

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly
worker 

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- Against Robert's rules
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Ten
years
after

LETTERS



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

YP Durham

Judging by the launch of the 'official' Your Party branch in County Durham, the current Central Executive Committee is a midwife presiding over a stillbirth. The long-awaited inaugural meeting on June 27 was attended by eight Durham YP members - *eight!* There was also one of the two CEC members for the North-East (a member of Teesside branch) and a staff member (or should that be 'minder?'), taking the grand total up to 10, brought together in a single Zoom meeting.

Because I was already taking notes, I was asked to take the minutes. There was no formal agenda circulated in advance - ostensibly to allow members present to decide on our priorities. The nominations for branch officers (chair, treasurer, secretary, organiser and workplace liaison officer) would open the next day, for five days, and we were urged to put ourselves forward, by self-nomination.

One of the first questions asked by one comrade was, 'How many members have we got?' We were told that would be revealed when the branch was properly constituted with our elected officers. But the questions kept coming. How can we organise an election if we don't know who the members are? Are we quorate? How can the meeting decide on priorities for the North-East if we don't even know how many members we have? It was getting embarrassing. The staffer went away, apparently to ask permission to tell us.

After a pause, we were told there were 421 members in County Durham. I'm not sure about anyone else, but it came as a surprise to me that there was still as many as that. However, that raised more questions. It meant that the quorum for a properly constituted meeting would be 84 (20%, as stipulated in standing orders). Is there a quorum for the election? Is it valid if less than 84 people vote? If the first meeting is inquorate (which seems likely) is the election null and void? I was urged to put the questions in an email and they would be answered.

It seems that elections for the branch officers would not entail hustings meetings, although local groups were at liberty to organise them, if they wished. Candidates would be able to write personal statements, but otherwise people could do their own research on candidates on social media.

We are assured that there will be a YP stall at the July 11 Durham Miners' Gala to facilitate recruiting. What materials would we have? What money do we have to pay for leaflets? Apparently, until such time as the officers are elected, funding would remain 'autonomous' (that is, we have to buy stuff ourselves and claim it back). We were assured that the new officers would be issued with a handbook. That's a relief! (Funny though - the lack of a handbook never came up in any discussion in YP at any point to my knowledge.) Aside from the stall, there is to be a pre-gala meeting at the Radisson Blu Hotel Durham. That'll cost a pretty penny, but there was no information on who would be there. I know Jeremy Corbyn is in town for the gala - there is a rumour that he will be signing copies of his new book - but there was no indication that he would be at the meeting.

We were also reminded of upcoming local elections next year and that would be a priority, which, considering how *low* a priority it was at the last elections, was another surprise.

Anyway, I have to feel sorry for

anyone who puts themselves forward for the branch officers' posts. From where I was sitting, it looked like their historic mission is to be the people to carry the can for the death of the branch. I won't be among them!

Ian Spencer
Durham

Gregson's ego

I was extremely surprised to see, out of the blue, a letter from Peter Gregson saying I had refused to speak alongside him at a Patrons for Peace event at Palestine House on May 30 and that my reasons for so doing was because I "could not speak alongside someone who said the holocaust was exaggerated".

This, like much else Gregson says, is untrue. Although my exchanges with the organisers are and will remain private, the reasons for my refusing to speak alongside Gregson are contained in my blog, 'Why the Palestine solidarity movement should have nothing to do with Peter Gregson' (tinyurl.com/3z3d3dwr).

If Gregson's only fault was to have misspoken or used the wrong word ('exaggerate'), then, of course, I would not have boycotted him. The reasons why I suggested, nearly three years ago, that people should avoid having anything to do with him are contained in a petition signed by the founders of Palestine Action, Huda Ammori and Richard Barnard, Mick Napier (chair of Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign), Asa Winstanley, Leon Rosselson, Graham Bash and other labour movement, Palestine solidarity and Jewish activists.

The comments I and others objected to were statements such as:

■ "Right from the outset, rich Jewish bankers, such as Lord Rothschild, backed Zionism. It is unlikely we would have Israel now, were it not for his influence."

■ "The people who foisted the IHRA definition upon us were the Jews in the UK who support Israel, so the question arises: do Jews in the UK have significant leverage within the bodies that represent our interests - our courts, our media, our trade unions, our political parties, our government?"

■ "... it was the wealthy and influential Jews in politics and the media who foisted the IHRA definition upon us".

Gregson was initially expelled by Labour Against the Witchhunt in 2019 for posting a petition with a link to an article by Ian Fantom that defended a holocaust denier, Nick Kollerstrom, who Gregson described as a "holocaust sceptic". Fantom wrote that Kollerstrom "had been targeted in a witch-hunt for a literature review he wrote on *The Auschwitz 'gas chamber' illusion* and a ... swimming pool at Auschwitz".

It is because of this that the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the Scottish PSC and a host of other organisations and individuals refuse to work with Gregson.

I told those who invited me to the May 30 event that it was their decision whether or not to disinvite Gregson, but regardless I would not make their decision public. Gregson, because of his own ego, has decided that attacking me is more important than giving Zionists ammunition, hence this response.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

RS21 network

The Revolutionary Socialists in the 21st Century's Festival of the Oppressed 2026 (held from June 20-21 at London South Bank University), was a vibrant, stimulating and sober assessment of what our class has to overcome. It showed a revolutionary left trying to think beyond just reacting to events.

But it also exposed a recurring, deeper problem within groups like RS21: a habit of letting everyone have their say without anyone having to commit to a clear position, effectively allowing curated discussion to replace real political debate.

A healthy communist culture needs open argument, votes, factions and accountability - not just a flat format, where a space is provided for everyone to speak, but disagreements are never properly aired or resolved. For anyone who thinks the left needs a proper, democratic Communist Party - rather than just loose network and various campaigns - this distinction matters.

The opening plenary, titled 'What would it actually take? Revolutionary strategy for our times', set a serious tone. Barnaby Raine argued that the right has adopted the language of civilisational decline, as seen in the Conservatives' pro-oil rhetoric in the Aberdeen South by-election, Kemi Badenoch's framing of green politics as an existential threat, and the anti-migrant rhetoric of Nigel Farage and Robert Jenrick. Because today's anti-racism is entirely negative, Raine argued that we need a hegemonic politics of "the good life". However, without the working class organised around a concrete programme, such an alternative risks remaining mere rhetoric. Who, ultimately, is supposed to bring this "good life" about?

The necessity of class politics became clearer in the discussions on the global far right ('Is it fascism yet?'). Rachel E provided a vital dose of reality regarding Jaywick, a village in the most deprived area in Britain. Marked by extreme food poverty, crumbling infrastructure and high flooding risks (set to worsen with climate change), it has become fertile ground for Reform UK. Rachel rightly argued that the left cannot abandon these areas, nor will we win anyone over by simply diagnosing the problem as racism.

To counter Reform, the answer is unyielding class politics - focusing on housing, public services and anti-war agitation - rather than echoing patriotism or accepting leftist figures like Eddie Dempsey, who are soft on nationalism. Jaywick has a radical history of housing and war resistance: an example of how the left beats the right by building that history, not by offering a more palatable version of patriotism.

The tensions between state-led geopolitics and genuine internationalism emerged across several panels. In 'Imperialism and its breakdown', Mau Baiocco spoke on Venezuela, noting that the lack of a popular counterweight to US intervention stems from a depoliticised youth and the contradictions of the Venezuelan state. Baiocco's central thesis was vital: anti-imperialism means little unless it is rooted in the working class; it cannot be delegated to states or politicians. Indeed, an anti-imperialism that isn't anchored in working class politics inevitably slides into nationalism or making excuses for other capitalist governments.

This links directly to the strategic dangers of 'broad fronts'. In 'The cost of war and the socialist alternative', Ira Hybris (from the Spanish group, Anticapitalistas) noted that, while we must work within broad, non-revolutionary organisations, communists must maintain strict political independence. The risk, however, is assuming that every struggle against oppression automatically becomes a class struggle: without open communist argumentation, these movements can just as easily be co-opted by liberalism or NGO politics.

Similarly, Paul Murphy (a People Before Profit representative in the

Irish parliament) highlighted local campaigns and the fight against Ireland's integration into Nato following anti-migrant violence in Belfast and Ballymena. Yet, while opposing Nato is necessary, it must not be confused with independent working class politics. Left-nationalist constitutional manoeuvres are not a substitute for genuine internationalism.

The festival gave significant weight to the interpersonal and artistic dimensions of our movement through an art and photography exhibition, a walking tour and an 'after-party' with live DJs. In 'Noise uprising', panelists including Millie K discussed how neoliberalism damages the social commons and pressures art to produce profits. They affirmed that, while subcultures like jungle and rave scenes possess revolutionary potential, they are not automatically revolutionary.

As a musician focused on traditional Irish music and choral composition, these discussions forced me to examine the ways I separate art from politics. Floor contributions rightly challenged the rigid, class-based separation of 'low' and 'high' culture. All art is the product of human experience and, while the ruling class attempts to capture certain art forms for itself, this can be resisted.

Joy James also contributed remotely to 'Private property, public patriarchy', offering a stark look at the structureless situation in the US and asking how the left can outwit a state apparatus that continuously studies and infiltrates its movements.

The structural weakness of the festival was that it stopped short of real debate. The format - panels of three or four speakers, five-minute breakouts, and brief floor contributions - stifled comradely polemic.

During the session on imperialism, two comrades from Workers Power intervened to argue that one can oppose Nato expansion, while supporting arms for Ukraine, and that Russia and China are imperialist states. Though I disagreed with their position, these were the most substantial remarks from the floor, raising serious disagreements that deserved a proper response. Instead, the panel brushed them aside. A speaker from Energy Embargo for Palestine dismissed the intervention entirely, arguing that defining which states are imperialist is a distraction from the threat of World War III - an unhelpful sentiment, given that Marxism requires us to define a system in order to challenge it.

Billy Clark
email

'Partyists' split

As a member of the Democratic Socialists (formerly DSYP), although not a particularly active or prominent one, I have been quite alarmed by the ongoing dispute between comrade Max Shanly and various members of the RS21 executive committee within the letters section of this newspaper recently.

Much of this dispute is about obscure events that I am sure most readers won't be aware of: even as a member of DSYP, it seemed confusing and obscure to me at the time. A general timeline of the events being discussed seems to be:

■ During the talks that led to the formation of the Grassroots Left slate during December 2025, some Marxist Unity Caucus-aligned members of the DSYP seem to have been critical of comrade Shanly's personal connection to Zarah Sultana and deplored the nature of the discussions as being anti-democratic.

■ Comrade Shanly and some members of the executive committee have an argument, where he calls them incompetent.

■ The MUC people respond with a

dossier about all of comrade Shanly's alleged conduct (I'm not actually sure what exactly was alleged) and resign.

■ Then there were elections for a new executive committee, which I am fairly sure was at the time considered an overwhelming victory for 'trends' within the DSYP that were aligned with comrade Shanly.

■ By January the GL slate manages to form and contest the YP CEC election. However, Comrade Shanly quits the campaign team, because he was constantly being outvoted.

■ After the defeat of the GL slate the DSYP starts to debate the next steps for the organisation. With Shanly's 'form a Democratic Socialists of Great Britain' idea counterposed to the MUC idea of 'just join RS21', there was a meeting to decide the strategy (I think around the middle of April).

■ The MUC evidently didn't have a majority for their idea and neither did Shanly, so the organisation voted for the more cautious Tina Becker plan, which seems to be essentially Shanly's 'Democratic Socialists of Great Britain' idea, just with the (I think quite realistic) conclusion that the Democratic Socialists do not quite yet have enough support to properly form a DSGB just yet.

The 'Shanly vs MUC' debate has at times contained very real differences of political ideas (how democratic should the GL slate negotiations be, what should the strategy for the democratic socialists be) and also unfortunately personal arguments which seem to be accusation and counter-accusation of toxicity.

I generally understand why the political arguments transformed into personal arguments, especially during the frantic and difficult negotiations of December. Particularly for the DSYP - an organisation that had just been established and whose executive committee were not paid to be full-timers and had an immense task of trying to cohere an alliance capable of contesting power within Your Party *against the people who controlled the party, and its main draw, Jeremy Corbyn*.

It is understandable why these conditions meant that political disputes would transform into personal animosity, although that is not to condone either Shanly or the MUC. I honestly do not know enough about the details of the arguments to take a specific side. But really, as serious political activists we should not be dividing ourselves over petty personal arguments.

I personally don't understand why comrade Shanly isn't still part of the Democratic Socialists. His exact political line didn't win the debates of April 2026, but neither did the MUC's ideas and, if we are going to just quit or split organisations because of not winning a vote, then what is the purpose of a democratic socialist organisation? Isn't the whole purpose to gather socialists within one organisation where we don't endlessly quit or split, depending on which exact political line is voted for?

If the issue is the personal dispute that comrade Shanly does not want to join an organisation with people he has had personal issues with, then I really hope that there can be some sort of reconciliation between those involved in the argument, if people can apologise to each other and work together to build the Democratic Socialists. Perhaps it is not my place to say, and perhaps I don't have the right to ask people to get along. However, as someone who has been inspired by comrade Shanly and the organisation he helped build, I cannot help but hope for this dispute to be resolved.

Comrade Shanly helped to found the DSYP and has always been an important figure for our organisation

- the organisation that represents to a significant extent his ideas - and, except for the CPGB-PCC itself, the Democratic Socialists are the organisation that best represents the ideas that have been set out by the *Weekly Worker*. It's not as if there's going to be another major socialist MP founding a political party any time soon, so the Democratic Socialists is the organisation to join for 'partyists' and socialists that want to build a truly democratic socialist organisation.

I hope comrade Shanly rejoins the organisation. I hope that all those who were inspired by the idea of a party republic know that the Democratic Socialists is still fighting to build such a party.

Dovah
Oxfordshire

Bolshevik cancer?

Mike Macnair seems increasingly openly a disciple of western European late 19th century social democracy and Karl Kautsky (with his fondness for constitutionalism, legalism and arithmetical majorities). The German SPD is apparently a model (despite the fact it was a broad formation, encompassing a range of both reformist and revolutionary currents), but what about the vital contribution of Lenin in updating and applying scientific Marxism to the imperialism of the early 20th century, or the whole experience, theory and practice of Bolshevism?

Macnair contemptuously dismisses virtually the whole experience and practice of the Bolsheviks actually holding state power in Soviet Russia and, it almost goes without saying, is completely opposed to the theory and practice of Soviet socialism. As a western social democrat, Macnair denies any significant contribution of Russian Marxism to worldwide revolutionary Marxism: "they were just trying to copy Kautsky and the SPD in Russian conditions..."

