandonment of liberalism, the end of the post-1945 political settlement and the rise of the far right. Not new in a grand-historical sense, since an increasing dominance of the far right characterised the whole inter-war period (1920-40); but new relative to what was widely believed to be 'secular' changes in post-war capitalism.

It is nonetheless mistaken to suppose that 'working class' support for the far right really characterises the historical big bastions of Labour, except insofar as these have been de-proletarianised by long-term unemployment producing a sort of lumpenisation: rather, in the UK, Reform has mopped up historical *Tory* votes. And, when serious work was done on the Nazi electoral base, it turned out that the urban and organised working class was not tempted by voting Nazi: rather, the far right gained support among small-town and unorganised workers.<sup>5</sup>

The old element is the marginality of the far left (Trotskyists, Maoists, etc) in the 'core' manual working class. This has been, in reality, a *continuous* truth since the 1930s. There have been *episodic* and *local* presences, like the US Socialist Workers Party in the 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters' strike, the Revolutionary Communist Party (mark I) of 1944-48 in Britain, the Trotskyists at Renault in the late 1940s, or the Socialist Labour League and then Workers' Socialist League in Oxford Cowley. In reality, however, all these local episodes failed to produce deep-rooted proletarianisation of the far-left groups involved or a stable ability to compete for leadership with the 'official communists' (let alone with the rightwing trade union bureaucrats).

The dependence of Labour and similar parties on white-collar workers, teachers, and so on, is no

novelty either. It was the object of commentary by leftists who expected social democracy to disappear in the 1960s. What it reflects, in reality, is the inherent *division of labour* between the trade union bureaucracy, on the one hand (focused on wage and conditions bargaining), and social democracy as an electoral formation, on the other (focused on claims to achieve 'reforms' through government).

This division of labour represents a *retreat* of proletarian class consciousness relative to pre-1914 social democracy and the communist parties - in the direction of 'mere trade unionism' as the 'bourgeois politics of the working class', in Lenin's phrase. In this context, for far-leftists to pose themselves as effective leaders of the trade union struggle - as opposed to electoral campaigners, and so on - was to accept this retreat of class consciousness: to appeal to militant trade union sectionalism. Far-leftist local-struggle leadership on this basis would inevitably be marginalised and overthrown, when the national political relationship of forces was brought into play against them.

Meanwhile, from the standpoint of the working class as a class, the organisations of the far left appeared as 'not to be taken seriously', because their splintered character counterposed themselves to the objective class interest in unity, which is the basis of trade union organisation, of cooperatives and mutuals, and of collectivist political parties. The 'official communists' could at least point to the regimes which they followed. And it turns out that even after the fall of the 'Soviet bloc' they can still do so.

The 'new situation' is thus *not* new at all in relation to the marginality of the far left. And there is no reason to suppose that the quack remedy of industrial colonisation will work any better under today's conditions than it did for previous generations of young far leftists.

## Badly wrong

Back to his letter, comrade David argued: "Every single communist party that went from a sect to a national force did so by organising workers and leading decisive sections of the proletariat in struggle. Work in the working class is thus absolutely key to rebuilding communist parties." I responded:

No evidence is offered in support of this argument and it is very doubtful that any can be. Just for a few examples of mass communist parties: Rosa Luxemburg's and Leo Jogiches' Polish Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania before World War I, which attempted to give *party* direction to the mass struggle, was a plain bureaucratic-centralist sect. The creation of the Polish Communist Party as a national force was made possible by unity with the Polish Socialist Party - Left. The German Communist Party became mass by unity with the majority of the Independent Socialist Party. The Communist Party of France was the majority of the old Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière. The Bulgarian Communist Party originated as the 'Narrow' Socialist Party, which grew radically through its anti-war position in 1914-18. The Communist Party of Italy remained largely marginal

until it was able to play a central role in the anti-fascist resistance in 1941-45. And so on.

Comrade David replies:

This is astonishing, coming from someone we assume knows quite well the history of the workers' movement.

The SPD, so dear to the *Weekly Worker*, became influential by essentially building the German workers movement. Then, what made the KPD a mass force was not merely the product of the Halle Congress and the subsequent unity with the USPD left, but the fact that the KPD had won decisive influence among the Revolutionary Shop Stewards in the heat of the 1919-20 strike waves. The French Communist Party consolidated itself as a real force not merely with the Tours Congress, but by leading the CGT, which organised the most militant sectors of the French proletariat, notably in the metal and rail industries. The Bulgarian 'Narrow' CP became a force by focusing almost exclusively on the industrial proletariat, and leading many strikes. The Italian CP was able to lead the resistance because it spent years building illegal cells in factories like Fiat, enabling it to lead the 1943 strikes. Even the small CPGB became a force in the 1920s because of its decisive influence within the shop stewards' network and among the miners. Macnair focuses on the formal foundations and congresses of those parties, at the expense of the decisive element which made them a real force: influence in the proletariat.

I can say equally that comrade David's interpretation "is astonishing, coming from someone we assume knows quite well the history of the workers' movement." The SPD became a mass force through, first, rejection of the Lassallean line of single-person leadership and direct party control of trade unions, which allowed the Eisenach party to be founded by unifying dissident Lassalleans with the Bebel-Liebknicht group; second, August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht's parliamentary stand against the war with France (even though limited to abstaining); third, the Gotha unification of Eisenachers and Lassalleans; and fourth, the exploitation of *electoral* action. The Bulgarian 'Narrow' attained mass influence in the 1914-18 war, as a result of being the anti-war party.<sup>6</sup>

### False history

Secondly, the KPD had not "won decisive influence among the Revolutionary Shop Stewards in the heat of the 1919-20 strike waves". See Ralf Hofrogge's 2015 book on the *Revolutionäre Obleute*: the KPD(S) did not win leadership of this movement, but won (some of) the forces involved as part of the USPD.<sup>7</sup>

Third, the French CGT was split in the same year as Tours, with the right wing having the ability to expel the pro-communist wing. The PCF became a significant minority party, but only became the dominant party of the French working class (with the SFIO more white-collar, and so on) as a result of its role in the resistance in 1941-45. The same is true, albeit in different forms, of the Italian PCI. These organisations obtained support from the Allies, as part of the global popular front created after 1941.

