

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



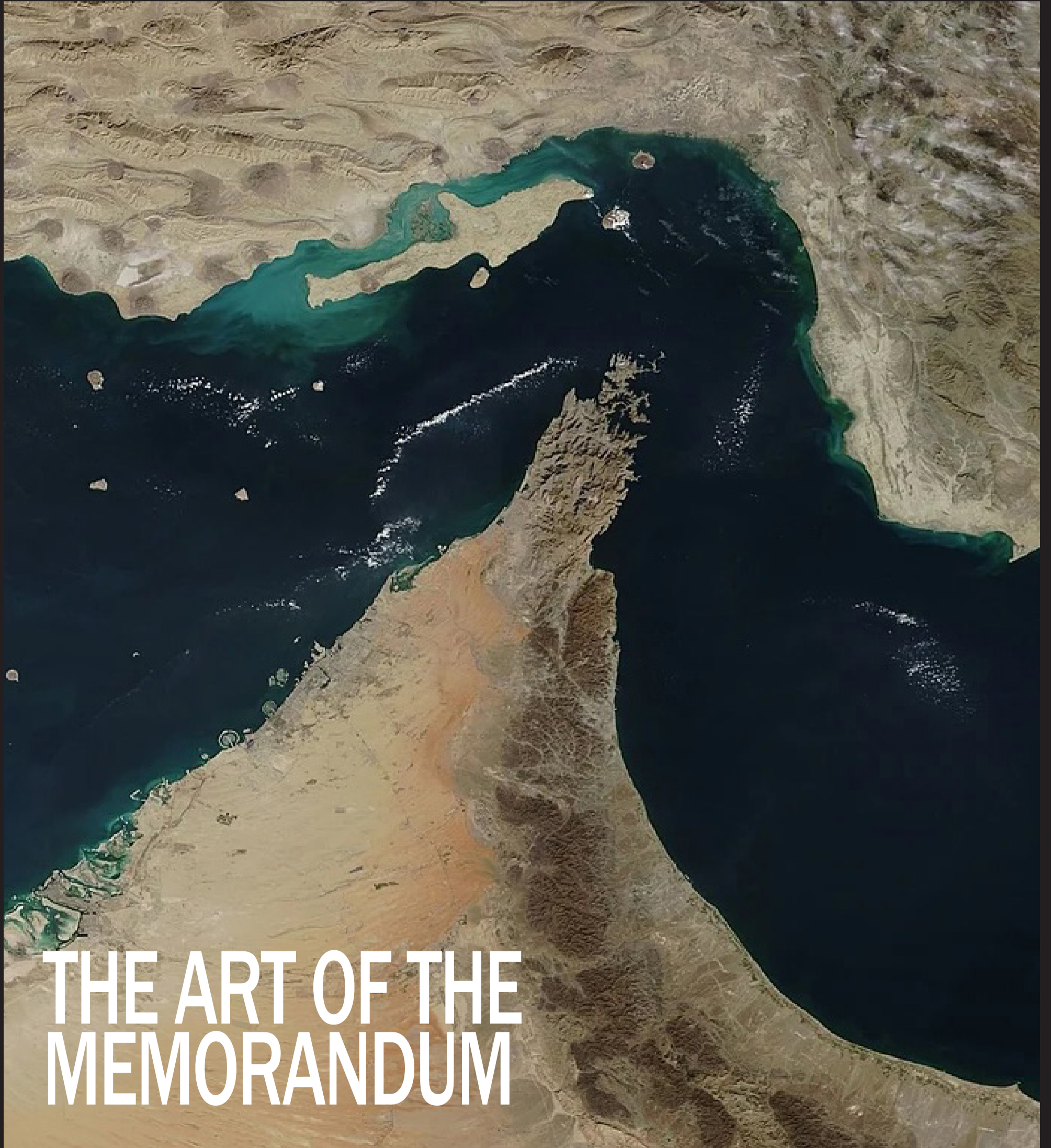
David Hockney painted friends, lovers, landscapes and pools ... could he have made it as an artist in today's world?

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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THE ART OF THE MEMORANDUM

LETTERS



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

Shanly resigns

I respond in a personal capacity to last week's letter from Max Shanly with the claim that members of RS21's Marxist Unity Caucus (MUC) led the Democratic Socialists of Your Party to become "nothing more than a rump of what it once was" (June 11).

DSYP, as we came to know it, was formed through the merger of two grassroots groups, DSYP and For a Party Republic, the latter founded by Shanly on the back of popularising a unitary, mass socialist party, modelled on the constitutional structure of the Democratic Socialists of America. These ideas formed the basis for a broad appeal and popular campaign group to win this approach in the founding of Your Party and ultimately, at the YP founding conference in late 2025.

Despite multiple attempts to plan ahead, comrades in DSYP were unable to reach clarity on its purpose. This is the moment when DSYP became the rump of what it once was - there was simply no agreed plan on what next - and after an incredibly intensive four-month campaign with mixed results, our organisers had started to disengage.

Shanly immediately pushed for DSYP to be the leading group in forming a slate for the YP central executive committee elections. His strategy focused on the exclusion of competing groups - eg, Democratic Bloc and Organising for Popular Power - in order to leverage his much repeated claim of deep friendship and connection with Zarah Sultana MP, as the 'big name' for a slate, and get as many DSYP organisers as possible elected to the CEC. In doing so, it would then be possible to course-correct YP.

While I was a member of the DSYP executive committee in late 2025, I warned that the lack of direction for DSYP after the YP founding conference, combined with sleepwalking into the CEC elections without democratic accountability inside DSYP, would demoralise and burn out a majority of our organisers. That's exactly what happened.

Shanly and his allies gained a majority influence within DSYP through internal disputes, personal attacks and making accusations of incompetence against myself and other members of the EC, which led to a number of us resigning. I published a long-form response alongside my resignation, raising my concerns, the risks, uncomradely behaviour and contradictions on Shanly's explanations on maintaining an exclusive communication channel with Sultana, which gave him unaccountable influence to bypass our democratic norms. In doing so I was accused by Shanly and his allies of betraying DSYP and jeopardising our chance to form a slate with Sultana. Soon after I resigned from the EC, Shanly was elected to the EC in a by-election, which in my opinion started a period of DSYP developing a culture of secrecy, a lack of democracy and accountability - despite the best efforts of some EC comrades who spent subsequent months firefighting and trying to open up the organisation.

Over the Christmas break, the Grassroots Left slate emerged from a series of secretive meetings, featuring Shanly and a line-up of DSYP candidates that were close to him. The national campaign team was headed by Shanly as one of two campaign directors and the team

consisted almost entirely of his close allies in DSYP, each given formal and hubristic job titles. Very early into the Grassroots Left campaign a series of internal disagreements, dramas and power struggles erupted. Just as the national campaign had barely started, Shanly and almost all of his campaign team resigned. Shanly disappeared, focusing instead on his individual campaign only. Around this time, Shanly also resigned from the DSYP EC.

A minority of DSYP organisers, including myself, recognised the opportunity and task ahead of us and critically supported Grassroots Left. Through the leadership of Tina Becker part-way through the CEC campaign, we helped to save Grassroots Left from the fallout of its key DSYP founders who had walked away. We had the unenviable task of repairing relationships, rebuilding credibility, developing systems, coordinating getting the vote out and more, in the middle of a live campaign - all critical tasks that should have been planned for before the campaign had even started. In these circumstances I'm proud of the camaraderie, transparency and discipline that we brought to the new national campaign team.

Several weeks later Shanly returned to the national campaign team in the final days to propose a library of day-one motions in the event Grassroots Left actually won. However, we did not win a majority on the CEC and Shanly resigned, again, leaving Grassroots Left as a minority bloc on the CEC that lacked any coherent political foundation and functional internal democratic processes.

By this time, Shanly had been losing votes routinely for months in DSYP, the EC and inside Grassroots Left. Therefore, the reasons why Shanly's motion for the refounding of DSYP (now Democratic Socialists) fell are simple - whilst his underlying proposal for a 'Democratic Socialist Party of Great Britain' was very ambitious, it lacked critical detail on practical and political questions, and his record spoke volumes as to his opportunistic attitude towards organising, leadership and group discipline. It then came as no surprise that, soon after, Shanly resigned from DSYP.

The refounded Democratic Socialists has just launched (see democraticsocialists.org.uk). I encourage comrades to read our points of unity, interim programme and constitution for a steady campaign to build towards a mass socialist party that we so desperately need.

Jon Benson

DS EC member, RS21 and MUC

WP nonsense

Further to my admittedly very short report of the 'Connections convention' event held on June 6 in Sheffield, which featured in last week's *Weekly Worker* ('Another fine mess' June 11), I thought it would be worthwhile to explain how the 'second statement' came about.

It is very short and reads: "This convention agrees to encourage local socialists to build an open meeting to organise against the coming anti-cost of living crisis and prepare to resist it, aiming to unite the left, local unionists and community campaigners, including tenants and renters groups, as well as those of the oppressed. This could lay the basis for a national anti-crisis assembly in future months that could outline an emergency plan to make the bosses pay, not us, and put it into action."

This was put forward by the Workers Power group, a couple of days ahead of the convention - initially

they wanted it to *replace* the much longer statement, which outlines some of the political problems that have led to the implosion of Your Party, as well as how a real democratic socialist party would have to be built: "with a clear programme for socialism (ie, a classless society in which production is for need, not private profit, with a planned economy in place of the market and private ownership), transparency, openness, accountability and thorough-going democracy". Any further conference of the left should be "a space for open and democratic debate, reflective of the need for a culture where differences are not brushed under the carpet, but are openly debated and discussed, in front of the working class".

At the convention itself then, Workers Power changed their tune and suggested their motion should become an "additional statement". That's a real shame, because there can be no doubt their nonsense 'statement' would have been defeated and rather spectacularly so.

It sums up everything that is wrong with much of the Trotskyist left today. It believes it can somehow fool the working class into becoming socialists by dreaming up this or that economic campaign or clever short cut (in this case, not so clever). For a start, the cost of living crisis is not "coming" - it is very much already here. There have been a number of campaigns which tried to organise 'the masses' around that - among them the People's Assembly and Enough is Enough - with very little success.

This is the kind of campaign that an *existing* party of the working class could perhaps organise - with mass occupations, local organising committees, etc. But it will not work the other way around - especially with the dwindling numbers of people involved in both the Socialist Federation and the Connections network. There are maybe 150 people currently remaining in both, and many of them are of the 'keyboard warrior' variety, with many different political outlooks (all effectively brushed under the carpet).

A real party of the working class will have to be built by patiently discussing what we are actually in favour of - what kind of party, what kind of political culture, with what kind of programme. This is the total opposite of the approach by much of today's Trotskyist left, which builds confessional sects and/or 'broad fronts' with swampy politics, but has no understanding of the need for a party of the working class that fights for extreme democracy. No wonder Workers Power first wanted to do away with the statement discussing some of those issues. Once again led by their former (?) leader, Richard Brenner, they have also been arguing for Grassroots Left to meet in secret and to adhere to Karie Murphy's demands for confidentiality (part of the reason why it imploded, as we explained in last week's issue of the *Weekly Worker*). This is the opposite of the culture of transparency, accountability and democracy we need.

Although the motion went through at the convention, there was little enthusiasm for it, with most people abstaining and a few opposing it. We have no doubt that this particular 'campaign' will go absolutely nowhere.

Carla Roberts

email

Atheist chime

I'd like to chime in with some musings originally inspired by Jon Hochschartner's letter of May 28. Because I've delayed so long to reply

to that letter, I can now also comment on Conor McC's response to the same (Letters, June 11).

Comrade Hochschartner's letter was, in essence, a plea by a socialist Christian that "religious tradition and historical materialism" can be "reconciled". Comrade McC's reply repudiates this contention, arguing that allowing a "divine foot in the door" obstructs our ability to gain an accurate understanding of the world we live in, and thereby also obstructs our ability to organise politically around a programme to change it. He concludes his letter with this line: "So the question remains not whether we *can* hold both perspectives at once, but rather whether we *should*."

Whether we should, indeed. Should we (I take this to mean the members of the organised socialist movement) each as individuals hold atheist or hard agnostic views on the question of religion? And if the answer to that question is yes, should we - this time meaning as a democratic collective decision made by our party - take measures to induce that minority of religious party members to leave their supernatural beliefs behind?

I ask these questions because the issue of religion is notoriously one of the most difficult things to change someone's mind about. People that choose to die rather than accept another or no religious creed are celebrated as 'martyrs' in the Abrahamic faiths. Atheists and agnostics (and most deists), lacking a belief in supernatural life after death, typically weren't as enthusiastic to die for thoughts that had no direct life-and-death relevance, but fictional accounts of atheist martyrdom still exist: for example, Percy Shelley's *Laon and Cythna*, who are both burned at the stake for their role in leading an atheistic failed revolution against the Ottoman state.

Therefore it is right to call religion a question of conscience, because individual beliefs about religion can sometimes contradict the will of the individual himself. For example, I myself was raised as a Christian, but I privately did not believe in a god from almost as early as I can remember. For more than a decade I tried to force myself to believe in the supernatural claims underlying the system of ethics, and I only fully accepted my atheism after I was won to socialist politics and read Marx and Engels.

As a result of this I think we should make no attempt to ban religious worship, ban religious believers from holding party office, or otherwise try to induce atheist beliefs by force. This position has very wide acceptance on the socialist left, including in the CPGB-PCC's programme. Its more controversial stance on religion comes from this later passage:

"The Communist Party says that the state should consider religion a private matter. However, from the point of view of the party itself, religion - whether it be an established cult or a residual belief in the supernatural - is not a private matter. Our party cannot be indifferent to the ignorance, gullibility and irrationality religion engenders in the minds of the masses. The CPGB therefore conducts atheist propaganda."

That gets at the real policy I think we need to debate: should our socialist press conduct atheist propaganda? If so, how ardently should we pursue our atheist evangel? Is it worthwhile to persuade socialists to become atheists, if at the same time we dissuade religious believers from becoming socialists?

Looking back at the five or so years I've been reading the *Weekly Worker*, I have a hard time remembering examples where I've seen atheist propaganda being conducted. Almost

all of it comes from Jack Conrad, typically around Christmas time, based on what I assume are extracts of his book on the historical Jesus. Granted, I also can't remember any examples of *religious* propaganda (the letters page excluded), but secularism is now the norm in most political publications, from the centre-right leftwards. It does not directly challenge "the ignorance, gullibility and irrationality religion engenders in the minds of the masses".