Macnair has very recently admitted that one of the basic arguments made about the successful building of socialism in the USSR was that this was never 'socialism in one country', but about trying to build socialism in a virtually continental-sized country with a vast amount of human, mineral, land and other resources. Of course, Macnair in his great sectarian wisdom would not dream of describing Soviet socialism as socialism, despite the obvious and factual reality, but he has quietly dumped one of the main arguments used by the ultra-left against the construction of a complete socialist society in the USSR. Good.

In his latest article, 'Time is on our side' (June 25), Macnair now sides with Trotsky and "the Bolshevik leadership majority" and *against* Lenin on the vital question of the timing of the October insurrection. This is really interesting and revealing. No wonder Macnair has described these as personal articles and not on behalf of the *Weekly Worker* group (WWG).

Trotsky, of course, argued they should wait until the Congress of Soviets had actually opened (very revolutionary), and abstained (very principled) on two key votes on the matter in the central committee in October. I am aware of the two traitors, Kamenev and Zinoviev, voting against - and then scabbing - but I am pretty clear the "Bolshevik majority" (including Sverdlov, Stalin, Dzerzhinsky, Bubnov, Uritsky, who were elected to form the "practical centre" for the uprising) were very much *with* Lenin: ie, they voted *with* Lenin and formed the majority on both occasions.

It was really obvious by the way events were unfolding in those latter days, as Kerensky mobilised the

government's armed forces to seize strong points in the city, that the Bolsheviks had almost left it too late. Trotsky's delay would have resulted in disaster - not only the defeat of the Bolshevik forces, but a rightwing military seizure of power, and waves of massacres and destruction being waged against the socialist and working class forces.

It is astonishing that Macnair and some other writers have no comprehension of how literally oxymoronic is their call for "a multi-tendency Communist Party with full factional rights". Factions are antithetical to how a real Communist Party should operate and antithetical to inner-party democracy.

I have the right to raise and discuss matters and issues in my Communist Party of Britain branch (does the WWG have local branches?). I can raise any issue I like with the elected leadership of the party and expect a decent reply. We have a national congress every two years and district congress the other year. I may want to influence decisions taken at either and I can seek to persuade members of my branch of my view on a particular matter. I might not succeed, but I might. We are free to elect who we like as delegates to congress. The choice of delegates will almost certainly be influenced by views expressed in the party branch and by the candidates for delegates. The number of delegates from each branch is roughly proportional to the paid-up membership in each.

Delegates to congress are obliged to use three sources to decide how to vote: the views of their branch, the discussion and points made by fellow delegates at congress, and their own judgement and experience.

Why would I want to form links or a faction with like-minded members in other branches? I have more than adequate opportunity to put forward my own point of view in my own branch and to try and persuade others. I may in fact be persuaded to a different view by the arguments put forward by fellow comrades.

Surely, the only reason to form links with other members, to form a faction, is to try and *unduly magnify and maximise the influence* to be exerted by those in that faction. A faction will have their own, usually secret, meetings and decide their own tactics and coordinate their efforts to maximise their impact.

But at whose expense would be this maximised impact and increased influence to the faction? It has to be at someone's expense! It is at the expense of *the majority of all other members who are not members of factions*. Factions therefore serve to reduce the democracy of the majority of the membership. That is one reason why they are antithetical to communist democracy.

I could half understand the argument that in an unhealthy (Communist) Party factions may become necessary or inevitable. But *never* that they are desirable or useful in principle, let alone essential.

I experienced the factionalism in the Communist Party of Great Britain (the real one) in the mid to late 1980s. Clearly, the party had been badly affected by reformist and revisionist ideas over time. While I had considerable sympathy for those who felt they had no choice but to form loose networks of like-minded comrades, in my view it was extensive factionalism which helped destroy the previous cohesion and discipline of the party, which massively demoralised the membership, and ultimately led to liquidation in 1991.

Whether factionalism was initially the symptom of the reformist/revisionist 'disease' in the CPGB, it certainly became the problem itself,

and the very formation of comrades into rival sides and sometimes factions actively served to prevent any democratic resolution within the party. I strongly believed that without organised factionalism it should have been possible to unite the great majority of CPGB members, with a new elected leadership, on the bases on which most communists in Britain had believed in until relatively recently.

Macnair has tried to explain the constant splitting tendency of ultra-leftist groups, but gets it wrong, probably being part of the milieu and problem. I think it's fundamentally about one of the key principles of collective working class democracy: ie, that when a decision is taken (and it may not necessarily be taken in the purest and most democratic manner possible), all are required to abide by it and implement it in practice. That, in fact, is a fairly good definition of democratic centralism.

The ultra-left are largely based in the petty bourgeoisie and academia in western countries. Whether it's a class thing, petty bourgeois, academic arrogance and individualism, these people do not like losing votes or office and think they have some inherent right to blatantly defy democratic decisions and to continue to do their own thing.

Whether they then split away or are ultimately forced out by the leadership due to their defying decisions matters little: the result is the same. They seem to have the personal arrogance to think they alone are right, and everyone else is wrong, so it's not surprising we end up with smaller and smaller groups - even sects of single figures.

On programme, I actually agree with the WWG's stance that members should "accept" the party programme rather than necessarily agree with every single statement within it. However, I do note that both Jack Conrad and Macnair chose to go 'hammer and tongs' precisely over details of the existing WWG programme, when they were engaged in unity talks with the Talking About Socialism comrades.

A party programme worked up democratically by the party membership and endorsed by congress is very important in defining the Communist Party itself, its role and contribution, and, importantly, stating publicly its position on a wide range of issues, to attract new members and engage in struggle with competing parties, tendencies and groups.

Communist Party democracy, as expressed in the principles and mechanisms of democratic centralism, provides every member with ample opportunity to contribute to discussion and decision-making. It also provides the solution to the Trot sect conundrum, where every disagreement leads to splits, etc. Members have full and adequate opportunity to engage in democratic debate and, in turn, they accept the basic working class discipline and principle that majority decisions are abided by and implemented.

Factions are a cancer in any Communist Party. They are destructive of communist democracy and undermine the rights and influence of the greater number of those who are not in the faction. At worst, and often inevitably, factions become parties within the party, and a split just waiting to happen.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Long downturn

Seven theses on 'American politics' - a provisional and hastily composed response to the 2022 US mid-term elections - touched off, somewhat to our surprise, an extensive debate,

stimulating and strongly argued, in the pages of *New Left Review* (and beyond).

We're grateful to all who engaged with the text, in many cases critically elaborating upon its implications in ways that helped us to clarify our own ideas. Before diving into the substance of the debate, we should consider what provoked the unexpected intensity of the response. In our view, this has much to do with the broader political conjuncture. The historical matrix in which 'seven theses' appeared was defined by the continuing incapacity of governments to revitalise the economy amid growing heartland discontent; the clear electoral advantage of the far-right forces over the radical new lefts, as protest vehicles for this ('MAGA' over Sanders, Farage over Corbyn, Le Pen over Mélenchon, the AfD over Die Linke); and rising geopolitical tensions, with the stand-off between the US and China and the Russian invasion of Ukraine; within a year, the Middle East would be on fire under a new round of Israeli expansionism.

Within this fraught situation - constituting a multi-front crisis for the left, even before Trump's second win - political discourse had become centred on narrow, electoralist questions. Our piece - perhaps precisely because of its aphoristic, fragmentary character - brought these larger strategic problems to the fore. Rather than look to the culture wars to explain America's polarisations, we argued that these expressed the material interests of different working class fractions within the zero-sum conditions of a stagnant economy; this had now mutated into a form of 'political capitalism', wherein low returns on productive investment were compensated by politically engineered upward redistribution on a systemic scale.

Our critics addressed these propositions from multiple angles. Tim Barker raised some acute questions about our analysis of secular stagnation. Aaron Benanav set the long downturn in the context of supply-chain globalisation, the shift to services and financial-sector 'over-accumulation'. Matthew Karp disputed our definition of class and our characterisation of the party coalitions, suggesting that we elided the extent to which the liberal Democratic elite signified a self-satisfied ruling class for many American workers. Alyssa Battistoni and Geoff Mann took us to task for neglecting any substantive discussion of Biden's Green New Deal.

Many critics took issue with our conception of 'political capitalism': notably, for Lola Seaton, we didn't differentiate its mode of upward redistribution from the normal operations of the capitalist state, nor explain its relation to neoliberal capitalism, as generally understood. Both Barker and Carmen Parmense - writing in *SS African Mercury* - pointed out that Brenner had previously rejected the idea of distinct 'regimes of accumulation'. Seaton, Barker, Parmense and others asked how political capitalism related to the highly charged international situation.

'What is the connection between the evolution of capitalism since the 1980s and the structure of politics that has emerged in the rich world, particularly in the US, since the financial crisis of 2007-08?' This was the question we wanted to answer. In responding to the myriad issues raised in the debate, we aim first to tackle the economic questions - the problems of declining profit rates, low investment, sluggish growth - and then to discuss the political issues of class and party alignment in relation to capitalism's changing parameters.

Full replies to the questions of class

definition, environmental strategy and geopolitical competition require a degree of theoretical elaboration that would exceed the bounds of this letter; we hope to return to them on another occasion. Here, however, we need to start by acknowledging that many of the responses to 'seven theses' pointed out real weaknesses or omissions in our analysis; in some cases, the confusion and misunderstandings that arose were a result of our own lack of clarity. We begin, therefore, by attempting to rectify this through an initial examination of secular stagnation as a feature of mature capitalism, expanding the historical frame to compare the two 'long downturns' of the 1930s and the 1970s, with the aim of illuminating their contrasted outcomes.

Our point of departure in 'seven theses' was the observation that the long downturn that has gripped the world economy since the early 1970s has proved more persistent than many commentators expected. As Benanav notes, however, there is now a widening consensus among economic historians on the reality of stagnation. Robert Gordon has documented the mediocre performance of American 'total factor productivity' (TFP) since the 1970s, while Bradford DeLong highlights the "significant drop" in worker-productivity growth for the 1973-2010 period. Ruchir Sharma notes that "productivity growth has slowed sharply since 1980". In a similar vein Thomas Philippon argues that the slowdown in TFP growth "started in 2000 and is now widespread among rich countries", adding that the great recession of 2008-09 "has probably reinforced this negative trend, but it has not created it".

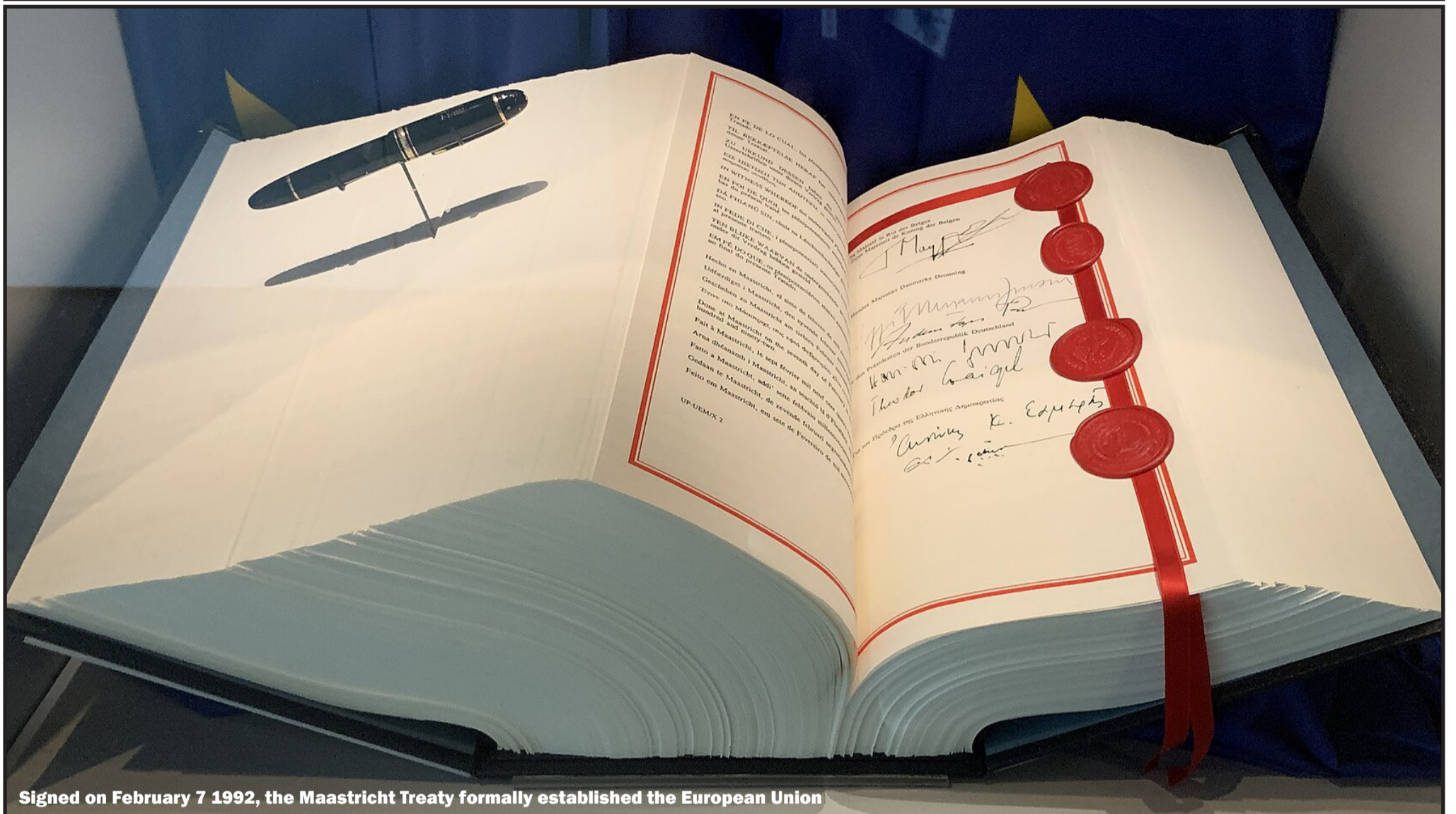
In *The crisis of democratic capitalism*, the *Financial Times's* Martin Wolf avers: "Average productivity growth in the 2010s (between 2010 and 2019) became dismal in all high-income countries. This is important and depressing." Meanwhile, the secular trend of declining investment in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries is, as Cédric Durand notes, "one of the least contested features of the advanced-capitalist economies". Recent OECD data confirms the decline in net business investment, with the corporate sector 'saving' - or paying out to shareholders - significantly more than it invested.

Long-term gross domestic product per capita growth rates bear this out. Average GDP per capita growth for the US, UK, Germany, France, Italy and Japan from the mid-1940s to around 1970 was often well above four percent, after the lower levels of the 1890s to 1930s. Following the severe depression of the mid-70s, such rates were never reached again. Since the early 2000s, growth rates have struggled to reach two percent and have often been closer to zero.

