

weekly worker



Jason Arday: tragic victim of an openly racist attack dog, a baying mainstream media and liberal anti-racism too

- Letters and debate
- Tony Greenstein's speech
- Communist University 2026
- Trump's D-Day sanctions

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Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

**Stop, look around
here it comes
here it comes
here comes our
sixth deadly heatwave**



LETTERS



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

Authoritarian DSA

Earlier this year, after admiring the organisation for about a decade, I finally joined the Democratic Socialists of America. In many ways, this was the kind of group I wanted to exist as a freshman in college, at the start of president George W Bush's second term, when the only leftist group active in my area was a Trotskyist sect. Of course, DSA technically did exist then, but it was nothing like what it is today. When, last month, I attended my first meeting of the revitalised, multi-tendency group, I was deeply impressed.

For instance, DSA appears very good at seeking to address the not explicitly political needs of its members. The Hartford branch offered board game nights, parent meetups and a choir that sang labor songs. It quickly became clear to me that, if you had the time and inclination, DSA could be your whole life, in a good way. Of course, they were engaged in impressive, more politically focused efforts as well, like helping elect leftists to the Connecticut state house and pushing back against Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

As I read more about the internal workings of DSA at a national level, though, I was disappointed to learn that one of the two elected leaders of the organisation belonged to what's called the Red Star caucus, which identifies as "Marxist-Leninist". For those who aren't aware, "Marxist-Leninist" is a phrase which has really only been used as an ideological self-description by Stalinists and their ilk. For instance, Vladimir Lenin and his followers in his lifetime didn't use the term. Neither did Trotskyists. It was really just reserved for the most unapologetically authoritarian of authoritarian socialists.

On a certain level, I don't think these various ideological descriptions are very relevant in the here and now. But, then again, this co-chair, Megan Romer, is one of two leaders of DSA. She's increasingly being called upon to serve as a public spokesperson for the group, and is being identified as a Marxist-Leninist on major media platforms. No-one forced her to identify this way. She could just as easily identify as a socialist or a Marxist, but she's chosen to identify with an extremely divisive, authoritarian tradition, which I can only assume doesn't actually reflect the kind of socialism which most of DSA's membership believes in.

Honestly, I'm not sure why anyone in the United States, circa 2026, would identify as a Marxist-Leninist. The best answer I can come up with is members of the Red Star caucus are either ignorant or edgelords. However, I want to be clear: I'm not calling for these self-avowed Marxist-Leninists to be expelled. I think, once socialist organisations start purging members, it can create a vicious, self-destructive cycle that's hard to stop. What I am saying, though, is I'd like members of the Red Star caucus

to be voted out of significant positions of leadership. Ideally, Marxist-Leninists would be reduced to the role of your crazy uncle at a family gathering. The sad fact is you're going to have cranks in any large group.

So, yes, it's about optics. I think it's a very bad look to have a Marxist-Leninist - even a very well-meaning and potentially confused one - leading a democratic socialist organisation. But, more than that, it's about substance. For me, socialism and democracy are inseparable: you can't have one without the other. Socialism means democratic control of the means of production. At the risk of pursuing a 'no true Scotsman' defence, I don't view Marxist-Leninism as meaningfully socialist or leftist in any real way.

Jon Hochschartner
Connecticut

Animal rights

I enjoyed reading Jon Hochschartner's August 6 letter on animal rights. He brings to our attention a number of individuals in the Democratic Socialists of America who are supportive of animal rights - "a cause which, sadly, receives scant attention across the political spectrum, including the left, where it fits most naturally".

I have myself been a vegan for over 10 years, and I have been active in the animal rights movement for eight years. I am also a Marxist, so it pains me to say that animal rights does not fit naturally on the left, and that attempts to combine the two movements can only weaken both.

Marxism aims to empower those who are exploited to overthrow capitalism. The capitalist state is to be replaced by a workers' state, and the market economy is to be replaced by a planned economy. Animals, unfortunately, have no capacity to take part in revolutions and, contrary to the claims of Donaldson and Kymlicka (referenced in Hochschartner's letter), cannot meaningfully function as members of a state.

Indeed, contrary to the claims of Wadiwel (again referenced in Hochschartner's letter), animals are not oppressed because of the profit motive: they are oppressed because of public demand for meat and milk. Animal products are only profitable because they are in high demand (remember that exchange value presupposes use value), and so, if capitalism was replaced with socialism, that demand would simply be fulfilled by socialised industries.

The danger of linking animal rights with Marxism is twofold: (1) Marxists are duped into thinking that animal suffering can be addressed after the revolution, meaning that the vital task of advocating veganism is deferred indefinitely; (2) animal rights advocates are duped into thinking that Marxism has more to do with morality than it has to do with seizing state power, meaning liquidation into liberal reformism.

I hope that this letter will not be used by anyone as justification for continued apathy towards animals. To say that sentient creatures should not be gassed or boiled to death, forced to spend their lives in crates too small for them to turn around,

or selectively bred to the point that their bodies collapse under their own weight has nothing to do with Marxism, but that should not matter to any member of civilised society.

Finn Lees
Leeds

Unite and SWP

What follows was sent to the Socialist Workers Party on August 5, before the end of the Unite general secretary election:

The letter, 'SW is wrong on Unite union leadership race: abstention is best' (*Socialist Worker* July 17), provided me with some relief to see that there are supporters of the SWP who want to stand up against both sides of the Unite bureaucracy. I do not agree with everything in their letter - namely their opposition to new oil and gas drilling in the North Sea - but the general thrust I can fully get behind. Both candidates are rotten, and it is disorientating to take a side. A particularly important point they make is: "But in the key local strike - the Birmingham bin dispute, which your article fails to mention - Graham refused to mobilise the membership of Unite." In your July 22 reply, you again failed to acknowledge this key class battle that Sharon Graham is selling out.

I want to make two points towards the said reply, titled 'Future of Unite union won't be determined by its general secretary, but by its membership': (1) Sharon Graham's rightwing policies are not things we can push to the side, and (2) her re-election will drive workers further into the arms of Reform.

Let us look at Graham's policies for a moment. From outflanking the Tories to the right in 2022, when ordering workers at Ellesmere Port not to offload Russian oil, to suppressing pro-Palestine voices inside the union, to pressuring the Labour government for higher 'defence' spending, she has not merely made 'rightwing interventions', but proven herself in action as the pro-imperialist lieutenant of capital that she is. These are not mistakes and can't simply be boiled down to imperfections. Sharon Graham has taken a side with the British establishment, always eager to prove her loyalty.

These examples may look like 'bigger questions', unrelated to the day-to-day struggles, but actually they have an immediate impact on all workers. Sanctions on Russian oil and gas have led to significant rises in fuel prices; suppressed pro-Palestinian voices in the union have emboldened Starmer's attacks on basic democratic rights and free speech, whilst increased defence spending will guarantee cuts to crucial social services.

Her workplace strategy stems from the same place as this. On the key battlefronts, from the Luton Vauxhall and Port Talbot plants to the Birmingham bin strike, Graham refused to take the action needed to fight the employers effectively. As with the big-picture political questions, her refusal to take on the establishment is the defining feature. The strategy always boils down to begging the bosses and then convincing members to accept the bosses' terms. Even when members force the union to adopt a more militant approach,

such as the ongoing all-out strike in Birmingham, this fundamental strategy never changes. For over a year, Graham has pleaded with the council to make another offer to the strikers, but the council has ignored her, and the union is paralysed.

You correctly oppose Simon Dubbins' pleas for "social partnership", but ignore Sharon Graham's active partnership with the bosses! Workers have suffered significant defeats under her leadership, and the union is in a worse place than it was five years ago. No-one, especially not the workers, is to blame apart from her and her lackeys. This brings me to my second point.

In the recent EC elections, whilst Graham's slate won a large majority, the real winner was apathy. The turnout for most seats sat at around the 5%-6% mark. It was evident that most Unite members did not care to take a side. Most members were aware of the election through emails, social media posts, etc. The word was out there - it was not an organisational failure to inform members. Rather, most union members are looking at the state of the union and rightly placing the blame on both the current bureaucrats and those who came before Graham. This is why it is so important that socialists do not take a side with either.

The union has, apart from a few small and isolated examples, failed to make real, significant gains for their members under the Sharon Graham and Len McCluskey (now represented by Dubbins) wings. Union members want change and, as such, many are now even looking to Reform - obviously seeing that, if nothing else, they are at least opposed to the Labour government (unlike the union leaders).

Socialists who support either Graham or Dubbins are only muddying their own names. We need to focus on putting

forward a socialist strategy that can actually defend our standing against the incoming onslaught and push back against the bosses. We can't do that if we are supporting various wings of the bureaucracy that are obstacles to this, and we definitely won't be able to build any sizeable base, given that the overwhelming majority of members already see right through these union leaders.

I urge the SWP to retract their support for Sharon Graham and, in future, consider putting forward a socialist candidate in *opposition* to the bureaucracy, if you are serious about building the militant union we need.

Tom G
Spartacist League Britain

Soviet sex

I am afraid, Mr Smithee, that the female population - or sections of it - do not exist simply to meet the sexual needs of "married men, whose wives are going through the menopause" or "shy and disabled men" or "those with Asperger's syndrome" (Letters, April 23 and August 6). These are, frankly, disgusting and repulsive attitudes and used to attempt to justify a deeply exploitative and dangerous industry, where (mainly) women are bought and sold for money and used by (mainly) men for sex.

All sorts of women and all sorts of men will find each other attractive and may mutually choose to engage in sexual activity with each other. That is *completely* different to a commercial transaction where (usually) a man purchases sex from (usually) a woman, who has been forced through a whole range of circumstances into sex work. It is appalling that Mr Smithee completely conflates these two fundamentally opposite sets of encounters.

Smithee assert that "escorts will exist under moneyless communism" and "they will enjoy meeting clients". No, normal,

Fighting fund

Five days to go

Welcome back to the *Weekly Worker* after our two-week summer break.

True, there've been no copies of the paper since August 6, but that hasn't stopped our readers and supporters sending us those essential donations! Over the last three weeks we've received no less than £1,729, taking our running total for August up to £2,357, with five days to go, as I write, to get the £400 we still need in order to reach that very necessary monthly target of £2,750.

No less than 36 comrades contributed to our fighting fund over the last three weeks - rather too many to tell you how much exactly they all chipped in with - but here are some highlights.

First of all, five comrades came up with *three-figure* donations - thank you very much, comrades TB, LM, SK, PM and JC. On top of that, comrades PB, MM, LR, TB, PM, KS and JB each contributed between £50-plus and £100. Then there were comrades NR, RD, DV, TR, OG, GB, SI,

DR, ST and AB, who donated between £11 and £50. Finally there were 14 comrades whose contributions were £10 or less - thanks also to comrades SM, PM, CC, JL, MD, TT, MH, NL, SO, AR, GP, RD, ES and Hassan.

It goes without saying, by the way, that quite a few of the last batch of donors only wish they could contribute more than a tenner, but, of course, everything they give mounts up when added together!

But now we want to make sure we not only reach that £2,750 target, but go shooting past it! If you want to play your part, please do so by Monday August 31. Please make a bank transfer or use PayPal to make sure we get it on time. Let's do it! ●

Robbie Rix

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

healthy, non-exploitative, mutually consensual, sexual relationships and contacts will exist - indeed flourish - under communism. Escorting, sex work, prostitution, will not. Let me tell Mr Smithee precisely how many 'escorts' would operate if they were not being paid for their 'services'. The answer is zero. (And, of course, in most circumstances the majority of the payment does not go to the sex worker, but to the pimp or criminal gang owning or operating her.)

Yes, some 'escorts' may enjoy some aspects of their work - that is not the point. If they were not paid (or received some kind of benefit in kind - eg, drugs, accommodation, 'protection'), they would not do it. Simple.