Comrade David says that "these parties became a force not because they led vague 'political actions' or had mergers in congresses, but because they led workers in key industries". On the "vague political actions" I cited Karl Marx for the meaning of "political action"; it is

worth directly quoting, since comrade David plainly has not followed up the citations. Thus, on September 21 1871:

Complete abstention from political action is impossible. The abstentionist press participates in politics every day. It is only a question of how one does it, and of what politics one engages in. For the rest, to us abstention is impossible. The working class party functions as a political party in most countries by now, and it is not for us to ruin it by preaching abstention. Living experience, the political oppression of the existing governments compels the workers to occupy themselves with politics, whether they like it or not, be it for political or for social goals. To preach abstention to them is to throw them into the embrace of bourgeois politics. The morning after the Paris Commune, which has made proletarian political action an order of the day, abstention is entirely out of the question.

We want the abolition of classes. What is the means of achieving it? The only means is political domination of the proletariat. For all this, now that it is acknowledged by one and all, we are told not to meddle with politics. The abstentionists say they are revolutionaries, even revolutionaries *par excellence*. Yet revolution is a supreme political act and those who want revolution must also want the means of achieving it: that is, political action, which prepares the ground for revolution and provides the workers with the revolutionary training, without which they are sure to become the dupes of the Favres and Pyats the morning after the battle. However, our politics must be working class politics. The workers' party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its goal and its own policy.

The political freedoms, the right of assembly and association, and the freedom of the press - those are our weapons. Are we to sit back and abstain, while somebody tries to rob us of them? It is said that a political act on our part implies that we accept the existing state of affairs. On the contrary, so long as this state of affairs offers us the means of protesting against it, our use of these means does not signify that we recognise the prevailing order.<sup>8</sup>

And in a letter of November 23 of the same year:

*NB as to political movement:* The political movement of the working class has as its object, of course, the conquest of political power for the working class, and for this it is naturally necessary that a previous organisation of the working class, itself arising from their economic struggles, should have been developed up to a certain point.

On the other hand, however, every movement in which the working class comes out as a class against the ruling classes and attempts to force them by pressure from without is a political movement. For instance, the attempt in a particular factory or even a particular industry to force a shorter working day out of the capitalists by strikes, etc is a purely economic movement. On the other hand, the movement to force an eight-hour day, etc *law* is a *political* movement. And, in this way, out of the separate economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a *political* movement - that is to say a movement of the *class* - with the object of achieving

its interests in a general form, in a form possessing a general social force of compulsion. If these movements presuppose a certain degree of previous organisation, they are themselves equally a means of the development of this organisation.

Where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organisation to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power - ie, the political power of the ruling classes - it must at any rate be trained for this by continual agitation against and a hostile attitude towards the policy of the ruling classes. Otherwise it will remain a plaything in their hands, as the September revolution in France showed, and as is also proved up to a certain point by the game Messrs Gladstone and co are bringing off in England even up to the present time.<sup>9</sup>

This is a radically different conception of what a workers' party is *for* than the idea that it is for giving direct leadership to strike struggles. This is not to say that a communist party will not have trade union and industrial fractions and things to say about strike struggles. But wagering on strike struggles to the exclusion of political action - characterised as 'electoralism' or (for that matter) "mergers in congresses" is precisely to leave the working class as "a plaything in [the] hands" of the liberal or conservative wings of capitalist politics - with the result that, as happened, far-leftists' purely trade unionist militant leadership of strike struggles, and so on, can achieve only local and ephemeral results.

### Class

Comrade David is committed to a syndicalist conception of *what the workers' party is* - and, in effect, of revolution. This leads him to adopt a bizarrely narrow conception of what the working class is: that is, only the *industrial* workers. The agricultural workers, transport workers, the building trades, and so on, and so on, are not part of comrade David's conception of the revolutionary actor.

Comrade David rejects my insistence that the proletariat is all those who, lacking property in the means of production, are dependent on the wage share either directly (as wage-earners) or indirectly (as homemakers, other dependents, etc). He claims:

This is a classic revision of Marxism, which dissolves the centrality of the *industrial proletariat* into a sea of wage-earners. According to this definition, there is no difference between a dockworker, an assembly operator at Land Rover, an Oxford University professor and a lawyer in the City of London. All earn a wage, right?

Wage-earners have existed since way before the birth of capitalism. Yet the possibility of socialist revolution appears only with the creation of the industrial working class, who not only have to sell their labour to survive, but who also work in *socialised production*: ie, industry. It is because the industrial proletariat is at the heart of capitalist production, which has become socialised on a large scale, that the industrial proletariat is a revolutionary class: that is, a class which carries within it a new, progressive mode of production - socialism. It is because the industrial proletariat is concentrated in key areas of the productive process that it is objectively pushed towards collective forms of struggle. When Marx and Engels talked about the proletariat in the *Communist manifesto*, they were not merely referring to people earning a wage.

Those existed even in Roman times. They were talking about the *modern industrial working class*.

I would suggest that comrade David go away and read volume 2 of Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution: the politics of social classes*,<sup>10</sup> which very elaborately collects all of Marx's writing on the issue of class. He will find that it is he, not I, who revises Marxism on this question.

I might add that I have recently written three articles on the question of class in the UK today - a review of Dan Evans's *A Nation of shopkeepers* and a two-parter on 'class composition in a snapshot'.<sup>11</sup> It should be clear from these that I do *not* imagine that "there is no difference between a dockworker, an assembly operator at Land Rover, an Oxford University professor and a lawyer in the City of London". My understanding of class is perfectly capable of recognising that Oxbridge dons and City solicitors are middle class (indeed, the dons at St John's and some of the other colleges are very large corporate landlords; the *partners* in the City law firms are major (unproductive) capitalist operators ...). I explore, where comrade David does not, the nature of the *employed middle class*.

I will not, however, take seriously comrade David's suggestion that "employees in small shops (like the famous barista, who often comes up in discussions with RCOers) are not proletarians. These layers form various strata of the petty bourgeoisie." Really? This would identify as middle class a large part of the base of Chartism - called by Marx and Engels the first political party of *the working class*.