How should we explain these developments? The bleak aftermath of the 2008 crisis brought a revival of the concept of 'secular stagnation' - first advanced by Alvin Hansen to describe the crisis of the 1930s. Hansen (1887-1975) was an early advocate of Keynes's perspective in the US, whose initial research focused on the business cycle. Summarising the work of Cassel, Schumpeter, Spiethoff and others, Hansen's *Business cycle theory* suggested this dynamic was set off by a sudden spurt of capital accumulation, which brought about the overproduction of capital stock, dragging down the rate of profit and ultimately issuing in the collapse of investment.

Dylan Riley, Robert Brenner
New Left Review

EUROPE



Signed on February 7 1992, the Maastricht Treaty formally established the European Union

Ten years after

Brexit went hand-in-hand with the promise of national freedom, economic dynamism, the shredding of bureaucratic regulations and a massive NHS spending boost. Few would argue nowadays that anything like that has been delivered, writes **Paul Demarty**

It is now 10 years since the Brexit referendum took place and so, unsurprisingly, there is a great deal of retrospection going on. Politicians, pundits and the rest, on all sides of the old debate, are fighting to determine the meaning of this event in memory. All claim to have been vindicated by subsequent history, but all are deluded.

That, in the end, is the meaning of Brexit - for Brexiteers and remainers alike: merely that it became such an inexhaustible source of self-deceit, of victories forever just around the corner, of impossibly contradictory expectations that could never be realised and only managed by the poor sods who were put in charge.

There was always something illusory about it. Telling the story must, in the end, return us to the beginning of the cold war, and the reshuffle of leadership roles in the west. Alex Gordon, general secretary of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, and perhaps the country's least repentant Lexiteer, has this part of the history roughly right in his own anniversary piece, so we may as well quote him (since we are going to be rather mean to him later on):

The Suez debacle was the moment when Britain's ruling class was forced abruptly to come to terms with its subaltern role in the new cold war world order. France continued to fight and lose bloody and disastrous colonial wars in Vietnam and Algeria. Britain's rulers opted to become the US poodle. A core element of the US geopolitical strategy was to use Britain's ruling class as an agent inside the European Economic

Community (later the European Union), founded with the 1957 Treaty of Rome, one year after the Suez crisis.¹

Thus, when Britain finally entered the EEC, it was as a US hireling, "with a mission to promote US banking, commercial and strategic interests". Here, we meet a certain blind spot of Gordon's - he prefers to focus on the EEC's and later EU's pro-market policies, putting "strategic interests" last, but that was foremost for the Americans. Britain served their interests in preventing a European superpower from arising to meaningfully challenge the US for hegemony within the cold war and post-cold war west. We pushed the EU to expand, thereby reducing its strategic and political coherence.

Britain's role in the EU and its predecessors, in other words, was always Janus-faced, involving a fundamental strategic dishonesty. And so the debate over British membership in the European confederations has, likewise, always been athwart the basic reality. The story must be told separately, really, about the bourgeois parties and especially the Conservative Party, as well as about the left. It was the Conservatives - once they were reconciled to their new role as 'Greece to the new Rome' - who took the initiative to bring Britain in, succeeding finally during Edward Heath's government in 1973.

Splits

Back then, however, the Tories were already split on it. The far right of the party, including standard-bearer Enoch Powell, but also the then-

infamous Monday Club of Tory MPs, were in uproar. Their rightism was deeply nostalgic for empire, and they had not been disabused of their nostalgia, as they should have been, by Suez. This was a weak point in the mainline-Tory armour; this faction, of course, could not *openly admit* the extent to which Britain's global power had been truncated by World War II and its aftermath (thus self-serving analogies like Greece and Rome).

With the downfall of Heath's government, membership of Europe was put, for the first time, to a referendum vote by Harold Wilson. That brings us to the left. In the cold war context, the 'official' CPGB and its fellow travellers in the Labour Party followed the diplomatic line of the Soviet Union, which was essentially to avoid provocations in western Europe and secure, in the long run, friendly neutrality in those countries. The EEC was seen, not unreasonably, as the civilian counterpart to Nato, likewise a US-dominated alliance structure. Most of the further-left effectively tailed the CPGB on this point.

The short-term result was that both the Tories and Labour were, each of them, split. A Labour left strongly influenced by the CPGB opposed membership of the EEC, and they found very unlikely allies among the likes of Powell, who famously shared platforms with technocrat-turned-leftist Tony Benn (the two had encountered each other during the war, in fact, and according to Benn later on, retained some kind of residual friendship, in spite of their extreme opposition in

politics). Opposed to them were the Atlanticist-realist factions of both parties, the Labour right and the Tory-mainstream *éminences grises*.

The pro-Europeans carried the day in the 1975 referendum, but the post-war settlement at large was on its last legs, and so the politics of EEC membership began to change. The Tories chose as leader Margaret Thatcher, a representative of the extreme pro-market 'new right' faction, and during her long reign she sought to push Europe in the direction of serving as essentially a free-trade zone (tariffs still existed in the EEC). This effort culminated in the 1986 Single European Act, which set in motion what later became the Maastricht Treaty.

Already by this point, however, Thatcher's attitude had cooled markedly. The suggestion that she might have to accept some kind of *compromise* in the direction of European social democracy drove her mad. In a famous speech in Bruges in 1988, she fumed: "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels." This, among other things, began to fracture her support among Tory MPs, contributing to her downfall in 1990.

The end of the cold war all but removed the old left from the scene altogether. So much was invested in the USSR as an alternative pole of power, even by people who would not have thought themselves terribly pro-Soviet. (It is strange

even now reading the *Morning Star's* coverage of the Europe issue: not so much a case of 'generals without armies' as 'tankies without tanks'.) With the left marginalised so, the Europe issue was repolarised once again: on the one side, a broad consensus of capitalist politicians, in Tory and (New) Labour variants, and on the other, the Tory right. While she remained in relatively strong health, Thatcher could serve as the Eurosceptic figurehead from the back benches and then the Lords.

Yet to look at the Europe debate in those days in primarily Westminster-political terms would be too restrictive. It was in that period that the rightwing *press* truly began to drive Euroscepticism. Journalists for the Murdoch papers and others - including a certain Boris Johnson - began to retail endless stories about largely-factitious Brussels regulations (straight bananas, smaller condoms to flatter the Italians...). And, whenever the EU, as it was by then, was enlarged, there was a new hurricane of nativist hysteria about who was about to arrive, mob-handed, to take our jobs.

Referendum

From there we can skip forward: the fundamental dynamic remained as it was: the Tory right and reactionary press permanently leading the charge against Europe; with Labour and the Tory moderates, integrated more closely with US statecraft, favouring a one-foot-in approach, so as to prevent the emergence of a powerful European bloc that could become a real great-power

competitor. This was an asymmetric war, at least in terms of feeling. The Eurosceptics could go full-bore; the pro-Europeans, however, always had to maintain a certain distance and disrupt closer integration of the EU, so as to follow US strategy.

When Tory prime minister David Cameron finally promised a referendum, hoping to shore up his right flank enough to prevent an outright Labour victory in the 2015 general election, he anticipated another coalition government, and the fanatically pro-European Liberal Democrats would 'force' him to stay his hand. But he had so successfully ensured that shit would roll downhill onto his junior partners that the Lib Dems were all but wiped out, and the Tories won outright. He then hoped that the inertia of the status quo would save him. Indeed, even the *Mail on Sunday* backed 'remain' in 2016. Yet the result was otherwise.

The trouble was that the rightwing press campaign was always a pack of lies. There was no great recovery of sovereignty on the other side of Brexit - indeed the UK was never primarily subordinated to Brussels, but to Washington. The particular motives of the Brexit constituencies were subjected to almost comical humiliation. Fishing communities supposed they would be rid of hated quotas, but ended up with worse ones. As for the unionists of the Six Counties, who voted in large numbers for Brexit, it seems never to have occurred to them that a break with the EU immediately posed the choice of an economically ruinous hard border with the Irish republic and a politically humiliating border in the Irish Sea.

As for the left, it too was divided on the Brexit issue. The residual cold-war policy still held at the time of the referendum for the CPB, Socialist Party in England and Wales and Socialist Workers Party; most of the rest took one look at the actually-existing Brexit movement and aligned with pro-Europe liberals. The SWP seems to have discreetly dropped its Brexitism. They would have been happier, in truth, as remainers; with their entire public policy nowadays being essentially liberal anti-racism

and fearmongering about the likes of Nigel Farage, the SWP's historic policy is merely an embarrassment.

For our part, we called for a spoiled ballot, for good and bad reasons. The good reason was that the referendum was a manipulative instrument, designed to put the issue to bed on the cheap; and that, indeed, has been borne out by events: the very fact that the 'wrong' answer was given, and that years of political paralysis ensued, was a useful demonstration of the limits of plebiscitary politics. If there is not in fact a *government* available to implement a policy, it is useless to choose it; referendums only work *at all* if you get the 'right' answer *according to the reigning government*. 'Direct democracy', on any scale larger than a public meeting, is merely a Bonapartist instrument.

The bad reason was that we did not anticipate that Brexit was actually on the table at all. It was a kabuki dance, as James Marshall wrote in the *Weekly Worker* at the time,² and, if Hillary Clinton won the US presidency, she would instruct the PM - whoever it was - to 'sort it out'. We therefore over-indexed on the fakeness of the European debate as a whole, and failed to take into account the global drift to the chauvinist right - which ensured, of course, that there was no Clinton to get it 'sorted out'.

Broken dreams

Brexit has crushed every dream it has thrown up. Despite the fervent hopes of remainers, rejoining is still politically toxic, and sensible centrist politicians wish the remainers would shut up about it. Post-Brexit Britain has taken in more migrants, to the rage of the nativist right. There is no prospect of a swashbuckling middle power emerging, as the hardcore Thatcherites hoped. The American yoke, under the more extractive policy of Trump's second term, is no longer quite so easy.

Lexitism is all but dead. The left remainers were right, at least, that this was always going to be a far-right project. The question, again, was always: if Brexit happens, who gets to implement it? And the answer was always: one or another faction

of the Conservative Party. Alex Gordon's article, which we have already quoted, is a strange old read. He writes: "Those EU nostalgics today who dream of Britain rejoining the EU have consistently failed to explain how British firms, which are now massively subject to US ownership through mergers and acquisitions, would reconcile those interests with EU regulations." What a bizarre objection! Is it the policy of the CPB today to welcome US ownership of British firms?

He concludes: "The democratic vote to leave the EU in 2016 has disoriented Britain's ruling class who can no longer rule in the old way. The question is whether the working class and those who are crushed by the interests of the financial oligarchs of the City of London will choose to live in a new way." Well, has anything in the last 10 years given you hope on this point, comrade Gordon? Do be so kind as to let us know.

The truth is that this was always magical thinking. The Lexiteers had a point, of course. The EU is, indeed, a bosses' club, as they always told us. It is marked out as such by instruments like the fiscal rules insisted upon by the German leadership of the bloc, but more importantly by the very political structure of the EU, which is judicialised to within an inch of its life. There is *no* legislative or executive recourse to overthrow the decisions of the courts, and the courts rule in favour of the bosses. State aid rules problematise the ability of members to invest. The Lexiteer-Keynesian economist, Larry Elliott, wrote in his own 'why I was right' article:

While it would be wrong to blame Brussels for all Britain's economic woes, any serious repair job requires a freedom of manoeuvre that EU membership made more difficult. The government's decision to impose tariffs to protect Britain's steel industry and to cut duties on 100 imported food products to ease the cost of living crisis are examples of that freedom being used. If Andy Burnham is serious about reversing "40 years of neoliberalism", that will require curbs on the free movement of capital, goods and people - all expressly forbidden by single-market rules.³

The fundamental error of the Lexiteers - whether zombie-tankie Gordon or *trentes glorieuses* nostalgic Elliott - is to suppose that any of this was actually on the ballot. It was not. The EU put up serious bureaucratic and judicial obstacles to the policies they favour; that is true enough. But they are not the fundamental obstacles. The latter are located not in our immediate neighbourhood, but in the whole US-dominated world order. The choice in 2016 was not Brussels diktat versus freedom, but domination by the US, somewhat mediated by Brussels diktat, versus domination by the US straight from the fire-hose.

As such, rescuing Britain from its financialised senescence is not a matter of getting room for manoeuvre by seceding from the strictures of the EU. It is a matter of *constructing* a unified political bloc of sufficient size, strength and economic diversification to resist the economic and plausibly military assaults of the US hegemon.

Britain, a small and modestly endowed island, could never be any such thing. British global hegemony was built, quite transparently, on a vast territorial empire. I take it that neither Gordon nor Elliott presumes to rebuild such an empire. They believe, or appear to believe, that we can literally go it alone, with

advantageous bilateral agreements with other countries to take care of minor matters like rare-earth metals and clean energy.

It would be foolish to say that the EU is such a bloc *per se*. Its political structures are fractious and subordinated systematically to international (and therefore American) capital. It is somewhat analogous to the antebellum US, in fact, whose political domination by King Cotton ensured its subordination to the king (and later queen) of England. One of the enduring results of the Union victory in 1865 was a far more centralised state, finally with its own national fiat currency and ability to conduct large-scale industrial policy. Likewise, the *territory* of the EU (plus, for present purposes, Britain) *could* so resist in principle. It has enough people, enough farmland, enough natural resources and industrial capacity.

A serious socialist policy for Europe, and for Britain in Europe, must start from this perspective. National sovereignty is a lie: it has never existed, and never will. Under feudalism, we had a mixture of personal sovereignty (of the prince or duke or king) and imperial sovereignty, with a high degree of devolution between empire and fiefdom imposed by mere technological necessity. Under capitalism, we have ended up with formally independent, roughly national states, radically subordinated to a new capitalist-imperial sovereignty. The *illusion* of independence may be granted to favoured dependents by the true, imperial sovereign; or it may not. Brexiteers, left and right, have convinced themselves of the reality of this illusion.

Pierce the veil

The socialist answer to this problem is, first of all, to pierce the veil - to see things as they actually are, and not conspire in the illusory politics of national sovereignty. It entails, secondly, rejecting the parallel illusions of 'remainism' - that the EU (or, for that matter, more recent alternative repositories of hope, like the Brics) represents a serious alternative sovereign to the world empire. Global hegemony is written into the script of capitalism; multipolar arrangements are always epiphenomena of transitions between hegemonies, so far always signed and sealed by means of global war. We would probably not survive another one of those.