Although prostitution in any society is undesirable, I am not in favour of making it formally illegal. Certainly not in favour of making the women involved illegal or subject to prosecution. It is best reduced and ideally eliminated through changing the social, cultural and economic conditions which cause it to arise in the first place: societies divided by class and by patriarchy and misogyny and run on the basis of ruthless, callous exploitation of many of the most vulnerable.

I am certainly in favour of prosecuting to the full extent of the law the pimps and criminal gangs which run prostitution in most of the world. Women involved in sex work should have much greater access to the health and social care services they need to rebuild their lives, to leave prostitution if possible, and to stay as safe and well if they remain.

Smithee asserts that Stalin's Soviet Union was "sexually repressed". Complete and utter nonsense. This Smitheism could be called a 'Macnairism': pronouncing on a subject he knows nothing whatsoever about, regurgitating some old slogans, comments or statements which have somehow stuck in their memory, and repeated with no sequential logic or evidence whatsoever. A film I've never heard of or books by a twisted and bitter anti-communist is no evidence at all.

What does "sexually repressed" actually mean? More or less sexual activity than in tsarist times? More or less than in the 1960s and 70s? More or less than in Yeltsin's post-communist Russia or than in Russia today? Compared with which other societies and when? Britain (or France, Germany or the USA) in the 1930s? In the late 19th century? What about compared to the present day, where incel culture appears to be a version of perceived sexual repression, echoed in a creepy way by Smithee's advocacy of the need for sex workers?

As well as fear of unwanted pregnancies and to a lesser extent of sexually transmitted diseases, one of the main factors for 'sexual repression' is religious ideology, which can regard many forms of sexual activity as deeply sinful and worthy of private and public shame. As Smithee is plainly unaware, organised religion and ideology in Russia suffered something of a setback with the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and in more concrete terms by the construction of an advanced, industrialised, modern socialist

society in the late 1920s and 30s, and the development of a widely educated, literate and cultured Soviet population, probably the most so in the world. Communist ideology as regards the family and sexual relationships and practices has always advocated these should be on the basis of equality and consent, and equality and consent should be real, concrete and material, not just formal.

I suspect what Smithee is really referring to were efforts in the Stalin period to try and protect and strengthen the family (no-one was forced into these), by making divorce more rigorous than in immediate post-revolutionary Russia, (thus, for example, making it harder for feckless and irresponsible men to clear off abandoning the mother and children), and restricting the number of abortions.

Let us examine the facts and realities of these and if they were truly about "sexual repression". Women and families were positively encouraged to have families and help grow the population. The Soviet population like all others needed to renew itself and, the more young workers there were, the more economic and social value could be produced, to the benefit of all in the socialist society. Is this repression??

One might think *increased* levels of sexual activity were perhaps required to produce the sought results of more pregnancies, more children and a renewed population... In support, the socialist state gave additional cash payments to pregnant women and new mothers, extensive pregnancy, maternity and post-natal leave, job security, health and social care services for children and young people, childcare services, such as creches, nurseries, kindergartens, etc, to give parents as much freedom and choice as possible to re-engage with paid work and in leisure and cultural activities. Doesn't sound like 'sexual repression' to me.

The divorce laws, tightened from earlier decrees, required both parties to consent to the divorce, to pay an administrative fee and there were harsh penalties for those who refused child alimony and other child support payments. Again, hardly "sexually repressive" - in fact it gave greater protection, rights and security to women, mothers and children.

The moves under the Stalin period to strengthen the family unit really represented a correction to earlier post-revolution decrees, which sought to radically abolish or fast-track the withering away of the family unit. Of course, the political revolution and seizure of state power was not followed *immediately* by socialist economic and cultural revolutions, which themselves could only be preconditions and lay the foundations for the ultimate withering away of the family.

The reality was that in the 1920s, 30s, 40s and indeed subsequent decades, the great majority of Soviet people, at suitable times in their lives, preferred and wanted to engage in longer-term and committed relationships and to start and build families. The changes to family and related laws just

reflected this reality. I would agree that - if the point was made, which it wasn't - that the June 1936 Decree on the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood, which effectively banned legal abortion except where the mother's life was in danger, *was* restrictive and socially conservative. But 'sexually repressive'? Is there *really* evidence that lack of contraception or safe legal abortion *reduces* the amount of sexual activity in the population and outside formal family units? I don't think so, so again, no evidence for Smithee's assertion.

I might also ask how many other countries in the world had legal abortion or even abortion on demand in the 1930s? Even where legal, the procedure was often risky to the woman. Fortunately, and due to the horrible, negative consequences of illegal terminations, abortions were relegalised in the USSR in 1955 - a considerable period of time before similar legal reforms in 'advanced' western countries. So the notion that Soviet people were "sexually repressed" in the Stalin period is just a Smithee fantasy, a bit like his fantasy about sex workers.

For very different reasons, specific acts of male homosexuality were made illegal in the Soviet Union from 1933 (only legalised in 1993), and these laws were not formally liberalised (although in practice, provided they were in private and didn't impinge on public awareness or decency, increasingly not prosecuted).

Male homosexuality in the 1930s was especially associated with Nazism in Germany and with counterrevolutionary activity (frequently linked with Nazi Germany) in the USSR itself and therefore to questions of national security.

Yes, 'repressive' to some small sections of the male population, but certainly not for the great majority of socialist society.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Sex work

While I think John Smithee somewhat romanticises sex work, there is a point well worth pursuing. I refer back to several years ago, when I attended the launch of a seminal book on the subject, *Revolt of the prostitutes: the fight for sex workers' rights*. In terms of decriminalisation several points are made. The Scandinavian model - ie, sale is not illegal, while purchase remains illegal - puts women and young men at risk, as they have to go to more dangerous locations, where punters are less likely to be observed.

For the contributors the idea of licensed brothels is rejected, as by material socialist observation the house management makes the big money and controls the output, time, amount and volume, for which the women are required - thus the measure of exploitation.

Rather, being a free agent is the best option for many women and young men, so that the sex worker makes their own hours, where they feel 'safe is best'. The contributors to the book are informed by real experience and have done academically rigorous work and write with keenness and clarity.

The theory part touches on the social constructionist, Jeffrey Weeks. More importantly it is a self-affirming development from positive mobilisation that came through the Sex Workers Advocacy and Reform Movement in the UK and the Sex Workers Alliance Ireland.

John Michael Ryan
Cork

Summer Offensive

Over the line!

Our Summer Offensive concluded on August 15 at the end of Communist University. We have reached our target, set on June 28, of raising £20,000 - *just*, at £20,010.92. As I said in the first of these reports, we set a lower target this year than in recent previous years because our members are worse off, and because we started the offensive a little later than usual. Reaching this target is still a matter for celebration.

High achievers were FK at £3,710, MM at £2,599 and CR at £1,200. JM showed ingenuity in raising money from book and car boot sales. Comrades from the Netherlands Communistisch Platform donated £235.

Andreas Chari has recently written: "If an organism has more than mere vocal cords, then a social organism must not just be a 'political voice': it must be able to produce a new generation of cadre who can overcome the limits of past organisational forms into one that can unite a collective will against bourgeois hegemony" (*Prometheus* August 12). The concept of the party (or any other political institution) as an "organism" is mistaken; and the left largely sacrifices political voice to the illusions

of directly addressing the masses and to diplomatic demands of 'alliances'. But the *Prometheus* comrades have, in fact, just set out on the task of constructing a political voice, launching their print quarterly on August 10. How this voice will be funded remains to be seen.

Just to remind readers, again, the *Weekly Worker* is not subsidised by advertising revenue, unlike the capitalist media. Nor is it by (for example) library subscriptions from the remaining 'actually existing socialist countries'. Political independence depends on *financial* independence: raising the money from CPGB members and from supporters of the paper to keep our ability to be an independent communist political voice.

We do so with tiny organised forces, reflecting the seriousness with which we take the party question and the need for a communist political voice. We raise funds regularly through the paper's fund drive. But the annual Summer Offensive is essential to CPGB's major projects. Raising £20,000 over two and a half months with our small forces is an achievement worth celebrating ●

Tim Browning

Online Communist Forum



Sunday August 30 5pm
Trump too designates Palestine Action a terrorist organisation: who's next? Political report from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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CLIMATE

New records for old

Civilisation itself is in danger. Heatwave after heatwave gives a terrifying glimpse of what the future holds. And now, after the thunderstorms and floods, we face a sixth heatwave, writes **Eddie Ford**

Part of a broader sequence of extreme heat events across western and central Europe, the UK has just experienced its fifth recent heatwave - this in a country once famous for its moderate climate.¹ Hence the hottest day of the year was 38.1°C recorded at Kew Gardens in southwest London on August 13 - which is fitting in some way, as the first heatwave that started on May 22 also saw what was then a record temperature of 34.8°C at the very same place on May 25, surpassing by 2°C the previous record set in 1922.

This intense heat made 2026 the first year on record to see three separate days where temperatures reached at least 37°C, as well as the first year with four days at 36°C or above. So far (but watch this space!) the highest temperature ever recorded in the UK was on July 19 2022, when temperatures reached 40.3°C - which marks the only day when a reading above 40°C has been recorded.

All this shows that the UK is on course to record its hottest summer on record for *mean* temperature, with only average conditions needed for the remainder of August to surpass the record set only last year. Therefore provisional Met Office statistics show that the UK's mean temperature for this year's meteorological summer² - due to end on August 31 - currently stands at 16.48°C, which is 1.88°C above the 1991-2020 average.³ Any hotter than this would establish a new UK record going back to 1884. Also, significantly, the country has so far had the hottest summer on record for *average maximum* temperatures - the previous record set in the iconic summer of 1976.

Apocalyptic

There is now speculation about another heatwave in September, with computer-forecast models suggesting that high pressure may become established to the south of the UK through the first part of September.⁴ There is also the fact that July was the driest on record across England and Wales since records began in 1836, with more than two thirds of England and all of Wales currently officially in drought (there are widespread hosepipe bans across southern England). And, when soil is very dry, air temperature can rise more rapidly - because no energy is lost in evaporating any soil moisture, so it goes directly into heating the air. Another additional factor is marine heat that can also influence the temperature on land, with the seas around England and Wales currently up to 3°C above average.

Anyhow, the long-range forecast for September, October and November from the Met Office suggests that the chance of a warm three-monthly period is "higher than normal" - meaning an "increased risk of heatwaves and heat-related impacts, especially during the first half of the period".

The long-range forecast also suggests that the three-monthly autumn period is likely to be drier than average. This spells bad news, as the unprecedented drought and the record-breaking heatwaves we have recently seen have led to devastating wildfires in which over 23,359 ha (57,720 acres) of land has been burnt.⁵ This brought particular devastation in Stourbridge, West Midlands: on the hottest day of the year "apocalyptic" fires broke out, destroying 19 homes and a producing a wildfire covering about 16 hectares. Andy Burnham



London's scorched and tinder-dry Greenwich Park

visited the area shortly after, saying Britain "is a tinderbox right now", as he announced plans to commission firefighting planes to combat the spread of wildfires - he also appointed a life peer, Baroness Blake of Leeds, as the UK's first ever fire minister.⁶ That should put a stop to it!

Of course, these heatwaves represent a statistical acceleration of what climate scientists had already modelled, but hoped would take longer to arrive. The climate crisis is speeding up and could hurtle temperatures to 3°C, 4°C and beyond above preindustrial levels - never mind the 1.5°C accepted in the Paris Agreement. Indeed, the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries - not an organisation known for its radicalism - has calculated that temperatures of this order could bring about "civilisational collapse" some time between 2070 and 2090.⁷

Delusion

Not that you can tell that to the crazies. Thus Richard Tice, the deputy leader of Reform UK, told a press conference that people should "enjoy" the heatwave and "if it means that English wine and sparkling wine gets better and better, fantastic", rather than "just be sort of doom and gloom about it".⁸ Then he went on to inform his audience that "climate change has always happened" and "it always will", suggesting that the "smarter thing" to do is "to adapt to it than think arrogantly that you can stop it". He declared that there "no evidence" that net zero is "going to stop it".

