

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



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Towards a mass Communist Party

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HELL ON EARTH



LETTERS



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

'Partyist' leader?

Recently the Democratic Socialists announced the decision to cease all activity and to disband its organisation. This news is quite disappointing, as for some time it appeared to be one of the only organisations to emerge from the late Your Party that could present a clear programme and path forward for British socialists. The fight for radical democracy, for scientific socialism and for a workers' republic is essential, and can only be achieved through comradely cooperation and working together towards refounding a communist party in Britain.

Organisations come and go, but building communist hegemony requires building lasting institutions - a task where the Democratic Socialists had a role to play. The involvement of DS in the foundation of the Socialist Federation was a great step forward, and could have potentially brought together groups and people into discussion that otherwise might have not given the *Weekly Worker* a second glance. There is very clearly still an appetite for socialist regroupment, but with every failed project more and more socialists are becoming pessimistic about the project of regroupment: many will retreat into their sect assigned at birth; others will become inactive altogether.

The discussions between comrades from the Marxist Unity Caucus and the Provisional Central Committee has left many of us with little faith in British partyism. Instead of open comradely discussion, the two groups have engaged in sectarian mud-slinging over Twitter and Discord - absent from this has been self-critique and responsibility. The PCC and MUC meaningfully differ only in theoretical maturity, and form the two pillars of British partyism. Unfortunately, a lot of good faith has been lost and collaboration appears no longer present on the agenda. I hope these two organisations can come to their senses.

As if the grapes weren't already sour, a second front against the Provisional Central Committee has opened, with MUC comrades eager to join. The recent 'N-word' debate in the *Weekly Worker* has overshadowed intriguing articles that meaningfully push forward partyism, and completely absent has been discussion on the Democratic Socialists, and the road forward. The fight for political freedom is the fight for light and air, but the PCC has dug its trenches, fighting the battle, mistaking it for the war.

The collapse of the Democratic Socialists has wide implications for British socialists - no longer is there such a pro-party pole for radical democracy and scientific socialism; and the breakdown between the MUC and PCC has left British partyism less than the sum of its parts.

International partyism is advancing rapidly forward, becoming an institutional force in the Netherlands, Australia and beyond. Whereas British partyism was once the crown jewel of our tendency, it has since brought disrepute and embarrassment. Without a communist party the British communist-workers' movement has nothing, and the path forward necessitates tact and open comradely discussion. I hope, when

the time is right, the Marxist Unity Caucus will play a leading role in the process of forging communist unity, and that process begins with rebuilding comradely ties with the Provisional Central Committee.

Katy MacIntyre
Communist Unity (Australia)

DSYP marsh

The mothballing of the Democratic Socialists of Your Party is a conclusion of a decline of several months. It took the form of a series of personal conflicts, which resulted in resignation after resignation until barely anyone was still active within the organisation.

These personal conflicts took place primarily between people aligned with Max Shanly, one of the founders of the organisation and the main public figure, and people aligned with the Marxist Unity Caucus of RS21 and the *Weekly Worker*. I attempted to explain, to the extent of my knowledge, these various disputes in a previous letter to this newspaper (June 2). It all started when comrade Shanly called a few members of the DSYP executive committee incompetent during the frantic Grassroots Left slate negotiations of December 2025 and they responded by writing a google docs dossier about various issues they had with comrade Shanly.

There's a whole variety of issues that each side can mention (much of which has been written about in various issues of this paper a few months ago, more has been written by comrade Shanly and others on his 'side' such as former GL CEC candidate Chloe B on twitter), although its often difficult to actually understand since there's not been a complete history of the DSYP written yet.

Generally the political differences between comrade Shanly and those aligned with the MUC and *Weekly Worker* seem to be very minor. The 'Shanlyites' seem to have a very negative view of the 'sects', often accusing the 'MUCists' of having been far too focussed on ensuring an alliance with various Trotskyist groups than with those more recently formed (Eco Socialist Horizon, Trans Liberation Group, etc). Meanwhile the 'MUCists' seemingly were very concerned about comrade Shanly's connection to Zarah Sultana (they knew each other from the Labour Party), which they seemed to think was causing issues of democracy within the organisation. These political differences were not so major - both factions seemed to agree with the core premises of DSYP, its programme, etc. Whether or not people within the organisation called themselves 'partyists', it was still an organisation of people who *should* be working together to build a democratic socialist party.

Unfortunately the debates got very personal, and I think, when the GL slate was defeated during the CEC elections, it meant that there wasn't much to really bind the organisation together, so the 'Shanlyites' gradually quit the organisation leaving the 'MUCists' in almost complete control of the executive. Eventually even they began to quit, as the active members of the organisation were essentially just themselves and a few people from the *Weekly Worker*. It would be a bit inaccurate to describe the MUCists as just giving up immediately after gaining control of the organisation, since they did bother to make a whole website and established a proper paid membership system.

All these personal arguments seem rather unnecessary: we are all trying to cooperate for an important cause that's surely much more important than the issues between the 'Shanlyites' and the 'MUCists'.

I do understand somewhat though how these arguments could get so personal. DSYP after all was an entirely voluntary organisation: it had no paid full-timers, its members were mostly quite young and, to put it simply, it was working class - meaning how that class exists today: not limited purely to manufacturing workers or union officials. The members of DSYP were mostly wage labourers who had to spend their days at work and then were spending their limited free time frantically working on building the organisation or negotiating with half a dozen different organisations or so. I think these conditions were possibly why the arguments got so personal.

It still is necessary for people to actually be able to work together for political purposes, despite personal issues. Ultimately the 'Shanlyites' and the 'MUCists' have similar enough political opinions, so that, if there ever was some sort of unified, democratic socialist party of considerable scale, then both groups would probably be part of it and almost certainly would be part of the same tendency within the party. At some point the two groups are going to have considerable reason to cooperate - ideally they would be cooperating now to try to build a democratic socialist party. We still need a party republic, and that requires people to build it together. Even in the absence of the mechanisms of bureaucratic centralism, it seems socialists are still unable to cooperate.

I do still hope that one day the people who were once DSYP can work together to build a democratic socialist party, and that they can start to discuss this with each other as soon as possible. I hope that personal issues between former DSYP members can be resolved. DSYP may not have succeeded in building the democratic socialist party. However, what it stood for is still fundamentally correct - the ideas of the organisation are still what the socialist movements requires. What is needed is an organisation that can unite those that believe in such ideas.

Dovah
Oxfordshire

N-word bore

No doubt readers of the *Weekly Worker* are thoroughly bored by the rehashing of the tired question of self-censorship. I, however, take the liberty of making a small observation about comrade Paul Demarty's claim that "people do not want to hear the word ['nigger'] 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." May I suggest that there is one? The word is 'taboo'.

That word seems the best explanation for why so many people are incapable of grasping the distinction between use and mention, when it comes to intense slur words. Nobody, I assume, would be at all confused by the distinction between saying 'Donald Trump deserves the Nobel Peace Prize' and saying 'the president of FIFA said "Donald Trump deserves the Nobel Peace Prize"'. There are subtleties to the use/mention distinction. It would be odd to put your name in

quote marks when asked for it on a form, but no such subtlety arises when it comes to reported speech. The confusion would seem to come about because, as comrade Demarty says, the word is grossly offensive. We can though drop the qualifier, "in ordinary usage". Its power to offend comes from it being written or spoken. That is the hallmark of a taboo.

The real question is then, do we have use for taboos? Should we treat them as superstitions? It is important to acknowledge that one can break a taboo without being cursed - at least not in any straightforwardly causal way. The argument in favour of maintaining the taboo is not, therefore, as comrade Demarty claims, an argument for personal safety. Indeed, the point about taboos is that the very fact that they are a taboo is a reason for respecting them. No further justification can be proffered. The moment that you look for one is the moment that you are no longer under the spell of the taboo.

That, of course, rubs against the grain of a certain materialist trend in Marxist thought, but Marxists should welcome that. There must be limits to materialism. Why make the bet on the working class? We want the liberation of all. Why care about liberation? Because it is the fundamental human good or, perhaps better, because it is the fundamental precondition of anything that is good. The Marxist must be as committed to the reality of irreducible normative qualities as the best of them. If it really is all just matter, then nothing matters.

Does that mean that all taboos must stand? I suspect that this one is one that should go. It seems to me that comrade Demarty is quite correct. We should quote people accurately. One cannot think about racism without thinking about racist language. It is perhaps not the most important aspect of the despicable phenomenon, but it is certainly one part. It makes sense to defy the taboo for that purpose. On the other hand, I remain in thrall to the word's power. In the second sentence, I

put the word in quote marks inside square brackets. I suspect comrade Demarty would have done the same. We are not normally so fussy about marking mention in that construction. Perhaps the pair of us really just want to say 'Fuck'.

I apologise for the tedium.

Jacob Berkson
email

Union factions

The discussion in Britain over which part of the bureaucracy to back in the Unite elections has an echo in discussions among the socialist groups in Australia.

Support (critical, of course) for Sharon Graham is based on the illusion that such leaders will remove the shackles from rank-and-file activists pursuing strike action. Empty promises cloud the judgement of such socialists. But this is due to their own illusions that strike action alone will lead inexorably to socialist consciousness.

In Australia a recent election in the United Workers Union saw two elements of the union leadership pitched against each other. Most of the socialist groups supported the 'Members First' ticket and its promises it would support rank-and-file committees and industrial action (for more detail on this, read the series of articles in *Labor Tribune*).

How true this is can't be tested now, as the faction more closely aligned with the ALP leadership ('United for You') won the election. But, even if the 'Members First' ticket had won and opened up avenues for more strikes, the idea that this leads automatically to political consciousness is risible. At its heart is the false idea of the 'transitional method': starting with politics 'where the workers are at', strikes on wages will, step by magical step, lead people to want to form workers' councils and take power.

Of course, industrial action is at a low ebb. This is due to the fact that *working class consciousness* is at a low ebb. But strikes and trade

Fighting fund

Just a week away

There is now just over a week to go before Communist University, the CPGB's annual week-long summer school, which begins on Saturday August 8. In other words, next week will be the final issue of the *Weekly Worker* before our normal two-week summer break.

But I can give you some good news before then: we have gone shooting past our monthly fighting fund target of £2,750 with two days of July still remaining. Over the last week we received some excellent donations. Thanks, first of all, to comrades JC (£176!), RL (£60), AG (£50), DD and JT (£25 each), PS (£24), CA, JP and AB (£20), JM (£15), TT and JD (£10) and AR (£5). All those comrades contributed via bank transfer or standing order.

Then we had five handy PayPal donations - thanks to comrades JB and DB (£50), ES (£8), DI and AC (£5). Finally comrade Hassan handed his usual £5 note to one of our team. All that came to £583, taking the running total for July up to £2,808 with two days to spare.

In other words, we're already £58 past the target - next week you'll know the final total for July, as well as how the August fighting fund has started.

While there won't be an issue of the *Weekly Worker* on August 13 or 20, why not experience a different form of debate to what you read in the paper? Come to Communist University - either in person or online (no charge), for as many sessions as you want, where you'll witness much more of the open exchange of ideas that you read in this paper. For all the details you need, go to communistparty.co.uk/communist-university-2026.

But, before then, we'll see by how much we exceed the July fighting fund target and how much is in the kitty after the first few days of August. Don't miss this column next week! ●

Robbie Rix

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unionism are the *lowest form* of class consciousness. The (largely Trotskyist) ‘activist’ left fetishises strikes - partly due to its poor method, but also partly due to a workerist substitutionism for their organisations’ largely student-based (or origin) membership.

The socialist left must do much better if it wants to break out of its siloed ghettos.

Marcus Strom
Australia

Day of mourning

Even so close to Christmas, there ought to be a national day of mourning on December 15 - the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the neoliberal age in Britain, with the budget of December 15 1976

That was delivered by Denis Healey on behalf of Jim Callaghan - to the delight of Margaret Thatcher and Geoffrey Howe, who considered that the fox of their back-bench and indeed front-bench critics had been shot. The only notable thing about the 1979 general election was the sex of the new prime minister. Everything else had changed two and half years earlier, and has carried on under all three parties ever since. Andy Burnham is right about that, even if it is remarkable for a man with his record to say it.

As defence secretary, Healey had expelled the people from the Chagos Islands - a wrong that was later compounded by David Miliband, before apparently being completed by David Lammy and Richard Hermer. But Burnham has dismissed both Lammy and Hermer. He should cancel the Labour right’s three generations of betrayal and recognise that the Chagossians had the same right to self-determination as the Falkland Islanders, beginning with the right of return to exercise it. If Donald Trump did not like that, then too bad.

There is only one British member of Trump’s so-called Board of Peace. The expulsion of Tony Blair from the Labour Party, and his removal from the privy council as an agent of a foreign and increasingly hostile power, would be quite the ‘clause four moment’. As would the righting of the wrong against the Chagossians. And as would the removal of the 1995 commitment to neoliberalism that Blair wrote into the Labour Party constitution in place of clause four, leading Thatcher to describe New Labour as her own ‘greatest achievement’.

David Lindsay
Durham

Irish visionaries?

As part of this year’s Communist University, Anne McShane will lead a discussion titled ‘Ireland, the rise of rightwing nationalism, Sinn Féin, and the collapse of People Before Profit’s left-government strategy’. For some preparatory reading I’d like to suggest the short book, *Neglect in the north of Ireland* by Odrán de Bhaldráithe.

The book makes the case that continued British rule is at the heart of the economic, political and cultural neglect seen in the Six Counties - with ‘cultural’ primarily referring to Irish language matters. De Bhaldráithe argues that, rather than tailing mainstream republicanism, the left is better served by returning to and building on the radicalism of visionaries like Bobby Sands, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey and Ruairí Ó Brádaigh.