The central question is thus the

construction of a transnational polity capable of overthrowing this cycle. It must not be an empire, certainly, in the sense we use that term in the modern capitalist world, of open and extractive domination by superior powers over dependents. Instead, it must be a polity capable of universally legitimate decision-making on matters concerning the whole of that transnational society; it must therefore have unified democratic political organisations capable of building that legitimacy.

This is the sort of thing we all used to call an international - and that is the real missing piece here. Not only do we not have an international: we scarcely have the raw materials for the parties of an international. But back to condition one: we must look that reality squarely in the face. We must start from what we *need*, rather than wishcasting some political meaning onto intractable events like the Brexit referendum. We need a supranational organisation of communists - a super-state within a super-state - capable of coercing multiple national states at once, and ultimately capable of taking power in multiple states in a coordinated fashion.

From there, we may build a common polity capable of resisting the world empire and, ultimately, replacing it. The replacement will have to be radical in its devolution of decision-making to regional and local levels. I would argue that, in this respect, it would more resemble feudal empires than capitalist ones - the Holy Roman Empire without the Holy Roman Emperor (or the countless princelings). But the truly egalitarian structure of such an 'empire' would authorise the retirement of that word. In this context, we may still have some use for the word, 'commonwealth', though it has a particular and degraded usage in modern Britain and its former colonies. The real sovereignty of the capitalist empire, and the fake sovereignty of the capitalist nation-state, would be supplanted by the sovereignty of the *socialist commonwealth*.

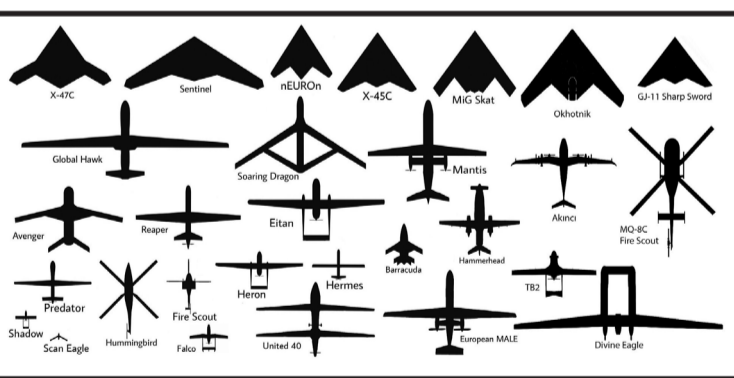
Europe is a potential stage for such a commonwealth, but it will never be on the ballot in a cheap referendum ●

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Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 5 5pm

Drones vs butter: the outgoing Starmer government's £298bn defence investment plan

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

Use this link to register:
communistparty.co.uk/ocf

Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and
Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk
For further information, email Stan Keable at
Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain

Fighting fund You did it!

Well done, comrades! Once again, you took us past the *Weekly Worker* monthly fighting fund target of £2,750! Thanks to some excellent donations in the last six days of the month, our running total was boosted by a more than useful £788, taking our final June total up to £2,937.

Among those who contributed via bank transfer or standing order was comrade JC, with his fantastic £176. Then we had JC (£70), RL and AG (£60 each), BK (£50), MW (£30), JT (£25), JP and AB (£20), IS (£17), JM (£15), JD and MD (£10), and AR (£5).

On top of that, there were five comrades who clicked on that PayPal button - thanks to MH (£60), FK, JB and DB (£50 each), plus AC with his handy fiver. Finally we received cash donations from comrade BP (£10) and comrade Hassan (£5), taking

us to £187 above the target. Just what the doctor ordered!

So can we keep up the momentum in July? Well, after just one day, we already have £254 in the kitty. Thank you, comrades BO and LC (£50), PR (£24), DL, MT and SJ (£20 each), CP (£16), AN (£15), RM (£13), MM (£11), DI (£10) and BG (£5). All of those came via bank transfer or SO.

Very good stuff, but we must keep it up! The *Weekly Worker* absolutely relies on our readers for both political and financial support, and you very rarely let us down! ●

Robbie Rix

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CLIMATE

Preparing for the worst

Record heatwaves in the UK and across Europe provide a grim harbinger of things to come, writes **Eddie Ford**. Meanwhile far-right ideologues demonise Ed Miliband because of his commitment to achieving net zero by 2050

We have just experienced a 'scorcher' that has seen records tumble, both in the UK and Europe - with possibly more of the same to come later this month.¹ In England we have had the hottest June ever recorded, remembering that the previous month had seen the hottest springtime (34.8°C, exceeding the previous record by over 2°C). Unfortunately things appear to be heating up at an extraordinarily rapid pace.

Therefore on June 22 the Met Office issued 'red extreme' heat warnings for June 24 and June 25, only the second time in history that such a rating has been issued in Britain.² The June temperature record was broken *three days in a row*: up to 36.1°C on June 24, 36.7°C on June 25, and 37.7°C on June 26. But forecasters say a fresh July heatwave could be brewing, with maybe more red warnings, and another "heat dome" trapping hot air over the country.³ If that turns out to be the case, this is very bad news, as at least 15 people died in water-related incidents during the May heatwave in the UK.

As for mainland Europe, the heatwave began on June 17 just days before the summer solstice.⁴ This culminated in Germany and Italy, which endured sweltering conditions on June 27 after temperatures broke records above 40°C. Even Denmark registered its highest temperature on record at 36.6°C, while in Slovakia temperatures have not dropped below 26.3°C. In France, June 23 saw a high of 44.3°C - around a thousand people died, rail travel and power generation was disrupted and outdoor events were cancelled or postponed.

By June 28, the World Health Organisation said that more than 1,300 excess deaths linked to high temperatures had been recorded across Europe over the previous week, and the World Weather Attribution service described the event as the most severe heatwave recorded over the region studied.⁵ Global warming - the human-induced climate crisis - made the June daytime heatwaves this year about 10 times more likely than they would have been two decades ago, and the night-time temperature highs *100 times* more likely.⁶

Just when the heatwaves should act as a grim harbinger of things to come, unless we act urgently, Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite, wants to do nothing. Like the sectional trade union bureaucrat she is, she attacked energy secretary Ed Miliband and his net-zero agenda, which she said would be a "noose around the neck" of job creation: she favours, like Kemi Badenoch and Nigel Farage, more drilling for fossil fuels in the North Sea and damn the environment - or any basic rationality, for that matter.⁷

Graham's pro-drilling, anti-Miliband stance has caused widespread unease within the wider trade union movement - one senior source saying that her interventions are "boosting Farage and his crypto backers" and have "played right into the hands of the Labour right". Interestingly, Graham is facing a contest for her position from Simon Dubbins - who says she has not done enough to challenge Reform UK.⁸ This is obviously correct, but communists would argue that even Miliband's net-zero agenda - insofar as it has any reality to it at all - is pathetically



Fragile planet: Earthrise 2026

inadequate and offers absolutely no solution to the climate crisis.

But tell that to the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (Arc), of which 4,000 people from more than 85 countries descended upon London's Olympia exhibition centre last week for three days of speechifying, mutual back-scratching and an orgy of confirmation bias - advertised as an "anti-woke Davos".⁹

According to those who were there, they were an assortment of anti-abortion activists, Christian nationalists and die-hard opponents of multiculturalism. While London sweltered, they took advantage of the air-conditioning, as they listened to speaker after speaker denouncing the woke net-zero obsession, using fans handed out in goodie bags and emblazoned with the slogan, "Free speech never felt so cool".¹⁰

There was Nigel Farage, of course, and YouTube warrior Chris Wright - the US energy secretary who has served as the CEO of North America's second largest fracking company - and all manner of far-right ideologues, politicians, thinkers and general weirdos - all chomping at the bit to attack Miliband's stated goal of zero carbon emissions by 2050. And, of course, there was Kemi Badenoch - a bit like Sharon Graham, with her speech labelling Miliband as the "villain" responsible for Britain's woes - "he has made our country poorer," said Badenoch, to enthusiastic applause from the audience.

Irresponsible

But, as we know, *all* serious climate scientists have been saying for decades that, even if we arrived magically at net-zero *today*, not in 2050, we would still be on course to break agreed climate targets and goals - not just for the next decade or century, perhaps not only for a few thousand years, but maybe for a *million* years. Because of what we have done in terms of

releasing CO₂ since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, we will still be dealing with global warming whatever we do.

Of course, if we simply carry on as we are - meaning actually *increasing* CO₂ emissions - then, yes, things will get worse than they would otherwise. So redouble the fight against global warming despite the time it will take to turn the oil tanker around (to beat an old metaphor to death). But we are not talking here about Ed Miliband's net-zero by 2050: rather, overthrowing the entire capitalist *system* and its production for the sake of production, and capital as self-expanding value.¹¹

When we are dealing with the wonderfully misnamed Arc, on the other hand, it should be renamed the alliance for *irresponsible* citizens. These people want to drill, baby, drill, and, though they might not quite say that climate change is a 'con' - as their hero in the White House frequently does - they have turned their opposition to net-zero by 2050 into an obvious code for climate *denialism*. Just as those who try to deny Israel's actions in Gaza are, to be frank, guilty of genocide denialism.

The BBC has always been a mouthpiece of the ruling class since its very beginning, it goes without saying. But it used to be the case that, in the name of 'balance', which we hear about endlessly from its hacks, the BBC would air a climate expert, someone like professor Ed Hawkins or Friederike Otto, who might briefly discuss the latest weather item. Then, in the name of 'balance', they would wheel out some old retired Tory MP, like Lord (Nigel) Lawson - he notoriously stated on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme that the last 10 years had seen a temperature *decrease* (August 10 2017). Others would dismiss warming as the work of sunspots, or even relish the prospect of vineyards in northern England and even mining coal in the Antarctic.

Such harebrained lunacy was on full display at Olympia exhibition centre. Yet what climate scientists tell us - backed up by huge amounts of empirical data - is that vast tracts of land, particularly in the centre of Asia, Africa, North and South America, will see vegetation dieback. Many places will get so hot that we human beings cannot sweat. Maybe you can just about survive with air-conditioning blazing, but meanwhile what you will get is *desertification*. What you will get is plants that cannot survive because of the shift in rainfall patterns. What you will also get (and we are guaranteed this under the best-case scenarios) is one coastal city after another disappearing under the waters, as the global ice sheets and the permafrost melt.¹² Liverpool, central London, New York, Dallas, Shanghai ... Jakarta is already being abandoned and Lagos, home to over 21 million people, is at risk of being inundated in the next 30 years or so.¹³

Terrifying

That is why the *New Scientist* was right to run the headline, "If you aren't terrified by this heatwave, you should be"¹⁴ - saying that the extreme heat currently being felt in Europe "isn't the new normal", because "much worse is to come, and we are doing far too little to adapt".¹⁴ We find out from the Copernicus Climate Change service this week that temperatures on the ocean surface have hit a record high - thus on June 21 temperatures outside the polar regions exceeded the extraordinary highs observed at the same time of year in 2023 and 2024.¹⁵

Copernicus went on to warn that the new peak would probably bring "consequences for weather patterns, global climate and marine ecosystems", not least because it would coincide with the earliest phases of an El Niño event they forecast to be the strongest in decades.

At the time when the previous ocean record for June was set, in 2023, scientists described the trends as "worrying" and "terrifying", for the simple reason that they were so far outside their expectations - presaging an El Niño and a period of devastating global heatwaves, floods and storms. But that 2023 record has now been surpassed, and the unbearable heat that we experienced last month looks more than likely to happen again this month - or possibly worse. All this raises unavoidable fears over the speed of total climate change.

This leads *NS* to say that "there are reasons to think that we're in for extremes even greater than those currently projected for a given level of warming". One reason for this, they speculate, is that climate models so far may not be capturing how the dynamics of the jet streams change in a warmer world, and also that the regional models have not yet accounted for reductions in sunlight-blocking air pollution. Then there is the question of how bad the "knock-on effects" of this extreme weather will be, also writes *NS*, as these things are very difficult to project, because so many complex systems are involved - but here too there is a reasonable suspicion that we are underestimating the impacts.

Not to forget what the *NS* calls the "wild cards", such as the Amazon drying up or the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation shutting down. Indeed, some scientists believe that a slowdown of AMOC around 12,000 years ago triggered extreme seasonality in places like Britain, with sweltering summers, but temperatures plummeting tens of degrees below freezing in winter.¹⁶ Frankly, with this in mind the so-called anti-woke rhetoric on display at Olympia exhibition centre ought to be dismissed as the ravings of the scientifically illiterate. Of course, what is worrying, what is tragic, is that so many of the speakers are in, or near to being in, government. These people have no intention, no thought of even tempering the destructive logic of capitalism. Indeed they seem determined to remove all controls ●

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MONARCHY

Obscene wealth not main problem

Instead of showing how 'transparent' the royal family is, writes **Carla Roberts**, the release of the tax returns of Charles III and William Mountbatten-Windsor shows how vulnerable this abhorrent institution really is

Publishing the tax returns of king Charles III and his heir, William Mountbatten-Windsor, is apparently down to "a commitment to transparency" and to "encourage wider understanding of our accountability". We are also assured that the annual amount of taxpayers' money paid to the royal family (via the 'sovereign grant') will "fall dramatically" next year, from £137.9 million this year to just under £100 million in 2027-28.¹ Looks like a bargain - if we ignore the fact that, just three years ago, the figure stood at £51.8 million.

Not even the most royal-loving media outlets managed to publish the news that the monarch had agreed to pay £12.9 million in 2024-25 without at least pointing out that this is astonishingly little tax, considering that his overall fortune is estimated to be at least £1.8 billion. The hedge fund boss, Sunel Setiya, paid £114 million despite his similar wealth.² It turns out that Charles pays absolutely no tax on the vast majority of his income - just like 'dear mama' before him (see below).

The finances of the monarchy are famously obscure - and deliberately so. Like the institution itself, it is purposefully shrouded in secrecy and obfuscation - or 'mystery', as they would have it. We are supposed to believe that this is almost a 'natural' state of things, based on 'ancient' tradition.

But things have changed in the last few years - and rather dramatically so. Gone are the days where the royals would even *try* to tell us that £100 million equates to an expenditure of 'under £1.50 per person' in Britain. This sudden embrace of what passes for transparency is designed to paper over the massive cracks that have opened up in recent years. The monarchy is not about to fall - but it is certainly in trouble.

Elizabeth II used to stick to the motto, 'never explain, never complain' - she was very aware that the less the public knows about the royals, the better. Show yourself in bright colours, wave, make inane small talk and then have yourself driven back to some palace and firmly shut the doors.

But her offspring are far less disciplined. The 90s were dominated by messy royal affairs, public divorces and the death of the "people's princess". Then grandson Harry had enough and made a very public 'Megxit', proving that being born a Mountbatten-Windsor does not mean you have to stick with this deeply dysfunctional family and endure life in the hypercritical public eye. He even dared voice some mild, if self-centred, criticisms. In his book, *Spare*, and a number of interviews, he complained about the monarchy's "institutional racism", lack of mental health support for his suicidal wife, and physical altercations with his brother - portraying William (the future king, no less) as an uncaring brute.

