



weekly **Worker**



Suspension of members of Your Party's central executive committee is yet another sign of suicidal control-freakery

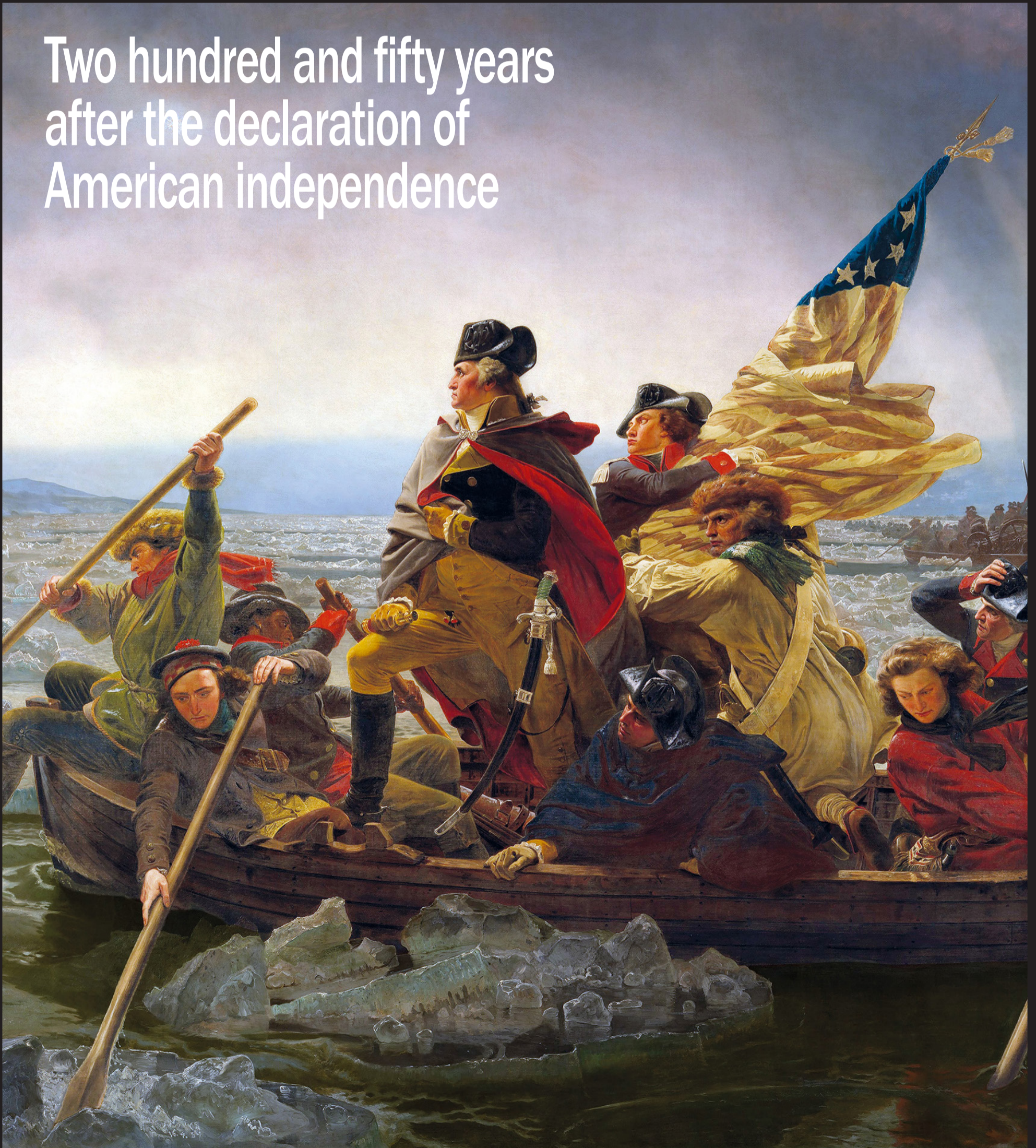
- Letters and debate
- Michael Roberts on America
- Ali Khamenei's giant funeral
- Drones versus butter

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Two hundred and fifty years
after the declaration of
American independence



LETTERS



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

N-word

In an episode of *The Boondocks* TV series, protagonist Riley Freeman, a young black boy, is called 'the N-word' by his teacher. He defends his decision to call him that - given that Riley and other black people use the word constantly, it was unclear to him how his own use of the word could cause offence. This episode is based on real events, which took place around 2006, when a white teacher referred to his student as 'the N-word' because he thought it would endear him to black students. This is only tangentially relevant.

Now, Jack Conrad of the CPGB is a peculiar, but very interesting, character. I quite like what he has to say about most things, especially on questions of communist strategy. I find myself agreeing with him often. He also has a funny way with language. Three or so times we can quote him saying 'the N-word' during the Online Communist Forum and sessions of Communist University. Now, this is not a 'woke left' 'cancelling' of comrade Conrad. Instead, we should think about his use of the word, 'nigger'.

In his first documented use, he quotes an apocryphal line from Muhammad Ali: "No Viet Cong ever called me a nigger". In his second documented use, he is quoting a line from Karl Marx in a personal letter, in reference to his friend and rival, Ferdinand Lassalle, as "the Jewish nigger, Lassalle".

Shortly after, Conrad defends his use of 'nigger': "Now, we are told that you can't use that word. You can't quote that word ... In my view, this is crazy, because if you use 'the N-word', we all know what your brain thinks. That's why it makes sense. Now, you can use what language you want. I'm in general in favour of using polite phrases, but you know, quite frankly, I'm also quite prepared, to use insulting language, but it depends who's insulted and why. So, yes, when it comes to Ian Donovan, I will use a phrase like 'You're an adherent of the socialism of fools'.

"That is not a compliment. That is not just an objective judgement. This is an attempt to use heightened language. And certainly, when it comes to investigating Marx on race, right, we ought to look at such passages and we ought to be able to quote them, put them in context - not to defend Marx, not to, you know, make him whiter than white, but to see Marx, to use a phrase from Oliver Cromwell, 'warts and all'. Marx could be completely selfish, completely self-centred ..."

So let's engage honestly with comrade Conrad's defence of his use of the word 'nigger' (he certainly could have phrased it a bit better!). Whether white people could 'quote' the word 'nigger' in books, songs, etc has been a hotly debated topic. White actors and actresses have had to say that word numerous times in film and television, from 2008's *Tropic Thunder* to 1974's *Blazing Saddles*, 1975's titular *Boss Nigger*, to just about every film made by Quentin Tarantino (who, coincidentally, often casts himself in roles where he must say the word ...). I agree broadly with Conrad that quoting the word isn't in itself some horrific act of racist violence. However, I do think the caveat here is that the phrase, 'the N-word', as grating as it is, is far more appropriate for Communist University/Online Communist Forum.

I will add, though, that referring

to Ian Donovan as adhering to the 'socialism of fools' is not quite comparable to calling someone a nigger. The former is an attack against their politics, the latter is an attack against their personhood; their identity (not to sound like a humanist). And, of course, we shouldn't shy away from looking at Marx[ists] and their occasionally backwards view of race. Marx used various racial slurs in his personal correspondence to others, in reference to people he disagreed with or didn't like. This is in spite of Marx's consistent support of something resembling human emancipation: not just for white people, but also for the 'Jewish niggers' of the world.

Fortunately, Conrad avoids the classic trap of the insecure white person who says the word, like the Louisville High School drama teacher in 2006 (who inspired the character of Mr Joe Petto). He does not bore us to tears trying to semantically separate 'nigger', being the racial slur, with 'nigga', being the slang term used in hip hop music, black films and the names of bands, although this semantic difference is real and at times matters. Conrad's use of the word is more amusing than insulting.

However, it does seem to be a trend with older people; Chris Cutrone of the Platypus Affiliated Society is also quoted as having used the word 'nigger' at least once, as well as Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek.

An unfortunate reality around the word 'nigga' is that it is funny, in ways that are unfathomable to polite liberal society. Black people derive a sadistic joy from saying 'nigga' around white people, knowing they cannot say it back. It's a beautiful kind of racial *Schadenfreude*. White people have since come up with ways of using the word without actually saying it, often involving replacing it with 'motherfucker', etc. But it's a kind of crass, overly transgressive form of subversive humour that is too reminiscent of the 2016-22 comedy podcast, *Cum Town* - not quite appropriate for the serious intellectuals of the Marxist left.

In the series, *The Boondocks*, the word 'nigger' is used repeatedly by its black - and white - characters. The series challenges expectations of what 'black culture' in the US is. It's a kind of cultural honesty which is lacking from a post-2016 left that tends to view all of society's ills as being caused by bigotry or malice against a specific identity group, whether it be queers, transgender men/women, specific kinds of black people, the neurodiverse, etc. I would, for sure, prefer a left that could engage with race and culture as earnestly as *The Boondocks* once did. But, of course, there's a time and a place.

One of the few saving graces for comrade Conrad and the CPGB as a whole, really, is that no-one but members of Communist Unity in Australia have seemingly noticed Conrad's use of the word. I would go on to say that the main issue with him saying 'nigger' is that it opens the door to other white people also saying it, in ways that could become absurd. If you see Jack Conrad saying 'nigger' and facing seemingly no response, you start to think, 'Well, why can't I say 'nigga'? And actually, I wouldn't have thought of writing a letter with the word 'nigger' in it numerous times if it weren't for the fact that I had heard Conrad say it at Communist University. This is despite being a black person who, by all means, can just say the word, though it never really occurred to me that I could. Eventually, however, if we let the Caucasian clowns of the Marxist left say the word all the time, we all end up sounding like characters in cartoons written by

Aaron McGruder. So, can a nigger borrow a French fry?

Colloquially, there is the concept of the 'N-word pass'. This is a form of social permission given to a white person, by a black person, to use the word, 'nigger'. You know what? I think Conrad has that pass. It's not as if we could stop him from saying it anyway. That he was able, through the spirit of partyism or something, to give himself that 'pass' in the first place probably says something about the beautiful but tumultuous nature of our universe.

A Black Communist
email

Prohibitions

As a member of the small group that was supposed to organise the launch of the Socialist Education and Debate Association (SEDA) on July 16, I was taken aback by the statement issued by Alex Green and Tony Collins on July 5 that clarifies the political terms upon which they wish to establish SEDA. Indeed, I was also concerned when Alex acted in the typical fashion of an administrator of a socialist WhatsApp group, when he closed the group to only himself as admin.

Let me be very clear: I have no disagreement on the fundamental need for decency, anti-racism and robust opposition to anti-Semitism within our movement. The prohibition of intentional slurs, physical violence and unsubstantiated allegations of state agency ('cop-baiting') should be baseline expectations for any serious socialist space. As a woman, I can't completely subscribe to not seeking redress from the 'bourgeois' legal system, as too often it's the only recourse possible. But I understand the caution.

However, the method by which these principles are enacted matters deeply if SEDA is to avoid the bureaucratic pitfalls of the organisations that preceded it.

Stating that they will not proceed "hand-in-hand" with those who question any of their listed measures, the letter authors risk bypassing the very democratic processes required to build a resilient, united association. Foundational principles carry genuine weight, when they are thoroughly debated, understood and voted upon by a sovereign meeting, rather than presented as preconditions, administered by an informal organising group via a WhatsApp suspension.

The debate regarding historical references highlights a need for pedagogical nuance. There is a distinct difference between an individual using an epithet to insult a comrade and an educator or text accurately reflecting historical documentation (such as the correspondence of Marx and Engels). While the desire to ensure a welcoming environment for people of colour is paramount, a rigid, total prohibition on verbatim historical citations risks treating adult activists as fragile, rather than equipping them with the historical literacy needed to understand the limitations and contexts of past socialist figures.

Proscribing political currents or individuals such as the 'Consistent Democrats' requires rigorous, transparent, collective assessment. If a political analysis crosses the line into anti-Semitism, that conclusion should be openly demonstrated and democratically ratified by the membership, ensuring that expulsions or bans are legitimate products of collective consciousness rather than executive decrees.

If SEDA is to be a vehicle for clarifying what a new workers' party must stand for, it must embody the highest standards of workers' democracy from its inception. We should welcome a thorough,

democratic debate on these principles at an upcoming meeting to establish a code of conduct, rather than allowing an ultimatum to fracture the project before it has officially begun.

Stephanie David
email

Lexit hero

Paul Demarty's 'Ten years after' (July 2) reminded me of the critique I made of the Lexit position of former RMT union leader Mick Lynch in my biography of him, *Mick Lynch: the making of a working class hero* (Manchester University Press, 2024). Although Lynch was not a leading Lexiteer at the time of the run-up to the 2016 referendum, he became a leading defender of Lexit after he was elected general secretary in 2022 and became the subject of intense media attention and scrutiny.

I wrote that Lynch contested the notion that the nature of post-Brexit Britain was the consequence of Brexit *per se*, and believed this was rather the result of the way the Tories had chosen to implement it. But, unfortunately for Lexit, it remained the case that the promise of Brexit to mean 'taking back control' would result in the economy and politics in Britain becoming fairer and more democratic was 'pie in the sky'.

From the outset, the Brexit campaign was almost entirely dominated by reactionary forces, and as a result further 'control' has passed on to those who were already in control, so there was no upending of the various elites that currently dominate society for their own benefit. Lexit was, therefore, in this period a major and predictable - even inevitable - strategic miscalculation. Such Brexit forces as existed wanted to leave the European Union in order to further deregulate the economy, allowing private capital to operate with even fewer constraints.

Thus, I argued there was only one way to have had a meaningful Lexit, and that was for a leftwing Labour government to take measures, such as renationalising key sectors of the economy, which would then have led to expulsion from the European Union - measures which would likely garner mass support for such a government to stand its ground and maintain such sectors in public ownership. But even with the credible election result of the Corbyn-led Labour Party in the 2017 general election, this expulsion option-cum-strategy was far from being in prospect, not least because there was considerable opposition to Corbyn from within the ranks of Labour itself.

By the way, the subtitle of my biography comes from what others said of Lynch and is not what I argued of him myself.

Gregor Gall
Glasgow

YP suspensions

We note the formal complaint on the suspension of Your Party central executive committee members Mel Mullings, Solma Ahmed and Naomi Wimbourne-Idrissi, made by seven of the remaining CEC members. The substance of this complaint is that the letter of suspension issued by the chair and secretary on July 3 was an abuse of authority, procedurally unfair and failed to follow agreed rules or procedures.

Republic YP defends the principles of the sovereignty of the members, democratic accountability and full transparency in decision-making, plus natural justice in any disciplinary matters against members - not least our three elected CEC representatives. We, therefore, support the formal complaint and demand answers to it be made available to all members.

On information currently available

we believe there are no valid grounds for these suspensions and call for the immediate restoration of the three suspended CEC members to their full status and rights as representatives of the members who elected them. Then Your Party should get down to debating and developing the programme we need to build Your Party.

Your Party has a major problem, because it has no agreed programme. This inevitably brings friction and disputes, and the danger that those with power will take disciplinary action against alternative opinions. This creates a crisis and damages the trust and credibility of Your Party in the eyes of members and the working class movement. The CEC must end these suspensions and get back to politics.

Republic YP
email

Slick rebrand

I have noted in recent months a lack of commentary in the *Weekly Worker* on the theory and practice of the Revolutionary Communist Party, which was rebranded in 2024 from Socialist Appeal in what I would cynically call a move to capitalise on a youth increasingly willing to identify with radical labels, such as 'communist'.

