

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly worker

World Cup 2026: crass political interference by Trump, a source of huge revenues for FIFA, but also moments of pure football joy

- Letters and debate
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- YP's rebel majority

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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LETTERS



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

SWP booted

The excellent article by Carl Collins, 'Anyone but England' (July 16), just about summed up my feelings on the *Socialist Worker* editorial of July 8 on England in the World Cup.

Wishing England's defeat in world and European football tournaments seems to be a peculiar and perennial obsession of the Socialist Workers Party. Variations of the editorial damning the England team - and by extension those who have the temerity to wish them well - have appeared in every *Socialist Worker* during every tournament since at least the 1980s.

In this the SWP have common cause with the racist right (though for different reasons). The fascists want England to fail because the team are heavily multi-racial in their composition. The SWP in contrast seek, ridiculously, to apply Lenin's revolutionary defeatism to a professional sporting team. To workers, if they notice at all, this just makes those advocating such a stance appear odd and rather weird.

To the heavily culturally middle class SWP, football has always been treated with suspicion and incredulity and it is seen as an inferior cultural pursuit, compared to, say, the theatre. I was briefly a member of the party in the 1980s and recall being literally sneered at by my then district organiser (who I later found out hailed from an aristocratic background), when I announced that I attended West Ham United games and wanted to see the England team do well in competitions. "God! You don't like football, do you?" was her incredulous response when I told her.

Ultimately, in the grand scheme of things, does it matter if workers in England back the England team? No, it doesn't. Being agnostic or even ignoring the tournament altogether is a perfectly valid position, but actively hoping they lose due to some misplaced 'anti-racism' or 'anti-fascism' just marks you out as distinct and separate from the class. Maybe that's the point?

Paul O'Keeffe
email

Neo Spart nats

I'm writing this in reply to Patrick Sliney's letter published in the *Weekly Worker* on May 28, under the title, 'Spart change'.

As a result of the International Communist League's reorientation, we renounced our long-held position on Ireland in favour of a united Irish workers' republic. But Patrick Sliney's letter upheld our old approach which was outlined in 'Theses on Ireland' (*Spartacist* No 24, Autumn 1977). This document was thoroughly debunked by comrade Perrault in the article, 'Theses on Ireland: a centrist capitulation to British imperialism', which we also published in *Workers Hammer* (No 256, September 5 2025). But, for all his angry words, Sliney doesn't address our fundamental arguments. 'Theses on Ireland' is a centrist document that claims to offer a proletarian perspective for Ireland. But at bottom it amounts to a Labourite programme on the national question in Ireland that maintains the integrity of the United Kingdom.

For Sliney, any move towards Irish unity must be rejected in the name of working class unity.

Forging unity among the working class, Protestant and Catholic, is crucial to the struggle for an Irish workers' republic. Our difference with Sliney is over how to achieve it. For him, the Catholic Irish must renounce their desire for a united Ireland. As he sees it, their burning desire to drive the British imperialists out of the north is a barrier to working class struggle against capitalist exploitation. This flies in the face of history. It means that communists must set themselves against the centuries-old sentiment for Irish freedom that has animated countless revolts, including insurrections, against British domination. That sentiment lives on, from the 1921 partition which dissected the country, through 30 years of the 'Troubles' to the support for a border poll today. The deep desire to end the British occupation of the Six Counties is a powerful force for revolutionary struggle to this day.

Far from demanding that the oppressed Irish set aside the historic cause that has animated their struggle against British subjugation for centuries, the task for communists is to wrest it from the nationalist leadership, which has capitulated to the imperialists at every point, and to integrate it into the class struggle against imperialist domination of all Ireland - which today includes the US, the EU and the British rulers, and against their Irish capitalist lackeys.

The key to class unity is to win Protestant workers away from 'Orangeism', the reactionary ideology that chains them to the United Kingdom and their capitalist exploiters. Our position is not based on 'love thy brethren' moralism, but on the class interests of Protestant workers. 'Theses on Ireland' make no argument to win Protestant workers to an anti-imperialist perspective. On the contrary, it buys into the pro-imperialist 'two nations' theory; paints the ideology of Orangeism as progressive, and neglects to call for the abolition of the monarchy!

In a flagrant denial of the reactionary character of Orange ideology, the theses state: "The communalism/nationalism of the Protestants has a defensive character and is not the chauvinism of a great power." What an utter whitewash! James Connolly would turn in his grave. He insisted that the Orange Order was founded so that "the Irish people might be kept asunder and robbed whilst so sundered and divided", and that "the Orange aristocracy went down to the lowest depths and out of the lowest pits of hell brought up the abominations of sectarian feuds to stir the passions of the ignorant mob" ('Labour and the proposed partition of Ireland', 1914).

The theses buy into the theory that unionism is a national movement. This is flatly wrong. The ideology and purpose of unionism is the very *opposite* of a national movement. It was invented in the 19th century to *prevent* Irish independence from the empire. Today, it is weaponised to justify British rule in the Six Counties, as well as to prevent Scottish independence. Unionism is a political outlook, not nationhood. Scottish unionists are part of the Scottish nation. Ulster unionists are part of the Irish nation. Protestants in the north, like those in the south, are a religious minority within the Irish nation.

The idea that both Catholics and Protestants are one Irish nation is not a "neo-Spartacist" invention. It was understood by revolutionaries

from Wolfe Tone, who named his movement the United *Irishmen*, to Connolly. Writing about the conquest of Ireland, he noted that the Catholic natives were "subjected and despoiled by open force", whereas the Protestant settlers were "despoiled by fraud". Nevertheless, regarding the Protestants, he wrote that "the rank and file of the armies of the conquerors" and their descendants "are now an integral part of the Irish nation" (*The reconquest of Ireland*, 1915).

Sliney's anti-nationalism goes so far as to *oppose* a referendum on Irish unity. This is quite a statement in a context where sentiment for unity is high in both the north and the south. Sinn Féin dangles the carrot of a border poll before the Irish people as a consolation prize for having conceded control of the Six Counties to British imperialism in the Good Friday Agreement, in a repeat of Michael Collins's betrayal in accepting the treaty and partition. The border is despised by the majority of Irish people, especially among the working class - indeed by pretty much everyone except hardcore 'free staters' and the far right. And, as our demand for a border poll points out, Sinn Féin is doing absolutely nothing to fight for a referendum, because to do so would mean challenging the imperialist overlords in London and Washington who dominate the whole of Ireland.

As our call for a referendum states, "A militant fight for a border poll will also hold Sinn Féin's feet to the fire. They cannot campaign for a united Ireland because they must be seen as respectable and fit for government. To this end the party has made its peace with the British establishment, including by bending the knee to King Charles III, Colonel-in-Chief of the Parachute Regiment. Sinn Féin has also cosied up to the US and EU by dropping its pledges to withdraw from EU military arrangements and Nato's Partnership for Peace. Placing our hopes for a united Ireland in these people is a recipe for defeat" ('Enough waiting: fight for a border poll!', June 10 2025).

Sliney opposes any move towards a united Ireland, at least until after the revolution. He says he's for winning Protestant workers "to a communist formation in which they can smash partition and unite Ireland under working class leadership". But even under working class rule, the theses support a separate state for Protestants, to safeguard their supposed national rights. As Sliney writes: "We would hope that [uniting Ireland] could be done within a socialist federation of these islands. This leaves it open where the Protestants fall - we don't seek to force them into a united Ireland: we are not nationalist irredentists." A socialist federation sounds good, unless, of course, it's being used to give 'socialist' coloration to what is in fact a unionist veto on Irish unity.

Sliney vehemently denies any similarity between the theses and the Militant/Committee for a Workers' International tradition, but offers no argument other than that "to tar the old SL with the Militant position is beneath contempt". Indeed, for Sliney's (and my own) generation, who believed that the theses offered a proletarian perspective of opposition to British imperialism, the comparison is a bitter pill. But we must face reality. There's a reason why the theses were studied by CWI comrades. Both organisations claimed to offer a "socialist" programme to unite the working class, Catholic and Protestant, on

the basis of economic interests, while dismissing the national struggle. This is classic Labourism.

Sliney's letter confirms his view that, by itself, the economic struggle of the working class can overcome the sectarian divide. He cites the example of the 2024 strike of 150,000 workers, which "brought the north to a halt", and concludes: "Tie that into the massive disgruntlement in the south and you have the basis for class unity and potentially setting a flame which could ignite a spark for our class in Britain." The one-day strike in the north was an impressive display of Catholic and Protestant working class unity. But economic struggle on its own, while ignoring the national oppression of the Catholics, cannot unite the working class.

The classic example is the 1919 Belfast strike, led by the Catholic socialist Charles McKay and composed mainly of Protestant workers. The Independent Labour Party had support among both Catholic workers and class-conscious Protestants, but it failed to support Irish independence. This was a fatal weakness. Winning Protestant workers to Irish freedom would have undercut unionism's hold on them and helped break Catholics away from nationalism. But, while many of its Catholic members and some Protestants supported Irish independence, the ILP refused to adopt a position in favour of home rule at this crucial historic moment, for fear of alienating Protestants. This failure was a concession to Orange reaction, which was used to crush this powerful show of proletarian power. The strike ended in bitter defeat and was followed by violent pogroms against Catholic workers and Protestant socialists. The Theses on Ireland indeed stand in the Labourite tradition of the ILP in the past, and the CWI today. CWI members occupy leading positions in the trade union bureaucracy in the north. Far from overcoming sectarian division, the CWI's refusal to oppose British rule alienates Catholic workers and cannot break Protestant workers' allegiance to Britain.

Labourism means unity with British imperialism; it divides the working class and weakens its struggle. The unification of Ireland will require a massive upsurge of the working class, north and south, united in an anti-sectarian struggle against all imperialist powers - British, US and European - and their lackeys, the Irish ruling class. Today, faced with the growth of the far right, it is all the more urgent to rebuild the national and class struggles; to offer Protestant workers an escape from deindustrialisation and ruin under British rule; to undercut illusions in Sinn Féin; and to break the grip of the Irish Labourite union bureaucrats.

These misleaders are obstacles to the revolutionary struggle for a *united Irish workers' republic*.

Eibhlín McColgan

Spartacist League Britain

Unite election

I am staggered that a paper of an organisation calling itself the Communist Party of Great Britain has nothing to say about the general secretary election in Britain's second largest union, Unite.

On the one hand we have the ultra-British social chauvinist, the pro-Zionist and pro-imperialist Sharon Graham, who has not only done nothing to build support at a time of genocide for the Palestinians, but has wilfully obstructed the solidarity of

others. Graham has pushed for an increased war budget and military spending, knowing full well this will mean cuts in welfare spending. She has attacked climate activists and those trying to stop further extraction of oil and fossil fuels.

On the other hand, there is her opponent, Simon Dubbins, who has a consistent record of support for the Palestinians and opposes increased military expenditure. Whilst Simon is no revolutionary, he is miles ahead politically of Sharon Graham, who has given next to no support to the Birmingham bin workers and who has authorised secret meetings with Reform.

What is wrong with you that questions of Trotsky and Kautsky are more important than present-day political battles?

Tony Greenstein

Brighton

Follow SF lead

Sinn Féin is in the driving seat of a united Ireland. It stands as a dagger at the heart of the British colonial state - together with the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru, pushing it towards dissolution.

The whole world would benefit from the demise of the British state, as its military, political, diplomatic and economic machinery, with its evil, worldwide reach, would cease to exist as the current, many-centuries-old war wagon for the benefit of the world bourgeoisie. It needs gelding and Sinn Féin is the veterinary surgeon!

England would emerge from its Arthurian slumber and Scotland, Wales, England and Ireland will be forever neighbours. Socialism is the next step for all four after the British state strangler is no more!

They've ruined the world with their class-division, apartheid nonsense. They are the high practitioners of human race division in whatever evil, multiple form it takes. So for the sake of humanity the British state must be put to the sword - not through mild-mannered independence elections, but through violent overthrow. But the political ground must be prepared and backed first, which is being done by the nationalist parties.

Let the workhorses do all the heavy work. We are waiting in the wings.

Elijah Traven

Hull

1905 dreaming

The archaic, so-called democratic system in Britain is tottering. Whilst a Bolshevik-style communist revolution is not imminent, a partial revolution similar to the 1905 revolution in Russia is possible.

Here is what it might achieve:

- (1) Irish unity, where the British state suppresses the fascist Orangemen, takes the weapons from the fascist Protestant militias and ensures a 'yes' vote in the Six Counties.
- (2) Disestablishment of the Church of England. Henceforth all religious organisations in Britain to have equal status.
- (3) Defund and disband the London Metropolitan Police. Like the former Royal Ulster Constabulary, London's police force continues its racism and misogyny. It's rotten to the core and must be abolished.
- (4) Henceforth the British army must swear loyalty to parliament, not the crown.
- (5) Scotland to be 'allowed' a second independence referendum.
- (6) The House of Lords to be purged of bishops and hereditary peers and moved to Manchester.

Then, the above achieved, we push for complete revolution and

the complete appropriation of the land and assets of the rich in Britain, domestic and foreign.

K Sean
Kent Bolshevik

Still going strong

Now the dust has settled, the litter and glasses and beer bottles have been cleared, and the sound of 30-plus brass bands and two or three pipe bands have gone from the ears.

The cacophony of sound came amid the collage of colour from countless ancient and renewed miners lodge banners. The sight of 200,000 happy, singing, dancing working class folk - in the main the generations of post-mining, from the villages and communities of a century or more. Of the surviving actual pitmen, 55,000 of us, many from every mining region in Britain turned up, in celebration, in memory to renew old friendships and tell the craic. Many a tonne of coal was hewed that weekend in the bars across Durham. Shots were fired, chocks were crept forward, fractured roofs repaired. Aye and many a scab got knacked or bobbie floored, as tales of struggles got relived and revived.

This year more than any other has seen a cynical sniping in the press and online about ‘this isn’t a miners’ gala’ and ‘there are no miners’, etc. Well I saw all the old lads - the Scott’s boys, the Yorkshire pickets, our Leicester heroes, Nottingham fighters - and, of course, the air rang with pitmatic with ancient Geordie and Wearside twangs. So, aye, there *were* miners - loads of us, and our families, and the next generations of miners’ kids and grandkids.

There are as a matter of fact 65,000 working miners in Britain (not mining *coal* any more, but still mining). Working our traditional cutting machines, roof bolting, setting steel arches. Many had years in coal or started there, and they could easily move back, should the need ever arise.

Of course, it’s not the same - we’re not young men any more, the

National Union of Mineworkers is disarmed, our once bold threatening columns, marching to those martial tunes, are now only for display and entertainment.

But we still inspire, we still argue about what it was all about - history as class war, not nostalgia. 1926 is not a page in an old book: it was our fathers, grandfathers and their families fighting, tanks on the street, mounted police, starvation. 1983-93 was a decade of battle to survive, as a vital sector of the class - miners as a way of life. We still discuss, argue about ‘what if?’ and ‘what about now?’