What lies behind comrade David's revision of Marxism on this point is the comrades' commitment to syndicalism, already mentioned. Marx's conception of the central role of labour flows from the *separation of labour from the means of production* forcing workers to organise collectively, unlike medieval peasants and artisans - and in a different sense, unlike slaves. Yes, there were wage-workers in classical antiquity and in feudalism. What changes is the expropriation of the peasants and artisans, meaning that the workers become the numerically dominant exploited class.

For the syndicalists, the working class is to take power through trade

unionism, leading to 'one big strike'. For this perspective, the size of workplaces matters enormously. In contrast, Marx's and Engels' conception of working class political action is posed just as strongly in a world of small workplaces (as was, in fact, true of Britain before World War I) as in one of large ones.

Comrade David's radical misunderstanding of class thus illustrates that the issues at stake in the "proletarianisation" proposal are by no means secondary. We would all like to create organisations which have deep roots in the working class - which none of the far left organisations to the left of the 'official communists' have or have had in the last 90 years. But the idea of creating these roots by industrial colonisation and leadership roles in what Marx called the "purely economic movement" is not only a quack remedy which has repeatedly failed: it also entails a very fundamental strategic error ●

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### Notes

1. 'Beware of Sparts bearing gifts' *Weekly Worker* February 26 2026: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1574/beware-of-sparts-bearing-gifts; 'Not a serious response', March 5 2026: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1575/not-a-serious-response; 'Key questions for uniting the left' March 12 2026: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1576/key-questions-for-uniting-the-left
2. As seen by Laocoon in Virgil's *Aeneid* (ii: 49): 'Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes', 'I fear the Greeks, even bringing gifts' (Latin: www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/aen2.shtml; English: vergilregit.blogspot.com/p/book-2-full-liter.html).
3. Letters, August 28 2025.
4. Letters, September 4 2025.
5. Eg. www.johndclare.net/Weimar6\_Geary.htm (1998); T Mason *Social policy in the Third Reich* Oxford 1993; T Kirk *Nazism and the working class in Austria: industrial unrest and political dissent in the 'national community'* Cambridge 2002.
6. JD Bell *The Bulgarian Communist Party from Blagoev to Zhivkov* Stanford CA 2020.
7. R Hofrogge *Working class politics in the German revolution: Richard Müller, the revolutionary shop stewards and the origins of the council movement* Chicago 2015 (especially chapters 7 and 8).
8. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/09/21.htm. An alternative report, with some additional material from September 20, is at www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/09/politics-speech.htm.
9. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71\_11\_23.htm.
10. New York 1978.
11. 'Rising middle classes?' July 3 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1545/rising-middle-classes; 'Class composition in a snapshot', part 1, August 21 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1549/class-composition-in-a-snapshot; part 2, August 28 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1550/class-composition-in-a-snapshot.

## Fighting fund

# Counting on you

Unfortunately, the running total for the *Weekly Worker* March fighting fund is still very much behind where we need to be. That despite some useful contributions in the last week.

Playing their part via bank transfer or standing order were comrades PB (£80), MM (£75), TR (£40), TW and GB (£25 each), OG (£24), plus MD, JL and PM, who all chipped in with £10. Meanwhile, donating via PayPal were comrades KS and PM (£50), not to mention comrades RD, AR, SO, RD and GP (a fiver each).

So we've received £424 over the last seven days, but, don't forget, our monthly target is no less than £2,750 and after 18 days of March the running total is now just £1,282. Well, at least we've now passed the first grand! True, within the next couple of days I'm expecting a few substantial contributions from regular donors, but they'll still leave us well behind the going rate.

We know that this paper's vital role is really appreciated by so many. For example, new subscriber JK writes: "You're doing a brilliant job! Keep up the good work." But now we need lots more of them to turn that appreciation into concrete support. To find out more about the various ways you can do that, please go to the web link below.

There are, as I write, just 13 days left to raise the £1,478 we urgently need, so please don't leave us waiting till the very last moment! Better still, why not set up a monthly standing order or regular PayPal contribution?

The *Weekly Worker* is counting on you ●

Robbie Rix

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

**YOUR PARTY**

# We need light and air

Real power is being exercised behind the backs of the elected committee members. The aim is clear: a politically pliant membership which votes in the approved way in occasional referendums and does the donkey work in elections. Meanwhile demands for closed sessions, secrecy and codes of conduct are threatening to paralyse Grassroots Left, reports **Carla Roberts**

The second meeting of Your Party's central executive committee is due to take place on Sunday March 22, from 3-5pm. The agenda circulated by YP chair Jenn Forbes is yet again so crowded that a short meeting cannot possibly discuss any of the issues in any detail. In addition to the "standing items" and various "reports", there will be "updates on local elections", "devolved nations election planning", a discussion on the "full CEC code of conduct", YP's "support for the Together march against racism", how to "operationalise internal CEC communications". Oh, and the question of "branch formations" is tabled yet again.