If by "net zero" you are alluding to meaningless pledges by government ministers to hit this or that climate target, or the greenwashing efforts by various capitalists to market and sell their products, then we would be the first to agree - you need a complete

systems change if you genuinely want to confront the climate crisis. But, of course, he does not mean that - quite the opposite: Tice believes that "net zero" is far too radical and must go. Reform has long campaigned to scrap the government's commitment to reaching net zero by 2050 and has promised to end green subsidies if elected. The party has taken tens of millions of pounds in donations from people with connections to the fossil fuel industry since it was set up in 2019 - most notably from billionaire Christopher Harborne, who owns a jet fuel brokerage and whose £5 million gift to Nigel Farage is again at the centre of a parliamentary inquiry. If anything, Tice goes further than Farage in denying that the planet is experiencing a climate crisis at all - that is all fake news, as his hero would say.

Amy Cameron, a programme director for Greenpeace UK, is quite correct to observe that Tice's words "show that a party bankrolled by fossil fuel interests will keep denying the climate crisis for its funders' benefit, even when its impacts are undeniable" - nurses fainting on shifts, farmers losing their crops, people running from burning homes, etc.

As for Burnham and net zero, when he was still mayor of Greater Manchester, he backed the fossil fuel treaty - a proposed international pact on phasing out coal, oil and gas - calling it a "lifeline" that "all governments" should join.⁹ However, in recent weeks, he has hinted that he might be ditching all that - spooking many by saying he would take a "pragmatic" approach to oil and gas drilling in the North Sea and how the government could not ignore the "potential resources" it holds. Drill, Andy, drill? You get the same line from Miatta Fahnbulleh, who as

energy secretary has expressed similar views since taking office - no more talk now about "the realities" of the climate crisis, adopting radically new policies, and so on. With consultations on the Jackdaw and Rosebank field projects now closed, a decision from the government could come at any time.

Rosebank

But, of course, the argument that approving Rosebank and Jackdaw would reduce UK bills and improve energy security is complete nonsense, as they are internationally traded commodities. An analysis submitted to the Rosebank consultation and to an academic journal, applying peer-reviewed research, demonstrates that the climate damage caused by developing oil and gas fields would destroy their economic benefits many times over.¹⁰ It estimates the economic damage caused by the carbon pollution from the oil and gas produced would amount to between £119 billion and £336 billion in the coming decades, compared with the £28.7 billion in value to the UK estimated by Adura, the fossil fuel company promoting the new fields. The analysis is based on the additional CO₂ being added to the atmosphere, as evidence clearly shows new oil and gas fields do not generally lead to other fields being shut down, so the whole premise for giving Rosebank and Jackdaw the green light is a delusion.

Now, 2026 so far seems to be playing out roughly the same as the year before it. But climate models strongly suggest 2027 could well bring even higher temperatures because of the El Niño effect, and it is very likely to replace 2024 as the hottest year on record.¹¹ It will surely be another year to exceed 1.5°C above the preindustrial period

- something first recorded by climate scientists in 2024 with an average figure of 1.6°C, followed the next year by 1.47°C above preindustrial levels - the third warmest on record. At this pace, getting to 2°C+ appears a distinct possibility by the early 2030s - especially with Donald Trump and his criminally reckless 'Drill, baby, drill' philosophy, designed to encourage the ambitions of big oil to massively degrade life on this planet.

Goldilocks

The overriding priority for communists is saving in some shape or form the 'Goldilocks zone' upon which our species depends. Of course, CO₂, methane, etc will not kill the planet - it will remain, but we might not. The actuary prediction of civilisational collapse in about 2070 to 2090 is a terrifying reminder that our revolution could occur under such conditions, which actually represents the breakdown of ability to exist in any sort of way. When you look at the likes of Trump, there is not a shred of the 'climate socialism' which we have talked about regularly in this publication - not even draconian measures that at least avert the climate crisis, even if only temporarily. No, instead those in charge seem hell-bent on self-destruction - taking us with them.

We need a vision that recalibrates our programmatic vision and inspires us. We do not want to abandon the Marxist idea of abundance - only the version of it that is a mimicry of the bourgeoisie seeing life as a "fully automated communism" just consuming endless stuff.¹² Communists want the "good life" for *all* human beings - why aren't we spending more time playing with our children, debating, telling stories, cooking for others, learning for the sake of learning? This should be an integral part of our vision for the future, which does not involve us and things, but us and other *people*.

That is what makes us human beings - a vision that comes from the original communism of our ancestors, where nine tenths of food is gathered and only one tenth results from hunting. We look back to the past as well as forward to the future - going forwards, or upwards, in a *spiral*. This requires a return to communism that would make us fully human - not masters who dominate the environment, but act as custodians ●

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Notes

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Heatwaves and excess deaths

Our bodies themselves are sending a clear message: something must be done about global warming as a matter of urgency. Already, reports **James Linney**, many thousands - perhaps millions - are needlessly dying

For us northern hemisphere dwellers, a blisteringly hot and exceedingly dry summer is coming to an end. Here in the UK, we have witnessed the familiar lush-green colours of summer being completely transformed into an alarmingly bleached yellow, until only in the past week we have had some much-needed rain.

The UK and western Europe certainly have had their hottest ever June and July.¹ The UK experienced its highest temperatures (38.8°C) on August 13 - our fifth hottest day of all time - and also had its hottest June since records began back in 1916. This summer has seen a record five separate heatwaves and it is not over yet - a sixth is forecast for September. More than two-thirds of England and the entirety of Wales are officially in a drought.

Things have been even more torrid in western and southern Europe, where in parts of France, Spain and Portugal, temperatures have regularly breached 40°C; and where devastating wildfires, blown by hot, dry winds, have spread at enormous speeds. The combination of blistering heat, lightning storms igniting flash fires, and hundreds of acres of tinder-dry vegetation and farming land has been the stuff of nightmares. In France hundreds of thousands of people have had to flee their homes, as fires burned across more than 116,000 acres, where a national emergency was called and the military had to be drafted in to help the desperately overstretched firefighters. The wildfires that have raged since July have only just come under control.

The heat and fires have been deadly not just for those exposed to the highest temperatures, dying from heatstroke or from being incinerated by the flames, but for the wider population of Europe too. Statistics reveal a startling rise in the number of excess deaths from heat this summer ('excess deaths' is a statistical estimate rather than a direct count, estimating the number of people who died during a hot period above the expected average for that same time of year in comparable years). Between May and June England saw nearly 2,900 excess deaths,² and this is likely to have increased even more in the hotter months of July and August. In Europe between mid-July and mid-August, more than 32,000 excess deaths were estimated.

Effects

Before we consider how the heatwaves are causing so many deaths, it will be useful to look at how heat affects us and how bodies have evolved to deal with it. If we become too hot and measures are not taken to cool us, we can become ill within a couple of hours: initially we start feeling flushed, thirsty, sweaty, fatigued and can get a severe headache. These symptoms are signs of heat exhaustion, which is like a warning system, alerting us to take action before it is too late. If the heat persists and no action is taken, we can quickly become severely ill - meaning that vomiting, dizziness, confusion, hot and dry skin, fainting, breathlessness, a racing pulse and seizures will result. This is termed 'heat stroke' and is extremely serious, with a mortality rate of 80%.

However, humans live in extreme environments, ranging from lows of -71.2°C in permanently inhabited Siberian villages to highs exceeding 50°C in desert regions: eg, the Danakil Depression in Ethiopia. This is possible because our body has an



Treating a victim of heatstroke in Louisiana

amazing ability to adapt to extreme temperature changes - a process called homeostasis, which maintains a fairly stable core body temperature of between 36 and 37.5°C.

Thankfully then, death from heatstroke is still unusual, even when outside temperatures surge above 45°C. This maintaining of a fairly narrow internal temperature is vital to allow an optimal environment for the millions of orchestrated chemical reactions constantly taking place inside us. Too low a temperature and these reactions slow down and eventually stop - resulting in death from hypothermia. Alternatively, as the temperature increases, these reactions speed up - this can lead to stress on our body, putting our organs and circulatory system under strain. If the internal temperature goes above 44°C, proteins eventually break down - like an egg being put into hot water, our blood and internal fluids congeal and solidify.

Humans have evolved two primary cooling systems when temperatures increase: increasing blood flow near to the skin's surface, and sweating. In his book, *Extreme survival*,³ Dr Kenneth Kamler describes our skin as acting like a "car radiator"; blood

(our liquid coolant) flows through our engine (organs), absorbing heat, then carries it to the skin's surface, where the outside air helps to cool it. With increasing temperature our bodies can respond by diverting more blood to those arteries nearer the skin surface (vasodilatation) - hence, when we get hot, we look flushed and our heart rate increases.

But this system becomes less effective, the higher the outside temperature - hence the need for sweating. Our skin is covered with more than three million sweat glands, largely grouped in our armpits, scalp, chest and back. When needed, these glands are turned on like taps, allowing a layer of water onto our bodies, which is then heated by the hot outside air and evaporates - a process that transfers heat from our body to the air. This evaporation process relies on air being drier than our bodies, hence why sweating is less helpful in cooling us down in very humid conditions. In high temperatures sweating is crucial to stay alive, but the debt paid is the loss of water and salt - that is why we need to increase our water and electrolyte intake to prevent dehydration and kidney failure.

The human body then is very

efficient at keeping us alive, even in very high outside temperatures, as long as we have plenty of water (and food) and can rest, ideally in the shade, (exercising in extreme heat is doubly dangerous, because contracting muscles create even more heat - like cranking the heating up on a hot day). So this leads us to the question then: why, given these adaptations, does heat lead to so many thousands of excess deaths?

The answer is due to indirect causality. Heat, as we have seen, increases the speed of the body's chemical reactions, increasing the heart rate and leading to dehydration; hence blood thickens and our organs are put under stress. Some people are at increased risk of these stress effects. Very young, old or pregnant people are more vulnerable because their systems are less efficient at losing heat. Similarly people with chronic health conditions, such as respiratory conditions, diabetes, cardiovascular or kidney disease, are less able to deal with heat stress - which can lead to fatal exacerbations of their chronic illness, heart attacks, strokes or renal failure.

According to a new study in the *Lancet Planetary Health* journal, we have been greatly underestimating heat effects on older people, finding that the impact of even a rise of 1.5°C above preindustrial levels will have a detrimental impact on the health of people over 60 years old.⁴ Given the UK's ageing population, this could have disastrous consequences for a national health service already unable to manage demand. According to the latest NHS statistics, emergency departments across England recorded 2.4 million attendances in June - the second-highest monthly total ever.⁵ An already severely overstretched NHS is now going to have to deal with both a winter and summer pressures crisis.

Underestimate

Globally, heat stress is the leading cause of weather-related death, officially killing around 489,000 people a year, but this is certainly a huge underestimate, due to the fact that heat is often not recorded as a contributing cause of people's deaths. This is more likely to be the case in the global south, where the burden of excessive heat is felt the most, but where underdeveloped health services have less resources. In India, for example, the highest populated country in the world (1.47 billion), a large proportion of the working population are employed in manual outdoor work, exposed to the increasing high temperatures, and live in poor-quality homes, often constructed from heat-conducting materials, such as concrete and corrugated sheet metal. This year temperatures have risen as high as 48°C and, on one day in April, the world's 50 hottest cities were all in India.⁶ Despite this, official statistics only attributed 84 deaths to heat in 2025, compared to 175,000 heat deaths per year recorded in Europe.

Heat and its effect on people has not been the only deadly consequence of the heatwaves this year. As wildfires have surged through multiple countries, people are increasingly being exposed to smoke and toxic air pollution. Wildfire smoke can be blown huge distances and can impact the health of people living thousands of miles away. In Canada, which has also experienced its worst wildfire season ever, with more than three million hectares being burnt, wildfire smoke in Ontario and the Northwest Territories led to 120 million people,

along with those in the USA, being exposed to poisonous air.