The gala is no longer an exercise in union/community democracy. We no longer choose the speakers, regardless of what our leaders think. The selection of speakers is somewhat a mystery these days. The days when no potential union or Labour Party leader ever missed a Durham Miners Platform are, it seems, gone. Labour leaders have largely boycotted the stage since the public humiliation of Neil Kinnock after the strike, when the crowd of tens of thousands literally walked away and left him alone. Burnham was invited, but incredibly he didn’t want to come. Corbyn was there, but in a non-speaking capacity. The union leaders, such as they were, were a collection of nonentities, a lacklustre mob. Sorry, but *who?* No Sharon Graham despite being up for election. No Eddie Dempsey, although he spoke last year. The platform speakers were in sharp contrast to the confidence and enthusiasm of the crowd.

The cynics have everywhere been attacking the presence of non-mining issues at the gala. In particular Palestine and the number of flags, etc. Such people have not been paying attention: galas have always - but always - platformed international politics. Ireland has been a cause since the inception, and Spain, Vietnam, Cuba and now Palestine.

Yes, there is an assumption of some from woke unions to try and impose the trans, LGTQ, etc agenda on the

gala and this is resisted. Likewise the mysterious presence of XR and net-zero stalwarts is always going to get the backs up of coalminers and their families, as well as other mineral miners.

But this is still a Miners Gala - plus others. It will last like this so long as we do ... so hopefully will still be here for a year of two yet.

David John Douglass
NUM Follonsby Miners Lodge Association

My permission

People have been rightfully perplexed by my previous letter (July 9). However, there are two full paragraphs that clearly state what the point was, and I think it proves my point entirely that allowing Jack Conrad to use the ‘N-word’ is unprofessional and, since ‘the Caucasian clowns of the Marxist left’ can’t be trusted to take things seriously enough, any use of it immediately liquidates any serious point being made.

People misinterpreted my letter to mean that I am ‘giving Jack Conrad permission’ to use the word. No, I’m very clearly saying that using it is unprofessional, and opens the door to others using it spuriously/exorbitantly. At which point, we begin to sound like characters from *The Boondocks* TV series. I made a point of using the word in that letter around 30 times and the point of referencing *The Boondocks* was to use a pop culture moment as a framing device.

I was and remain unaware of any situation with the Socialist Education and Debate Association, Your Party or other UK groups (RS21?) - my letter was in response to Conrad’s use of the word in certain episodes of Communist University and I believe once or twice during the Online Communist Forum. It’s a sarcastic letter, because I find it overall very silly that this is a conversation to begin with. I also sent in anonymously because, though I stand by my point, I don’t typically write in the way I did in that letter and didn’t want it to be associated with my wider body of writing.

A Black Communist
email

Domesticated left

Last week, Danger Dan of the pro-US, pro-Israel, ‘anti-fascist’ German hip-hop group, Antilopen Gang, was ‘uninvited’ from a planned performance on German TV, after the editors discovered that his song, ‘Keine Angst’ - performed together with the like-minded pianist, Igor Levit - contained a ‘call to violence’.

Thus, two of Germany’s most ideologically conformist ‘leftwing’ artists got their chance to present themselves as ‘cancelled’ and somehow dangerous - not through any politically radical messaging, but through some performatively radical antifa banalities about ‘hitting Nazis’. As many domesticated leftwingers have discovered, once you no longer have any political content that distinguishes you from the establishment - indeed, if you cheerlead its global power games and mass-murder operations, as the Antilopen Gang and their ilk consistently do - you can always fall back on denouncing Nazis, when you want to strike a militant pose.

Over 10 years ago, I wrote a short commentary on the Antilopen Gang for the German music magazine, *Melodie und Rhythmus*. I argued that the group exemplified a ‘neoliberal subculture’, with its pseudo-rebellious image masking a fundamentally conformist political stance. Back then, the band was not used to being criticised. So upset were they by the article that they published

a photo of it, covered in faeces, on their social media, dedicated a diss track, ‘Neoliberale Subkultur’, to it, and tore the article to pieces in their next music video.

It is good news that the winds seem to be shifting a little, because this time there has been quite a bit of criticism across the German leftwing press, including a useful article by Leon Holly, surprisingly published in the left-liberal *Die Tageszeitung*, whose title translates roughly as: ‘Now they’re even cancelling the establishment’s loyal servants’.

One song recommends setting up antifa groups and preparing for ‘street politics’ against Nazis, including physical confrontations, doxxing them, calling their bosses in an attempt to get them sacked, and reporting them to their schools and universities. Quite apart from the question of whether the blatant class collaboration involved in some of these tactics can really be called ‘street politics’, does anyone seriously believe that, given the current strength of the AfD, Fratelli d’Italia, Reform UK, Trump’s MAGA movement and so on, the far right can be stopped by ‘hitting Nazis’ or rattling them out to (hopefully) liberal-minded employers?

This is not the 1990s, when the far right was largely a subculture that one could hope to contain through street fighting. Today, far-right parties and movements have millions of supporters, control governments and enjoy the backing of considerable sections of the state and the capitalist class. The idea that they can be defeated by punching a few ‘Nazis’ and getting others fired is a complete fantasy.

Perhaps, at some point, it will occur to some of these people that countering the growth of the far right requires more than ‘anti-fascism’. For the time being, they remain content to rail against the symptoms, while defending the causes.

Maciej Żurowski
Italy

Follow Mandelson

On July 14 I spoke about ‘The Few’ at the joint meeting of the Democratic Bloc, Republic Your Party and Spotlight. So I was pleasantly surprised to read that by coincidence Carla Roberts wrote about ‘The Few’ in her article last week (‘Final death throes’ July 16).

I made the case that Your Party should be identified as a ‘populist Labour Party’, because it emerged as a proto-party from the mass support galvanised by Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of Labour. It adopted the populist slogan, ‘For the many, not the few’, and took the name ‘Your Party’ as a convenient way to avoid a clear political identity.

Various Trotskyist groups saw YP as their best opportunity to build a mass communist party. They formed the Grassroots Left (GL) as an opportunist electoral front. When GL was defeated in the central executive committee (CEC) elections, The Many majority purged all the Trotskyist groups they could identify. Disillusionment set in.

Some of the Trotskyists who avoided expulsion set up the Socialist Federation and the Democratic Socialists, as they headed for the exit door. The implication of this was likely to be a realignment within the remainder of Your Party between ‘The Many’ and ‘The Few’. This is what Carla might have been hinting at.

She adopted a narrower idea of The Few - simply as dissidents from The Many faction on the CEC. She says, ‘Let’s call them ‘The Few’, who have had enough of having to front what has turned into a very

failed project.’ She mentions Sam Gorst and Louise Regan and says ‘The Few’ were ‘previously loyal Corbyn supporters’.

Carla notes that ‘five of The Few were present [at the CEC meeting] and voted in favour of *some* of the no confidence votes’, but warns: ‘Their commitment to democracy and transparency is patchy, at best’. Hence she concludes: ‘... it remains to be seen if The Few really keep their bottle until the next meeting on July 19. There will be a lot of pressure on them at that meeting not to support any votes of no confidence (if they are even tabled)’.

However, the main thrust of her article is about the YP ‘final death throes’. She says, ‘Your Party is as dead as a dodo’, and therefore ‘Rebellion on the YP leadership cannot save the Corbyn party’. It is ‘a tightly controlled vanity project - a nice retirement number that allows Labourite Corbyn to travel the planet, giving worthy speeches’.

Carla, as she waves goodbye to Your Party, is wrong to have such a very narrow definition of ‘The Few’, as confined to five rebels on the CEC. There are many more among the rank and file. I would include Dem Bloc, Republic YP and Spotlight, and others yet to be determined, who are not dancing to the Trotskyist tune.

The fundamental question is whether The Many and The Few have the same programme for the future direction of YP. If so, they are simply arguing over the decision-making process, the role of bureaucracy and speed at which the party is built. Or is the conflict deeper than that? Is it really about the programmatic foundations of the party?

The case made by Republic YP is that The Few cannot become anything other than the tail of Corbyn’s populist Labour unless and until it takes seriously Tony Benn’s programme for a Commonwealth. The few cannot become ‘the many’ unless they build on strong programmatic foundations and adopt the attitude of Labour’s disgraced Peter Mandelson, when he said, ‘I am a fighter, not a quitter’.

Steve Freeman
Republic Your Party

Ageism as well

People on the left generally seem to accept that racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and anti-Semitism are all to be avoided. Ageism, however, is a different matter. In the course of a letter, saying that people should be very careful of what words they use in case they cause offence, the writer then complains about their ‘demented grandparents with too much screen time’ (July 16).

Some of the poorest people I know are pensioners - and some of the most active socialists too. Yet the stereotype of the pensioner is a moronic Reform voter with a comfortable lifestyle that they deliberately deny to younger people. Ageism is used particularly with regard to the housing crisis: nothing to do with the selling off of council houses, or the introduction of ‘buy to let’, or low wages and the increasing cost of living; it’s all about older people occupying the houses that young people should have; we can only hope that they hurry up and die!

The pensioners of today include those who took part in the class struggles of previous decades, who fought for workers’ rights then and in many cases still do. Some, of course, have become demented, but that is a tragedy for them and their families, and not something to be sneered at.

Margaret Stone
email

Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 26 5pm

Andy Burnham’s new cabinet: political report from the CPGB’s Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Sunday August 2 5pm

Mike Macnair: Against Robert’s rules and all that bureaucratic crap

Use this link to register:
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Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and
Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk
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A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain

LABOUR

Cut from the same cloth

Andy Burnham claims he will head a 'cost of living' government that will bring back hope and turn the page on 40 years of Thatcherism. But he will do nothing of the sort, reckons **Eddie Ford**

After the "kissing hands" ceremony and taking the oath of allegiance to King Charles III at Buckingham Palace, Andy Burnham became the fourth prime minister in five years and the seventh since 2016. Some absurdly say this is a sign that Britain has become 'ungovernable' (as if anti-government strikes were breaking out across the country), when if anything the reverse is true. Under present conditions, whoever is sitting in No10, the bourgeois order carries on.

In the end, when it comes to cabinet picks, Burnham chose neither Shabana Mahmood nor Ed Miliband to be his new chancellor - going instead for John Healey, the former defence secretary (this surely ensuring more spending on guns and less on butter). Healey was chosen not only to send a reassuring message to the Trump administration, but the money markets too.

As for Mahmood, she stays as home secretary, while Angela Rayner got her old job back as housing secretary, Yvette Cooper became health secretary and Wes Streeting was moved to defence - again something the American cousins will fully approve of. That cannot be said of Miliband who becomes foreign secretary (he is considered wildly untrustworthy what with his 'crazy' obsessions about achieving net zero).

Interestingly, Louise Haigh - a key ally, who oversaw Burnham's preparations for No10 - got the influential new post of first secretary of state and chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, effectively becoming his deputy (amongst other things, she will oversee the forthcoming No10 North in Manchester and parts of the cabinet office. Meanwhile, David Lammy, who was once deputy prime minister and justice secretary, has been consigned to the back benches.

This has been described as a "brutal" clear-out of Keir Starmer's allies - even a coup - but this is typical journalistic over-statement. In reality it is more like a change in presentation. As one of our *Weekly Worker* headlines ran: 'Meet the new boss, same as the old boss' (June 25).

Manchesterism

When Andy Burnham delivered his first speech as prime minister outside No10, another ridiculous fuss was made by the commentariat that he did it without notes, but it only clocked in at just over five minutes - hardly requiring the oratorical skills of a Cicero.

Anyhow, Burnham announced he would "end rough sleeping in our country" - this was swiftly followed by a No10 press release promising an extra £340 million for the task over the next five years from within the housing department budget. This, of course, is a direct echo of a promise he made on becoming Greater Manchester mayor, saying he would end rough sleeping within his watch by 2020. But this did not happen, it need hardly be said. Yes, numbers fell - thanks largely to the impact of Covid-period measures - but then started creeping up again, once the pandemic was officially over.¹ So 'Manchesterism' here is not exactly something to boast about.

He also promised a new 10-year plan for Britain, to be unveiled later this year, and to build a new economy putting "life's essentials back under public control" - and pledged in addition a "circuit breaker" moment, a term from the Covid era.² A model, Burnham declared, "bringing



Should not be promoting illusions in Andy Burnham

forward the biggest changes in the last 40 years" - when Britain took some "wrong turns" under Margaret Thatcher, such as "economic power privatised" and "large parts of the country deindustrialised", and still has not recovered. Hence it was Andy Burnham's mission to "bring back hope."

But, following his argument that people needed "breathing space now", the first announcement about tackling the cost of living crisis came on July 21, with the government saying electricity bills will be reduced by an average of £45 from October by removing VAT - at a total cost of £850 million in 2026-27. John Healey said the move would be funded from cancelling the digital ID programme, but that scheme was actually unfunded at the last budget - though the chancellor says he would be setting out detailed costings of the plan, and more "long-term action" to bring down living costs, at the budget later this year.³ In that spirit, Burnham has also announced a reduction in the cap on bus fares by a third from £3 to £2. There is even talk of temporarily freezing rents in the private sector.

We are told too that, as well as bringing down bills, the move will help encourage consumers to replace gas boilers with electric heat pumps, given the gap between gas and electricity prices will now be reduced. Andy Burnham has implored his new cabinet to examine "all possible ways" to confront the cost of living crisis, and telling ministers his would be a "cost of living government" - but all *within the existing borrowing rules*, including the planned uplift in arms spending. But the £45 per year reduction in energy bills is, of course, risible, as it is less than £1 a week, and will probably get eaten up by inflation anyway.

If Andy Burnham ignored the fiscal rules and *really* tried to tackle the "cost of living" crisis, the first problem he would immediately encounter is the City of London. On paper it generates

about 20% of Britain's revenue, though in reality it is a lot more than that. If Burnham had gone further and adopted the radical or left reformist measure of 'taxing the super rich', there would be an instant exodus of capital, with interest rates spiking and government revenues rapidly falling - not that this stops the likes of the *Morning Star*, *The Socialist*, *Tribune* and *Solidarity* advocating voodoo economics.

Leave aside the 'blind hand' of the market. We all remember Mike Pompeo's remarks that the US will have to "push back" against Jeremy Corbyn if he became prime minister, which it could do by imposing sanctions, promoting think tanks and far right movements and parties. Yes, we have a US imperialism in relative decline - but it is still the *hegemonic* power, and what it is doing in decline is precisely strengthening its position *vis-à-vis* its allies. It is demanding more tribute and more obedience. So, even with the most febrile imagination, it is impossible to see Andy Burnham really turning the page on 40 years of Thatcherism, financialisation, neoliberalism, and all the rest of it.

Then there is the unavoidable fact that we are dealing with a cash-strapped Britain that has accumulated huge debts and extremely sluggish 'growth'. The latest gross domestic product figures from May show that debt is estimated to have increased by 0.6% in the first quarter.⁴ We are also told that economic growth was a princely 0.1%. In other words, Britain PLC is bumping along the bottom. Yet you have economists saying, well, that is not bad - because of the Iran war, a contraction might even have been expected. But, whatever the exact case, you have huge amounts being paid out in terms of interest to the money markets - yet at the same time stagnant revenues, with no sign of that changing in the near future.

Either way, absolutely no-one is expecting another 20-year boom

- the last one over 1945-65, of course, followed the destruction and death of World War II, and the US global hegemon replacing the British hegemon.