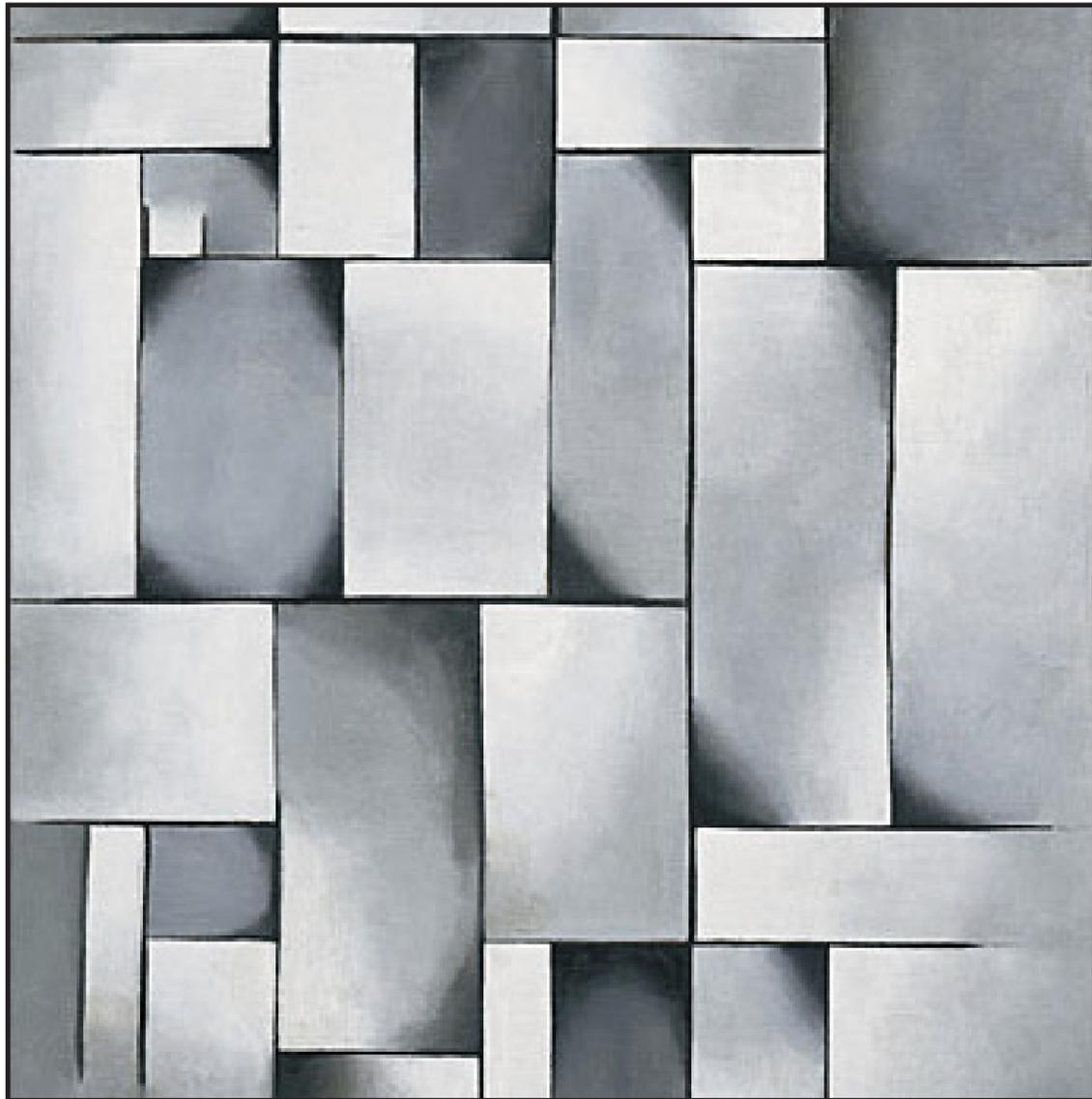
As is apparent, the CEC is not actually supposed to make any *real* decisions - it is there to rubberstamp and to give the mere *illusion* of democracy. All key decisions have been delegated to the officers' group. And in reality, it is not even that group that runs the party - it still is very much Karie Murphy who is really in charge. We are unsure if she has an official position (yet), but, if there was any transparency or democracy in YP, she would have to be given the title of 'general secretary'. We suspect, however, she knows that this would not go down too well with many members, even the thousands who remain loyal to Corbyn.

There still remains a false perception that the decent Corbyn has been led astray by this female Machiavelli. And, while he is certainly averse to conflict and a hippie at heart, there can be no doubt that he is fully and actively in support of what Murphy is doing and has been doing for years.

**Key question**

Branch formation remains the key question. No proposal has been circulated yet as to how the Corbyn clique envisages official branches being set up. However, there can be no doubt that it will not just recognise the 150 or so real existing branches. We hope that the Grassroots Left members on the CEC will bring their own proposal (GL had produced a good proposal during the election, which could be tweaked). Publishing such a motion in advance would go a long way to revive the GL and the left in YP (more on that below).

One of the key hurdles is the constitutional requirement that inaugural meetings require a 20% quorum of all local members - that was the least bad "option" available at the stage-managed launch conference in Liverpool. That would have been difficult enough last year, when YP was still growing. But the way the Corbyn clique has run the CEC elections - in the most undemocratic way possible, with expulsions, the barring of candidates, stage-managed hustings, the worst form of single transferable voting and hostile leaks to the bourgeois press (Murphy's speciality) - has alienated many. We know that thousands have left already - some towards Green pastures. Numbers at most branch meetings have dwindled to about a third from what they were in the summer. And some people never actually joined YP in the first place, as it turns out. Andrew Feinstein has just explained



Theo van Doesburg 'Composition in gray' (1919)

that, "even though I was very involved in the initial discussions, I eventually never actually joined as a consequence of the factionalism and a number of other issues".<sup>1</sup> As the comrade actively supported the Grassroots Left, we presume he means the factionalism of the Corbyn clique.

Not that these departures worry HQ - quite the opposite. A passive membership that occasionally clicks in email referendums suits them perfectly. Corbyn has no desire to build an active, mass working class party, let alone a revolutionary one. Something like Momentum or Podemos, that is what he and his supporters envisage.

We hear that the proposal the leadership clique will put forward is likely to contain various delaying tactics: apparently there is a plan to hold, yet again, regional assemblies first, where members may discuss ways in which a modern party can engage in community organising, activists' assemblies, networking circles, etc - anything but real, decision-making branches (that is so "old-fashioned", you see). Judging by the comments by membership officer Cassie Bellingham at a meeting in Oxford, they also seem to want to do away with local branch officers altogether (see Letters page).

That will be combined with massive bureaucratic hoops that those wishing to organise 'official' branches would have to jump through. The March 8 CEC meeting already heard that HQ demands all branches be set

up as "accounting units in accordance with the requirements of the electoral commission". If that is indeed the plan, then local branches would not just have to appoint a *proper* treasurer: they would have to submit detailed, annual accounts to the electoral commission<sup>2</sup> - a hugely bureaucratic and time-consuming task. The commission does not actually require such units - a national party can choose to register as a whole unit. But that is not what HQ wants. It wants to *prevent* active branches forming.

And, as Podemos shows, you do not need to give members *real* power to get them to occasionally go out to canvas in elections. For the May 2026 elections, this has mainly been outsourced to a list of 22 "local community groups" anyway. But an email by Forbes informs these groups that, even though they have been 'pre-chosen', they would still have to properly apply to YP:

Should Your Party decide to officially support your group, you will be designated as an Affiliate Local Group of Your Party. This will not alter your local identity and will apply on a temporary basis. We will also ask each individual candidate standing for election with your group to complete a separate form for administrative and due diligence purposes.