The RCP claims a growth from 800 members in 2023 to 1,200 members in 2025, with an overwhelming focus on campus recruitment. They defend this as a way of assembling a "core cadre base", through which they will "eventually reach the working class" (they admit that their retention is still poor).

They have done a decent job of presenting themselves as the only 'serious' party for radicalised young people to join, and have developed a strong, slick social media presence to back this up - as an example, their Instagram page has over 45,000 followers, compared to the SWP's 30,000. While membership numbers and social media presence are not everything, I still think it is important to engage with their ideas, as they become increasingly prominent; otherwise we risk leaving behind a disillusioned layer of young people who have passed through the party and end up perceiving the far left as inherently undemocratic. Despite all their seriousness, the RCP seems insistent that there is a revolutionary crisis around the corner, and that the masses will look to their leadership when it comes.

A recent development, outlined in 'Raising our sights ...' (an update published on June 30), is that the party has decided that they are finally large enough to plant their flag "prominently in the anti-racist movement". They have rightly criticised the "liberal-reformist" approach of the SWP, claiming that they will act as the "revolutionary wing" of the anti-racist movement. Time will tell if they will maintain this posture or fall into the same opportunism that leads the SWP to the politics of the lowest common denominator.

All in all, I hope to see more contributors to the *Weekly Worker* writing about the RCP, as they start to exercise their influence beyond mere 'party-building'.

Matthew B
Bristol

Tony's rants

Is it just me or does anyone else find Tony Greenstein's rants against fellow travellers to be somewhat predictable (Letters, July 2)? He rants against them for not measuring up to his holy standards - that Jews must never be mentioned in relation to Israel, the destruction of Palestine being all the fault of western capitalists.

First, he came for Gilad Atzmon, and we did nothing. Then he came for David Miller, and we did nothing (apart from Carla Roberts and Jewish Voice for Labour and the *Weekly Worker*); then he came for me, and again no-one did anything about it. Is this what solidarity looks like?

Rather than rebut Tony's attacks against me all over again (he really hates free speech, doesn't he? He's never happier than when he is throwing some poor Palestine supporter under the bus for saying something he doesn't like), I beg readers to go to my Substack page again, and read what I have to say about Tony and Huda and his other mates, at substack.com/@petegregson.

Yes, Tony's pals (he listed them in last week's letter), who also seem to have a bee in their bonnet about me, might be delighted to hear that Huda Ammori of Palestine Action denounced me as a Jew-hater just a month before one of her assistants called me up to be a driver for some Elbit hooliganism. You can imagine what I said to the man, as I withdrew my services to Palestine Action at this point.

Funny, that; since Huda had declared me *persona non-grata*, it never occurred to her to tell her fellow PA activists that I was not to be allowed within a mile of any of the PA sledgehammers. One wonders what your average Palestinian (I don't think Huda is your average Palestinian) makes of all this infighting? I believe they would just want to be rid of the Zionist yoke, even if it were anti-Semites who were doing the de-yoking.

Still, Tony must have his ego stoked with his ranting attacks that some fellow anti-Zionists seem to be quite prepared to entertain. I generally find that personality bullies accuse others of their own greatest weaknesses. And so with Tony it is his own ego, which he then seeks to tar as egotism in others, which is possibly why last week's letter to the *Weekly Worker* was headed "Gregson's ego". That and his insecurity and competitiveness...

I grant that Tony is a very principled and educated man: it's just that his principles suggest that he cares far more about protecting those calling themselves Jews than about Palestinians. And most of the organisations that he lists as boycotting me are run by folk calling themselves Jews who feel the same need to protect Jews that Tony does. Except for the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign, of course, which was set up by Mick Napier, who dislikes me because I disagreed with him over Christian Zionism vs Judaic Zionism. Mick is notorious for his expulsions - one woman I know was kicked out because she thought the SPSC might like to portray Palestinians as something other than stone-throwing victims.

To conclude, I often get the feeling with Tony that Zionists must be rubbing their hands with glee, as he lays about others in the Palestine solidarity movement, doing their dirty work for them. They don't need to de-platform people - Tony does it for them!

Please read my Substack piece and make up your own minds.

Pete Gregson
Edinburgh

Faction ban

According to Andrew Northall, factions are a cancer in any Communist Party: they are destructive to communist democracy and undermine the rights and influence of the greater numbers of those who are not in a faction (Letters, July 2).

These are strong sentiments, but

the question is, how true are they to reality? As far as I know, the Bolsheviks made a revolution and won a civil war without ever having to ban factions. The same can be said of the Communist Party of China in reverse; the communists won the civil war first and made a revolution also without having to ban factions.

Another important point to note is that the banning of factions in the Soviet Communist Party was never repealed. Officially the ban was held in place right up until the end. In other words, Lenin's ban never prevented the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party from losing power in 1991. This event was the real reason for the demise of the old CPGB, not factional wrangles, as Andrew seems to believe.

Since communists in the past have made revolutions and won civil wars without having to ban factions, and since banning factions never prevented the CPSU from losing power, we need to look closely at those who are demanding that the Communist Party must ban factions even before the socialist transformation of society begins. If the Leninist policy of banning factions didn't save the Soviet Union or Communist Party rule, can anyone now seriously maintain this policy as a dogma?

The main question we need to ask is which class interest does the banning of factions serve? To try and answer this question two important points need to be made, which some people on the left may not be aware of. The first is that the fundamental contradiction on the left is that between a democratic and a totalitarian form of socialism. That a totalitarian tendency exists on the left which is antithetical to democratic socialism was obvious enough for it to become a subject of satire by George Orwell in his novel, *1984*.

The contradiction between the democratic and the totalitarian tendencies in socialism is not immediately apparent, because the totalitarian tendency usually does not display itself openly and remains mostly concealed until it reaches a position where it can impose itself. I would argue that the totalitarian, bureaucratic tendency within socialism is mostly behind the call to formally ban factions. This is not to say that everyone who wants to do that is a conscious agent of the totalitarian tendency. It is the end result that matters.

I would argue that Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky and others, who supported the banning of factions in the Bolshevik Party in 1921, which was mostly directed at the workers' opposition group, became the unconscious agents of the totalitarian tendency within socialism. This was the point, when Leninism began the transition from democratic socialism to totalitarianism. They became the unwitting agents of a semi-conservative Soviet bureaucracy. We know that Trotsky was to later take a stand against bureaucracy. The problem here is that Trotskyism's opposition to bureaucracy was based on ultra-leftism, combined with an incorrect understanding of the nature of bureaucracy itself.

Trotsky called for a 'political revolution' to overthrow what he termed the 'Stalinist bureaucracy', but the Soviet bureaucracy was no more 'Stalinist' than the British or French civil service. Stalin's later purge of the bureaucracy simply adds weight to this view. For decades Trotskyists have defended the ultra-left view that a political revolution can resolve the problem, while claiming that the Soviet bureaucracy was a product of backwardness,

which was the opposite of the truth. Bureaucracies arise based on the increasing complexities of a society, given the level of technology available at the time.

What the left needs to realise is that every socialist revolution will lead to the domination of a bureaucratic caste or class in the absence of democratic socialism. It was the weakness of democratic socialism which gave the soviet bureaucracy such a significant sway, which in turn was one of the reasons which led to Stalin's attempts to reverse this in the purges of the 1930s. Stalin's anti-bureaucratic purges sought to put Trotsky's political revolution into practice and were therefore of an ultra-left character. These purges were partly Stalin's attempt to refute Trotsky's claim that the revolution had been betrayed.

There is another issue which some people on the left may not be aware of. Not only is there a concealed contradiction within socialism between democracy and totalitarianism, with the latter demanding a ban on factions, but related to this issue is the fact that the bourgeoisie can rule society through a communist party. Those who equate the bourgeoisie only with private property may have some difficulty with this idea. But what I am saying is simply that the bourgeoisie or a new privileged caste can come to power on the basis of 'social ownership' of the means of production. This can happen in advanced countries. It is not something which is limited to backward countries which make socialist revolutions.

This is why the debate about factions is one of the most important related to socialism. We need to know which class interests the banning of factions serve. Based on the understanding that communists made revolutions and won civil wars both in Russia and China without a formal banning of factions, and being aware of the contradiction between the democratic and totalitarian tendencies within socialism, we need to be wary of those calling for a formal ban, since factions never prevented communists from winning power before, neither in Russia or China.

If banning factions had contributed to saving communist leadership in the former Soviet Union, those who believe in a ban would have a more solid ground to stand on. In fact, the ban on factions may have ultimately contributed to the collapse of socialism, because it led to a situation where the enemies of socialism remained hidden in the party, rather than presenting themselves openly as a faction where they could be exposed and politically defeated. It was only during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union that the anti-communist elements in the party, like Boris Yeltsin, openly came out in opposition to socialism.

We on the left in Britain usually don't support the banning of factions in the Labour Party and I see no convincing reasons to do so in relation to communists. My argument is that, while communists shouldn't encourage factions, we shouldn't formally ban them either. If we ban factions, they are likely to simply go underground.

As pointed out above, the demand for a formal ban comes mainly from the totalitarian tendency within socialism, which in turn represents the bourgeoisie within communism. In the 1848 *Communist manifesto* Marx points out that when the capitalist ship begins to sink a small section of the ruling class will find their way into socialism. Since Marx was writing in the 19th century, I

think it's safe to say that today we are no longer talking about a small section of the bourgeoisie: rather a significant portion of this class may abandon ship and come over to socialism, when they see which way the wind is blowing.

To call for a formal ban on factions under these conditions is simply disarming the working class. Even Andrew recognises that factions under some conditions may be unavoidable. The problem here is that, if you previously banned factions, you have already given an important weapon to individuals who may seek to serve their own group or class interests rather than the interest of the whole people. In view of the fact that the bourgeoisie can rule society through a communist party, the point is to determine whether the banning of factions serves the interests of the revolution or counterrevolution.

The contradictions in the working class and within socialism are of a non-antagonistic nature. What this means in practice is that in most cases there is no need to form factions, and where factions are formed the contradiction to the rest of the party is also non-antagonistic, unless such factions actually represent alien elements detrimental to socialism.

Tony Clark
For Democratic Socialism

Britain looted

How can a government work when the parties which have governed Britain for a hundred years have become separated from the people? Government has committed vast amounts of revenue to its information ministry and multiple channels of the news media. Coincidentally or not, the media in Britain has suffered a catastrophic loss in newspaper sales and television-radio news audiences have also significantly collapsed too.

Government massively depends on the police to tell them what's going on in the country. The police can only see people as potential criminals. No wonder we've had a million acres of harsh crime legislation, as the government, through police eyes, can only see millions of potential or actual criminals - they see the population in terms of crime. Government has become terrified of its own people, who it doesn't trust in the least.

Since Margaret Thatcher took over the helm in 1979, this country has been absolutely looted. In fact it was and is the last major revenue stream for the 1.8 million colonial families - the blood-sucking, inbred morons, who form the British state. With the empire gone by the 1970s, it had no option but to loot its one remaining colony, Britain! It has looted far too much for its own safety. It has destabilised the people, the political system and the country at large. They see the people of Britain as they saw the people of the empire. 19th century Britain was one vast crime scene. The British state stunted our physical and psychological growth, physiologically and psychologically terrorised us, created a so-called 'middle class' (an ideologically schizophrenic and psychopathic nonentity) and above all else robbed us of the fruits of our labour.

First went the British empire. It had bolted the British state together. Joining the EU was a ploy to maintain a state that had lost its reason to exist. Then Brexit happened and the wolves of nationalism have since staked their claims to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Finally and most vitally for keeping this hellhound state together, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party - the twin pillars of state power in practice and

in philosophy - have both suffered enormous loss in public confidence. There is no turning back for them. Regional dissatisfaction is another nail in the coffin! Britain has 'RIP' written all over it. Those who have confidence in this fraudulent apparatus they call a state have no place in any communist party.

Reform UK and the Greens are but flimsy shelters seeking to contain the political stampede that is going on across England. They are nothing but parliamentary second elvens. The political bomb has fallen, leaving millions of political refugees. The people are aroused and in motion. Those who can supply ideological bomb-proof shelters for millions of disaffected people will be the new rulers of what seems likely to be an independent English Republic. The stage is set for freedom for Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England.

It's a liberation struggle above all else and the holding to account of the monarchy and the colonial fiefdoms. We must judge them in order to rid our invaded mental infrastructure of them.

Elijah Traven
Hull

Cuba work

The Cuban revolution faces its gravest danger in decades. With Cuba under relentless siege by US imperialism and subject to a crippling blockade, the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) leadership has responded by capitulating and opening the door to far-reaching marketisation and foreign capital.

This course threatens the very social foundations of the 1959 revolution and risks repeating, under different conditions, the disastrous events that culminated in capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union. We therefore appeal to every organization and comrade on the left prepared to defend the conquests of the Cuban revolution - from revolutionary socialists to dissidents in the PCC and trade-union militants within and outside Cuba - to reject these reforms and collaborate to defend the revolution.

Whatever our differences on broader strategic questions, we share an urgent responsibility to oppose capitalist restoration, demand an end to the US blockade and fight for the preservation of the planned economy. The decisive question is whether we are prepared to act together against the counterrevolutionary danger.

Such collaboration could take the form of organising joint events, demonstrations or statements, and publicising the urgent need for a left opposition to the disastrous course of the PCC leadership as widely as possible in the countries and arenas in which we work. This must be combined with the broadest possible debate among the working masses on the way forward. The International Communist League has put forward some elements of such a programme in our articles, 'Cuba: how to stop the catastrophe' (June 30) and 'Cuban CP "reforms" open the door to counterrevolution' (June 20), as well as our June 23 podcast, 'Fight counterrevolution in Cuba! Oppose reforms, for a left opposition!'

We welcome any suggestions for initiatives and joint work. Now more than ever, a united anti-imperialist campaign is urgent to offer the Cuban people a socialist alternative to both bureaucratic stagnation and capitalist counterrevolution.

Julia Emery
International Communist League
(Spartacist)

USA 250



Benjamin West's 'Treaty of Paris' shows the American delegation about to sign the 1783 Treaty of Paris (John Jay, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Laurens, WT Franklin). British delegation refused to pose, so the painting was never completed

Celebrating the defiled republic

Two hundred and fifty years after the declaration of independence, America still awaits democracy. Only a third revolution can achieve that, argues **Paul Demarty**

There is an apocryphal story that, on July 4 1776, King George III wrote in his diary: "Nothing important happened today".

This story is certainly false. That most wayward of kings did not even keep a diary; and, if he had, he would not have heard of the declaration of independence by the 13 British colonies in America that would, ultimately, become the United States, until weeks later, given the speed of communication at the time.

Nonetheless, he might not have been wholly unjust in recording these events so dismissively *at that time*. The American war of independence had many more years to run. It was not until 1783 that the British finally conceded defeat; direct engagements in the war tended to favour the British. George Washington's genius was for strategic retreat. It is not the kind of genius typically rewarded in the folk mythology of national birth, but it told in the end.

The question of the first American revolution is a troubling one for Marxists. On the plus side, it was the first indication of the vulnerability of the British empire in its very heartlands. No colonial population in its whole extent, at the beginning of the 1770s, was so very British; yet the tyrannical measures following on merely from membership of that empire drove the American gentry into revolt. Governments at home were exasperated: how did the restive American colonies propose to defend themselves without the British army

and navy? And how should the latter be deployed without proper funding, necessarily through taxation? Yet the Americans spurned the aid available, and were driven in the end to an independent form of oligarchic republican rule.