The most classic examples of atheist propaganda seen historically in the socialist press have come from our obituaries: "the greatest living thinker ceased to think", having "peacefully gone to sleep - but forever", and so on. No matter how poetically things are put, the thought of sleeping forever is unsettling, compared to the religious presumption of thinking forever in heaven (and it is always presumed to be heaven and not hell; visit almost any 21st century gravesite today). Despite this, most of the heroes of the Marxist left made a point of writing these implicitly atheist obituaries.

For what it's worth, I remember Eleanor Marx being especially eager to use the eternal sleep metaphor for her writings in *Commonweal*; we can deduce that the daughter of Karl Marx felt it was important to challenge the religious beliefs that were much more prevalent in Britain than in continental Europe. Also, for what it's worth, I went back to the *Weekly Worker's* memorial coverage for its deceased comrade, Kevin Bean, and saw none of this implicit atheist propaganda. I don't know exactly how comrade Bean felt about religion, but I feel pretty confident in assuming he was an atheist.

The press affiliated with the Socialist Party of the United States during the Second International era provides us with an interesting example of a secular compromise in a party made up of widely varying viewpoints on religion. I really need to go back into the archive to dig up some more precise statistics on this question, but my impression from reading the socialist press is this: first- and second-generation immigrant socialists were mostly atheists, while native English speakers were mostly Christian. The socialist immigrants came first from Germany, especially during the Anti-Socialist Laws (1878-90), and then later from the Russian empire; ironically, ethnic Jews were the most notoriously militant atheists in the party.

On the other hand, seemingly a majority of the native English speakers in the party kept their Christian faith, and often claimed it was the force that inspired them to become socialists. Among the party's native-speaking intelligentsia, I can only recall two confirmed examples of writers who left their childhood Christianity for "agnosticism": William English Walling and Robert Rives La Monte. Compare them to John Spargo, Robert Hunter, JG Phelps Stokes or George D Herron (to name a few) as devout Christians, writing mostly secular socialist articles and books.

The result of this unusual melting pot is that I have never once seen an eternal sleep metaphor in US Socialist obituaries. This includes a case where I confirmed that both the deceased and the writer were self-described agnostics. Open atheist propaganda was surprisingly rare, although it did occasionally appear, mostly in the form of translations from German, such as Kautsky's *Origins of Christianity*. On the other hand, openly religious sermons from socialist pastors were fairly regularly printed without comment in publications like the *New York Call*.

I get the impression that the *Call's*

editorial team, in keeping with the attitude of socialists in general, was trying to avoid printing any statements that could be quoted as endorsements of atheism. To that end, I'm pretty sure that most socialist 'agnostics' used the term as a euphemism for atheism; similarly, I think the widespread use of the term, 'economic determinism', was meant to avoid the atheistic connotations of 'materialism'. In book-length works of socialist theory from that era, typically either Jesus is claimed as a socialist ("there is a lapse of nearly two thousand years between the birth of the first International and the second", writes Robert Hunter in *Socialists at work*), or the topic is artfully avoided. William English Walling broke this silence and dared to declare in his book, *The larger aspects of socialism*, that "the majority of socialists are firmly convinced that socialism and modern science must finally lead to a state of society where there will be no room whatever for religion in any form". The quote then became a favourite of anti-socialist propagandists for years to come, and I remember at least one socialist local coming out to disclaim the statement.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of an editorial conspiracy of silence in the US socialist press is the fact that its letters pages were packed to the gills with debates over religion, particularly in cooperatively run enterprises like the *Call* - debates so common that I stopped reading them before I started taking systematic notes. I can't therefore give you an idea of how the question of atheist propaganda was dealt with, but I can tell you that, when the movement fractured over the question of opposing World War I, the debates over religion continued as if nothing had happened. It is true that immigrant socialists in the US remained anti-war to a far greater extent than native-speaking socialists, but it doesn't appear to me that religion was a reliable dividing line in the split. Spargo and Stokes were Christians that supported the war, true, but perhaps the most vociferous pro-war renegades were the 'agnostics', Walling and La Monte. Walling went as far as cheering on the sometimes decades-long sentences imposed on his former comrades for "sedition"; La Monte went a step further by enlisting in the military at the age of 50 and willingly crushing anti-war strikes on the 'homefront'.

So far I have only dealt with the Socialist Party of the US. On the subject of religion I would be remiss not to mention street agitation of the Industrial Workers of the World, which was surpassed only by the anarchists in anti-theist invective. Many of us here have heard the IWW song, 'The preacher and the slave', and its chorus, "You'll get pie in the sky when you die"; what you may not know is that the song is set to the tune of a Christian hymn, and historically it was mostly sung to mock the street preachers that soap-boxers competed with for attention. Bill Haywood, the IWW's most famous celebrity, was an outspoken atheist. While the IWW apparently officially disclaimed "anti-religious propaganda" by 1920, there's no doubt that a lot of informal propaganda took place, and that members of the IWW opposed World War I and, moreover, joined what became the Communist Party at a far greater rate than the socialists.

I'll wrap up with some provisional conclusions of my latest historical anecdote from America (if you, my mostly British audience, are lost or bored by these, please let me know!). I have come to believe that the American socialist movement, in the course of its political struggle against anarchism in the 1880s and 1890s, began to espouse an implicit

orthodoxy that would hamstring its ability to respond to the political crises of 1914 onward. I don't have space to explain what I think that orthodoxy was, except that I am now adding one more dogma to the list: a commitment to neutral secularism that ignores the need for atheist propaganda.

Socialism is compatible with the Christian virtues of neighbourly compassion and human brotherhood, true; socialism is not compatible with orders for "slaves" to "obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ", in the hope of supernatural remuneration after death. The most admirable Christian cults sought to bring about the 'Kingdom of Heaven on Earth'; we socialists don't want a kingdom: we need a democracy; and we don't want a saviour, because we need to free ourselves.

Bill Wright
USA

Imperial China?

I would like to address the International Socialist Alternative's response (Letters, May 21) to my own criticism (Letters, April 30) of their article, 'Just so stories' (April 23). First of all, I apologise if poor reading comprehension led me to misidentify them as Spartacists. My bad. I am also willing to concede that I was overly enthusiastic with my accusations of Communist Party of China apologetics. Having revisited their initial article, and with the helpful clarification of their subsequent letter, I believe that I was hasty in judging their arguments as being motivated by partisan support for China. Nonetheless, I maintain my fundamental disagreement with their assessment of China's position in the global order.

With many of the ISA's points, a comparison with the rise of imperial Germany during the late 19th and early 20th centuries is useful. Indeed, one can often directly swap out a few words in the ISA's sentences and find that they transform into arguments for why the Second Reich was not imperialist.

For example, "... instead of constituting a new imperialist power - the CPC leadership have accommodated US imperialism as part of their strategy for export-oriented economic development within the US-dominated system" becomes: "... instead of constituting a new imperialist power - the German leadership have accommodated British imperialism as part of their strategy for export-oriented economic development within the British-dominated system."

This is a great deal more than a superficial similarity. The Second Reich rose to prominence in a world dominated by the British empire and sterling. Its economy was deeply intertwined with that of Britain. Its development was largely dependent on exporting goods to the UK, which absorbed 18% of German exports by as late as 1911 (greater than the proportion of China's exports currently absorbed by the US). Most significantly, German growth in this period was totally dependent on a global system of trade underpinned by sterling and routed through the City of London.

Meanwhile, German expansion in Africa was only possible because it was, to use the ISA's wording, "tolerated by" the UK, on occasions where the UK viewed the Reich's presence as complementary to its own. More broadly, the two powers collaborated on a number of colonial ventures, from Venezuela to China. During the 19th century especially, given the UK's naval dominance, Germany's escapades overseas were

only possible with the consent (and often support) of Britain.

Despite all of this, I am sure that ISA comrades would not call the Second Reich non-imperialist. Then, as with now, it was certainly true that the insurgent power had much invested in the established order. But to end the story there would be to miss out a great deal. Insurgent powers have to play ball with the existing system, insofar as they are not yet powerful enough to change it. This does not mean that they are not independent actors. Despite operating in a system dominated by another power, China, like Germany before it, makes great efforts to probe at that system's boundaries and further its own ambitions. It is easy to draw parallels between, for example, Germany's motivations in establishing the Berlin-Baghdad railway and China's motivations for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Similarly, just as Germany sought to circumvent the City of London by establishing 'Auslandsbanken' in South America and elsewhere, so too has China looked for ways to loosen the bonds of the dollar.

Simply put, there is a dual character to the relationship between rising and established powers under capitalism. Established powers can benefit from and even encourage the rise of their competitors, whilst at the same time viewing it as a cause for alarm. Insurgent powers benefit from and exploit the existing global infrastructure, whilst at the same time being constrained by and seeking to undermine it.

Beyond this general picture, a few specific points the ISA makes should be addressed. First of all, the contention that, for China to be imperialist, it must have "somehow managed to redivide the world without fighting a single war". First of all, no-one is claiming that China has redivided the entire world: merely that they are pursuing an imperialist agenda, insofar as they are able to. In any case, imperialism is not just or even mostly about armed invasions of places. It is much more about diplomatic manoeuvring and economic leverage. Though the US has obviously instigated a number of bloody wars, its global position is not primarily a product of military conquest. In fact, the majority of places the US has under its thumb did not need to be invaded at all. Considering Djibouti, for example, whilst both China and the US have bases in the country, neither fought a war to obtain them. Meanwhile, the German experience in Africa demonstrates how expansion can take place without triggering warfare between imperialist powers.

Secondly, the ISA argues that China is "not currently compelled by economic circumstances to create a distinct imperialist bloc". The immediate response to this is to point out how significant China's domestic construction overcapacity has been in its decision to embark on massive infrastructure projects overseas (the BRI rears its head once more). But, beyond this, it is too simplistic and static to understand imperialism as only being about clear, distinct 'blocs' in competition with one another. There are shades of grey, degrees of influence, directions of travel. Again with the Second Reich, for much of the 19th century, you would have been hard pressed to identify much of a German-led 'bloc'. At least until, at a certain point, the great quantity of acquired ports, guarantees, alliances, trade agreements and everything else became a distinct new quality. It seems strange to say that this moment of transformation was the moment that Germany became imperialist, and that it had merely shored up the British system in every moment

before. Something similar can be said of China presently.

Kieran Jeffs
email

Left patriarchs

I'm researching in order to write about how the problem of the patriarchy, as expressed within the left, is one of our biggest stumbling blocks to success. Many enlightened socialist men know that we cannot end capitalism without simultaneously ending the patriarchy - the two are completely intertwined. But there are still a considerable number of men on the left who refuse to acknowledge this, and will not reflect on and adjust their own behaviour accordingly.

Can you please ask your readers to let me know their experiences/knowledge of sexism generally - and sexist bullying of women by socialist men especially? I'm also interested in the ways in which both individual men and certain socialist organisations react, when they are accused by women of being male-dominated and/or sexist. One particular way in which this happens is when women themselves are then immediately accused of something, in a classic 'DARVO' move, in order to avoid addressing the actual problem or criticism.

And an especially ugly instance of this mechanism, which I have seen in operation a couple of times recently, is when the conversation is twisted in order to unfairly accuse the woman of being transphobic, when all they were doing is pointing out sexism on the left: ie, that men dominate by sheer numbers in organising groups, and that they dominate the debates by speaking more than women. This weaponisation of transphobia in order to silence women, especially intellectual ones, is something I find particularly concerning.

What's your readers' experience of all this? All input regarding the topic, 'male domination of the left', is welcome. Please contact me at <https://substack.com/@deborahwafoulkes>.

Deb Foulkes
email

Mind control

Paul Demarty's piece on Henry Nowak's murder proves that most of the left aren't aware of the machinations of elements operating within the deep state mind-control network ('Explaining Henry Nowak', June 11).

The stabbings we have seen recently (in the US it is usually shootings), which appear to the general public as random attacks by people from ethnic minorities, are actually being orchestrated by elements within the deep state, using mind control.

In Britain, the pattern which has clearly emerged is that someone from an ethnic minority launches an attack on innocent members of the public. This leads to demonstrations and rioting ... The knife attackers are all people previously known to the police. This in itself should ring a loud alarm bell. Vickrum Digwa, who killed Henry Nowak, was previously known to the police, like all the other knife attackers. With the recent Belfast knife attack by Hadi Alodid, the Police Service of Northern Ireland was quick to announce they had no previous connection with the assailant. This again sets off the alarm bells. Alodid, I read, was himself a former policeman, but he behaved in a way completely at odds with what would have been his police training.

Like we have seen in the US, these deep state assets are secretly programmed to carry out horrendous attacks on members of the public for a definite purpose. But to understand what is going on you need to know

what the deep state agenda is. The agenda is to help generate social instability to eventually provide the pretext to introduce a police-military dictatorship which replaces parliamentary democracy. The problem is that most of the left is not aware of the existence of the deep state and its criminal operations. The left needs to become aware of the deep state and what they are capable of doing, using their mind-controlling assets. For instance, a deep state mind-controlled slave can be sent into a public meeting being held by a leftwing group to kill someone, or attack the people at the meeting. The assailant will be passed off as a nutter or perhaps a rightwing extremist by people not aware of the deep state connection.

In *Trance: formation of America*, a book about the experience of former mind-control slave Cathy O'Brien, she wrote, in reference to the US: "People are literally waking up to the mind-control reality, because there is an obvious lack of logical explanation for certain sensational news events. What really happened at Jim Jones' Jonestown with Sirhan Sirhan, John Hinkley, and Lee Harvey Oswald? And more importantly, why did it happen? The simple common denominator existing among these persons has been publicly stated by the media, based on research of their medical histories, to be mind control". In fact, mind control goes even further than Cathy O'Brien realised at the time.

We on the left in Britain need to be aware that the deep state exists and fascist elements within it are seeking to destabilise society and create the conditions for the introduction of a police-military dictatorship. We also need to be aware that in Italy and Germany in the 1920s and 30s the far right used crimes committed by individuals from ethnic minorities to divide the working class and drum up support for fascism ...

Tony Clark
For Democratic Socialism

Far-right march

The growth of the far right in Britain and the north of Ireland has been met with impressive, mass anti-fascist mobilisations, like in Brighton last weekend, but the race riots of previous weeks are a stark demonstration of the growing need for militancy on a broad scale.

Already we have far-right street mobs burning houses and holding check points - but we must also consider the looming threat of what they could do under a Reform government. Nigel Farage is open that his answer to imagined 'two-tier policing' will be to set the police - and likely, in Trumpian style, his proposed immigration force - against the left. The show trial of the Filton 4 and proscription of Palestine Action are the latest high-profile instances of state repression of the left (without mentioning the Spy Cops inquiry... or so many other cases).