Delay, delay, delay.

In theory, 'normal' YP members

can also apply to stand in the elections under the YP banner. But there are a number of hoops to jump through. Eg: "All individual candidates standing under the Your Party banner will need to be selected democratically by members. And they will need to pass due diligence checks and demonstrate they are able to mount a credible campaign", as Louise Regan writes in an email on March 17.<sup>3</sup> How can they be selected "democratically" by local members if HQ does not recognise any branches? We could well imagine that this will be done via email, requiring perhaps a certain 'quorum' of positive replies. Perhaps 50%? An utter impossibility. Which is the point, of course.

Further proof, if it was needed, is the refusal by HQ to send out an email to all members in Scotland, drafted by the Interim Scottish Executive Committee (ISEC), which wanted to ascertain which members might consider standing. Good on the ISEC for publishing the reply it received from Jenn Forbes<sup>4</sup> - after four weeks. She claims that there are "legal and regulatory matters", which, very sadly, stop the party from sending out the email. Some believe that shows "incompetence" by HQ. Not so - it is exactly the opposite. After all, there were no such "legal and regulatory" problems when HQ sent out tens of thousands of postcards during the CEC elections to all those who had not voted in the first few days. No, this is very much part and

parcel of HQ's *conscious* strategy to stop YP becoming anything but a tightly controlled, top-down, online organisation.

**Grassroots Left**

Can the left oppose this? And how would it have to go about it to be successful? The Grassroots Left had scheduled a meeting of its Advisory Committee<sup>5</sup> on Sunday March 15 to discuss just that. The AC is made up of what was previously called the GL slate committee (one representative from each of the constituent organisations involved in GL), plus all elected CEC members. A couple of days before the meeting, Socialist Worker carried an article that - if you know how to read it - announces that the Socialist Workers Party is about to withdraw from Your Party. This was followed by SWP national secretary Lewis Nielsen leaving GL. The Socialist Unity Platform has also withdrawn its rep, on the understanding that, having helped to launch GL, SUP had not met since.

Most of the remaining constituent groups in the GL did not show up at the meeting. This unfortunately reflects the demoralisation that has set in. It is extremely hard to build after a defeat: it requires patient stock-taking and honest discussion on the way forward - neither of which are particular strengths of today's left.

Four motions had been submitted to the AC in advance. The only one submitted with more than 12 hours' notice was on transparency, from the Democratic Socialists of Your Party, which "encourages" members of the CEC to organise public feedback sessions directly in the aftermath of CEC meetings; prepare and publish motions on branch recognition and a democratic recall conference for the next CEC meeting; and to publish all CEC documents, "including the agenda, before and after CEC meetings, including anything marked 'confidential' (apart from disciplinary matters, individual membership and certain financial information)".<sup>6</sup>

The reason: while the GL CEC members have produced a long, very detailed report of the March 8 CEC meeting, this only occasionally quotes from those reports and documents. The comrades have shied away from publishing anything marked 'confidential' - because the word appeared once on top of the agenda, it has been taken as meaning 'everything'. A mistake in our view. The CPGB's rep certainly would have supported the DSYP motion.

On the other hand, we would have opposed the overly detailed and bureaucratic 'GL structure proposal' produced by two individual DSYP members who attended as observers. It entirely misunderstands where GL is currently at. It assigns voting powers to a list of 30 or so individuals, but makes no proposal on how 'normal' GL members could get involved. It is a non-starter. It is also very unlikely that the DSYP would have endorsed the motion. To make matters worse, this proposal at first contained a terrible 'code of conduct' written by a GL CEC member (more on that below), but it has since been taken out and presented separately.

Workers Power and its former leading member, Richard Brenner

(who was there as an observer), put forward a proposal to basically drop GL and set up 'Your Party Organise' "as a constructive coordinating body - not a faction".<sup>7</sup> Which seems to come down to relaunching GL by ditching the constituent groups, but instead focussing on the proto-branches - and all that under a different, 'non-factional' name, which happily enough would also appeal to the thousands of socialists who - don't you know it? - are about to leave the Green Party (and Greens Organise) when it "starts enforcing cuts". To join Your Party? Really? This has more than a hint of wishful thinking about it.

There are a number of further problems with this proposal, aside from the rather dishonest attempt to pretend that it has nothing to do with the 'factional' GL. For a start, the comrades have specifically rejected to link such an initiative with a political programme of any kind. And it is clear that they would certainly oppose GL's programme,<sup>8</sup> which comrade Brenner rather memorably ridiculed as being "full of weird *Weekly Worker* obsessions", before backtracking spectacularly, when it was pointed out to him that Zarah Sultana had played a leading role in writing it.<sup>9</sup>

This anti-programme attitude is explained by the so-called 'transitional method', which means opposing anything that goes beyond the most basic economic demands. "The full programme for socialism develops organically", we have been told, in defence of the apolitical proposal. When has that ever been true? Producing a full programme for socialism is a very complex and time-consuming task. Marx and Engels, for example, were commissioned to produce the most famous party programme of them all, the *Communist manifesto*. Marx also helped to write the programme of the Parti Ouvrier in France. Then there are critiques of the Gotha and Erfurt programmes, the latter serving as the model for the *foundational* programme of Russian social democracy.

Worse, there already is a body in existence that is coordinating the YP proto-branches and which also does not have a clear political programme - YP Connections Network. What would be the point of duplicating its efforts? It might have been an idea for GL to get together with that network and try to sharpen and politicise it. And perhaps GL can still play that role - but Sunday's meeting has made that a lot harder.

## Transparency

As the keen reader will have worked out by now, the March 15 meeting of the GL advisory committee (AC) did not actually get to any of those motions. It descended into what a couple of attendees told us was "one of the worst meetings" they ever sat through. As it got very heated and quite a few people lost their composure, we will refrain from quoting anybody directly.

But we do make an exception for Richard Brenner. Not only because he is somebody who has played a leading role in the Trotskyist sect, Workers Power, for over 40 years and very much knows what he is doing. But also because he is chiefly to blame for the meeting descending into chaos.