Integration

A big test that will come for Andy Burnham is over issues like Gaza. The first thing you have to say is that he has been a member of Labour Friends of Israel since 2015, and there is no public evidence that he has changed this association⁵ - he has now chosen LFI's ex-chair, James Parnell, as his chief of staff!⁶ Burnham has been quite astute in terms of his statement apologising for Labour's stance on Gaza, saying the party "didn't get it right" and needs to "do better".⁷

But then, when journalists ask, 'Andy, is Gaza a genocide?', he immediately becomes hesitant, demonstrating a significant silence. Of course, he does not want to come out and say it is.⁸ What he actually wants to do is attract back Muslim voters who rebelled against Starmer and his overt subordination to US foreign policy. Communists do not think for a minute that Burnham is going to break from that subordination, but he wants to put out a message: 'Come back to the Labour fold' (whether that turns out to be a successful appeal is another question altogether).

The other taxing issue for Burnham - and Miliband - is clearly the arms supplies to Israel. It is not that Britain is a big arms supplier, but it is *locked* into the American arms industry. So, for example, we all know that, when it comes to F-35s, the cutting edge fighter bomber in the western arsenal, it is hugely expensive and can do everything: it is stealth, can bomb, fly high, fly low, can take off vertically - you name it. And its ability to take off vertically owes everything to British technology: ie, BAE Systems know-how from the old Harrier aircraft that has been incorporated into the F-35 programme since its inception.⁹

We also have the recent

development of the *integration* of the Israeli Defence Forces with the US military.¹⁰ We might have had a settler colony, which was peopled from all across Europe, but to realise the Zionist aim of taking the whole of Palestine, they were forced to rebel against their British sponsors. France replaced Britain from 1947-48 - it was France which supplied the technology which allows Israel be a nuclear power today - but maybe in the late 1960s, certainly by the early 1970s France had been replaced by the United States.

Today there can be no doubt that Israel is actually an *extension* of the United States. Israel remains a settler colonial power, of course, but its deep integration with America has been taken to new levels under Donald Trump. So for the UK to end support for Israel would mean breaking with US imperialism, which Andy Burnham will never do - having already stated his commitment to the "special relationship."

Illusions

This brings up the Gaza demonstration on July 18, in central London. Essentially, many thousands of pro-Palestine protestors were rallied to march in order to call upon Burnham to impose an arms embargo on Israel and to end Britain's complicity in Israel's genocidal war on Gaza.¹¹ You can see why the organisers called the demonstration, of course, but tactically it was a mistake because it reinforces the illusion that you can pressurise Andy Burnham to break with Britain's historic subordination to the United States (agreed at Bretton Woods in 1944 and confirmed with the 1956 Suez fiasco).

At the Whitehall rally at the end of the demonstration, Jeremy Corbyn began his speech by congratulating Burnham on becoming Labour leader. Then he went on to say he should remember Palestine and what is going on in Gaza. Of course, Burnham is extremely well aware of what is going on in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. If you pose things in the way Corbyn did, you basically give Burnham a free gift, which we have already seen him spend. If the truth be told, certainly when it comes to foreign policy, Burnham and Miliband will be no different from Starmer and Lammy. We should not pretend otherwise ●

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SPEECH

Polemic, not shibboleths

Overthrowing capitalism entails a culture of radical free speech, not least in the left and our own movement. Paul Demarty responds to the 'N-word affair'

Our letters page is, not for the first time, dominated by attacks on the CPGB and this paper.

Our crime: our policy of using the word, 'nigger', in full when quoting people, and our criticism of other comrades who insist on this word's omission or replacement by euphemisms like 'the N-word'. (I should say that I happily used the full spelled-out version in an article on an ephemeral media controversy on this question some years ago, and stand by it.)

We do not generally use the word outside of quotation marks. Despite the insistent claims of some, this is not a racist organisation, at least in the old-fashioned sense that referred to favouring the political subordination of people of some 'races' to others (the exact definition of a 'race' is hardly uncontested, of course). We favour, as a matter of policy, strict equality of all people regardless of ethnic background, and furthermore oppose all immigration controls. We oppose racism in the workers' movement, such as it may arise, and it has: unions have from time to time been in favour of colour bars and differential rates of pay, for example.

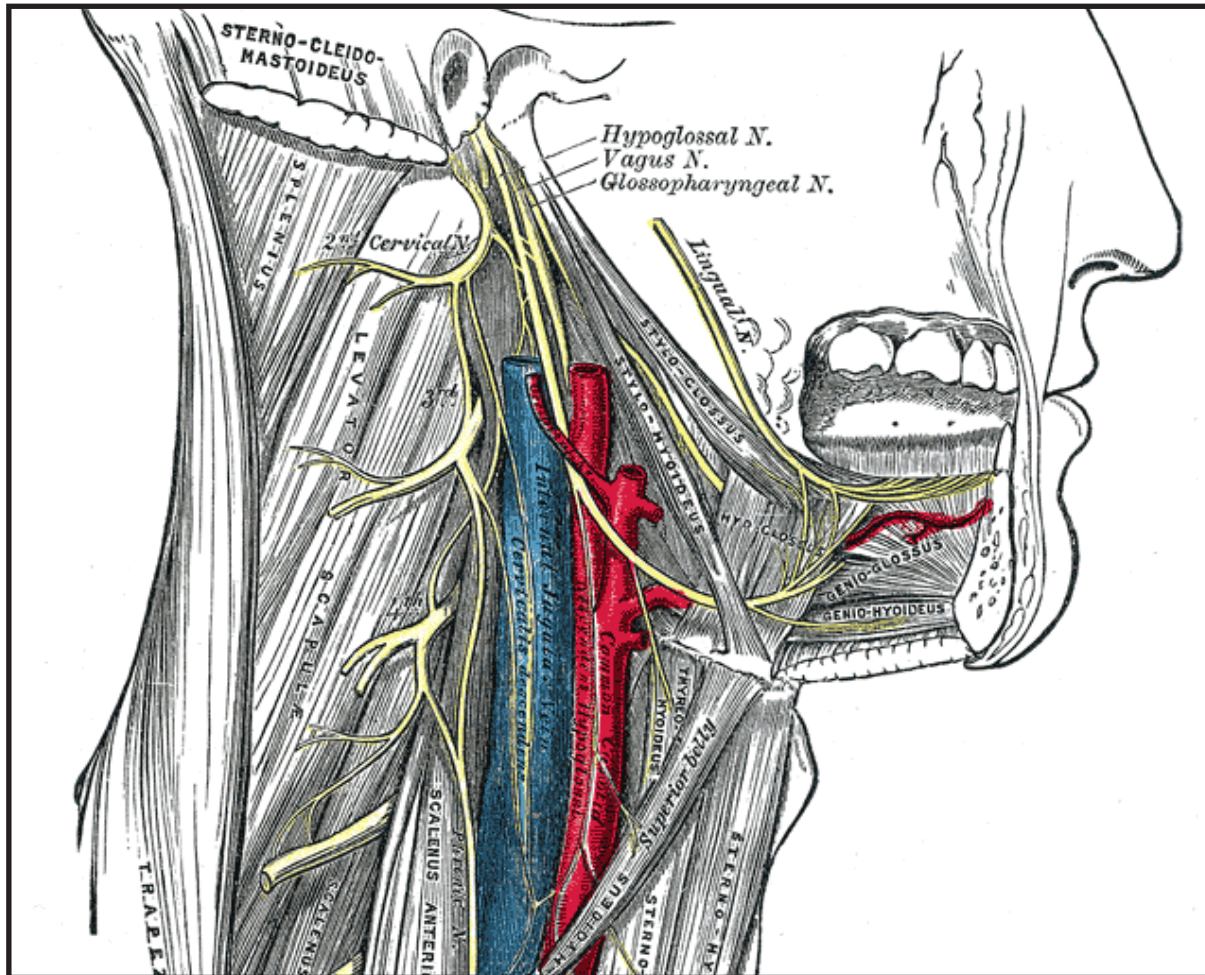
Nor are we trying to be 'edgy', and obtain some notoriety on the cheap. If we were doing that, we would pack up this paper and move into short-form video. Our intention is quite straightforward: we believe in quoting people precisely, as a matter of political and intellectual honesty, and this courtesy is something we do our best to extend to everyone, including racists. That is, in a nutshell, the whole problem. Many on the left believe, it seems, that it is acceptable to sacrifice clarity and honesty in favour of some other goods, at least in this case. We do not.

In any case, it clearly cannot be taken for granted, so I offer one more response to this controversy. Before responding directly to our correspondents, I will lay out an argument in favour of our position.

Objectives

To begin at the beginning (and, inevitably, to recapitulate some points made by Mike Macnair in his present series on leftwing political culture), the proximate objective of the communist movement is the replacement of capitalist society with the political domination of the proletariat. The proletariat can only achieve this domination collectively, as a democratic mass movement. Substantive political democracy requires, first of all, decision-making power on the part of political majorities, and on the other hand, the ability of minorities to make their case. Without the former, nothing can be done; without the latter, no failure can be corrected.

The rule of the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, is intrinsically undemocratic. It must represent the interests of capital-owners, and it does so through the operations of an intermediary stratum of lawyers, managers and bureaucrats. This rule, as Mike argues frequently, *extends into* the workers' movement, in the form of the domination of the bureaucracy over the trade unions and (in this country) the Labour Party, but also, on a minuscule scale, in the small groups of the far left. If the communists are to fight the power of the bureaucracy, that is in part an *internal* fight against bureaucratic



Our ability to speak: use it

political tendencies within our own movement and the wider workers' movement.

Secondly: therefore, small groups on the left, like ours and those who count our correspondents as members, must conduct their own affairs democratically, which - again - means majority rule and the unconditional right of minorities to organise as they see fit, so long as the practical decisions of the organisation are not compromised. It means, indeed, that majorities *have a political obligation* to protect the platforms of minorities. All are obliged to ensure maximum political clarity: to ensure that debates are about *what they are about*, and not conducted through vague accusations, conspiracy theories and innuendo.

In order to conduct polemic on such a basis, it is essential that opponents are quoted accurately and clearly. It is also essential that *enemies* are so quoted - that is, people who are not directly participating in the discussion, but are the object of it, as racists normally will be in leftwing discussion. Our objective is political clarity, which requires accuracy and precision in expression.

Thirdly: speech controls, including in the form of baroque codes of conduct and the old fad of 'safe spaces' policies, are in themselves a mechanism of bureaucratic rule. Some rules concerning conduct are clearly unavoidable (against sexual harassment, say, or spending party funds on expensive salt-shakers); and some of these will pertain to acts of speech, be they the proper conduct of meetings or, indeed, the prohibition of direct racist abuse. Intrusions on free speech within the organisation should be extremely minimal and justified in terms of securing the democratic rights of members. The more such rules exist, the more likely it is that political disagreements will be transformed unjustifiably into disciplinary questions, subject to the decisions of the disciplinary bodies: that is, the bureaucracy.

Fourthly: it is moreover clearly the case, on the basis of recent history, that aggressive policing of speech taboos of this sort has failed to fight racism in any meaningful way. Indeed, overt, Enoch Powell-grade racism is now perfectly acceptable in British politics, in a way that it was not in my own youth. Rupert Lowe was never going to abide by any 'safe spaces' policy; the *only* people who could be disciplined this way are our comrades on the left, and it is plain that the result of the 'intersectional' turn in left politics is merely grouplets even more fissile and prone to anarcho-bureaucratic chaos than the 'old white male left' that was supposed to be replaced; or, alternatively, doomed Bonapartist cults of particular personalities (Jeremy Corbyn, and now Zack Polanski...) who are rendered effectively exempt from such policing by their personal prestige.

The result is that we have failed to present a meaningful, politically effective alternative to the rise of the racist far right. That is certainly not *only* the fault, specifically, of *recherche* speech codes - far from it. It is the result, rather, of our general political choice in favour of bureaucratic and Bonapartist forms of politics, which do *not*, in fact, pose a viable challenge to the rule of capital. Turning taboos into unquestionable shibboleths is *part of* that choice. The CPGB exists to argue for taking a different path, and so we fight against all expressions of bureaucratism in the left, including this one.

Replies

To the correspondents on our letters pages, then.² First, a reminder of the context: a proposal by a participant in the Socialist Education and Debate Association (SEDA) for a debate on Marx and the race question; in motivating his proposal, this comrade quoted Marx's grossly offensive diatribe against Ferdinand Lassalle in a letter to Engels, which included the suggestion that Lassalle

may be descended from a 'nigger'. This caused an enormous ruckus, which Jack Conrad of this parish later mocked, also quoting the forbidden word.

An anonymous writer, under the name 'An Immigrant Communist', denounces both the bureaucratic response of the core SEDA clique, and our own 'absolutely idiotic, libertarian' response. (The substance of this response, remember, is that it is appropriate to quote this word in reported speech - nothing more.) They ask: 'Comrade, do you really think the 'N-word' is just some word whose definition can just be changed, like 'queer'? Have you gone postmodern?' To which one answer might be: why shouldn't it be such a word? Hasn't it already been *partially* recuperated (in its usage by rap musicians, comedians and so forth)? Has it been cursed by a god or something? (The word, 'idiotic', after all, was also once a slur against the mentally disabled. No doubt sensitive souls of the time argued that it should *never* be used, not even in quotation.)

But another, more relevant response: well, seeing as it is so offensive, isn't it important when people use it? Shouldn't we, therefore, *quote* them when they do so? Why do the racists favour softening their forms of expression for our consumption?

More substantially, the Immigrant Communist writes: 'Comrades, yes we defend democratic rights and free speech, but are we libertarian bourgeois democrats? No, we defend free speech *against* the bourgeois state.' But this is inadequate, as I have already argued, because bourgeois rule *extends into* the workers' movement. (Consider, in this context, the infamous 'Unison monkey trial', when several left members of that union were victimised for years because they used the famous image of the three wise monkeys in a leaflet, which was deemed to be racist.) Our correspondent insists that this

is all irrelevant and we should talk about something else, but either we have such controls, hanging over *all* discussion about *everything*, or we do not. Which is it to be, comrade?

Comrade Brunhilda Olding attempts, like our Immigrant Communist, to split the difference. Yes, there is an 'abstract' right to use the word, and others like it - she offers us an extensive menu of transphobic slurs, some of which seem restricted to her native Australia - but you should not: 'After all, as far as I am concerned, if a cis man strolled up to me and called me a tranny, he has every right to say the word, and I in turn have every right to sledge him in the face for it.'

Brawling

I would prefer methods other than brawling for the settlement of such disputes, but the thrust is fine. But again it seems off the point. At issue is *quoting* racists (or, in the case of Marx, racist utterances from someone with an otherwise respectable record on the matter.) I repeat that doing so accurately is a duty, for the sake of clarity of political discussion even among anti-racists. But she concedes the 'right' in general, so perhaps this is a case of 'violent agreement' (the sort of phenomenon, I add, that a commitment to accuracy in quotation can help to avoid ...).

Finally, comrade Dovah accepts that we are not racist for using the word in the way that we do, but chides us that we must 'argue effectively'. No arguments deemed effective are presented for this, however: merely some pointers on what to avoid in 'effective argument'. We 'never seem to properly acknowledge the genuine reasons why people might want the word to not be said at all'. Surely that does not need to be said: people do not want to hear the word because it is grossly offensive in ordinary usage. Some more elaborate arguments may be put on this point, but I have never found one that does not amount in the end to an argument from perceived personal safety.