Anti-fascists on the ground at any number of recent mobilisations can attest to the police physically beating a path for the far right to march - what will they be doing under Reform? Various mass anti-racist organisations choose to distance or even undermine militant anti-fascist groups, but they must be asking themselves now if the image of establishment respectability is more valuable than doing what it takes to defend our communities and our organisations.

Not everyone can be front-line, but part of the work of all serious anti-fascists should be to support those who are.

Anna Price
South Wales

US-IRAN

Art of the memorandum

The interim agreement extends the ceasefire, opens the Strait of Hormuz and, perhaps, ends the four months of conflict between the two countries. With both sides claiming victory, **Yassamine Mather** gives her take on the diplomacy to come

Following weeks of a highly precarious 'neither war nor peace' ceasefire, the United States and Iran have arrived at a Memorandum of Understanding. This has produced widely divergent reactions - both around the world and within Iran itself.

The current consensus among reliable sources indicates that this agreement initiates a strict *60-day technical negotiation period*. It serves as a mechanism to extend and consolidate the pre-existing ceasefire rather than to resolve the systemic geopolitical grievances between Washington and Tehran. The core provisions that are publicly understood include:

- extension and consolidation of the active ceasefire for a duration of approximately 60 days;
- immediate reopening of the strategic Strait of Hormuz to commercial maritime traffic;
- establishment of a framework for follow-on technical talks, specifically addressing Iran's nuclear programme.
- a structured, phased schedule for sanctions relief and the release of frozen Iranian financial assets, strictly contingent upon implementation milestones.

Global financial markets have reacted sharply to the news of the agreement, however. Because the final, legally binding details are not yet locked in, investors are hedging their bets - some are celebrating, while others are bracing themselves for bad news in the fine print.

Earlier this week, global stock markets entered 'party mode', rallying strongly in celebration of the US-Iran ceasefire despite the vast number of unanswered questions. On the other hand, commodity markets dropped sharply, with Brent crude oil falling to just under \$80 a barrel. This price crash caught many energy experts by surprise, as they had actually predicted long-term price spikes.

Just a few weeks before the ceasefire, the interest rates (yields) on US government bonds shot up to their highest levels in decades, because investors were terrified that the war would cause massive inflation. While those interest rates have dropped a tiny bit, now that the ceasefire looks real, they are still much higher than they were before the war started.

People betting in the financial markets don't expect the Federal Reserve to change its game plan any time soon. Most investors are completely sure that the Fed will keep interest rates exactly where they are for the next two meetings. There is still a small chance that it might raise them a little bit in October - slightly lower than a few weeks ago, but still way higher than before the war, when everyone assumed a rate hike was completely off the table.

Bond investors are still playing it safe, because inflation in the US is not just being driven by high oil prices. Companies are still hiring a ton of workers, and the cost of everyday services (like dining out or healthcare) is still stuck at a high 3% inflation rate. Because of this, it is hard for the Fed to lower interest rates, and there is still a risk they might have to raise them again.

Despite the agreement being pushed through, the text is plagued by starkly divergent interpretations by the American and Iranian media.



Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu: different interests

These contradictions threaten the stability of the MoU before its implementation even fully begins.

For the Trump administration, the primary success of the deal is the unblocking of the Strait of Hormuz - a critical maritime choke-point, through which one-fifth of global oil and gas trade passes. The closure of the strait had induced severe shocks across global energy markets, though it was a direct consequence of the war initiated by the US and Israel.

Monitoring rights

The terms of reopening are already a point of friction. US officials say that the strait will be completely "open to all" commercial vessels, entirely free of restrictions, tolls or interference. Conversely, semi-official Iranian media outlets report that the agreement allows Tehran to retain monitoring rights over passing vessels and collect "service fees" - a claim that both the US government and international shipping interests dispute.

The most significant omission from the MoU is the absence of concrete requirements regarding Iran's nuclear enrichment capabilities. Historically, the Trump administration and its negotiators maintained that any signed document must include strict, verifiable clauses to dismantle Iran's nuclear programme. In the MoU text, however, Iran secured a major diplomatic concession: the nuclear issue has been completely deferred to the subsequent 60-day negotiation window.

The current text contains only a broad, aspirational statement, affirming that Iran will not pursue nuclear weapons. This has led to intense scrutiny of US officials by the White House press corps, who have pointed out that the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action contained far more rigorous, legally binding restrictions. Critics argue that after executing a highly destructive military campaign, the US has accepted a deal that is substantially weaker than the accord Trump originally walked away from.

Furthermore, it is clear that Iran has no intention of compromising on its right to enrich uranium. Iranian leaders are expected to use the upcoming 60-day window to negotiate levels of enrichment, arguing that they need

to keep existing enriched uranium reserves - with the calculation that Trump will be highly reluctant to resume a costly military campaign in the immediate run-up to the November midterm elections.

The potential for the agreement to be completely derailed remains exceptionally high, with the conflict in Lebanon representing the most immediate hazard. The finalisation of the MoU experienced delays precisely because of continued Israeli military operations. Internally, Iranian officials argued against signing the document on specific days to avoid offering Donald Trump a symbolic political victory. However, the formal justification provided by Tehran for delaying the declaration that they have reached a deal was the intense Israeli bombing of southern Beirut.

Iranian leaders have claimed to their domestic audience that the interim MoU explicitly contains an adjacent clause requiring a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. This framing has been rejected by Jerusalem, with prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu publicly refuting the existence of any such agreement.

Because Israel is not a direct party to these bilateral US-Iran negotiations, any language linking the regional ceasefire to Lebanese security remains indirect or aspirational. However, there is no doubt that Israel's position looks deeply uneasy and most of the country's politicians oppose the agreement, calling it a "bad deal", because it focuses too narrowly on the Strait of Hormuz and does not address the wider issues Israel wants to focus on, especially the nuclear programme, missiles and Iran-backed regional forces.¹

Israel also feels sidelined. According to the Israeli press, senior officials believe their warnings are not being heard, and that Jerusalem has very little influence over the US-Iran process, even though the outcome could affect 'Israeli security' directly.²

For the deal to work, Trump would have to spend a lot of political energy forcing Netanyahu to stop fighting. This might not even work, since Netanyahu is facing a tough election soon and - unlike Trump - has strong support at home to keep the war going. The precise scope, timing and

nature of the economic incentives promised to Tehran remain shrouded in ambiguity and conflicting official statements. However, according to Reuters, a new US-Iran framework agreement outlines a \$300 billion 'reconstruction and development fund' - with over half already pledged - aimed at revitalising Iran's energy, transport and manufacturing infrastructure. Conceived after the US rejected Iran's initial \$400 billion demand for war reparations, the fund will rely on regional contributions through loans, credit lines and direct financing.

The assumption is that Persian Gulf countries contributing to the fund will be saved from future Iranian attacks. If true, this represents an economic turning point for Iran, which has suffered from a four-decade drought in foreign investment due to sanctions. Notably, the fund operates on a separate track from sanctions-relief negotiations and will only take effect, once a final agreement is formalised, triggering a 60-day structuring period.

To manage the flow of capital without violating the political optics of the deal, Qatar has been designated as the central financial hub. Unfrozen assets will be transferred to Qatari accounts, allowing Doha to monitor and regulate Iranian expenditure.

Furthermore, unverified reports suggest that the United Arab Emirates secretly negotiated a multibillion-dollar asset release for Iran in exchange for an explicit guarantee that Iran and its allies would cease attacks on Emirati soil. Although UAE officials have formally denied these allegations, regional analysts note that Arab Gulf states are increasingly looking to establish deep economic interdependence with Iran. By entangling Tehran in regional trade, these states hope to create a powerful financial disincentive against future military aggression.

The political fallout from the announcement of the MoU has been immediate and severe within both nations, exposing deep internal divisions.

Opposition

The Iranian state apparatus has launched an aggressive domestic propaganda campaign to frame the MoU as an absolute victory over the US and Israel. State media has even publicised claims that the regime outmanoeuvred the White House by employing specialised teams of psychologists to analyse Trump's social media posts and tweets, thereby crafting calibrated responses, designed to exploit his unpredictable decision-making.

Despite this official narrative of triumph, the regime faces significant internal instability:

- **Hardline backlash:** Fringe religious and paramilitary factions have fiercely opposed the deal. Minor protests have occurred in Tehran, led by organised groups of motorcyclists who denounced the agreement as a direct betrayal of the country's soldiers and the legacy of the late Ali Khamenei (who has been elevated to the status of a martyr).

- **Government consolidation:** President Masoud Pezeshkian has attempted to neutralise this opposition by stating publicly that the supreme leader's office fully endorsed the framework. Pezeshkian admitted that, while individual factions within the government maintain serious

reservations regarding specific clauses, the 'ruling council' has unified behind the decision.

- **Public despair and deprivation:** The reality for ordinary Iranian citizens is more complex and differs from the comments of both government and other commentators, who claim Iran won the war.

The combined effects of the US sanctions war and its naval counter-blockade have brought Iran's economy to near-collapse. The population faces catastrophic hyperinflation of food prices, and severe, widespread shortages of essential commodities, such as fuel and agricultural fertilisers.

Economic hardship

While many citizens express profound relief at a temporary window to breathe, others express deep anxiety. Those who had supported foreign intervention openly admit that the war achieved nothing except economic hardship, while leaving the Iranian regime much stronger than before. For the Iranian working class prospects of long-term job losses remain the main concern. There is scepticism about how any financial gains from the lifting of sanctions will benefit the economy - as opposed to the pockets of corrupt officials and their associates.

In the US, opposition politicians and conservative factions have heavily criticised the deal, characterising it as an outright "sell-out" of American security interests. The backlash prompted prominent figures, including JD Vance, to release statements on social media urging the public to disregard reports of massive, immediate financial windfalls for Tehran, labelling such figures as highly exaggerated.

For Israel, the agreement represents a severe strategic failure. Netanyahu and his cabinet feel profoundly alienated by the fact that the final phases of these critical negotiations completely bypassed Jerusalem. The Israeli government claims that, by failing to address Iran's long-range ballistic missile development or its extensive network of regional proxies, the US has left Israel exposed to an existential threat.

While the MoU successfully averts an immediate escalation into an all-out global conflict, it has caused substantial, long-term diplomatic damage to America's alliance network in the Persian Gulf. Nations such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar bore the brunt of Iranian retaliatory strikes and suffered severe disruption of maritime trade. The revelation that the Trump administration executed these high-stakes negotiations without consulting its regional partners has further undermined trust in Washington's security guarantees.

Ultimately, the region faces a highly volatile, conditional framework rather than a durable resolution. Because every meaningful step beyond the initial opening of the Strait of Hormuz is strictly tied to future compliance and highly contested interpretations, the agreement is incredibly fragile. Rather than signalling the conclusion of the Middle Eastern crisis, this MoU marks the beginning of a dangerous and highly unpredictable diplomatic phase ●

Notes

1. www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/article-89717.
2. www.ynetnews.com/article/ryybu4jwgl.

LAW

Attempting to silence us all

Top British judges show themselves to be stunningly ignorant about basic British history. Clearly we should have no illusions in such people, including when they sit in international courts. Rather we should put our trust in the working class movement and mass politics, writes **Carla Roberts**

Appeal Court judges have upheld Shabana Mahmood's "lawful" ban of Palestine Action as a "terrorist" organisation (overturning the previous ruling by the High Court in February). Claims by Palestine Action to be a "direct-action protest group which follows in the footsteps of the suffragettes, and the campaigns against apartheid and the Iraq war" were brushed aside.

You see, the suffragettes were very different, the five judges claim - nobody in their right mind would oppose them! They were the good people, representing the *acceptable* face of "civil disobedience". Here are a couple of the most ridiculous passages from the judgement:¹

... civil disobedience on conscientious grounds has a long and honourable history in this country. People who break the law to affirm their belief in the injustice of a law or government action are sometimes vindicated by history. The suffragettes are an example which comes immediately to mind. It is a mark of a civilised community that it can accommodate protests and demonstrations of this kind. But there are conventions which are generally accepted by the law-breakers on one side and the law-enforcers on the other. The protesters behave with a sense of proportion and do not cause excessive damage or inconvenience. And they vouch the sincerity of their beliefs by accepting the penalties imposed by the law. [point 145]

... The public nature of the act - in contrast to the actions of other law-breakers who generally seek to avoid detection - is a demonstration of the protestors' sincerity and willingness to accept the legal consequences of their actions. It is also essential to characterising the act as a form of political communication or address. Eschewing violence and showing some measure of moderation in the level of harm intended again signal that, although the means of protest adopted transgress the law, the protestor is engaged in a form of political action undertaken on moral grounds rather than in mere criminality. [point 146]

Palestine Action, on the other hand, is "the antithesis of this kind of civil disobedience protest group", write the judges:

First, Palestine Action's activities are planned and undertaken secretly with the objective of avoiding detection. Secondly, the members of Palestine Action do not vouch their sincerity by accepting the penalties imposed by the law. Thirdly, on a fair analysis, Palestine Action has little or nothing in common with the suffragettes or the anti-apartheid or Iran War protest groups [point 161].

So the suffragettes were "eschewing violence", did not cause "inconvenience", showed "moderation", "accepted the penalties imposed by the law", and their activities were not "planned and undertaken secretly with the objective of avoiding detection"? You do not have to be history professor to know that this is utter nonsense - and a rather



Enemy of the state

shameless attempt to rewrite history, for very obvious reasons.

The suffragettes' motto was 'Deeds, not words'. They sent letter bombs, smashed windows, attacked iconic pieces of art, burnt the contents of pillar boxes, set fire to sporting pavilions, railway stations, lumber yards and the houses of prominent politicians. David Lloyd George was a particular target. Would any of those actions have been possible without secret planning? Obviously not.

So the suffragettes did not just throw themselves under horses. Indeed during the 'Deeds, not words' campaign over 1912-14 the Women's Social and Political Union described themselves as "terrorists". Emmeline Pankhurst herself, bluntly stating that the suffragettes committed violent acts because they wanted to "terrorise the British public".²

As to the suffragettes "accepting the penalties imposed by the law" - another lie. There were mass protests outside the prisons where the women were held. When their demand to be treated as political prisoners rather than common criminals was rejected, Marion Wallace-Dunlop initiated the first hunger strike in July 1909. The tactic was quickly adopted by most of the imprisoned women - with horrific consequences: guards pinned the women down and shoved rubber tubes down their noses or throats to pour liquid food directly into their stomachs, causing severe physical and mental trauma. The health of many of the women was ruined for the rest of their lives.