Sinn Féin supporters can point to their electoral success, the passing of an Irish Language Act - and, of course, its role in the peace process. But in prioritising results over method, the consequence of these apparent victories has actually been to legitimise partition - nowhere seen more clearly than in the Good Friday agreement. By participating in Stormont’s power-sharing

agreement, Sinn Féin has fully cooperated with unionism.

In so doing, Ireland’s largest republican party, which has a long leftwing history, has aided the Democratic Unionist Party in reforming the tax system to welcome big business - bringing the north in line with the Irish Republic, which is considered by economists to be a tax haven. They have also signed off on the economic status quo, in which all funding for the north is agreed solely in Westminster. Workers, especially those of a Catholic background, feel the impact of all this in consistently missed hospital targets, shortages of social housing and parents forced to home-school children with special educational needs, since there aren’t enough places for them in the education system.

The trade union movement is hampered by the same error as much of mainstream republicanism: that of brushing aside the real history of unionism, treating it as merely a culture or identity that must be respected and accommodated. In reality, unionism is a system of domination, necessarily opposed to democracy and working class solidarity in Ireland. Common-sense politics dictates that trade union leaders are ‘sectarian’ or anti-peace when they stray from regular struggles over wages, and instead raise demands that question the northern statelet.

De Bhaldráithe sums the situation up: “Organised labour has admitted defeat in its challenging of the political arena.” The example is given of Steve Turner who, as assistant general secretary of Unite, consistently supported the manufacture of RAF fighter jets in Belfast. Later, as a candidate for general secretary, Turner received backing from the Communist Party of Ireland. If the labour movement can’t even fight against colonialism and for greater democracy, then it can forget about the all-important struggle for working class power.

With the limited scope of this work, it touches on financialisation, but doesn’t get into Ireland’s dependence on the United States, whose interests dominate the country even more than Britain’s. Marxists cannot overlook this challenge when thinking about a united Ireland, or indeed any national liberation movement.

There have been many developments to grapple with since the publication of this book, such as the pogroms against migrants and Roma in the north, and the work of People Before Profit and the Palestine solidarity movement both sides of the border. Much of the impotence of the revolutionary left in Britain and in Ireland is down to our unwillingness to describe things as they really are, and our refusal to debate.

So come to Communist University and get the discussion going.

Billy Clark
email

Family abolition

In an article titled ‘Romantic love and family are not the enemy’, which involved a discussion between *Jacobin* editor Meagan Day and Swedish gender studies academic Evalina Johansson Wilen, *Jacobin* completely mischaracterises the ‘family abolitionist’ position. I would like to set the record straight. Of course, I can only speak for myself in this letter, though I hope other “family abolitionists”, as we are described in the article, will

agree with what I have to say.

In this interview, Wilen argues that “family abolitionism” - I shall call it ‘abolitionism’ from now on - is a position arising relatively recently due to increased demands on familial reproduction, alongside decreasing capacity to meet those demands. However, abolition of the family was advocated more than one hundred years ago by Marx in *The communist manifesto*. The socialisation of reproductive labour (which is, as Wilen acknowledges, the substance of abolishing the family) was an important part of the programmes of the social democratic parties of Europe, despite what the right wing of those parties thought about it.

Wilen also claims that abolitionists do not recognise that the family exists outside of market relations, and that this exterior existence is not only how capital makes use of it for its own interests, but also how it can serve as a basis of resistance. Wilen must not have done very much research into the abolitionist position to have come up with this perspective. It has been the exact perspective of socialist feminists for nearly one hundred years - from de Beauvoir to Wittig, to Mitchell, to Federici and Fortunati - that the family’s apparent separation from capitalist market relations is what allows these relations to subjugate it according to capitalist interests. Wilen’s claim that the family is completely external to the market is quite odd, as it is the gender pay gap which forces men and women proletarians together into families to function as stable economic actors. This separation is, in fact, illusory. It exists to ensure the stable supply of labour power, according to the economic and political interests of the ruling classes of the various nation-states of our global society.

The authors of this article make the point that familial relations can, and have, served as the basis for class struggle. This is true, without a doubt. Workers’ immediate experience of their exploitation, and their interest in fighting against it, often emerges from their loving relationships with their partners, children or other relatives who are suffering. But this alone tells us little that is interesting. It is certainly no reason to be soft on the family or romantic love. Workers also experience their exploitation in the workplace alongside their colleagues, or through their friends out in the ‘social factory’ of their towns and cities. Do we, then, go soft on wage labour?

It is only because the patriarchal and nuclear family structure favoured by capitalism is a part of capitalism that it can function as a site of resistance in the way that Day and Wilen argue. It is

not truly external. It is not a novel argument that it is only with the tools provided to us by capitalism that we will be able to abolish it. This is exactly what Marx said when he wrote: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please”.

Wilen’s argument that capitalism is, at the most abstract level, ‘gender blind’ is patently false. While only that half of the species who are labelled ‘women’ are capable of reproducing the human species through birth, it is they who will be the absolute focus of capital’s need to reproduce the class which it exploits.

‘Hetero-pessimism’, an antagonistic view of the relationships between men and women, is not created by dating apps. First, there has always been a moral panic about ‘the war of the sexes’; it is nothing new. Secondly, if this ‘war’ has intensified, it is primarily a result of women’s entrance into the workforce and thus our increased capacity to decide our sexual partners for ourselves, and the anxious effect this has had on the consciousness of young men raised in an ideology that they deserve women’s sexual labour simply by existing.

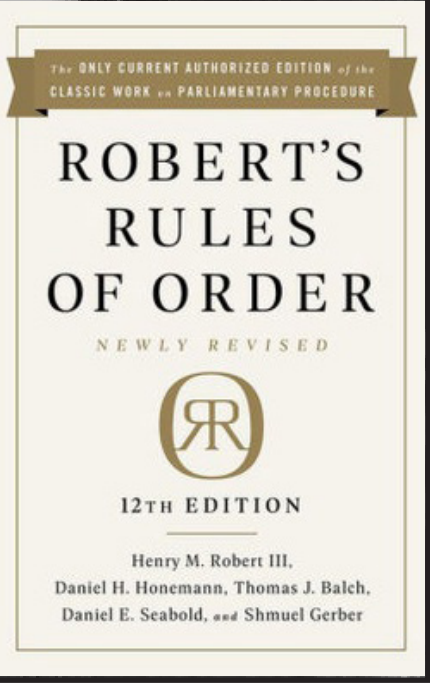
And anyway, romantic love is not the true counterpart to the sort of dating culture created by dating apps, and we certainly shouldn’t be soft on it. Bourgeois romantic love, in all its tentalisations about finding ‘the one’, of men and women as different puzzle pieces fitting together, and of love everlasting, has a complementarist - and thus sexist - view of love by design.

The response to this which is truly in line with working class interests is not to fetishise romantic love, or to go soft on the family for fear of alienating the proletariat, which is so enmeshed in it as an institution, but to propose our own alternative. Comradely love is the negation of romantic love and of the family. It proposes that the proletarian-human of a future communist society will be free to love whomever and however many they wish in whatever manner they see fit and for however long they want - not in an exploitative manner, but in a way that is respectful to the wishes of all parties involved (for as long as they are compatible) and is responsible to the community.

The aim is a form of love which is truly free from economic considerations and not tied up automatically in oppressive amounts of reproductive labour. This kind of culture needs to be consciously built by a united, democratic, international communist party of the working class. I say, let a thousand blossoms bloom!

Mila Volkova
Communist Unity, Australia

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CLIMATE

Hell on Earth

Record temperatures, intense rainfall, terrifying whirlwinds and murderous wildfires - all are sure signs of a runaway climate crisis that can only get worse. The solution cannot lie in tinkering with capitalism. There has to be climate communism, argues **Eddie Ford**

France is now sweltering under this summer's fourth heatwave that, at its peak, will hit 40°C or more, which in turn could flare up the wildfires that have already ravaged its south-west. Similar temperatures are expected in Spain.¹ So far about 375,000 people in both countries have been forced to leave their homes, as wildfires wreak havoc across southern Europe.

Some 2,000 firefighters in France are now working against the clock to contain the fires - a spokesperson for the national firefighters' federation saying that "the fire is like David against Goliath". Bordeaux's mayor, ominously said that the city must prepare itself for "all eventualities." Not, of course, total evacuation, but from nearby towns and perhaps even the suburbs. President Emmanuel Macron declared that the wildfires are "completely unprecedented" and the country faced the "toughest" situation since World War II. Not hyperbole.

Meanwhile, fires have burned "uncontrolled" to the west of Madrid. Socialist Workers Party prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, not only declared a disaster zone. He took the opportunity to take a swipe at rightwing regional governments: "Climate denial is the worst fuel for the fight against the climate emergency."² Andalusia, Aragon and Extremadura, Castile and León, Murcia and Valencia, and Madrid itself, are run by the conservative People's Party, sometimes in alliance with the far right Vox. Note, PP calls climate change 'natural', while Vox opposes anything that smacks of 'green taxes'. Of course, while Sánchez talks the talk of climate socialism, when it comes to the walk all there is talk of a 'national pact' with the PP and Vox.

Nearly 4,000 tourists have been evacuated in France - a measure described as "precautionary" - affecting campsites, holiday villages, etc around the resort of Lacanau to the west of Bordeaux. One holidaymaker vividly recounts seeing an "apocalyptic" scene on the sand dunes, where "the sky just changed colour and the smoke was really intense", with "ash falling from the clouds". The beach was "littered with black soot, where the waves normally leave seaweed" which he found "oddly haunting and beautiful", yet also "quite terrifying".³

Underlying the terrifying quality, a French firefighter told an international news agency that the fire had formed a pyrocumulonimbus, or "pyroCB clouds" - a fire-generated thunderstorm that "creates its own wind, with whirlwinds, becoming erratic and uncontrollable". In a nutshell, when the fire plume rises high enough, low atmospheric pressure causes its air to cool, and the moisture condenses and forms a cloud - and such clouds can generate lightning strikes and windy conditions. But, if a wildfire is sufficiently large and intense, the smoke plume it generates can form a pyroCB cloud, which can reach altitudes of six to nine miles and penetrate the stratosphere. In an unusually poetic form of words,



Not many smiles in Spain and France at the moment

Nasa calls them the "fire-breathing dragon of clouds".

Australia started experiencing pyroCB clouds at the beginning of the century, and they formed during massive wildfires in California in 2022 - but, if confirmed, this would be the first time a pyroCB has been observed in France. An ominous sign of the rapid developing climate crisis.

Global phenomenon

Of course, wildfires are a global phenomenon. Hence thousands of lightning strikes triggered fresh wildfires in western Canada last week, leading to a series of evacuation orders in British Columbia - in what Mark Carney, the prime minister, called one of the country's most intense seasons on record, with the authorities warning that drying and warming conditions could always cause the wildfires to grow.⁴

Many of them have still not been controlled. The federal government mobilised more than 5,300 firefighters and about 300 water bombers, helicopters and evacuation aircraft to battle the fires, and thousands of people, including some 'first nation' communities, have been evacuated this summer. Over 3.7 million hectares (7.29 million acres) of land have been burned this year, way above the 10-year average of about 2.55 million hectares - and Canada has undergone more active wildfires than it has for years. Showing the true interconnectivity of everything on this planet, the country's forested areas account for 28% of the world's boreal forests.

But, closer to home for many *Weekly Worker* readers, there have been wildfires in the Scottish Cairngorms national park, which have lasted for more than 10 days - with residents of Nethy Bridge having to be evacuated at one

stage.⁵ Scottish first minister John Swinney asked the UK government for military aid, as more than 500 firefighters - alongside specialist wildfire appliances, all-terrain vehicles, helicopter water-bombing operations and partner agencies - tackled the fire.

There have also been wildfires in other parts of the country with "major incidents" declared in north Wales and Derbyshire - they have also, to one degree or another, affected Hampshire, Durham, West Sussex, East Sussex, Devon and Somerset.⁶ The UK, of course, is undergoing its fourth heatwave just like the European mainland, with temperatures climbing to the mid-30s Celsius on July 29 in the south-east and east of England - the UK Health Security Agency issuing amber heat health alerts.⁷ An ongoing lack of rain means hosepipe bans are in force for millions of households and dry vegetation has provided perfect fuel for wildfires to burn in a number of areas. The driest locations - including central, southern and eastern England - have seen little, if any, meaningful rainfall recently. According to the Met Office, rainfall in England this month is at 4.4mm - one of the lowest levels on record.

As is all too clear, the climatic drivers for wildfires have been made worse by the merger of fields to facilitate 'prairie farming'. Paradoxically it is not only profit-maximising agricultural practices and scorching heat that has caused the fires. So has the increased rainfall seen earlier in the year. The more the rain, the more vegetation there is to feed the fires once they start. Obviously, both phenomena are associated with global heating.

So, nowadays, it is standard for a news organisation such as the BBC to get someone along who is a climate expert to explain that hotter and more extreme weather are set

to become the norm. In fact, we can only expect this situation to get worse and worse.

Yet we have a political elite set on a path to destruction. We look at our new UK government that is committed to growth for the sake of growth, it being strongly suggested that Andy Burnham might give the green light to new drilling in the North Sea by approving the Jackdaw and Rosebank oilfields, which were initially accepted under the Conservatives, but put on hold by legal action. We also have a global hegemon that is constantly talking about 'Drill, baby, drill' under Donald Trump. There is too, though, China. Yes, it is true that there are massive investments in renewables - and this has resulted in a plateauing of CO₂ emissions since 2024. Nonetheless, despite being heralded as a "historic breakthrough" by the *Morning Star*'s Nick Matthews,⁸ China remains by far the world largest CO₂ emitter - roughly 12.3 to 13.1 billion metric tons annually. That is between 33% and 35% of the world's total, and twice as much as the United States.