Certainly, that is the perspective put forward by comrade Dovah, who worries that new people from non-white backgrounds, unaware of the context, may be made to feel uncomfortable. 'Of course, debate could make people politically uncomfortable and intellectually uncomfortable, but we shouldn't be making people personally uncomfortable.'

The trouble here is that these things are not easily separable: I speak from two decades' worth of experience in the polemical trenches. It is bad form to use psychological manipulation in debate, and such sensitivities certainly *could* be exploited this way. But, if we have the choice between infringing on the right to impose intellectual discomfort and accepting the risk of personal discomfort, we should choose the latter. After all, we need comrades - of all races - to be resilient to much, much worse than hearing the ill-tempered words of a broke Karl Marx a century and a half ago.

The very nature of our political project, to return to the beginning, depends on it •

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Notes

1. 'Racism and jealous gods' *Weekly Worker* August 13 2020: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1312/racism-and-jealous-gods.
2. Letters, July 16: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1594/letters.

DISCUSSION

Break from failed nostrums

Decision-making must be removed from the hands of the full-time apparatus and take place at the appropriate level. This necessarily involves a narrowing of choices. Mike Macnair concludes his series on procedural principles by discussing the advantages of democratic centralism

This series started five weeks ago with the point that questions of procedures of collective decision-making are not, as much of the left thinks, a diversion from 'real politics'.¹ On the contrary, they are at the core of the possibility of posing an alternative to capitalist decision-making.

The second article² argued against ideas that democratic decision procedures are time-wasting *in general*, and against claims that the urgency of the situation, or the need to seize the moment and the initiative, require undemocratic decision procedures. On the contrary, while *some* decision-making is urgent, and delay to the point of making no decision returns to the sovereignty of property-owners, for much decision-making we can and should take as much time as is necessary for full collective deliberation.

The third article³ argued against the bourgeois liberal 'constitutionalism' of *Citrine on chairmanship* or *Robert's rules of order*; and drew out of those arguments the more fundamental points that rules need principles to serve their interpretation, and seeking to decide everything by rules inevitably results in the overproduction of such rules (as in *Robert's rules*).

The fourth article, last week,⁴ moved to the paramount positive principle that people who are prepared to participate in the decision process should be able to take actual decisions. On the one hand, the 'silent majority' do not get to be 'represented'. On the other, those who do participate - as party, union, cooperative (and so on) members, as voters, as jurors, get to deliberate, not just to exchange soundbites, and to take real decisions, not to have these pre-empted by officials or by unprincipled manoeuvres.

The members, or - as we will see this week, the elected delegates or representatives - have to have the right to make mistakes. But equally they need to be aware that their decisions may be mistakes - and therefore to include and pay attention to minority views (which after the event may turn out to be right). Within the framework of this principle, I addressed the *conduct of discussion and of decision-making meetings*, procedures for discussion and for voting.

This week we move to the problem of decision-making on a larger scale. The simplest example is national organisation, but the same issues would apply in a local or sectoral organisation that got big enough; and international organisation poses the problems even more sharply. *Sub-division* into local groups - cells, branches, and so on - is indispensable; and a large part of discussion can and must take place in these, before any larger conference. But, even so, large numbers imply too many choices available, and it remains necessary to narrow the range of possible choices beyond the procedural forms discussed for meetings in general. Part of this role can be played by factional groups and caucussing at conferences; but arrangements such as commissions (as used in the early Comintern) and compositing negotiations (as used in the Labour Party before the recent past) are necessary.

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



José Clemente Orozco 'The Demagogue' (1946)

leaders (and the direct election of individual officers) is a choice between democracy and Bonapartism. But, in addition, it is vital to avoid seeing leading committees as 'the government', and conferences as 'the legislature'.

I reiterate yet again the point that I made in the first article, that what follows is merely *my* views: I may miss some important points and not everyone will agree with my arguments. And I repeat the point made in the third article, that what is at issue is *guidelines* for procedure on the basis of the *principle* that participants get to decide, not fixed rules. And the *fundamental* principle remains that people who are prepared to participate in the decision process should be able to take real decisions.

Local

I begin with two points I made back in 2010, polemicising against Paul Cockshott's critique of my book on strategy.⁵ Decision-making on any scale greater than the local requires both delegation to the local (or sectoral), and mechanisms for narrowing the number of options for final decision.

For the first of these points, it is only necessary to imagine the case under global communism of a decision to adopt, or not to adopt, a new bicycle design at a minor bicycle factory in a small town, whether this town is in northern England, southern India or any other location. It would be plainly irrational for this decision and the numberless similar decisions that arise every day to be taken by the six billion-odd people in the world above the age of 15. This is true, even if we assume universal literacy and net access and (trustworthy) instant electronic referenda. Global decisions will need to be of *rough frameworks*, which are then more closely specified by local decisions - 'local' here includes both a range of geographical instances from continent level down to village level, and a range of sectoral instances from

the level of global shipping, through continental rails and power grids, down to workplace levels.

The point applies with equal force to political action under capitalist rule, to trade union and cooperative organisation, and so on. The endeavour to take all decisions centrally is visibly demobilising: both recently and very strikingly in Your Party, and over the longer term and on a smaller scale in the inability of the Socialist Workers Party to convert its 2,800 paying members and larger periphery into a party on the scale of the old pre-1991 official CPGB. Autonomy of local action is necessary for practical mobilisation of support. And this includes the ability to publish locally, local control of funds and local knowledge of who is and is not a member (an issue which arose in Your Party).

This is not a novelty. As I observed in the second article in this series, already by 1920 it was visible to the Russian Communist Party that the combination of the pressures of war work, plus the 1919 military-centralist turn that barred local publication and imposed a veto from the centre, was destroying the collective life of the local organisations.⁶ The reality was that, if Bolshevism had from 1903 been like the military-centralist organisational conception developed in 1919-21, it would never have won the mass working class support that allowed the Bolsheviks to take power in 1917.

In the UK in 1974 (following failed attempts in 1969 and 1971-73) the capitalist class succeeded in securing apparatus control of the trade unions under a judicialised regime, marginalising the shop stewards and other local activists. At the same period, control of local government by judicial review and by central government control of funds was radically increased, reducing the extent to which there could be democratic politics in local government.

The full-time officials of the trade

unions, the Labour left and much of the far left since 1974 have gradually *internalised* this culture of apparatus centralism and juridification, imposed by the capitalist class to enforce subordination of the workers' movement. As long as the left clings to this culture, it will never pose an alternative to capitalist rule.

The other side of the coin of local organising relates to the problem of time, discussed in the second article. A couple of commentators on 'X' have criticised (not in depth) my objection to three-minute time limits on interventions, basically on the assumption that more people get to speak on three-minute soundbites than if (for example) 10 minutes is the limit.⁷

Suppose, however, a party of 300,000 members (like the British Labour Party). Leave aside finding a venue in which 300,000 people could meet; for all to speak in a five-day meeting occupying 40 hours would require a time limit of 0.48 seconds for each intervention. Even an organisation like the SWP with 2,800 paying members, assuming a three-day meeting occupying 24 hours, the time limit would need to be 31 seconds. The reality is that the effect of the claim to restrict floor interventions to three minutes is to exclude deliberation in actual membership or delegate meetings, leaving the *actual* decision process to take place among the officials.

The solution is that most of the discussion takes place in parallel - in the branches, cells and other standing organisations of the party (some discussion may usefully be in specially convened district or regional aggregate meetings, both to facilitate national and/or faction speakers attending and to integrate experiences and ideas beyond the single branch). Comrade Andrew Northall in his letter of July 2 was right that most discussion has to be in branches; his (profound) error was to counterpose discussion in branches and their election of delegates to the right to organise platforms/factions.⁸

'Workshops' or 'breakout sessions' and such-like arrangements attempt to create a simulacrum of the parallelism of discussion that takes place in branches - but on an anti-partyist basis: that is, without the decision-making capabilities of branches and in particular their right to elect delegates. This absence entails, as other devices to have discussion without decision do, that the actual deliberation (involving more time spent than three-minute soundbites) and actual decision-making, will be taken elsewhere (by the full-time officials).

Too many

The second problem is that of narrowing the range of possible positions to the point at which a collective decision is practically possible. Comrade Cockshott and his co-author, Allin Cottrell, have demonstrated that von Mises' objection to socialism, that planning is impossible because of the complexity of the calculations involved, is false in the light of modern computing power.⁹ However, the planning exercise they propose *presupposes* general choices of plan goals.

Put another way, the planning exercise could contribute to narrowing the range of choices by excluding impossible combinations (like capitalist politicians' promises of both lower taxes and improved public services). But a range - very likely a

large range - of different combinations of plan objects and means remain possible. As soon as we start looking at the versions of communism and socialism available on the web, it becomes apparent that very nearly *quot homines, tot sententiae* ('there are as many opinions as there are individuals'). To reach decisions for action among a large range of options it is necessary to have means to narrow down the options.

The process of narrowing down options to get to the point where a decision is possible necessarily involves delegation arrangements. The problem is simply the natural limits of time and numbers. Consider our six billion people deciding among (at a very conservative estimate) 850 different options for a global set of annual plan priorities...

Take, for another example, the old and somewhat more democratic form of Labour Party conferences, where 650 constituency parties, 20-odd affiliated trade unions and various other affiliated organisations each had the right to submit a single motion to party conference. To enable a week-long conference to take place some means was necessary to reduce the number of these that went to the vote. I do not recommend the particular bureaucratic solutions traditional in the labour movement, but the problem is a real one.

Comrade Cockshott argued:

If Macnair really wanted to follow the logic of the working class party being the most consistent advocate of democracy, what he should be demanding is:

- the replacement of all parliaments, councils, assemblies and quangos by juries drawn randomly from the population;
- the right of initiative and referendum, with taxes and the budget to be submitted to popular vote; declarations of war only by popular vote ...;¹⁰
- abolition of the judiciary and magistracy; juries to be supreme in courts; no loss of liberty without jury trial.¹¹

Under full global communism, I think that the first and third of these slogans would in principle be entirely correct (though the particular forms of decision-making organisation will, of course, be decided by future generations). The reason they would be correct is that communism involves the supersession of the 'social division of labour': ie, it ceases to be the case that people specialise for life in particular tasks, and in particular that some people specialise in decision-making tasks and others in doing what they are told.¹² Doing decision-making tasks for a period of time then becomes a tedious chore that the individuals involved are obliged to do from time to time, like jury service.

Universal decision-making by referendum with an unrestricted right of initiative would, however, be wrong even under full communism. The reason is that, completely irrespective of access and trustworthiness issues, it ignores the delegation problems - both of local decision-making and of narrowing the agenda for decision. Imagine for a moment: you get up in the morning and log on, and find in your inbox 20 million referendum proposals to be read and voted on...

Exactly the same problem affects a common far-left idea, that representatives or delegates should be subject to imperative mandates in

all their voting. If fully implemented in practice, the effect would be that the meeting of the delegate body at which the delegates vote is a complete waste of time: what has actually happened is a referendum, with the voting taking place in the delegating bodies. Precisely because the effect is actually a referendum, there is only an illusion of delegation. (In reality, as usual, these seemingly ultra-democratic schemes produce hidden decision-making by the full-time staff or the initiator clique; in Jack Conrad's useful expression they are "anarcho-bureaucratic".¹³)

Narrowing

Though the process of discussing in the branches (and other organisations), and the branches electing delegates to a congress or conference (from now on I will just say 'conference'),¹⁴ the members in the branches take real decisions to narrow the range of proposals to be considered at the conference: proposals supported only by individuals or by small minorities are effectively taken off the immediate agenda.

Off the immediate agenda. It is important to retain the awareness that small minorities - and oddball individuals - may turn out to be right and the large majority turn out to be wrong. This is an important part of the reason for rejecting speech controls (the main reason is that we cannot trust officials with imposing them).

"Priorities ballots" are not a substitute for using delegate conferences. In local discussion and delegate elections, the democracy that reduces the range of choices is deliberative, and it may turn out that unexpected support for an initially minority option appears in discussion. On the other hand, a priorities ballot is a referendum process and, like all referendum processes, places the actual decision process in the hands of the officials or other Bonapartist figures who construct the ballot.

Under a pure system of branch representation at conferences, a minority that is evenly geographically distributed may be un- or under-represented at conference, with the result that the majority at conference imagines that there is less disagreement than there actually is. The primary reasons for not banning factions are about class politics, and in particular holding the full-time officials in subordination to the membership. But the need for the conference to be able to make real choices also implies that branch representation should be to some extent supplemented in the direction of proportional representation of organised minorities.

We should not advocate perfect proportional representation (that is, without any lower limits on representation). In perfect proportional representation, 'the map is as large as the territory' and the process has failed to reduce the range of possible choices.

Further, branches should be entitled to vote 'uncommitted' and elect uncommitted delegates. This is again

an aspect of maintaining the character of the conference as a real, deliberative decision-making body - not one which merely ratifies the result of a 'general election' conducted in the branches. (This point is an auto-critique of the practice of the International Marxist Group and its successor organisations, while I was a member in 1974-93. The effect of not allowing uncommitted votes and delegates was to incentivise the creation of groupings like the 'Outer West London tendency [faction]' of 1984-86 and to produce an overestimate of support for the individual organised groupings.)

Narrowing the choices also involves procedures for handling amendments, drafting issues, and multiple not-fully-counterposed proposals. To some extent I have already discussed these procedures in connection with meetings generally, in the last article. The problem becomes harder for a large conference. Factions again can assist in clarifying what is at stake.

The technique of compositing can be of some use. Bureaucratically controlled compulsory compositing, as has been used by the Labour Party, is yet another device to secure control by the apparatus. But voluntary compositing, which still allows space for counterposed motions and amendments to be voted on, can potentially assist the conference in arriving at real choices. Both factions and compositing require space to be made on agendas for meetings.

Comintern in the 1920s used drafting commissions to amend documents and clarify issues at stake. These may seem analogous to workshops/breakout sessions. The difference is that drafting commissions are working bodies which, like compositing meetings, deliver a product for decision by the conference as a whole. Workshops/breakout sessions, on the contrary, are managed opportunities to 'let off steam', while the real work of decision-making is done elsewhere.

Initiative

Someone has to take the initiative to propose agenda items for collective decision; and to produce initial draft proposals that can subsequently be replaced or amended in discussion and voting. In the absence of an existing party, this 'someone' will inevitably be self-appointed organisers or initiators. So far, no problem. We can take, for example, the 1880 programme of the French Parti Ouvrier, initially drafted by Karl Marx, Jules Guesde, Friedrich Engels and Paul Lafargue in Engels' front room in London, and later adopted with amendments by the party in process of formation (though this led to a split with the 'Possibilists' (capital P) who opposed the centrality of political demands in the programme).

That someone has to take the political initiative is an important point. There is a common belief on the left that programme - the political platform of a party - should "emerge in struggle". A slightly more plausible

version is the idea that it can be developed on the basis of 'workers' inquiries', promoted notably by 'Notes from below'.¹⁵ This was part of the basis of the Programme of the Parti Ouvrier. But what 'Notes from below' forgets is that the workers' inquiries conducted in the run-up to 1880 were on the basis of an existing newspaper with significant public circulation and an implicit existing political platform. Somebody is still taking the political initiative - on a non-transparent political basis.