There can be absolutely no doubt that the suffragettes would today be banned as "terrorists". But there has been a very successful attempt to incorporate them into mainstream history and they have been scrubbed-clean, prettified, reinvented. This was beautifully summed up by then prime

minister Theresa May in 2018, when she celebrated the "heroism" of the suffragettes on the 100th anniversary of the Representation of People Act, which gave all men over 21 and some women (those over 30 and "with property qualifications") the right to vote and be elected to parliament. (It took until 1928 for women to be granted the same voting rights as men.)

Like most media outlets and the school curriculum, May falsely claimed that the introduction of the legislation in 1918 was the result almost entirely of the campaign by the suffragettes, ignoring the far larger and peaceful "suffragists", but more importantly the labour movement and also the little matter of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

The WSPU in fact suspended its campaign at the beginning of World War I, rallying patriotically behind the British flag (as did the Labour Party, of course). The WSPU formally dissolved in 1917. It was to a large degree the fear of the 'red threat' spreading to western Europe that forced bourgeois leaders across the continent to grant a range of social and political reforms. No wonder our ruling class falsely claims it was a small group of mostly middle class women who won it.

Class party

This really does point to the fact that lasting and real change generally comes about not by individual acts of protest - but by pressure exercised by the organised working class. Of course, we defend and stand in solidarity with all who have been arrested, charged or found guilty. But their tactics represent, at the heart of it, the politics of desperation, not the politics of liberation.

This political limitation is reflected in the commentary put out by Amnesty International and Liberty, who are both listed in the court judgement as "interveners" on behalf of Palestine Action co-founder Huda Ammori. We presume PA needed the financial and legal support of both organisations - but politically, they are clearly stuck in a bourgeois-legalistic framework.

In a touchingly naive petition (now updated), Amnesty International pleads that "the government can still reverse its decision and begin undoing years of attacks on our right to demonstrate", arguing that locking up people for holding up placards is a "violation of the UK's international obligations".³ This is mirrored by many well-meaning activists on the left, who cry that the government should be made to adhere to some or other piece of "international law". Huda Ammori too has announced that "we'll take it all the way up to the European Court of Human Rights, if needs be".⁴

We are far less confident that 'justice' could be found in this or any other bourgeois court and this might be an opportune place to make the obvious point that international law is, in reality, little more than 'politics dressed up as legality' (Martti Koskenniemi). Such courts - made up of picks acceptable to the dominant powers - are not on our side, notwithstanding symbolic rulings like the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant against Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant.

The European ruling classes stand firmly on the side of Israel (the key

ally of US-led imperialism in the Middle East). A staggering 25 out of 27 EU member-states have officially adopted or endorsed the so-called "working definition of anti-Semitism" published by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance; globally, it is 47 countries. As we have pointed out many times, it does not actually define anti-Semitism (which is discrimination or hatred of Jewish people). Instead, it lists 11 examples, where it effectively labels criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic, thereby entirely changing the definition of the word. This is very much part and parcel of a wider, international strategy of intimidation and criminalisation of all those critical of Israel.

Anti-terror laws

Even worse than Amnesty International is the statement by Liberty:

We are disappointed about this judgment and believe this proscription is a disproportionate use of counter-terror powers. When it's not clear what counts as terrorism, public trust collapses and without trust, counter-terror laws simply don't work. There is an urgent need to update the current definition of terrorism to enable current and future governments to uphold their duty to safeguard the public and national security, whilst protecting people's rights and preventing overreach."⁵

Wrong, wrong and wrong again. The anti-terror legislation is doing *exactly* what it is supposed to do: silence us all.

Under Keir Starmer, the government's use of the Terrorism Act 2000 has gone into overdrive. The previous Prevention of Terrorism Act was mainly aimed at Irish republicans and not really designed to deal with the rising number of groups abroad that were taking actions against their respective governments - and were being supported by an increasing number of migrant groups in Britain.

This was very clear to Tony Blair in the run-up to the 'war on terror'. He felt that more restrictive legislation was required to criminalise opposition to the wars against Afghanistan and then Iraq. Dozens of groups were outlawed in a first batch in 2001, including a few rightwing British nut outfits. The main target was, however, the Muslim population.

The legislation has been amended a number of times over the last 25 years to suit the changing needs of the government - most recently in 2021, when section 12(1A) was added, which specifically outlaws "support for a proscribed organisation" - clearly with the aim of targeting pro-Palestine supporters, including those holding up placards.⁶

The government is, in effect, imposing a permanent state of terror against anyone who dissents from UK foreign policy. In the process, the 'common sense' definition of 'terrorism' has entirely changed, just like the definition of anti-Semitism. The June 15 judgement is likely to lead to the 3,000 people who have been arrested for expressing support for PA to be charged with terrorism offences (over 700 individuals already have been charged). There will be more convictions of activists as 'terrorists' - with the sentencing of

four Palestine Action activists (even though they were not convicted of terrorism offences when tried by two juries) just the tip of the iceberg. This absurd piece of judicial theatre was partially designed to circumvent the jury.

Supporting a proscribed organisation carries a maximum penalty of up to 14 years in prison - it would take a hell of a jury to convict under those conditions. Juries are famously unreliable from the state's point of view and "there is the suspicion that too many jurors are allowing sympathy for well-intentioned, but misguided, offenders to override their duty to decide cases according to the law", as the *Daily Telegraph* complains.⁷

It is therefore no surprise that the right to trial by jury has come under attack over the years. Not only have judges restricted the defences available to them and limited mention of the defendants' motivations⁸ - the whole *principle* of trial by jury is now under attack, with the government wanting to scrap jury trials for thousands of offences, allegedly "to reduce record court backlogs".

But the danger is even broader than that. The Terrorism Act 2000 defines terrorism as the "use or threat of action" directed not just at "the government", but also at "an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public or a section of the public or the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause".⁹

Darling of the liberal left George Monbiot complains that the rioters in Belfast should therefore be called 'terrorists': "There is another way of describing the actions of the rioters burning people out of their homes in Belfast, though ministers somehow cannot bring themselves to say it: terrorism."¹⁰ As so often, he entirely misses the point. This 'terrorism' definition is so broad as to encompass the entire history of class struggle. It does not take a genius to work out that our own working class organisations could be outlawed pretty damn quickly, once they become a threat to the ruling class once again.

We do not demand the 'just' application of so-called 'anti-terror' laws: we demand they are abolished altogether - along with the secret state, the 'hostile environment' and all other repressive laws designed to keep the working class in check ●

Notes

1. www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2026/721.html (#para7).
2. www.historyextra.com/membership/kitty-marion-were-suffragettes-violent-terrorists-fem-riddell.
3. www.amnesty.org.uk/get-involved/take-action/sign-a-petition/end-the-prosecution-of-peaceful-protestors-in-the-uk.
4. www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/jun/16/palestine-action-ban-will-be-overturned-groups-co-founder-vows.
5. www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/liberty-responds-to-court-of-appeal-judgment-on-palestine-action.
6. www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/section/12.
7. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2026/06/16/culture-war-came-to-britains-courts.
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9. www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/section/1.
10. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/jun/17/belfast-riots-palestine-action-protests-terrorism.

SPACE X

Who wants to be a trillionaire?

Amid an increasingly obvious tech bubble, Elon Musk has added a 13th digit to his net worth. Paul Demarty asks what this tells us about American capitalism today

So, finally, humanity has minted its first trillionaire.

The lucky man is Elon Musk, who made his initial fortune in the flurry of mergers that produced PayPal, and has since concentrated his efforts on the hardware end of high technology, assuming control of Tesla and turning it into America's first mass-market manufacturer of electric cars, creating The Boring Company as a way to create car-based, high-speed transit in underground tunnels (so far a failure), and recently purchasing Twitter and turning it into an even more miserable social network called X.

Commenting back in 2003 on the scandalous corporate bankruptcies of the dot-com bust era, comedian Lewis Black expressed astonishment that the owners of the Tyco IT conglomerate had extracted \$500 million from the company. "What were they going to do?" he asked. "Start their own space programme?" If only he had known what was coming! Musk broke the 13-digit net-worth barrier by floating his personal space programme on the stock market. The initial public offering (IPO) of SpaceX, as it is called, went off fairly cleanly (though the powers that he had to relax their standards to allow this entirely unprofitable enterprise into public markets). He is not even the only member of the ultra-rich to have such an endeavour - Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin continues its work, albeit still under Bezos's personal tutelage.

What even is a trillion dollars? What could one do with it? How much land would you need to do the old Keynes trick and pay people to bury it and dig it up again? How many trees would you need to fell to print the banknotes to represent it? What, more to the point, could you spend it on? Obviously not enough luxury goods exist in the world; and there seems little point in owning 100% of all Lamborghinis, Swiss watches and so forth. It could be invested, and at that point Musk could set himself up as *his own* 'institutional investor'. But all he could get from *that* is ... more money.

Fortunately for him, of course, it is not precisely the case that he has a bank account with a 13-digit balance. His worth is largely in asset holdings in his own and presumably other companies; the trillion dollars is obtained from adding up the market capitalisation of this portfolio and assessing his relative ownership stake. No doubt Musk has plenty of ready cash to be going on with, and - so long as the stock price of his various ventures remains buoyant - he can liquidate some of his possessions. But a lot of this money exists, at best, only in theory.

Price and value

What is the 'theory'? The stock price of a company - and the price of other associated assets, like corporate debt - is supposed to be a function of its present and historical financial performance, on the one hand, and expected lifetime value, on the other. There are standard, off-the-peg measurements of this - take this year's profit and multiply it by some factor, for example. Yet there has always been the possibility of selling at a premium, if there are plausible reasons to expect far better performance than in an average company.

This little get-out clause, as one might call it, has been exploited mightily by the tech industry, broadly



How to spend it?

conceived, in the past 15 years or so. Venture capitalists have been broadly successful in convincing institutional investors that economies of scale are so easy to achieve in verticals like software-as-a-service that valuations which look, *prima facie*, ludicrously inflated can be a good deal. When I started programming as a career, it was still rare for startups to achieve billion-dollar valuations, and so such companies were called "unicorns". By the end of the zero-interest-rate era in 2022, it seemed that there were more unicorns in northern California than there were buffalos on the great plains prior to the coming of the Pilgrim Fathers.

This period was not without its scandals. WeWork - a short-term office-space subletter - caused a stir when its S-1 (the formal IPO filing to the US Securities and Exchange Commission) bombed completely, and proved to be full of guff about "elevating the world's consciousness", including plans for a network of woo-woo schools run by the CEO's wife (a relative of woo-woo god-empress Gwyneth Paltrow). Nonetheless, a lot of idiotic stuff got waved through, particularly in the region of cryptocurrencies and related technologies.

The Federal Reserve put an end to that, and the startup scene is now

at best stagnant. However, a much more concentrated bubble has taken form since, particularly focused on artificial intelligence (and, specifically, large language models). A third of the value of the American stock market is in a small number of tech firms heavily involved in the AI business. A decent chunk of US economic growth is in data centre expansion, specifically for these purposes (LLMs are enormously hungry for very specific kinds of computer hardware). Anthropic, one of the two major AI model vendors, quietly began preparing for IPO last week. That will certainly be an S-1 worth reading.

SpaceX is not *obviously* part of the AI bubble *per se* (a certain amount of bandwagon-jumping guff about AI was added to the various investors' prospectuses). It nonetheless has something of a similar smell to it. Its present-day financials are pretty awful, with annual losses in the order of \$20 billion. Amazingly, the various bankers involved in this sale blithely admitted that they expect losses to *increase* over the next 15 years. This is not the 'conventional' prospectus of the tech premium: investors buy in with the expectation that the stock price will go up regardless.

Similar dynamics swirl around

Anthropic, OpenAI and friends; the vast capital expenditures required to make their products work at all do not seem to unlock superlinear revenue growth of the sort required to justify exposing the world's pensions to their shares. The promise is of a new industrial revolution forever just around the corner.

It is increasingly clear that, beneath all the talk of industrial revolutions, the marquee names of AI - and the cloud hyperscalers like Amazon and Microsoft, for that matter, who effectively resell this functionality - will in fact have to cash out in deals with governments, and specifically in the military. It is suspected that Anthropic's Claude was used in the targeting of the girls' school on day one of the Iran war; but, of course, this is already a routine matter, and it will get more so.

That is radically more true of SpaceX, which - when you get down to it - has very little potential for profitable civilian business at all. Its Starlink network is already a real factor in various hot wars around the world, and a telling military asset for the US. It is a successful contractor for government rocket launches, including the recent Artemis II mission; for all the *Star Trek* utopianism, in reality this work will largely turn into line items at the Department of Defense - sorry, War. The US military budget, after all, also hovers around \$1 trillion at present.

Deferral

So there are a couple of reasons why a bursting of the bubble may be deferred. The first is simply that, since deindustrialisation began to hit hard, the United States has managed its social fabric effectively by asset price inflation, backed by ballooning public and private debt. This periodically goes into crisis, of course; credit dries up, individuals and corporations must sell assets to meet liabilities; the asset prices begin to shrink, making more debt go bad, and so on. Sooner or later, the cost must fall on someone. In 2008, the cost fell on ordinary mortgage-holders; the banks were able to sell gilts under quantitative easing and use that to pay off their underwater liabilities.

This came at an enormous cost to the political coherence of the American state. It is not surprising, then, that - despite the fact that everyone from JP Morgan to the *Financial Times* recognises that we are in a bubble - the only actions being taken are to protect the bubble. The political choice between hammering 'savers' and imposing big haircuts on the banking sector is singularly unattractive, so it is deferred.

The second reason is that we are moving into a period of great-power competition, and it is in the interests of the *state* to prop up industries it considers to be of military and strategic importance. Plainly this includes SpaceX. It also to some extent includes AI, although much of the big-name products in the recent AI boom are tailored either to consumer-grade trivialities or automating business processes substantially irrelevant to global conflict. However, military and surveillance uses of the *fundamental* technologies of AI are plentiful, and America has an interest in the 'research and development' taking place there instead of in China.

The enormous increase in the share of the surplus going to capital (and, within that, specifically to the

tech industry, broadly conceived) rather than to labour has, of course, provoked a certain amount of theoretical reflection on the left. Many well-known intellectuals, notably Yanis Varoufakis, Jodi Dean and Cédric Durand, have begun to advocate a theory of 'techno-feudalism' - the business model of the great tech platforms is, after all, centred on rent extraction, typically from other capitalists, and fuelled by mass, unpaid labour in the form of platform engagement (which generates the data on which the platforms are trained).