Yet even the shift to republicanism, of any sort, is complicated by the ends to which such republicanism was directed. The states were settler colonies. They expanded to the west, in turn displacing the native peoples. The latter, indeed, tended to favour the British in the war. The British preferred a slower pace of westward expansion; the colonies were champing at the bit to obtain new territory and move the frontier beyond the Great Lakes. What is at issue, in other words, is the independence of a settler colony. A settler colony that really did undertake a revolution, which placed the American bourgeoisie in control of the old colonial territories; but one whose relentless march would come at the expense of the native peoples, sometimes in near-open genocidal form.

Where do we place our emphasis: on the fight for freedom, or the fight to dominate? In truth, the two cannot be separated. That is not a reason to reject the revolution, such as it is; to suppose it to have merely been a fake. It is to understand its irreducible moral limits. Something, indeed, was unleashed on that day in 1776, something of decisive importance. The notion of republican self-government returned to the sphere

of possibility of the great powers, in ways that would be telling, especially in France a few years later. Yet the American revolution has always been dogged by who it did not include: the Amerindians and the African slave populations, above all. Much later on, Karl Marx famously wrote that a nation which oppresses another can never itself be free. Besides Ireland, he may well have had the contradictory American experience in mind too.

Great idea

Much depends on getting the interpretation of these events right; but we may as well start by looking at the celebrations themselves.

America's 250th anniversary was presided over by its 47th president - a man whose ability to represent the 'distinct American genius' is, to put it mildly, contested. His great idea was to turn the governmental district of Washington DC into "the great American state fair" - a strange facsimile of those provincial celebrations of above all agricultural production. The idea of the yeoman farmer was, after all, central to the Jeffersonian vision of American democracy - a great society of property-owners never far from direct work on the land. Yet even out in the states themselves, these fairs have become caricatures of themselves; the national version was a caricature of the caricature.

Few enough people turned up, in the first place; those who did had the usual range of diverting activities to

attend. There was a faux-revival tent, where you could listen to Christian rock and perhaps be baptised there and then. Military planes thundered overhead in formation. There was a heatwave on, and dozens were hospitalised as a result of heat exhaustion. An apocalyptic storm delayed Trump's big speech; when it came, it was the usual fusillade of self-congratulation and score settling.

He had already made a big speech at Mount Rushmore, denouncing the evil rise in the US of "communism" (it is unclear whether he meant the Democrats or specifically the Democratic Socialists of America, who recently scored a number of victories in Democratic primaries) and implying state action against it. In theory, a revolutionary anniversary of this sort - something like a royal wedding this side of the pond - is supposed to be a unifying event. That message seemed to have gotten through to DSA New York mayor Zohran Mamdani, who made the sort of cautious but ultimately triumphant patriotic speech that one might have expected from a Barack Obama. It even got through to the pope - an American, of course, whose message of congratulation covered much the same ground.

For Trump, the national mythos is simply irrelevant. He has never engaged in the default set of hypocritical national obeisances. His contempt for the dead and wounded of America's wars is legendary - he prefers winners, people who

'do not die'. Instead, America is to be interpreted through his own person. The American experiment is a success, because it produced the amazing genius, Donald J Trump!

In a certain respect, it is worth taking this seriously. In Trump's first term, liberals would often react to a new horror with the stock phrase, 'This is not who we are'. At the very peak of the woke wave, when American history was viewed by such people as *only* a tissue of white-supremacist violence, that phrase fell out of use. After all, *isn't this exactly* who 'we' are? Trump is a racist huckster selling shallow nationalism to a mass base of marks he clearly despises. What could be more American?

Even the obviously criminal aspects of the Trump enterprise - the naked self-dealing, the crypto scams, the bribes - have the smell of authentic nationhood to them. As Raymond Chandler put it in *The long goodbye*: "We're a big, rough, rich, wild people and crime is the price we pay for it - and organised crime is the price we pay for organisation." Corruption is a recurring problem in American politics, from the effective ownership of the state by the antebellum cotton barons to the flunkies of the Grant administration, through the robber-baron era to Warren Harding's Ohio boys, and then to the profligate thievery of Richard Nixon's entourage. Defenders of Trump today point to the hiring by the Ukrainian corporation, Burisma, of Joe Biden's crackhead son to a no-show job in a

naked act of influence-peddling - and, in a sense, they are right to do so.

These defects in political culture have always stood athwart the content of the national myth: that America is the world's first and most stubbornly enduring democracy. As such, it has taken on a special role, merely as a proof that such a thing is possible. "Our popular government has often been called an experiment", Abraham Lincoln told Congress on the first independence day of the civil war. He understood the conflict then underway as a decisive test of that experiment - not only for Americans, but all peoples. He was right; but it was not to be the last. The test of the last century of American society has been of the democratic ideal, only ever realised very imperfectly in its governing institutions, coexisting with the administration of a world empire. The Trump era merely makes that moral danger explicit.

First revolution

Back to the beginning, then, and to a different empire. The British empire was in a state of semi-continuous war with France, which lasted throughout the 18th century and then until the final defeat of Napoleon. French Canada bordered directly with the American colonies; disputes over how to pay for the required defence dogged those colonies for decades. The Brits employed 'carrot and stick': as the 1770s rolled around, the emphasis shifted to the stick, and the American gentry began to chafe badly against new taxes they had no say in. 'No taxation without representation' is the famous summary of these objections.

When the British attempted to disarm American dissidents in 1775, the situation rapidly fell into full-scale war. Though overwhelmingly dominant in military strength, the British were successfully resisted with guerrilla tactics and canny diplomacy with the governments of France and Spain. The American territory was already vast: patriot forces could retreat at will into the deep country. Independence was declared in 1776, and achieved finally in the peace treaties of 1783.

What emerged from the war was a decentralised continental confederation, which rapidly proved entirely inadequate for governance. The crisis came in 1786, when the economic dislocation caused by the war triggered a general uprising of plebians and small farmers in Massachusetts - the Shays rebellion. This could only be put down by effective suspension of the articles of confederation in order to raise troops, and in turn produced the convention that agreed the US constitution, more or less as we know it today. It created a federal government with distinct legislative, executive and judicial branches that were - crucially - capable of coercing the individual states. As part of the political struggle to do so, popular elements imposed the amendments known today as the bill of rights, of free speech, the right to bear arms and form militias, the right to avoid self-incrimination and arbitrary search and seizure, and so on.

There remained, of course, two major matters to be resolved. The first was the limited geographical extent of the new-born United States, and the pertinent fact that the 'virgin lands' yet to be seized were populated. The second was an internal population - that of the slave labourers on the plantations, especially in the south. A shining democratic exemplar to the world ought not, presumably, to indulge in extensive ethnic cleansing and genocide to extend its territory; and it really, really ought not to treat some class of persons as, literally, the property of another class.

There was, sadly, little enough opposition to the first of these crimes, and the settlement of what is now the

continental United States proceeded in fits and starts until the early 1900s, to the great disadvantage of the native peoples - a great civilisation reduced, by way of coercion, trickery and mass murder, to a few reservations. By expanding in this bloody-handed way, America bought itself a measure of social peace - the development of capitalism back east had a safety valve, as surplus populations could "go west, young man", in Horace Greeley's words.

Second revolution

Slavery was not so easily dealt with. The cotton produced by the slave plantations fed the mills of northern England; the profits were extraordinary. But it was labour-intensive and land-intensive work. The slave trade *per se* was illegalised by the British - the only people who could really carry it out. New slaves had to be bred from old ones, like prize horses put out to stud. Interference with this reproductive process was a real threat to the planter class. Meanwhile, land hunger drove the US to squalid wars of conquest like, most spectacularly, the 1848 Mexican-American War, which brought territories from Texas to Alta California into the union.

The interests of the planters were opposed, first of all, by a small, but growing, mass movement of abolitionists, largely religiously-inspired, for whom slavery was a gross national sin, on account of which America could expect severe divine retribution. The abolitionists remained marginal until the dominance of the slavocracy began to retard the economic development of the north. There emerged a parallel movement of free-soilers, dedicated to spreading a system of free labour in the states and especially in the territories yet to become states.

The conflict over the legality of slavery in these new territories turned violent, with the 'bleeding Kansas' conflict - a low-level civil war in that territory between rival slave-state and free-state governments and their associated bandit gangs. The free-soilers formed a political party, the Republicans, and the resulting political crisis led, in short order, to full-scale civil war when the south refused to accept the presidency of the Republican, Lincoln, in 1861. While the military goals were initially limited to restoring the full union of the states, by 1863 the immediate end of slavery was in sight.

This was now, in the proper sense, a revolutionary war - the second American revolution. The American polity that emerged was very different. The federal government was far stronger in relation to the states. There was now a unified fiat currency and a central bank, long resisted by Jacksonian Democrats. The pressure of war-needs revolutionised the forces of production in industries from arms to textiles. And, finally untethered from the backward planter class, the great era of railroad construction could begin. The constitution gained three new amendments, which authorised the federal government to intervene against the states in favour of the rights of ordinary citizens (or, as the case may be, *against* them).

Nothing useful can be said about 1776 that does not include the protracted struggle of this whole history - at least the difficult and, in the case of the suppression of the slaveholders' revolt, extremely bloody process by which the real enduring constitutional settlement of the US was reached. That, of course, complicates the more simple-hearted reactions to the 250th anniversary.

As an example: writing in *Compact*, James Vaughn - a founding member of Platypus - offers 1776 as a breakthrough for the distinctively modern form of freedom, associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie. He

takes 1776 as the declaration of independence of the new world from the old, and this is the new world of bourgeois freedom, the freedom of self-creation, the recognition that fulfilment is the product of social rather than divine laws, and the subordination of the state to social life - "that modern, bourgeois freedom should be given full scope to develop on its own terms, and that the state should be the servant of society, not its master".¹

The obvious objection to this is that this bourgeois freedom, of absolute self-creation, was an abortion even in revolutionary America. The society of self-creating bourgeois gentry proved unable even to suppress the Shays rebellion (a rabble of small farmers and revolutionary war veterans) without a military coup, later ratified in constitutional law. If Vaughn had been around for that rebellion, and had kept a diary, one can well imagine him marking the day in the same words as the pseudo-George III.

Even that settlement proved unsustainable until the conclusion of the civil war. It is notable that Vaughn cites above all in his list of bourgeois freedoms "the rights of the society of free labour, of universal social cooperation based on the free exchange of labour and its products", but he does not even mention the basis of American prosperity on categorically unfree labour in the slave societies of the south. To read his article, one could almost be forgiven for thinking there was never slavery in the United States at all. The native peoples, notably, are also entirely absent.

Vaughn is nonetheless right to insist that the founding documents of the American republic proved an indispensable resource for those who sought to rectify tyranny, including the tyranny of chattel slavery. When the great abolitionist preacher, William Lloyd Garrison, publicly burned a copy of the US constitution in 1854, to protest the denial of its provisions to black Americans, he paid that text a backhanded compliment. There was something important in there, precisely, that was being betrayed, entailing its immolation.

Third revolution

And so, to the text itself of the 1776 declaration:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organising its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

On display in these famous words are both the genius and the fatal flaws of the document. The genius is, above all, the audacity - a statement of uncompromising egalitarianism (that the equal creation of men is *self-evident* - if only!), and the enshrinement of the right of revolution. This, after all, might seem a contradiction in terms. A right of revolution could never actually exist in any particular constitutional arrangement. The appeal is to a higher order - in the text, a religious order, a reference to absolute human ends, but one that might well be reinterpreted - and has been reinterpreted - in terms of human reason.

Yet that higher order must always

meet grubby reality. That absolute equality never extended to the natives, described in the declaration as "the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions". The question of the equality of the slaves, as noted, dragged on until its bloody conclusion in 1865 - and indeed afterwards, with the defeat of reconstruction and the institution of segregation and Jim Crow.

The civil war, of course, also called into question the right of revolution. It was just that right, after all, invoked by the southern secessionists, who supposed a free-soil Republican government to "alter or abolish" their accustomed rights. The Union disdained this exercise of the right of revolution, as well they might. Yet they could only do so by departing from the text: the interests of the *class* of planters - *their* life, liberty, etc - could not be suffered to dictate American history any longer.

The class character of American 'democracy' is not a mere Marxist obsession. In fact it goes back to the very origins. Thomas Jefferson supposed, as previously noted, that the yeoman farmer could provide a stable social base for such a political regime. The free-soilers had their own one, a fluid class alliance of labour, homesteader and the petty bourgeoisie against the decadent pseudo-aristocrats of the southern planters. That alliance, in the end, was obliterated by the northern capitalist robber-baron (an attempt was made to recreate it with the People's Party - the original populists - which likewise foundered). Its condition of possibility was always the expanding frontier, the possibility of the homestead. The closure of the frontier made America a lot more like Europe - sharply polarised between capitalist and proletarian, with a smaller and politically ambiguous petty-proprietor class between them.

That leaves the working class movement itself - never as powerful in

the United States as it was in Europe. Yet its separation from property, in the US like everywhere else, makes it a meaningful contender to realise the total egalitarianism of the declaration. Property itself is tyranny - that much is obvious from Jefferson and Hamilton, through the slavocracy and the robber barons, to the openly corrupt extraction regime of Trump 2.0.

If the workers' movement meets the goal of realising the best of the democratic spirit of 1776, however, it will have little enough use for the Heath-Robinson machinery of the US constitution. Its checks and balances are mechanisms precisely in favour of property, and from there in favour of tyranny and corruption. That there are indispensable gains in it that have never been put better, at least in English - the robust defence of freedom of speech, of religion, of the right and duty to bear arms, of protection from self-incrimination and arbitrary arrest - cannot be denied, but these elements are *in contradiction* with the overall design.

The 'separation of powers', always rickety, could never survive America's transition to become the global hegemon. Power has bled out of the legislature, the most roughly democratic of the three branches - into the executive, which controls both the vast military forces assembled over the last century, and the judiciary, which ensures capitalist control of the political process, in favour of the financial oligarchy produced by global primacy.

American politics has always had two souls: democratic and oligarchic. But they cannot co-exist forever. If substantive democracy is ever to reign, a third American revolution must be put on the agenda ●

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Notes

1. www.compactmag.com/article/the-new-worlds-declaration-of-independence-from-the-old.

Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 12 5pm

Nigel Farage's resignation: voters should decide who they want, not the Commission for Standards and MPs

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USA 250

From independence to empire

The history of the United States can be divided into four distinct stages. Michael Roberts takes a panoramic look at what is now a descaling hegemon. China is its main rival

July 4 2026 marked 250 years since the 13 British colonies in North America declared independence from the British colonial power at a congress in Philadelphia. Since independence, the United States of America, as it came to be called, expanded to the west to encompass the whole continental area and later built an overseas empire in the Americas and on to the Pacific.

By the end of the 19th century, the US had become a major economic and industrial power and, following World War II, it became the dominant industrial, financial and military power globally. 'Pax Americana' epitomised the period from the mid-20th century to its end. However, in the three decades of the 21st century, that dominance began to give way (relatively) to new emergent economic and political rivals.