Wildfire smoke is a collection of toxic gases and fine particulate matter (known as PM2.5) - released when vegetation, buildings and other materials burn; these cause inflammation of the airways, but can also enter the bloodstream, leading to multi-organ damage and long-lasting health effects. Like excessive heat, the same groups of vulnerable people listed above are more susceptible to these harmful effects from smoke. A recent *Lancet* study⁷ found that globally a staggering 1.53 million people a year (between 2000 and 2019) died as result of the air pollution caused by wildfires.

This summer the deadly effects of climate change have well and truly arrived in Europe and North America, but they are not exactly new, having been around for decades already. It is just that the majority of deaths have been experienced by the most poor in the global south - of little concern for the ruling class in the capitalistically advanced countries, which has, of course, always seen death among the poorest as an acceptable collateral damage for the sake of generating economic growth and therefore profits.

But the wildfires ravaging large parts of Europe this summer act as a reminder of the vulnerability of even the more economically advanced countries, meaning that ultimately our science, technology and infrastructure can be swept aside (or incinerated) in the face of the devastating power of nature being unleashed by capitalism's abuse of our planet.

Despite this the capitalist establishment still, of course, gives preference to profit and market growth over any meaningful attempts at change. At best we get empty liberal promises to reduce carbon emissions at some point in the future; at worse blatant denial and disdain for any attempt to prevent the global climate crisis. This was evident in the interview given by Richard Tice of Reform UK recently, when he said the UK should not focus on the "doom and gloom" and instead "enjoy it when it gets warm".⁸ For those wedded to the destructive drive for profit and ever-expanding markets it remains easier (or preferable) to imagine the end of the world than to consider ending capitalism.

This summer is still just the beginning - a warning of more to come - and, as with the internal homeostatic warning systems our bodies have, if ignored, disaster looms. Profound systemic social change, led by an organised working class, is of immediate and urgent importance. Without this the future looks bleak and almost too hard to contemplate ●

Notes

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TRIAL

Supporting Palestine is no crime

Tony Greenstein was tried at Kingston Crown Court on charges of “inviting support for a proscribed terrorist organisation” - namely Hamas. He faced a possible 14-year sentence. Judge Sarah Plaschkes repeatedly warned him not to treat the proceedings as a “political forum”, threatened him with contempt and even dismissed these powerful closing remarks of his as the ramblings of an old man. The jury took just two hours and seven minutes to unanimously find him not guilty

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury. First, a word about why I have chosen to address you in person rather than through my barrister, Lawrence McNulty. My decision implies no criticism of Lawrence. It is simply this: when my liberty is at stake, I wish to speak to you directly rather than through someone else. It is my words that are on that indictment. When someone is accused of meaning something he never meant, he should be the one to tell you what he did mean.

I am not a barrister - I hope you will bear that in mind. However, what I will do is speak from the heart. I am 72 years old. I have been arguing in public for more than 50 years, and this may be the most important half hour of argument in my life.

The prosecution say that I invited people to support an Islamic group called Hamas, while accepting that I didn't support Hamas myself. Think about that for a moment. Why should I invite people to support a group that I don't support and never have supported? It is illogical. According to the prosecution's opening statement, although I did not mention Hamas by name in my X posts, my “reference to support for the ‘Gaza ghetto uprising’ - in that specific context, on that specific date - can only have meant support for Hamas”.

In order to sustain their case the prosecution fixated on one sentence in a blog of 10 pages, concerning the congratulation of Hamas for a well-planned and audacious attack. In other words, if you ever say anything about any group, then you are a supporter, if not a recruiting sergeant.

In fact my blog was cut right down by the prosecution in their evidence. Even on the one piece they produced they had to ensure that you didn't see all of the evidence - let alone produce uncut the 15 or so blogs that demonstrated that I didn't support Hamas and never had.

According to the prosecution logic, Kemi Badenoch supporting Starmer's decision not to make British bases available for the war against Iran means she supports the Labour Party. It is like being told that the pope has supported abortion by helping out women who have had an abortion. The fact that you support one action of a group does not mean that you therefore support the group itself. That logic escapes the prosecution, although it should be obvious that supporting one action of a group doesn't mean supporting the group itself.

Who I am

Before I make my case, you are entitled to know a little of my background. Firstly I am a parent, with four children. Although I am now separated from my wife, Fiona, she was in the public gallery yesterday with our 35-year-old son, Daniel, who is severely autistic. Fiona and myself are Daniel's carers.

I went to Brighton Polytechnic in 1974 where I obtained an honours degree. In 1996 I obtained an MA in colonial history from Birkbeck, London University and between 2000-02 I obtained a law degree from Sussex University and the following year a legal practice certificate from the College of Law in Guildford. Apart from being a blogger, I have written for, among other papers and websites, *The Guardian*, *New Statesman*, *Al*



Tony Greenstein: vindicated

Jazeera, *Middle East Eye*, *Open Democracy* and many others.

I was born in 1953, in the shadow of the holocaust, which had ended only eight years before. My father's parents came to England from Poland and left the rest of the family behind. Nearly all of them died in Treblinka extermination camp. My father mentioned it just once in his whole life. Just one sister, who jumped off a deportation train, is known to have survived. Over three million of Poland's 3.3 million Jews were murdered.

My father was rabbi Solomon Greenstein. In 1936 he stood at Cable Street, where the working people of the East End - Jews and dockers together - stopped Oswald Mosley's blackshirts from marching through a Jewish neighbourhood. That is the house I was raised in: not a house of quietism, but a house where you stood in the road.

So I am extremely aware of the trauma caused by the holocaust. It is not history to me: it is the empty chairs at my family's table. But what I have always fought against was those who used the murder of six million Jews to justify the murder and genocide of others. That is why I authored my book, *Zionism during the holocaust*.

I was brought up as a religious Zionist. In 1967, when Israel captured what is now known as Gaza and the West Bank, I shared in the joy of fellow Jews. None of us knew then what horrors would be visited on the indigenous Palestinians who lived there.

Then, at the King David School in Liverpool, I was asked to take part in a debate on whether Zionism was right or wrong. In the course of researching the topic I suddenly realised that I had grown up with a series of fabrications and lies. The refugees of 1948 had not left voluntarily on the orders of the Arab regimes. They had been expelled at the point of a gun, and after a series of massacres. The documents that proved it were classified and are still classified.

This was the pivotal moment of my

life. From then on I became a Jewish anti-Zionist. And I learnt something my school had never taught me: that anti-Zionism had been the majority trend amongst Jews until World War II. It is a Jewish tradition, as old as Zionism, and I stand in that tradition. Today 44% of young British Jews describe themselves as non- or anti-Zionist. We are not a curiosity: we are a tradition.

And I have lived that tradition the way most of our Jewish ancestors did. For 50 years I have opposed fascist groups on the streets, because racism and fascism led to the holocaust. I was also a founding member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

I am a Jewish socialist. The Palestinian organisation whose politics I have supported for decades is the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - secular, socialist, founded by a Christian Palestinian, George Habash. Hamas is an Islamist movement. Its full name is the Islamic Resistance Movement. Ask yourselves - is a Jewish secular socialist who has spent 20 years criticising political Islam and Hamas a plausible recruiting sergeant for it?

My arrest

At 6.30am on December 20 2025 a dozen counter-terror police raided my home, seized my electronic devices and arrested me - on the basis of a single tweet posted a month previously. We live, ladies and gentlemen, in dystopian and Orwellian times.

When I applied for the return of my devices, the officer in charge explained in a witness statement why they were keeping them. They needed, he said, to fully understand my “mind set and ideology” from my internet search history, and from how, “and indeed if”, I talk about Hamas with others away from the public domain.

Is it really the job of the police to act as amateur psychologists, inquiring into people's minds? There might be a justification for all this if they thought I was going to set off an explosive device. But that is obviously not the case. It was the police themselves who

gave me bail the same day, with three relatively trivial restrictions - which, on appeal, Westminster magistrates watered down further. Clearly, they did not think I was a terrorist.

But the Terrorism Act has been creating a whole new category of ‘terrorist’. On the home office's own figures, arrests under the Terrorism Act have leapt in 2024 from around 200 to more than 3,000 in 2025. And the profile of the average ‘terrorist’ has changed too. It used to be a 31-year-old man. Now it is more likely to be a 59-year-old woman. You may well ask yourselves whether the word ‘terrorist’ has quietly been given a new meaning - and whether I am standing in front of you because of that.

And when they interviewed me, I did not hide behind “No comment”, as my solicitor advised me. I answered every question for over an hour, and came back three months later, voluntarily, and did it again. When they asked me directly whether I supported Hamas against the Israeli army, I gave them an answer I will repeat again, because it is my whole case: “I would probably support the devil against the Israeli army. That doesn't mean I support the devil itself.”

And if the devil exists, it is amongst those who prohibit anaesthetics entering Gaza, so that children have to endure amputations without the benefit of pain relief. The devil exists amongst those who deliberately starve children to death, because they rationalise that those children will only grow up to be ‘terrorists’. It exists among those who bomb tent encampments and literally burn children and their parents alive. It exists amongst those who call Palestinians “human animals” - the same phrase used by Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS, about Jewish children in a speech in 1943 to senior SS generals.

In a situation where there is a conflict, you support the oppressed rather than the oppressor. That is not support for an organisation. That is a moral position - one, I might add, with a rather long Jewish pedigree.

Her honour will direct you on the

law, and what she tells you about the law you must take from her, not from me. But you know by now what the prosecution must make you sure of, and it is worth setting out plainly, because everything I say from here on hangs from it.

They must make you sure of three things: that Hamas was proscribed on October 7 2023 (agreed); that my words in fact invited support for Hamas; and that I knew, at the time, that that is what I was doing.

Now notice what is *not* on that list. It is not on that list whether you agree with my opinions about Israel and Palestine. It is not on that list whether you find those opinions congenial or offensive - some of you may find that they are. And it is not on that list whether Hamas ought to be proscribed. That is the government's decision. It is not mine, and it is not yours.

The charge is not holding an opinion. The charge is inviting other people to support an organisation, Hamas. Those are two different things - and every single question in this trial lives in the distance between them.

Hold on to that distinction, because I am now going to show you what I actually wrote.

My writing

This case hinges on three short posts and one article. That is the entire alleged crime. So let us read it - carefully, the way the prosecution hopes you won't.

First, Hamas is not mentioned. Not in the first tweet. Not in the second nor the third. Not once. The prosecution invite you to supply the name yourselves.

What I wrote about was “the Gaza ghetto uprising”. I chose the word “ghetto” deliberately, but not for the reason the prosecution imply. Let me explain, for those of you who do not know the history. In World War II, the Nazis walled the half a million Jews of Warsaw into a ghetto - a sealed district, starved and diseased, from which the trains left for the Treblinka death camp. And in 1943 the young Jews who remained did something nobody expected: with a handful of smuggled pistols, they rose against the tanks and the SS. They knew they could not win, but it was better to die resisting than to be led away quietly. It is one of the proudest moments in Jewish history.

The last surviving commander of that uprising was a man named Marek Edelman. And in his old age, Edelman wrote to the Palestinian resistance and addressed them as fellow fighters - much to Israel's annoyance. It was Edelman who described Gaza as a ghetto - I used his comparison for years before October 2023. My blog supported the uprising then, just as I would have supported the slave uprisings of the 19th century. That was a political opinion on October 7 2023, and it is a political opinion now.

And here is the crazy thing. Read section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2000 and ask what it would have made of the Warsaw ghetto fighters. If this act had existed in 1944, they could have been classified as ‘terrorists’. So could the French Resistance. That is how widely this law is drawn - and it is worth remembering when you consider who it is now being pointed at. The ‘definition’ of terrorism in the Act is no definition at all.

Second, I wrote on my blog:

“Please share.” The prosecution imply those two words are an invitation to support Hamas. Members of the jury, I have written a blog for 18 years. “Please share” means: read my article, pass it on, argue with it. Asking people to read what you have written is not asking them to support an organisation. If it were, every writer in this country would be standing where I am standing. My purpose was not to invite support for anyone. Yet the prosecution’s case - that this was an invitation to the public to support a proscribed organisation - is a fantasy that they have created out of nothing.