Alternatively there is the theory of Robert Brenner and Dylan Riley that what we have is a new regime of accumulation they call 'political capitalism': we are going through a long period of secular stagnation, which depresses the rate of profit and tends to make the system more zero-sum than positive-sum in its dynamics. The result is a move towards profiting by direct control of the political system, with rival camps of the working class absorbed into competing class-collaborationist alliances and, in the end, a substantial upward redistribution of wealth.

The techno-feudal thesis seems insupportable. It radically overstates the novelty of large-scale rent-seeking in capitalist society, as well as the use of surveillance as a labour-disciplining system. It has the advantage, from its advocates' point of view, of recommending a politics of class collaboration on essentially populist grounds: workers and petty proprietors alike are united against a tiny elite of stupefyingly wealthy people.

Brenner and Riley are more interesting, since their objective is plainly to reject class collaboration, though their account is at best radically incomplete. They introduce a distinction between "working class politics" defined through participation in struggle for class-level demands *per se*, and an individualist competition for sectional advantage. Correct in principle, but they draw so sharp a distinction that it risks caricature: "Working-class politics in this sense has been a highly unusual occurrence in US history. There were only two brief spells of it in the 20th century."¹ It is better, I think, to consider sectional politics a *degraded* form of class politics, in that it is likewise oriented to a situation of real class antagonism, albeit in a strategically hopeless way.

Related to this is the near-total absence both of the intermediate classes (effectively folded into the proletariat in their account) and the *bourgeoisie*, and how the latter might fight for their interests. Nonetheless, their account does throw an interesting light on the bourgeoisie, since presumably they, also, fight for *sectional* advantage against the background of stagnation and feeble profit rates. The growth of fortunes like those of Musk and Bezos, in short, inescapably flows from parasitic relations with the state and alliances with fractions of the state core. At this stage of capitalist decline, that is where the action is, and perhaps this justifies a term of art like 'political capitalism'.

Regardless of that, nobody, surely, could be so stupid as to see this news as evidence of the system's vitality ●

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Notes

1. 'Seven theses on American politics' *New Left Review* November-December 2022.

TURKEY

Rot at the heart

Erdoğan's blatant intervention in the internal affairs of the main opposition party is all part of a master plan to ensure him a third presidential term. Meanwhile, lacking a principled programme, the left is reduced to tailism. **Esen Uslu reports**

A Reddit reader asks: "Can someone explain what's happening with CHP [Republican People's Party]?" Among the many replies, one simple answer stands out: "Business as usual in a non-democratic country."

This simple and plain truth is difficult for the various groups on the Turkish left to comprehend. With their trust in their own or other leftwing groups' ability to initiate and sustain independent action on behalf of working people as a whole having been undermined, they tend to cling to the centre-left CHP in an attempt to present a semblance of opposition to president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his coalition.

A distinguishing feature of these leftwing movements is their lack of a clear political programme. This hinders their ability to comprehend the existing contradictions within society and causes them to turn a blind eye to the realities.

A hodgepodge of pre-1980 coup slogans, mixed with the slogans of new mass movements against 'neoliberalism', constitutes the new 'platform' for much of the leftwing opposition. When they are unwilling to address the pressing issue of democracy, such as the Kurdish question (or only address it superficially with the age-old slogan of 'the right of nations to self-determination' without combatting deeply rooted Turkish nationalism), many on the left are willing to regard the CHP as a unifying force and therefore participate in its internal struggles.

The problem has many historical aspects. In smaller cities and towns, the weak leftwing opposition could only gain ground when working with the CHP. As young leftists are more militant and ready to be mobilised, CHP organisations assumed that they would either leave (or be ejected) after a few years, as they would be unable to stand the hypocrisy, or be



Brothers in arms: Erdoğan, Zelenskyy and Starmer

absorbed into the mainstream CHP and lose their leftwing ideas. From one election period to the next, a part of the Turkish left disappears into the mainstream CHP. They drag along a larger segment of leftwing workers with them.

Neighbourhoods

In the principal cities, the situation is somewhat different. Here, there are districts and neighbourhoods that inherently oppose the regime. For example, Alevi communities that have settled in former city slums have become more mainstream, as gentrification continues. However, they still suffer from the Islamist-nationalist pressure exerted by the state authorities. In the past, these areas were hotbeds of revolutionary activity. Now, the new generation has lost interest in politics and regards any attempt to overthrow the regime

as a hopeless pipe dream. They stay well clear of political opposition as a result. Therefore popular discontent is mainly expressed through the CHP's opposition to the regime. Left organisations that have alienated their grassroots support have been unable to resist the pressure and have joined the bandwagon.

The situation in the Kurdish areas of the main cities is somewhat different. The Kurdish freedom movement has the upper hand in those areas, but is unable to convince the Turkish left to adopt its policies. There is still a discrepancy between the leadership of the founder of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, who is still imprisoned, and local organisations, meaning their approach to the left is neither smooth nor consistent. Furthermore, nationalism in the guise of anti-imperialism remains a significant feature of many leftwing organisations and poses a major obstacle.

The 'peace process', or the 'terror-free Turkey process', as it is called by the Erdoğan regime, has created yet another layer of difficulty. Initially, the new CHP leadership did not join the parliamentary group visiting the island prison of İmralı to meet Öcalan face-to-face.

The CHP decided to participate in the parliamentary 'Commission on National Solidarity, Brotherhood and Democracy'. However, its distrust of the coalition between the AKP (Justice and Development Party) and the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) led it to adopt a neutral position on the outcome. For example, the CHP did not use the commission as a platform to press for the removal of central government-appointed managers instead of elected mayors from the Kurdish freedom movement and those elected on the CHP ticket.

While these factors are pushing and pulling the various leftwing tendencies towards the CHP, the regime is determined to break the CHP's backbone in order to paralyse the entire opposition and thereby secure one more presidential term for Erdoğan and his coalition.

A couple of years ago, Erdoğan instructed the judiciary to "shake

the municipalities until the rotten fruit falls off". The CHP had, note, become Erdoğan's main electoral challenger after winning Turkey's 2024 local elections and retaining control of İstanbul, Ankara and other major cities.

The appointment of hand-picked 'yes men' in accordance with the mandatory retirement or promotion timings of various judicial and prosecutorial positions were carried out carefully. Eventually, they were ready to deliver the *coup de main*.

The 2023 CHP congress and any subsequent congresses were deemed unlawful, as were the leaders elected at those congresses. CHP chair, Özgür Özel, thereby found himself ousted and former leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, was reinstated by an Ankara appeals court ruling. Kılıçdaroğlu proceeded to take control of the CHP's disciplinary machinery, change the party's website, sack headquarters staff and take steps that distanced CHP from jailed İstanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu (he was, for example, removed from the new CHP website). İmamoğlu is, of course, a CHP member and is Erdoğan's strongest potential rival when it comes to presidential elections.

Full cooperation

Obviously the Erdoğan regime needed the full cooperation of Kılıçdaroğlu. As the old Turkish saying goes, 'When a tree is getting rotten, the worms are deep inside'. The former party leadership was willing and conniving enough to play the role assigned to them by the Erdoğan regime. Kılıçdaroğlu and his CHP has, it should be noted, resumed official contact with Erdoğan's AKP (broken because of the arrest of İmamoğlu and other CHP mayors).

Özgür Özel and his CHP - which reportedly has the majority of the party's MPs and mayors - is determined to put up a strong fight. However, recent events have shown that, while a good proportion of the party base supports the old, democratically elected leadership, a substantial section of office holders are procrastinating and adopting a middle of the road position, in an

attempt to persuade both sides to avoid splitting the party, which would ruin its electoral chances.

Many on the Turkish left sensed the possibility of a split and therefore proposed the formation of a new party. The ousted leadership has been openly appealing to leftwing organisations such as the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP). TİP leaders were elected to parliament on the Kurdish freedom movement ticket in the last elections. While Öcalan considered them to be part of the broad movement he was planning to bring together to further the peace process, and had sent them an invitation to that effect, the leader of the TİP, Erkan Baş, gave an interview with T24 in which he claimed that the TİP might not be able to support a candidate whose "native language" was Kurdish! While Baş later 'clarified' his remarks, it is clear that TİP is hedging its bets. It wants to keep the option of continued cooperation with the pro-Kurdish DEM open, but it might find cooperation, even unity, with an Özel CHP split more appealing.

While the main parliamentary opposition party is in disarray, having two leaders with varying degrees of support among the rank and file, as well as a growing indecisive centre, the AKP is gathering 'ripened' parliamentarians from the 'shaken' CHP and the other parliamentary parties into its fold in an attempt to increase its number of seats. The numbers are crucial for changing the constitution, as well as supporting Erdoğan's third-term candidacy.

The judiciary appointed by Erdoğan, ignoring the constitution and laws, is tightening the screws every day, with a new 'anti-corruption operation' - detaining more and more mayors, elected municipal officers and public employees of municipalities. The harassment has spread to their spouses and even their extended family members. These unjust detentions and baseless court cases are keeping many influential CHP members in jail, while the newly appointed CHP leadership is talking about 'cleansing the party of corruption'.

The *raison d'état* subtly expressed in the speeches of the leader of the MHP reflects the needs of the USA and its allies in Turkey and the Middle East during these turbulent times. Thomas J Barrack, the US envoy to Turkey, Syria and Iraq, is busy 'ironing out problems'. The Kurdish region of Iraq is unable to function as a parliamentary structure without US intervention. The al-Sharaa regime installed in Syria has proven a difficult ally. While Iran is a handful, nobody wants to shake the seemingly stable foundations of Turkey.

The European Union is considering imposing sanctions on the new minister of justice, Akın Gürlek, appointed by Erdoğan in February 2026, over his role in the sham trials. But apart from Spain there has been no strong opposition to the shenanigans in Turkey.

Next month's Nato summit in Ankara will, in effect, be a tacit endorsement of the Erdoğan regime, and may provide the impetus needed to split the main opposition party and detain its rebel leaders. We shall see ●

Fighting fund

We can do it

With exactly two weeks still to go before the end of June, I am confident that the *Weekly Worker* monthly fighting fund target of £2,750 is within reach. But will we actually get there? So far we have raised £1,420, meaning that we still need another £1,330.

Thanks very much to comrades PB (£80), MM (£75), TW (£50), TR (£40), TW (£25), OG (£24), CC, MD, JL and AM (£10 each), and TR (£8) - all of whom made their donations by bank transfer or standing order. Then we had the usual batch of PayPal donors - thanks to comrades EM (£60), PM (£50), JP (£12), plus comrades AR, SO, GP and RD, who all chipped in with their more moderate (but still much appreciated) £5. So, overall, another £484 was added to the running total for June.

But let's make sure we don't fall short. If you can, please make your own contribution via bank

transfer or SO, hand a banknote to one of our comrades or even send us a cheque (yes, we still accept those!). I can't stress enough just how much we rely on our readers' support to continue the key role we play in fighting for what the working class movement so desperately needs - a single, united, democratic-centralist Marxist party, capable of leading the struggle to replace the current order with the eradication of exploitation, not just in Britain, but across the globe!

If you need more information on how to play your part, please go to the website below. We can do it! ●

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

DISCUSSION

Centrality of democracy

Too many on the left consider lengthy debates, polemics, decision-making votes and minority rights a diversion from the 'real struggle'. A fundamental error. Mike Macnair begins a series of articles

I attended the Connections event, 'What next for the left', in Sheffield on June 6. It struck me that apart from the very limited plenary discussions (vague platform speeches; the usual three-minute interventions from the floor), there was a lot of *non-engagement* between the participants. On the one hand, two sets of five parallel 'workshops' looked at a variety of topics. This is a practice which began in the 1960s-70s US anti-war movement 'teach-ins' and such-like. At its origins, it reflected the student-based character of the 1960s 'new left', and behind that the normal structure of academic conferences. Workshops provide an opportunity for more people to *talk*, but not actually to make decisions. It is assumed that the decision process will be somewhere else.

On the other hand, there was a series of parallel 'self-organised spaces', organised by Democratic Socialists, Republic Your Party, Campaign for a Mass Workers' Party... Again, discussion; but in separated bubbles. We did have *some* debate in the Democratic Socialists' 'self-organised space', but this was because the comrades there deliberately set out to organise some debate.

I do not mean to blame the organisers. It was not supposed to be a decision-making event and they were, anyhow, merely following normal leftwing practice. But with this event - aiming to discuss 'what next for the left' in the wake of the debacle of the anti-democratic Bonapartist manipulations of Your Party, self-identified as 'democratic' - it struck me forcibly how useless the normal leftwing practice is from the point of view of democratic decision-making.

And it also struck me that in the USA, Renato Flores has offered on *Cosmonaut* arguments for the Democratic Socialists of America's use of *Roberts' rules of order* (the US equivalent of the British *Citrine on chairmanship*) and 'Rusty's rules' (a simplified version of Roberts, like Wal Hannington's simplified version of *Citrine, Mr chairman!*).¹ But there does not seem to be an obviously available defence of the principles of the procedural practices of the pre-1914 Social Democratic Party of Germany, carried into the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party and thus Bolshevism before the 1921 ban on factions was carried into practical effect in 1927-29; and at least to some limited extent partially preserved in the practices of the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International, when I was a member of its British section in the 1970s-80s; and which *relate to* the practices we attempt to operate in the CPGB.

I do not mean that these practices are all correct (or that everything we in the CPGB have done procedurally in recent years has been correct). But I do think that trying to work up a defence of these procedural forms is worthwhile.

I have to say at the outset that this is not a party position, but simply *my* attempt at a case for and explanation of these procedural forms, as opposed to bureaucratic centralism, to bureaucratic Bonapartism masquerading as 'democracy', and to reliance on *Citrine/Roberts' rules* and 'traditional labour movement practice'. It is pretty much certain that I will miss some issues, and quite likely that some things I say will be controversial within the CPGB (it is not news that they will be controversial



SWP: action, action, action

among the wider left, to the extent that anyone is willing to pay any attention to my arguments...)

This raises a good many issues and hence is unavoidably going to be a series of articles. To lay out at the outset what I plan to cover, I begin with arguments for the importance of the issue, and why questions of procedures of decision-making should not be regarded as a diversion from 'real politics'. For this purpose I will unavoidably repeat both arguments I have made recently (and repeatedly) for the centrality of questions of political democracy,² and arguments I made back in 2011³ against Trotskyist arguments that these questions are secondary.