In recent months, *The Guardian* in particular has also exposed the fact that most members of the royals - even 'non-working' ones - enjoy free accommodation in the various palaces, thanks to the taxpayer. Then there is, most damagingly, the ongoing scandal around ex-prince Andrew and his lucrative friendship with Jeffrey Epstein. Much of the media has focused on the horrific and systematic abuse of vulnerable young women. While he continues to deny that he had sexual relations with any of them, the fact that his mother paid £12 million to Virginia Roberts (Giuffrè) to settle a civil sexual assault lawsuit speaks



Crown jewels: symbols of power

volumes. In the process, his lawyers did everything in their power to trash Roberts' reputation, and her suicide in April this year has understandably been linked to such treatment.

In comparison, his incredible 10 years as the government's official 'trade envoy' - despite not having any relatable qualifications or discernible understanding of economics - has come under far less scrutiny. It is clear enough though that he used the unpaid role to travel the world for free (all expenses paid by the taxpayer), meet female 'friends' of Jeffrey Epstein -

and make profitable connections and a number of 'deals' on the side.

Publishing the fact that Charles and William are paying (very small) amounts of tax is supposed to show that some of them *do* take responsibility, you see. As is prince William's oh-so wonderful charity, Earthshot Prize (which hands over £1 million every year to a particularly 'green' capitalist company in a glitzy gala, to which he and many other celebs fly by private jet), or his campaign to "eradicate homelessness" - not by opening up the palaces or using the many empty

houses on his 'duchy of Lancaster', of course - that would be too obvious. No, by "bringing businesses together". The lovely princess Kate meanwhile travels up and down the country to teach mums that "early childhood" really matters and if they mess things up by living in poverty, for example, well, they are basically to blame themselves if their kids turn to a life of crime.

For now, the public still laps it up - support for the monarchy has slightly fallen overall, but is still at just over 50%, depending on the news of the

week. For young people, however, the picture is different: among 18- to 34-year-olds, approval is persistently down to 33%. The liberal campaign, Republic, has certainly made a difference and it is good to see their yellow placards whenever Charles shows his face (though we entirely disagree with their proposal to replace the monarch with an elected head of state).

There are many on the left who dismiss the fight to abolish the monarchy as secondary at best - some kind of diversion from the 'real' class struggle. But communists should make a real effort to understand how the crown works and how the royals are financed. Not because we have any illusions that 'this money could be spent on building x amount of hospitals', which is how much of the economic left comments on the monarchy, if they comment at all. Many believe it is some kind of feudal leftover that will eventually just crumble and die.

These attitudes are profoundly wrong. For a start, in today's conditions, the money would more likely be spent on the military. Arguing on a mainly financial basis also opens you up to the charge that, actually, the monarchy might be a money-maker for the British economy (tourism, etc, etc).

Also, today's monarchy is profoundly 'modern' - it has changed dramatically over the centuries in an effort to stop it being abolished by revolutionary pressure from below (as happened in many countries). As Rosa Luxemburg insisted, we stand against the monarchy not on the basis of cost, but as a matter of principle and, even more fundamentally, on the basis of democracy.

The monarchy in Britain possesses substantial reserve political powers. The idea, for example, that Jeremy Corbyn was ever going to be allowed to become prime minister was pure fantasy. Not least because it is the monarch that decides, albeit after taking advice from the privy council, about who to call to the palace to form a government. And just imagine for a moment that he had actually been in a position where the majority of the parliamentary Labour Party supported him as prime minister: we would still have been in a situation where the army swears loyalty to the monarch, not to the government. To all intents and purposes, a legal coup can be carried out through the monarch. We live in a parliamentary 'democracy' based on the crown in parliament.

The fight to abolish the monarchy goes to the heart of our vision of socialism as the rule of the working class. Which means the left needs to start taking very seriously the issue of how we are ruled, and by whom. The monarchy is not just a problem when one of the royals messes up: it is an institutional bulwark against popular sovereignty and democratic control. The fight to abolish the monarchical system, the house of lords and the entire secret state must go hand in hand with the fight to democratise society, going down to each and every workplace ●

Notes

1. www.royal.uk/financial-reports-256.
2. www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/jun/26/now-we-know-how-much-tax-king-charles-pays-and-it-is-very-little.
3. www.zmscience.com/other/economics/britain-70-percent-william-conqueror-rep.
4. assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c815040f0b62aff6c2250/mou_royal_taxation.pdf.

Origins and scale of their finances

The core of royal assets stems from the Norman Conquest in 1066, when William the Conqueror claimed all the land as "crown property", later parcelling it out to loyal nobles: 70% of the land in Britain is still owned by 1% of the population.³

In 1760 king George III was forced to surrender management and revenues of the crown's lands to the government. In return, parliament cleared his substantial debts and granted him a fixed annual income previously known as the 'civil list' (now the 'sovereign grant').

The crown estate is one of the biggest landowners and worth £16.7 billion. It includes vast areas of London real estate, the majority of the UK seabed and over half of the UK's foreshore. Every British monarch has formally surrendered these hereditary revenues at the start of their reign. Theoretically though, prince William could simply lay claim to them once more when his father dies.

In 1992, queen Elizabeth II was forced to sign a 'memorandum of understanding' with the government of John Major after a fire badly damaged Windsor Castle and there was a public outcry against the taxpayer footing the £60 million bill.⁴ The memorandum laid out that

the queen and the state would split the cost - but also that the reigning monarch and their heir would "voluntarily" pay *some* unpublished amount of income tax on the profits from the duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall (the privy purse). In return they would continue *not* to be liable for the newly established inheritance tax.

Sovereign grant: the Sovereign Grant Act of 2011 abolished the old civil list system. Since April 2012, the government uses the profit from the crown estate to calculate the sovereign grant, which covers the cost for staff, official duties and travel expenses of the 11 'working' members of the royal family, and about half of it is spent on the upkeep of occupied palaces. According to the 'golden ratchet' rule in the law, this grant can only ever go up, never down, even if the profits from the crown estate fall. The royal trustees (the prime minister, the chancellor and the king's keeper of the privy purse - ie, treasurer) set and revise a percentage from the crown estate's profit, in five-year intervals. In 2012-16, the rate was 15%, then it went temporarily up to 25% to pay for the repairs to Buckingham

Palace and now stands at 20.5% for the years 2027-32.

Privy purse: this includes the duchy of Lancaster - a portfolio of land, property and assets which is worth around £687 million and is separate from the crown estate. It is held in trust for the monarch and is used to "pay for his private and public expenditure" not covered by the sovereign grant. It made an "adjusted net surplus" of £25.2 million last year: ie, after Charles' accountants had taken off every shred of expense they could think of. In other words, this is pure profit, on which Charles paid 45% tax - ie, £12.9 million. The rest goes into his own pocket.

Duchy of Cornwall: this is another massive portfolio worth an estimated £1.2 billion, which is used to pay for the private expenses of the heir to the throne. It made a surplus of £21.6 million last year and prince William paid tax of £7.76 million. The capital gains made by buying and selling property, and the rents received from tenants, can all accumulate and be reinvested tax-free - they are operating as mini-tax havens. To top it off, when a resident in either duchy dies without a traceable heir, their assets are transferred to the duchies ●

DISCUSSION

Legalism and labyrinthine rules

Neither Major Henry M Robert nor Lord (Walter) Citrine provide the approach needed by the revolutionary working class. **Mike Macnair** critiques the widely accepted parliamentary forms of decision-making in the third of a series of articles

In the first article in this series, two weeks ago, I laid out what I planned to cover; and began 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'.¹ Last week I turned to issues of *time*, which were 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.²

This week we come to my third general point: that we are concerned with principles and guidelines for practice, not with fixed rules like those to be found in *Citrine on chairmanship* or *Robert's rules*.³ Rather, we need to begin with a paramount principle - which will reassert itself at all levels of concrete details - that people who are prepared to participate in the decision process should be able to take real decisions.

Within the framework of this principle, it will then be possible to approach *the conduct of decision-making meetings*: meetings need chairs; how should the chair work (to draw out and promote clarifying disagreements); how to handle proposals for amendments; what about proposals that 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 larger 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 caucusing 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.

Rules

There is a considerable history of the construction of elaborate rules or proposed rules for left groups. CPGB authors have written critically about this in connection with the Socialist Alliance around 2000-03, the small Campaign for a Marxist Party in 2007, Left Unity in 2013-15, and recently Your Party's left.⁴

In the USA, there is some recent history of explicit debate. Ramsin Canon of the Bread and Roses Caucus of the Democratic Socialists of America in 2019 advocated the use of 'RONR' (Robert's Rules of order newly revised) throughout the DSA; Renato Flores in a 2021 *Cosmonaut* article calls for attention to knowledge monopolies as producing



House of Commons: not our model

or reinforcing power imbalances, and seeks attention to skills training; he advocates use of the 'Rusty's rules' simplified version as more accessible than *Robert's rules*.⁵

Robert's rules of order in the current (12th) edition of 2020 runs to 714 pages in a format slightly larger than a mass-market paperback⁶ (the index is made up of 63 pages and there are 50 pages of separately paginated front matter). The original 1876 *Pocket manual of rules of order* ran to 192 pages, including eight pages of index and the front matter. There is some parallel with *Butterworths company law handbook*, which collects UK statutes relating to company law (for American readers, corporate law); in the 1978 edition I used when studying the topic in 1980-81, there were 462 pages (plus front matter and index), in the 2025 edition 3,776 pages (plus front matter and index).

The dynamic to expansion reflects the character of the project as *law*. The original author of *Robert's rules*, Major Henry M Robert (1837-1923) was perfectly explicit on this: "A work on parliamentary law has long been needed, based, in its general principles, upon the rules and practice of Congress, but adapted, in its details, to the use of ordinary societies ... This manual has been prepared with a hope of supplying the above information in a condensed and systematic form ..."⁷

I will discuss later why law as a technique tends to produce an expanding volume of rules. But at this point it is worth noting that Robert derives his basic conceptions from English 'parliamentary law',⁸ as adapted by the US Congress. A page later, he quotes from Thomas Jefferson's 1801 *Manual of parliamentary practice*:

And whether these forms be in all cases the most rational or not is really not of so great importance. It is much more material that there should be a rule to go by than what that rule is; that there may be a uniformity of proceeding in business not subject to the caprice of the speaker or captiousness of the members. It is very material

that order, decency and regularity be preserved in a dignified public body.

The choices made thus *express loyalty to the parliamentary form of the constitution*. Hardly surprising, given that Robert was a US army officer. We can make the same point in relation to the 'procedural bible' of the British labour movement before the recent intensification of bureaucratic control through 'consultation', plebiscitary Bonapartism, and so on: *Citrine's ABC of chairmanship* (originally published in 1921 as *The labour chairman*). The model is derived from capitalist procedural practice. Lord (Walter) Citrine was a trade unionist, arch-bureaucrat, witch-hunter of communists and later director of public companies. In the 'preface' to the *ABC* he makes the continuity clear:

I have consulted most of the authoritative works including Erskine May's *Parliamentary practice*, Palgrave's *Chairman's handbook*, Gore-Browne's *Handbook on joint stock companies*, Courtenay Ilbert's *Manual of procedure of the House of Commons*, and several old books, among them Smith's *Handy book of public meetings* ...⁹

Wal Hannington's *Mr chairman!*¹⁰ was written by an 'official communist' - but the procedural method it lays out is, in fact, a simplified version of Citrine. Citrine's method had become deeply entrenched in the Labour Party and trade union movement, just as *Robert's rules* has become deeply entrenched in the US trade union movement and left.

If we ask *why* the US and British labour movements adopted procedural forms derived from those of the capitalist class, the answer is fairly simple. The original craft unions emerged out of artisan guilds, which were organisations of the urban petty bourgeoisie. Moreover, the 'rule of law' regime was utterly dominant in 19th century British and US politics.

Many trade union leaders were - until they were forced to accommodate

to the idea of a Labour Party - ideologically committed Liberals, just as many trade union leaders in the US today have been ideologically committed Democrats. Labour as it emerged began as a Lib-Lab appendix to the parliamentary Liberal Party and went on, in 1914-18, to distinguish itself as a *state loyalist* party. Authors and leaders like Citrine were part of this political milieu. For them Labour was a lobby group *within the framework of loyalty to capitalist rule*. It is entirely unsurprising that they should create procedural forms that express loyalty to the existing constitution.

Serving capital

The modern capitalist 'rule of law' state form was created by trial and error out of elements drawn from Roman republicanism and elements drawn from the 'feudal constitutionalism' of *Magna Carta* and similar instruments. In each of the original bourgeois revolutions it was found to be necessary to have bulwarks for the defence of property rights and creditor claims against the plebeian masses.

The first element was the 'single person': the Stadtholder in the Netherlands, Cromwell and later the restored monarchy in England, the Federal presidency in the US, Bonaparte in France. This aspect is copied in later bourgeois constitutions in preserved or restored monarchies and in elected presidencies, and in corporations in the persons of the managing director or chief executive officer. In modern politics the principle is also expressed in the demand of the capitalist media that there must be a single directly elected 'leader' of every party, and the attempt to run elections as plebiscites on the virtues or vices of this individual. The 'single person' serves to insulate the *state* bureaucracy from immediate subjection to the elected representatives.

The other side of this coin is the 'rule of law' and the creation of formal written constitutions, from Cromwell's 1653 Instrument of Government, through the US constitution and successive French constitutions, to modern constitutions

generally. The 'rule of law' is an ideological concept, but at the end of the day it expresses the primacy of property-owners' interests, guaranteed in all the bourgeois constitutions and bills of rights, and in the predictability of judicial decisions.

This political form is specific to *capitalist* rule, because it is the first ruling class in history whose claims to take the social surplus are grounded solely on capitalists' ownership of the means of production and money, without claims to direct rights over other people grounded on *personal status* (the free citizen's ownership of slaves, clerical standing, lordship). As long as the state is committed to guaranteeing property rights, it is committed to the rule of capital; and the 'rule of law' guarantees that commitment.

The 'separation of powers' is part of this commitment. What is fundamentally involved is the separation of the *judiciary* as the oracles of law from the other branches of government. This separation is materially grounded in the income of the caste of lawyers from legal fees paid by property owners. This income enables the lawyers and hence the judges to oppose the state core or the majority in the legislature. But it is *formally enabled* by the separation of the legislative power (parliaments and other elected bodies) from the executive power (monarchs and presidents and the bureaucratic-coercive state under them). The point is that the elected legislature is permitted to act only by making general rules: it is then for the executive to decide how to implement these rules and for the judiciary to interpret them.