There is a problem if the political basis of the initiative is unclear. In this case what is actually on offer is personal support for the initiators. The same is true if the initiators impose procedural mechanisms that can prevent the party-in-formation from making its own choices at its founding conference. In either case the appearance of creating a party is deceptive.

Once a party has been created, it will need to have some sort of central committee, national committee, executive committee, or whatever, meeting between congresses. (From now on I will say 'central committee' or 'CC', because 'national committee' seems inappropriate for a multinational state like the UK, while 'executive committee' suggests the liberal separation of powers). This is, firstly, because a party conference (or for that matter a trade union, cooperative, etc, conference) cannot sit in permanent session, unlike a parliament or analogous body; secondly, because a party will need organisation and finances, and hence full-time officials, and there needs to be a body meeting more often than annually, to whom these people are to be immediately answerable.

Why a CC and not directly elected officers? The answer is simple. Directly elected officers are a Bonapartist form. They give the individual elected officer, as I said of MPs in the third article in this series, a "term of years absolute" - a property right in their office. In an organisation large enough to attract bribe-paying by capitalists, the officer will have a strong tendency to become a bribe-taker. In a small organisation, it remains the case that the elected officer's property right amounts to the political expropriation of the membership.

These points are in a sense obvious. It follows that it also seems obvious that, once there is a party (or a lesser party-like organisation), the CC should do the job of initially proposing an agenda and drafting proposals for discussion. This is not, strictly, logically necessary. The German SPD and the RSDLP had separate CCs and editorial boards - 'unified command' that subordinated the EB to the CC being a creation of 1919-21. It would be perfectly logically possible to have also a separately elected 'conference preparation committee'. It is merely convenient for the CC to propose the agenda and draft texts.

This is, again, no problem in itself. Problems arise, firstly, if the CC places obstacles in the way of open discussion and voting; secondly, and underlying this, if the CC comes to think of itself as the government and the conference as parliament (or, as a general election) and plays the sort of games that governments play in order to foreclose deliberation and voting.

The IMG (and successors) of the later 1970s-80s provides a somewhat baroque example. The conference (of an organisation at its height of around 600 members) elected a CC of around 60. The election was conducted through a 'nominations commission' of conference that proposed a slate, giving a 'working majority' to the actual majority or largest minority at the conference, but after this point carefully 'balanced' on a range of criteria (particularly geography). The CC met quarterly. The CC elected a

political committee (PC) of around 30, which met monthly. The PC elected a political bureau (PB) of around 10, composed of full-timers, which met weekly.

The PB was the actual political leadership - the CC was merely a parliament. The PC provided the PB with an equivalent in the CC of the 'payroll vote' of junior ministers in parliament, lined up in advance of CC discussions. The effect was that the normality of factions (called tendencies) was like the normality of parties in liberal constitutionalism: whoever you vote for, the government (meaning, the full-timers) will get in.

The essential point, I think, is to avoid fetishising leadership as such. We need committees to manage business between conferences. It is convenient that they should also prepare conferences. Their function is not - unlike delegates - to represent the membership (whether geographically, or by 'oppressed sections', or whatever). They are to be the servants of the conference and thereby of the membership, not its masters (Engels' 1891 point). In this context, nominations commissions and election by slate create non-transparency of election. The Mandelites' 'norm' that the largest minority should obtain a working majority of the CC is merely the doctrine that 'the king's government must be carried on', transposed from English parliamentarism into left politics. It is in itself political expropriation of the membership.

Centralism

What I have written so far is mainly about parties, though I began with the problem of decision-making under communism. Some of it is specific to workers' organisations under capitalist rule: there is no reason, other than traditions formed under capitalist rule, why a 'supreme soviet' (national assembly of workers' councils) could not become under workers' rule a standing body that meets daily for much of the year, like a parliament.

The implication of a supreme soviet as a standing body would be that the functions of a government formed by this standing body can and should be reduced, to be mainly functions of initiative in proposing agendas and draft motions to the standing body. If we think of the English constitution after 1688, but before the expansion of the suffrage in the 19th century led to the reduction of the democratic elements of the constitution,¹⁶ a good deal of decision-making was actually in parliament - or in local government - rather than in central government.

The question of 'democratic centralism', as it was understood before 1919, would, however, still be posed. Here is Lenin in his 1913 Critical remarks on the national question:

But, while, and insofar as, different nations constitute a single state, Marxists will never, under any circumstances, advocate either the federal principle or decentralisation. The great centralised state is a tremendous historical step forward from medieval disunity to the future socialist unity of the whole world, and only via such a state (inseparably connected with capitalism) can there be any road to socialism.

It would, however, be inexcusable to forget that in advocating centralism we advocate exclusively democratic centralism. On this point all the philistines in general, and the nationalist philistines in particular ... have so confused the issue that we are obliged again and again to spend time clarifying it.

Far from precluding local self-government, with autonomy

for regions having special economic and social conditions, a distinct national composition of the population, and so forth, democratic centralism necessarily demands both.¹⁷

This is not about a party; still less about a 'revolutionary party': it is about the relations of central and local government in a state. Democratic centralism is fundamentally about the relations between central decision-making (in the first place, by the conference; only secondarily by CC or similar bodies) and local (and sectoral) decision-making.

This takes us back to my starting point: the failure of Your Party, and the uselessness of common broad left decision procedures. Both are connected to the attempt to put in place national organising without local organising (and without effective recognition of factions); whether to maintain bureaucratic control (the Corbynistas) or to try to 'organise' on a non-party basis, without membership and branches, in the hope of broad unity (the left opposition to the Corbynistas).

Democratic centralism is by no means restricted to parties: it is a potential approach to democratic self-government in general. But it is illusory under capitalist rule to attempt to create democratic centralism without attempting to create a political party - or attempt to create a political party without attempting democratic centralism. Without this approach, we remain within the endless repetition, worsening, of the failed nostrums of the left ●

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Notes

1. 'Centrality of democracy' Weekly Worker June 18: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1590/centrality-of-democracy.
2. 'Time is on our side' Weekly Worker June 25: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1591/time-is-on-our-side.
3. 'Legalism and labyrinthine rules' Weekly Worker July 2: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1592/legalism-and-labyrinthine-rules.
4. 'Principles and guidelines' Weekly Worker July 16: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1594/principles-and-guidelines.
5. 'Representation, not referendums' Weekly Worker June 30 2010: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/824/representation-not-referendums.
6. The resolutions, including expressions of concern about loss of the mobilising capacity of the local organisations, are in R Gregor (ed) Resolutions and decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Vol 2: The early Soviet period 1917-1929 Toronto 1974, pp83-89, 90-98, 107-14, 119-24.
7. 'OT Biscuit' aka @gaoblai, and MUG activist Jean Allen.
8. Letters Weekly Worker July 2. I responded in the previous article.
9. 'Computers and economic democracy': www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/~wpc/reports/quito.pdf; also 'Mises, Kantorovich and economic computation': mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/6063/1/MPRA_paper_6063.pdf.
10. I have omitted the third point in the list - "Full political rights, including the right to elect officers in the armed forces" - because I agree with it without reservation (it is already in the CPGB Draft programme).
11. I have argued against the idea of the abolition of the judiciary in 'On reducing undue trust in judges' King's Law Journal Vol 31 (2020), pp41-58.
12. More exactly the social specialisation of function. The division of labour, properly so called, will undoubtedly continue: we will not all be doing identical tasks at any one time. But 'social division of labour' is, though not fully scientifically accurate, the conventional expression for the lifelong specialisation I have described in the text.
13. Eg, 'Coventry by numbers' Weekly Worker October 4 2000: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/354/coventry-by-numbers.
14. There is a distinction in the history of Bolshevism and hence in the 'official communist' tradition between congresses (which were sovereign) and conferences (which were special-purpose meetings). This distinction is in my opinion unnecessary and not particularly desirable.
15. notesfrombelow.org.
16. For references for this point, see note 7 above (pp48-50).
17. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/cmq/6.htm. I do not mean to promote the substance of Lenin's argument in this chapter, which supposes that nationally homogenous territories (even as local government divisions) are attainable. In my view that is false.

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YOUR PARTY

Rebellion that never was

Opposition forces on the CEC might actually constitute a small majority now. But they have neither the organisational cohesion nor the politics required to carry out the revolution that is needed, explains **Carla Roberts**

It is telling that the only mention of Your Party in the press recently has been around Joshua Kerry, the alleged killer of Ann Widdecombe. He had signed a petition drawn up by Our Party,¹ which campaigned to take YP's founding conference out of the hands of the (unelected) Karie Murphy - and put it into the hands of an (unelected) 'interim leadership'. Bourgeois journalists have been sniffing around the South Yorkshire left, but we are pretty certain that Kerry never joined YP or attended any meetings of the Rotherham YP proto-branch - the local comrades we have spoken to had never come across him. Small mercies.

At this stage, it would take a genuine revolution to transform the floundering Corbyn project into an organisation that would be worth attacking in the press, something underlined by the latest meeting of YP's Central Executive Committee on Monday July 20.

The notice and agenda were sent out with less than 24 hours' notice; long papers about 'governance' issues were emailed an hour beforehand. The only amendment was rejected, because it was "submitted too late" - you couldn't make it up. Not that it mattered.

No confidence

The whole meeting was occupied by YP chair Jenn Forbes trying her very best to ignore the fact that there had been a 'special CEC meeting' on July 12, which had voted in favour of no confidence motions against Forbes, secretary Dawn Aspinall and membership officer Cassie Bellingham.² Fourteen out of the 22 CEC members were present and between 11 and 13 voted in favour of the motions, which means that, *on paper*, they met the requirements demanded by the CEC standing orders.³

They state that CEC 'special meetings' may be convened "at the request of 50% of all CEC or OG members"; that CEC meetings are quorate when 50% of members attend and that "a 2/3 majority of members present and voting will be required for the vote of no confidence to pass".

No matter. In true Kafkaesque manner, Forbes (having disabled the chat) brushed off various points of order that argued that she should make way for an alternative chair. We hear that, in backing her up, Jeremy Corbyn bizarrely suggested to take the points of order *after* the agenda had been completed. How absurd is that?

Forbes insisted that the July 12 meeting *did not* meet the requirements of the convoluted and contradictory standing orders, because those *also* state that "the CEC will hold an annual general meeting, at which a vote of no confidence may be taken." There was no AGM, so *ipso facto* there cannot have been a successful vote of no confidence... This is an utter nonsensical clause, seeing as all officers would surely serve only until an AGM anyway, as this is where elections for officers' posts take place. But then these standing orders are there to serve the ruling bureaucratic clique, not make things clear. Bureaucrats love long constitutional documents - they can pick the bits that suit them best (which is why communists favour rules that are as short as possible and only as long as absolutely necessary).

The GL members argued that, following the Corbyn clique's claim that the special meeting was illegitimate, Forbes should have



Outrageous violations of basic democracy

scheduled a no confidence vote. Had it been successful, the meeting would have had to close and an election for a chair scheduled. But Forbes would not take the motion.

Another reason given by Forbes for rejecting the July 12 results was the fact that Scotland representative Jim Monaghan had not been officially invited. That much is true - because there is no *official* way he could have been invited. The Corbyn clique has refused demands to set up a communication channel for CEC members, so, when Jo Rust (originally elected on the Corbyn slate) called the July 12 meeting, she seems to have copied in those email addresses she had access to, from the one single time when Forbes forgot to blind-copy everybody! That was before Monaghan joined the CEC, though he certainly *knew* of the meeting and posted about it on Facebook beforehand.

The YP ruling clique are clutching at straws. Their bureaucratic micro-management of YP was 'no problem' - as long as they had a clear majority. Forbes usually just rushed through the packed agenda and The Many waved through the various documents that had already been decided either by the small officers' group or by Murphy herself - including the ridiculous standing orders.

But no longer. The botched July 4 suspension of three CEC members elected on the slate of the Grassroots Left was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back: YP is staggeringly unsuccessful, the 'branches rollout' is a slow-motion joke, the organisation makes no impact in any election and it remains solidly at 0% in the polls. Some CEC members clearly do not want to continue carrying the responsibility for this failing project.

Since that July 12 meeting, 'independent' Sam Gorst has resigned from YP and at least one attendee seems to have been there only to spy. But we understand that there are still four or five CEC members (in addition to the seven GL supporters) who continue to demand that Forbes, Aspinall and Bellingham should step down - and three of them are members of the YP officers' group. In a meeting of the YP Connections Network, they were named as treasurer Fadel Takroui, spokesperson Noor Begum and political officer Louise Regan - we believe that is correct. The OG group is now down to seven, after the earlier resignation of vice-chair Laura Smith.

On the CEC (currently 21 members) there is now a slim, but clear enough majority against the current trajectory - but it cannot

exercise this majority. This is *partially* down to the tight control exercised by Karie Murphy, Corbyn's right hand woman and de facto general secretary of YP. We hear that in CEC meetings Forbes mostly reads out scripts, which no doubt have been prepared by Murphy. Sometimes she appears to receive direct messages from Murphy in the actual meeting, 'reminding' her of this or that particular interpretation of a rule.

In the July 20 CEC meeting, for example, after almost two hours of batting away all attempts to install an alternative chair, she suddenly changed her mind and wanted to take a vote on this after all, having 'remembered' that it would require a two-thirds majority to be successful. GL members argued that no, a simple majority should be enough, but this was again dismissed by Forbes. We understand that at this stage the GL supporters on the CEC, recognising that they would lose the vote, walked out and the meeting was left inquorate.

Murphy would be a much better target of a no-confidence vote - but, as she was installed by the officers' group, only the OG can get rid of her. And, on the OG, The Many still has a (small) majority. What an utter mess.

Toothless

The chief reason why the CEC opposition cannot act decisively is because it has no political coherence. There is no clear way forward. The Grassroots Left itself is very 'diverse' as a result of a rushed, cobbled-together election process, which means some candidates were chosen without even being known to the groups who elected them. Sometimes, this was down to Zarah Sultana 'vouching' for them; at other times it was a lack of any other female candidate in a particular region.

Most of them quickly started doing their own thing and rejected even the limited accountability mechanisms agreed by GL: there were plans for regular public feedback meetings, as well as meetings with the groups that made up GL, to agree on joint positions. We have been called "toxic bullies" for urging them to publish all CEC documents - including those labelled 'confidential'. Transparency was the only real weapon the left had and it *could* have helped to give *some* power to the members and the branches, while cohering GL as an opposition - instead, GL CEC members stuck to Murphy's rules and GL has now fallen apart.

The Many opposition is even less politically coherent. They do not want their names published, though

Murphy had already leaked them to the website, *Canary*, in an early non-agreed version of the minutes of the July 12 meeting (which were deleted shortly after). Murphy wanted to show that she knows who the 'traitors' are - it is YP members who are being kept in the dark. It is not exactly hard to work out who they are, mind, particularly as those who remain loyal to Corbyn are very keen to make their ongoing sycophancy known: Hannah Hawkins and Cath Davies have gone on the *Crispin Flintoff* show to prove they have learnt absolutely nothing.