Although he only attended as an observer - he was invited at the request of a couple of CEC members - Richard presented the first motion: to hold the meeting in "closed session", as a "private" event that "no individual should be reporting about". He demanded that only a collectively agreed report (if such a report should even be produced) should see the light of day.

Naturally, the CPGB rep strongly disagreed - as did the delegates from DSY, Socialist Alternative and Sheffield Left. Considering what

was at stake (the future of GL, no less), comrades argued in favour of transparent reporting - not just internally, to the members of the constituent groups, but also to GL supporters, the YP membership and the wider working class. If we want to take any YP members with us, we should - at the very least - feel obliged to tell them where we think we should go next. That is particularly important, considering how undemocratic and untransparent YP HQ has been running things. "How can we claim to build something more transparent if we don't actually behave any more transparently?", as one comrade asked. Brenner's motion also goes against the agreed remit of the AC: "Transparency, democratic accountability and collective ownership will be central to the AC's functioning."

The meeting got increasingly fraught and soon enough the real target became clear - the *Weekly Worker*. Brenner and Workers Power have always disagreed with the *Weekly Worker's* open reporting - which he rather unoriginally calls a "gossip sheet", though he usually adds adjectives like "insignificant" or "toxic". The culture of our paper goes entirely against the *modus operandi* of bureaucratic centralist sects, including, of course comrade Brenner himself, who is a member of a sect of one: we understand that a couple of years ago, he presented a set of theses on what he calls his "gender-critical" views to WP - and walked after he lost the vote.

Workers Power - nowadays to be counted in the social-imperialist camp over the Ukraine war - cannot contain differing views on *any* substantial question for long. Why? Because members are not allowed to *publicly* disagree with the leadership line. Therefore, instead of gagging himself, he felt he had no option but to leave. Naturally, none of the discussions on this issue have been published. One day, he just vanished from an organisation he had been leading for decades. Funnily enough, he recently deactivated his Facebook account, where he published many of his "gender-critical" views. For anybody who is wondering, there is nothing original about them. They are very similar to the biological determinist line of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain.

In the March 15 meeting, he charged the CPGB rep in particular with "being a nasty bully" who had created a "toxic atmosphere" in GL and wanted to "wreck" and "destroy" GL and Your Party. He repeatedly claimed that both Lee Rock and Chris Strafford (of DSY) are members of the CPGB. When it was pointed out that both had left a good few years ago, he called them "liars". The intention is clear: red bait anybody who is calling for transparency and who argues against secret meetings.

Sadly, he seems to have had some (no doubt temporary) success with some in GL: a number a attendees have parroted his line about the "toxic atmosphere", which had allegedly been created due to our "incessant calls for absolute transparency".

## Code of conduct

The proposed code of conduct reflects a similar approach to transparency - though we believe it does come from a different motivation. Comrade Brenner is hostile to transparency and "washing your dirty linen in public" as a principle, and has been egging on the CEC members on this question. Some of them are clearly feeling the strain. Requests to publish the full CEC documents or hold public Zoom sessions have been misinterpreted as "personal attacks".

No doubt, some of our CEC members are still coming to terms with the fact that, rather than actually running the party, they are being pushed into a role of 'controlled

opposition' by HQ - and rather rudely so. They are feeling under immense pressure and it was worrying to see a couple of them feeling so vulnerable that they burst into tears in the meeting. Not because anybody said anything rude, horrible or hostile to them, we should add, but because they have no power on the CEC. Anything they propose will be voted down, automatically. Which is, of course, exactly why we keep insisting that transparency and openness are now our key weapons.

The proposed code of conduct<sup>10</sup> is very much a reflection of that sense of vulnerability. Take the point, 'Confidentiality and consent', which states: "Information that is not already public should not be shared externally without the explicit consent of the relevant CEC members or the body that owns that information. Requests for internal information should respect this principle."

This is, we believe, partially as a result of the *Weekly Worker* Twitter account being the first to publish the names of the elected members of the YP officers' group, a couple of hours after the event. We were scolded for being "irresponsible" and "spreading gossip".

There is the appeal for communicating in a "respectful and comradely manner" and the claim that "hostile, dismissive or disrespectful language is not acceptable". As always with this type of document, that leads straight to the obvious question: who exactly decides what is "hostile, dismissive or disrespectful language", and what is an "acceptable" argument? Who makes those decisions?

Then there is this: "Disagreements should focus on political or strategic questions, not interpersonal arguments. Participants should avoid conducting extended one-to-one arguments in group channels" and "avoid escalating disagreements through social media or public channels without prior attempts to resolve them internally". We have yet to see any "interpersonal arguments" on the GL channels that are not actually about *politics*.

The rest of the points are all designed to protect CEC members from being 'badgered' and/or criticised: "Participants should: avoid unreasonable pressuring or repeated demands; respect boundaries and avoid persistent messaging; avoid public attacks on any individuals on the committee and CEC; avoid misrepresentation of others' positions."

And, yes, there are penalties: "Breach of the code of conduct will lead to up to two warnings, followed by removal from the WhatsApp groups, a suspension of voting powers, and disinvitation from the following NC meeting. A motion will be raised to that meeting to discuss and vote on either the formal removal of membership or the conditions for reinstatement."

Rather than elected CEC members being held accountable by the organisations that make up the Grassroots Left (or the 2,000 or so people who signed up to GL, for that matter), this proposal would give CEC members the power to discipline and remove GL supporters. It is hard to believe that three or four CEC members have apparently come out in support of it. The only CEC member we know who has openly opposed it is Sophie Wilson from Yorkshire. Good on her. We would also be very surprised if Zarah Sultana supports it. She has, understandably, kept her distance from these shenanigans.

Unsurprisingly, the March 15 meeting ended in total disarray. The rep from Socialist Alternative had proposed that perhaps we could agree on "not directly quoting anybody". This was accepted by everybody, apart from Richard Brenner, who insisted on pushing his motion to a vote. It

was eventually voted on and 'sort of' passed, by five votes to four. In addition to the CPGB, it was opposed by Socialist Alternative, DSY and Sheffield Left. All three CEC members present voted in favour, as did Workers Power - and, controversially, the rep of Nothing About Us: they had walked out of the AC the previous week after somebody had questioned if this 'disability network' is actually in operation. Most AC members understood this to mean 'no, it is not' and the group was taken off the list of constituent organisations. In any case, even without this 'problematic' vote, the CPGB rep would have felt under no obligation to accept it. Just like our CEC members should feel under no obligation to adhere to the 'confidentiality' rules doled out by Karie Murphy.