Both the directly elected presidents, and so on, and the elected representatives are in possession of a 'quasi' form of *property right* in their offices: a lease, or *term of years absolute*, to quote the English Law of Property Act 1925 section 1(1) (b). They are not removable during the term: even if provision is made for recall, it is usually impracticable. The term therefore functions within capitalism as *an exploitable property right*: that is, that the president or legislator sells his or her vote. In the imperialist countries these transactions are rarely transparent: rather, the official does favours for particular capitalists, in return for which they contribute to his or her re-election, in return for which ... and so on.

The result of this combination is that the state is responsive to the capitalist class as such and to particular capitalists. The relationship of forces *within* this class is expressed in the relative ability to bribe officials and to pay legal fees. Thus, just as shareholders have votes proportional to their shareholding in the company, property owners within the state's territory have an indirect voice in the state proportional to their property holdings and income (a point made by Tom Paine's 1776 analogy of government with a joint stock company).

The system of the rule of law and separation of powers thus functions to politically expropriate the large mass of the voters. The only choice voters are given is to decide to which corrupt politician to lease an office. In the direct election of presidents, and in first-past-the-post single-member elections, the choice is even narrower, since the only *meaningful* choice will be between the two candidates, or

parties, that capitalist financial and media support has previously selected as having a 'real chance of winning'.

This characterisation offers a little historical theoretical elaboration, but the fundamental points are not original. They were diagnosed by Marx and Engels.¹¹

Robert's rules, Citrine and 'labour movement practice', described above, follow the general pattern of the separation of powers and the rule of law. There is an elaborate constitution, and a separation between the conference as a *legislature* and the national *executive* - often overtly so-called. The conference takes *policy* resolutions, which are the equivalent of legislation. The constitution and the procedural forms amount to a 'law' that sets limits on the decisions of conference. The elected officers and other full-time officials, like presidents and MPs, have a quasi-proprietary 'term of years' in their offices.

There is one significant omission. Though labour movement constitutions often provide for a 'judiciary' in the form of a disciplinary tribunal, there are no permanent judges or lawyers specialised in labour movement disciplinary proceedings. The private property and money is not there to support such a practice. When push comes to shove, however, and some capitalist or part of the state is prepared to back the dissident with legal costs, recourse can be had to the *capitalists'* courts and lawyers. Compare the Labour right's well-funded 'lawfare' against the Corbyn leadership in 2015-19.¹²

The rule of law form of labour movement constitutions, in other words, acts to subordinate the membership to the capitalist class and the capitalist state - through the political monopoly of the union and party leaderships, the independence of the bureaucracy and the rule of the bourgeois courts, just as the voters are subordinated within the bourgeois state itself by analogous means.

Left support

Why should leftists, who seek to *overthrow capitalist class rule*, support ideas of this sort? Ramsin Canon's argument for *Robert's rules* centres on two primary points and a number of secondary ones. The two primary points are, first, that the rules are "objective and widely available" (point 4 in his list) and "widely used and accepted" (point 5); and, second, that they "err on the side of promoting debate" (point 2) and "protect minorities without immobilising political majorities" (point 7).¹³

The second argument, from availability and common use, is in substance simply an argument for not thinking about the issues in question - apart from a single point, which is that, since *Robert's rules* is in common use, leftists need to know how to play the game, if they are not to be constantly outmanoeuvred by the right.

The same can, of course, be said of the *less* democratic procedural forms of the post-Blair Labour Party: it was very striking that a lot of leftist youth who went into Labour in the 'Corbyn surge' were turned off and dropped out rather than learning to play the procedural games, which the right, who largely retained control, deployed against them in the constituency parties.

But the argument - from 'most people use these forms' to 'we ought to use these forms' - would *actually* imply accepting full capitalist control through bribery, or the bureaucratic centralism of the Communist Party of China (after all, 101 million members) or the Hindutva Bonapartism of the Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (140 million members).

The argument that the rules "protect minorities" is probably the more potent one. Many leftists and ex-leftists have passed through bureaucratic-centralist far-left groups and have experienced

in them the political expropriation of the membership. That bureaucratic centralism politically expropriates the membership was blindingly obvious in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and is equally obvious in, for example, the British Socialist Workers Party: the appointment and employment of local full-timers by the centre creates a patron-client chain or apparatus faction; the members receive only such truths as the apparatus faction chooses they shall hear (and for the rest, lies); the powers of the central committee are used by the apparatus faction to pre-empt the appearance of any organised opposition by expulsions, etc; the occasional use of violence against dissidents creates an underlying threat to keep the rest in line.

Moreover, the former Eurocommunists and their satellites in the 1990s carried this bureaucratic-centralist political culture into the trade unions and socialist parties (the DSA is an unusual survivor of the older Labour and Socialist Party style of procedure). From this point of view, 'traditional labour movement practice' looks nostalgically attractive.

Before recent changes to increase bureaucratic control, and in the more democratic bodies remaining, this 'traditional labour movement practice' framework provides a means for quasi-democratic decision-making. Members, groups of members or branches or affiliates as the case might be can submit any motion they choose to meetings, provided they do so within the deadline. Others can then submit amendments to the motions (again within a deadline). Everything submitted will appear on an agenda, if it is not ruled out of order on one or another ground of inconsistency with the rules.

But the chair and secretary in a local organisation - or at national level the conference arrangements committee or standing orders committee - arrange compositing, list motions in an order they choose, and so on. These decisions have a profound impact on the likelihood of a motion succeeding. In the first place, there are almost invariably more agenda items than the time available, so that the order of the agenda determines which items will even be discussed.

Secondly, a commonly accepted rule is that, if there are two or more inconsistent motions or amendments, the passage of the first taken causes the others to 'fall' and not be voted on. The result is that by listing the chair's or CAC/SOC's preferred motion or amendment first it is possible to *prevent the meeting seeing the level of support for alternatives*. The effect of this is to pre-empt an important discussion element of the decision process. The chair, or CAC/SOC, confronts the members as monopolists of information - and the members are to be atomised (if there is more than one minority, we can never see the proportionality of views for alternatives - in order, perhaps, to make coalitions).

This procedural political expropriation was familiar to leftists who were involved in the Labour Party or trade unions in the 1960s-70s. From what I know (from reading leftist journalism from the 1970s-80s and some historians) the US trade union movement decision-making had the same vices, but with added vote-rigging and gangsterism. In sum, in 'labour movement practice' the members are politically expropriated by the same means by which the mass of voters are politically expropriated in universal-suffrage capitalist constitutional regimes: limited choices are allowed, but these possible choices are defined *outside* the democratic decision process by the officers, using procedural control and control of information.

This character actually flowed from the underlying ideas of parliamentary

procedure that informed Roberts and Citrine. For two reasons.

The first I referred to last week. Parliamentary procedure was developed on the more-or-less silent assumption that the default rule is decision-making by private property owners; so that *inaction* is preferable to action. Parliamentary procedure, and the dilute forms of parliamentary procedure expressed in *Robert's rules* and Citrine, therefore offer plenty of mechanisms for blocking collective action by procedural means without a substantive vote.

Secondly, parliamentary procedure was created as much in the interests of the crown as in the interests of the representation of the Commons: one of the principles is that "the king's government must be carried on". The speaker of the House of Commons is now supposed to be neutral (unlike the Speaker of the House of Representatives); but, until quite modern times, was put in by *government* to assist with managing the elected representatives. This is part of a bias *towards control of the agenda by government* that is deep-rooted in parliamentary procedure. Taken into the labour movement, it implies control of the agenda by the full-time officials.

Law problem

There is also a deeper problem involved. Canon writes:

- Robert and the subsequent revisers of his rules were primarily concerned with one thing: "careful balance of the rights of persons or subgroups within an organisation's or assembly's total membership". To that end, the rules have been developed to protect the rights of
1. The majority
 2. The minority
 3. Individual members *vis-à-vis* the whole organisation
 4. Member non-participants (ie, absent members)
 5. The organisation as a whole

The protection of the "member non-participants (ie, absent members)" is the classic tale of the "silent majority" invoked by Richard Nixon in 1969, and (without the language) Neil Kinnock against Militant in 1985, John Rees against left critics in Respect in 2004-05; and most recently the Your Party leadership.

It is more fundamental, however, that *Robert's rules* is a system of *rules* (as I quoted earlier, of *parliamentary law*) that sets out to *balance rights*. The scheme *inherently* follows a rule-of-law practice. The problem takes us back to the earlier question: why *Robert's rules* has expanded from 192 to 714 pages - and analogously, the statutes governing UK company law have expanded from 462 pages to 3,776.

The very basic problem is that rules are made of words. And then the question which is posed is: what do these words mean? How are they to be interpreted? Really quite simple words turn out in the case of dispute to be arguable. In the 1986 case of *Re St Stephen's Walbrook* the question was whether a large Henry Moore statue with a flat top could be considered to be a "table" for the purposes of the 1602 canons of the Church of England, which require every church to have a "convenient communion table" (for some reason it was not argued whether the object could properly be called "convenient"). The Diocesan Court took the view that, since the purpose of the 1602 canons was to get rid of altars as part of making the Church of England Protestant, this statue was not a "table". On appeal, the Court of Ecclesiastical Causes Reserved disagreed: the ordinary natural meaning of 'table' was in their view an elevated flat surface on which things could be put down, so this statue was a 'table'.

This issue of 'literal interpretation' versus 'purposive interpretation' can have extremely sharp political consequences. The UK Supreme Court in *For women Scotland* overruled the purposive interpretation of the Scots Court of Session in favour of an "ordinary natural meaning" of the word 'woman' - drawn from the Book of Genesis (though that was not in the least admitted).¹⁴ Whenever judges claim that they are relying on the ordinary natural meaning of words, we should assume that they are about to make an arbitrary decision.

Law is made to more or less work, in spite of this very extensive potential arbitrariness in the interpretation of words and hence of rules, for two reasons. The first is the *existence of the legal profession*. Because the legal profession is a smallish closed group, it can have common ideas about what words mean. This is clearest in what are referred to as 'terms of art', the lawyers' technical language - like the 'fee simple absolute in possession' (very roughly, legal ownership of land), or 'murder'. The *Digest* of the Roman emperor, Justinian (529 CE), contained a title, *De verborum significatione*, ('on the meaning of words'). Today LexisNexis markets *Words and phrases legally defined* (there are various competitors).¹⁵

The legal profession takes us to Renato Flores's point about knowledge monopolies and *Robert's rules* as the basis of a knowledge monopoly. But it is also true that the 'specialists' in *Robert's rules* or *Citrine* who pop up with procedural objections are mostly not ordinary lawyers, but 'barrack-room lawyers': they do not form a functioning professional collective. The consequence is that the argument for the 'objectivity' and 'common understanding' of these rules is false. To have a legal profession proper, it needs to be *paid for* - out of social surplus, by some exploiting class (slaveowners, landlords, capitalists).

The second reason that law is more or less made to work is that the rules are not just words. They have underlying them two foundational purposes (principles or goals). One is predictability of decision or 'certainty'. This can serve interpretation in the sense both of tying interpretation to previous interpretations (precedents, and so on) and in the sense of asking the question: is the interpretation offered going to work in a variety of future related cases?

But this on its own is not enough. Law *also* has as a foundational purpose *justice*: "careful balance of the rights of persons or subgroups". 'Justice', of course, is widely debated. But the basic principle of legal justice is *corrective* justice: that a defendant should not take away something that belongs to a claimant. That is, 'rights' have to be analysed to private property in order to function as a legal goal or principle that can cut down the range of possible interpretations of words.

Back again to the rule of law as the form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The Soviet case demonstrated that without the lawyers paid by the ruling class, and thus independent of the state, formal laws exert no practical control over the state.¹⁶ Conversely, law becomes less law-like, the further it moves from private property relations.

Companies and voluntary associations are one of the areas in which this is a problem. The courts have been since the late 1600s concerned to deal with issues arising because of the conflict between the idea of the company shareholders having rights against each other, and the internal regime of majority rule. The result is that corporate management issues come to be treated as (at least sometimes) 'non-judicial'. The frame of justice and the frame of majority rule are in conflict.

Another aspect of the same point was quoted as proverbial by the Roman advocate and politician, Cicero, in 44 BCE: *summum ius, summa iniuria* - 'the more law, the more injustice'. Behind this tag is the fact that the *predictability* goal of laws (and rules) *inherently* promotes the dishonest use of the rule as a form of scam. It is this conflict which drives the enormous multiplication of rules - and the expansion of both the UK company law statutes and *Robert's rules*. If we are committed to the method of rules as the only way to deal with problems, all we can do is create an exception to the original rule. And then an exception to the exception. And then ...

To make any rules work requires underlying principles, to enable choice between interpretations. The principles underlying *Robert's rules*, *Citrine* and so on are 'rights' - that is, private property. To create *democratic* procedural forms we need to start in a different place. As I said at the beginning, this starting point will be the paramount principle - which will reassert itself at all levels of concrete details - that people who are prepared to participate in the decision process should be able to take real decisions ●

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Notes

1. 'Centrality of democracy' *Weekly Worker* June 18 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1590/centrality-of-democracy).
2. 'Time is on our side' *Weekly Worker* June 25 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1591/time-is-on-our-side).
3. W Citrine *Citrine's ABC of chairmanship* London 1943.
4. Socialist Alliance: see, for example, J Conrad, 'Sectarianism and a binary constitution' *Weekly Worker* November 8 2001 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/407/sectarianism-and-a-binary-constitution); Campaign for a Marxist Party: M Macnair, 'The procedural is political' November 15 2007 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/697/the-procedural-is-political); Left Unity: PCC, 'Left Unity: How to vote at conference' November 28 2013, (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/988/left-unity-how-to-vote-at-conference); P Manson, 'Left Unity: making a safe space for left ideas' December 5 2013 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/989/left-unity-making-a-safe-space-for-left-ideas); M Macnair, 'Left Unity: code of conduct or a safe spaces nightmare?', November 13 2014 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1034/left-unity-code-of-conduct-or-a-safe-spaces-nightm); Your Party left: C Roberts, 'Drag towards bureaucracy' February 19 2026 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1573/drag-towards-bureaucracy); 'We need light and air' March 19 2026 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1577/we-need-light-and-air).
5. R Canon, 'Why Robert should rule' *The Call* April 16 2019; Flores, 'The procedural is political' *Cosmonaut* August 2012. For 'Rusty's rules' see chicagoivw.wordpress.com/rustys-rules-of-order-understanding-meeting-procedure-and-putting-ideas-into-action; and libcom.org/article/how-hold-good-meeting-rustys-rules-order (2020).
6. HM Robert *Robert's rules of order* New York NY 2020.
7. HM Robert *Pocket manual of rules of order for deliberative assemblies* Chicago IL 1876, p11.
8. On this the major source is *Erskine May* (first edition: 1844; the current version online is at erskinemay.parliament.uk).
9. W Citrine *Citrine's ABC of chairmanship* London 1943, piii. The list in the Preface to *The Labour chairman* (at pv) is slightly different, but still starts with Erskine May and Palgrave.
10. W Hannington *Mr chairman!* London 1950 (my copy is 1980).
11. H Draper *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* New York NY 1977, Vol 1, book 1, chapter 13.
12. See, for instance, 'Scorched earth litigation' August 2016 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1118/scorched-earth-litigation); 'Hodging their bets' August 9 2018 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1215/hodging-their-bets).
13. The secondary points are that RONR is flexible (points 1 and 3) and that RONR is sufficiently elaborate to deal with complex problems (point 6).
14. See, for example, M Macnair, 'Case of judicial usurpation' *Weekly Worker* April 24 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1535/case-of-judicial-usurpation).
15. lexisweb.co.uk/sources/words-and-phrases-legally-defined.
16. For more discussion, see M Macnair, 'Law and state as holes in Marxist theory' *Critique* vol 34 (2006) pp211-36 (also available at legalform.blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/macnair-law-and-state-as-holes-in-marxist-theory-2006.pdf).