The rise of US capitalism over 250 years mirrors almost exactly the rise of capitalism to become the dominant mode of production globally. In the mid-18th century, capitalist accumulation was still very much confined to trade and farming. Industrialisation was not the motive force of growth and the vast majority of the population in the Americas, Europe and Asia lived and worked on the land.

1776 was the year that the Scottish enlightenment economist, Adam Smith, published his still famous book, *The wealth of nations*, which provided the theoretical and empirical foundation for the ending of feudal and semi-feudal restrictions on growth and prosperity.¹ Smith argued that the wealth of nations should and could be built on free markets for buying and selling, with minimal government interference and with the ending of state-controlled monopolies. Such freedom would enable increased 'division of labour' to maximise productivity and the accumulation of capital. The rise of US capitalism has personified Smith's expectations - but it has also starkly revealed the faultlines and contradictions in the capitalist mode of human social organisation.

The rise (and fall?) of US capitalism can be divided into four historical periods:

(1) 1776: independence from British colonial power and the expansion of the US empire;

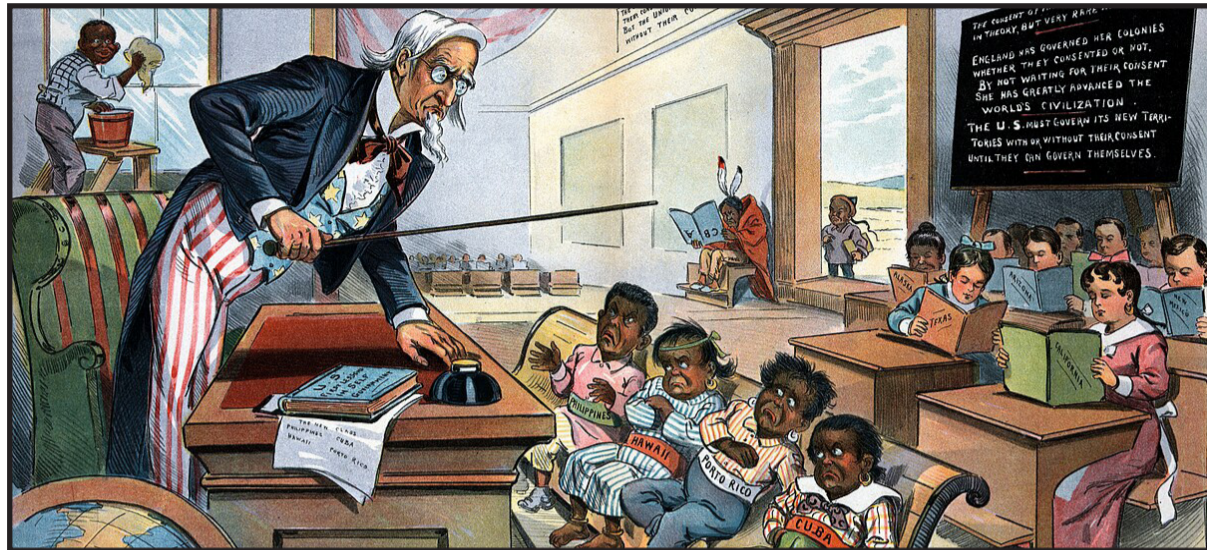
(2) 1861-64: the Civil War that forced the submission of the slaveholding states to federal power and accelerated industrialisation and capitalist markets throughout the continent, along with the expansion of the US empire into the Americas and the Pacific;

(3) 1941-45: after two world wars, US global hegemony was confirmed and the international rules of trade, order and institutions came under US control;

(4) from 1991: the cold war ended, as the Soviet Union collapsed, but ironically, far from the US sustaining total global dominance (with the 'end of history'), US imperialism went into relative decline, both economically and politically, even if it is still by far the most powerful nation on the planet.

Divisions

The Founding Fathers, who signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4 1776, did so first and foremost to obtain 'home rule' from Britain, in order to gain specific political and economic rights denied by the British crown (which had also denied such rights to Ireland at the same time).



Louis Dalrymple's caricature shows Uncle Sam lecturing four children, labelled Philippines, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, in front of children holding books labelled with various US states and territories. A black boy is washing windows, a native American sits separate from the class, and a Chinese boy is outside the door

But the Founding Fathers in no way wanted a systemic restructuring of society.

Led primarily by the wealthy planter and mercantile elite, their goal was to eliminate British interference, while preserving established social hierarchies and property traditions. However, to succeed in their aims, the elite had to enlist the support of the poor farmers and the multitude in the coastal towns. So, as in any such rebellion or revolution, the War of Independence developed into class divisions within the 'national' struggle for freedom from British rule. Apparently, "all men are created equal" (of course, not women, not slaves or indentured white servants, not native Americans), said the Founding Fathers. So even in a highly unequal society that was the 13 colonies, some encouragement had to be given to the poor multitude.

Indeed, from the Boston Tea Party in 1773 through Yorktown in 1781 and the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the Revolution became a civil war. By 1780, about a third of the roughly 2,100,000 free citizens of the British colonies that became the 'United States' would have described themselves, with mixed idealism and self-interest, as Patriots. But another third stayed loyal to the British empire. Threatened with being tarred and feathered, having their property seized, about 60,000 of these roughly 700,000 Loyalists decamped to Canada or Britain.

The final third of the colonists occupied the uneasy middle. They were not willing to pledge their lives and fortunes to a bloody, collective war with the British empire, but neither would they sustain a fierce and also bloody loyalty to the British king and country.

Historians calculate that 25,000 to 70,000 Patriots died directly because of the war, killed by camp fever and musket fire. Some 7,000 Loyalists did too. An additional 130,000 Americans were killed by a spike in smallpox that the movement of populations during the war exacerbated. The American revolution was hell. Nearly as many died relative to the population as in the civil war of the 1860s: ie, almost four percent of the free population. By comparison, about one-third of one percent of Americans died in World War II. The revolution for 'democracy and independence' was a bloody business.

The struggle for independence became a war and a civil war first because of the deteriorating economic situation for the British empire after it

managed to defeat the French in the so-called Seven Years War of 1756-63, in which many colonists and native Americans fought. From the early 1600s, British settlers in North America had relied on overseas trade for their wellbeing. Trade furnished the colonists with clothing and blankets, nails and firearms, cooking implements and metal goods, and other tools and materials that could not be produced locally. Without these imports, their standard of living might have suffered so much that they would not have stayed.

But after the French war, booty from the French and revenues from British troops stationed in North America disappeared. Interest rates soared, forcing real estate prices ever downward, eventually to a half or even a third of their highest point. The colonists appealed to the 'mother country' for aid, but at every turn, the British crown and its parliament in Westminster looked to get the colonists to pay for the war against France.

First came onerous trade restrictions that cramped intra- and intercolonial trade. Cut off from traditional trading partners abroad, the colonists could not earn sufficient foreign exchange (coin) abroad. Next came the Currency Act, which made it unlawful for the colonies to issue any more fiat paper money. Then came the straw that broke the camel's back: the Stamp Act, which required colonists to pay a tax on any printed material (encompassing everything from legal documents to newspapers). The Patriotic elite roused the population to oppose 'taxation without representation' - somewhat ironic, given that back in Britain much of the people had to pay taxes decided by a parliament that elected members from just 1% of British adults.

The call for 'democracy' sounded the bell for independence. In January 1776, Thomas Paine, a poor artisan who had immigrated from Britain, wrote a pamphlet called *Common sense*, presenting in an exciting and impressive fashion the case for an independent republic, not just representation under the British crown. It was a massive best seller (100,000 copies) and spread across all classes and especially to the rank and file in the Patriot army.

But democracy in Paine's sense was not the aim of the Founding Fathers. Throughout the war against the British, they were determined to ensure that any radical democratic movements and proposals were

suppressed. Military leader George Washington, one of the richest men in the colonies, with thousands of slaves and many acres of land, tried to stop the recruitment of slaves to the army - the British were offering freedom to them if they joined the crown's ranks. Eventually, Washington had to give way. But he still crushed any rebellions and mutinies in the army, just as Oliver Cromwell had done in the 1640s English Civil War. In America, the most famous of these attempts to turn independence into economic equality was the so-called Shays Rebellion in 1780, after the war against the British had been won.

Such rebellions frightened the merchant and slave-holder elite and encouraged them to ensure that the loose confederation of colonial states was solidified, using a constitution deliberately designed to curb any democracy for the many over the few. It was modelled on the ancient Roman republic, which had a constitution designed to ensure power rested with the aristocratic landowning elite through so-called 'checks and balances'. There was to be a president with executive powers to replace the British monarch (the revolution's military leader, Washington, was elected by acclamation as the first). And there was to be a Senate composed of the elite to ensure no anti-business, anti-slavery and anti-land majority would hold sway. The president would be elected not by a mass adult vote, but by an 'electoral college' that strengthened the slave states and weakened the most populous states in the north. And there would be a Supreme Court of appointed-for-life judges that could block any measures that were 'unconstitutional'.

Those who looked to rebel against this 'stitch-up' of democracy were greeted with vicious repression or the cry, "Go west, young man" - ie, go beyond the Blue Ridge mountains to seek your fortune. From the very beginning of the revolution, both the elite and the multitude in the colonies looked to gain lands in a massive continent as the way to increase their prosperity. The British had blocked this and assigned those lands to the native American nations. With the defeat of the British, the flood to the west began - acting as a powerful safety valve against rebellion within the ex-colonies. The native American tribal nations were subject to relentless policies of genocide (similar to what is now being repeated in Gaza), with their populations decimated and their food sources (buffalo) annihilated.

Meanwhile, slavery in the southern colonies was cemented, despite the British attempts to end it globally.

After the revolution, economic power remained firmly in the hands of the slave-holding elite. Large landowners and merchants constituted 1% of the population, but held nearly half the wealth of the country and had enslaved one-seventh of the population. The American revolution was thus a 'bourgeois revolution' (with some 'peculiar' institutions left intact - requiring further action later). Yes, the revolution had to mobilise the poorer classes to succeed, but only to establish an independent capitalist state that would eventually rule the world.

Transition

It took some time after independence and the defeat of the British before the new economy of the United States got going. War continued on and off with the British over Canada and through a short British invasion and the destruction of Washington DC in 1812.

During this period, trade was volatile, rising to over 20% of GDP after the revolution and then collapsing during the subsequent war with the British. After that though, the US economy started to expand fast. Trade as a share of gross domestic product stayed low only because domestic output rocketed, as agricultural production exploded.

The US administration under its early presidents encouraged the settlement of the west and south at the expense of the native Americans, who were driven further and further west. The US expanded its territory by purchasing Louisiana from the French in 1803. With the Indian Removal Act of 1830, native Americans were forced to relocate, leading to the devastation of thousands in a 'Trail of Tears'.

In 1823, president James Monroe proclaimed his famous 'doctrine' that the western hemisphere would be under American control and the old former European colonial powers were not welcome.

In 1846, the US expanded its territory by signing the Oregon Treaty with the British to allow settlements and went even further by launching a war against Mexican control of Texas, eventually taking over vast areas in the south-west right to the Pacific Coast.

But there was one important factor holding back the United States from becoming a major industrial and trading nation: slavery in the southern states. When they tried to secede from the Union, the north launched a long and bitter war lasting nearly five years. But the resulting victory for the industrial north with its much larger 'free' working population laid the basis for a huge expansion of output. The Civil War shifted political power to the Republican Party from the north, which instituted high tariffs to raise revenue and to protect domestic industry.

The US economy became more diversified, with a growing manufacturing sector that reduced the nation's dependence on imported manufactured goods. By the end of the Civil War, the US had already become the largest capitalist economy in the world in GDP terms. In addition, the advent of the railway boom, which culminated in the transcontinental rail connecting east to west in 1869, was a huge step forward for domestic production and trade.

By 1900, US per capita income exceeded that of the then current (but

declining) hegemonic power, the UK. So, in just one century, the American capitalists had overtaken their former masters.

Beginning in the 1850s, the United States took its first steps toward developing an overseas empire in the Pacific. In 1867, the US bought Alaska from the Russians. Trade with Asia now became possible and the US elite began to open their eyes to gaining control of the vast Pacific Ocean.

The new empire was driven by economic interests. When there was a commodity boom, entrepreneurs raced into Pacific islands to set up shop, creating farms and plantations or staking claims for mining. The first islands were annexed in the 1850s and 1860s, starting with Midway. By the 1870s, American citizens were effectively running the Hawaiian government, steering the course toward annexation. And by the 1880s the US government was directly administering Samoa and behaving like a traditional imperial power in cooperation with the British and German governments.

The late 19th century marked a transition from a continental nation to an established global power, largely galvanised by the Spanish-American War of 1898. Using the excuse of an unexplained explosion of the battleship, USS Maine, in February 1898, the US declared war on Spain and quickly took over Cuba. Soon after, the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico were occupied and the independent Republic of Hawaii was annexed by the US.

The construction of this American empire was riddled with racism from the start. For some in the elite, building an empire in the Pacific was a problem because it could lead to "polluting and weakening our system of government by taking to our bosom a horde of Asiatic savages".² Others favoured a missionary approach. American control was necessary because Filipinos are "children utterly incapable of self-government", in the words of Senator Albert Beveridge.³ The US role in the Philippines was a "divine mission" to establish a "system where chaos currently reigns". Imperialists doubted the capacity of the Philippine people for self-government; they would "need the training of fifty or a hundred years before they shall even realize what Anglo-Saxon liberty is".

Although the US economy expanded throughout the 19th century, it did not do so in a steady and harmonious way. The 'boom and bust' cycle of capitalist accumulation operated, engendering a long depression from 1883-97. Even as late as 1880, nearly half of all American workers were still farmers, with only about 15% working in manufacturing.

But in the next 40 years that ratio was reversed. By the 1920s, the US was the world's manufacturing powerhouse and financial centre. The American working class was now the largest in the world. But, as 'going west' was no longer an option if you were unemployed or on low wages, trade unions were formed and class struggles intensified in the cities.

The weakening and destruction of large parts of Europe and Asia during the two world wars put the US firmly in the driving seat of global capital. In 1945, the US was dominant in manufacturing, finance and military power (only the Soviet Union could rival the latter). The US controlled the post-war institutions set up at the Bretton Woods meeting in the US that established the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The world entered a period of 'Pax Americana'.

As the term suggests, it was world 'peace', only on America's terms: the cold war continued against the Soviet Union; and the US intervened to stop leftist governments gaining power,

not only across South America, but also in the Middle East and in Asia - not always with success, as the war in Vietnam proved. Indeed, that ignominious defeat coincided with the beginning of an underlying decline in America's economic power: first with the rise of European industry from the ashes of war; and then with Japan's meteoric industrial revival in the 1970s. The dollar began to lose its almost total dominance in world markets and was devalued in 1971, as US manufacturing declined and was forced to shift overseas to find cheaper labour. The Vietnam disaster led to the economy running trade deficits and the US government running budget deficits for the first time since World War II. The profitability of capital had begun to fall and the 'Golden Age' of US investment was over.

The fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s was supposed to give US imperialism complete control forever. It would be 'the end of history'. Ironically, it was just the start of US decline in the face of an even stronger new economic rival: China.

Decline

In just some 200 years since winning independence from the British empire in 1776, the United States had become the most successful capitalist state, leading all the major economies in the world in national output, income per head, productivity of labour, financial dominance and military power.