Delusional

We all know what is required, but equally we all know it is not going to happen. Climate scientists are saying that if we stop *now* - quite literally this very instant - by not adding to the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere and achieve net zero in 2026, not the hoped for 2050, we would still be dealing with unprecedented problems for many generations to come. The polar ice caps will continue to shrink, and the oceans will continue to rise - which of course will then have a negative feedback mechanism that releases yet more CO₂, and so on.

Last week we reviewed Bill McGuire's, *The fate of the world* (he will incidentally be speaking

at this year's CU).⁹ McGuire presents a frightening claim, which you can take as an artistic turn of phrase, but one which is scientifically based - saying that if you look at what has happened since 1850, from the very start of industrial capitalism, this will affect the global climate for at least another *million years* - even if we stop doing what we are doing in the way of emitting more and more CO₂ right now.

In other words, the oft used analogy of the oil tanker actually minimises what is going on. We will still have the shrinkage of the ice sheets and the *certainty* that huge numbers of cities will be inundated: Miami, Shanghai, Bangkok, Alexandria and Ho Chi Minh being the first. There will be enormous numbers of people displaced. There will be massive disruption of agriculture too. Not just traditional peasant agriculture, but the industrial agriculture of East Anglia, central Europe, the Russian steppe and the American prairies. The danger is that such areas will turn to desert and along with that the world will see the dieback of the great forests - this will happen even if the working class is able to seize power.

But, of course, there is no prospect at the moment of the working class taking power *anywhere*, let alone on a global scale. Rather, what we have got is a pack of politicians and corporations that are locked into the destruction of civilisation, even though we know objectively that the only answer to the climate emergency lies with the world's working class. Therefore Bill McGuire is wrong in saying that we have no choice other than to 'adapt as individuals and small communities' - talking, for example, about the centralised state shattering. That is a possible scenario which we communists can all too easily envisage - but that would go hand-in-hand with warlordism, general chaos and even reaching the point where the human population can no longer renew itself.

No, to avoid such a scenario, including the danger of extinction, the working class has to come to power if the world is to be slowly, generation after generation, managed back into health. That will require more than a revolution - ie, the overthrow of existing capitalism and its system of rival states. There will have to be climate communism too ●

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Notes

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REFORM

Sleaze at the seaside

Can Farage get out from under the mounting corruption allegations against him and his party? As bad as it looks, don't bet against him, warns **Paul Demarty**. For certain, negative SWP campaign won't make an iota of difference

It seems that, for now, the shine is very much off Nigel Farage's privately-owned subsidiary, Reform UK.

While Reform has been leading the polls for over a year, recent surveys tend to find a very close three-horse race, with Labour and the Tories nibbling away just behind in the mid-20-percentage range. On Monday, a poll by More in Common found Labour in the lead, for the first time since 2024.

Some of that is outside Farage's control, of course. We are now in the Andy Burnham honeymoon period, with the new PM giving out a few freebies and generally looking like a man with the rudiments of a plan. That would be tolerable from the Reform point of view: honeymoon periods do have a tendency to end, and - as Mike Tyson famously said - everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.

Yet most of Reform's troubles are self-inflicted. A series of damaging revelations about Farage's financial relations with dubious businessmen have rocked his pseudo-party. There was the case of the £5 million donated by Christopher Harborne, a tax-exiled crypto billionaire, just before Farage announced his return to front-line politics, and undeclared by him to the responsible authorities. (Farage asserts that this was not for political operations, and therefore fell outside the rules.)

Later, it was reported that Farage had received benefits in kind, including security and social media staff, from his chum, 'Posh' George Cottrell - a young spiv who was convicted of charges related to money laundering in the US in 2017. Since his release (for time served, the lucky boy), he has served in various roles for Farage's successive political vehicles, and recently co-wrote a book called *How to launder money*. (Though there has been much mockery on this point, the book sounds mildly interesting and received an approving review from the *LRB*'s in-house finance bro, John Lanchester.)

The *Guardian* then discovered an even more tangled set of donations, with the name 'Cottrell' all over it - but this time it was Posh George's mother, Fiona, apparently at the start of the chain. She had donated £1 million to Britain Means Business - a company controlled by Reform's deputy leader, Richard Tice. £500,000 of that money was donated shortly afterwards to Reform itself. All this set off alarm bells: the transactions were reported by banks under standard anti-money laundering policies, and George and Fiona were interviewed under caution by the Metropolitan Police. Over the weekend, the BBC was able to confirm that there is still an active police investigation into the Fiona Cottrell donation. Unlike Burnham's honeymoon period, this one could run and run.

Fighting playbook

The response of Farage and Reform has been to come out fighting. This is typically described as the Trump playbook in the liberal press and, while this is rather tediously one-eyed framing, there is no doubt that this old tactic of crooked demagogues has enjoyed a distinct revival since its spectacularly successful deployment by the crooked demagogue in chief, again and again, over 10 years in and out of government.



Nigel versus jokers

With Farage facing a parliamentary investigation, he resigned his position as an MP, hoping to fight and win a by-election to clear his name in the court of public opinion. But canny heads at the top of the mainstream parties (and of the even more far-right splinter, Restore Britain) conspired not to stand, and so now Farage is left cruising around Clacton campaigning against the prankster, Count Binface, and the swivel-eyed failed actor, Laurence Fox - to say nothing of the 29 other timewaster candidates taking the opportunity for a good laugh by the seaside. Farage will win, of course, but has been denied the opportunity to humiliate his enemies.

The "people vs the establishment" framing was also in evidence over the weekend. Asked about the police investigation into the Fiona Cottrell donation, Tice denied all knowledge and barked: "Why are the Met police briefing the BBC before contacting interested parties? Is the Met leadership now engaged in the widespread, politically motivated smear campaign against Reform and its leaders?"

Dare we take such accusations seriously? We are, of course, no fans of the Met round these parts, but frankly we suspect its leadership could do *without* being dragged into a very tense political bunfight, especially given that its rank and file is likely chock-full of Faragists, and the general rightwing line of attack on 'two-tier policing' (they don't go after *black* recipients of huge political donations from the mothers of convicted money-launderers, we suppose). Is the AML department of Fiona Cottrell's bank also part of this calculated smear campaign? Or the National Crime Agency, which receives those reports? I think we should be told.

In any case, it seems to me that Tice could have avoided such a 'conspiracy' quite simply. He is

the sole director of Britain Means Business. In that capacity, he could simply have refused or returned the donation from the generous Mrs Cottrell. He could have knocked two brain cells together and seen, immediately, how this would *look*: both in the public gallery and to the people whose job it is to ask questions about where large sums of money actually come from.

Conspiracy theory

The *appearance* of such a conspiracy is not wholly unfounded, however, which surely factors into Farage's and Tice's guess that they can style this one out. Much political effort in the post-Brexit era has been expended on shoring up the range of 'acceptable' politics - both by the Labour right's immune response against Corbynism and the attempts to keep Brexit sentiment safely in the Tory fold. These efforts have *largely* received the backing of the press, although frankly that part of the line has begun to collapse, with the *Telegraph* titles drifting steadily Reformward, among others.

Moreover, it can hardly be seriously argued that those mainstream parties are clean-looking operations. The last Tory government, especially under Boris Johnson, was dogged relentlessly by accusations of cronyism and corruption. No sooner had brave Sir Keir Starmer got his feet under the table in 2024, on the other hand, his whole front bench - including himself - suffered a wave of unflattering stories about freebies. Starmer's receipt of expensive designer clothes from donor Waheed Alli became emblematic of the whole affair.

Starmer huffed that he had reported everything properly; and so, today, Farage insists that no rules were broken in his case. Yet a simple fact is embarrassingly obvious to an increasingly cynical and nihilistic

electorate - if these things are allowed by the rules, it is because the rules *defend* corruption, as it is properly (morally and politically) understood. Reform's vote has stalled because it is starting to look a lot like all the people it is promising to throw out on their ears, both in its curiously cosy relationships with donors and even in its habit of recruiting damaged goods from the Tories.

It is the *universal* presence of corruption in British politics - the fact that corruption, in properly dignified and legalised forms, is simply how business is taken care of in Westminster - that should warn us against too easily writing off Farage and friends. After all, except in the very worst case, the likely chain of events going forward will be something like the following: Farage will beat Binface; parliament will find the Harborne donation breached rules, and suspend him from the Commons for some token period; he may then face a recall process, and have to fight *another* by-election, and he could well win that one too.

A true finding of large-scale fraud by the police will lead to charges and a trial, which will last a long time and take place under a media blackout. In the meantime, history will continue, and Labour and the Tories will have ample opportunities for scandal. The reality principle will bite down on Burnham - guns, not butter, truculent obedience to Trump, and so on. The recent pattern of British politics, under such circumstances, could well reassert itself.

Anyone but Nigel

This should call into question the usual routine of 'anti-racist' politics on the left, exemplified by the Socialist Workers Party and its Stand Up to Racism front. That is to pick an enemy of the day, and engage in relentless and purely negative campaigning against that person or party. A

Socialist Worker report of SUTR's ground campaign in Clacton is more interesting than such reports usually are, albeit perhaps unintentionally.

For once, the vox pops are not universally sympathetic. One person 'snaps' at them: "Stand up to racism? I stand up *for* racism. And Nigel stands up for us, when no-one else does." Probably not a winnable vote on the required timetable; and, we are told by reporter Pat Meusel that "some reactions were even more hostile". However, some do take the leaflets: they wonder what Farage has done for Clacton after all; he seems just to be "lining his pockets". This goes with a general cynicism about politics in general, however. "So what if he took some money?" another local says. "They all do." Don't they just ...

The optimistic summary comes down from "Julie Sherry from SUTR" (*Socialist Worker* readers are, per usual, denied the pertinent detail that comrade Sherry is an SWP lifer): "There are people in this town who are angry, disaffected and frustrated. But, when you have conversations with people, sometimes very difficult conversations, you can start to shift their ideas to win them to our side."¹

This would be a perfectly defensible - if slightly banal - statement if it was being made *in the name of the SWP*. Then there would be some meaningful content to "our side": socialism from below, workers' power - however they want to put it. Winning people over to "our side" by talking to them and trying to convince them, moreover, would be a more honest way of proceeding than the usual SWP method of trying to engineer ever bigger protests and expecting socialism to spontaneously grow in the hearts of the participants like wildflowers.

As a policy for *SUTR*, however, it is utterly comical. SUTR does not have an "our side". Who should people in Clacton vote *for*? Probably not Laurence Fox. Maybe that other guy who *dresses up* as a fox? Count Binface himself? (Beneath the silly costume, of course, he is simply a basic-liberal comedy writer.) There is no answer. In more usual contexts, with meaningful rival candidates, one answer at least springs immediately to the mind of the leaflet recipient: vote *whoever is most likely to beat the racist of the day*. That could be Labour, Green, Lib Dem or even Tory. The pattern of recent by-elections suggests, at least, widespread and canny use of tactical voting on the part of anti-Reform voters.

In failing to pose a positive substantive alternative, SUTR inescapably aligns itself with the mainstream immune response. In doing so, it cannot fight the nihilism embodied in the statement, "So what if he took some money? They all do." Corruption is built into bourgeois politics: it is a matter not of failing civic virtue, though civic virtue certainly is degraded, but of political economy.

A positive socialist programme represents a real alternative, because it presents an alternative political economy, and an alternative set of political institutions to go with it. The value of single-issue anti-racism, on the other hand, may be judged by its recent results ●

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Notes

1. socialistworker.co.uk/anti-racism/two-crucial-by-election-battles-against-reform-uk.

LAW



Juries should be able to hear all the arguments

Guided by conscience, not judges

Prompted by Rajiv Menon KC being prosecuted for contempt over his defiant Palestine Action defence speech, **Mike Macnair** shows that the struggle to defend and extend the jury system has a long and contested history

The latest stage in the campaign of government and a section of the judiciary against trial by jury has taken the form of the prosecution of Rajiv Menon KC for contempt of court, in the form of his closing speech in the trial of Palestine Action protestors. The prosecution of Menon is presented in a form 'spun' to avoid the core issue,¹ but is best described as 'satellite litigation' arising from the effort of prosecutors and a section of the judiciary to prevent jurors knowing² of the rule in *Bushell's case* (1670) and its antecedents, going back to the 1200s, that jurors are entitled and bound to give their verdicts according to conscience.³

The problem with juries giving verdicts according to conscience from the point of view of the government is essentially political. Conviction in the crown court labels the person convicted as a 'criminal' in a way in which conviction in the juryless magistrates' court (which deals mainly with traffic and low-level regulatory offences) does not. And an 'exemplary' severe sentence in the crown court can be trumpeted in the press and can thus at least be hoped to deter repetition of the conduct. Some opponents of "perverse" acquittals have suggested extending magistrates' court sentencing powers. But this does not substitute for the political, 'criminalising' and publicity, effects of crown court conviction.

The prosecutors and judges who are pursuing this policy are guilty of "high crimes and misdemeanours" eligible for impeachment. It is the constitutional duty of the House of Commons to pursue impeachment proceedings against them - but we

can be pretty confident that they will not. The workers' movement and the left should defend jury trial against these attacks, but has largely failed to do so. This article aims to provide some context to the struggle over judicial control of juries, which has a long history, and to explain why the claim of judges to exclude particular defences from the jury inherently involves violation of the judicial oath.

It also aims to argue that the defence - and restoration - of jury trial should be a fundamental aim of the workers' movement. After all, even if we throw back one attack, the anti-jury campaigners will persist with another. The left needs *enough contrary persistence* to keep knocking them down. That means a party, with a party press that appears regularly and keeps doing so, and a party programme that includes something like the formula in the CPGB's *Draft programme*: "Defend and extend the jury system. Anyone charged with an offence that carries the possibility of a prison sentence can elect for a jury trial."⁴

Origins

Go back to the early middle ages, and all sorts of disputes - both what moderns would call 'civil' and what we would call 'criminal' - were decided by groups of the 'notables' of a locality (kingdom, shire/county, borough ...).