As Marxists, we believe that people can change for the better - our vision of socialism depends on it. But that does not mean we should be naive about the role that The Many 'rebels' have played. They are rebelling against the current direction chiefly because it is so very unsuccessful and it is harming their reputation, not because they oppose the lack of democracy, transparency or the purging of the left - they all voted in favour of it. Best-case scenario: they might agree with GL CEC members on some limited joint motions, perhaps to amend the standing orders.

But this is no opposition that could see through the kind of revolution it would take to make YP into a useful vehicle for the working class - especially as thousands of members have already voted with their feet and left, including members of the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales.

We can therefore ignore Richard Gerrard and his Socialist Federation, which calls on "the CEC majority to assert their leadership of the party and call on the branches to recognise them as the rightful leadership!" Cloud cuckoo land. For a start, the politically incoherent opposition would not build anything qualitatively much better. He also urges the CEC majority to take "legal action" against YP to get their hands on the money and the data. The CEC minority is now acting illegitimately, don't you get it?

Actually, we suspect that the majority of the remaining members are probably *in favour* of Corbyn and Murphy leading the party in any which way they like. It would *at best* be a legal coup, leaving aside how very unlikely a victory would be -

something we should have learned from the many unsuccessful attempts to sue the Labour Party. Perhaps Gerrard hopes his r-r-radical posturing will convince CEC members to join his Socialist Federation. We doubt it. It looks like it is already going the way of YP itself: there were 45 people at SF's public meeting on Burnham, down from 120 at the first conference and 80 at the second.

Incorporated

The truth is that Murphy could have easily incorporated most of the CEC opposition (from both sides) by throwing them a few crumbs. But then YP was never supposed to become a vibrant, mass working class party. After Zarah Sultana bounced them into launching YP, the Corbyn clique did its very best to make sure it will be nothing more than a tightly controlled vanity project. Corbyn is a Labourite to his marrow and would eagerly return to the fold if invited (he will not be!). He has no interest in building anything other than a fan club that can fund his political travels around the world.

We expect the annual 'conference' later this year will agree to some changes that make sure it will remain as such - for example, by doing away with 'collective leadership' - not that there ever was one. Still, getting rid of it properly will save Murphy a lot of time and effort.

We suspect that a few more CEC members will resign before that. YP is likely to go out with a whimper, taking the last remnants of Jeremy Corbyn's reputation with it. And, although general demoralisation is likely to follow, we will fight hard to make sure it can also teach a valuable lesson about the need to fight for the kind of party the working class *actually needs*: not some vague, halfway house, but a democratic, transparent party with a culture of free speech and a principled programme for communism ●

Notes

1. www.ourparty.org.uk.
2. See 'Final death throes' *Weekly Worker* July 16: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1594/final-death-throes.
3. docs.google.com/document/d/14F5EXEnhQCY36KUBcVKqqGannwgijvumDuVTEpH/TW18/edit?usp=sharing.

Summer Offensive

This paper is not subsidised by advertising revenue, unlike the capitalist media (or, indeed, the *New Statesman*). Nor is it funded by (for example) library subscriptions from the remaining 'actually existing socialist countries'. The comrades who founded *The Leninist* learned from the Communist Party of Turkey (*İşçinin Sesi*) that political independence means financial independence: raising the money from CPGB members and from supporters of the paper to keep our ability to be an independent communist political voice. We do so with tiny organised forces, reflecting the seriousness with which we take the party question and the need for a communist political voice.

Of course, we regularly raise money month-by-month for the paper; and Robbie Rix routinely reports the progress. But every year we embark on a serious effort

to raise significant funds for the CPGB: our Summer Offensive. We attempt to push hard to raise a major chunk of money for substantial projects, and for reserves.

This year the target is £20,000. Down from last year's target, because comrades are poorer than they were a year ago - and we mean to make a realistic target, rather than falling short of an unrealistic one. The Summer Offensive was launched on June 28, and will continue till the end of Communist University, on August 15.

We are off to a solid start. Comrades' individual pledges amount to £12,900, a little short of two thirds of the way to the target. So far received is £7,264, over a third of the way there. We need to keep up the progress, and push on to smash through the £20,000 target ●

Tim Browning

WORLD CUP

Most profitable yet

Crass commercialisation, a source of huge FIFA revenues, crude political interference by Donald Trump, but also moments of pure football joy. **Carl Collins** weighs up the pros and cons

When the song, 'Three lions', entered the charts in May 1996, the line "30 years of hurt" captured the frustration for England fans since the 1966 World Cup victory. The song became the soundtrack of a generation and is still played widely today.

More time has now passed since the release of 'Three lions' than had passed between England's 1966 victory and the song's release. The anthem that once looked back on 30 years of waiting has itself become a relic of an even longer era - one in which football and the society around it have continued to be transformed by commercialisation, inequality and the capitalist corruption of the beautiful game.

England's campaign at the 2026 World Cup ended with a third-place finish. Although it was their best performance since lifting the trophy in 1966, representing progress in footballing terms, the familiar sense of unfinished business remains. The "hurt" immortalised in 'Three lions' has not disappeared: it has merely been extended into a seventh decade. For all the talent available to the England squad, and despite another deep run into the tournament, the ultimate prize once again proved elusive.

Disappointing

Elsewhere, Scotland endured a disappointing tournament from a footballing perspective, failing to make a significant impact on the pitch. Yet Scottish supporters won widespread admiration off it. Their good humour, friendliness and enthusiastic embrace of host communities earned praise across the United States and the world. In an age when football is increasingly marketed as a corporate entertainment product, the warmth and solidarity displayed by ordinary supporters remains a reminder that it is the fans, not the governing bodies, politicians or sponsors who give the game its soul.

One of the biggest talking points before a ball had even been kicked was the expansion of the tournament to 48 teams. Many critics rightly saw the move as another attempt by FIFA to maximise broadcasting revenues, sponsorship opportunities and commercial income by simply creating more matches. Those concerns remain valid. Every expansion of a sporting competition is viewed first through the prism of profit. Indeed FIFA's revenues were boosted by a cool \$11 billion, what with ticket sales, broadcasting rights and advertising - the most profitable yet.

Yet the enlarged format produced genuine footballing stories that would otherwise never have happened. For example, Cape Verde, making history by reaching the tournament for the first time, captured the attention of the world - not just football fans. Their remarkable run included holding this year's winners, Spain, to a 0-0 draw in their opening game. They also took defending champions and this year's runner-up, Argentina, to extra time in the round of 32 before narrowly losing 3-2. At the centre of that story was, of course, the 40-year-old goalkeeper, Vozinha, whose outstanding performances symbolised what makes international football compelling. Such moments remind us that football's genuine riches are not measured in advertising and television contracts, but in the dreams



Spain: worthy winners

of fans, particularly in smaller nations competing on the world stage.

Ironically, Cape Verde's success nearly scuppered FIFA's carefully managed tournament structure. The governing body had gone to considerable lengths to protect the leading commercial attractions: Argentina, England, France and Spain. Those teams were effectively granted privileged status by being placed into separate quarters of the draw, ensuring they could not eliminate one another before the semi-finals. On paper this was presented as a competitive balancing measure. In reality, it was about safeguarding television audiences and commercial value by maximising the chances of as many as possible of football's biggest brands progressing in the tournament.

As events unfolded, the four highest-ranked teams all reached the semi-finals anyway. But the process itself illustrated FIFA's willingness to manipulate tournament structures in pursuit of commercial objectives. Even so, the decision to switch Argentina into Group J and move France into Group I ensured the two highest-ranked nations, Argentina and Spain, could not meet until the final. Had the groups remained in their original positions, England would have faced France in the semi-finals, while Argentina met Spain. Instead, FIFA reshaped the pathway to preserve the possibility of what it evidently considered the ideal final.

For working class supporters, the greatest barriers were not found in the draw, but in the cost of attending the tournament itself. Travelling across the vast distances of the United States, Canada and Mexico required flights, internal transport and accommodation beyond the reach of many ordinary fans. Those fortunate enough to secure tickets often found themselves spending thousands of pounds to follow their team.

Sky high prices

Ticket prices themselves became the subject of official scrutiny. FIFA was in fact subpoenaed by the attorney general of New York and New Jersey as part of an investigation into ticket pricing and seat allocations. The fact that football's governing body found itself under legal examination during its own flagship tournament says much about the priorities that increasingly dominate the modern game. That said, we can expect nothing to come of this.

Supporters also faced restrictions that bordered on the absurd.

Tournament organisers initially considered prohibiting spectators from bringing their own water bottles into stadiums, despite many matches taking place in intense heat. Only after significant criticism was the proposal reversed. The episode reflected a familiar pattern: supporters are viewed less as participants in a shared sporting occasion than as captive consumers, whose every need presents another opportunity for making money.

That same commercial logic was visible on the pitch through the widespread use of 'hydration breaks'. While in some cases extreme temperatures undoubtedly required measures to protect players, the scheduling and presentation of these interruptions revealed another purpose: they provided ready-made advertising windows for broadcasters and sponsors, creating opportunities to monetise the game in addition to the official break at half time. The 'welfare' measures served as much resented cover.

Given the financial incentives involved, it seems highly likely that hydration breaks, or similarly packaged commercial interruptions, will become a permanent feature, at least in international and continental competitions. Football has already absorbed ever more advertising into its fabric, from digital pitch-side boards to sponsored time-keeping and endless branding opportunities. Every pause in play now risks becoming another commodity to be sold.

The tournament also demonstrated once again that claims of keeping politics out of sport remain highly selective. FIFA has long insisted that football should remain separate from political disputes, yet that principle is regularly abandoned, whenever powerful states intervene.

One of the clearest examples came in the controversy surrounding Iranian players and support staff, never mind supporters, who faced significant difficulties obtaining visas to attend matches. Restrictions placed on the team, such as being required to travel in and out the US on match days, were deliberate attempts by the global hegemon to hobble their chances of any success and FIFA did nothing to protect the integrity of the game. For ordinary Iranian fans, following their national team became impossible - not because of footballing reasons, but because of geopolitical realities. While FIFA frequently speaks about inclusion and unity, it possesses remarkably little influence, when

those principles collide with the policies of powerful governments.

Just as outrageous was the intervention by Donald Trump following US player Folarin Balogun's red card, personally calling FIFA president Gianni Infantino to overturn the subsequent punishment. Such decisions might appear unprecedented, but football has seen similar episodes before. Cristiano Ronaldo benefited from disciplinary action being suspended in order to play in this World Cup. And in another FIFA competition Lionel Messi's Inter Miami were effectively awarded a place at the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup without progressing through a predetermined qualification pathway. Rules, it appears, often become surprisingly flexible when the commercial value of particular individuals or teams are considered sufficiently great, or interventions are made by the 'right people'.

Donald barges in

Trump's involvement did not end there. Having previously overshadowed Chelsea's FIFA Club World Cup celebrations by inserting himself into the trophy presentation (and, of course, revelling in the award of the hastily created, sycophantic FIFA 'Peace Prize'), he was handed another prominent ceremonial role during this World Cup. He presented the winning trophy to Spain, despite not having attended any of the 100 or so games before the final. He also presented rings to the winners - something taken from the US National Football League's Super Bowl.

None of this interference should surprise us. Sport has never existed outside society. Under capitalism, football reflects the contradictions of the economic system that surrounds it. The enormous wealth generated by

the game is concentrated in the hands of governing bodies, broadcasters, sponsors, owners and corporate partners, while the supporters who create its atmosphere and cultural significance are asked to pay ever more for the privilege of participating.

This trend extends well beyond the World Cup. Domestic supporters can expect further increases in season ticket prices, replica shirts, subscription packages and matchday costs. Every successful commercial innovation introduced on football's biggest stage soon finds its way into domestic leagues. Whether through dynamic ticket pricing, expanded sponsorship opportunities or further broadcasting changes, the burden invariably falls upon ordinary supporters.

Yet football will continue to endure, precisely because it belongs, culturally if not economically, to the working class. The passion that filled stadiums, the friendships formed across borders and the unforgettable stories produced by nations like Cape Verde remain stronger than the corporate structures attempting to package and monetise them. For now anyway.

While FIFA may own tournaments, it does not own the emotions they inspire. It is the job of the left to recognise this and show it can appeal to the masses who enjoy the game by organising opposition to its commercialisation and linking it to the wider political and economic struggles.

As long as football remains organised according to the priorities of profit rather than the interests of supporters, the struggle over the future of the game will continue. The World Cup demonstrated both the enduring beauty of football and the accelerating commercialisation threatening to suffocate it. It is a contradiction unlikely to disappear any time soon.

Fighting fund

Keep it rolling in

Things are looking pretty good for this month's fighting fund - especially after the last seven days, when no less than £1,047 came our way in donations!

It was especially helpful that no fewer than four comrades produced huge *three-figure* contributions - thanks very much to comrades LM, TB, SK and PM! Other bank transfers/standing orders came from comrades MM (£75), TR (£40), GB (£25), GD (£24), DR (£20), IS (£17), JL and AM (£10 each).

Then we had comrades KS (£50) and RD (£5), who made their donations via PayPal, and comrade PB, who handed a £10 note to one of our team.

All that came to more than a grand in a single week, taking our running total for July up to £2,225! Don't forget that the monthly target is £2,750, so surely we're going to go shooting past it, seeing as there are *eleven days* still to go, as I write!

Well, let's hope so - don't forget there were two months earlier in the year when we were short of target, so an extra few hundred pounds over and above

that £2,750 would be just what the doctor ordered! Can you help us out? Let's not only go shooting past the target, but also break through that *three-grand* barrier! What a boost that would be for the *Weekly Worker*!

There are all sorts of ways you can donate, but the most efficient is via bank transfer (see below for our account details). For more information on the various ways you can play your part, please go to the web address you can see there too.

By the way, we have Communist University in central London over August 8-15. That means two more issues before our normal two week break (we will publish the finalised CU timetable in the August 6 edition). However, rest assured, we will be back with you on August 27. Meanwhile, keep the money rolling in.

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

REVIEW

Back to a hothouse earth

Bill McGuire **The fate of the world: a history and future of the climate crisis** Harper Collins, 2026, pp265, £20

A couple of years back, in 2024, climate scientists recorded, for the first time, global temperatures exceeding 1.5°C above preindustrial levels. The average figure was 1.6°C. The following year, 2025, was 1.47°C above preindustrial levels - the third warmest on record.¹ However, while 2026 is expected to be roughly the same as 2025, climate models suggest 2027 could well bring even higher temperatures because of the El Niño effect.²

Given the sheer momentum of the rise, 2°C+ seems a distinct possibility in the early 2030s, not least with Donald Trump, America pulling out of the Paris agreement and the ‘drill, baby, drill’ message to big oil.

But it is not only the good old US of A. The world continues to giddily pump out greenhouse gases on an increasing scale. Indeed there are serious warnings that with atmospheric CO₂ concentrations going from 280 parts per million in preindustrial times to 430ppm today³, climate feedback will kick in soon and catapult temperatures to 3°C, 4°C and beyond. Enough, it is authoritatively reckoned, to bring about “civilisational collapse” some time between 2070 and 90.⁴ This is within the lifetime of our younger readers.

Here is what the solemn pledges to limit global temperature increases to well below 2°C (ideally to 1.5°C), made in Paris 2015, have come to.