AGGREGATE

Change and stasis

Andy Burnham will be crowned leader and become the seventh prime minister in ten years. We should not expect a mass influx into the Labour Party. **Scott Evans** reports on the June 28 aggregate of CPGB comrades

Last Sunday the CPGB held one of our regular all-member meetings. We discussed the direction of UK and world politics, as well as the question of the organisation's wider periphery both in this country and internationally.

Jack Conrad opened the meeting on behalf of the Provisional Central Committee with a look back on the period of Sir Keir Starmer's premiership and leadership of the Labour Party, capping it off with some educated guesses on the prospects for 'Andy Burnham's Britain' (Burnham's 'coronation' being almost certain at this point).

There had been some chatter on the left in the lead-up to the 2024 general election that Starmer was uninterested in winning power, being so myopically focused on purging the left in Labour, and anyway - so the story went - from a statistical point of view it would be unprecedented for a party to win, having suffered such a massive loss in terms of 'bums on seats' in parliament.¹ Of course, the fact that something has not happened before does not mean it cannot happen, argued comrade Conrad, least of all when one lives in a time of turbulence like our own.

The story of Sir Keir's fall from loveless landslide to severe unpopularity is not one of pure objective forces. There have been unforced errors. Even so, the comrade was surprised that Starmer ended up leaving so soon. But we do live in an era of 'expect the unexpected'.

But Burnham is looking like much of the same, he said. Committing to the same spending limits, the same draconian immigration regime, and so on. There has been a good deal of speculation as to what the man actually stands for, and his 'maybe or maybe not' commitments include further devolution (whatever that might mean - more local Bonapartism does not mean more local democracy), scrapping the pension triple lock, increasing capital gains tax, a land value tax, scrapping green levies, and so on. The truth is, we do not know what exact policies he will commit to.

Burnham bounce

There is - as is common, especially in recent years - a pernicious presidentialist framing of the whole thing. The bourgeois media are trying to force the idea that there needs to be a general election. Labour MPs are very unlikely to push Burnham for it, given the risk of a whole mass of them losing their jobs - even if there is an actual 'Burnham bounce'.

It is extremely unlikely that there will be any flood into the Labour Party. But, in any case, Conrad wondered what the Labour left will have to say about all this. For the moment Momentum is saying nothing - just how to vote in the national executive committee elections. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, nothing - also just the NEC elections. The Labour left is effectively dead, concluded comrade Conrad. It can revive, of course, but for now it is effectively dead.

What about the trade union movement? 'Anyone but Ed' seems to be the mood around Burnham's pick for chancellor, given Miliband's 'net zero by 2050' commitment. The workforce has gone up, while trade union membership is down. Activity is hollowed out, meetings are easily dominated by a handful of SWP or



King of the North heads south

SPEW members. A lot of meetings are not even quorate. Individual sackings are transferred straight to the courts, and wages and conditions disputes are dominated by the trade union bureaucracy.

What about the wider left? SPEW is playing around, seemingly, with a 'Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition mark two', leading towards a Labour Party mark two. The SWP rightly calls out Burnham as fundamentally no different from Starmer, but its call for the usual 'streets and strikes' response is no surprise. As for fragments from the implosion of Your Party - eg, the Socialist Federation - they are clearly not going to go anywhere. If there were 80 serious people committed to a Communist Party that would be great, but that is not the case.

There is no point, given all this, in dusting off Labour Party Marxists, concluded comrade Conrad. Timing is crucial in politics, and now is not the time to rejuvenate LPM. It seems there is very little going on in Labour branches, and we should not expect that to change in the near future.

The discussion that followed was fairly limited. Jim Nelson noted that the media's reflection on Starmer's administration has been remarkably inconclusive, particularly when it came to matters like Gaza.

Adding to comrade Conrad's point about the low turnout in Labour's wins in 2024, Mike Macnair made the point that Labour picked up fewer absolute votes than under Jeremy Corbyn in 2019, in large part because Reform split the Conservative vote. He added that the dynamic of world politics remains to the right, of course.

Carla Roberts said there is likely to be an anti-Reform coalition in parliament eventually, and it is likely the left will just tail it, as they have done in Germany for similar things. She agreed on the Socialist

Federation being yet another dead end and the necessity of presenting a political alternative.

Periphery

Following this, the aggregate once again discussed the question of how to most productively relate to the organisation's periphery.

Comrade Macnair asked in his introduction to this session why so many of our contacts were unwilling to actually join the CPGB, echoing a concern of comrade Conrad. He speculated that one element of it is probably an exaggerated conception about what we require of members. The second element is that some people have political differences with us, such as our general opposition to no-platforming, or to practising diplomatic silence in order not to damage friendly associations with this or that part of the left. They may believe that such differences exclude them from joining us. If we were to set up a "supporters' network" (for lack of a better name), he said, we would expect them to be working alongside us, rather than just diffusely identifying with us.

The left in this country is deeply committed to 'human resources department' type positions on what is considered appropriate behaviour, and to intersectionalism, said comrade Macnair. The comrade continued that it is worth noting, however, that our influence internationally is considerably greater than at home in Britain.

Comrade Farzad Kamangar made the point that it is only by talking to supporters that we can convince people that we are not like the misleading picture of us as bullies who demand difficult things of members. She talked about just how easy-going we really are in comparison to her own personal political history.²

In her contribution Carla Roberts said that we come over as awfully disciplined because much of the left is just so *undisciplined*. A two-hour cell meeting once a week, regular dues at more than a symbolic level, attending weekly online communist forums (OCFs) and our annual Communist University - much of today's left finds this to be all too much! Comrade Macnair's characterisation of the Democratic Socialists as being not in political solidarity with us is not quite fair, she continued. They have been working with her (and hence us) productively in the recent period, and understand significant parts of our politics.

On our culture, it is certainly true that the PCC can be aggressively defensive, she said, and if you want to raise a difference you do have to be prepared to have shit poured over you. We have to accept that this is part of why some people do not join. The comrade implied that there is a serious brittleness in the organisation, because if Conrad got knocked over by a bus tomorrow, the organisation probably would not last very long.

Comrade Paul Cooper suggested that we should be more forthright and explicit in asking people to join, and asking why, if they did not want to. He suggested that people may like aspects of what we do - not enough to join, but enough to participate - and that is as good a reason as any to build a "supporters' network". The comrade is putting a lot of thought into how best to make use of online and especially social media.

Comrade Conrad made the usual point that resources are, of course, limited, but that comrades can go ahead and do what they like in terms of experimenting with this stuff. But, as he rightly said, anything which would blur the boundary between a member and a 'supporter' would be seriously problematic. The reality is that people, in this period, are frightened of commitment and lack seriousness, he said. It is easy to make the right noises, when it comes to our politics, but many such comrades still want to maintain friendly diplomatic relationships with opportunists and social imperialists. Anyone serious about forming a Communist Party should be talking seriously with us. Anyone committed to uniting communists with modern-day social democrats should look elsewhere.

Comrade Andy Hannah highlighted the issue as being the fact that so many Trotskyists have a kind of theorised opportunism in the form of the transitional programme. From this basis it is difficult for people to understand and defend our principled approach. Comrade Conrad later added 'popular frontism' - in general, 1930s Trotskyism meeting 1930s 'official communism' - as characterising much of the malaise. Stan Keable made the point that our membership standards are, quite rightly, applied flexibly: the level of discipline required is proportional to a comrade's level of understanding and experience. It would be wrong to recruit people by saying that membership is easy. It is precisely because we are serious that joining us is worthwhile. The fact that we have recruited such experienced and politically competent comrades is evidence that we are doing the right thing.

Comrade Tom Cormack said that we produce a "weekly miracle" in the

shape of both the *Weekly Worker* and the OCFs. He thought it important to recognise comrade Roberts' previous proposal about bringing people onto the editorial board as liquidationism. Anything we do in reaching out should be around the paper, he said. There is a real danger in getting too involved with reaching out through social media and the like; there is a risk it will never *really* add up to anything substantial. He made the important point that one of the big issues we face is that it is very difficult to ask a lot of people when they are getting less back than they used to in actually meeting socially, with so much being online. Most relevant to this discussion, our efforts around the cultural programme are ultimately about reaching our periphery.

Following this, comrade Moody reflected on the Socialist Alliance as a high point in real revolutionaries coming together to discuss with each other. Organisation and open debate under real democratic centralism is key.

Years ago

The supporters' network has been discussed many times over the recent years, said comrade Anne McShane. She had drafted something about supporters distributing the paper and so on some years ago. We should consider involving comrades overseas. On culture, relating to her own recent experience, she said that the left in Ireland is very lax, a lot of it is about personal relationships and not explicitly politics, except perhaps in the abstract.

Comrade Conrad replied that it is true that our lack of social components is relevant, but socialising is not the solution - think about the RSDLP: a lot of it was just letters. Responding to comrade Moody's point on *ad hominem*, he argued that in politics we actually do have to attack people as well as ideas: what about the term, "renegade Kautsky"? Was that just about his ideas? No, it was about his betrayal. It is right to be proud of what we do, he said, but we should not be complacent; we should be ambitious and look for advances.

Comrade Macnair summed up what came out of the discussion in three categories. First, go ahead with creating a supporter category - not by publicly appealing for *Weekly Worker* supporters, but by getting people to sign up as supporters and do practical work: eg, social media publicity, writing letters, distributing the paper locally. Second, on the Democratic Socialists: engage and discuss. Third, take up any outreach opportunities, but with no illusions that these are radically transformative circumstances. Some people have taken *elements* of our political line, not the whole. There have been repeated projects ending in demoralising defeats, but these do not seem to stop people repeating such projects, so we have to fight on the politics.

The aggregate ended with a discussion on the forthcoming Communist University and our annual Summer Offensive fundraising drive. Our target this year is £20,000 - and £11,000 was committed by just the members attending ●

Notes

1. See, for example, jacobin.com/2022/05/keir-starmer-uk-labour-party-political-chameleon-book-review.

BOOKS

My summer reading

Here are three widely-read titles that I could not ignore, writes Michael Roberts

Let us start with *How to win a trade war* (London 2026) by Soumaya Keynes and Chad Bown. Keynes, a descendent of economist John Maynard, formerly wrote for *The Economist* and now for the *Financial Times*. Chad Bown is an international trade economist at the American Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE).

This is a truly irritating and fallacious book. But it does tell you all you need to know about what the governments of the major western capitalist economies want to do about China's rapid rise in manufacturing and trade globally: namely to launch a trade war with sanctions and tariffs.

As Keynes put it in an interview with guru Paul Krugman,

... the conceit of the book is that you, the reader, are really interested in fighting a trade war, right? And we are the two nerdy kind of reluctant guides saying, 'Uh, if you really want to do it, then, you know, we'll give you the evidence that you need.' After all, we [presumably, the west] are in some sort of trade war, and really China is the part that's driving this.¹

Yes, according to mainstream economic theory, international trade benefits all with economies of scale, etc and cheaper and better goods, but "in a world where we're not friends with everyone and we don't trust everything", that does not follow. We need to find out "new, new ways of protecting ourself against China's subsidies".

Bown is particularly dedicated to adopting bans and other sanctions on Chinese exports and companies in this apparently necessary trade war. We must carry out "the really hard task at hand of fighting the real trade war that needs to be fought, which is dealing with these challenges with China ... with our partners and allies". You can see that the book starts from the premiss that what's good for western capital is good for us all; and the 'enemy' is China.

Let us deal quickly with the fallacies of this book's arguments. First, is the decline in economic growth and manufacturing in the US and now Europe due to some 'China shock' caused by unfair trade practices adopted by an overproducing Chinese manufacturing sector? No. As Jason Furman, former chair of the US Council of Economic Advisers, argues, the so-called "China shock" is a myth. According to him, "85 to 95% of Americans benefit" from trade with China, and "China has been part of helping [the US economy] work, not hurting it work." In other words, the narrative that China "stole" American jobs and wages is the exact opposite of reality.

Furman also points out that the majority of what the US imports from China is not consumer goods: "more than half of what we import is actually inputs into the manufacturing process itself". In other words, Chinese imports make US manufacturing more competitive, as it decreases their input costs. If you were to cut all Chinese imports, you would cripple US manufacturing, as it would no longer be able to compete on price with anyone. And that applies to Europe as well.

But this notion that China is somehow 'stealing' western jobs and prosperity has become the unquestioned premiss of western



US-China trade negotiations 2025

governments and financial media, and features in the assumptions of this book. The European leaders' solution to the so-called China shock is to slap tariffs on Chinese imports, copying Trump's tariff war. But is China overproducing at unfair low prices for world markets or is America's trade deficit really a result of the simple fact that the US buys more than it produces and covers the gap with imports? As for Europe, the shift in China's trade balance with Europe has been truly dramatic. The deficit has more or less doubled in the years since Covid.

But why has this deficit shot up? German chancellor Friedrich Merz says that China is unfairly keeping its currency undervalued. But there is little evidence to suggest any exchange-rate-driven price dumping. The unit exchange value of Chinese exports is on an upward trend and moves closely with those of Japan and South Korea. A large part of the Chinese export surge to Europe is accounted for by green energy goods, which are heavily in demand for Europe's energy transition. Another large element is chemicals, the production of which has been hit in Europe by high gas prices. European imports are thus not the result of China's low valued yuan, but the necessary demand for key products.