Around 1100, systems of this sort began to be replaced by forms of professionalised law. The major variety across western Europe was the 'canon law' - the law of the Roman Catholic church. In this, decisions were taken by professional judges

sitting alone, subject to rules of law, and were appealable: from the bishop's court to the archbishop's court, from the archbishop's court to the pope in Rome (and also directly to the pope, who would then appoint 'judges delegate' in the province to hear the case and report back to him). The system of decision by judges sitting alone was notoriously dodgy. Archdeacons were responsible for local enforcement of church criminal law; a joke of the 1100s posed an imaginary examination question in theology: "Can an archdeacon be saved?"⁵ - ie, will a church court judge inevitably go to hell?⁶ Canon law procedure was ferociously dilatory and expensive, because, since judges sitting alone were untrustworthy, appealing had to be easy, and easy appeals produced cost and delay.

Trial by judge alone in civil proceedings since the later 1800s has produced all the same vices of endless appeals, inordinate costs and delay.

The government of the English king, Henry II (1154-89) came up with an alternative approach that tried to avoid these problems. Rather than appeals, the equivalent of modern supreme court judges had to ride round the country, sitting and hearing cases in each county ('eyres'). Questions of fact fell to be decided by means that could not be contradicted, and thus involved no judicial discretion: thus trial by battle (witnesses on each side - or in privately prosecuted criminal cases prosecutor and defendant - fought each other with spiked clubs) or in publicly prosecuted criminal cases trial by ordeal (defendant might be made to carry a piece of hot iron blessed by a priest over a set distance,

or be tied up and thrown in a blessed pond, and so on, with the results 'deciding' guilt or innocence).⁶ And in a limited range of cases, where the facts were likely to be publicly known, like land boundaries or recent possession and dispossession of land, panels of locals were summoned to swear to this public knowledge.⁷ The point of this overall scheme is to avoid both dodgy decisions by individual judges, and appeals leading to cost and delay.

In 1166 the 'Assize of Clarendon' (the law made by a meeting of the king's council at Clarendon Palace, Wiltshire) ordered panels of locals to be summoned to swear to 'present' (accuse) persons who were generally believed to be armed robbers, and so on, thus bringing the jury form (later called the 'grand jury') into criminal law. The accused would be put to the ordeal. But juries also became available as an alternative to trial by battle in privately prosecuted criminal cases. In 1215 the church prohibited the clergy from blessing the hot iron, cold water, etc, in the ordeal, and some alternative had to be found. After some hesitation, the jury form was adopted for this purpose: the 'petty jury'. Meanwhile, the use of juries in land claims was gradually extended beyond its original context.

The whole point of these choices was to *avoid judicial fact-finding* and thus to avoid the normal consequences in arbitrary judicial behaviour, cost and delay, which judicial fact-finding by judges sitting alone, and subject to appeals, produced.

It was not originally aimed at constitutional liberty or egalitarianism. However, by the mid-1300s trial

by jury was beginning to become associated with the "judgment of peers (equals)", guaranteed by Magna Carta, chapter 29, and forms of juryless procedure could be objected to as denying the 'due process of law'.⁸ This evolution did see jury trial as an egalitarian form through the idea of 'peers'. It is reflected in the guarantee of jury trial in the seventh amendment to the US constitution.

It is a corollary of this regime that judges could not just overrule juries. If the jury was guilty of misconduct, a procedure called the 'attaint' could be used. Here a new jury of 24 was summoned to decide whether the original jury of 12 was guilty of perjury. Thus, for an early example, in *Urse de Cadiho v Ralph fitz Ralph* (1204), Urse de Cadiho successfully sued Ralph fitz Ralph for 'novel disseisin' (recent dispossession of land), but Ralph brought attaint. Unusually, the attaint jury tells us the story: Ralph's great-aunt, who had given him the land, died and, while the family was out at her funeral, Urse de Cadiho broke in and put one of his employees in; when they got back, the family ejected him. On this basis the first jury was convicted of perjury: Urse never really had such possession as to properly be said to be dispossessed.⁹

The attaint procedure was gradually extended by statute,¹⁰ and was still 'live' in the 1500s. Thus, for example, in *Regina v Ingersall* (1593)¹¹ the court of Queen's Bench held that attaint was available for the prosecutor in an 'information qui tam' (a kind of prosecution) for a misdemeanour - a lesser criminal offence; but that the special verdict found by the attaint jury

in the present case did not amount to a conviction of the first jury, because the first jury were entitled to disbelieve the whole evidence of a witness who was shown to be wrong on a single point.

In 1665, however, Chief Justice Hyde said in King’s Bench that “jurors ought to be fined if they would go against the hare and direction, take bit in mouth and go headstrong against the Court; and said, that by the grace of God he would have it tried, seeing the attainit is now fruitless.”¹² The last actual report of an attainit case in the law reports is from 1639, so Hyde was probably not wrong to think the procedure had gone out of use.¹³ But that should not imply that the judges should take control. The underlying idea of the attainit - that judges were not entitled to overrule juries - resurfaced in different forms.

Judges’ control

The feudal regime in decline became more authoritarian - among other means by developing judicial controls over juries. The Court of Wards - established in 1540 to extract the royal feudal revenue from the landowning class - asserted, at least from the 1590s, a power to fine and imprison jurors who refused to find a verdict for the crown.

This practice was the subject of complaint by the 1641 Grand Remonstrance. The Court was abolished by the Long Parliament in 1645, and this abolition was retained at the Restoration with the Tenures Abolition Act 1660, which asserted:

... it hath beene found by former experience that the Courts of Wards and Liveries and Tenures by Knights service either of the King or others, or by Knights service in Capite or Soccage in Capite of the King and the consequents upon the same have beene much more burthensome grievous and prejudiciall to the Kingdome then they have beene beneficiall to the King ...¹⁴

The Court of Star Chamber claimed a general disciplinary power over jurors. It was abolished in 1641, along with similar ‘prerogative’ courts and the jurisdiction of the Privy Council in England; the statute criminalised any executive or judicial attempt to revive it. This statute had been agreed by Charles I (albeit under political duress) before the outbreak of the civil war, and was not repealed in 1660.¹⁵

In spite of these concessions, the Restoration government was concerned to crack down on religious dissent, and had difficulty with juries failing to convict people as a result. Two months after Hyde CJ’s statement quoted above, the King’s Bench in *Wagstaff* ruled that criminal trial jurors could be fined and imprisoned for refusing to convict under the ‘Conventicles’ legislation, which prohibited non-Anglican religious meetings, “contrary to their evidence, which in the opinion of the [trial] Judge [Kelyng J] was full and pregnant” or failing to follow the direction of the trial judge “on a matter of law” (unspecified).¹⁶

The political nature of the case is indicated by the government having hired the former Cromwellian chief justice, John Glynn, and Richard Cromwell’s solicitor-general, John Maynard - historically political opponents of the royalist regime - as their counsel to defend the practice. This was an attempt to establish a constitutional consensus for it. Maynard argued that “trust must be laid some where” (hence, in the judge), and Twisden J extended this: “The Judge is intrusted with the liberties of the people, and his saying is the law”.

They did not succeed in settling a consensus. The fall of the Earl of Clarendon, lord chancellor and effective prime minister, in August

1667 opened a political door, and Clarendon was impeached in November for treason by subverting the constitution, and fled to France. On December 11, the House of Commons heard a committee report on the conduct of Kelyng, now chief justice of king’s bench:

That the Proceedings of the Lord Chief Justice, in Cases now reported, are Innovations in the Trial of Men for their Lives and Liberties; and that he hath used an arbitrary and illegal Power, which is of dangerous Consequences to the Lives and Liberties of the People of England; and tends to the introducing of an arbitrary Government.

That, in the Place of Judicature, the Lord Chief Justice hath undervalued, vilified, and contemned Magna Charta, the great Preserver of our Lives, Freedoms, and Property.

That he be brought to Trial, in order to condign Punishment, in such manner as the House shall judge most fit and requisite.¹⁷

On December 13 Kelyng was heard in his own defence, and the Commons decided not to impeach him, but nonetheless “Resolved, &c that the precedents and practice of fining or imprisoning jurors is illegal”. And “Ordered, That the Lord St John have leave to bring in a Bill for declaring the Fining and Imprisoning of Jurors illegal”.¹⁸

The bill died in the usual process of parliamentary delays. But the threat of it, and the threat to impeach Kelyng, had their effect. In 1670 in *Bushell’s Case* the Court of Common Pleas led by Vaughan CJ ordered habeas corpus to release jurors who had been imprisoned until they paid fines for failing to convict Quakers, contrary to the judge’s direction.¹⁹ The core of Vaughan’s elaborate argument, which also involves a lot of technical law, is that there is no reason to suppose that the trial judge’s assessment of the evidence is actually better than the jury’s.

Conversely, if the trial judge’s view of the case is to overrule the jury’s, why bother with having juries at all? This point is, at the end of the day, the fundamental answer to all arguments for judicial control of “perverse” verdicts.

Libel

Bushell’s Case was not universally accepted by lawyers,²⁰ but *politically* it killed the practice of imprisoning and fining jurors for failing to convict contrary to judicial direction. The issue of judicial control resurfaced in a different form after France during the Seven Years War (1756-63) abandoned the Jacobites and with them the hope of feudal restoration in Britain. This, in turn, allowed the Tories, who had been tainted with Jacobitism and hence in opposition since 1714, gradually back into office and into judicial appointments. A section of the Whigs gradually became ‘Torified’; another section started to revive 17th century constitutional arguments for liberty.

In this context, sharp arguments emerged about the relative roles of judge and jury in criminal libel (seditious libel, which allegedly undermined the government; defamatory libel by allegedly defaming government ministers and other officials; blasphemous libel by writing that allegedly undermined Christianity).²¹ A new mechanism of judicial control was developed. This was to rule that certain questions posed by an indictment or information (charge against the defendant) were questions of law, not questions of fact. The famous lawyer, Sir Edward Coke, had said, “*ad quaestionem facti non respondent iudices* [the judges do not

answer a question of fact]; and matters in law the judges ought to decide and discusse; for *ad quaestionem juris non respondent juratores* [jurors do not answer a question of law].”²² Now the 18th century judges argued that the question whether a published statement was libellous (seditious, defamatory or blasphemous) was a question of law; hence the jury could be forced to give a special verdict *only* on whether the defendant published it.²³

The claim here is as unsound as the argument for judicial punishment of juries before *Bushell’s Case*. That seditious libel ‘consists of publications that tend to undermine the government’ is certainly a statement of law (19th century judges cut the definition down). That *the particular statement prosecuted in the particular case* tends to undermine the government, so as to be seditious libel, is a claim about the actual likely effect of *the particular statement*, which is a claim that a judge cannot make without claiming to find facts to the exclusion of the jury.

This version of judicial control was defeated by political action, though Lord Camden (Chief Justice of Common Pleas 1762-66, Lord Chancellor 1766-70) opposed the majority view of the judges and in House of Lords debate in 1792 backed the eventual legislation. Fox’s Libel Act 1792 asserted the right of juries to give general verdicts in libel cases. Until recently, it was regarded as constitutionalising the right to trial by jury in defamation cases; but the legal profession has recently managed to get rid of it.²⁴

Fox’s Libel Act was not broad enough. It simply asserted the right of juries to give general verdicts in criminal libel cases. It did not strike down the practice of judges turning questions of fact into ‘questions of law’ and thereby undermining jury trial. Defendants in accident cases (employers, railway companies ...) have been enthusiastic supporters of the practice, beginning in the early 19th century: it helped them to escape liability.²⁵

The result was also to increase the costs of jury trial itself and gradually undermine the advantages of the common law procedure. Eroded in this way, civil jury trial in general was suspended in 1918 and again in 1939 as a war measure, and not reinstated by the 1945 Labour government.²⁶

This, in turn, produced a tendency to marginalise the *criminal* jury trial, and radically increased general public ignorance of the law. The legal profession thus appropriates the law as its own exploitable private property, and the monarchs franchise to the profession the sale and denial of justice in violation of Magna Carta, chapter 29.

Today

It can thus be seen that the recent ‘contempt’ rulings are merely the latest version of the judicial power attempting to take over the role of the jury for the benefit of government and of the paying customers (the wealthy). The objection to them in principle is at its core the same objection that Vaughan CJ made to fining jurors in 1670, and that Lord Camden made to the majority judges’ enforced special verdicts in 1770-71 and 1792.

An indictment for criminal damage puts in issue whether the defendant/s “without lawful excuse destroys or damages any property belonging to another intending to destroy or damage any such property or being reckless as to whether any such property would be destroyed or damaged shall be guilty of an offence” (Criminal Damage Act 1971, section 1). On such an indictment, it is impossible for the judge to exclude evidence

or argument to the jury that sets up a “lawful excuse” without the judge him or herself *finding facts*.

A judge could make a ruling of law that officials of the Israeli state are not capable of committing war crimes within the Geneva Conventions Act 1957 - which is the real substance of the government’s case on this issue. Such a ruling would be obviously contrary to law, but it would be a *ruling of law*. Or it could be ruled that arms manufacturers cannot be accessories to such offences. Again, this would be a ruling of law; it would merely be obviously inconsistent with the Nuremberg prosecutions of Krupp, etc (and with the ‘sanctions’ operations of the UK and USA).²⁷ Or it could be ruled that the prevention of crime is not a “lawful excuse” in criminal damage prosecutions; this would again be a legal ruling, but obviously inconsistent with the law relating to the police damaging property in the course of their duties.²⁸

But merely ruling that “lawful excuse” may not be presented to the jury *in this case* is finding facts to the exclusion of the jury, and abusing the contempt power to control what is said to the jury on this front, is not only a usurpation of the constitutional role of the jury, but also a usurpation of the legislative power in the interests of the executive and animated by judicial bias: perjury of the judicial oath and high crimes and misdemeanours.