Grand scale

Against this grim background, Bill McGuire - emeritus professor of climate hazard at University College London - has written his much acclaimed book: it comes with glowing recommendations from the great and good, when it comes to the climate crisis (Chris Packham, Tony Juniper, Jonathan Porret, Roger Hallam, etc).

His is a popular book, designed to inform the widest audience, but also rouse. Basically, the thesis is that, with the industrial revolution, humanity has broken the planet’s recent (in geological terms) interglacial oscillation between cool and the cold. Without the post-1850 massive release of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases we would expect a gradual warming of temperatures before returning to the ice age conditions of some 10-15,000 years ago. Instead our future lies in a hotter - perhaps a *much* hotter - past.

Professor McGuire begins at the beginning with our ever changing star, the sun - one of 100 billion stars in our galaxy, the Milky Way. Yet, while this fusion reactor is the “ultimate arbiter of the temperature of our world”, there are other factors too (p2).

Planet Earth dates back some 4.6 billion years to the formation of the solar system out of the primordial dust left over from prior stellar extinctions. Crucially, though, the “head-on collision” with Theia, a Mars sized “chunk of rock”, not only added to the Earth’s mass: it created an oversized satellite, the moon, which orbits and still churns the planet. This has had “huge consequences for our climate” (p5). Without the moon, no axial tilt, no seasons and no tides.

The Earth’s first eon, the Hadean - named after Hades - saw the molten surface slowly cool, over some five million years, and harden into a solid crust (p27). The first atmosphere contained abundant amounts of CO₂ - perhaps between 10 and 200 times as much as today.⁵ Solar winds stripped away the lighter, volatile gases. Because of the much closer proximity



One of CU’s many star speakers this year

of the moon compared with today, together with associated volcanic activity and countless asteroid and meteorite strikes, a second atmosphere formed: besides CO₂, there was ammonia, methane, carbon monoxide and water.

Earth was a hothouse - more like present-day Venus than present-day Mars. Surface temperatures were a melting 230°C. Despite that, there were oceans. Heavy atmospheric pressure - maybe up to 100 bar - prevented liquid water evaporating into steam⁶: to put it mildly, not a “nice place to be” (p6).

Amazingly, there is “some evidence” of life’s “arrival” as long ago as 4.1 billion years (p27). True, the building blocks could have *arrived* from asteroids and meteorites. Either way, abiotic processing of CHNO compounds resulted in prebiotic compounds. Certainly, as shown by the fossil record, simple, heterotrophic (food-eating) life was abundant some 3.1 billion years ago: tiny, single-cell, blue-green algae were busy converting carbon dioxide into oxygen through photosynthesis. Eventually there was enough oxygen in the atmosphere to react with the methane and turn the sky blue.⁷ So Earth’s third atmosphere is the product of co-evolution. Indeed our climate results from the interaction of atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere ... and biosphere.

The ozone layer formed 600 million years ago ... and as a byproduct it provides the vital shielding from the sun’s biologically harmful ultraviolet rays. The evolutionary leap into complex life forms happened in the balmy seas of some 540 million years ago. The Cambrian explosion occupies a mere few million years - in geological terms, a blink of the eye - and led to “virtually all major groups of modern animals”.⁸

Temperatures in the deep past were mostly much higher than today. The Cambrian (600-500 million years ago) 14°C hotter. The Silurian (425-405 million years ago) 4°C hotter. The Devonian (405-345 million years ago) 10°C hotter. The Triassic (252-201 million years ago) 10°C hotter. The Jurassic (201-145 million years ago) 8°C hotter. The Cretaceous (145-66 million years ago) 4°C hotter. The Palaeocene (66-55 million years ago) 10°C hotter. The Eocene (55-33 million years ago) 4.5°C to 12°C hotter.

Besides hothouse Earths - the default condition - there have been, though, iceball Earths: eg, the Permian (298-252 million years ago). It was on average 3°C colder than today. As might easily be guessed, all my figures are rough and ready estimates, but they serve, nonetheless, to illustrate the deep past.⁹

Professor McGuire explains that ‘hothouse’ describes conditions where things are not just warmer, but where the “poles are ice free”: therefore sea levels are much higher (p24). Conversely icehouse conditions see relatively reduced levels of greenhouse gases, much lower sea levels and massive extended ice-sheets. His fear is, of course, that we are sleepwalking back into the past at an extraordinarily rapid pace - back, for example, to the sweltering Eocene.

Professor McGuire treats the Eocene as our probable future (unless there is an immediate and radical change of direction). During this epoch there were palm trees in Antarctica, great forests covered northern Canada, Siberia and even parts of Greenland - home to three-toed horses and herds of giant camels (p39). Charcoal and soot layers in the geological record reveal “huge wildfires”. There is the distinct possibility too that hurricanes and typhoons reached enormous speeds and persisted for months on end. As for sea levels, they were 100 to 150 metres higher than today.

Doubtless, some of these temperature changes we have seen across the Earth’s natural history are due to planetary wobbles (Milankovitch cycles), volcanic activity and variations in solar brightness. But there is also plate tectonics: the continents ‘drift’ at the speed with which your fingernails grow.

Some three billion years ago the vast mass of the Earth’s surface seems to have been covered with water. There were only a few spots of dry land. Arctica, or Arctida, was perhaps the first supercontinent, and arose some 2.5 billion years ago (there might well have been others, but, if so, only mere geological fragments remain). Eventually Arctica broke apart, but after many more millions of years there were other succeeding continents and supercontinents: Kenorland, Columbia, Rodinia, Pannotia.

Beginning in the Neoproterozoic, about 550 million years ago, most

of Earth’s land masses are found joined together in the Gondwana supercontinent: McGuire writes of a supercontinent cycle and how it has a “profound impact on all sorts of geological mechanisms” - not least those which relate to “atmospheric carbon levels” (p48). Basically, high carbon levels coincide with the coming together and consolidation of supercontinents; lower carbon levels with when they break apart.

There is life too. With the conditions brought about by the Gondwana supercontinent, things were ripe for terrestrial flora and fauna. Probably the migration from the seas began some 500 million years ago.¹⁰ Complex life drifted, crept, coiled, clambered and slithered onto the land and rapidly evolved.

Something like our present configuration of continents appeared 60 million years ago. Doubtless this helped establish our contemporary algal - ie, chilling - climate regime. The North American and Eurasian land masses more or less encircle the northern pole; that, and the Antarctic continental plate centred on the southern pole, provide almost perfect conditions for ensuring an oscillation between cool and cold conditions. Moreover, the bulk of Earth’s fresh water is kept frozen in two gigantic polar ice sheets - which means much reduced sea levels.

Over the last million years there has been a glacial-interglacial, 100,000-year pattern. Each cycle has its own particular features and oddities. Understandably, though, as with any study of the past, data becomes ever more uncertain with increasing distances of time. So the best records we possess go from the interglacial (known as the Eemian) period down to the present Holocene period - deep ice cores drilled from Greenland and Antarctica have yielded enormous amounts of information.

In terms of climatic transition, the most reliable information is for what is called the Younger Dryas to Holocene, which ended the last ice age. At its maximum, some 15,000 to 20,000 years ago, the Arctic ice sheet extended all the way down to Chicago, New York, Moscow and London and saw much lower sea levels than today. What is now Britain was joined to France, the Netherlands and Denmark. Recent studies give a -6.1°C average temperature.¹¹

The transition to our present-day climate regime occurred some 11,650 years ago and saw the retreat of the great ice sheets. The tipping point seems to have been only a decade or two long. It is argued that the “speed of this change is probably representative of similar, but less well-studied, climate transitions during the last few hundred thousand years”.¹² In point of fact, says McGuire, any complex system, such as the climate, is “prone to tipping” (p120).

During the present (Holocene) interglacial period, there have been cold and dry phases occurring over a roughly 1,500-year cycle, and climate transitions on a decade-to-century timescale. There have been little ice ages, as well as bursts of relative warmth. Between 1100 and 1300, for example, Europe experienced temperatures which were 0.7°C to 1.6°C higher than today (though, it must be emphasised, this was a local, not a global, phenomenon: elsewhere things were cooler). That allowed for more productive agriculture throughout the continent and saw flourishing English vineyards.

It is also worth recalling, though,

that the Thames regularly froze solid during mid-17th century winters and that the years from 1805 to 1820 were comparably cold and bleak. What we are experiencing at present certainly needs to be put into the context of the transition from the little ice age, which finally ended around 1880. Temperatures would be expected to rise ... very slightly. But, of course, what we have seen is way beyond that: temperatures increased on average by 0.08°C every decade since 1880 and by an average 0.18°C since 1981.¹³ The main cause is human-induced greenhouse gases: eg, in the 20th and 21st centuries “the level of carbon dioxide rose by 40%” - now the highest for some 20 million years (UK Met Office).¹⁴

McGuire is withering, when it comes to so-called climate sceptics, such as Piers Corbyn. The same goes for “pragmatic politicians” who admit the dangers of runaway global warming, but refuse to do anything meaningful, because of electoral considerations, media spin, cost, etc. However, showing something approaching resignation, he despairingly says that, for “good or ill”, we are ultimately “in the hands of politicians and global corporations” (p220).

Well, Bill, if today’s mainstream bourgeois politicians stay in control and continue to serve the global corporations, it will certainly be for the ill. Perhaps triggering, as already mentioned, civilisational breakdown and, as McGuire argues, the “likely splintering of effective central control” - something which he almost relishes, because it will, in his opinion, force a social reset and provide an “opportunity for a long, hard think about where we went wrong and what we can do differently - and better - next time” (p223).

Here is a real flaw in what is otherwise an excellent book. Though McGuire bemoans “consumer capitalism”, he is, in the absence of a viable counterpower, reduced to almost accepting the ‘inevitable’ and advocating small-scale solutions, like adapting your house and reaching out to neighbours at a “local level, meaning town, village, street, block of flats” (p223). Nothing wrong with such solutions in and of themselves. Of course. But, given that we face a global climate crisis that threatens social breakdown, clearly inadequate.

Politics needed

To get an idea of the political problems we face when it comes to convincing the likes of Bill McGuire, we need look no further than the Socialist Workers Party. We shall leave aside here the notorious ‘What we stand for’ formulation found in *Socialist Worker* that was unquestioningly trotted out week after week and year after year: “Workers create all wealth under capitalism” (proposition 1). As I show in *The little red climate-book* (2023), a Lassalleian, not a Marxist formulation.¹⁵ No less to the point, nature is, *in fact*, the main source of wealth, no matter what the mode of production.

Instead, we shall look at the SWP’s front, the oddly named Campaign against Climate Change. Why ‘oddly named’? Simply because, given the potted history of Earth’s climate outlined above, let alone professor McGuire’s much more detailed account, it reveals a profound ignorance of what should be ABC, when it comes to the climate.

The climate has and will continue to change. In fact, climate and change go together like weather and change. The two are inseparable. The weather

changes from hour to hour, day to day and month to month. Imagine a Campaign against Weather Change. It would be too, too silly.

But the problem runs deeper, far deeper. Despite being promoted by the SWP, CCC, founded in 2001, is politically safe, soggy and, quite frankly, stupid. Capitalism, socialism, the working class all go studiedly unmentioned.

According to its ‘mission statement’, CCC exists to “influence those with the greatest power” to “minimise” the “harmful effects of climate change” with the “utmost speed and resolution”. Flattering courtiers similarly pleaded to Canute, the 11th century king of Norway, Denmark and England, to reverse the incoming tide. Needless to say, as he famously showed (purportedly on Thorney Island), no-one, not even he, could pull off such a feat.

Nor, despite CCC “street demonstrations” and avoidance of “detailed questions” in the attempt to “bring together as many people as possible”, can we really expect “those with the greatest power” to agree an “international climate treaty” that will actually “minimise” the “harmful effects of climate change”?¹⁶

Well, of course, since that ‘mission statement’ was first written, an “international climate treaty” has been agreed. With much fanfare, Cop21 was adopted on December 12 2015 in Paris, signed on April 22 2016 by 195 parties and supposedly made effective on November 4 2016. But has this international climate treaty really served to “minimise” the “harmful effects of climate change”? Hardly: emissions continued to rise.¹⁷

Surely then, to “minimise” those “harmful effects” our sights must be set far higher than “street demonstrations” (or elitist stunts). We must talk about capitalism. We must talk about socialism. We must talk about organising the working class into the ruling class. The CCC ‘mission statement’ needs more than a long overdue update. No, an entirely different approach is needed.

Climate is big weather. Karen Bice gives the following definition: climate “is simply weather ‘averaged’ over a time period of one year or more”.¹⁸ In other words, there is nothing fixed about the climate. Climate change has never ceased, is ongoing and must therefore be considered natural. Notions of a static, unchanging climate are, to put it mildly, badly misconceived. While the climate constantly undergoes change, that happens within a self-adjusting system: that is, within a relatively stable equilibrium, and hence distinct geological epochs and periods. However, yes, there are tipping points - often accompanied by mass extinctions. There have indeed been five great mass extinctions: the first happening at the end of the Ordovician period 445 million years ago.

McGuire usefully devotes an entire chapter to this: ‘Endings, close calls and new beginnings’ (pp153-77). “Ultimately”, he says, a species, either “evolves into something else or succumbs to some kind of external threat”. Checking the famous Doomsday Clock, he soberly warns that we stand 85 seconds away from extinction.

Most species last between 500,000 and three million years. *Homo sapiens* have only been around for some 300,000 years, so we are comparative youngsters and might expect to last many thousands of years more. Maybe millions. However, we are not a ‘normal’ species. Though we continue to evolve, straightforward evolution no longer applies. The danger we face is not from nature in the sense of being red in tooth and claw. Leave aside a generalised nuclear exchange, the main danger we face is from our own grossly irresponsible actions -

well, the grossly irresponsible actions of a system which has no choice but to accumulate for the sake of accumulation.

So the reason why we face the danger of a “hothouse hell” is surely all too obvious: M-C-M’. Under capitalism, money is laid out for the production of commodities with one overriding aim: making more money (ie, profit) - the secret of making something out of nothing lying in the exploitation of labour-power. Surplus value is pumped out from workers and realised through market sale. Using money to make more money is, though, a never-ending imperative. Hence what is called the Capitalocene (p191).

And yet we have also seen the Soviet Union of the five-year plans and a non-capitalist system of accumulation for the sake of accumulation. There is China too. Today it is the world’s biggest emitter of greenhouse gases. True, as a country, it is fully integrated into the global capitalist economy, but, on the other hand, it is dominated by the Communist Party of China, where, at least arguably, politics is in command. Exactly the sort of hybrid regime Marxists would predict in our epochal transition from the capitalist to the communist mode of production.