Third, here is the sentence that this whole case rests on: “Whatever criticisms one can make of Hamas, we should congratulate them on this well planned and audacious attack.” Note the words, “whatever criticisms”. Those are not the words of a recruiter - who does not open with the criticisms of the thing he is recruiting for. Those are the words of someone who has spent 15 years *making* those criticisms in public.

And “well planned and audacious” - that is a description, not an endorsement. October 7 was well planned, and it was audacious. Israel had constructed a five billion dollar electronic fence, complete with drones, sensors and automatic machine guns, and it was breached in minutes. Retired generals said the same thing on television that week. Nobody raided their homes at dawn. As for “Hamas should be congratulated”, it is so obviously a figure of speech, not meant literally - I am surprised that the prosecutor doesn’t blush every time she argues this.

In the same article and/or the comments following, I wrote that the retribution of Israel would be bloody and savage. I wrote to a commentator: “... believe you me, I am apprehensive of the days ahead and Israel’s potential for genocide.” Those are not the words of someone celebrating. They are the words of someone who feared exactly what was coming - and who, you may think, has been proved catastrophically right.

But you would not have read the latter comment, because the version of the blog in your bundle is only half the original (1,060 words as opposed to 1,935 words). The comments underneath made up another 2,000 words and they too were not in your bundle. Why? Because it is clear that the conversation didn’t mention anyone joining Hamas. Anyone with eyes to see would understand that the blog was not an invitation to do that.

It takes a certain malevolence to read that into the blog. And let it be clear that support for an action of a proscribed group is not the same as support for the group itself. Expressing an opinion or belief that is shared by or coincides with the aims of a proscribed organisation is not the same thing as expressing support for the organisation itself - that is (or should be) common sense.

So ask yourself the only questions that matter. Where, in any of this, did I ask anyone to join anything? Did I ask for money? Did I ask a single human being to take a single action - other than to read an article?

You may take those three posts and that article into your deliberation room and read them from beginning to end as many times as you like. You will not find it. It is not there.

My expressed views

Let me show you what I have actually written about Hamas - during over 20 years. These are the titles of my articles:

- ‘We support the Palestinian people of Gaza - not Hamas’ (March 2009).
- ‘Islamic fascists attack children’s summer camp in Gaza’ (May 2010).
- ‘Hamas - speaking with a forked tongue’ (December 2010).

- ‘The lousy Hamas government’ (February 2011).
- ‘Hamas prevents Palestinian students studying abroad’ (August 2011).
- ‘Hamas’s attack on NGOs resembles that of Israel’ (August 2011).
- ‘Hamas pays the price of forced Islamicisation’ (April 2013).
- ‘How Israel helped create Hamas’ (July 2014).
- ‘Hamas does its best to make Palestinian lives a misery’ (February 2018).
- ‘Abbas and Hamas - abuse and torture of Palestinians’ (October 2018).

Ten years of headlines. I called them “Islamic fascists” - in print, in public, under my own name. Do the titles of those blogs indicate support for Hamas? And these are only some of them. You can be sure that if my writings helped the prosecution in any way, they would have given them to you to read rather than objecting to them.

I have spent my political life supporting the secular, socialist tradition of Palestine. So when the prosecution tell you that on the morning of October 7 2023 I woke up and decided to become a recruiter for the Islamic resistance movement, you are entitled to ask, ‘On what planet?’

So, if the words don’t say it and the record contradicts it, you are entitled to ask the obvious question: why is this prosecution happening at all? Let me answer with a comparison, and you may draw your own conclusions.

Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham - Al Qaeda’s franchise in Syria - was a proscribed organisation in this country until October of last year. While it was still proscribed, and while its leader, who became Syria’s president, still had a ten-million-dollar bounty on his head, eminent British public figures - Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair’s former spin doctor, and Rory Stewart, a former Conservative MP - travelled to Damascus to conduct a friendly, filmed interview with him. This is a regime whose forces have killed thousands of Christians, Druze and Alawites because of their religion. They came home and were effusive in their opinions about him, to audiences of hundreds of thousands.

Nobody raided their homes at half past six in the morning. Nobody seized their devices to investigate their “mind set and ideology”. A decision was taken not to trouble them.

Now, when a law is implemented against certain people and not others, that goes against the first principle of the rule of law. Either laws are applicable to all, or to none. To apply them only to those whose opinions the government of the day disagrees with - that is the hallmark of a police state, not a democracy.

And you do not have to take the point from me on trust, because the same double standard is written on a larger canvas. Parliament made genocide and war crimes offences under the International Criminal Court Act 2001. Yet successive British governments have gone on supplying arms to what most of the world regard as a genocide in Gaza, and yet no minister has ever stood where I am standing.

This is not a new story. Nelson Mandela - whose statue stands today in Parliament Square, facing the Houses of Parliament - was described by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan as a terrorist, and the movement he led as a terrorist movement. If this act had been in force in those decades, that movement would have been proscribed - and anyone in Britain who wrote “we should congratulate them” would have been at risk of standing exactly where I am standing now. Mandela himself said: “The west sees liberation movements as terrorist

movements - and that is why I am accused of supporting terrorism.”

Now let me be precise about what I am saying, because it is not what the prosecution may pretend. I am not comparing any organisation to Nelson Mandela. The comparison is not between organisations at all. It is between governments - then and now - and how easily they attach the word ‘terrorist’ to whoever opposes the policy of the day. Today, Mandela is widely admired. The label of terrorism should be applied to those who *are* terrorists, not those who are not.

Not political?

Judges have always insisted that the trials before them are not political - they said it at the trial of Emmeline Pankhurst in 1912. Chief prosecutor Sir Rufus Isaacs emphasised: “Suffrage is not the issue: it is the criminal behaviour of the suffragettes and their incitement to partake in militant activity, at which 54 windows were broken.” That was also the view of the judge, who handed out a sentence of nine months.

A century ago the state admitted what today it denies: that some prisoners were political. And consider what this country has done, within my lifetime, with laws that prosecuted people for what they were and what they said. The law of blasphemous libel - repealed. The law of gross indecency, which criminalised sexual conduct between men was also repealed - and more than that: under the Alan Turing Law of 2017, every conviction was wiped out, as if it had never existed. Parliament itself has accepted that there are times when it has made mistakes, and the law of the day was wrong.

The editor of *Gay News*, Dennis Lemon, was the last person sentenced to a six months suspended sentence in July 1977 for ‘blasphemous libel’ for suggesting Jesus was gay - the judge at his trial stated that homosexuality was responsible for the downfall of the Roman empire. Judges have nearly always been the fiercest opponents of free speech.

When the state prosecutes opinions, it always says it is prosecuting something else. And usually it eventually, apologises - but too late. Freedom of speech in this country was not granted to us from above: it was won through political struggle - at the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, where cavalry rode down women and children; by the Chartists at Newport who were brutally slaughtered for peacefully demanding democratic reforms in 1839. People died for the right I exercised on October 7 2023: the right to publish an opinion the government doesn’t like.

Benjamin Franklin warned: “Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech.” George Orwell - a man who knew something about both socialism and dystopia - put it in one sentence:

“If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.” But if you want the alternative philosophy - the philosophy of this prosecution - it was stated with admirable honesty by the Ugandan dictator, Idi Amin: “There is freedom of speech - but I cannot guarantee freedom *after* speech.”

Ladies and gentlemen, you may think that sentence sums up a dawn raid over a tweet rather well. I was arrested, not for anything I did, but for what I said. This case is not about terrorism: it is about freedom of speech.

This is why the government’s own independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, David Anderson KC, was critical of the new terrorism laws. I quote from his 2014 report on ‘terrorism’ legislation:

- (a) To afford over-broad discretions

to ministers, prosecutors and police is undesirable in itself. As the Supreme Court maintained in *R v Gul*, B91 it leaves citizens in the dark and risks undermining the rule of law.

b) To render people subject to the terrorism laws whom no sensible person would think of as terrorists risks destroying the trust upon which these special powers depend for their acceptance by the public.

I have committed no violence. I have threatened no-one. I have incited nobody. Nobody in this courtroom suggests otherwise. I wrote an article! And for that article I face a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison - 14 years for three posts and a blog. Ask yourself what kind of country are we becoming to send a 72-year-old Jewish grandfather - a carer - to prison for three tweets and a blog article.

Freedom lamp

Which brings me, finally, to you, members of the jury.

Let me be clear about what I am asking of you, and what I am not. I am not asking you to set aside the law. I am not asking you to agree with my politics. You may think I am wrong about everything I believe, but it would change nothing about your task.

The role of the judge is concerned with the law. The role of juries is to ensure justice is done. That is why successive governments have slowly whittled away at the right to trial by jury. The previous justice secretary, David Lammy, wanted to abolish them for half of those who are now entitled to a jury. I have no doubt that, although Andy Burnham has stopped these proposals, they will return.

You are the sole judges of the facts, of the context and of the meaning of words. Not the prosecution, not the police analyst who selected certain phrases. Twelve ordinary people, precisely because ordinary people know what words mean. The prosecution does not get to dictate that ‘Please share my article’ means ‘Support Hamas’. That question belongs to you, and to nobody else in this building.

That is not an accident of our constitution. It is the whole point of it. Lord Patrick Devlin - one of the greatest judges this country produced - said: “Trial by jury is more than an instrument of justice and more than one wheel of the constitution: it is the lamp that shows that freedom lives.” The jury, he said, is “an insurance that the criminal law will conform to the ordinary man’s idea of what is fair and just”.

Dame Heather Hallett, who sat on the Court of Appeal from 2005 to 2017, gave the 2017 Blackstone Lecture on the role of the jury. She said: “A jury may refuse to convict in spite of the law and the evidence because it concludes that the law is an unjust law. The jury passes its verdict on the law. Secondly, it ensures that the prosecution and the judge are on trial.”

There is a plaque inside the entrance to the Old Bailey. It commemorates one of the most famous legal cases, when in 1670 the jury refused to convict two Quakers for the ‘crime’ of unlawful preaching. For that refusal the jurors were locked up for two nights without food, water, fire - or a chamber pot. They did not budge. And out of their stubbornness, in Bushell’s case, came the right that you now hold: the right of a jury to deliver its verdict according to its conscience and its convictions, and to answer to no-one for it.

I am asking you to do something far more modest than those 12 jury members did. I am asking you to read three posts and an article, in their full context, with your own common sense - and to answer honestly the only two

questions in this case. Were those words an invitation to support Hamas? And was I, a Jewish socialist with 20 years of published criticism of Hamas, knowingly recruiting for them?

And understand that your answer will not stay in this room. If these three posts are ‘terrorism’, then the word has a new meaning for everyone in this country: every student who shares an article; every pensioner who retweets the ‘wrong’ opinion; every writer, every blogger, every one of your neighbours with a social media account and a view about a war. Can it really be the law of England that any of them - that any of you - will be condemned to 14 years of prison for a tweet? You have the power, today, to answer that question. Whatever your answer is, it will be remembered long after this trial is forgotten.

If you are left in doubt as to whether I was genuinely inviting people to support a proscribed organisation - you must acquit. That is not politics: that is the law.

Trading liberty

I have told you what it is to be me, standing in this dock. Let me end with why it should matter to you.

I was born eight years after the gates of the concentration camps were opened. It was British soldiers who opened the gates at Belsen. Whatever quarrels I have had with British governments - and you have heard today that I have had many - I have never once doubted what that meant.

I do not say that to ask for your sympathy. I say it because my family’s history taught me one thing above all others: the moment that matters is never the loud one. It is the quiet one - when ordinary, decent people are asked to go along with something that does not sit right with them, and they do, because it is easier, because the language is technical, because someone in authority has assured them that it is necessary.