From this I will turn to issues of *time*. These are posed both by arguments that democratic decision procedures are time-wasting *in general*, and by claims that the urgency of the situation, or the need to seize the moment and the initiative, require undemocratic decision procedures. These arguments are not wholly without foundation, but they artificially generalise on the needs of *military* or *emergency management* (fire, flood, etc) decision-making.

The third general point is that we are concerned with *principles* and *guidelines for practice*, not with absolute fixed rules. This point will involve some unavoidable discussion on the nature of laws and rules in general and in particular of constitutional law. Some leftists are prone to designing elaborate 'Heath Robinson' (US: 'Rube Goldberg') constitutional machinery; these machineries will both inevitably fail, and point to support for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie (rule of the capitalist class).

The paramount principle - which will reassert itself at all levels of

concrete detail - is that people who are prepared to participate in the decision process should be able to take real decisions. The principle is two-sided. On the one hand, the 'silent majority' do not get to be 'represented'. On the other, those who do participate - as party, union, cooperative, and so on members, as voters, as jurors, get to take real decisions, not to have these pre-empted by officials or by unprincipled manoeuvres. The members - for shorthand, because we are not in power, organising the decision-making of the whole society - have to have the right to make mistakes. But equally, they need to be aware that their decisions *may* be mistakes - and therefore to include minority views (which after the event may turn out to be right).

Within the framework of this principle, it is possible to approach *the conduct of decision-making meetings*: meetings need chairs (not 'facilitators', which is a managerialist concept); how should the chair work (to draw out and promote clarifying disagreements); how to handle proposals for amendments; what about proposals which are counterposed to each other; and so on.

Decision-making on a larger scale involves specific considerations. The easiest example is national organisation, but the same issues would apply in a local or sectoral organisation that got big enough. *Sub-division* into local groups - cells, branches, and so on - is indispensable; and a large part of discussion can and must take place in these, before any major conference. But even so, large numbers imply too many choices available, and it remains necessary to narrow the range of possible choices beyond the procedural forms discussed for meetings in general. Part of this role can be played by factional groups

and caucussing at conferences; but arrangements such as commissions (as used in the early Comintern) and compositing negotiations (as used in the Labour Party before the recent past) are necessary.

The same issue - too many choices available - poses in a different way the question of leading committees. These are as much needed by large local organisations as by national ones. Here the choice between *collective* leading committees and the cults of *individual* leaders (and the direct election of individual officers) is a choice between democracy and Bonapartism.

Political

Both the Spartacists and Duncan Chapel of the Fourth International in Scotland argued that the left in Your Party over-emphasised questions of party democracy at the expense of offering an alternative political line. These are versions of a standard Trotskyist political story - that "a political line dominates over the regime". Leon Trotsky argued that "A party regime has no independent, self-sufficient meaning. A party regime is a derivative magnitude in relation to party policy." And again, "A political line predominates over the regime."⁴ The second of these quotations has become dogma for the organised Trotskyist movement. It was originally written in 1937 in defence of the Cannon leadership of the Socialist Workers Party in America against its internal critics and has been used ever since in defence of bureaucratic centralism.

This approach is profoundly mistaken. In the first place, if we are to appeal to Trotsky, he also wrote in 1928 that "All questions of internal and international policy invariably lead us back to the question of the internal

party regime", and that "A change in the internal regime of the Comintern is becoming a life-and-death question for the international revolutionary movement". Both these quotations are from the section, 'The question of the internal party regime', in *The Third International after Lenin*.⁵

If we are forced to choose between Trotskys, we should prefer the fighter against the degeneration of the Soviet state to the promoter of 'Trotskyist' bureaucratic centralism. The whole section could be profitably read by anyone who believes that "a political line predominates over the regime".

Members and leaders of the SWP (Britain) would benefit particularly from reading it: *de te fabula narratur* (the story is told about you - Horace): see yourselves in the mirror. The story Trotsky tells of the ban on factions, the usurpation of power by the apparatus, false unanimity, the top-down promotion of the obedient, the political expropriation of the ranks and the loss of the party's ability *actually* to mobilise its members for its political purposes could be reprinted with the names changed to those of the SWP and still tell a true story.

Secondly, the argument that "a political line predominates over the regime" is internally contradictory, and not in a dialectical sense. Trotsky was and Trotskysts are advocates of a 'democratic centralist' party, as opposed to a loose federation and of a republic of soviets (workers' councils) as opposed to parliamentarism. But both choices are no more than choices about 'party regime' and 'state regime': ie, about procedures for collective decision-making. You cannot coherently, or even dialectically, but only in Orwellian doublespeak, say that the party question or the question of soviets versus parliamentarism is a first-order issue of political line, but opposition to bureaucratic centralism is merely subordinate to the political line.

Thirdly, advocates of the view that procedural and 'constitutional' issues are second-rate questions claim to be Marxists and Leninists. But this view is flatly opposed to the actual political practice of both Marx and Lenin. Dip into Lenin's *Collected works* for the period down to 1917, and you will see how much writing effort he put into constitutional and procedural questions. Reread (or read for the first time) Lenin's *State and revolution*, or the arguments by Marx and Engels on which it is based - especially *The civil war in France*, but also the polemics with the Bakuninists and the Lassalleans, or Engels' critique of the draft Erfurt programme. Most of this material is available free online at the Marxists Internet Archive. You will find that it is Bakunin, not Marx and Engels, who thought political, 'constitutional' and organisational forms were unimportant; and that it is the Trotsky and Luxemburg of 1904 (when they sided with the Mensheviks), not Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who also thought that.

Fourthly and fundamentally, the economic and social issues themselves are at the end of the day issues about who decides and how the decision is taken.

Every serious strike, and every withdrawal of capital should remind us that "no man is an island entire of itself" (Donne). Our everyday life constantly depends on the actions of other people - eg, those who work in farms, food transportation and so on, to give only the most obvious example.

In other words, our lives are *already* collective and socialised. Capitalism is a means by which we collectively delegate critical decisions in social affairs to capitalists, and a procedural form through which they take these decisions on the basis of a body of social rules which gets called 'the market', 'economic rationality' or - for Marxists - 'the law of value'. We delegate these decisions to the capitalists by simply *putting up with* them running society and by not creating alternative procedures for collective decision-making.

The result, of course, is substantive decisions which are in the interests of capitalists generally or of particular groups of capitalists who happen to have paid out the largest bribes (sorry, 'political donations' or 'fees to counsel') recently, and which are opposed to everyone else's interests. But in order to get rid of this problem, we need *alternative ways to take collective decisions* without the capitalists and 'the market'. And alternative ways to take decisions are, at the end of the day, merely procedural forms. This is, in fact, not merely a first-order political question. It is *the* first-order political question - the question of questions.

Minority

The underlying situation of the left is that we are very radically a minority (as I argued some weeks ago, and as it remains necessary to repeat). Contrary to the Trotskyists, the 'transitional method' *cannot* solve this problem, because it arises not from lack of clarity about how to get to socialism, but from the hostility of the majority of the working class to the 'socialist' end-point, towards which 'transitional method' points: that is, 'war communism' in a single country and the bureaucratic regime.

The blunt fact is that socialism and communism are (fairly small) minority ideas because *we still live in the shadow of Stalinism*. The generation who were adult and active before 1989-91 are now getting elderly, and there is a certain revival among a small minority of the young of using the communist name and Soviet imagery to *épater les bourgeois*; but every school-child is taught the calamitous history of the USSR and its fall. The large majority view among *all* classes is that socialism is either undesirable, because tyrannical, like the Soviet and east European regimes; or infeasible, because economically radically inefficient, again like the Soviet and east European regimes.

It is nonetheless *objectively necessary* to promote socialism and communism. And it is true, first, that the working class needs socialism in order to defend its elementary interests. Second, the *society* needs socialism - and this needs to be what Marx called in 1871 "*la domination politique du prolétariat*" - the political dominance of the working class over the other classes, and in particular over management and the state apparatus. And, third, this is only possible with radical democracy.

The working class needs a socialist project.⁶ The starting point for this is that the 'working class' means, as I have argued before, the *whole social class* - in and out of work, home-makers, elderly, adults and children - which lacks property in the means of production and in consequence is dependent on the *wage share of total output*: either directly through wage-work or indirectly through dependence on a wage-earner, or on the 'social wage' (state benefits and charities).

Workers need trade unions - and cooperatives, and renters' organisations, etc - for defensive struggles to maintain their elementary position. Karl Marx characterised the necessary strikes, etc as "guerrilla struggles".⁷ Through these struggles it

is possible for *some sections*, who for one reason or another have particular economic leverage, to win *sectional* gains from capital. In particular, under boom conditions more concessions may be made; though the competitive pressure to push the wage share down persists, and concessions generally need to be extorted. In the slump phase of the business cycle the pressure is intensified.

Sectional gains are always vulnerable to being taken back - precisely because they are sectional, and capital can manoeuvre around them (as, for example, replacing British-mined with imported coal and with gas-fired power stations). And/or capital can *politically* attack the sectional gains as unfair to other workers. This was how the 1978-79 'Winter of discontent' was used to bring in Thatcher's government; and similar ideological offensives about supposed unfairness to other workers are underway now in relation to disability and sickness benefits and public-sector pensions.

As long as the workers' movement accepts that capitalism will always exist, it also *inherently accepts* that at the end of the day the wage share must fall. This is true if the point is to preserve the competitiveness of the *firm*. It is true if it is to preserve the competitiveness of the *nation* in international trade and in the battle to attract investment capital (the commoner argument of centre-left and centre-right politicians). And it is true if it is to pay for armaments: Adam Smith's 1776 "defence, however, is of much more importance than opulence", or Herman Goering in 1936 (following US policy debates in 1916-17) arguing for guns to take priority over butter - an argument currently revived.⁸

The working class's alternative needs to involve democratically organised planning of production in kind. At one level this should be obvious from the fact that the Ten Hour Day Act, public education and so on are *already* interferences with the market allocation of resources to secure goods identified in kind (more free time; the actual education of children whose parents cannot afford to pay ...) rather than money for free choices.

At another level, suppose a 'market socialism' of worker cooperatives linked by money and markets: each cooperative would be driven by market imperatives to *self-exploit*, to attempt to drive down the wage share. This was part of Karl Marx's arguments against the 'mutualism' of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and it is empirically confirmed by the effects of marketisation in Yugoslavia in the 1960s-70s.⁹

Planning

It is not just the working class that needs socialism. At a superficial level of analysis, since the 'neoliberal turn' in the 1970s-80s we have been living in the 'west' through an experiment in testing whether (as the neoclassical economists claim) free markets can deliver superior outcomes through financial engineering to the *partial* planning in kind which had characterised earlier capitalism, and had intensified after the failure of free markets to deliver in war conditions in 1914-16.¹⁰ The neoliberal experiment has, in fact, resulted in systematically *more expensive* outcomes in health and other areas, and *worse* outcomes in public education, housing and transport infrastructure maintenance.

Equally, politico-legal free markets in public regulation now transparently support practical immunity of the rich from the operation of laws - illustrated in Britain in the inability of the state to hold the water companies to account, the Grenfell Tower story, and so on. Overcoming these dynamics requires at least partial *de-marketisation* of

politics, media and law; and these in turn require explicit rationing in kind of access to decision processes, as opposed to price rationing. Again, these problems affect everyone except a very small minority (considerably smaller than the top 5%) who are not 'priced out' of justice and political access.

More fundamentally, avoiding catastrophic consequences from human-induced climate change is quite unavoidably going to involve extensive planning in kind. We need to reduce carbon emissions to avoid climate change accelerating to the point of human extinction. That is a choice in kind, even if it is to be achieved by 'market' mechanisms of 'carbon markets'. We also need a mass of measures for mitigating consequences that are already unavoidable - which will again involve planning in kind to deal with population movements due to changes in sea level, in fresh water availability, in land fertility, and so on, which are all already visibly in progress.

The inability to get anywhere with international conventions to deal with climate change reflects another side of the problem. The money system entails the state and the regime of many states, geopolitics and the drive towards war.

Capitalist states are driven towards competition in a semi-stable hierarchy. The process throws up a hegemon state, whose currency is the global reserve currency: Britain in the 19th century, the USA since 1945. But the position of *being* the hegemon state leads to inward investments that push up housing costs and in consequence wages, undermining *industrial* competitiveness, leading to offshoring and the *relative* (not absolute) decline of the hegemon.¹¹

The USA has managed this relative decline since the 1970s by exporting *simple destruction*: in Mozambique, Angola, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Syria ... and also since around 2000 pursuing a policy of aggressive encirclement of China, which has driven the current wars in Ukraine and against Iran. This drive to war is not a false policy choice by individual US leaders: it results from the inherent dynamics of the USA's position as a (relatively) declining world hegemon.

This, too, affects all of us. If we do not break with the money mechanism, the logic forces yet more destructive wars; and in the end the choice between human extinction through generalised nuclear exchange and the 'Somalification' of the whole world outside the USA (leading, in turn, to the collapse of the USA itself).

Overall, then, the point is that *society* needs to shift sharply into the planning in kind of major productive activities, because the continuation of capitalist rule and decision-making through money and markets threatens us not only with worsening immediate conditions, but also with human extinction - either through runaway climate change or through generalised nuclear exchange.

USSR

But - as I said above - socialism is unpopular, because we still live in the shadow of the disastrous Soviet experience.

We have to recognise that the Soviet regime began with an attempt to construct socialism and continued to ideologise itself as 'socialist'. The USSR did *aspire to* planning of productive activities in kind. It failed.

This failure is partly the product of the siege warfare conducted by the capitalist powers against the Soviet regime between the Red victory in the civil war in 1921 and 1941, and between 1946 and 1991. The actual *survival* of the USSR under this siege warfare reflected partly the support of the USA and British empire in 1941-

45 and the ability to take equipment from eastern Germany in 1945-50. It reflected partly the fact that this was never socialism in one *country*, but bureaucratic socialism in one of the great European *empires*, including both an industrial core and a large agricultural periphery. This made siege warfare ('sanctions') less immediately effective than they have been in other cases.

The second element, however, was the absolute dominance of lies in Soviet 'planning'. This flowed from the career interests of managers, party bosses and other full-time officials, in *pretending success in order to keep their jobs or obtain promotion*. The result is 'garbage in, garbage out' in the planning process, and a dynamic towards the Soviet workers' joke: 'They pretend to pay us and we pretend to work'.