The fundamental lesson of this long history is that the judiciary is *not*, as Alexander Hamilton claimed in 1788, the branch of government “least dangerous to the political rights of the constitution”.²⁹ Judges can and do actively subvert political rights, and vigilance against them is essential.

The left and the workers’ movement has largely stood silent in this country, as trial by jury has been gradually undermined over the past century and a half. Important steps were, in fact, taken by *Labour* governments - by the Attlee government and, more recently, by the Blair-Brown government (though ‘reforms’ of libel begun under them were actually carried into effect by the Con-Dem coalition in 2013).

This failure to defend jury trial, and indeed the practical undermining of it, reflects in the majority of the workers’ movement commitments to managerialist forms of socialism, whether these are to be Fabian, Kautskyite³⁰ or Soviet-bureaucratic - not to the concept of socialism as democratic self-government. Managerialist socialism can all too easily succumb to the supposed ‘efficiency gains’ of anti-democratic procedures; including judicial fact-finding. But in reality judicial fact-finding is as unreliable, and more dilatory and expensive, than the common law procedure was.

Jury trial is not self-government in the full sense, but it is nearer to self-government than fact-finding by judge alone (or by judge sitting with ‘assessors’, as they did in early Soviet ‘People’s Courts’).

In the far left, failure to defend jury trial reflects the general economism that tends to ignore constitutional questions on the basis of the delusion that, by setting these on one side, masses can be mobilised in street action or strikes, and then led by the nose into making a revolution. It does not work; and the result is the inability of the far left to pose a *political* alternative to capitalist class rule. The case of the left’s failure to defend trial by jury is one among many examples of this ●

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Notes

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uk/judgments/in-the-matter-of-contempt-proceedings-against-rajiv-menon-kc-2 (June 30); *Re contempt proceedings against Rajiv Menon KC* (2026) EWCA Crim 966 (July 24).
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 3. (1670) 1 Freeman 1, 89 *English Reports (ER)* 2, Vaughan 135, 124 *ER* 1006, 6 *State trials* 951-1026 (*Bushe*) T Jones 13, 84 *ER* 1123. 1200s: G Woodbine and SE Thorne (eds) *Bracton* (1230s-50s) Vol 3, Cambridge MA, pp63, 336-338 (amesfoundation.law.harvard.edu/Bracton); for later medieval usage see N Doe *Fundamental authority in late medieval English law* Cambridge 1990, pp146-48; and for general discussion TA Green *Verdict according to conscience* Chicago IL 1985.
 4. communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/3-immediate-demands.
 5. RC van Caenegem, ‘Public prosecution of crime in 12th-century England’, in CNL Brooke *et al* (eds) *Church and government in the middle ages* Cambridge 1976, pp41-76.
 6. R Bartlett *Trial by fire and water* Oxford 1988. The *increase* in the use of battle and the ordeals, as opposed to other methods of proof, in the time of Henry II, is noteworthy.
 7. M Macnair, ‘Vicinage and the antecedents of the jury’ *Law and History Review* Vol 17, pp537-90 (1999).
 8. Eg, Statute 25 Edw. III, stat 5, c 4 (1352).
 9. *Curia Regis Rolls* London 1926, Vol 3, pp131-38.
 10. The extensions are conveniently listed in Blackstone’s *Commentaries* Vol 3 (1768) at avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/blackstone_bk3ch25.asp.
 11. Croke Elizabeth 309, 78 *ER* 560.
 12. *Anonymous* (1665) 1 Keble 864, 83 *ER* 1288. God did not permit: Hyde died (aged 70) a few days after he made this statement.
 13. See also *St Bar v Williams* (1674), 3 Keble 351, 84 *ER* 761, at p352, where the court says that attainit juries had in the past refused to give verdicts, and “it would not be so, were the judgment not so penal; and because of that the new trials were introduced”.
 14. ‘*Lamnois case*’ (1597) Moore KB 730 pl. 1016, 72 *ER* 869 (actually a collection of precedents); HE Bell *The court of wards and liveries* Cambridge 1953, pp148, 158-59; Tenures Abolition Act 1660, preamble.
 15. TA Green *Verdict according to conscience* Chicago IL 1985, pp140-43; ‘Habeas Corpus Act 1641’ - see *Statutes of the realm* Vol 5, 1628-80 www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol5/pp110-112.
 16. T Raym 138, 83 *ER* 75, 1 Keble 934, 938, 83 *ER* 1328, 1331. The reporter, Thomas Raymond, was plainly sceptical: he cross-referred to an earlier case, in which he had noted the conviction of the infamous Richard Empson, who was executed in 1510, having been charged among other offences with fining juries for refusing to convict according to direction (T Raym 98, 83 *ER* 53).
 17. *Journals of the House of Commons* Vol 9, p35.
 18. *Ibid* p37.
 19. Extensively reported - see note 4 above.
 20. JH Langbein, ‘The criminal trial before the lawyers’ *University of Chicago Law Review* Vol 45, pp263-316.
 21. The fourth variety, obscene libel, gave rise to legal-constitutional argument in 1707 and 1727, but was not part of the late 1700s jury control arguments.
 22. Co Lit 155b. The tag is over-general, as JB Thayer already argued in 1890, in ‘Law and fact in jury trials’ *Harvard Law Review* Vol 4, pp147-75 (1890). The principle Coke’s tag attempts to express is, on the one hand, that judges *were bound* to decide questions of law *appearing on the face of the record*, not otherwise; and, on the other hand, that juries *might* under the Statute of Westminster II, 1285, c30, elect to give a special verdict and thus dump on the judges questions of law that have arisen at trial - though they *might* give a general verdict (at the risk of being attainted if a second jury thought the first’s view of the law was so perverse as to amount to perjury).
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 24. Libel Act repealed by Coroners and Justice Act 2009, schedule 23, part 2; the right to jury trial in civil proceedings abolished by s11 Defamation Act 2013; I Charalambous, ‘Luke Cooper’s case shows damage of abolishing trial by jury in libel cases’ *The Guardian* June 28 2012.
 25. D Ibbetson *Historical introduction to the law of obligations* Oxford 1998, pp173-74.
 26. P Devlin *Trial by jury* London 1956, chapter 7.
 27. On Nuremberg, see G Baars, ‘Capitalism’s victor’s justice? The hidden story of the prosecution of industrialists post-WWII’, in KJ Heller and G Simpson (eds) *The hidden histories of war crimes trials* Oxford 2013, pp163-92. See also lieber.westpoint.edu/nuremberg-lafarge-corporate-war-crimes-another-name (July 1 2026).
 28. researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06627/SN06627.pdf.
 29. *Federalist Papers* No78: avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed78.asp.
 30. ‘Kautskyite’ is less obvious, but it is in fact clear that Kautsky was already committed to the independent role of legal and other ‘experts’ in the 1893 *Parliamentarism and democracy* (see B Lewis, translator *Karl Kautsky on democracy and republicanism* Chicago IL 2020), and continued to be so later.

GERMANY

No bans, no coalitions

There are calls to end the ‘firewall’ against the AfD, there are calls to ban it too. **Carla Roberts** says we need independent working class politics and our own ‘firewall’ against coalitions with bourgeois parties

Alternative für Deutschland stands to the right of the establishment parties, though not quite so far to the right as they vociferously claim. Nonetheless, the entire Bundestag establishment rejects - for the moment - “any cooperation” with the AfD, up to and including forming any local, regional or national coalitions. This has been extended to also mean that AfD representatives are not allowed to take up positions usually reserved for the main opposition party, like participation in parliamentary bodies or committees.

Hence, having come second in the 2025 general elections with 20.8%, behind the conservative Christian Democratic Union on 28.5%, the AfD should be able to appoint the deputy parliamentary speaker, for example - but such proposals have been consistently voted down by all other parties. Which means that very few AfD politicians have been put to the test anywhere, where no doubt they would quickly be found wanting.

But that firewall is now crumbling - chiefly because it does not work: the AfD has been leading in the polls for many months, currently on 28%, way ahead of the CDU at 20%, the Greens at 14%, and the Social Democratic Party and Die Linke, both at 12%.¹ The results of three forthcoming regional elections in September will increase the pressure on the firewall - in all three, the AfD is predicted to win - and overwhelmingly so, particularly in the two eastern German regions of Saxony-Anhalt (41%, according to the polls) and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (38%).

Regional government minister Michael Kretschmer, who runs the eastern state of Saxony and is also the deputy federal chairman of the CDU, is one of a number of politicians who have called on his party to drop the firewall and reverse its 2018 ‘resolution on incompatibility’ (*Unvereinbarkeitsbeschluss*), which rules out “any coalitions or forms of cooperation” with the AfD - and, funnily enough, Die Linke too, despite the fact that the left is a dedicated upholder of the ‘firewall’ (more below).

Particularly in the east, it has become almost impossible for the mainstream parties not to cooperate with the AfD, particularly given how unpopular the national ruling ‘grand coalition’ of the CDU and SPD is. It has led to some very unstable regional coalitions, as basically all other parties have to get together to stop the AfD from taking office. This crisis of the ruling coalition has just been massively exacerbated by the bizarre resignation of the gay leader of the CDU fraction in the *Bundestag*, Jens Spahn. He is on the hard right of the party, always keen to flout his Catholicism and reactionary social views, including his support for the ongoing German ban on surrogacy. And then he went to the USA to employ a surrogate to have a child. Well! It took a while for the German media to pick up on the outright hypocrisy, but they eventually did and Spahn had to step down. This latest scandal will have convinced even more voters that none of the establishment parties are worth a dime.

The most infamous policy of the AfD is the pledge to “remigrate” the



AfD: main opposition party in Bundestag

estimated 250,000 people who are in the country “illegally” - a provocative phrase, but not actually all that different to what the current ‘grand coalition’ advocates. While shouting about ‘AfD fascists’, most political parties in Germany have moved rapidly to the right over the last couple of years, adopting policies to further restrict asylum rules, while promising to radically reduce migration - all in order to try and stop the rise of the AfD.

Greens and BSW

To no avail - unsurprising really, as the establishment parties have proven that the AfD is in fact ‘right’ about the issue. The Green Party too jumped on the anti-foreigner bandwagon, ditto the BSW (Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht), which split from Die Linke in 2023. Die Linke was the only party that ‘stood still’ on the issue, which massively helped to turn round its fortunes - it stood at barely 3% in the polls at the beginning of 2025.

The issue of migration is, in reality, just a reflection of a much bigger problem. The state of international capitalism and the stagnating EU economy is hitting Germany particularly hard, because, in addition to higher interest rates and declining exports, it remains Ukraine’s biggest financial supporter in Europe. Germany might still be the third largest economy after the USA and China, but it is in “technical recession”² (defined as two consecutive quarters of declining gross domestic product).

The billions of euros spent on the Ukraine war have made the dire post-Covid economic situation 10 times worse. German industry has suffered greatly from the CIA-directed sabotage of Nord Stream 1 and 2, which supplied the country with much-needed cheap energy. Instead, energy prices have more than doubled - a situation now made worse by the Iran war. The once mighty German car industry is crumbling. Unemployment stands at 6.4%, inflation at just under 3%. The cost-of-living crisis is hitting many people very hard.

And this national picture does not even capture how much worse things are in the east: the “economic strength” there stands at just 78% of the levels of the west³ - that more than 35 years after reunification (which in reality was an annexation and is very much perceived as such, even among young people). This is a fertile ground for the rise of rightwing populism, irrationality and fear of ‘the other’. Unsurprisingly, the AfD does best in the east, where a majority of people also oppose the ongoing financial support for the Ukraine war (unlike in the west, where most people agree with it).⁴

Incredibly, the AfD is the *only* party in the German parliament that will even *mention* that the Nord Stream pipelines were blown up at the behest of the CIA in order to damage Russia’s economy - and it remains the only party that demands that the pipelines be repaired and reactivated. All the others explicitly reject this and the official “goal” of energy policy remains “independence” from fossil fuels from Russia (they’re okay with fossil fuels from elsewhere!). Die Linke has, as always, a mealy-mouthed position of opposing the war and arms exports, but also of “supporting Ukraine”. The party merely demands an “investigation” into the pipeline explosions.

It stands to reason that the AfD’s call to immediately end all German support for the Ukraine war is part of its ongoing success in the polls - as are its demands that Germany should withdraw from the EU (‘Dexit’) and that the euro is abolished. We have seen the same arguments in Britain, of course: the EU is a billionaire’s club, etc. Instead, the AfD wants *German* billionaires to run German capitalism. Nevertheless, just like Reform, it has managed to present itself as the party for the ‘little people’ - those left behind.

In other words, the AfD is today the *main German opposition party* in the real sense of the word. It opposes what the government does and is being opposed by all

other parties, who have joined the said ‘firewall’. There are regular demonstrations against the AfD, in which all the other parties march together, arms linked: a rogue’s gallery of the entire establishment.

Die Linke

Although Die Linke is a victim of the CDU’s “double firewall”, it proudly supports this establishment alliance against the AfD. Needless to say, it would love to show it can be relied upon to “take government responsibility” and has done so a number of times at a regional level - with the predictable result that its attempt to manage a stagnant capitalism meant it ended up enforcing cuts and closures and was soon enough punished by its supporters. It links any potential participation in national government to ‘red lines’ - but these have shifted quite dramatically over the years, in an attempt to show it can be relied upon to govern.

It continues to peddle the illusion that here could be a ‘two-state solution’ in the Middle East and, while it agreed a resolution at its recent conference that describes the policy towards Palestinians as “genocide”, the same resolution also states that it is “committed to the right of the state of Israel to exist. As a protective space for Jews, the state of Israel has a special historical and current significance.”