That total hegemony in global capitalism was not to last. The Marxist theory of capitalist crises argues that, as capitalists invest more and more into technology in order to lower the costs of production and boost the productivity of labour, the overall profitability of capital will tend to fall, because profits come only from labour. If investment in labour power declines relative to the investment in plant, equipment and technology, profitability will eventually fall. And so it did with a vengeance from the mid-1960s, generating the first simultaneous international slump in 1974-75, followed by the deep manufacturing double recession of 1980-82.

During this period, the first signs of a decline in US hegemony were exposed. Europe's industry - based on cheap labour, American credit and the latest technology - started to gain a global market share from US industry. In the 1970s, Japan also began to eat away at US manufacturing's global output and export share. Politically, America's defeat in Vietnam and the fall of Saigon weakened their international dominance. Throughout the 1960s, the US current account surplus was gradually eroded until, by the early 1970s, it registered a deficit. The US began to leak dollars globally *not only* through outward investment, but also through an excess of spending and imports, as domestic manufacturers lost ground.

The US became reliant for the first time since the 1890s on external finance for the purposes of spending at home and abroad. By the 1980s, the US was building up net external liabilities that have now reached 90% of GDP.

In 1971, president Richard Nixon announced that the US was going to devalue the dollar and end its peg to the gold price. In effect, this was the end of the Bretton Woods agreement that had established a framework committing all to fixed exchange rates for their currencies and set in terms of the US dollar. With Nixon's announcement, the US abandoned Bretton Woods and, with it, the whole post-war Keynesian-style international currency regime.

The fall in profitability in the major economies, the accompanying stagflation in the 1970s and the slumps of the early 1980s led to a complete change of economic policy.

From the 1980s, during the so-called neoliberal period, capitalists ended macroeconomic management and moved to cutting public spending, privatising state assets, deregulating finance, weakening trade union power and, above all, switching manufacturing out of the US into Asia, in particular China, to take advantage of cheap labour.

US imperialism had seen the collapse of the Soviet Union, but in the 1990s it was losing relatively in trade and output to other major economies, particularly China. Europe had integrated further into the euro zone and widened towards eastern Europe, using the cheap labour supply available there. And the Asian tigers leapt forward with new technologies. China took over as the manufacturing and trading global power (partly driven by US multinationals, which had located there in the 1980s).

Neoliberal policies helped to raise the profitability of capital in the major economies, including the US, for nearly two decades, during which the new technologies of computers, digital software and eventually the internet were applied to boost productivity. But again, Marx's law of profitability eventually exerted its downward pressure and by the end of the 20th century, all the major economies struggled to sustain the economic growth rates they had achieved in the 1990s (let alone the 1960s). They entered what I have called a 'long depression', particularly after the global financial crash and the ensuing 'great recession' of 2008-09. In the first three decades of the 21st century, the major economies have experienced slowing economic growth, falling investment and productivity growth, along with the two largest slumps in the 250 years of US capitalism: 2008-09 and 2020.

But at 250 years old, the United States still generates 26% of global GDP and is home to 59 of the world's top 100 firms. The US dollar is still the main reserve currency internationally. Roughly 90% of global foreign exchange transactions involve a dollar leg; approximately 40% of global trade outside the US is invoiced and settled in dollars; and almost 60% of US dollar banknotes circulate internationally as a global store of value and medium of exchange. Over 60% of global foreign exchange reserves held by foreign central banks and monetary authorities remain denominated in dollars.

Having said that, the underlying relative decline in US competitiveness has gradually worn away the strength of the US dollar against other currencies, as the supply of dollars outstrips demand internationally. Since Nixon's momentous announcement, the US dollar has declined in value against other currencies by 20% - a good barometer of the relative decline of the US economy.

Dangerous rival

In the 21st century the US empire now faces a rival much more dangerous to its hegemony than the Soviet Union, Japan or Europe. China began expanding its industrial capacity in the 1980s, then ramped it up on a large scale in the 2000s, surpassing the United States in the share of global manufacturing output in 2010. China is now the world's manufacturing superpower. Its production exceeds that of the nine next largest manufacturers combined.

It took the US the better part of a century to rise to the top in manufacturing, while China took about 15 or 20 years. In 1995, China had just 3% of world manufacturing exports. Now its share has risen to well over 30%. While China runs a surplus on payments and receipts with other countries of around 1%-2% of GDP a year, the US runs a current account deficit of 3%-4%.

All attempts to restrict China's expansion into tech products, semi-conductors, etc have miserably failed. China is catching up in the 'chip war' and has launched its own 'open source' AI models like DeepSeek that are seriously undercutting the likes of ChatGPT and Claude, America's expensive AI models. China also dominates the entire range of renewable energy manufacturing.

And China leads by far in the use of robots, with installations rising at 7% a year, while in the US they are falling by 9% a year. China now has more robots in industry than the rest of the world put together.

There is still a long way to go before the mighty US economy will be on its knees. It may have the largest net liabilities globally, but it can manage that because it is also the only country that can issue dollars - and the dollar is still the international currency for trade, investment and reserves. Trade surplus nations like Germany, Japan and China must use most of their dollar earnings to buy dollar assets. So the 'exorbitant privilege' of the dollar keeps the US empire ticking over.

Moreover, US investments abroad may be less *in value* than foreign investment into the US, creating the negative investment position, but foreigners earn less *income* on those US assets than US investors do on their foreign assets. So there is a net surplus in income for the US of at least 0.5% of GDP on average since 2008, to add to its domestic economy.⁴ The US has not yet reached a 'tipping point', where the size of its net liabilities to foreigners is so high that its net income surplus disappears.

In the 21st century, geopolitics increasingly boils down to a battle between a weakening hegemonic power, the US, and a rising economic giant, China. The US still dominates in military prowess, spending more on armed forces than the rest of the world put together. It runs nearly 800 foreign bases worldwide - while China has one. But, even here, the war in Iran has exposed the inability of the US military to impose its will over a third-level economy and state, which has no nuclear weapons (shades of Vietnam over 50 years ago).

For the US ruling elites, China is the ultimate enemy and threat to its global hegemony. That applies to both the 'Make America great again' wing supporting Trump in the White House and the 'globalists' in America's 'deep state' and 'neo-con' circles in government. The policy difference is that the Trumpists want to concentrate US power in the western hemisphere, with a view to taking on China across the Pacific, just as America did with Japan in the 1930s. For the Maga crowd, Europe can deal with Russia and Ukraine on its own, just as Israel can deal with the Middle East.

The globalists, on the other hand, still have serious ambitions to dominate globally. They want the war with Russia to continue until Moscow is brought to its knees and there is 'regime change'; and they aim to back Israel and participate militarily until Iran's regime falls. Trump vacillates between the two policies, currently swinging to the globalists over Iran. But both wings are agreed: China must eventually be 'dealt with'; it must be weakened economically and finally forced to accept western policies and control.

The US empire has no official 'emperor', although Trump is increasingly trying to establish himself as one, as he rides roughshod over Congress, the courts, financial rules and the electoral process. But the US empire is in trouble. This is why a significant section of America's ruling elite are prepared to accommodate Trump and his supporters in trying to 'make America great again': by ending international free trade

rules and resorting to protectionist tariffs; by sharply increasing military spending; and by cutting taxes for the rich and mega companies, while reducing healthcare and public services for the rest. So the rich get even richer and the rest get poorer.

Bleak outlook

No wonder Americans now have a bleak outlook on the nation's future after 250 years, with most saying the US has already seen its best days and a record-low number saying they are extremely proud to be Americans.

President Trump has the lowest approval level of any president, but he rolls on regardless towards the mid-term Congressional elections. He kicked off the 250th birthday weekend with an attack on what he called the "communist menace" in America, framing its supporters as "the enemy of July 4th, 1776". (He was speaking in the Black Hills, Dakota which the US government illegally seized from the Sioux nation in 1877 after Congress forced the tribe to cede land it had been guaranteed under treaty.)

Apparently, communism is a greater threat to American liberty than both world wars (including the defeat of Nazism) and the September 11 2001 terrorist attack (made by Islamic fanatics previously funded by the US to defeat Russia in Afghanistan). Trump argued that communists do not love god or religion and have no respect for law, justice, principle, tradition or god-given rights (looking in the mirror here).

"You can be loyal to Karl Marx or you can be loyal to America. You can be a communist or you can be a patriot. You cannot be both." Pledging to "vanquish communism quickly" and "send them into exile", he told a cheering Maga crowd: "We will send them quickly away, and we will continue to build our country bigger and better and stronger than ever before. America will never be a communist country."

The ancient Roman republic was the model adopted by the Founding Fathers for the US constitution. But its 'checks and balances' to share power were abandoned, when one of the elite achieved total power and Rome became an empire (with an emperor) around zero BC. The empire reached its pinnacle some 200 years later, but then began to decline through a combination of internal contradictions in its slave economy (no more slaves), hugely widening inequalities (land in the hands of an aristocratic elite) and externally from its weakening ability to police its empire from resistant forces (not least German tribes).

The same trends exist now for the US empire. Its capitalist economy is no longer a powerhouse of prosperous expansion; inequalities of income and wealth have never been so extreme in 250 years and are worsening. And the US has increasingly lost its power to police the world, as Vietnam, Iran, Ukraine and China show.

Rome took two centuries to decline and fall, but it will not be so long in the modern capitalist world. The US might yet become a 'communist country' well before the end of this century, or we shall all be driven into the dark ages, as the world was when the Roman empire collapsed - this time either by climate catastrophe or nuclear annihilation ●

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Notes

1. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2026/03/14/adam-smith-250-years.
2. Second session, 55th Congress, June 11 1898.
3. history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/APA/Historical-Essays/Exclusion-and-Empire/1898.
4. libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2026/05/honey-who-shrunk-the-u-s-income-surplus.

YOUR PARTY

Karie's clampdown and a mini-me

The botched suspension of three members of YP's central executive committee is yet another sign of suicidal control-freakery. But, says **Carla Roberts**, there is a general problem on the left when it comes to free speech

It is hard not to feel a touch of *Schadenfreude* at the current unravelling of Your Party. For many months, all those who had joined in the hope that YP could become a viable alternative to the rotten capitalist system had to watch from the sidelines, as Jeremy Corbyn's right-hand woman, Karie Murphy, strangled the life out of it.

She has been micro-managing every aspect of the party: stitching up the launch conference in Liverpool, where participants were chosen by sortition (rather than a democratic delegate system), with motions and amendments selected and written by herself; securing an outright majority for Corbyn's leadership faction, The Many, in the YP leadership elections; suppressing the nascent branches; and - the 'crowning glory' - proscribing leftwing groups and expelling a whole string of socialists.

The aim was always twofold: stop the left playing any role in YP and, once she succeeded with that, stop YP becoming anything more than a tightly controlled, top-down 'network'. A cushy retirement number for our dear leader, JC. But such tightly run bureaucracies are very fragile things, and sometimes all it takes is for somebody somewhere to make a daft mistake to bring down the whole house of cards, exposing that YP is, in fact, not even good as a network - it is little more than a Potemkin village.

On July 3, Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, Mel Mullings and Solma Ahmed were informed via email (signed by YP chair Jenn Forbes and secretary Dawn Aspinall) that they would be "suspended" from a meeting of the Your Party central executive committee (CEC) taking place on July 5, because there were "ongoing investigations" against them, to do with their having attended a meeting of the Socialist Federation.

The CEC comrades who were elected on the Grassroots Left slate have produced a formal complaint,¹ in which they make some obvious criticisms. For a start, comrade Wimborne-Idrissi was not even there and, contrary to what the email claims, did not advertise the event anywhere (she is quite critical of SF). And how come *they* were suspended for attending a meeting of the minuscule SF, which is not banned by YP, while the much bigger Socialist Workers Party welcomed, at its annual Marxism festival taking place the very next day, a certain Jeremy Corbyn?

The comrades also correctly state that, contrary to what the suspension email says, there is actually no "chair's authority under the CEC standing orders to regulate attendance at meetings where necessary" - Forbes and Aspinall just made that up (and then some).

Then all hell broke loose: when asked about the suspensions during Marxism, Corbyn publicly expressed his "surprise and anger". This was followed by the news that former MP Laura Smith (YP vice-chair) had allegedly resigned from the CEC altogether. Then an email from CEC member Jo Rust - who, just like Smith, was elected as part of Corbyn's slate - started making the rounds:

Dear CEC members, it is with huge regret that I write this email. But I feel strongly that it is needed. I have grown increasingly concerned about the direction, tone and style of our party and our CEC meetings. There appears to be no opportunity or option to express concern or dissent. I have actually felt that this is a popularity contest with one



Never wanted a political party

'side' over another. I didn't join YP and work to get on the CEC for this. As a result, I am proposing a vote of no confidence for our chair and our secretary and wish to see them removed from their posts. I have no desire to hold a position of authority myself. I only wish to provide an alternative and credible political party that our communities can vote for.

Best wishes, Jo.

We hear this email might have been leaked by Murphy's side to stop Rust's call for a 'vote of no confidence' dead in its tracks - but the opposite seems to be happening, with even supporters of The Many slate now publicly voicing their criticisms. Hannah Hawkins, another usually loyal CEC member elected on Corbyn's slate, has stated in a number of WhatsApp groups that "none of us were best pleased" about the suspensions. It is, of course, worth pointing out that neither Rust, Smith nor Hawkins made any public criticisms *before* this episode and we hear that they have been extremely quiet during CEC meetings too. Smith is part of the CEC officers' group, to which all decisions had been outsourced - a fact about which she certainly never complained. There is no resignation statement, no public explanation, no fightback. She has not posted anything on X since May, so perhaps her resignation is of a more personal nature (if she has indeed resigned).

The July 5 CEC meeting was hastily cancelled, and will probably take place this Sunday, no doubt after Murphy stepped in. But the damage has been done. The façade erected by Murphy and Corbyn is clearly starting to fall apart. It seems unlikely that it was Karie Murphy herself who was responsible for this particular mess and we are guessing that Forbes and Aspinall have misinterpreted some order coming down from mount Murphy. They are so used to operating without any kind of democracy and transparency that it probably looked, to them, like a sensible thing to do (CEC meetings are very tightly run by Forbes and are just a charade to rubberstamp the decisions taken by the officers' group - ie, Murphy). A fine example of bureaucratic overreach quickly spiralling out of control.

Incidentally, we do not believe for a minute that Corbyn is some kind of victim in this mess or that he is really opposed to the suspensions - only to the cack-handed way in which it was done. He entirely supports what Murphy is doing and has publicly justified the banning of socialist organisations from YP. In fact, he played a similar two-faced role when he was leader of the Labour Party, where he privately assured a number of suspended comrades around the Labour Representation Committee that they had his full solidarity (sometimes he even paid for their lawyers!) - only to watch silently as his general secretary, Jennie Formby, went on to expel them for 'anti-Semitism' and/or 'bringing the party into disrepute'.

Of course, we know that there are a number of disciplinary actions being brought against GL CEC members: Mel Mullings, for example, had a "hearing" on July 6 over her participation in SF. The case is now "resolved" and Mullings has been reinstated, we hear, no doubt because of pressure from above to make it so. The suspensions of comrades Solma Ahmed and Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, on the other hand, seem to have been quietly dropped without a hearing - or, more precisely, they have been overtaken by the looming vote of no confidence against Jenn Forbes and Dawn Aspinall. The investigations looking at the 'leaks' of various CEC documents might or might not still be ongoing.