Should this code of conduct - or further requests for private and secret meetings - be accepted by a majority in GL, then that would certainly spell the end of the organisation. But, then again, it remains to be seen if there even will be another meeting of the AC.

Some argued that secrecy is necessary, because it would amount to "sabotage" if the "*Weekly Worker* tells Karie Murphy what we're doing". Murphy actually knows perfectly well what we are doing: debating politics, trying to map out a viable alternative strategy and seeing what initiatives we can agree on. In the real world, that is what is called 'politics'.

We have nothing to be ashamed of, we have nothing to hide. After all we are not engaged in some underhand, sinister plot, a conspiracy designed to damage or bring down YP. On the contrary we seek to rescue YP, an organisation that we believe has taken a badly wrong course with the top-down control freakery of HQ, the refusal to provide branches with membership lists and the complete lack of transparency about what is going on.

Yes, doubtless Karie Murphy reads the *Weekly Worker*. But so do thousands of others on the left, including YP members, who want to, need to, know what is happening. Murphy will find nothing in the *Weekly Worker* that endangers anyone's security, that leaves anyone open to criminal charges. But she will find the truth ... and that can only but be pointed, frank and cutting. Yes, sometimes it can hurt. But without the unvarnished truth, we as a class can never hope to build a democratic party, let alone run society.

Only those who serve ulterior, hidden or privileged interests insist on the dull, sanitized, grey upon grey version of things. Grassroots Left should leave that to the Corbyn clique ●

## Notes

1. x.com/andrewfeinstein/status/2033187796744094075.
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6. bit.ly/4cWCK22.
7. bit.ly/4bCFIXi.
8. grassrootsleft.org/platform.
9. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1567/left-gets-itself-organised.
10. bit.ly/4bkrSKj.

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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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# One-dimensional men

Louis Theroux's latest documentary has sparked perplexed commentary in the liberalosphere. Why is the tacky world of masculinist influencers so attractive to so many young men? Paul Demarty gives us his take

The subjects of Louis Theroux's *Inside the manosphere* are the topic of great moral concern among contemporary liberals.

These men, we understand, give their young fans a bizarrely distorted picture of the proper relations between the sexes. In doing so, they perhaps play some role in the lurch of society to the far right, and above all the interruption of the general leftward drift of successive generations on questions of gender. The effect of the film, however, is not to paint these influencers as evil geniuses. Their ideas are contemptible merely *as ideas*, never mind political prescriptions. These men skim across life; they plumb no greater depth than the jet-ski we glimpse, at one moment, arcing across the bay of Marbella. They deliberately avow their shallowness, and that avowal counts perversely for sincerity among their followers.

In the course of 90 minutes, Theroux takes us first to Marbella, where he meets the Brits, Harrison Sullivan and Ed Matthews. Sullivan is plainly the bigger fish; Matthews more or less his Adderall-added thrall. He then moves onto Miami, noting its pride of place in the manosphere scene, where he meets Louisiana-born businessman and masculinist Justin Waller and edgy podcaster Myron Gaines. Finally there is a stop in New York to meet the man best known as 'Sneako', certainly the best known of all these men, before a return to Marbella, for a bizarre confrontation with Sullivan in the company of his mother.

The nature of his subjects puts a strange twist on his tried and true formula, which is basically to interview very peculiar people in an assiduously guileless manner. Caught off guard, and probed with innocent-seeming questions by this strange, gangly, awkward Englishman, they say more than they ought.

## Recursive

But the manosphere guys are not his usual subjects. Precisely because they are so superficial, they are paradoxically extremely reflexive. Their obsession with how their 'content' plays online puts them on their guard. Their fans, of course, are happy to warn them that Theroux is out to get them - which, to be strictly fair, he is. One remembers the second half of *Don Quixote*, where the knight's adventures are shaped by the fact that he is already famous for the exploits recounted in the already-published first part (Theroux's previous interview with Jimmy Savile is thrown in his face repeatedly). The interview scenes are strangely recursive, since both the Netflix crew and the subjects are constantly filming, duelling to master the narrative.

Or perhaps that is not quite right. There cannot be anyone who is both on Myron Gaines's Telegram channel and in the market for this documentary. There is not actually a fight for the soul of young men taking place here: rather two perfectly symmetrical, but



Filming being filmed

non-overlapping, acts of ideological warfare. One finds its place in the manosphere's struggle against the feminising tendencies, as they see it, of modern culture, exemplified in the woke Netflix documentary; the other in the liberal battle against rightwing misinformation. In this instance, the liberals undoubtedly have the better share of the truth, but the film ends up haunted by its own futility.

The livestreams of the subjects are interpolated, typically vertical-format, phone-friendly video cropped in a *trompe l'oeil*. The relentless chatter of the viewer comments scrolls past. Theroux's final confrontation with Sullivan is presented twice: firstly, as edited by the Netflix team, and secondly, as clipped by Sullivan's people. The Netflix version is notable for Sullivan's increasing inability to distinguish clearly between views he actually holds and views he avers for more likes and investments into his plainly fraudulent financial schemes.

There is a glimpse into a kind of insanity here - the mask having fully eaten into the face of this attractive, hench, if slightly dim, young man. Sullivan's take emphasises the moment when he reduces Theroux to silence by asking him if the Gaza war is a genocide. It's a nicely executed gotcha, if a complete non-sequitur (it is also clearly fed to him by an online commentator).