Even more self-defeating: just like the Greens, it calls on the state to ban the AfD - and backs this up with its reclassification as a “proven rightwing extremist endeavour” by the vile Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz intelligence agency. Until 2013, this ‘Office for the Protection of the Constitution’ used to officially monitor Die Linke for exactly the same reasons - “extremism”. No matter - here is Heidi Reichinnek, chair of the Die Linke parliamentary fraction in the Bundestag, commenting breathlessly:

There can be no doubt that the AfD poses the greatest threat to our democracy and our country.

Everyone who has advocated - or continues to advocate - the normalisation of the AfD is thereby empowering rightwing extremists and endangering democracy. We must now join forces and use every tool available to our resilient democracy to protect it.⁵

Jan van Aken, national chair of Die Linke, admits: “I used to oppose a ban, because a ban obviously cannot eradicate the ideology from people’s minds,” he writes in the same press statement, calling them “fascists” in the process. “But when we look at how openly the AfD seeks to abolish democracy, we should not hand them our sharpest weapon - democracy itself.”

Where to begin with this utter nonsense? Banning a party that is supported by up to 40% of the population in some East German federal states is clearly a ridiculous idea and a non-starter. And is the AfD really “the greatest threat” today? What about war? The climate catastrophe? Capitalism itself?

Are 28% of the entire German population really “fascists” or in support of a “fascist party”? While there are a fair number of eccentrics and rightwing nut jobs in the AfD, it is clearly not a “fascist party”. There are no fascist gangs roaming the streets. The AfD does not organise hit squads to break up meetings of trade unionists or communists (not that there are many). In fact, most AfD supporters and voters tend to be rather quiet about their affiliation - so overwhelming is the establishment’s ongoing taboo.

At least on paper, Die Linke commits itself to “overcoming capitalism” and fighting for “democratic socialism” (whatever that means). We would have thought that “overcoming capitalism” goes hand in hand with “overcoming” the German constitution and what passes as ‘democracy’. There have only been two successful bans of political parties in German post-war history: in 1952, the Sozialistische Reichspartei was banned as the successor party of the Nazi party. And in 1956, it was the turn of the ‘official’ Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands. Why? Because it wanted to “abolish the German constitution”. And quite right too.

By standing firmly on the existing constitution, Die Linke exposes itself as utterly inadequate for building a real, radical alternative that is so desperately needed. Surely, a wide swathe of AfD supporters could be won over to a programme that presents a *real* alternative to this rotten system, unlike the cheap anti-migrant rhetoric of the AfD. But, by calling for a ban, Die Linke shows that it does not believe it could win the battle of ideas ●

Notes

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2. www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/konjunktur/di-wirtschaftsprognose-100.html.
3. www.iwkoeln.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/klaus-heiner-roehl-warum-der-osten-hinter-dem-westen-zurueckbleibt.html.
4. www.ndr.de/ndrfragt/ndrfragt-mehrheit-gegen-gebietsabtretungen-im-ukraine-krieg,ukraine-2558.html.
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BIG TECH

Playing for highest stakes

Hyperscalers are banking on two colossal assumptions. First, that AI will be profitable - eventually. Second, that there will be widespread demand for AI - and soon. **Michael Roberts** investigates

Alphabet (Google) announced its earnings results last week. At first sight, the results were spectacular: revenue was up 24%, particularly from its 'cloud' business (up 82%). Earnings per share were \$9.11, which is very high. But more than two-thirds were based on booking \$77 billion from 'unrealised' gains from its purchase of shares in Anthropic, a major artificial intelligence model firm. In other words, these 'gains' are just 'on paper' and depend on Anthropic shares staying up.

Google is one of the so-called 'hyperscalers' - the mega tech companies that are ploughing huge amounts of funds into AI, hoping and expecting it to lead to a sharp rise in profits. Google's investment in AI has pumped so much money into companies like Anthropic and OpenAI, and into data centres to run AI with expensive 'chips' made by Nvidia, that its huge cash revenues are no longer covering the cost of investment. 'Free cash flow', as it is called, went negative for the first time in Alphabet's history.

Google is increasing its AI investment massively this year, like its rivals, Meta, Microsoft and Amazon, to build AI infrastructure, with the four hyperscalers combined on track to spend more than \$725 billion in 2026. Before those results, Google had been seen as the hyperscaler best placed to withstand the AI arms race, with cash flows from its vast search business expected to cushion the financial pressure. But now, its cash burn to fund AI capex will require raising debt and/or issuing equity shares. Alphabet has already taken on nearly \$100 billion in debt, and in June it moved to raise about \$85 billion in its first share sale in more than two decades.

All this tells us that the AI stock market 'bubble' is getting closer to bursting. The hyperscalers are hugely profitable, based on their existing businesses, with current earnings about 59% above trend. But such is the size of the AI investment boom being conducted by these hyperscalers that even these profits are being sucked into AI like water disappearing into the Sahara desert.

As previously argued,¹ the US economy is one big bet on AI. The stock market value of the hyperscalers now accounts for roughly 40% of total market capitalisation. If there is any sign that, first, they cannot sustain their current investment growth and, second, they are eating away their profits with no return on those AI investments, their stock values could turn south and take the whole stock market with them.

The US capitalist economy is balanced on the apex of AI. All will be well if: first, the AI models become marked by heavy demand and start to be used globally, thus boosting profitability for the hyperscalers and eventually the rest of the corporate sector; second, the generalised use of AI technology in all sectors of the economy also leads to a step change in the level of productivity, which can take the US economy into a new age of prosperity.

Before the advent of the AI boom, the US information technology had already become the driver of relatively faster economic growth in the US, compared to the rest of the G7 economies during the long depression of the 1930s. But then they all saw a slowdown in the growth of real GDP output, investment and productivity. Then, after the pandemic slump,



Sky-high share prices, but where are the profits?

inflation returned in most economies, threatening to introduce a new period of 'stagflation'² (slow or no growth alongside faster and high inflation) not seen since the 1970s. Now the Iran war is accelerating energy price inflation. Central bank monetary policy failed to get economies going in the 2010s with low interest rates and monetary injections (quantitative easing). And central bank monetary policy is failing to keep inflation from rising since 2020 using higher interest rates, because the only way economies can grow without inflation rising is by increasing growth in the productivity of labour.

Trump-appointed

The new Trump-appointed chair of the Federal Reserve expects a productivity boom from AI. Kevin Warsh says: "AI is perhaps the most significant change in our economy in my adult lifetime. AI will be a significant disinflationary force, increasing productivity and bolstering American competitiveness." He reckons that productivity improvements from AI would drive "significant increases in real take-home wages. A one-percentage-point increase in annual productivity growth would double standards of living within a single generation." He is right. Even just a 1% rise in current US productivity growth over 20 years would not only keep inflation down: it would provide income and revenue that could end the deficits in government budgets, without raising taxes or making cuts in spending. Public debt to GDP ratios would fall.

But will AI deliver this step change in productivity? From 2005 to 2019, US productivity growth averaged about 1.5% per year. The pace remained similarly slow during and immediately after the pandemic (2020-22). But US labour productivity has accelerated since 2022. Output per hour grew around 2.5% per year from the end of 2022 to the start of 2026, exceeding its pre-pandemic pace by one percentage point.

So is AI delivering? Most of the acceleration in labour productivity growth comes from faster growth of what mainstream economics calls total factor productivity (TFP). This is not something real that can be measured: it is just a mathematical residual from analysing the drivers of productivity growth. More workers working harder plus more machines working longer is what delivers most productivity from labour. TFP is the

residual that is assumed to be from the impact of 'innovation' (eg, AI).

But the rise in US TFP is not yet the result of AI application in the economy. According to economists at Barclays, AI adoption has been gradual and steady rather than rapid and transformative, with most households and businesses still reporting limited exposure to the technology.³ The rise in productivity growth since 2022 is really due to more intensive use of existing technology after the end of the pandemic, not the introduction of AI.

How do we know this? Well, Barclays economists looked at the St Louis Fed's nationwide Real-time Population Survey (RPS) of working-age US adults. The most recent survey shows that, while AI has found its way into work routines for 45% of respondents, its usage is miniscule. Assuming an eight-hour workday, the average AI adopter has gone from roughly 20 minutes of usage in late 2024 to around 30 minutes by mid-2026, the RPS survey shows. And what is not known is whether the workers are using their extra two percent of work time per day to be more generally productive, or to verify and fix whatever the AI has produced, or to slack off!

Indeed, most surveys of AI adoption by companies show only modest progress. The US Census Bureau's bi-weekly Business Trends and Outlook Survey shows just 21% of businesses were knowingly using AI, 69% reported no use, and 11% were not sure! A Fed Board of Governors discussion paper finds that "productivity trends across all three levels have been relatively consistent over time, suggestive of micro-level productivity gains not adding up in aggregate". It seems that 'micro-level' experiments typically measure task-level productivity, like the speed that a programmer generates code, rather than job-level or firm-level output. A 10% improvement on a task does not necessarily lead to proportional gains for a firm if adjustment costs or other bottlenecks lie elsewhere in the production process and erode the upstream productivity gains.

By running a series of complicated regression analyses on RPS survey data, the US Fed found no evidence of AI doing anything positive: correlations between industry-level adoption rates and improvements in productivity are "not statistically distinguishable from zero", it says. However, the AI optimists remain

just that - optimistic. They refer to the 'J-curve' that the productivity impact of new technologies generally follow.⁴ First, there is a slow - even negative - effect on productivity, as companies invest heavily in the technology. And then the boom comes. Such a J-curve was seen in US manufacturing productivity growth, which fell in the mid-1980s and then, after the recession of 1991, accelerated sharply until the mid-2000s.

But even that optimistic view has its caveats. First, it seems that those workers exposed to AI are resisting its use. An April survey of 2,400 knowledge workers by AI firm Writer and Workplace Intelligence found the 29% of employees admit to actively sabotaging their company's AI strategy.⁵ Among workers under 25, that figure was 44% - up from 41% a year earlier. A separate WalkMe survey of executives and employees across 14 countries, conducted the same month, found that more than 54% of workers had bypassed their company's AI tools in the past 30 days to do the work manually instead.⁶

In the early 19th century at the start of the industrial revolution in Britain, a group of skilled weavers tried to resist the introduction of machine weaving by various means - including sabotaging and wrecking the machines. They were called Luddites. Now it seems that a form of Luddism has returned over AI. Just as the Luddites had a case about protecting their livelihoods, so do 'generation Z' workers now.

The AI optimists, Stanford's Erik Brynjolfsson and ADP Research, are tracking 4.6 million workers across more than 730 occupations.⁷ They find that jobs for workers aged 22 to 25 in AI-exposed occupations are shrinking more than 4% annually. Goldman Sachs analysis suggests information, professional services, insurance and finance are best positioned for early productivity gains - but these are where the 'sabotage' surveys find the highest rates of resistance.

Bottom line

The step change in productivity growth that Fed chair Warsh puts all his hopes in still seems some way off. But what about profits from AI? So far, any revenue that the AI model companies are making is way short of covering the costs of research and development and the building of data centres all over the US. And Goldman Sachs estimates that each dollar of hardware investment requires at least

another \$1.70 of complementary "intangible" investment - software, data systems and the hardest category to measure: 'organisational overhaul'. There is now 15 times more data centre capacity than the demand for it.

And debt is building up. Bloomberg estimates that over \$500 billion is outstanding in AI data centre debt.⁸ Nikkei Asia reported that Meta, Google, Amazon, Microsoft and Oracle have accrued around \$1.65 trillion in outstanding debt in the last five years, with an additional hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of "off balance sheet" debt, meaning that the corporate structure allows the company to not include it as part of its liabilities.⁹

Now US companies are switching to using 'open-source' AI models coming out of China that can nearly match the performance of the US models at a fraction of the cost. First, there was DeepSeek that strikingly hit the industry back in early 2025.¹⁰ Now there is the newest Chinese AI model, Kimi K3, just released by the Beijing-based Moonshot AI. Chinese models are 112 times cheaper than Anthropic per million tokens. One token costs \$56 from Anthropic, \$26 from OpenAI, \$1.50 from Meta, \$1 from xAI and Google, and \$0.50 from the Chinese models. No wonder the proportion of tokens used by US firms that run through Chinese AI models is up to a record 58%.

But the optimists have not given up. Some suggest that increased efficiency will lead to increased demand, as unit costs of spending on AI falls. That will generate the profitability that AI companies are seeking and the stock market is hoping for. But only two percent of the top-ranked 500 companies mentioned AI productivity during earnings calls in the first quarter of 2026. Among those that did, the focus was overwhelmingly on *cost savings* rather than revenue growth. This raises serious questions about how the hundreds of billions in investment can be expected to turn into profits, let alone revenue.

The AI bet rests on two big assumptions. The first is that AI will be profitable - eventually - but just because a technology leads to a huge increase in productivity does not mean it will generate strong returns. The second assumption is that there will be widespread demand for AI - and soon. But, as noted above, Goldman Sachs estimates that it could take as long as 15 years (the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development says 20 years!). Can the current AI companies survive that long? Can the stock market wait that long before the bubble bursts? ●

Michael Roberts blogs
at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2026/06/06/ai-just-one-big-trade.
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SPORT

Capitalism's compressed game

Cricket was born in rural England and spread globally alongside British colonialism. Nowadays, however, India is the dominant force and, as shown by The Hundred, commercial considerations rule, says **Carl Collins**

Sport does not exist outside history or politics: it develops within various social and economic relations and cricket is no exception. The sport's evolution has mirrored the development of British capitalism and imperialism, while its modern transformation reflects the changing character of capitalism itself.

This is evident in The Hundred - the latest and shortest professional format of the sport - whose 2026 campaign started last week. Launched by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) in 2021, it reduces each innings to just 100 balls. Matches typically last around two and a half hours - even shorter than the relatively recently introduced T20 format (which emerged in 2003, with each side batting for 20 overs, and lasting three to four hours) and a tiny fraction of test matches (lasting up to five days), which once represented cricket's highest ideal.