Even the little democracy that still exists in YP is a problem for Murphy and Corbyn. They would rather run YP as they do the Peace and Justice Project, which generates a healthy income without the bother of having to spend time and effort manipulating and micro-managing. Much better to entirely get rid of those who continue to embarrass the leadership by publishing regular reports about CEC meetings.

The few branches that have been allowed to form are clearly so small and insignificant that they do not pose a danger - and many will struggle to hit the 20% quorum.² Some believe that this is a huge embarrassment to the leadership. We doubt it. It should be clear enough by now that they do not assess YP's 'success' by counting

how many branches it has or by how well it does in the polls.

The Corbyn clique never set out to build an active, members-led party, despite all the waffle. They were effectively bounced into setting up YP by Zarah Sultana, when she launched both the 'appeal for a party' in July 2025 (which was signed by over 800,000 people) and then, after Corbyn had continued to dither, the first membership portal, in September. He has no interest in building a party that organises an active working class in vibrant branches and with a healthy culture of discussion and debate - that kind of party would hold its leader to account. And Corbyn certainly does not believe in the need to build a revolutionary party. He thinks that socialism can be introduced by a vote in parliament - and therefore you need another Labour-type party. He is, at best, a left Labourite in exile. He would go back at the drop of a hat - but there is no chance that Andy Burnham could allow that without being eaten alive by the right inside and outside the Labour Party. Which means YP will continue to serve as a crumbling vanity project for Corbyn - at least until he retires to his allotment ...

Leaks

There are a number of *less obvious* points that should be made in the context of these suspensions. Any Your Party member who might want to check out the standing orders or the code of conduct agreed by their elected leadership would be hard pressed to find them anywhere. They are not published on the YP website.

Unfortunately, the GL CEC members have not published them either, after Karie Murphy stuck the label 'confidential' on these and other documents - despite the fact that they were railroaded through the CEC without any amendments or input from the GL members. They also have not published the full suspension letters sent to the three comrades - nor any details of the other 'investigations' that are being conducted. For example, we hear that the complaints against the GL members came from the officers' group itself. YP members really should be told all of this, openly and transparently. It's not as if the GL members have much to lose if we are told. They have been entirely sidelined

all the way through and cut out of the decision-making process anyway.

The CEC code of conduct and the standing orders at least have been published by 'other parties' - excellent.³ Members should, of course, be able to see *how their elected leadership* is meant to work!

We think it is a serious political mistake that most GL CEC members continue to stick to rules that are not only entirely anti-democratic, but are clearly being made up on the hoof. In the context of the tight bureaucratic control of YP, a commitment to total transparency and openness should have been the main weapon of GL. Instead, as we have reported, calls by *Weekly Worker* supporters to publish all documents have been met with accusations of "toxic bullying". This culminated in a proposal for a bizarre 'code of conduct',⁴ chiefly drafted by CEC member Candi Williams, which would have turned the idea of accountability entirely on its head: it would have made representatives from the groups making up the Grassroots Left accountable to the elected GL CEC members! Then there were attempts to hold GL meetings in closed session and ban reporting of GL meetings, led by the Workers Power outfit and its former long-time leader, Richard Gerrard.

Unsurprisingly, this bureaucratic attitude has killed Grassroots Left as a potential opposition platform. Nothing remains but an ill-tempered WhatsApp group of 100 or so people, many of whom just use it to argue that we should join the Greens and/or the Socialist Federation. CEC members elected on the GL slate basically do their own thing. They produce slightly dull, factual reports of CEC meetings and publish *some* documents, but there never was a collective fightback or active intervention in YP. A couple of them are indeed involved in the Socialist Federation to one degree or another, but the most prominent GL supporter, Zarah Sultana, is staying well clear of that, and understandably so.

In an attempt to 'hoover up' what remains of the left around YP, the SF method consists of brushing differences under the carpet. For example, SF contains people in leading positions with *very* different views on the 'trans question' - that would not

be a problem if the issue had been discussed. But, no, it has not even come up yet - this particular timebomb is simply being ignored. Ditto the question of social imperialism: the only organisations properly involved, as far as we can tell, are Workers Power and Anticapitalist Resistance, who both want Keir Starmer and Andy Burnham to send *more weapons and more financial support* to Ukraine's president Zelensky. Again, this massive issue has not even been discussed. We presume there would be some opposition to this pro-imperialism, but who knows?

The SF founding conference heard a staggering 32 motions, all introduced with two-minute speeches! The three most popular motions in each of the two categories ('political statement' and 'structure') were then supposed to be amalgamated, on occasion forcing together political perspectives which are entirely incompatible. The mover of the motion which gathered most supporters, Olivia Presland, felt so strong-armed in this process that she withdrew entirely.

Unsurprisingly, attendance has fallen sharply after that first meeting, from 120 (which *The Guardian* for some reason blew up to a fictional 250 people) to just 80 at the second conference on June 28 (with around 50-60 actually voting). It was rather hilarious watching speakers boasting how the federation will launch this or that "mass working class campaign" - for example, on the cost of living - while a quick glance at the numbers, political diversity and age range in the Zoom meeting told a very different story altogether.

Worse, SF has continued the same anti-democratic culture of Grassroots Left (and Your Party itself, for that matter): it has barred from its meetings two comrades who have committed the crime of sharing in a WhatsApp group the transcript of the first conference⁵ (which was open to anybody who clicked a button to agree with their minimalist 'Points of unity'⁶). This is a terrible culture, and the left will get nowhere if we do not start to embrace openness, transparency and democracy.

Bad words

Sadly, the same bureaucratic culture has now stopped the Socialist Education and Debate Association (SEDA) dead in its tracks. We previously reported positively about SEDA - an initiative by Alex Green (formerly of the Spartacist League) and leftwing author Tony Collins. Their draft constitution, which they wanted to present to a founding meeting on July 16, stated that "its goal is to increase the understanding of international socialist principles, programmes, strategy and tactics by a structured but free exchange of information and views, where controversy is welcome as an aid to clarity"⁷ (our emphasis).

While we would question why a debate and education association needs a long and complex constitution, we very much welcomed these aims - they stand in stark contrast to how much of left organises. SEDA looked very much like an antidote to SF's method of ignoring differences and cutting debate short, for example. We welcomed it as a potentially useful tool to overcome the sect culture of much of the left, where you can either shut up if you disagree with the leadership line or you have to split.

However, it seems that SEDA has stumbled at the first hurdle - and before it has even launched, which is quite a feat. In a small organising meeting of about 15 people on June 24, which was planning the July 16 launch, comrade Ian Spencer outlined his plans for an education series on the ABC of Marxism, during which he proposed to tackle the question of 'Marx and racism'. As

part of that, he was going to examine the famous charge that both Marx and Engels were racist towards Jews and black people. Comrade Spencer was going to investigate if they *really* did express deep racial and anti-Semitic prejudices, as is often claimed by bourgeois commentators.

In that context, he explained that he wanted to look at the five or six famous instances when Marx used the words "nigger" and "negro" in his private correspondence to Engels. There is also the famous essay, *On the Jewish question*, his critique of Bruno Bauer and the way fake radicals deflect immediate demands for equality. There are passages in the essay which, taken out of context, certainly lend themselves to be misinterpreted as Marx expressing deep anti-Semitism:

Let us not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion, but let us look for the secret of his religion in the real Jew. What is the secular basis of Judaism? Practical need, self-interest. What is the worldly religion of the Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly god? Money. Very well then! Emancipation from huckstering and money - consequently from practical, real Judaism - would be the self-emancipation of our time.

Few of Marx's many detractors have gone to the bother of explaining that Marx was actually *combatting* the malign anti-Semitism of Bruno Bauer and was advocating Jewish emancipation - something that becomes very clear from reading the text as a whole.⁸ We do not view Marx or any other historical figure as some kind of infallible, god-like being, who never made any mistakes - but clearly it is important to understand the political and historical context (including the fact that Marx's nickname was "Moor", in reference to his own dark skin colour and love for Shakespeare's *Othello* - a black man). Needless to say, we think these issues would make for an excellent education session and to sharpen our own intellectual weapons, so we can take on those who vilify Marx as racist.

Alas, right at the end of the SEDA organising meeting, a comrade started to object to the earlier use of the full word, "nigger". Ian immediately apologised "if I have caused any offence". A brief discussion ensued, where some comrades argued that we should only use "the n-word" in our meetings and should also not show the full word in written form. Quite a few people disagreed with that demand. For a start, we were going to produce reading lists - would we even be able to link to the original sources?

A few days later, on June 30, SEDA initiators Alex Green and Tony Collins put forward two motions, one of which proposed to ban "the use of racist epithets in historical/political references" - the other one sought to ban Ian Donovan and his group, Consistent Democrats (more on that below).

The first motion⁹ is honest enough *not* to repeat some of the more idiotic interpretations of the disagreement, which run along the lines of "some people just want to be allowed to go around making racist slurs". That silly charge entirely misses the point, needless to say. Of course, absolutely nobody was or is arguing in favour of participants at SEDA events being welcome to use - or being subjected to - racist insults (ditto misogynistic insults). We have seen many on the left hysterically repeat this nonsense, which really says more about them than anything else.

But there are other, serious problems with the motion. Take the second sentence: "The contemporary meaning and impact of terms is not determined by their historical meaning or the subjective intent of

a speaker." That is ahistorical and logical nonsense. Words constantly change, as does their meaning - which means they are *always* influenced by the previous meaning. There are many, many words in day-to-day language which have changed into their *exact* opposite, for example 'awesome' (which used to mean 'terrifying' or 'fear-inspiring'), or 'nice' (which meant 'foolish', 'ignorant' or 'silly' in Middle English).

This also applies to slurs. The word 'queer', for example - in the recent past a vicious insult directed at homosexuals - has been reclaimed and now serves as a proud moniker for anybody who is not boringly straight.

The n-word, horrible as it is, has long been reclaimed by the black community too, particularly in the US - as a way to protest against racism, obviously. A quick search on Spotify brings up dozens of musicians who use a version of the word in their name or as song titles. Among the most famous bands is N.W.A. (Niggas with Attitude), who have sold over 10 million albums in the US alone. Are we seriously to tell them that they should not be using the word?

Some have claimed that only black people should be allowed to use it. What about Asians? Who decides who is black enough to escape censorship? I am being facetious on purpose.

The authors of the motion and their supporters assign almost mystical powers to the full word - with those powers apparently not transferring when you say 'the n-word' instead. It is still the same word and everybody knows it. There is the Orwellian implication that, conversely, you could somehow stop racism by banning particular words. Of course you cannot. You can, however, still insult somebody with the sanitised version, depending on how you use it.

Therefore, the "intent of a speaker" very much matters. There is a huge difference between racially abusing somebody and examining the linguistic heritage or cultural and political context of a word. Take Mark Twain's 1884 classic, *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, in which he uses the n-word over 200 times - entirely on purpose, to realistically satirise and condemn the racism of the American south. A controversial 2011 edition replaced the word with 'slave' - which, in the meantime, has become equally loaded and controversial. Many people demand that the book should simply be banned. Perhaps our SEDA comrades would agree?

In this context, we are also troubled to read that the n-word is not the only one that the comrades want to ban: there are also "words of comparable effect". Richard Gerrard has already added 'Yid' to the list. Which presumably means that fans of Tottenham Hotspurs will also be banned, seeing as many of them continue to shout every week how they are members of the 'Yid army', despite efforts by management to discourage it. They do not 'hurl racist slurs' at each other, needless to say - they have been doing it exactly for the opposite reason, to loudly take the mickey out of the anti-Semitism thrown at the North London club. Elsewhere, he has argued for GL to ban the word 'Zio'. The list of very bad words is, quite literally, endless and we have been involved in organisations that wanted to ban colourful 'insults', such as 'twerp', 'idiot' and 'scab'.¹⁰

Offence

This whole sorry episode boils down to the idea that 'people would be offended', even if the bad words are examined entirely in the context of a historical source. And no doubt *some* black people (and many white lefties) *would* probably be offended. We are also guessing that many other people *would not*. It was certainly telling that the only person of colour who

was present in the SEDA organising meeting argued vehemently *against* banning the word: a rather symbolic reflection of the deep political problem at the heart of this attempt at censorship. It is extremely patronising, and is based on the idea that people have to be protected and mollycoddled by the enlightened few, who 'get it'.

But for real Marxists, socialism can only be the act of *self-liberation for the great majority by the great majority*. It follows that the working class cannot be approached or treated as little children who are incapable of handling awkward, upsetting and complicated questions - or who have to be protected from bad words.

This increasingly dominant culture of 'taking offence' is, when it comes down to it, a reflection of the growing replacement of class politics with identity politics among many sections of the contemporary left. This comes, by definition, with calls to restrict free speech, with cancel culture and lists of people who have to be 'no-platformed'. This is the total opposite of the kind of culture we need.

There are some comrades, like Barbara Duke from the International Bolshevik Tendency, who have gone to great length to explain that their opposition to both motions has "nothing to do with free speech". We disagree. This is very much about a *culture* of free speech, which is absolutely vital for the working class and socialism - such a culture stands in opposition to bans and censorship. Why? Frederick Engels explained the need for the working class to fight even for "bourgeois freedom, freedom of the press and rights of assembly and association. Without these freedoms it [the working class] will be unable to move freely itself; in this struggle it is fighting to establish the environment necessary for its existence, for the air it needs to breathe."¹¹

The ruling class is extremely well organised and uses many and various paid persuaders to stop the working class from rattling the status quo. Philosophers and journalists, bishops and historians, teachers and media commentators, evolutionary psychologists and establishment politicians - all combine to manufacture and disseminate a floodtide of half-truths, diversionary nonsense and cynical lies.

Marx never thought that freedom of expression was a perfect thing in itself - some kind of 'be all and end all'. Free speech is not the same as general freedom. But it is one of its preconditions. Free speech allows us to cast a sharp light on what lies under the surface of events and what is kept hidden away and is distorted by the state and the media. This is how we educate ourselves - including about our own history.

Bad people

Yes, the 'rose' of free speech comes with 'thorns' - there will always be people spreading sick, daft and crazy ideas, including on our own side. But banning them pushes these ideas underground, makes them fester. Instead, we should take them on and seek to defeat them.

That brings us neatly to Ian Donovan and his organisation, 'Consistent Democrats' (we are actually not sure if it has more than one member!). CD has been pre-emptively barred from joining SEDA, because some of Donovan's theories are clearly based on anti-Semitic stereotypes. Our opposition to this ban has been criticised as inconsistent and hypocritical. Didn't Labour Against the Witchhunt expel him and his former organisation, Socialist Fight? Ditto the Communist Platform in Left Unity?¹² Both times with the active support of CPGB members?

All true. But both times, we were in an entirely different situation. Left

Unity was a *party project*, and we needed to fight as a coherent faction, with principled politics. LAW was fighting against false and trumped-up charges of anti-Semitism levelled against socialists in the Labour Party. We could not have run an effective and coherent campaign if we ourselves had not been able to oppose *real* anti-Semitism.