Moreover, China's subsidies for industry are in no way outsized, compared to the European Green Deal or Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act. The German car industry got comparable subsidies for reinvestment. But, rather than being ploughed back into much needed new investment, these were paid out to shareholders in the form of dividends. In 2023 alone, as the Chinese EV avalanche was already upon them, Germany's big three automakers, according to analysts, paid out €31 billion in dividends.

Overall, I have dealt with all these arguments against the 'China shock' in a previous article.² So I will not go further on this. The real question that this book does not answer: 'Is the solution for Europe and US manufacturers - or, more important - for the majority of people in those two continents, a trade war, as the authors assume?' I think not.

Billionaires

Inequality expert Gabriel Zucman has got a bestseller out, called *The need to tax billionaires* (Stoughton 2026). Zucman provides the reader with devastating facts about the inequality of wealth globally and its increased concentration in a handful of mega rich billionaires (and now even a trillionaire with Elon Musk).

Zucman shows that just 3,000 households have 16% of the world's total personal wealth and that share is

accelerating. He argues that billionaires often pay a lower effective income tax rate than teachers or nurses, because their wealth is tied up in companies and assets, which avoid income taxes unless sold. The billionaires hide much of their wealth in tax havens around the world to avoid paying tax: "This kind of global tax evasion has been one of the linchpins of rising inequality and growing government debt worldwide. It has also led many to lose hope in the very possibility of a fairer society, creating a breeding ground for the reactionary political movements that are thriving today."

Zucman calls for a coordinated global minimum tax requiring individuals with a net worth over \$100 million to pay at least 2% of their wealth in taxes each year. That would raise huge sums for governments to use on social needs and restore a fairer tax burden for all.

He dismisses the cry that any wealth tax imposed by governments would actually lead to a loss of tax revenue, as the billionaires would all leave the country. He points out that if "all France's billionaires were to flee to the Cayman Islands tomorrow, the loss of tax revenue to the country would be insignificant: around 0.03%". Zucman concludes:

... it is time to finish what we started with income tax - a major advance for democracy - in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is time finally to bring billionaires, who have never really been subject to income tax, into the fold. Carrying this unfinished revolution to completion is imperative if we wish to live by our most fundamental principles of equality before the law.

My main criticism of Zucman's book is that it proposes only trying to redistribute wealth and income through taxation.³ The point really is: why does such inequality arise? Why are there billionaires in the first place? It is not due mainly to tax evasion or low taxes: it is to do with the structure of capitalist economies. The underlying inequality is the concentration of corporate assets in just a small number of companies globally. A Swiss technology team found that just 1,318 transnational corporations control the assets of the world's economy: "In effect, less than one percent of the companies were able to control 40 percent of the entire network" (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology).

Most were financial institutions. The main shareholders of such companies thus become billionaires. It is not just a question of properly taxing the billionaires, as Zucman proposes, but instead establishing

public ownership of the dominant large companies globally. That would end the world of billionaires and allow governments to plan investment and production for social needs, not the profits of billionaire shareholders.

Public ownership of the world's largest companies? Surely, that is totally utopian, given their power to control governments - governments that support the capitalist system? But then expecting to get governments to impose a 2% wealth tax, which might seem a more modest proposal, is just as utopian under the present system.

Global warming

The climate and accelerating global warming is literally a burning issue, as even the global north is now experiencing extreme heat waves through this summer. Average global temperatures compared to pre-industrial levels keep breaking new records. Professor Lord Nicholas Stern is the most venerated climate economist and he has a new book out called *The growth story of the 21st century: the economics and opportunity of climate action* (London 2026).

Stern presents a story of optimism that the global warming crisis can be resolved. Moreover, climate action and long-term sustainable growth are not conflicting strategies. His solutions? He advocates massive upfront green investment and international climate finance, provided by a partnership between governments and private industry, along with carbon pricing, environmental taxation and cap-and-trade permit systems to make polluters pay.

In other words, these are all the mainstream economic policies that have been around since the Paris Agreement of 2015 to cap global warming at 1.4-2.0°C above pre-industrial levels. And they have failed. Fossil fuel production is not being phased out - on the contrary. And funding for climate action has disappeared. As Brett Christophers has pointed out in his book, profitability for capital stands in the way of any real action on the climate.⁴

Instead of hoping that the big energy companies, the global banks and industrial combines will 'see sense' and invest in climate action, as Stern advocates, the answer really lies in public ownership and planning, as economists Paul Cockshott, Alin Cottrell and Jan Philip Dapprich explain in their book written many lost years ago.⁵

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. paulkrugman.substack.com/p/how-to-win-a-trade-war.
2. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2026/05/12/trump-meets-xi-us-v-china.
3. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2026/06/09/solving-the-economic-problem.
4. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/06/23/fixing-the-climate-it-just-aint-profitable.
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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

Strait of Hormuz remains crucial for MoU

More than a matter of words

Negotiations are happening, but their significance is much disputed and there are those, not least inside Iran, who want no agreement. Then there is Lebanon and the danger of civil war. **Yassamine Mather** reports

Despite repeated breaches of the ceasefire, the US-Iran memorandum of understanding (MoU) remains alive for the time being. It has paused or reduced direct fighting, opened a 60-day negotiating window and placed the Strait of Hormuz at the centre of any agreement. But the two sides are already disputing what the next step means and who has the authority to define it.

■ **US position:** The strait must remain entirely open and free of charge.

■ **Iranian position:** New charges should be administrative, insurance or navigation “fees” rather than a formal “toll”.

■ **Oman’s dilemma:** As the other country bordering the strait, Oman is trying to balance both sides. It supports free passage under international law, but is also discussing ‘service costs’ with Iran.

The possibility of holding further negotiations in the capital of Qatar, Doha, has become one of the most disputed tests of MoU. On June 29, Donald Trump claimed Iran had requested a meeting in Doha and said “it will perhaps be important”, adding that US envoys would attend. Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff arrived in Doha on June 30.

Experts

Iran’s position was different: Tehran said there was “no negotiation at any level” scheduled with the US, while acknowledging an expert-level visit to Qatar, connected to implementation of the MoU and the release of frozen funds. That means Doha talks are happening, but more likely as mediated, technical contacts rather than formal, direct US-Iran negotiations. A spokesperson for the foreign ministry stated that Iran would have no negotiations at any level with the US in the coming days, and that the Iranian delegation’s trip to Doha would be “to follow up on the implementation of the terms of the memorandum of understanding”, including the release of Iran’s frozen assets.

Ultimately, this is a fight far more than language: is it toll-free navigation, or is it paid management services?

Oman and Iran are cooperating and competing at the same time. They have discussed a joint working group on Hormuz management, which signals technical cooperation. But there is also political conflict: Oman wants a “lawful, stabilising” framework that preserves safe passage and protects its mediator role. Iran wants to prove that no Hormuz settlement can happen without Tehran’s consent. This is why the Hormuz question is not simply about shipping lanes: it is also about recognition, regional authority and whether Iran can convert military pressure into a recognised management role over maritime security.

A major political problem is about the order of operations. The US wants a step-by-step deal: Iran stops attacks first, keeps the Strait of Hormuz open, and accepts nuclear limits - then



Trump signs the MoU in France

gets sanctions relief, oil benefits and unfrozen funds. Iran wants to keep its bargaining power, so is willing to talk, but does not want to look like it is caving in to US pressure. That is why it sends negotiators to Doha, while publicly denying it is actually negotiating with the US.

Going forward, talks will likely focus on four issues, each with a clear gap:

■ **Nuclear programme:** the US appears to accept some uranium enrichment, but is adamant on deciding the limits of enrichment, insists on inspections, and wants a role in deciding what will happen to stockpiles. Iran wants its right to civilian nuclear power recognised, plus sanctions relief.

■ **Sanctions and oil:** the US wants relief to be conditional (earned over time). Iran wants quick, visible economic benefits.

■ **Strait of Hormuz:** the US wants free, unrestricted shipping through it. Iran wants to be recognised as having a security role there.

■ **Regional security:** the US wants Iran to rein in allied militias and stop attacks on ships and bases. Iran wants to bundle in bigger issues - Lebanon, Israel, Gulf security, and the US military presence in the region.

In short, the US wants ‘Behave first, get rewarded later’ and Iran wants ‘Get something now, and tie it to everything else’.

The bottom line is that the MoU is already being stress-tested. The current reality is that there is a negotiation track, but not yet a clean, direct US-Iran negotiation. The next decisive signs will be whether shipping normalises through Hormuz, whether Iran stops trying to impose route approval or fees, whether Qatar releases or administers the frozen funds, and whether both sides publicly confirm the same meeting format.

Opposition

Inside Iran, the continuation of open or secret talks with the US has produced some, if limited, political opposition. President Masoud Pezeshkian has stated that all stages of the negotiations with the US have progressed “within the framework of the regime’s macro-policies and with

the full and continuous coordination” of Mojtaba Khamenei, the current supreme leader.

In a recent meeting, Pezeshkian called the agreement to end the war with the US a “diplomatic achievement” and argued that some factions, aligned with the psychological operations of hostile media, were trying to undermine this achievement by attacking the negotiation team and questioning national decisions. The Iranian president added that the government had refrained from responding to certain statements in order to maintain the country’s cohesion.

The opposition includes a couple of political factions, which have harshly attacked the agreement, and the criticism became sharper after the release of a message attributed to Khamenei regarding the agreement. The criticism remains marginal; however, last week a maddah, a religious singer or eulogist, reportedly threatened Pezeshkian in connection with the negotiations. This domestic conflict shows that the MoU is not only an international arrangement: it is also an internal struggle over who can claim legitimacy for negotiation, who can accuse others of capitulation, and who controls the political meaning of de-escalation.

At the same time, Iranian officials are trying to present the agreement as both a diplomatic achievement and a military ceasefire that can be reversed if violated. Acting minister of defence Majid Ebn-e-Reza stated that “undoubtedly, in the event of any violation of the ceasefire terms, we will take appropriate and necessary action and reaction”. According to the official IRNA news agency, he raised this issue during a phone call with Qatar’s deputy prime minister and defence minister, while also expressing Iran’s readiness to expand defence cooperation with Qatar. Ebn-e-Reza added: “We do not trust the enemy, and our hands are on the trigger.” This language is designed to reassure hardliners that the government has not disarmed politically or militarily, even while it pursues implementation talks through Qatar.

The MoU has also sparked debate

inside Iran over whether it requires parliamentary approval. Proponents of parliamentary oversight state that binding MoUs are legally equivalent to contracts, and note that the word “commits” appears eight times in the current text. Conversely, some officials argue that MoUs do not carry the same legal weight as treaties and are therefore exempt from legislative voting. Historically, during similar episodes such as the Algiers Accords and the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal, the government bypassed direct parliamentary ratification through general authorisations or separate legislation. Currently, despite calls from dozens of lawmakers to hold in-person sessions to oversee the pact, the national leadership has shown little intention of involving parliament, and parts of the agreement have already been put into effect.

Pezeshkian has also said that, under the plan currently in place, \$6 billion of the \$12 billion in Iranian assets frozen in Qatar will be released and returned to Iran - although, as I write, neither the US nor Qatar has confirmed that an actual transfer has taken place. Meanwhile the Iranian insistence that the Doha visit concerns implementation rather than negotiations allows Tehran to accept financial benefits, while denying that it is entering direct talks with the US. Following the Israeli and American attacks that began on February 28, Iran launched retaliatory strikes, including targeting objectives in Qatar. According to the IRNA report, the acting defence minister said that the region must not be exploited by extra-regional countries, and that the presence of foreign forces not only fails to bring security, but also increases misunderstanding, distrust and insecurity. Qatar, along with Pakistan, is currently mediating between Iran and the US in an effort to reach a permanent peace agreement.

Regional turmoil

The position of Israel and the Gulf states is another important part of the MoU’s regional meaning. Some view Israel as the biggest strategic loser because of the depletion of its political and military capital in Washington and the damage to its public image in the west. On the other hand, the Persian Gulf states are seen as relative winners - not because they achieved massive gains, but because they averted an existential and devastating war. Arab nations nevertheless remain deeply concerned about the lack of restrictions on Iran’s ballistic missile programme in the MoU, especially given that Trump has notably moderated his rhetoric on this issue. It is likely that, rather than demanding total Iranian disarmament, Persian Gulf states will respond practically by upgrading their missile defence systems.

The proposed \$300 billion reconstruction fund for Iran - a real provision in the MoU, though its funding mechanism is still undetermined and disputed in Washington - has also sparked concern that Gulf states might end up paying “the price of both war and peace”.

However, this financial participation will not be a blank cheque. It is more likely to take the form of conditional, commercial investments aimed at creating economic interdependence and restraining Tehran’s regional hegemony. Ultimately, some believe that, if the Gulf states maintain unity, their hosting of US military bases and their influence over energy markets could give them even greater leverage over Washington’s future Middle East policy than Israel.

Then there is the US-brokered framework agreement between Israel and Lebanon. It is meant to end the latest Israel-Hezbollah/Lebanon conflict and create a path towards a broader settlement. The main points reported are: the Lebanese army taking control of some areas in southern Lebanon; a process aimed at removing Hezbollah’s armed presence from the south; and eventual Israeli withdrawal steps.

A key condition is that Hezbollah disarms or is removed from southern Lebanon, especially the area south of the Litani River. Earlier US-Lebanon-Israeli statements said the ceasefire depended on a complete halt to Hezbollah operations and the evacuation of Hezbollah militants from the South of Litani sector.

The biggest controversy is sequencing: many Lebanese critics say the deal demands Hezbollah’s disarmament first, while giving no firm guarantee or timetable for full Israeli withdrawal. Reporting has noted that this has generated an intense reaction inside Lebanon. Hezbollah rejected the deal outright, calling it humiliating and “null and void”. Along with its allies, it argues that the deal amounts to a surrender of Lebanese sovereignty, because it accepts Israeli ‘security’ demands, while Israel keeps leverage on the ground.

Even some Lebanese who oppose Hezbollah are uneasy. Their concern is not necessarily defending Hezbollah’s armed forces, but that forcing the Lebanese army to implement disarmament under Israeli and US pressure could risk an internal explosion. Hezbollah-aligned lawmakers have openly warned that any attempt by the Lebanese army to enforce the deal could lead to “civil war”.

There is also a legal and human-rights backlash. Reports have highlighted concern over a clause requiring both sides to stop “hostile or negative actions” in international legal or political forums. Lebanese legal experts worry this could weaken efforts to pursue accountability for alleged Israeli war crimes in Lebanon.

So, in short: the deal is being presented by the US and Israel as a path to ceasefire, state authority in south Lebanon, and possible peace. But inside Lebanon, especially among Hezbollah and many sovereignty-focused critics, it is widely seen as one-sided. The central danger is that the deal tries to solve Lebanon’s external war by forcing an internal confrontation over Hezbollah’s weapons ●