Incentives for managers and bureaucrats to lie, and pretend things are going better than they are, are not in the least unique to the USSR. They are perfectly visible in ordinary western business management and the state bureaucracy. They can be seen even in the small-scale bureaucratic hierarchy of the British SWP. The ideologues of capitalism tell us that markets provide the necessary consumer feedback to control managers' lies. This is at most a *partial* truth: while small businesses collapse rapidly if their business models fail, established firms can go on losing money for decades before collapse. Checks on managerial lies and self-deception are nonetheless essential to any rational decision-making.

The effect of the regime of career managers and bureaucrats without anyone to whom they were effectively answerable was to make each manager owner of 'his' factory, or whatever, each regional party boss owner of 'his' region, and so on - subject only to the occasional arbitrary interventions of the Renaissance court-style cliques at the centre. Marx already identified the issue 1843-44 in his critique of Hegel's idealisation of the Prussian state bureaucracy: state bureaucrats do not express the 'general interest', but their particular turf interests.¹² Bureaucratic or managerial socialism thus turns into the opposite of socialism; and *tends towards capitalism* - either by way of collapse, as in 1989-91, or by way of the managed increase of capitalism, as in China.

To whom are the bureaucrats and managers to be answerable, if they are not to be Soviet-style informal owners or accountable to capital (as western bureaucrats and managers are)? They can for *some purposes* (in relation to *local* decisions) be made answerable to those immediately below; but this does not solve the problem of *planning as coordination* on a national and international scale, which we need to solve (at least to some extent) in order to get beyond market ordering. Local answerability alone winds up as (at best) market-linked co-ops or Yugoslav-style 'self-management' under marketisation; and, as noted above, this fails.

The answer is that the bureaucrats need to be answerable to *the working class as a class*: as I already said, to the whole social class. That the proletariat is in charge and subordinates the middle classes (including management and state bureaucracy) to itself is what Marx meant in 1871 by "*la domination politique du prolétariat*" - proletarian political rule, which is more commonly called among Marxists the dictatorship of the proletariat.

And again, as I already said, this class is *driven to* collective activity - trade unions, cooperatives, collectivist political parties - because its *separation from* the means of production means that such organised collective action is its only strength. It is this proletarian drive to collective

activity that is the ground of the Marxist wager on the working class. It is not, contrary to the ideas of the revolutionary syndicalists (who imagine that they are Trotskyists), the employed workers' strength at the point of production, which can always be dislocated by capitalist manoeuvres.

Proletarian political rule thus implies everyone gets one vote, one voice, freedom of access to information and communication, and freedom of association. It also requires democratic procedural methods of decision-making: ones that as far as possible return real decision-making to the ranks, so far as they are willing to participate in the process.

"As far as possible" because there are decisions which genuinely have to be taken too quickly for democratic decision processes to be used. But these are fewer than is commonly claimed. The next article in this series will begin with this issue of time: which turns out to involve not only the difference between emergency and non-emergency decisions, but also really quite detailed procedural questions about, for example, the early publication of proposals, the frequency of meetings, the length of agendas ... ●

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Notes

1. 'The procedural is political', August 7 2021: cosmonautmag.com/2021/08/the-procedural-is-political.
2. Eg. 'Effective collectivity is key' March 2 2023 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1432/effective-collectivity-is-key); 'Very essence of Marxism', March 6 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1528/very-essence-of-marxism); 'Socialism requires democracy', May 7 2026 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1584/socialism-requires-democracy).
3. 'The procedural is political' *Weekly Worker* November 15 2011 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/697/the-procedural-is-political).
4. 'The groupings in the communist opposition' (1929): www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1929/03/commopp.htm; 'On democratic centralism and the regime' (1937): www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/xx/democrat.htm.
5. [#p2-11](https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1928/3rd/ti07.htm).
6. Here and below I use 'socialism' as we do in the CPGB (and as Leon Trotsky did in *Results and prospects*) to mean what *immediately* follows the overthrow of capitalist rule: that is, a contradictory society under workers' rule *on the road to* communism as a stateless, classless society.
7. Value, price and profit (1865), chapter 14 (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/value-price-profit/ch03.htm); 'Trade unions: their past, their present, their future' (Geneva Congress of the First International, 1866: www.themilitant.com/2012/7632/763249.html).
8. *Wealth of nations* book IV, chapter 2: www.marxists.org/reference/archive/smith-adam/works/wealth-of-nations/book04/ch02.htm (defending the English Navigation Acts as a defence measure); Wikipedia: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guns_versus_butter_model summarises the history of 'guns or butter'. Current: see, for example, www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2026/04/16/wes-streeting-welfare-fund-defence-spending-keir-stamer/; 'Badenoch and Starmer clash over welfare spending at PMQs', BBC News, April 29 (www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/ce35dwdvewwt). For the current political dynamics of the issue in Europe see, for instance, S Sacchi, G Buzzelli and C de la Porte, "'Guns versus butter'" in public opinion: the politicisation of the warfare-welfare trade-off' *Journal of European Public Policy* Vol 33 (2026), pp1199-1225.
9. See, for example, C Samary *Le marché contre l'autogestion: l'expérience yougoslave* La Brèche 1988; *Plan, market and democracy* (www.wiire.org/node/663), lectures 2 and 3.
10. Characterised earlier capitalism: eg. J Guldi *Roads to power: Britain invents the infrastructure state* Cambridge MA 2012 (18th century Britain); DF Noble *Forces of production* New York NY 1984 (19th century USA). On World War I, see JE Hutton *Welfare and housing: a practical record of war-time management* London 1918.
11. More elaboration on these points and supporting references in M Macnair 'Imperialism and the state', a four-part series of *Weekly Worker* supplements: March 17 2022 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1387/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-i); March 24 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1388/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-ii); April 7 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1390/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-iii); April 14 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1391/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-iv).
12. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/ch03.htm.

DEFENCE

Labour's toxic arms race

British imperialism is weak economically and yet feels obliged to commit to bigger and bigger arms budgets. However, we need to do more than oppose increases in so-called defence spending, argues **Carl Collins**

John Healey's resignation as defence secretary has exposed deep contradictions within the state and within the Labour government. On the surface, the dispute concerns the level of so-called 'defence' spending and whether Britain is committing sufficient resources to its armed forces. Yet a proper analysis requires us to look beyond the immediate political drama and examine the underlying geopolitical pressures and structural constraints that shape the debate.

Healey's resignation has naturally intensified speculation about Sir Keir's future and the possibility of one or more leadership challenges. However, much of this discussion proceeds from a mistaken assumption: namely, that replacing Starmer would significantly alter the fortunes of capitalism in Britain.

Economic stagnation, weak productivity growth, high levels of public debt, pressure on public services and the constant scrutiny of financial markets - all place severe limits on what any capitalist government can do. The experience of successive governments since the financial crisis has demonstrated that even modest departures from accepted economic orthodoxy can provoke punishing reactions from what is widely described as 'the market'. Remember Liz Truss?

Then there is the geopolitical reality of Britain's position within a US-led international order. Particularly under Donald Trump, American demands towards allies have become increasingly explicit. Washington expects them to spend more on the military, align themselves with American strategic priorities and contribute more resources to maintaining the existing international balance of power - preferably whilst buying American-made war equipment and services. Members of the government may occasionally disagree with particular US actions, but all remain fundamentally committed to the so-called 'special relationship'.

Any future Labour leader would therefore find themselves constrained by demands for fiscal restraint on the one side and US demands to increase military spending on the other. Clearly, Healey is one of those who is willing to solve the dilemma by savaging the welfare state and cutting spending on infrastructure, health, benefits, etc.

Defence spending

The point must be made that the term, 'defence spending', is itself something of a misnomer. Until Trump, almost to his credit, signed an executive order to rename the Department of Defense to 'Department of War' (even changing its URL to 'war.gov'), states have commonly presented their military expenditure as 'defensive'.

Historically, however, military establishments have, of course, served not primarily to defend the territory of individual states, but to protect strategic interests, secure access to markets and resources, maintain alliances and project power abroad. Britain's military posture cannot be understood separately from its role within Nato, its close relationship with the US and its continuing attempts to preserve influence in a world where its relative economic weight has declined.

Military spending is therefore not about defending the British population from external attack: it is about preserving a particular



Drones have changed warfare

international order. The language of 'defence' obscures the reality that Britain's armed forces are integrated into a wider network of alliances and commitments, led overwhelmingly by the United States. The debate is not merely about how much Britain should spend, but how Britain should contribute to a broader imperial system.

While Healey's resignation speech on June 16 centred on GDP percentages, that cannot be said of Al Cairns, the former armed forces minister. Cairns has made himself the champion of radical military reform and fighting tomorrow's wars, not yesterday's.

The character of warfare is rapidly changing. Wars in Ukraine, the Middle East and the spread of advanced technologies have demonstrated that military power is no longer measured solely through expensive platforms such as aircraft carriers, tanks and fifth generation fighters. Increasingly, relatively inexpensive drones, autonomous systems, electronic warfare capabilities and cyber tools can have disproportionate effects.

This creates contradictory pressures. On the one hand, military establishments continue to pursue ever more sophisticated and expensive weapons systems. On the other, smaller states and non-state actors have shown an ability to innovate, using cheaper, more flexible technologies. The result is an arms race characterised not merely by greater expenditure, but by uncertainty about where expenditure should be directed.

For Britain, this raises difficult questions. Should resources continue to flow towards major prestige projects and legacy systems? Or should investment shift towards newer technologies, whose effectiveness appears increasingly evident? The disagreements between sections of the political and military establishment reflect this uncertainty.

Yet, regardless of how these questions are answered, a more fundamental problem remains: military expenditure requires resources, and those resources must come from somewhere. This is where the political crisis surrounding defence spending intersects with the broader economic difficulties facing British capitalism. For much of the public, calls for increased military spending are difficult to reconcile with everyday experience. Britain continues to face sluggish economic growth, strained public services, housing shortages, stagnant living standards and persistent insecurity.

Large sections of the population are asked to accept tangible sacrifices, while simultaneously being told that billions more must be devoted to future or faraway military purposes.

We have already seen elements of this emerge in public reaction to the war in Ukraine. While many in the US initially supported aid and assistance, there has also been a noticeable backlash from sections of the population who say that 'it's not our war' and that resources should instead be used to 'look after our own'.

Similar sentiments have emerged in Britain with the likes of Reform UK and Robert Lowe's Restore. Such developments reflect a broader difficulty governments face, when attempting to secure public support for increased military expenditure during periods of economic strain. The old phrase, 'butter or guns', captures the dilemma perfectly. Resources devoted to military expenditure are resources that cannot simultaneously be spent elsewhere. The precise trade-offs may vary, but the underlying contradiction remains (we can put aside the Keynesian stimulus argument - which probably applies in the US).

Andy Burnham

This is especially significant because governments increasingly find that the low-hanging fruit of fiscal retrenchment has already been harvested. Years of austerity have reduced many areas of public spending, particularly in welfare.

However, welfare cuts are likely to remain among the most politically accessible targets. Benefits, disability support and other forms of social expenditure will continue to face pressure. Even the state pension and the 'triple lock' is becoming increasingly prominent in debates.

Pension expenditure represents a growing share of government spending, yet for psephologists, pensioners also constitute one of the most electorally significant groups in British politics. Capitalist common sense, class struggle, the ownership of the means of persuasion, all go discounted. Focus groups, pitches, policy offers, positioning is everything. Either way, pensioners are divided along class lines, and yet the fact of the matter is that they are more likely than any other section of the population to have a petty bourgeois outlook. It is not only a matter of age: private pensions, managing little property portfolios, paid-off mortgages, etc, provide a better explanation.

Either way, the Labour government, whoever is prime minister, is likely to

rob every big spending department to pay for bigger and bigger military budgets. Some of Andy Burnham's supporters portray him as representing a more social democratic or left-leaning alternative to the current leadership. There are even those who hope he will solve all spending problems by 'taxing the rich' (as if they are not already taxed). Such demands feature in almost every edition of the *Morning Star*, *Socialist Worker*, *The Socialist* and *The Communist*. The inevitability of capital flight goes all but ignored.

Burnham should certainly be treated with considerable scepticism. Individual leaders operate within structures that constrain their choices. Britain's economic position, its membership of Nato, its financial dependence on international markets and its strategic relationship with the US all place limits on what any mainstream Labour leader can realistically do.

This does not mean that personalities are irrelevant. Different leaders may emphasise different priorities, adopt different rhetoric or pursue different tactical approaches. Yet the underlying direction of policy is shaped by forces that extend beyond their individual control.

Burnham himself provides a useful illustration of the problem. On several occasions he has sought to position himself to the left of Sir Keir's leadership - only to retreat, when confronted with institutional or political pressure. During debates over Labour's fiscal rules he suggested that they should be examined and reconsidered. Yet, as soon as concerns emerged about market reactions and financial credibility, the language softened and the position moved back towards orthodoxy. Similarly, on the issue of compensation raised by Women Against State Pension Inequality, Burnham initially appeared sympathetic to campaigners - before subsequently moderating his stance, when confronted with the practical and political implications.

The significance of these episodes lies not in Burnham's personal failings, but in what they reveal about the operation of the political system. Politicians may signal dissent, while operating in opposition or in regional government. Yet, once questions of state power, financial markets and governing responsibility arise, the room for manoeuvre narrows dramatically.

A Burnham leadership might therefore employ a more socially conscious language. It might seek to distance itself rhetorically from aspects of Starmerism. It might promise greater attention to inequality or regional development. Nevertheless, when confronted by pressure from Nato, the Treasury, financial markets and Britain's security establishment, it would face many of the same constraints as the current government.

The same logic applies to defence policy. Whatever differences emerge within Labour, there is little evidence that any serious contender for the leadership intends fundamentally to challenge Britain's strategic alignment with the US. On the contrary, support for Nato and close cooperation with Washington remains one of the strongest areas of consensus across the British political establishment.

Our approach is entirely different. We have no interest in the argument about how to increase so-called defence spending. Well, except to get a handle on the contradictions in the

governing class and its rival parties and factions.

The same goes for left calls for 'cutting defence spending' by this or that percentage: by a half is the usual going rate nowadays. Others on the left speak in even more moderate tones: Stop the War Coalition commits merely to resisting "any increase in military spending" (2025 conference resolution).

Nor are we interested in how Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Ukraine should be financed and armed. We can safely leave that to Trump, Starmer, Macron, Merz, etc ... and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Workers Power and other social imperialists. We are not concerned with Britain alone and some leftwing British nationalism. Ukraine is a capitalist country ruled by a thoroughly corrupt oligarchy. It is also a proxy for western imperialism - something that was crystal clear from 2014 and the Maidan coup.