Just like Norman Finkelstein, Donovan believes that Jewish "overrepresentation" amongst the bourgeoisie is a major factor, explaining imperialist backing for Israel. This is nothing new on the left - see August Bebel's critique of the 'socialism of fools' - and it certainly is not the view of just an insignificant niche either. Many people believe that the Israeli tail wags the US dog. Utter nonsense - as, likewise, is the opposite view, that Israel just does whatever Donald Trump says. Israel is an important ally and the attack dog of the US in the Middle East. Moshé Machover describes it as "a phenomenon which is well-known to dog breeders: if you train a Rottweiler to be an attack dog, it can sometimes be very difficult to control."¹³

SEDA, however, is not a party project - but an initiative to *educate and debate*. The best way to take on wrong ideas like those Donovan holds - and which are very widespread on the soft left - is to show how stupid they are, by exposing them, openly and in front of the class. Banning Donovan would give him more credence than his daft ideas deserve. We need to tell anybody who shares his views that those ideas may be persuasive, but are utterly confused, dangerous and explosive.

Banning ideas is entirely the wrong approach and the polar opposite of what Marx, Engels, Lenin and many other giants of our socialist history used to do: they painstakingly took on and dissected wrong and harmful ideas (including those on the left) in order to win people over to a principled programme for socialism. As socialists, that is one of our key tasks.

These are the types of arguments we were going to raise against the two motions at the July 16 launch of SEDA. Alas, on July 5, comrades Green and Collins simply closed down the various SEDA WhatsApp groups and announced that they will continue SEDA only with those people who "agree" with the "principle" of having this list of banned words and organisations. In other words, the question will not even be up for "debate" at the launch (should it ever take place). We suspect they feared that their motions might have been defeated and that their view is, in fact, that of a minority.

We hope they change their mind. We cannot think of a worse way to start a 'debate association'! ●

Notes

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IRAN

Funeral in Mashhad

The late Ali Khamenei is being transformed into a potent symbol. But, with his son and successor completely absent, continued sanctions and an on-off war, factional rivalries above may become more acute. Meanwhile, those below experience continued repression and worsening conditions. **Yassamine Mather** reports

Four months after supreme leader Ali Khamenei was killed at the outset of the US-Israeli war, the Iranian government has organised a mammoth funeral in his honour: beginning in Tehran on July 3-4, the carefully choreographed procession headed first to Qom, then Najaf and Karbala in Iraq, before finally returning to Iran and interment, on July 9, in Mashhad's Iman Riza Shrine.

The 86-year old Khamenei was targeted on February 28, the first day of the war. The US-Israeli military strike also killed members of his family, including his wife, and badly injured his son, and now successor, Mojtaba Khamenei. He must have recognised the danger, but took no special measures to protect himself. Becoming a martyr would have been a welcome prospect.

Ali Khamenei ruled Iran for 37 years with a style defined by ideological rigidity, hostility towards western powers and deep suspicion of anyone who opposed his version of the Islamic Republic. Before his assassination he had faced some of the largest anti-government protests in the history of the state. His government responded, as so often before, with brute force. Yet his death has allowed the Islamic Republic to present him as a unifying symbol. In this sense, his death may have made him more useful to the regime than if he had continued to live.

Many Iranians now willingly repeat the claim that he was the architect of Iran's military strategy in the US-Israeli war. Yet while there is no doubt that he played a crucial role in creating unity between the regime's rival factions, I remain somewhat sceptical about claims that he was a superb military thinker. However, the funeral is designed precisely to elevate him into whatever now serves the regime.

Clearly the funeral has seen a huge popular mobilisation. Some 15 million have turned out. And the political message is clear: Iran is undefeated, it wants to move away from the focus on bomb damage and peace talks and unite the population around avenging its martyred leader. Day after day Iranian television, radio and newspapers have focused almost entirely on the funeral. Tribute songs, documentaries, clerical speeches and religious programmes about Khamenei's life.

"We must stand up and scream for our nation's blood, so the whole world knows that the proud people of Iran will not stay quiet when they are bullied, and we will not forget the blood of our leader," wrote Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the head of parliament, in a state media message on July 2. Ghalibaf, who is also leading Iran's current talks with the US, called the funeral a historic achievement that would show the spirit of the Iranian people. The contradiction is striking: the same leadership that is negotiating retreat abroad is staging defiance at home.

The chosen dates were full of deliberate symbolism. Khamenei's body was displayed to the public on the same day the US celebrated its 250th Independence Day. Another major day coincides with an important Shia religious holiday. The funeral is taking place during Muharram, the month when Shia Muslims focus



Massive funeral procession moves through Tehran

intensely on sorrow, betrayal, sacrifice and martyrdom - especially the 7th-century death of Imam Hussein, from whom Khamenei claimed descent.

Iran has handled only two funerals of comparable size before: Ayatollah Khomeini's in 1989 and Qassem Soleimani's in 2020. Both descended into chaos, with deadly crowd crushes. During Khomeini's funeral, grieving crowds even tore the burial cloth from his coffin, forcing the authorities to rescue the body by helicopter. That history has made security and crowd control essential. Protecting Khamenei's body, controlling millions of mourners, hosting foreign delegations and coordinating ceremonies across five cities in two countries required a logistical operation larger than anything Iran has previously attempted, especially after a major war and months of unrest.

The first public viewing began at 6am local time on Saturday inside a giant mosque complex in Tehran. Firefighters installed more than 6,000 water sprayers above the crowd to keep people cool in the July heat. Tehran's main airports were closed during the funeral, and the government has declared national holidays in the cities through which the coffin travelled.

Tehran, a city of around 17 million people, experienced its largest traffic control plan ever. Private cars were banned from the funeral route, hundreds of parking areas were opened, mobile bakeries and emergency services deployed, and the government asked ordinary citizens to open their homes to visitors.

Taking Khamenei's body into Iraq carries a deliberate political and religious message. It shows that Iran sees itself as a Shia power whose authority extends beyond national borders. Khamenei's followers - Shias who consider him 'Marjae Taghliid' (a religious guide who should be imitated), live not only in Iran, but also in Iraq, Pakistan, Lebanon, Bahrain and elsewhere. The Iraqi processions are therefore meant to present the funeral as an international event rather than merely an Iranian one.

Government officials have claimed that some 900 foreign reporters covered the event. Iranian state media placed great emphasis on the foreign leaders and representatives who attended. In reality, aside from the leaders of Georgia and Pakistan, as well as Russia's deputy security chief, few major international figures came. Western countries were not invited.

During the first day, the regime

chose carefully selected Quranic verses to suit the different foreign delegations. They appeared to signal how the regime viewed each country or movement: loyalty and steadfastness for Hamas and Hezbollah, martyrdom for Iraq's Hashd al-Shaabi, divine victory for Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Qatar's neutrality framed as dependence on god. There were also similar supportive, or critical Quranic messages, for China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan and Egypt.

The biggest question hanging over the event was the absence of Mojtaba Khamenei. Government officials try to present him as fully recovered and actively involved in running the country, including the current negotiations with the US. Yet there are obvious doubts about his health, his authority and who is really running the government. His absence from a small private funeral for his own wife earlier this week increased speculation.

The Iranian military pointedly warned enemies not to 'make any mistakes' during the funeral. The foreign minister has also said that Iran would immediately retaliate against any renewed threat to its leaders. This warning followed the Israeli defence minister's public statement that Mojtaba Khamenei was next on Israel's target list. The funeral is therefore not only an act of mourning: it is also a theatre of deterrence, succession, anxiety and unresolved power struggles.

Despite the government's effort to turn the funeral into a display of unity, strength and loyalty, many ordinary citizens appear indifferent or exhausted. One Tehran resident bitterly complained that they could not even buy petrol because the lines were too long.

But the Islamic Republic remains in place. The government still functions, the security and military institutions are active, and the regime's legal framework has not changed. At the same time, recent developments have fuelled speculation about shifts in the style of governance, the role of the leadership, the decision-making process and the distribution of power within the political structure. The central question is no longer simply whether the regime has survived. It is whether the Islamic Republic remains a system with a single centre of decision-making, or whether it has become a constellation of competing power centres.

The first reality revealed by the war and Khamenei's death was not

the fragility of the Islamic Republic, but the durability of the class state he helped consolidate. The constitution, the doctrine of Velayat-e Faqih, the Guardian Council, the network of appointed and elected institutions and above all the military-security apparatus, particularly the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, have continued to function. This demonstrates that the Islamic Republic was never reducible to the rule of one man: it is a historically formed apparatus of class domination - clerical, military, bureaucratic and capitalist at once.

The regime is therefore not merely an ideological dictatorship: it is a capitalist state shaped by sanctions, militarisation, privatisation, corruption and the systematic subordination of the working class. Its ideological language is religious; but its social content is *class rule*.

Life and times

During the 1960s and 1970s, the young Ali Khamenei operated primarily as a ground-level activist, underground organiser and regional operative within the anti-Shah religious opposition. He was first arrested in Birjand for propagating anti-regime messages from the pulpit, and later that year for helping organise demonstrations around the June 1963 '15 Khordad' uprising.

In 1964, Khamenei cut short his advanced seminary studies in Qom and returned to the city of his birth, Mashhad, to care for his ailing father. In Mashhad, he taught Islamic classes and lectured on the *Quran* and the *Nahj al-Balagha*. His approach was explicitly political: he used religious exegesis to criticise social and political conditions under the monarchy. These lectures became popular among university students and revolutionary youth.

Khamenei's rhetoric reflected broader anti-imperialist currents of the 1960s and 1970s. Influenced by figures such as Jalal Al-e-Ahmad and Ali Shariati, his circles fused traditional religious opposition with third-worldist, anti-western and anti-colonial critiques. By 1967, surveillance by the Savak secret police forced him to move his classes into clandestine gatherings in mosques and private homes.

As opposition to the monarchy shifted towards armed resistance in the early 1970s, Savak targeted intellectual and clerical figures who provided an ideological foundation

for radicalised youth. Between 1963 and 1975, Khamenei was arrested six times. His most testing time perhaps occurred in 1975 when he was confined to the Joint Anti-Sabotage Committee prison in Tehran. He spent months under harsh interrogation and in solitary confinement.

After his release, the Shah's regime banned him from teaching or preaching. When he continued with underground networking activity, Savak arrested him again in late 1976 and sentenced him to three years of internal exile. That exile was cut short in late 1978, as Pahlavi began losing control amid nationwide strikes and mass demonstrations. Released ahead of schedule, Khamenei returned to Mashhad to help direct local revolutionary committees. Recognising his record as an organiser who had remained inside the country through repression, he was appointed to the underground Council of the Islamic Revolution, as the monarchy was collapsing in early 1979.

Khamenei is often portrayed by Israeli and western media as an illiterate old mullah. In fact he was an unusually committed reader, whose interests went well beyond religious texts. He presented reading as spiritually essential and had read large multi-volume works in his spare moments. His literary tastes were broad. He reportedly admired Russian classics, including Sholokhov, Tolstoy, and Chekhov. He was also an admirer of French writers such as Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas and Romain Rolland, and had read and cited English-language writers such as Jane Austen, John Steinbeck and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Persian poetry was another major interest, especially that of Allama Iqbal. He was a friend and admirer of Iran's well known contemporary poet, Shafiee Kadkani, until 1979. However, the two fell out after the Islamic revolution.

His non-fiction reading focused heavily on politics, history, science and revolution. He often used western critical works to support arguments about negative US cultural and political influence. He was also interested in the history of science and the transfer of knowledge between Islamic and European civilisations, using such themes to encourage Iranian scientific self-confidence. A major part of his reading was devoted to Iran-Iraq War memoirs and revolutionary history. He frequently wrote commendations for war memoirs and treated revolutionary novels and histories as case studies in how revolutions unfold.

There is a story, which someone recently told me, that captures the contradiction of his political life. In early 1970s, Khamenei was reportedly in a house in Tehran, when Masoud Ahmadzadeh, a well-known Marxist and founding member of the Fedayeen anti-shah guerrillas, arrived while on the run. It was raining, and Ahmadzadeh took refuge in the house for a couple of hours before continuing his escape. Khamenei later pointed to the wet patch on the floor left by Ahmadzadeh's soaked clothes and praised him, saying that the ground he had touched should be valued. Yet decades later, Khamenei presided over a regime that executed thousands of Marxists, presumably because their opposition to the Islamic Republic was treated as part of a '*fitna*' (plot or conspiracy). The revolutionary who

could once admire the courage of a Marxist militant became the dictator of a state that crushed Marxists, workers and dissidents of every kind.

Contrary to the claims of bourgeois commentators, often echoed by sections of the Iranian left, the central problem with Khamenei was not his opposition to what he called the "arrogance of the west". Nor was it his hostility towards the US or Israel. The fundamental contradiction lay in his failure to recognise that meaningful opposition to western domination requires fighting capitalism itself. Although he never employed the term, "imperialism", preferring an Islamic vocabulary of resistance, genuine anti-imperialism cannot be separated from opposition to capitalist social relations and private ownership of the means of production.

In practice, Khamenei combined rhetorical denunciations of western domination with policies that facilitated the almost complete privatisation of previously nationalised industries. He endorsed the neoliberal economic programmes pursued by successive governments, including subsidy removal, affecting the poor, in pursuit of reforms broadly consistent with international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. These policies, not rhetoric, generated deepening poverty, entrenched corruption, widening inequality and growing domestic opposition.

Hegemony

The regime's continuity should not be confused with stability. The exclusion of parliament from major political decisions, including negotiations with the US and the signing of the war-pause memorandum of understanding, shows a further hollowing out of formal institutions. While the legal architecture remains in place, power has moved more openly towards unelected institutions: the Supreme National Security Council, the IRGC, intelligence bodies and offices where military, clerical and capitalist interests converge.

The same dynamic is visible in foreign policy. The Islamic Republic's approach towards the US and its regional proxy forces remains embedded in a strategic framework developed over decades. This framework is tied to the regime's material interests: regional leverage, military-security expansion, sanctions-based accumulation, smuggling networks, reconstruction contracts, arms flows and the political economy of the IRGC.

What is often called Iran's 'Axis of Resistance' has always been more pragmatic than purely ideological. It combines religious solidarity with political calculation. It has functioned as a regional security strategy, a means of projecting power and a mechanism through which sections of the Iranian ruling class, especially the military-security bourgeoisie, expand their influence and resources.

The post-war crisis, economic exhaustion, growing domestic anger and weakening of Tehran-backed forces have caused the regime to engage in talks with Washington. But this was not a principled transformation of foreign policy: it was a tactical retreat under pressure, aimed at preserving the state, stabilising the ruling bloc and preventing the crisis from becoming revolutionary.

This is evident in the written message attributed to Mojtaba Khamenei regarding negotiations with the US. Like his father, he attempted to preserve ideological purity, while avoiding direct political responsibility. This is the familiar language of Bonapartist manoeuvre: retreat while declaring resistance, compromise while staging defiance, preservation of the state while denying the scale of its problems. The regime bends tactically only in order to defend the strategic foundations of its rule.

The same applies to the economy. There is no serious break from the existing model. State and quasi-state institutions remain dominant, the IRGC's economic empire remains intact and policy-making remains trapped in crisis management. The regime does not seek emancipation from dependency, poverty, inflation, unemployment or corruption: it seeks only to manage these contradictions in ways that preserve capital accumulation for the ruling bloc. There is no reform project here: only the reorganisation of exploitation under permanent crisis.

While the regime has shown tactical flexibility abroad, it has shown little meaningful flexibility at home. Domestic repression remains the central pillar of its survival. Reports of continued arrests, rising death sentences and intensified crackdowns show that the machinery of coercion remains fully operational.