Defenders of The Hundred claim it modernises the game and attracts new audiences, but critics dismiss it, using the widely repeated phrase, "cricket for people who don't like cricket". Both views miss the deeper question: why has such a format become possible, even necessary? To answer that requires understanding not only cricket's history, but also the changing nature of capitalist society itself.

Class distinctions

From its origins in medieval bat-and-ball games, cricket developed into a recognisably modern form in rural England during the 17th century, before being appropriated and institutionalised by public schools. Elite schools such as Eton, Harrow and Winchester transformed a popular game into an instrument of ruling-class education. Discipline, hierarchy, leadership and the ideology of 'fair play' were cultivated not simply for success on the cricket field, but to prepare Britain's future officers, civil servants and colonial administrators.

Industrialisation simultaneously rooted cricket within the working class. The game flourished in the factory towns and mining villages of industrial Britain. Lancashire's textile workers, Yorkshire's miners and the pit communities of Durham produced generations of outstanding professional cricketers. The ruling class and working class competed within the same game, albeit on profoundly unequal terms.

Those inequalities were formalised in the game's organisation. Until 1962, English first-class cricket maintained the distinction between the amateur 'gentlemen', drawn overwhelmingly from the wealthy and educated classes, and the professional 'players', who earned a living from the game. The division was more than symbolic.

Although the gentlemen/players divide has formally disappeared, its legacy remains. Private school pupils, who make up only around 7% of the population, continue to be disproportionately represented in England's team. Cricket remains one of the sports most strongly associated with private education, demonstrating how class privilege continues to shape access.

Even within the game, class stereotypes developed that reflected the wider capitalist division between mental and manual labour: fast bowling, requiring strength, stamina and relentless physical effort, became closely associated with working class players from industrial communities; meanwhile batting, and particularly



Ranjitsinhji Vibhaji: 'Father of Indian cricket'

captaincy, were more often linked to the educated elite.

Harold Larwood - the Nottinghamshire miner whose bowling spearheaded the infamous 'Bodyline' tactic¹ - and Yorkshire's Fred Trueman exemplified the tradition of working class fast bowlers, while England's modern batting greats, Sir Alastair Cook and Joe Root, both emerged from the private school system. These distinctions were never absolute, but they reflected enduring assumptions about who was expected to lead and who was expected to labour.

Perhaps no Marxist writer explored these contradictions more profoundly than CLR James in his classic *Beyond a boundary*. James famously asked, "What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?"² His point was that cricket cannot be understood separately from the social relations that produce it. The game reflected imperialism, race, class struggle and, to a limited extent, national liberation.

Cricket was exported with British colonialism. Soldiers, administrators and missionaries took the more codified version across the empire as part of Britain's wider cultural domination. Yet colonised peoples transformed it into something the imperialists never intended. In the West Indies, India, Pakistan and elsewhere, mastering cricket became a means of attaining equality with the colonial power. Victories against England carried significance far beyond the boundary rope, becoming symbolic blows against imperial prestige.

India perhaps represents the most striking example. Introduced by officials of the East India Company and later by the British Raj, the game sunk deep roots. Indian teams were established, universities and clubs embraced the sport and by the late colonial period cricket had become an arena in which Indians could challenge the supposed cultural superiority of their rulers. As the Indian scholar Ashis Nandy quipped, "Cricket is an Indian game accidentally discovered by the British" (*The Tao of cricket* 1989).

This tongue-in-cheek remark captures a profound historical

transformation. A sport intended to reinforce imperial authority was appropriated and remade. Cutting across India's 28 states and nine territories, its 120 major languages, its 19,500 dialects, its mosaic of castes and religions, cricket constitutes an important component of common identity. International victories became moments of collective celebration, while players such as Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli attained a status extending far beyond sporting achievement, becoming symbols of Indian achievement.

Mass participation

Cricket's popularity rests not simply on television audiences, but on mass participation. It is played on the streets of Mumbai and Delhi, in village fields, school playgrounds, public parks and improvised spaces where a bat, any ball and makeshift wickets are sufficient. Yet this popular culture exists alongside an increasingly sophisticated system of talent identification and development. In many respects India reproduced and vastly expanded the institutional model first developed in England's elite schools. State associations, academies, schools and private coaching networks now identify promising players from a young age, providing structured coaching, competition and pathways into professional cricket. The scale is unprecedented. A country of over 1.4 billion people can draw upon an enormous reservoir of talent, making elite cricket both intensely competitive and deeply embedded in everyday life.

However, this extraordinary popularity has also made cricket one of the most profitable sports on earth. Like football, the game has been transformed by commercialisation. Billions of pounds are invested in franchise leagues, broadcasting rights, sponsorship, advertising, player auctions and corporate ownership. The Indian Premier League has become the clearest expression of cricket as a global entertainment commodity, with players increasingly circulating through an international franchise circuit.

In this process the Board of Control for Cricket in India has emerged as the dominant economic and political force within world cricket, exercising enormous influence over scheduling, governance and the sport's commercial direction. Such a concentration of wealth and power has inevitably generated corruption, conflicts of interest and opaque administration. Yet, as with football, commodification has not extinguished the game's popular appeal. Rather, capitalism simultaneously exploits and depends upon the genuine passion of millions whose attachment to cricket continues to transcend the commercial spectacle built around it.

Long tests

For much of cricket's history, test matches represented the pinnacle of the sport. Some early tests had no time limit whatsoever, although now they are always five-day affairs at a maximum. Victory demanded patience, endurance and tactical planning over days rather than hours. Cricket rewarded concentration, accumulation and delayed gratification.

Commercial pressures gradually reshaped the game. Limited-over cricket emerged during the 1960s, partly to fit spectators' changing lives and partly to create contests with guaranteed results. One-day internationals became enormously successful following the inaugural World Cup in 1975.

The Hundred represents the latest stage in this evolution. Every aspect of the competition has been consciously designed to produce a faster, more accessible television product, aimed particularly at younger audiences and families unfamiliar with traditional cricket. This was not simply a sporting innovation: it was a commercial one. The Hundred increasingly resembles not a domestic English competition, but another component of a global network of cricket franchises owned by transnational capital.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) justified its introduction by arguing that modern audiences have shorter attention spans and demand quicker entertainment. While this claim is often repeated, the evidence is sketchy. Research does suggest that digital technologies have altered patterns of attention and that the average time people remain focused on tasks before switching has declined dramatically over the past two decades. However, rather than focusing on some sort of biological reductionism, we must consider wider societal changes.

People have not suddenly evolved into beings incapable of sustained concentration. Millions still happily watch five-day test matches, attend Wagner operas or read lengthy novels. Instead, capitalism has created what economists describe as the 'attention economy', in which every technology company, advertiser and media platform competes relentlessly for human attention. Cricket therefore finds itself competing not simply with football or rugby, but with TikTok, YouTube, Netflix, computer games and countless other forms of digital entertainment. The Hundred reflects the sport's adaptation to this new economic reality.

The Hundred fits perfectly within this broader trend. Rather than requiring audiences to invest a full day watching cricket, or even just three hours for T20, it compresses

excitement into an even shorter period. Boundaries, wickets, music, fireworks and entertainment follow one another in rapid succession. The game increasingly resembles a stream of marketable content rather than a slow-burning sporting contest.

Time poverty

Perhaps the strongest explanation for The Hundred lies not in psychology, but in the material conditions of modern life. Marx argued that the struggle over time lay at the heart of capitalism. Workers sell only part of their day to employers. However, capitalism has always been interested in what workers do in their remaining time and continually seeks to colonise those parts of workers' lives too.

Many workers experience growing 'time poverty'. Long commutes, insecure employment, shift work, unpaid overtime, second jobs and permanent digital connectivity leave millions with less meaningful free time than previous generations. Smartphones, rather than liberating workers, frequently extend work into evenings and weekends through emails, messaging apps and expectations of constant availability. Domestic labour has also intensified.

Against this background, asking workers to devote six or seven hours to county cricket, let alone five days to a test match, becomes increasingly unrealistic. The Hundred therefore attempts to occupy a genuine social need. Millions of supporters simply cannot spare entire days for sport, however much they might wish to. A two-and-a-half-hour evening match more easily fits around work, commuting and childcare. In other words, The Hundred is not creating new habits: it is adapting to habits produced by capitalism.

While critics portray shorter cricket as evidence of cultural decline, a Marxist analysis reaches a different conclusion: workers have not freely chosen to sacrifice or compress their leisure time; their leisure time has been sacrificed and compressed because capitalist production increasingly dominates their lives.

Ultimately, The Hundred is neither the salvation nor the destruction of cricket. It is another stage in the commodification of sport. Professional cricket increasingly revolves around television rights, sponsorship deals, franchise branding, gambling partnerships, corporate hospitality and merchandising. Fixture schedules reflect broadcasting requirements rather than sporting considerations. Supporters become consumers. Players become marketable assets. Even club identities increasingly function as brands competing for market share.

A socialist society would not necessarily reject shorter formats of cricket. It might well embrace innovations that genuinely broaden participation, increase accessibility or reflect the wishes of players and supporters. But the difference would lie in who controls those decisions: instead of television executives, marketing departments and corporate sponsors determining the future of sport, those decisions would be made democratically according to social need ●

Notes

1. Introduced in the 1933-34 Ashes series against Australia, when Larwood was clearly aiming at the batter's body, not the wicket.
2. CLR James *Beyond a boundary* London 1963.

CU 2026

Nothing is fixed or finished

We are seeking to establish a collective of artists, musicians, scientists, academics and activists who can work together across a range of performative platforms. **Tam Dean Burn** looks forward to the evening culture sessions at this year's CU

Our cultural programme for this year's Communist University will begin with the launch of 'Diderot Gesellschaft Movement' (DGM) on Saturday August 8 at 6pm. This follows on from discussions at last year's CU.¹

We are seeking to establish a multi-disciplinary collective of Marxist artists, musicians, scientists, academics and activists, who can work together across a range of performative platforms. The name, Diderot Gesellschaft, draws inspiration from the great 18th century French encyclopaedist and theatre-maker, Denis Diderot, and the German word for a particular type of society that Emile Durkheim described as having "organic solidarity". It takes inspiration too from Bertolt Brecht's plans for a similar gathering in the 1930s-40s that never reached fruition due to World War II and the cold war afterwards, but we have added 'Movement' to this inherently internationalist moniker to increase its resonance as an activist base and a forum for artistic action.

Last year we seeded a number of projects at CU, all of which we are continuing, along with this year's new projects. The idea is that nothing is fixed or finished - instead fluid and capable of adaptation and change, as conditions and opportunities arise. At CU2026 we will also launch our DGM Substack platform, where projects can be developed with live and recorded broadcasts, further documentation and means to debate.

As co-chairs and founders of DGM, the Marxist academic Esther Leslie and I will prompt a discussion on what might be included in a DGM manifesto and invite contributions from those attending and involved in the programme through the week. This will be continued at the *Historical Materialism* conference in London in November, with a manifesto to follow.

There will not be time directly at CU2026 culture sessions for discussion because it was recognised that last year it was a bit much for comrades who had already attended a full day of debating sessions to do so in the evening too. So this year we are keeping them to a tight one hour (6pm-7pm), but, of course, things can be discussed informally afterwards in person or online.

Darko Suvin

In particular, we are honoured and excited to have the eminent Marxist professor, Darko Suvin, involved this year in several of the programmatic projects - including what we have billed as the 'Darko Days'. In the first of these, on Sunday August 9, we will present a *Sprechgesang* ('spoken song') exploration of Darko's recent essay, 'A song of death and ongoing joy: o bella ciao', about the origins and power of the great song of solidarity which has been taken up and treasured across the world.

As well as a celebration of that inspiring song, this session offers the opportunity to look at how to take the essay form into performance potentials. We sincerely hope that Darko - now 96 years old and living in Italy - will be able to join us on the Zoom for this and other events through the week. Indeed his and Brecht's mighty presences will be felt first thing each morning, when I will read an extract from their shared poeticisation of the *Communist manifesto*. To give greater depth and



Co-chairs and founders: Tam Dean Burn and Esther Leslie

possibilities for further performance I will be attempting to learn the poem by heart as soon as I get this article finished!

On Monday August 10 we begin on a project that gave rise to the idea of using Substack as a platform for DGM. I came across an essay there on 'Sally Mju's Marxism' page, entitled 'Marx's communism and the inspiration from Hegel's "anti-Christ"', which I found very inspiring, particularly with regard to the use of physical movement metaphors and similes. When I commented on this, the enthusiastic response from Sally (at the time a student living in Vietnam) prompted me to look deeper into the essay, which deals with understanding alienation, spirit and religion from Hegelian and Marxist perspectives.

It reminded me of the legendary speech given by Jimmy Reid, the communist leader of the Upper Clyde shipbuilders, when he was inaugurated as rector of Glasgow University students in 1972. What he said on alienation, known as 'the rat race speech', was at the time reprinted in full in *The New York Times* and praised as the greatest speech since the Gettysburg address! It has recently been sampled by the radical Glasgow academic band, The Tenementals, for a song on their album, *Glasgow: a history (volume 1 of VI)*.

When I then discovered that the title of the first song on the album, 'The owl of Minerva', comes from a phrase by Hegel, my mind was truly blown over how such interconnectedness occurs. I knew for certain that this is another project that needs seeding - especially when we look at the symptom of the very alienation Reid explores in his speech involving the opium of so many people in Glasgow today, which is causing the highest level of drug overdose deaths in Europe. So all of this will be explored on Monday August 11. It affirms what I have come

to view as one of the true purposes of art - to show the interconnectedness of everything or how that is being stifled or denied.