Climate socialism

It is also worth questioning McGuire’s assumption that, with the climate crisis, the centralised state will be “splintered”. Not that we should discount that possibility. But if it happens what will arise will not be a multitude of peaceful towns, villages and hamlets happily rubbing alongside each other in their climate-adapted houses and flats. On the contrary, the likelihood would be warlordism and social chaos. Eg, the collapse of the western Roman empire saw rival generals and tribal leaders fighting over the wreckage and in some areas - eg, Britannia - severe social and technological retrogression. Christianity, building in stone, using kiln-baked roofing tiles, minting coins, even writing virtually disappeared.¹⁹

But there is another possibility. The centralised state can impose itself over capitalist society and suppress - or even supersede - the law of value in the interests of the state as the state. For many on the left, not unreasonably, capitalism is defined as categorically “incapable of carrying out the radical measures required”.²⁰ “Capitalism can’t solve the climate crisis.”²¹ “Can this climate emergency be halted under the current world economic, political and social system - capitalism? ... No.”²²

However, even the most fabulously wealthy billionaires and the system’s top politicians and state actors live on the same planet as the rest of us (true, Elon Musk wants to rocket off to a frigid, lifeless, almost airless Mars, but he is widely considered to be bonkers by his more sober-minded peers). Even if it is only in the interests of their children and grandchildren, they know that something must be done, and done soon ... that or we collectively face Doomsday. True, according to the writer and high-class prostitute known as Salome - she served the needs of the rich and powerful at the Davos conferences - many of them think we are in the end days and that they might as well enjoy themselves to absolute excess while they can.²³

So it is hard to imagine today that any of the big countries will carry out a programme that actually achieves net-zero emissions by 2030 or 2035 - after all, that would require a dramatic restructuring of the entire socio-economic order. Therefore, in all probability, today’s crop of myopic, lying, narrow-minded, thoroughly corrupt establishment politicians will continue with their denialism - that or simply kicking decisive action down the road to an electorally safe distant

future. Meantime there will be more drilling for oil and gas, more nuclear power plants, more roads, more air travel, more poor-quality housing ... crucially, more of everything - ie, more economic growth for the sake of economic growth.

Yet, as seen with the Covid pandemic - and World War II and World War I before that - the ruling class was prepared to allow governments to temporarily suspend the law of value, given a dire emergency. The normal workings of capitalism were overridden, curtailed or tightly directed in order to achieve agreed state aims.

The more intelligent sections of the left have written about how governments introduced ‘Covid socialism’ - roughly equivalent to the *Kriegssozialismus* (war socialism) put into effect by the German high command in 1916: ie, the use of concentrated state power to deal with a dire national emergency - the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine being a good example. Developed double quick, produced on a non-profit basis, it was then rolled out and administered according to need by the NHS.

In terms of the general interest - more particularly the general capitalist interest - governments will take what are usually regarded as extreme measures. Faced with Covid-19, then Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak talked about tearing up his economic textbooks, doing what is necessary, thinking the unthinkable, and so on and so forth.

Though fraught with horrendous difficulties, not least because capitalism - from the level of the firm to that of the state - is characterised by internally generated contradictions, we should not categorically discount the possibility that this will happen with the climate crisis.

So ‘climate socialism’ imposed by a firefighter state - maybe urged on by Friends of the Earth, the Green Party and CCC demands for the declaration of a ‘climate emergency’; maybe with ‘beyond politics’ green advisors, enlightened technocrats, the securocracy and the armed forces playing a leading role - could conceivably impose draconian restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions by reorganising industry, transport, housing and agriculture.

Of course, that - or something like it - would have to happen in all the major countries, if the rise in global warming is to be limited to 2°C (1.5°C is now a dead letter). Adding to that little difficulty, the imperial hegemon, the United States, is in visible decline and is, as a result, bent on destruction and extracting ever more tribute - not the construction that marked out the post-1945 world order with the Marshall Plan, Bretton Woods and the social democratic consensus. So there is nowadays no effective power that can enforce the general good.

Even on a purely national level, we should have no illusions about any climate socialism, introduced, overseen and enforced by this or that capitalist state (or, for that matter, China’s hybrid regime). As with war socialism, if climate socialism happens, there will be stupid blunders, severe restrictions on democratic rights, attempts to drive down popular living standards - all accompanied by massive corruption and corresponding opportunities for well-connected insiders to enrich themselves beyond the dreams of Croesus.

Nor will such a climate socialism evolve peacefully and smoothly into proletarian socialism. True, we reach a partial negation of capitalist production - the outer limits of capitalist society. But, because there is a swollen, parasitic, aggressively repressive, bureaucratic state, what we have is the extreme opposite of proletarian socialism.

Nonetheless, there is a relationship between climate socialism - in reality capitalism attempting to save itself on the back of the working class - and proletarian socialism. After all, in the paragraph above - the one talking about draconian restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions and reorganising industry, transport, housing and agriculture - substitute the firefighter state with one where the working class is organised as the state power.

Such a state, based on extreme democracy, closely coordinating with other similar states across the globe, could radically reorganise power generation, industry, agriculture, transport and housing; a state that reduces greenhouse gas emissions to net zero and then below; a state that subordinates production to need. Then it is clear that such a state is nothing other than genuine climate socialism that really does benefit the whole of humanity - and therefore represents the negation of capitalism and the first step towards a classless, moneyless, stateless and ecologically sustainable communism.

This, not localism, not accepting the inevitability of 3°C ... and beyond, as some sort of blessing in disguise, provides the only rational basis for building “a new global community” that can “live sustainably as custodians of the natural world rather than its plunderers” (p223) ●

Jack Conrad

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Will Red Sea become next conflict zone?

Deadlock and danger of escalation

American air superiority is overwhelming, but it cannot stop retaliation or open the Strait of Hormuz. Meanwhile, civilian targets are increasingly being hit, warns **Yassamine Mather**

Since the fragile US-Iran ceasefire broke down in early July, the United States has conducted consecutive nights of military strikes across Iran. The campaign has concentrated on missile and drone launch sites, command centres, naval infrastructure, coastal surveillance, transport routes and facilities linked to Iran's ability to contest navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. In response, Iran continues to launch missiles and drones at US bases situated in the region and commercial shipping. The central strategic fact is not American air superiority, which is clear, but the failure of air power alone to eliminate Iran's capacity for retaliation or compel it to give up its leverage over the strait.

Iranian attacks have continued to penetrate regional air defences often enough to produce casualties and disruption. Publicly reported figures place the cumulative US military toll at 18 dead and more than 500 wounded, although casualty reporting has been gradual and remains politically contested. The significance lies less in any single number than in Iran's ability to impose a steady cost despite overwhelming US technological superiority. On the Iranian side, casualty totals remain disputed and have been reported differently by Iranian authorities, rights monitors and international agencies. However, we know that at least 3,500 Iranians - many of them civilians - have been killed and more than 27,000 injured. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said in March that up to 3.2 million people had been displaced inside Iran since the conflict began.

The most important development in the renewed campaign is the widening of attacks from clearly military installations to infrastructure with both military and civilian functions. This creates cascading effects: damage to a bridge can interrupt food, fuel and medical deliveries; damage to electricity generation or substations can halt pumps and water treatment; damage to ports and railways can paralyse both military logistics and ordinary commerce.

Strikes in Hormozgan province reportedly hit road and railway bridges around routes which connect Iran's principal southern port and naval facilities to the central plateau and Tehran itself. Even when described as military-logistics targets, their destruction also slows civilian freight, food distribution, fuel deliveries and emergency access.

Iran's energy ministry has acknowledged damage to power infrastructure, including generating units, transmission lines and substations, causing blackouts beyond the immediate strike zone. Electricity and water systems are interdependent: pumps, treatment works, desalination units and distribution networks require continuous power, meaning that a strike on electrical infrastructure can therefore become a water crisis, even when the water facility itself is not directly hit. In temperatures above 45°C, interrupted water and electricity supplies carry immediate health risks,

particularly for children, older people and those unable to leave.

Earlier in the war, Iran accused the US of hitting a desalination plant on Qeshm Island, allegedly cutting supplies to 30 villages. Washington did not acknowledge that strike, so the attribution remains disputed. Nevertheless, the episode demonstrates the extreme vulnerability of coastal communities that rely on desalination and electrically powered distribution.

The broader consequence is cumulative rather than local. Southern Iran already faced heat stress, water scarcity, electricity shortages and ageing networks before the war. Repeated damage, shortages of spare parts and sanctions on equipment can turn a repairable outage into a prolonged breakdown. Hospitals, refrigeration, sewage systems, telecommunications and small businesses are then affected, even when they are not directly targeted.

Destruction

The war has damaged major steel and petrochemical installations, which depend on reliable electricity, natural gas, water, rail transport and port access. Damage to any one of these systems can keep production offline after the physical plant itself is repaired. Steel and petrochemicals are also major non-oil sources of foreign currency, so their disruption deepens the pressure created by sanctions and the naval blockade.

One estimate suggested that roughly 10 million tonnes of annual steelmaking capacity, or about 25% to 30% of Iran's total, had been knocked offline after the attacks, but the precise figure remains hard to verify. What is not in doubt is that two of Iran's largest producers were struck and that production at major sites was at least temporarily halted.

Iran said the under-construction Darkhovin nuclear power project in Khuzestan was attacked. The International Atomic Energy Agency stated that the site was at an early stage, contained no nuclear material when last inspected and was not believed to pose a radiological risk. However, damage to nuclear-related sites still carries political and environmental risks, even when no radioactive release occurs. It can also affect surrounding electricity, transport and industrial infrastructure and further narrow the space for diplomacy.

There has been some speculation in the region that the southern strikes indicate preparations for a ground invasion. A more cautious reading is that the concentration of strikes around Bandar Abbas, Chabahar, Sirik, Qeshm and the Hormuz coastline is primarily connected to the contest over the Strait of Hormuz.

The immediate objectives appear to include:

- destroying mobile missile and drone launchers;
- suppressing naval, surveillance and coastal defence units;
- cutting military supply routes to ports and bases;
- protecting or restoring commercial shipping;

- creating bargaining leverage; and
- preparing potential options for limited raids, island seizures or operations against coastal positions.

Preparing the battlefield is not the same as preparing a full-scale invasion. The same air campaign could support continued bombing, naval escorts, special-forces raids, seizure of a small island or a limited exclusion zone. A conventional invasion intended to occupy Bandar Abbas, control the Hormuz coast or advance inland would require a much larger mobilisation: army and marine formations, amphibious shipping, engineering and logistics units, field hospitals, extensive fuel and ammunition stocks, and sustained access through Gulf states.

A limited landing or commando operation is more plausible than an attempt to occupy southern Iran. Even so, a supposedly limited action could expand quickly if US forces suffered heavy casualties or if Iran retaliated against regional bases and infrastructure.

Regional impact

On July 20, Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement announced a maritime embargo against Saudi Arabia, saying it was retaliating for the long Saudi blockade of Yemen and more immediate aviation and airport disputes. The declaration threatens to widen the conflict from the Strait of Hormuz to the Bab al-Mandeb strait and Red Sea, creating pressure on two major maritime chokepoints at once. The practical effectiveness of the announced blockade remains to be tested, but it increases insurance costs, military risk and uncertainty for Saudi exports and global shipping.

It looks as if the war has reached a strategic deadlock. The United States can destroy fixed targets and impose extensive economic and infrastructural damage, but it has not forced Iran to relinquish control of the strait or stop retaliating. Iran cannot defeat the US conventionally, but it can impose casualties, disrupt shipping, raise energy prices and expand the conflict to US bases and allied states.

Diplomatic contacts through Pakistan and other intermediaries continue. This indicates that neither

side has completely abandoned a negotiated exit, even while both attempt to improve their bargaining position through force. The most probable near-term course is therefore continued US intensive bombing, Iranian retaliation and confrontation over Hormuz, punctuated by intermittent ceasefire efforts.

The most dangerous signs of further escalation would be:

- deployment of additional US ground-combat brigades or marine expeditionary forces;
- a concentration of amphibious vessels near Oman and the Strait of Hormuz;
- large civilian evacuation orders around southern Iranian ports;
- attacks designed to cause prolonged national power or water failure; and
- a shift in US language from reopening the strait to occupying, administering or permanently controlling Iranian territory.

Meanwhile, more than four months after his appointment, supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei has still not made a verified public appearance. Statements and letters attributed to him have circulated through official channels, but the absence of any live image, voice or independently verifiable appearance has fuelled speculation about his health, authority and even whether he is alive. Iranian officials attribute the secrecy to wartime security, and president Masoud Pezeshkian has said he met him in person. The available evidence does not permit a firm conclusion.

Hardline cleric Mohammad Mehdi Mirbaqeri attracted attention by comparing the leader's disappearance from public view to the religious concept of 'occultation'. The analogy is politically revealing, but theologically weak. In Twelver Shiism, the occultation of the Twelfth Imam is understood as divinely ordained and tied to an infallible figure. But, of course, Khamenei is a constitutional and political office-holder whose authority formally derives from the Assembly of Experts and the institutions of the Islamic Republic, not divine appointment.

The rhetoric of occultation may nevertheless serve a political purpose: the system treats keeping secrets like a sacred duty, so asking for proof or evidence is discouraged and allows power to be exercised through an opaque network of offices, clerics and security institutions without a visible leader. His absence therefore matters not only as a question of personal health but as a sign of the regime's increasingly concealed and collective mode of rule under wartime conditions.

Iranian left

The analysis of the character of the war, and of responses to the ongoing destruction and devastation, has exposed significant divisions within the Iranian left.

On one side are sections of the reformist left that have returned to a post-1979 position of near-unqualified support for the Islamic Republic. They treat the regime's survival as a political achievement

and reproduce the language of international commentators, such as John Mearsheimer and Jeffrey Sachs, who present the conflict as an Iranian 'victory'. Some endorse negotiations; others combine support for talks with support for the continuation of the war. Among the more militant elements, there is a genuine belief that Iran can prevail militarily and assume a leading role in the global south - whether in alignment with China or as one of its principal regional partners.

At the other end of the spectrum, sections of what presents itself as the 'radical left' have produced an equally unsatisfactory line of argument. In this view, the conflict is not a war of aggression waged by an imperialist power - to identify it as such is allegedly to demonstrate support for the Islamic Republic. This framework collapses the distinction between the aggressor state and the state under attack.

A related position holds that the US, Israel and Iran are equally culpable for the war. Although this argument is most visible in certain exile circles, it also finds support among social-imperialist currents, especially those that adopt a conciliatory posture towards Israel. Taken to its conclusion, this logic would imply that support for the Palestinian struggle is suspect, because some Palestinians support Islamist organisations. In the name of ideological purity, such reasoning can therefore become accommodating towards another reactionary state in the region: the Zionist state of Israel.

The reality is more straightforward. This is a war of aggression, and its implications extend well beyond Iran. It forms part of the wider confrontation between the US and China. The left cannot afford to retreat into historically thin, politically evasive or factually incoherent commentary if it wants to retain any credibility.

Fortunately, the more extreme versions of these positions remain largely confined to small exile groups. Years of splitting and fragmentation have reduced many of them to marginal organisations with only limited support. Nonetheless, the public endorsements they receive from figures associated with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, as well as from Labour politicians such as John McDonnell, can create a misleading impression of their political weight.

It is entirely possible to describe this war as an act of imperialist aggression without thereby endorsing the Islamic Republic. The correct position is to recognise that even a reactionary capitalist state has the right to resist military attack by Israel and the US, while creating no political or strategic illusions about that state itself.

Defence of the Iranian and Palestinian peoples requires mass mobilisation - not only against foreign aggression, but also against nationalist and religious forces within their own societies. In the final analysis, such forces either accommodate imperialism or pursue a catastrophic strategy of 'victory' at all costs, while in reality supporting regimes whose corruption, inequality and repression generate the very social discontent that helps to destabilise them ●

**Mojtaba Khamenei:
occluded?**