I ask you to ensure that no-one else goes through what I have experienced: not merely a case like this hanging over my head for three years, but the harassment that I have experienced from the state. Five times in the past two years I have been debanked for what is called ‘regulatory reasons’. First was Nationwide Bank, which I had been with for a quarter of a century, then HSBC which closed an account my wife and I opened for our son Daniel’s disability benefits. Then First Direct, which I had been with for 33 years. Then this year Santander and Kent Reliance building society. It is clear that some agency of the state fed false and malicious information to the banks and under money laundering legislation they are not allowed to tell me.

Lord Lane, Lord Chief Justice of England from 1980 to 1992, put it best of all in a House of Lords debate on April 7 1989: “Loss of freedom seldom happens overnight. Oppression doesn’t stand on the doorstep with toothbrush moustache and swastika armband - it creeps up insidiously ... step by step, and all of a sudden the unfortunate citizen realises that it is gone.”

You are 12 ordinary people, and this is one of the quiet moments. You are not being asked to make a protest, or to change any law. You are being asked to look at three short messages and one article, and to answer, on your conscience: was that an invitation to support Hamas - and did I know that that was what I was doing?

Although I am on trial today, it is really freedom of speech in this country that is on trial. The pretext for this attack is terrorism. However, that is all it is: a pretext. I will finish with a quote from one of America’s founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, who said: “Those who trade liberty for security deserve neither.”

Thank you, members of the jury ●

CU 2026

Partyism in theory and practice

Communist University was a model of internationalism, and openings and discussion were of a high quality throughout. But we are not complacent - there should have been a much bigger attendance, says **Carla Roberts**

This year's Communist University, taking place between August 8 and 15 in central London, attracted speakers and participants from across the globe: we spent the week with comrades from France, the Netherlands, Ireland, Germany, Turkey, Australia and the USA. Over 200 people came together (on Zoom and in person) to be educated, to talk, debate and argue - and all without restrictive speech controls, censorship or three-minute time limits. This was a small example of exactly the kind of partyist and democratic culture we are fighting for, almost uniquely on the British left.

Given the recent implosion of Jeremy Corbyn's Your Party, it is no surprise then that partyism was a key theme and we consciously opened the school with a panel discussion: 'How to get to the Communist Party we need'. Roxy Hall discussed the newly-merged Communist Unity in Australia, JLevi described the work of the Communist Platform in the Netherlands and Mike Macnair outlined the difficulties in achieving communist unity in Britain. We also heard via Zoom from Matthew Campbell-Strupp, a member of the Marxist Unity Group in America.

The MUG comrades have suddenly burst into the consciousness of the mainstream media, thanks to a string of DSA candidates having been selected as Democratic candidates for the mid-term elections - and thanks to MUG being the most programmatically coherent faction within the Democratic Socialists of America. We have long had friendly relations with the MUG comrades, who have participated in previous CUs going back many years.

Comrades can watch all of this year's sessions on our YouTube channel and we will be publishing some of the openings in the following weeks and months - but it is worth quoting MUG's comrade Campbell-Strupp at some length, because there are increasing numbers of socialists in Britain who almost worship MUG (and, in the case of the Marxist Unity Caucus in RS21, have even named themselves after the comrades) - but without really understanding the important partyist work that MUG is actually doing:

Something we learned from the CPGB, which was an attractive answer to us and which we're still pursuing, is the idea of going through the existing left to get us to the mass Communist Party we need - regrouping self-identified Marxists in a programmatic unified party through open polemic. Achieving unity in this way, we can have the sort of collective social weight and legitimacy as an alternative political force in order to get a snowball effect of growth, resulting in a communist party becoming a hegemonic political expression of the working class. This is in opposition to small groups of competing communists attempting to go to the class directly, either through agitation or by attempting to lead the economic struggle directly without having first achieved unity on a political basis.

In the US there was something called the 'base building tendency' and an organisation called Marxist Center that promoted the latter position. What became the Marxist Unity Group around the magazine *Cosmonaut* instead embraced building a political alternative and



Our four 1992 general election candidates: reunited at Communist University 2026

promoted the idea of programmatic unity. So, in the US context, those of us who formed the Marxist Unity Group have attempted to follow this path primarily through engagement with the Democratic Socialists of America.

In other words, unlike many sects in Britain, the MUG comrades in the US have made the conscious decision not to try to go 'to the class directly', but to patiently sit down with other partyists and try to work on clarifying their political programme. Of course, comrade Campbell-Strupp was not uncritical of the DSA and he went on to discuss some of its political and bureaucratic shortcomings. There can be no doubt that the comrades have a distinct advantage of being able to engage with others in the context of the DSA - while in Britain, Your Party has now almost entirely run itself into the ground and thereby squandered the enthusiasm and hopes of the 800,000 people who originally signed up for a new party of the left.

We debated the bureaucratic shenanigans of the Corbyn clique in a separate session, which saw Marcus Strom and Tina Becker also discuss a range of other failed unity projects in Britain. "They all have in common that so-called socialists set up halfway houses that they *know* cannot lead to socialism. It shows that they do not trust their own programme and they certainly do not trust the working class, which they believe can be tricked into fighting for socialism", as comrade Becker said. Comrade Strom, who had sat on the leadership of the Socialist Alliance and is now editor of *Labor Tribune* in Australia - outlined how the *economistic* transitional method developed by Leon Trotsky - in the run-up to World War II - has been thoroughly internalised by his followers and given an added opportunist twist: "Instead of building the united fronts these comrades envisage, they keep setting up *popular* fronts, in which they subordinate themselves to what they imagine the programme of the right to be," comrade Strom explained.

In the discussion, most comrades agreed that the absence of a party like the DSA in Britain does not mean that communists in Britain should see it as their task to build such an organisation. If halfway-house parties like that arise - and Your Party was such an example, just like Left Unity, Respect and many other previous projects - then of course we get

involved. But the task of communists is to build what is *necessary*, not what we think we can trick the working class into. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, of course - these halfway houses last, at best, a couple of years, before they fall apart under the weight of their own contradictions. We will remain members of Your Party for as long as we can, but there is no doubt that from the perspective of building a working class alternative, it is as dead as a dodo.

Problems

Considering the widespread adherence to identity politics and intersectionality within the left and even partyist circles, Roxy Hall's session on 'What is wrong with identity politics?' was extremely useful. The comrade located the rise of ID politics firmly in the period of "political defeat for the left, where class politics has been replaced with a fixation on the politics of injury, which requires a reliance on the state to protect the various identities". So, instead of building the forces of resistance, the logic of ID politics actually leads to a 'popular front' with the right and props up and strengthens the state.

This danger was also discussed by Mike Macnair in the session on 'Why no platforming and speech controls strengthen the right'. He explained that, while much of the left believes they are building united fronts against 'fascism', groups like the Socialist Workers Party are in fact pursuing popular fronts with Labourites, liberals, Muslim businessmen and even some Tories that are strengthening the state in its campaign against the left. He outlined that

... we need a positive, alternative culture - if we just replicate the managerialism of capitalism, we are saying there is no alternative to it. Instead, our alternative must be a culture where everybody gets one vote and a simple majority always decides; where there is freedom of communication and association and nobody gets a veto, including caucuses of various oppressions.

In response to some critical questions from the floor, he explained that this does not mean we do not deal with those who want to disrupt our meetings, for example, because "free speech is not absolute, in the sense that we let trolls and saboteurs harm us". But it is in the realm of political discourse that we should reject no-

platforming and instead discuss, explain and expose wrong ideas.

The question of partyism was also discussed in a session on Ireland opened by comrade Anne McShane, who discussed the rise of nationalism and the collapse of the 'left government strategy' in People Before Profit, which is effectively run by the SWP's co-thinkers in Ireland. Comrade McShane explained that she had been barred from becoming a member of PBP, because of her critical articles in *Weekly Worker*.

It was great to have input from comrade Eoin McGinley in this session, who stayed at CU for the whole week and is one of the founders of the new partyist faction in PBP that has been set up around the magazine *Horizon*. He echoed comrade McShane's criticism that much of the left in Ireland is "preoccupied with defending what is supposedly Irish neutrality, while ignoring many other democratic questions about the state and how we are ruled". Both stressed that the left does not only misidentify the rise of the right in Ireland as "fascist", but that it is also wrong to counter this with left nationalism "and sloppy slogans like 'Love Ireland, hate racism' - as if the right don't pretend to love Ireland too", as comrade McGinley stated.

In the discussion, comrades insisted - and not just because of current circumstances of where capitalism is in decline and the forces of the left are entirely marginal - that communists and socialists should not be advocating participation in a bourgeois government. Whatever subjective good intentions, they would end up having to attack the working class, enforcing cuts and closures. Our recent history is full of such sad examples - Die Linke, Syriza and Rifondazione Comunista. Socialists should only ever consider going into government when and if they can implement the full minimum programme.

Another very useful session on the broad theme of 'partyism' discussed the widespread social-imperialism and social-pacifism on much of the international left. Instead of embracing the need to fight for the abolition of the standing army, much of the left makes pointless pleas to the United Nations or 'international law' to bring about peace. Some even support imperialist sanctions against 'rogue states' or leaders, when clearly sanctions are very much part of today's warfare and hit the working class and the poorest

people the hardest. Marcus Strom explained that, "over 100 years ago, it was entirely uncontroversial in our movement to fight for the abolition of the standing army and replace it with a popular militia of the armed people. This has been forgotten, together with the Marxist minimum programme."

In his excellent opening, comrade Floris B from the Communist Platform in the Netherlands explained quite rightly that there is a certain "under-theorisation of the concept of the people's militia, which is often confused with the workers' militia, a defensive form of organisation that arises spontaneously from below." This thought-provoking session went a long way to clear up this confusion.

Working class

Last but not least, the red thread of partyism running through CU saw a debate on the question of 'Who is working class and why does it matter strategically?' Vincent David of the Spartacist League explained why their Australian comrades are trying to commit Communist Unity to sending at least 50% of their members into "working class jobs" - by which, as the discussion showed, the comrades specifically mean jobs in blue collar industry - like "factories and transport". Apparently, that would "teach them discipline and to get up in the mornings".

The now famous coffee shop 'barista' (discussed at length in the *Weekly Worker*) might be part of the wider proletariat, the comrade conceded, but because employees in the service industry are quite atomised they are not part of the real working class - which, according to comrade Vincent, is "a minority in Britain". This is quite an astonishing claim, considering that a very clear majority of about 60% of people in Britain consider themselves to be working class. This has clear strategic implications, particularly with the rise of the precariat and fake self-employment. If you do not believe there is a working class majority in society, then your vision of socialism requires a minority government - or a cross-class coalition.

Mike Macnair, when answering comrade David, bent the stick perhaps a bit too far in the opposite direction, claiming "it is not the job of the party to give tactical direction to trade unions or to individual strikes, etc". This all depends. We certainly do not advocate micromanaging our trade union members. But at certain points of the class struggle, the party must, of course, give firm political instructions.

The key, as Jack Conrad outlined in his contribution, is to win workers and trade unionists to a genuine Communist Party, "like the old CPGB did. It had many working class leaders and trade unionists as members, because it was able to pose a coherent political alternative. The CPGB certainly never sent students into factories - that is just a bizarre tactic". Marcus Strom thought the Spartacists' attitude "reflects a fundamental petty bourgeois approach to politics, projecting middle class political fantasies of the horny-handed sons of toil and that revolutionary consciousness spontaneously arises just because of where you happen to be in the labour process."

Highlights

We cannot cover all sessions in this overview - all were of high quality, which makes it even more unfortunate that there were never more than 50 or so people in the room. Yes, almost 150

joined via Zoom throughout the week and some of the videos have already been watched thousands of times on Facebook and YouTube, but we were disappointed that fewer of our own members and supporters made it to London. CU is the highlight of our political year and comrades should really strive to be there in person - it is also important to help us build a collectivity and to socialise together.

A few more highlights from the week:

■ The climate catastrophe was covered by a number of sessions, with two sobering introductions by climate scientist Bill McGuire and a session opened by Jack Conrad, who explained that, even if “capitalism just stopped, today, we would still have to deal with the dramatic consequences of rising temperatures for thousands of years”. Which makes our fight for a communist future even more important, he said. The alternative is beyond the kind of ‘barbarism’ that Rosa Luxemburg envisaged.