The regime's greatest fear is not merely foreign pressure: it is the political entrance of workers, women, youth, oppressed nationalities, teachers, pensioners, students and the urban poor as an organised social force. For this reason, the Islamic Republic can tolerate factional

quarrels within the ruling elite more easily than independent organisation from below. Repression is therefore not a temporary policy: it is the concentrated expression of the state's class character.

Under Ali Khamenei, speeches, televised appearances, crisis interventions, religious ceremonies and direct ideological messaging were part of the regime's mechanism of domination. He did not simply rule administratively: he constantly reproduced the ideological authority of the state.

Even in the Iranian year 1404 (beginning in March 2025), when wartime and security conditions limited his public presence, Khamenei delivered at least 39 speeches and televised messages. His authority was produced through repetition, visibility and command. Mojtaba Khamenei, by contrast, has remained unseen and unheard. His supporters chant, "To protect the nation, obey the leader's command", yet the leader who is supposed to issue the final command remains politically absent.

What exists in his place are numerous written statements - abstract, defensive and bureaucratic. These statements invoke cohesion, preservation of the regime, resistance and security, but they do not present a coherent project of rule. They do not generate hegemony, mobilise society or resolve the contradictions of the ruling bloc.

This is not simply a communications problem: it is a crisis of political authority. Mojtaba Khamenei may have effectively inherited the office, but he has not yet inherited the ideological and institutional authority that allowed his father to discipline the regime's competing forces.

In this vacuum, conflicts within the hardline camp can become more visible, prolonged and difficult to contain. Disputes over negotiations with the US, wartime management and political positioning have spilled into Muharram eulogies, televised debates and factional attacks.

These conflicts do not yet amount to a full crisis, but they indicate that the old mechanism of elite discipline has weakened. The ruling bloc remains united against the masses, but it is increasingly divided over tactics, authority and responsibility for crisis management. This is a classic contradiction of authoritarian capitalist rule. When accumulation is stable and repression effective, elite conflicts can be managed behind closed doors. Under conditions of war, sanctions, social discontent and economic dislocation, factional competition becomes harder to contain. The Islamic Republic remains intact, but its internal contradictions are becoming harder to conceal beneath slogans of unity, resistance and obedience.

In recent months, appointed military and security bodies have become increasingly important. Decision-making remains concentrated at the top, but the process of announcing, justifying and implementing decisions now runs more openly through coercive institutions. The government, the Supreme National Security Council and military structures, such as the *Khatam al-Anbiya* ("Seal of the Prophets") headquarters, have played a more visible role not only in executing decisions, but also in defending them.

Masoud Pezeshkian's remarks about the vote of Supreme National Security Council members, including military officials, in favour of signing the memorandum with the US, along with Amir-Hossein Sabeti's comments on Saeed Jalili's opposition, reveal new alignments and fissures within the ruling bloc.

The Supreme National Security Council still formally operates under the leader's supervision. In practice, however, it has become one of the decisive centres of security and foreign

policy. This does not mean that power has been transferred to one single institution: rather, it indicates a shift in the internal balance of the ruling bloc, with the military-security bourgeoisie gaining greater practical weight.

Selective repression

Some changes are visible in the social sphere, but they should not be mistaken for liberalisation. On issues such as the wearing of the hijab, lifestyle and certain everyday restrictions, there appears to be a relative reduction in confrontation, compared with previous periods. But repression against dissidents, labour activists, women organisers, students, ethnic minorities, political prisoners and defendants in security cases has continued.

This contradiction is better understood as selective repression. The regime may reduce direct confrontation in areas where coercion risks provoking mass anger, while intensifying pressure against activity that could become organised political opposition. In other words, it may loosen control over appearance, while tightening control over class struggle.

Taken together, the evidence points neither to imminent collapse nor to simple continuity. What is emerging is a recomposition of authoritarian capitalist rule. The core structures of the Islamic Republic remain intact. Its strategic policies remain largely unchanged. Its military-security institutions remain powerful. Its economic model remains dominated by state, quasi-state and military-linked capital. And its rule continues to be based on repression.

But the form of command is changing. The regime appears to be moving away from a model centred on the personal authority of Ali Khamenei towards a more fragmented, militarised and security-mediated form of 'collective' authoritarian rule. The central question is whether this arrangement can stabilise. Mojtaba Khamenei has inherited the office, but not the authority. He has inherited the machinery, but not the hegemonic capacity to unify the ruling bloc and impose discipline on its factions.

This fragile balance depends on the current post-war situation. A renewed military confrontation, a new security crisis or another wave of mass protests could rapidly destabilise the emerging arrangement. But the deeper contradiction lies below the surface of elite politics. The Islamic Republic faces not only a succession problem, but a crisis of social reproduction. It presides over a society marked by inflation, unemployment, unpaid wages, ecological collapse, gender oppression, national oppression, privatisation, corruption and the systematic degradation of working class life.

Its rulers can reorganise power from above, but they cannot abolish the antagonism between state and society, capital and labour, the military-clerical ruling bloc and the exploited majority. The future of the Islamic Republic will therefore not be decided only by palace manoeuvres, factional alignments or security councils: it will also be shaped by the capacity of workers, women, youth, oppressed nationalities, teachers, pensioners, students and the urban poor to transform scattered anger into organised political power ●

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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Fighting fund

More than welcome!

It's not been a bad week for the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund - £414 has come our way, taking our July running total up to £668.

Thanks very much to comrade AC for his brilliant £100, while other, more moderate amounts added up nicely to give things a bit of a boost. Amongst them were other standing orders/bank transfers from comrades FK (£41), MM (£31), CG and DV (£30 each), II and RG (£25), RP and RD (£12), SM (£10), KA (£8) and TM (£5). Then there were those who made their contributions via PayPal - thank you also, comrades FK (£50), MH (£10), JN and NL (£5 each). Finally comrade IR wrote us a cheque for £15.

So, as I say, not a bad week. But we do need to step on the gas a little bit - and how much we could do with really going shooting past our £2,750 target in July! As

comrade JG, who has just taken out a subscription, writes, "I know you don't have many regular writers, but the ones you do have really do a splendid job. You never know, one day I may join your team!" She adds: "I can see why you have to rely on the support of people like me!"

She's right: our team is relatively small - especially when you consider the vital role the *Weekly Worker* plays in "uniting the left to do what's necessary", to use comrade JG's words once again. So if you fancy helping us out too, you'll be more than welcome! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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weekly worker

Popular militia
will need the
most advanced
weapons

Drones versus butter

Like his predecessor, Andy Burnham is committed to spending more on the military. Communists, on the other hand, say 'not a person, not a penny' for the bourgeois armed forces - a slogan we combine with the call for a popular militia. Eddie Ford explains

"Putin will be laughing at Starmer's pitiful defence plan," said a *Telegraph* headline¹ in response to the government finally publishing its much-delayed Defence Investment Plan (DIP).²

Of course, there has been much agitation from the conservative press, and retired generals and admirals (speaking 'on behalf of' *servicing* admirals and generals) who want more weapons, because enough is never enough, when it comes to the military and its budget. This lobby decided long ago that Sir Keir Starmer had failed to ramp up military spending with enough hard cash, even if the DIP is billed as the most significant uplift for a generation, committing £298 billion over the next four years.

But what the military discontents really want is new style weapons, because it is true, from their perspective, that the Ukraine war has revolutionised warfare. Yes, there were already hints of that way back in Afghanistan against the Soviet army, with the Mujahideen equipped with Stinger missiles. However, what we have seen in Ukraine is something qualitatively different. It is a sort of combination of World War I trench warfare plus drones, drones, drones - which have largely replaced artillery shells, manned aircraft and tanks.

Shortfall

Running across 80 pages, the DIP, published in the run-up to Nato's July 7-8 Ankara conference, will be one of Starmer's last acts as prime minister - perhaps he even views it as a possible defining event in terms of his premiership.³ Regardless, he has promised to increase defence spending - or *war spending*, to be more honest (like Donald Trump). Britain has been forced into taking this course by the US, not only by Trump. The accusation is that other Nato countries have been enjoying a 'free ride' at the expense of the US. Hence the commitment to up the percentage of GDP going to the military: Britain now has a target of 3.5% by 2035.

Anyhow, the treasury agreed to stump up an extra £1.5 billion to the ministry of defence in the wake of John Healey resigning as defence secretary last month, pushing the total amount of extra money for the DIP to £15 billion in "spending power" over four years - but only £11.6 billion of that amount is new money, with the rest comprising a reallocation of existing resources. In a further sign that Starmer is trying to placate his conservative critics and spend even more money on rearming, the DIP says that "funding and plans" behind a goal to push defence spending to 3% of GDP in the next parliament - from around 2.3% now - will be revealed in the next spending review, expected in 2027, where defence will naturally be the "number one priority".

But, of course, that will be a decision for Andy Burnham to make (unless he falls under a bus), but



Tanks and aircraft carriers are as outdated as bearskins and redcoats

like his predecessor he says he is committed to "fully fund" the DIP and as prime minister there will be "no compromise on the security of the nation". Yet that still does not detract from the fact that Starmer has left Burnham with a pretty rotten hand, because there is a shortfall (or 'black hole') of £4.7 billion in terms of the budget. Speaking in his first interview since winning in Makerfield, Burnham confirmed reports that he was not told about the spending gulf when Starmer's government briefed him on the DIP - admitting that he "didn't have all of the details".⁴

Whether Burnham's pledge was enough for the military chiefs remains to be seen, but it will inevitably trigger months of speculation about tax rises, spending cuts or tweaks to borrowing rules that Burnham could enact to raise the funds in the next budget, which is expected in October or November. But the former mayor of Manchester has already said that he will stick to Labour's 2024 manifesto pledge not to raise income tax rates, national insurance or VAT - though it has been reported that Burnham will be looking for "perhaps more flexibility in how the fiscal rules are applied".⁵

Either way, Burnham will quickly be confronted by the unavoidable question of priorities - guns or butter? Or, more accurately for the times we live in, drones or butter?

Timeline

But we already know the answer to that, as we have had stories about infrastructure investment being cancelled or delayed.⁶ Stories about green measures suffering the same fate by being scrapped altogether or given a good kick down the road. This tells you that the Burnham government may have some wriggle room, but it is *extraordinarily*

narrow. Maybe he can get away with much better presentation or performative gestures such as "No10 North".⁷ Perhaps he might tinker around with this particular version of the DIP. But, when it comes to the "reindustrialisation" of the north and "galvanising" the British economy, it is all bullshit. So, Burnham is indeed Starmer with another face.

Echoing the military chiefs, the outgoing prime minister himself has given us a timeline - to be ready for a possible war with Russia by 2030. But, of course, the top brass believe that the money they are being given is insufficient to rearm at the pace necessary. Indeed, ex-military tops have popped up in the media saying that, unless we have this DIP right now we will be unable to resist a Russian invasion.⁸ The claim is that Russian stormtroopers and Cossacks will be marching through the streets of London in 2030, and Vladimir Putin doing what Adolf Hitler could not do in 1939-40 by picking out the Senate building in London's University College to be his new headquarters.⁹ Total nonsense, of course, but it serves the purpose of getting us hyped up to accept new arms spending.

The new defence secretary, Dan Jarvis, stresses the need to focus more on autonomous weapons and artificial intelligence to ensure the military is "fit for the next war, not the last one". The UK will scrap some older weapons and kit, including the very expensive Storm Shadow cruise missiles and a range of helicopters. The new plans will not include funding for new frigates, as it prioritises smaller, budget warships and drones instead. Well, objectively, that seems sensible, as that really is 20th century naval warfare. But instead they are going to go for some sort of *hub*, an equivalent of a frigate that controls aerial drones

and sea drones. There is also talk of a sixth-generation fighter aircraft too, one that controls semi-autonomous drones. But there are legitimate grounds for scepticism here. Surely the era of ultra-expensive high-tech aircraft has come to an end. For example, the present-day F-35s can do everything: it is stealth, a bomber, can take off vertically. You name it, it can do it ... but it would not last long in a theatre of war like Ukraine, where both sides have cheap killer drones and shoulder-launched missiles.

It is the same with aircraft carriers. They dominated naval warfare from World War II onwards, but how would they fare if they had coming at them a swarm of drones - not 100 or 200, but 1,000 or 2,000? Have they got the ability or the support fleet that would be needed to shoot down such numbers? Well, maybe yes, if they can be protected by laser beams or some other such technology which is, at the moment, still very much at the drawing board stage. At the moment it is hard to escape the conclusion that they are highly vulnerable craft in the same way that battleships became highly vulnerable to air attack or submarine attack in World War II.

Intimidate

So what is the CPGB's position on 'defence'? We do not come out like the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and organisations on the Labour left and call for a halving of arms spending. We do not, to use a throwaway figure, demand that 'only' £150 billion be spent on the means of mass destruction over the years 2026-30. Taking hold of a good phrase and adopting it for modern purposes, we say, 'Not a person, not a penny, for the bourgeois army'. We do not want them to have even a peashooter.

Instead, we call for a popular militia. Of course, that will need finance - but that does not commit us now to voting for a war budget for a popular militia. We would vote for the principle of a popular militia, which basically means that every adult who is fit and of an agreed age has an obligation to serve. By that we do not mean just someone armed with the equivalent of a Lee Enfield like a modern-day version of *Dad's army*. Rather, we are talking about a popular militia being equipped on the basis that it *replaces* the standing army - which requires the availability of drones, missiles, radar, nuclear bunkers, satellite links, etc. etc.

True, such an organisation will not have global reach, but nevertheless we are talking about a *serious* armed force, and it can be done. Generally speaking, one of our models is Switzerland, where every adult is obliged to serve in the army if they are over a certain age and available for a call-up, keeping their firearm under lock and key in their home. And the country has tank traps, dragons teeth and nuclear bunkers - it is very well defended. In fact, it has more than 370,000 nuclear bunkers - more

than any other country in the world - enough to shelter *every* member of the 9.15 million population.¹⁰

Not that Swiss communists would be obliged to vote in favour of the budget for the Schweizer Armee. No, on the contrary, the principled position would be to either abstain or vote against. Why? Because war, even a war of defence, is the continuation of politics, and historically, and at the present moment, those politics are the politics of the bourgeoisie (as expressed through the permanent coalition, the *Zauberformel*, of the mainstream parties).

True, the popular militia is not much use in fighting foreign wars. Good! But that does not apply, when it comes to defending the home territory, because you can do that in depth and *en masse*. As we are not pacifists, we do not ignore the military question - you cannot successfully stop an invading army with a flower ... or even a revolutionary speech. Yes, we are quite prepared to fight, but first and foremost we want a revolution and towards that end we bank on two, interlinked, strategic pillars: firstly, winning a clear majority, not least through standing in elections and, secondly, splitting, bringing over the popular militia to our side (why we demand the regular election of officers).

We certainly want that revolution to be as peaceful as possible, because otherwise it is our side that would tend to suffer the most. And the chances are that, the stronger we are in terms of our ability to inflict violence, the less likely that the other side would attack.

Marx and Engels used the term "slave owners' rebellion", of course, when they looked at the Civil War in America. They expected the bourgeoisie and the landlord class in Britain to be tempted by that option, even though they talked about the possibility of peaceful revolution. Hence they wanted to *intimidate* the class enemy.

In other words, don't do it - don't even be tempted to start a civil war - because if you do we will crush you. Essentially, that is what our military programme is designed to achieve ●

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