A lukewarm review by *The Guardian's* Lucy Mangan notes that Theroux's interviewing style is a little more aggressive than normal, and thinks this is all to the good: "the silent supposed bafflement and dependence on giving people enough rope to hang themselves, which are such a large part of his arsenal, look like increasingly feeble weapons". In the end, she concludes that the film is in any case a failure as an attack on the manosphere people: "I don't think there's been a documentary about these men presented by a woman ... That, I think, might yield something new."<sup>1</sup>

This is probably wrong - above all, for being too optimistic. Netflix has recently been dogged by rumours that the writers on its productions are told that they are creating "second screen"

content - that is, one must assume that the viewer has the show on in the background, while they scroll through some feed on their phone. This is denied by Netflix and also by many jobbing writers, so may be literally false. But it is worth mentioning, since there can hardly be five minutes of this film's 90 where there is *nobody* in the frame looking at their phone. To suppose that a documentary about people looking at their phones, broadcast on a platform that happily assumes its viewers are looking at their phones, could in fact puncture the balloon of a reactionary ideology seems, on reflection, ridiculous - whatever the director's gender.

## Success

Taking that impossible objective off the table, then, there are a couple of ways in which the film could succeed or fail. One is aesthetic: is it, in some way or another, worth watching? Does it have a strong narrative through-line, drama, cinematographic verve, and what have you? The other is a more *restricted* political objective: does it tell us anything useful about this ideology, its reach, its motivations and scope?

I think, on balance, it succeeds as spectacle. The postmodern meta stuff - filming people filming you filming them - is exploited quite nicely. The locations themselves are too: the absurd, shallow British outpost of Marbella and then Miami - increasingly a utopia of the American right, a kind of Caribbean Dubai; the perfect sun-kissed backdrops to false promises of a life of tacky leisure and limitless, indifferent sexual intercourse. In this respect, it could have done with less of the 'second screen' heavy-handedness. Most of Theroux's 'this is all very important' voiceovers could have been cut without loss to the film's clarity. Say what you like about Adam Curtis (no stranger to expository voiceover), but the man knows when to shut up and just let the B-roll unspool.

As a political text, the film has a few tasks: to explain what these men think, to give some account of why, and to also give some account of why it is attractive to so many others. On

the first point, it seems - even given the threadbare pseudo-theoretical basis of manosphere ideology - too superficial. Perhaps, as football people say, you can only beat the team in front of you, and the interview subjects seem particularly shallow. Their interest in their own ideas seems entirely limited to how they can screw money out of them. All the same, the strange melange at work here - bowdlerised evolutionary psychology, self-help, prosperity gospel with god conveniently edited out of the picture - is occluded. In its place are scattered references to conspiracy theories and random bursts of gonzo misogyny.

The manosphere view of the world is that men are naturally highly sociosexual - that is, they pursue multiple sexual partners - and this sexuality is somehow connected to a natural role as heads of households and political societies. Women pursue security and avoid conflict, and prefer sexual exclusivity, selecting their mates carefully. Sexual success is a matter of antagonistic conflict between males, adjudicated in modern times by way of financial success. In the way stands a bureaucracy focused on safety, characteristically feminine - and also the malign influence of the most powerful men, trying to keep everyone else down.

Working a nine-to-five job is to surrender to the bureaucracy and the boss - castration in all but the gory physical reality. It is good to pursue the outward trappings of success - leisure, fast cars, vast harems of OnlyFans models. This worldview intrudes on the film occasionally, but there is nobody prepared to spell it out; or, if they did, it is on the cutting room floor.

There is more interest on the second point. Several of Theroux's subjects seem to have fallen into it by accident. Sullivan started out his online media career as a fitness influencer, telling his followers how to get biceps like his, but seems to have noticed that tying this to the cartoonish vision of masculinity of the manosphere increased his success. It gathers a large audience, to which he then sells access to a plainly exploitative investment app. Some scam is always at the bottom of the rabbit hole: a worthless online success school, or a dodgy cryptocurrency. It is this sort of idiotic fraud that ultimately pays for all the Lamborghinis and mid-century home furnishings.

## Missing dad

Theroux notes that some of these men were raised by single mothers abandoned by their fathers - including Sullivan, the estranged son of long-time England rugby star Victor Ubogu. This is the most conservative implication of the film: perhaps the lack of *actual* male role models made the cartoonish and wholly abstract masculinism of the manosphere more attractive? (Some on the online right have come to mock such influencers as "male-to-male transsexuals", performing their own sex as if they were in drag ... Judith Butler, in her

younger days, might have approved.)

To say this is conservative is not to reject it out of hand, but it needs expansion. In an interesting critique of the 'post-liberal' right, Nicolas Villarreal notes that it assumes that there is a 'natural' aristocracy in waiting to assume leadership over a new polity oriented to the common good. But no such layer exists:

No process of socialisation, the cultivation of individuals into specific social roles, exists to create such a strata. The cause of the post-liberal turn, the intense atomisation, precarity, deracinated civil society, and subsequent nihilism which drove people to abandon liberalism, is also what prevents post-liberalism from forming into a coherent social framework.<sup>2</sup>

The manosphere people are not exactly post-liberals, but the two phenomena are related. The essential problem that motivates both is this *general* breakdown in socialisation mentioned by Villarreal. Societies as atomised as contemporary Britain and America produce neither a competent ruling class nor - without great and proximately thankless effort - a threatening revolutionary class. In this void, the time is ripe for apparently grand explanations of dysfunction that have wholly individual purported solutions - and any number of grifts and scams.

That, of course, brings us to the *followers* of these influencers, whose interest in them is primarily on the self-help level. Most excruciating is an exchange with one of Waller's fanboys. Under light interrogation, he reveals that he was recently living in his car, but Waller's advice has helped him. He refuses to believe in the reality of depression. Of course, he was sad when his brother died, but he got over it. How did his brother die, asks Louis? By suicide.

If there is a lesson here, it is that the left - if it is to be equal to its tasks - has to be a pro-social force. Freedom, as a purely empty space of decision, is not enough as an end goal. Generations must replace each other, physically by way of sexual reproduction, but also as custodians of the good life. Socialism has no meaning except as a positive condition for morally defensible relations between individuals.

The prattlings of the manosphere are plainly worthless in this respect, but they *are* adequate to the lived reality of pervasive atomisation. Changing that reality is the problem before us ●

Adrian Choa (director), Louis Theroux (presenter), *Inside the manosphere*, Netflix 2026

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## Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2026/mar/11/louis-theroux-inside-the-manosphere-review-why-doesnt-he-focus-more-on-the-impact-on-women.
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