■ Comrade Conrad also introduced his first book on the Soviet Union, which, following the methods of Hegel and Marx, starts with the “elemental part” - ie, the ‘product’, as a way to analyse the general laws of what he called a “freak society”: “Products had target-value but no exchange value. There was no profit, no capital accumulation, no market and no money. It clearly was not a capitalist society.” It also was not socialist, in the sense that “workers were clearly not in control. It is important that we do not just stick a label on it, which is what much of the left has done, but understand the Soviet Union according to its own laws.” The book will soon be available for purchase.

■ August 14 was ‘Radical Anthropology Day’ at CU, with Chris Knight introducing his new book, *The revolutionary origins of language* (Yale University Press). He explained that most linguists have now finally come to agree with Lewis Henry Morgan and Friedrich Engels, according to whom our ancestors lived in matrilineal societies - and that it was this female solidarity that allowed humans to develop language. In a second session, he outlined the unsettling relationship between linguist Noam Chomsky and Jeffrey Epstein: “Chomsky’s theory that language is not social, but is an organ in the brain that ‘just got there’ is as misguided as him turning to Jeffrey Epstein to help him sort out his finances and praising him as his ‘best friend’,” comrade Knight explained. In the afternoon, Camilla Power opened a session discussing the ‘Origins and the theft of fire’, outlining a number of myths that reference our matrilineal ancestry and the “dancing picket line of women” who are exercising their power through solidarity. This was followed by a group of comrades giving a spirited reading of *Prometheus bound* by Aeschylus.

■ A number of sessions dealt with economics: Ted Reese took a critical look at the concept of ‘degrowth communism’, while left economist Michael Roberts discussed if “AI can save capitalism” - the short answer is ‘no’. As the comrade explained, “the AI bubble will burst, but it will not spell the end of plagiarism software. Resisting and sabotaging AI is akin to modern Luddism. The key is to bring it into common ownership to free humans from toil, so they can concentrate on creative and social work that only humans can do.”

Funnily enough, we got a lot of grief during CU for using AI to help us produce quick little graphics advertising the various sessions - but we very much agree with comrade Roberts about using technology where it can be useful and help our work in building the mass Communist Party we need ●

Free-wheeling dialectic

Readings from Bertolt Brecht, Darko Suvin, Bill McGuire, Jimmy Reid and Aeschylus. Tam Dean Burn reports on the CU culture sessions

I was pleased that the *Weekly Worker* editorial team chose to headline my preview of the culture programme for Communist University as ‘Nothing is fixed or finished’ (July 30).¹ That is exactly the sort of dialectical ethos I had in mind and that we saw develop and grow over the week of August 8-15 at this year’s CU.

Our culture linchpins were Bertolt Brecht and Darko Suvin, upon whose Marxist intellects and experience we were readily able to free-wheel out sessions on a wide range of topics. Esther Leslie and I started with a launch of the ideas behind our Diderot Gesellschaft Movement (DGM), with Darko contributing on Zoom live from Italy.

His dear, departed comrade, Fredric Jameson, offered us much inspiration in the readings Esther and I gave from his book *Brecht and method*. As Darko said of it, “Brecht can be supremely useful to us if we wish to think through and do something about the present catastrophic state of the world; and what is useful is his method. This is Fredric Jameson’s thesis in his path-breaking book.”

In it Jameson offers up so much of Brecht that fits what we are attempting:

I want to retain the connection between Brecht’s ‘usefulness’ for us today and a whole range of activities into which it might be expected to energise us ... Brecht offers us a world in which practice is entertaining ... so activity itself is also one of the features of knowledge and art, as those flow back into the useful ... this is why a Brechtian conception of activity must today go hand in hand with a revival of the older pre-capitalist sense of time itself, of the change or flowing of all things; for it is the movement of this great river of time ... that will slowly carry us downstream again to the moment of praxis ...

This points towards Brecht’s understanding of the philosophy that could be very useful going forward, as climate catastrophe beckons. I also think there is a moonlight reflection of similar senses to what Camilla Power has been presenting in the Radical Anthropology Group with regard to time and capitalist control of it (more on comrade Camilla later).

Anyway it is all a beginning that might lead towards a ‘DGM manifesto’ developing through our activities and practice. CU offers such an opportunity for that and I will come back below to where we go next. And this is what Marx said about such developments: “Every metamorphosis is to some extent a swan song, to some extent the overture to a great new poem.”

At the next session we took Darko’s recent essay on the great solidarity song, ‘O bella ciao’, and divided sections of that between Esther and I, with elements of *Sprechgesang* (spoken song) thrown in. The singing worked fine, fitting the emblematic “song of death and ongoing joy”, as Darko bills it, and had our audience joining in the choruses of each version.²

When comrades Erin from Dundee and Janne from Utrecht joined us for the session titled ‘Hegelian alienation in Glasgow spirit and opium’, we really started to see how various fragments could be interlinked and collectivised. This sprang from a Substack essay entitled ‘Marx’s

communism and the inspiration from Hegel’s “Anti-Christ” by Sally Mju - a young Marxist student from Vietnam.³

This passage from her essay shows why I saw possibilities for physical performance: “In Hegel, spirit or Geist is always in movement. It does not stand still. It passes through many shapes of consciousness. It divides itself, becomes alienated from itself, faces itself in strange forms, and slowly learns to recognise itself in what seems to be ‘not itself’.” Splitting passages from Sally’s essay between the four of us instantly made it all more performative, with us functioning more like a chorus in a play than delivering a lecture.

We then combined some of the discussion Sally and I had in the comments below her essay, and opened out into several other interconnected writings. These included the famous ‘Alienation’ speech made by CPGB Clydeside trade union leader Jimmy Reid when he took up the post of rector at Glasgow University in 1972⁴, and lyrics from the album by Glasgow band The Tenementals, where a song entitled ‘Universal alienation’ sampled Reid’s speech and opening track ‘The owl of Minerva’.⁵

We found a further link from Dutch comrades at CU about a notorious speech by a far-right leader quoting the above renowned Hegel phrase on live television, whilst clearly under the influence of drugs! Drugs also feature in connection to both Glasgow having the highest rate of drug deaths in Europe and to Marx’s turning Hegel upright on alienation - as Sally outlines in her essay:

When Marx calls religion the ‘opium of the people’, he is not simply mocking religious people as stupid or blind. Before that, he writes that religious suffering is both the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is ‘the sigh of the oppressed creature’. So for Marx the critique of religion is only the beginning. The real problem is to criticise the world that makes people need religion as comfort.

Gob-smacking

In the discussion afterwards Jack Conrad gave us his personal take on comrade Jimmy Reid as the most charismatic speaker promoting communism he had ever heard, even though he came from a different wing of the CPGB (whilst also, remarkably, becoming something of a celebrity, with appearances on the BBC Saturday night Parkinson chat show). Another connected element he outlined was that Reid was a committed Christian as well as a communist.

What was quite gob-smacking to us was that all this - plus sections of a brilliant folkloric poem by Erin Farley about the myths of the Glasgow river Clyde and class struggles there. such as the rent strikes during World War I - took just half an hour to deliver.

Discovering content that fitted each session’s theme was in process in the lead-up to CU and sometimes - as with the Jameson excerpts offering ideas towards a DGM manifesto - such discoveries were made in the spare hours during CU. Such a late addition was the very useful book, *Tragedy of the commodity - oceans, fisheries and aquaculture*, by Stefano B Longo, Rebecca Clausen and Brett Clark.

This exposure of how the Marxist metabolic rift theory applies to the sea fitted so well with our look at the subject through the prism of the poem,



Camilla Power: Prometheus and the stealing of fire

‘The rime of the ancient mariner’, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This began as a play written by Johny Brown, in which I appeared as the mariner, performed in 2002. For the CU session Johny gave voice to the albatross shot by the mariner and then the bird exacting revenge by turning into a drone aimed at Burrough’s head. Such a dystopian take could perhaps fit in the future with Darko’s work on science fiction!

Another idea planted at CU was in regards to Darko’s translation and adaptation of Brecht’s *Communist manifesto* versification, which I performed in sections at the start of the morning sessions. We discussed how one thing that the poem does not contain is an awareness of the climate catastrophe that capitalism is unleashing. This is understandable, given Brecht was writing it around World War II, so Darko suggested we look at such writings on the subject by him and he will attempt to put them into the hexameter verse form used by Brecht and himself in the rest of the poem.⁶ Again we find solutions to challenges presented to us through our activity.

We will also now endeavour to make contact with the *Tragedy of the commodity* authors, operating in the field of radical sociology, to see if we can develop further work together. That would be an example of our DGM in action - working culturally with Marxist scientists.

The prime example of this at CU was the extended afternoon session we did on the last full day in cooperation with the Radical Anthropology Group, who have been regular CU participants over the years. This involved looking into the issues around the ancient Greek play, *Prometheus bound*, by Aeschylus. It had been brought to my attention by Darko through his essay, *A long hope: the Prometheus counter-project*.⁷ I have to confess that I had never come across the play in all my years as an actor, but have now seen how much it has meant to Marxists drawn to culture - not least the great man himself, who gave Prometheus the title, “patron saint of the philosophical canon”, in his early

writings and employed his labour power (or use value?) in *Capital* itself.

In discussions with RAG stalwart Camilla Power I discovered a very different take on the Prometheus myth that binds him to the long patriarchal counterrevolution which usurped the female sex-strike solidarity that drove the original human revolution. This opens up a fascinating debate on whether Prometheus - like Jesus, another “menstrual male” symbol according to RAG - can still be considered a revolutionary figure despite being on the wrong side of history.

It was decided we should begin the session with an illustrated lecture on *Origins and theft of fire* by Camilla and then do a reading of the play with a full cast. That session felt like the highest achievement of our culture programme, because it brought unique beginnings of a debate into focus around such a cultural icon.

But that is not to take anything from the other sessions, including the dramatised readings of Bill McGuire’s geoengineering speculative fiction, *The fix*, and Darko’s poetry, including his incredible epic work, ‘Thus spake the muse - do not profit by the blood of your fellows’.

They all offer possibilities for further development and were certainly not fixed or finished on this outing. Next up for our DGM is the Historical Materialism conference in London on November 5-8, which has had me daydreaming of a Marxist mini-festival, featuring much of what was seeded at CU and with The Tenementals as our house band! ●

Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1596/nothing-is-fixed-or-finished.
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JASON ARDAY

Fraudsters, great and small

He was undoubtedly the tragic victim of an openly racist attack dog and a baying mainstream media. However, maintaining that Jason Arday was not guilty of plagiarism is worse than useless. We need the truth about him and, more importantly, the whole neoliberal university system, argues **Paul Demarty**

There is a general commotion to answer the question, 'Who killed Jason Arday?'

On one level, this is a bit silly. Though we await confirmation from a coroner or some such authority, it seems abundantly clear that he killed himself. Weeks into a media feeding frenzy, in which public allegations of plagiarism fed into a detailed examination of the spectacular life story he had retailed in his career as a celebrity academic, he had already resigned from his post at Cambridge University, and it had become clear that most of the grandiose claims he had made about his biography were false.

He had not been a non-verbal autistic until the age of 11, nor illiterate at 18. He had not played for Crystal Palace, or been a pro snooker player, or run 600 miles in six days, or miraculously recovered from a brain tumour. A hate crime incident involving a severed pig's head seems likely to be fabricated, as does a subsequent report of a knife-wielding, masked man confronting him in his office. Simply to read the list of his supposed accomplishments and brushes with death is to confront the reality that he was a fabulist of uncommon imagination. Journalists with the smell of blood in their nostrils made short work of this tissue of preposterous lies.