Marxist slogan

Nor are we pacifists. Everywhere we support just wars - above all revolutionary civil wars for socialism. Communists will therefore strive to expose the war preparations of the bourgeoisie, the lies of social imperialists and illusions fostered by social pacifism.

We therefore stand by the traditional Marxist slogan: 'Not a person, not a penny' for the armed forces of British imperialism. That does not mean indifference towards the armed forces and defence spending.

We are *against* the standing army, but *for* a popular militia. Of course, that will have to be financed. But we recommend the popular militia not because it would be considerably cheaper than the standing armed forces. We recommend it for two main reasons: a popular militia is the most effective means to ensure national defence and the most effective way of making revolution.

The popular militia will never be realised voluntarily by some benign capitalist state. It has to be won, in the first place by the working class developing its own fighting formations. Such fighting formations grow out of the class struggle itself: defending picket lines, mass demonstrations, workplace occupations, fending off fascists, etc. We saw that in the Russian Revolution with its Red Guards. We saw it too in Britain, albeit on a smaller scale, in 1926 with the Workers' Defence Corps.

As the class struggle intensifies, conditions are created for the workers to arm themselves and win over sections of the military forces of the capitalist state. Every opportunity must be used to take even tentative steps towards this goal. As circumstances allow, the working class must equip itself with all weaponry necessary to bring about revolution.

To facilitate this we demand:

- Rank-and-file personnel in the state's armed bodies must be protected from bullying, humiliating treatment and being used against the working class.
- There must be full trade union and democratic rights, including the right to form bodies such as soldiers' councils.
- The privileges of the officer caste must be abolished. Officers must be elected. Workers in uniform must become the allies of the masses in struggle.
- The people have the right to bear arms and defend themselves ●

FAR RIGHT

Politics of restoration

Challenging Reform UK from the right, Rupert Lowe's Restore Britain not only has open fascist support, it is finding a real resonance for its promise to reverse mass migration and hold a binding referendum on the death penalty, writes **Eddie Ford**

Restore Britain is very much a sign of the times. Set up by Rupert Lowe, it challenges Reform UK from the right. MP for Great Yarmouth and a multimillionaire, Lowe left Reform in March 2025 after publicly criticising Nigel Farage as a "messiah" and allegedly making threats of physical violence against Zia Yusuf, then party chair - who reported these 'threats' to the Metropolitan Police. The investigation was later dropped.

Needless to say, Lowe and Farage are bitter rivals with different political perspectives, fighting for the crown of who is the biggest opponent of the status quo. For instance, Lowe advocates the large-scale deportation of people from the country without legal status, wants net-negative immigration, withdrawing public funding for the BBC, banning the burqa and niqab, stopping "wokery", banning kosher and halal slaughter, abolishing inheritance tax, which is "evil", ending hosepipe bans, and expanding the legal scope of "reasonable force" in defence of the home, as laid out in one of Restore's policy papers, 'Retaking the English castle: self-defence in an era of anarcho-tyranny'. Centrally, he calls for a binding referendum on restoring the death penalty, using PMQs late last year, for cases where "the evil" is "so irredeemable" (and "far too often perpetrated by someone who should not be in our country to begin with").¹

Indeed, Restore wants to introduce "binding referendums on major national issues" - a model of "direct democracy in which citizens have a genuine say in the decisions that affect their lives".² Of course, ruling by referendums was a favourite device of dictators like Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, because its cuts across class



When they were all Reform UK: James McMurdock, Richard Tice, Nigel Farage and Robert Lowe

consciousness and reduces people to atomised individuals (emulated, of course, by Jeremy Corbyn and Karie Murphy in Your Party). People are expected to vote on a simple 'yes'/'no' question, carefully chosen by those above, who already know what the answer will be (hence the scorn directed against David Cameron by the British establishment for losing the Brexit referendum). Voters can normally be herded in the right direction by the wielders of "direct democracy".

One important factor that seems to account for Rupert Lowe's appeal is his agitation demanding a public inquiry into rape gangs - the perfect vehicle to spread more xenophobia. Keir Starmer later buckled to pressure on this demand and announced his £65 million inquiry ... due to publish its findings and conclusions by April

2029. But Lowe's own independent 'Rape gang inquiry' is available right now.³

According to a Restore spokesperson earlier this year, whilst Reform believes that anyone from anywhere can become British - just love the monarchy and the flag - Restore has a straightforward ethnonationalist definition. Britain is for a "people defined by indigenous British ancestry and Christian faith". Lowe himself in a characteristic post on X has said that "countless foreign men from cultures and religions which treat women like shit are now roaming our streets whether they arrived legally or illegally": Afghans, Somalis, Albanians, Sudanese, Pakistanis, Eritreans ... "they drink, they loiter, they spit, they intimidate, they harass" - savage hordes waiting to defile decent British folk.

Hammering home the message back in May, Reform's video of Muslim mayoral candidate Laila Cunningham, walking around London with ethnic minority supporters, was pounced on by Restore supporters who posted comments on social media like 'Is anyone still pretending Reform are against immigration?'

Unsurprisingly then, Restore Britain is increasingly attracting support from fascist groups, prominent members of which were seen campaigning on the streets of Makerfield for its candidate, Rebecca Shepherd.⁴ This is in sharp contrast to Reform, which tries to cold-shoulder extreme-right groups.⁵ Strangely, they are nearly always referred to as "neo-fascists", while many of them are the real thing.

In fact, Lowe's readiness to work with such types has accelerated his complete rift with Reform, with Farage putting a *cordon sanitaire* around Tommy Robinson, refusing to let him join the party. But Rupert Lowe takes a completely different approach, saying that, if Robinson wants to join Restore, "that's up to him", as he does not "audit our membership".⁶ After all, as far as Lowe is concerned, Robinson "gets flak for being right about the rape gangs", but Restore's leader gives him "credit for it", as he was "an early adopter of the view that it was happening".

This endorsing of Robinson and implicitly of fascist groups has sparked a civil war amongst the rightwing press.⁷ The *Mail on Sunday* led the charge with its front page, "Restore activists at 'White supremacy summit'" - saying

supporters canvassing for Lowe's party had attended an event that hosted calls for "a white-only Europe", and its editorial sternly declared that "anyone who really cares about Britain won't vote Restore". This was followed the next day by the *Daily Mail* getting excited about how "Restore is the 'new home for neo-Nazis'", citing Lowe's statement that Tommy Robinson could join Restore if he wants to, with a Reform source apparently supplying the 'killer' quote used for the headline. In response, Lowe accuses Farage of being part of the political establishment.

It would be a profound mistake to regard Restore and Lowe as merely fringe or marginal, using as evidence that they are backed by organisations like the British National Party. Lowe points out that Restore has 130,000 paying members and "new branches jump up every day", with over 800,000 followers on X, and 10 of his posts since February having received more than 10 million views. That is how Restore is "able to play the game", as "we know how to use social media" - undoubtedly too he knows how to monetise outrage. But, even more importantly perhaps, he is enthusiastically supported by the world's first *trillionaire*, Elon Musk, whom he calls a "free-speech hero" - bonding over their shared outrage over grooming gangs (who are always portrayed as being brown and Muslim, never white and Christian) ●

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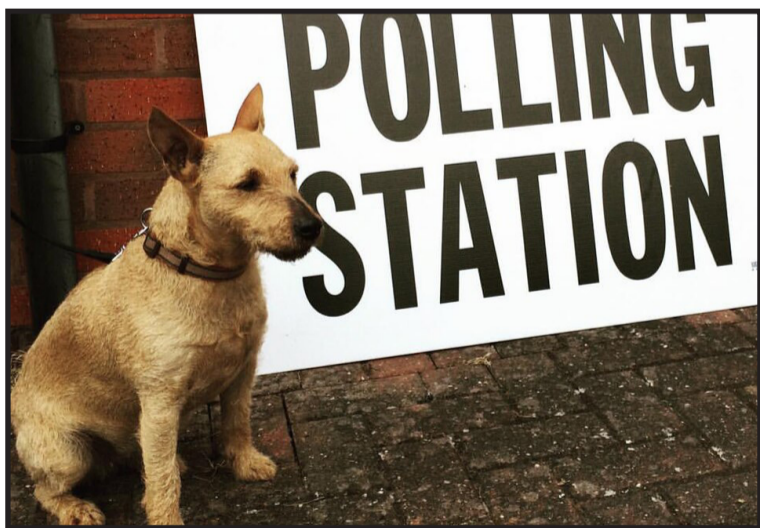
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1. thelondoneconomic.com/news/rupert-lowe-slammed-after-calling-for-referendum-on-reinstating-the-death-penalty-400231.
2. restorebritain.vote/policies/elections-democracy.
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Sunday June 21 5pm

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Political report from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

He painted
friends, lovers,
landscapes
and pools

Popular and respected

He loved many things: cigarettes, good-looking young men, restaurants, opera and Picasso ... but above all he loved his art. David Hockney July 9 1937-June 11 2026

Britain's acclaimed, rich and arguably most famous artist, David Hockney, died at his London home aged 88. He was called 'Britain's Picasso' and regarded as a national treasure. What would an artist have to do now to reach the same peak?

Hockney was born in Bradford in July 1937 - nowhere near the south of England, which is the launching pad for so many British artists (though Henry Moore also came from the West Riding of Yorkshire). Hockney's father, Kenneth, was an accountant, who went on to run his own business, while his mother, Laura, was a strict vegetarian, who encouraged David's interest in art. As a child, Hockney used to do drawings and paintings and hawk them round the streets in an old pram (in those days there were not so many cars or drug gangs around to make it risky for a young artist).

He attended Bradford Grammar School at a time when even grammar school kids did not expect to make it to higher education. Hockney, however, proceeded to the free Bradford College of Art (that is, free, thanks to a post-war state grant). There he met future professional artists Derek Boshier and Pauline Boty, who would join him in promoting British pop art. Later at the Royal College of Art he met his mentor, RB Kitaj (it is useful to know fellow practitioners, who are about to become part of a lauded art movement). In 1961 Hockney joined Peter Blake and the others in the Young Contemporaries exhibition at the new Institute of Contemporary Arts in London.

Hockney's work was pop art, but a lot more abstract than that of Blake and Boty, who pictured rock stars and film actors in their work. Hockney was more like Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso, painting simple box-like figures with sketchy heads and words across the surface. One such was *We two boys together clinging* (1961) - a defiant allusion to homosexuality, which was still illegal at that time (Hockney had already come out at the age of 23).

A love of the USA does not hurt and in 1964 Hockney wanted to go there. He first went to New York and later crossed to Los Angeles (where, even though he had never driven a car, he managed to acquire a licence!). Like many English intellectuals at the time, Hockney was excited by the promise of the US - it was 'the future' and the place to be. It was in LA that he famously began to do paintings of swimming pools, with and without human figures. He used a relatively new art material, acrylic, giving these works a bright sheen evocative of California's sunshine.

When Hockney came out as gay, men were still getting busted (such as actor John Gielgud), but homosexuality was not treated by some as political or part of any 'culture war', but as 'artistic' and even entertainment. Unless the police were involved, the mainstream media treated gay artists with discretion,



David Hockney 'Portrait of an artist (pool with two figures)' (1972)

while sexless effeminacy began to fill radio and TV. The press referred to Hockney as "flamboyant", a dandy - his colourful, round spectacles a code for his sexuality. As long as you did not mention actual sex, everyone was discreet and allusive.

In his art Hockney was never snobbish about trying new materials or media. His genres were traditional - portraits, interiors, landscape - but he was always interested in using new means and making a few formal innovations. He did develop a scepticism about the rigid use of perspective. He found the convention of lines of sight converging on the eye meant neglecting the human sense of space, the experience of being inside a place.

In 2012 at his solo Royal Academy show, 'A bigger picture', he produced huge paintings of landscapes and trees, some of which suggest 'tunnels' you might walk down, while other pictures of hills and roadways seemed to allude to driving a car. In the 1990s he had returned to Yorkshire on the advice of a friend to explore such places, and

later went on to Normandy to do much of the same. He could be seen outside in all weather, making these pictures, without relying on photographs. However, at other times he did use photography - in fact polaroids and Photoshop, as well as iPad and iPlayer. You looked at the images in these new media: they were recognisable, but in collaboration with the latest means. You mused about the effect and why he had done it.

Hockney painted many portraits, chiefly of his own circle - friends, business acquaintances, a young lover (Peter Schlesinger) and the occasional private commission. Unlike other painters, such as Edouard Manet or indeed Lucian Freud, he rarely explored strangers.

One of his most famous portraits is that of his friends - textile designer Celia Birtwell and fashion designer Ossie Clark. This large painting - 'Mr and Mrs Clark with Percy' (1970-71) - is apparently the most popular art postcard from the shop in Tate Britain. Perhaps people take it as more than 'personal', belonging to Hockney's

affluent life, more symbolic of all our lives now (even if only in aspiration). It showed a tasteful modern bedroom, with Celia in a long formal dress and Ossie sitting with bare feet on a rug, one of their cats on his lap. Perhaps it can be taken as representative of what many think of as Britain's two main leisure activities - going out on the town and relaxing at home.

In recent years, he was attached to the advisory board of the magazine *Standpoint* (2008-21), associated with the Thatcherite Institute of Economic Affairs. He used its pages to publish sketches, while writing against arts funding cuts and the ban on smoking cigarettes in pubs and restaurants.

From the 1970s on, Hockney appeared on many of the plethora of TV arts programmes typical of the period, exercising charm and directness. His earnings rose too. In 2005 one of his early 'abstracts', *Seated woman being served tea by standing companion* (1963), was sold at Sotheby's to the Museum of Modern Art in New York for £1,800,000 - a new world record at the time. Other

paintings are exhibited in galleries all over the world. Nowadays, though, some art entrepreneur (someone who has never been anywhere near the West Riding) may yet come up with an 'AI Hockney'.

So how might you become another David Hockney?

■ Be born at a time when only a few northern lower-middle class people went to a free art college; be ambitious; become part of an art movement (like pop art) that the media cannot help but be interested in; be pro-American.

■ Be accepted as 'flamboyant' (aka gay), while having a series of relationships with younger men, without anyone making a point of it.

■ Innovate within traditional subjects; be familiar in the mass media without the need of 'reality TV'; don't be afraid of making huge expensive canvases or using your opportunities as a member of the Royal Academy.

■ Don't even think of being pursued by the obnoxious rightwing media - be both popular and respected!

Good luck, comrade! ●

Mike Belbin