Interconnection

Such addiction leads into the next session on Tuesday August 12, when we seed a new project that shows another level of interconnection across the cultural programme sessions. This did have a previous life as a theatre play by Johnny Brown (also leader of the music group, Band of Holy Joy), entitled *William Burroughs caught in possession of the rime of the ancient mariner*. The play pitches Burroughs as the ancient mariner captain with a New York junkie loser crew of Johnny Thunders, Jean Michel Basquiat and Kathy Acker, and was performed at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre in April 2002, which I co-directed.

We also begin exploring a possible one-man-show version that connects the celebrated poem by that other drug addict writer, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with the Marxist understanding of 'metabolic rift' and how capitalism is leading us into such uncharted waters of climate catastrophe. It will feature extracts from Burroughs' own writings on ecological disaster.

Bill McGuire's latest book, *The fate of the world: a history and future of the climate crisis*,² has very recently been published and he will be leading two sessions in the main CU programme on August 13 and 14. After the first, on geo-engineering, we will present a dramatised reading of Bill's short story, *The fix*, which deals with the issue and went on to be expanded into his novel, *Sky seed*.

On Thursday August 13 at our 'Darko Days 2' we explore some of comrade Suvin's many poems and parables including his epic warning, "Thus spake the bitter muse: do not profit by the blood of your fellows!"

Our extended session on the

afternoon of Friday August 14 (3.30pm-5.30pm) also owes a debt of gratitude to Darko for his 2023 essay, *A long hope: the Prometheus counter-project*. It begins with a statement that matches much of what we are attempting too:

This essay [sic!] uses my professional orientations of theatre studies with comparative literature and a movement into political epistemology. Dramaturgy and literature meet here the overwhelming existential threat to all our lives, which demands reflection about how do we understand what we hope and wish to understand? Classical studies, in this case of Athens and Aeschylus, I much honour and try to learn from, but the essay cannot be bound by or to them, for I seek a different animal: how to grasp, amid our danger and distress, the prominent poetic and cognitive view of a similar cataclysm from the past, as a lesson to the present.

The work is, of course, a provisional statement: a contribution.

Marx himself famously wrote in his 1841 doctoral dissertation that Prometheus was the foremost saint and martyr in the philosopher's calendar (he also makes an appearance in *Capital*). Another interpretation of Prometheus will be presented live in the session by Camilla Power of the Radical Anthropology Group, who told me: "This is an Indo-European patriarchal story connected to the 'world historic defeat of the female sex'. I think we know more about mythic structures than Marx did. It's a menstrual male myth like Jesus Christ."

That should certainly open up a good debate. We will also have a reading of the play, as translated by Joel Agee (I am trying to get hold of him). He was brought up in the German Democratic Republic and in his introduction states how his version ties in with Jan Kott's essay, *The vertical axis, or the ambiguities of Prometheus*. Kott came from a Polish communist background and I had only been previously conscious of him as the author of the highly influential *Shakespeare, our contemporary*, which I last read when I was playing Hamlet some 40 years ago! So there is lots to explore there too.

Given the crises we are already living through now and the widely held belief that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, it is vital that we break barriers and build bridges between Marxists of all varieties to use our collective imagination to explore alternatives to the beckoning barbarism ●

Notes

1. 'Learning to play our way' *Weekly Worker* July 24 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1548/learning-to-play-our-way.
2. See Jack Conrad's review, 'Back to a hothouse earth' *Weekly Worker* July 23: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1595/back-to-a-hothouse-earth.

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly Worker

Strait of Hormuz is the main lever

Oppose both imperialism and tyranny

Trump promises to mete out a beating. Saudi Arabia becomes directly involved. Pezeshkian urges Iranians to stand firm against the enemy. **Yassamine Mather** explains why the ceasefire could not hold

Predictably, the short lull in the war between the US and Iran has ended. Iran launched a missile attack against US forces in Jordan. The US and Saudi Arabia carried out strikes against Iran-aligned militias in Iraq and a US-owned tanker was hit off the Egyptian coast. Meanwhile, Donald Trump promises to “beat the fucking shit” out of the Islamic Republic, telling Fox News: “They’re going to get a beating.”

However, the central issue in dispute remains control of the passage through Hormuz. Iran has shown that its geographical position provides leverage far more effective than its nuclear programme, while the US and the gulf states reject any arrangement that would allow Tehran to impose unilateral control or compulsory charges on international shipping. The disagreement is no longer simply about whether Iran should have a role, but about how much authority it should exercise over each traffic lane and whether payments are voluntary service contributions or mandatory tolls.

Targets

Before the pause, the US had conducted 13 consecutive nights of attack. The early target list concentrated on coastal radar, missile batteries, naval installations, drone facilities and command-and-control systems. As the campaign continued, the range of reported targets broadened to include communications networks, bridges, tunnels, transport links, electricity installations and other infrastructure described by Washington as military or dual-use. Tehran argued that this widening campaign struck systems essential to civilian life and showed that the war was moving beyond narrowly defined military objectives.

Iran replied with missiles and drones aimed at American bases and associated facilities in Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan and Iraq. Some claims of successful strikes have not been independently verified, and damage assessments remain contested. Nevertheless, the political logic of Iran’s response was clear. Tehran sought to demonstrate that Gulf countries could not host US forces, provide logistical support and permit operations from their territory, while claiming neutrality. In Iranian eyes, bases used by the US make the host state part of the architecture of the war.

The previous Memorandum of Understanding was unstable from the beginning. Even its name suggested a deliberately vague arrangement rather than anything approaching a final settlement. It tried to address immediate military risks and long-term political disputes without precisely defining either side’s obligations. Hormuz was the most visible ambiguity, but the same problem affected the nuclear programme, missile capabilities, sanctions, security guarantees, the sequencing of reciprocal steps and the consequences of alleged violations.

Such ambiguity may be useful when governments need to stop an immediate escalation without admitting defeat. It allows each side to present the same document

differently to domestic audiences. But the advantage is temporary. Once implementation begins, incompatible interpretations become trigger points. Iran could argue that the understanding recognised its security role in the strait; the US could argue that it guaranteed unrestricted international passage.

The collapse of the MoU should therefore not be explained through simplistic stories about Iran’s irrational decision to suddenly abandon a workable peace, nor has it anything to do with factional differences within the Iranian regime. Washington appears to have concluded that the terms were too restrictive or insufficiently advantageous. Tehran concluded that compliance without enforceable guarantees would leave it exposed to renewed bombing and economic pressure. Each side tried to improve its position through force.

Defensive

The language used by Britain and the US has become increasingly strained. British ministers insist that the UK is not participating in the war, but supporting American “defensive” operations. But the distinction between defence and attack cannot be established simply by the label used in a ministerial statement. If US aircraft use British facilities, intelligence, logistics or protected airspace in operations that strike Iranian territory, Tehran will not regard Britain as detached from the conflict.

The same contradiction applies across the Gulf. Kuwait, Bahrain and other states may object that they are being attacked despite there being no formal declaration of war. Yet hosting US bases is not a politically neutral act, when those bases support military operations. This does not mean Iranian attacks are justified, nor that civilian populations should be made responsible for the decisions of their governments. It means only that the infrastructure of American power is regional, and war exposes the political meaning of that infrastructure.

The term ‘defensive’ performs an ideological task. It presents western military action as a response to aggression, even when it includes strikes deep inside another country, while describing retaliation by the targeted state as inherently offensive. Iran employs its own selective language, presenting all its actions as national defence and minimising the coercive effects of restricting international shipping.

As for Iran, the Strait of Hormuz has become more useful strategically to it than the nuclear programme. Nuclear capacity is surrounded by inspections, long technical timelines and the threat of ‘preventive’ attack. Hormuz is different. Iran’s coastline, missiles, naval forces and proximity to shipping routes allow it to affect energy markets almost instantly. Even partial disruption raises insurance costs, slows traffic and forces governments and companies to calculate the risk of escalation.

Tehran certainly fears that, if it restores normal passage without obtaining guarantees, the US will simply resume regime change



Potent weapon for Iran

operations, once the immediate pressure on oil markets has passed. From Iran’s perspective, surrendering control first would remove its strongest bargaining instrument, while leaving in place the US threat. That is why calls for Iran simply to ‘give in’ misunderstand the logic of the confrontation, regardless of one’s view of the Islamic Republic.

At the same time, Iran cannot use this weapon indefinitely without serious consequences. Regional economies suffer, but so does Iran. Neighbouring populations may initially blame the US, especially where American bases are unpopular, but prolonged disruption, unemployment, empty hotels, rising prices and attacks on infrastructure can shift opinion against Tehran. The belief that the peoples of the region will inevitably support Iran because their governments are allied with Washington is a dangerous illusion.

Global impact

The US-Iran conflict cannot be understood simply as an isolated quarrel between Washington and Tehran. It forms part of a broader struggle over the political order in the Middle East and, beyond that, the rivalry between the US and China. Iran matters in its own right, but it also occupies a strategic position in energy routes, relations with Russia and China, the politics of the Gulf and the future regional order sought by the US and Israel.

One objective of US pressure is to restrict the flow of discounted Iranian energy to China and reinforce American influence over the terms on which global trade is conducted. The US is seeking to demonstrate that it remains the hegemonic power capable of policing strategic routes. The war therefore carries a significance beyond the immediate Iranian state. It demonstrates whether Washington can use military and financial power to determine access to energy and discipline states connected to an emerging anti-American bloc.

None of this reduces every event to a direct US-China confrontation. Regional actors possess their own interests. Israel seeks to weaken Iran and reshape the regional balance; Gulf monarchies fear both Iranian power and the consequences of a another round of American-Israeli warmongering; Oman attempts to play

a mediating role; Saudi Arabia wants secure energy exports; and Iran’s rulers seek regime survival, regional influence and protection from attack. These interests intersect with global rivalry without being mechanically determined by it.

The war has also spread through related theatres. Houthi operations in and around the Red Sea create pressure on Saudi shipping and widen the danger to global trade. In addition we have Ukrainian claims of involvement in the Caspian adding another layer, although many specific claims require independent verification. What is certain is that, the longer the conflict continues, the more opportunities arise for separate wars and rivalries to become entangled.

China, Qatar, Pakistan, Egypt and Oman have all had reasons to encourage a pause. None want disruption of energy markets or a direct regional war. But mediation does not remove the underlying imbalance. The US can threaten destruction on a scale Iran cannot match. Iran can impose substantial costs, but it cannot equal American military capacity. This asymmetry shapes every negotiation.

Predictions that limited foreign strikes would automatically produce the collapse of the Islamic Republic have proved to be nonsense. Such claims underestimate the effects of nationalism, fear and wartime repression. A population may deeply oppose its government, while also rejecting a foreign military victory. Hostility to the regime and support for American bombing are not the same political position.

Foreign attack often strengthens the state in the short term. It allows the authorities to identify dissent with assistance to the enemy, restrict protest, intensify surveillance and demand ‘national unity’. People who would ordinarily mobilise against the government may hesitate, when demonstrations can be portrayed as weakening the country during war. Material hardship does not necessarily produce rebellion, especially where organisation is weak and repression is severe.

The Islamic Republic has long relied on crisis. External confrontation helps it justify internal coercion, while internal repression helps it manage the consequences of its foreign policy. This does not make the regime anti-imperialist or progressive. It remains a reactionary state, whose principal domestic enemy is its own population: workers, women, national minorities, political opponents and all those subjected to imprisonment and execution. Wartime conditions may strengthen rather than soften this machinery.

At the same time, explaining the war primarily as the result of Iranian irrationality, or reactionary obsession with ‘crisis’, obscures the history of US policy. At several points, including after 2001 and during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Tehran offered cooperation to Washington. Those openings did not produce a stable accommodation. The US has repeatedly sought a settlement in which Iran is subordinated, contained or transformed. In fact

Democrats and Republicans have never forgiven the Iranian people for overthrowing their stooge - the shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi - in 1979. The current war cannot be separated from the project for ‘revenge’.

The Islamic Republic’s rhetoric about Palestine should also be treated critically. Its support has often been selective, instrumental and subordinate to state interests. But exposing that hypocrisy does not justify an American or Israeli war, nor does it absolve the powers responsible for the destruction of Gaza and the wider regional crisis. Two reactionary forces can oppose one another without becoming political equivalents in power, responsibility or historical role.

False choice

The left can reject the false choice between supporting US victory and politically endorsing the Islamic Republic. Those sections of the so-called Iranian left (only in exile) who argue against calling the US assault an ‘imperialist aggression’ do so because, in their limited imagination, if that was the case one would have to defend the Islamic regime. That is *not* the case. In Britain and the US, the first responsibility is to oppose one’s ‘own’ state: bombing strikes, the naval blockade, the system of bases, arms supplies and diplomatic manoeuvring. This is not because the Iranian government deserves support, but because workers in the imperialist states have a particular duty to oppose the power exercised in their name.

However, defeat for the American war aims would not automatically mean a victory for our side. Iran’s rulers could easily intensify repression, mobilise popular anger and attack its domestic enemies ever more aggressively. The left must therefore combine opposition to imperialist war with solidarity for independent working class, democratic, women’s and minority movements within Iran.

This requires more than predicting whether the regime will fall. The essential question is how people can organise from below under conditions of war. Immediate demands should include protection of civilian life, an end to executions and wartime repression, freedom for political prisoners, defence of wages and essential services, democratic control of emergency measures and opposition to ethnic or sectarian scapegoating. Longer-term organisation must aim to create a political force independent of both foreign intervention and the existing state.

The slogan of defeating the US has use only when connected to the agency of working people, not to the military success of a reactionary government. Likewise, opposition to the Islamic Republic has progressive content only when separated from monarchist restoration, external regime change, plans to dismantle Iran as a country and the fantasy that American bombs can deliver democracy. Any sort of viable revolutionary politics must treat both imperial domination and domestic dictatorship as enemies, while understanding that they are not identical forces ●