I start off with this rather blunt summary since, distressingly, large parts of the left in this country seem intent on - if not quite *denying* that this was a tissue of lies - simply refusing to acknowledge this part of the story at all. This was simply a racist crusade against a successful black man that succeeded in driving him (apparently) to suicide. Thousands gathered in Trafalgar Square, led by the SWP's Stand Up to Racism franchise, to hear this story told again and again. It is as if there were conspiracy theorists to be found who, rather than denying that moon landings had occurred, denied instead that the moon existed at all.

Racism is, of course, part of the story. The public allegations of plagiarism were made by Nathan Cofnas - a 'race realist', who believes that only statistically minuscule numbers of black people are intellectually capable of high achievement except in sport and showbusiness. Cofnas had his tenuous connection to Cambridge terminated when his views on this attracted controversy, which he freely admits is his motive for dropping this bomb in the lap of the university. The rightwing press is increasingly comfortable with overt racism and, of course, did some of the digging here.

Yet so did *The Guardian*, even as it ran endless hand-wringing op-eds about how dreadful it all was. More than a racist crusade, this was a silly season story (which has now become less silly) of a chancer who successfully conned his way to the apex of the British academy, with endless florid details to run over. It may be objected that there was, after all, a human being at the centre of all this hostile attention, whose gift for fantastical self-mythologisation may have been evidence of psychological instability. Sure.

But the idea that, had a white person conned his way to the same job in the same way and fallen foul of some grudge-bearing mediocrity like Cofnas, it would have attracted no media attention, is simply risible. (History never gives us such exact counterfactuals, but some have mentioned the case of George Santos,



Floral tributes left at Jesus College, Cambridge

an equally imaginative Republican congressman from New York, whose tall tales generated a lot of column inches and who eventually went down for fraud.)

Nor is it the case that he was even monstered particularly awfully, by the standards of the yellow press - his defenders ought to check in with Christopher Jefferies or even think back to Diana Spencer. The campaign for a special law to restrict the right of journalists to report on individuals - supported by the likes of Amnesty - is a special kind of stupidity. It would be worrying if it were not so obviously counterproductive on its own terms. If our hatred of our enemies leads us to deny the plain reality before us, then we are lost.

Academia

In reality, this story is not so much about Arday as the institutions which not only credulously boosted him up the greasy pole, but even attempted to cover up for his indiscretions. It was a source of no small excitement to the rightwing punditocracy that institutions formally committed to the pursuit of the truth should have proven so singularly unable to critically interrogate Arday's claims, or for that matter to identify plagiarism in his published work. For such pundits, of course, the universities are enemy territory - merely so many copies of Mao Zedong's Yanan commune scattered across the British landscape, which reject the pursuit of truth in favour of spreading ideological fanaticism.

Really, guys, look in the mirror. Yet these people are right, at least, that universities do not exactly model the pursuit of truth today (if they ever did). If we ask what makes an Arday scandal possible, we must take a closer look at this evident dysfunction, which in fact requires a historical perspective.

Cambridge, like its older brother, Oxford, and various similar institutions in Europe, has a history stretching back to the Middle Ages. In those days, higher learning was effectively the property of the clerisy; medieval universities were religious

institutions, and their scholars were typically priests, friars and monks. Some residue of that history remains, particularly in the system of colleges. Yet these are now characteristically modern institutions.

The modern university is a product of state-building. The expansion of the state under capitalism - and particularly when colonial empires created demand for administrators - demanded a system for producing credentialed specialists to run everything. It equally demanded advances in the general intellect, as a matter of inter-state competition. The result, after a lot of evolutionary selection, was the dominance of the research university, in which scholars are gathered simultaneously to prepare students to enter the professions and to generate novel work in the sciences and humanities. This is an institutional structure that emerged first of all in Germany and was then widely copied.

The relevant problem here is the humanities. It is fairly clear what progress in the natural sciences looks like: the formulation and confirmation of hypotheses about nature. Progress in the social sciences is a little fuzzier, but it cannot be denied that, say, empirical anthropology has made discoveries about the forms of life of previously little-known societies, economic models have become more accurate, and the like. Within the humanities, there are some domains, like history, where straightforward progress of this sort is possible; but even there we start to run into difficulties. Historians must interpret their sources, which are often very obscure; interpretive frameworks compete. All the more so in the case of literary studies, philosophy and similar fields.

As such, the generally accepted purpose of a humanities education is, precisely, education - the formation of the student such that they adopt the specific virtues of the humanistic disciplines, of liberality with respect to diverse human others, awareness of history, subtlety in argument where no knock-down arguments are really possible, and so on. It is very difficult to measure whether such an education has been successful.

It is not even clear that this result is more than a comforting 'just so' story for the academics; indeed, that is another thing that the academics argue about (did not a lot of cultured, humanistically-educated men serve in the officer corps of Hitler's SS?).

The humanities were suffered to exist in this ambiguously useful state for much of the modern university's history. However, with the transformation of higher education in the neoliberal era, that has changed in many respects. Academics have been marginalised in university governance in favour of a managerial class, substantially identical to the senior management of corporations. Tenure is harder and harder to come by: precariously employed academics must compete for grants and positions, which means proving 'impact', according to increasingly philistine measures. They must publish continuously, which produces an endless flood of careless and largely unread writing.

On the teaching side, things are hardly better. In this country, students are charged punitive fees, which replace the old system of state funding. Significant reductions in student numbers present serious problems for institutions - especially foreign students, for whom fees are uncapped. Classes get larger; the incentive structure is always to wave people through, and give them the degree they have paid so much money for. With the advent of large language models, coursework is increasingly fraudulent (and, of course, overworked academics are not above delegating marking to ChatGPT and friends). The result is something like an old Soviet joke: 'We pretend to teach them, and they pretend to learn'.

Downfall

It is this world that Arday entered when he became a university professor. By his own account, he found research to be a burdensome waste of his time, and he was right in many ways. Even if his papers had not been plagiarised, they would have been slop; in that respect, they fit in perfectly with the wider system, which incentivises

only a low-effort performance of the pursuit of knowledge. His now widely publicised rows with students are surely also the tip of an iceberg.

Naturally, then, it is not surprising that Cambridge's hiring committees did not look too closely at his CV. They were out to hire someone who was, yes, black, but - more importantly - who could reproduce the required clichés about the marginalisation of black scholars, so as to meet a particular marketing requirement of the day. That he was already a minor media personality surely helped; his youth - at 37, a mere infant in Cambridge don terms - would also have sent the right message of cleaning out the cobwebs in the senior common room.

Prestige

Inadvertently, they thereby put him in danger of exposure. It is one thing to tell tall tales at Liverpool John Moores, or even Durham and Glasgow. But Cambridge has a special prestige: it turns a lot of people down, and thus breeds grudges; it is a juicy target for vexatious journalists. Not long after his appointment, David Harris of Plymouth Marjon found evidence of plagiarism and contacted Arday. The latter responded with a furious email, and reported Harris to the police, who took no action. In 2025, Jack Groves of the *Times Higher Education Supplement* found far more extensive evidence; when contacted for comment, Arday (and presumably Cambridge) sent a letter before action, courtesy of terroristic libel law firm Carter Ruck. Groves was also reported to the police. The *Guardian* got on the trail months ago, when Arday attempted to sell them the pig's head story; but Cofnas, the gerbil-faced, calliper-waving degenerate, beat them all to it.

Fixing all this means, I think, first of all acknowledging that neoliberal managerialism has already killed the modern university. It lumbers on because human resources departments have not found a better proxy for tolerance for pointless clerical tasks than possession of an undergraduate degree. Some useful research in the sciences, to be sure, continues to take place. But the humanities were never a good fit for it, and administrators now increasingly see these departments as relics in what is taken to be a post-literate society.

Yet the neoliberal-managerial university merely reflects the wider values of society. All education must *appear to be* technical - in particular marketable skills. Some education *really is* like that, and I am not saying that such education is bad (I am all in favour of surgeons knowing where my spleen is!). But a society that demands occupational hyper-specialisation has no room for the plumber who wants to prove or disprove the existence of god, or the computer programmer who wants to read Proust in the original French.

Loosening that specialisation opens the way to a more capacious model of higher education. The humanities and sciences alike could be made available to all curious adults in innumerable, more intimate schools; teachers in such institutions could really be teachers. Why should a Jason Arday not find a home there, indeed? Why should a few tall tales be disqualifying?

A fraud he was - but how much worse is the fraud of Cambridge? ●

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REVIEW



Man the hunter: but what about the other half of the human population?

Slingshots and arrows

Luke Kemp *Goliath's curse: the history and future of societal collapse* Penguin Viking, 2025, pp579, £25

As a senior research associate at the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, Luke Kemp is well-placed to write a book about civilisational collapse. Its tone is firmly set within the zeitgeist, ‘We could save ourselves, but I wouldn’t bet the house on it [if the house is still standing!].’

Kemp kicks off by charting the rise and fall of several civilisations - although, as he explains, he does not like the term. It is derived, after all, from the Latin, *civilitas*, ‘implying restraint, moderation, and good political conduct’, they have instead delivered ‘[s]lavery, war, patriarchy, [human] sacrifice... crucifixion... or dropping atomic bombs’.

Preferring the term, ‘Goliath’, to identify these structures and systems of violence and domination, he points out that, historically, their collapse is often a blessing - in the longer term - for those at the bottom. Freed from oppression and exploitation, they grow taller, are better fed: eg, stateless Somalia has seen reductions in childbirth deaths, infant mortality rates and instances of extreme poverty. (In the immediate term, as former elites fight to recover their privileges, we often see violence and destruction.)

Of the Goliaths studied by Kemp, the average lifespan is 326 years; for the largest states, this falls to 155 years. These figures, he acknowledges, mask a huge range: from the four years of China’s Later Han Dynasty to over 1,000 years for the Byzantine empire of the Mediterranean.

Interviewed in *The Guardian* when the book was first published, Kemp argued that these societies are an evolutionary regression from the more egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies that preceded them. In the chapter, ‘Egalitarian origins’, Kemp asserts that this egalitarianism is not

“a passive condition, but an active choice” amongst modern foragers, who have “an array of customs and traditions” to enforce sharing.¹

He describes how the Ju’hoansi people of the Kalahari Desert swap arrow heads prior to a hunt; the owner of the original arrowhead allocates the meat from the kill, not the hunter who fired it. The Ju’hoansi also use counter-dominance strategies - teasing, shaming, ridicule, expulsion - to sanction bullies and those who do not share. In extreme cases, the punishment is death.

Intriguingly, Kemp identifies an anatomical basis for our innate egalitarianism. Some two million years ago, changes to our shoulder joints allowed for the *accurate* throwing of projectiles: rocks, spears, and - with a nod to the Biblical giant - slingshot. A big and imposing beast could be brought down by something much smaller. There was a concurrent increase in brain size.

So, if we are innately egalitarian, why do these Goliaths repeatedly arise? For Kemp, they have two pillars: ‘Goliath fuel’ and the ‘dark triad’, each having three elements.

Goliath fuel consists of surplus grain, monopolised weaponry and “caged land”,² which makes it difficult for people to simply walk away. As Marxists we would recognise the necessity of a food surplus, an armed body of men, and a trapped population for the stratification of society into *classes*. However, Kemp struggles with the ‘C word’ - I could find no mention of it in the near-600 pages of the book, despite its clear and obvious relevance. A huge and disappointing lacuna.

So what is the ‘dark triad’, the second pillar Kemp identifies? Goliaths, he claims, require rulers who share three personality traits:

narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism. Further, “Our corporations and, increasingly, our algorithms, also resemble these kinds of people. They amplify the worst in us.”

So our collective failure to keep in check those among us who are strong in these traits has brought us to where we are today. According to Kemp, that includes Lenin, who, in the pamphlet, *Will the Bolsheviks retain state power?*, asserts that the “class-conscious workers must lead, but for the work of administration they can enlist the vast mass of the working and oppressed people”. For Kemp, the Russian Revolution was simply the act of one section of the elite replacing another.

He identifies rising and extreme levels of inequality as the internal contradiction that eventually brings these societies down - something we can observe all too clearly today. But, if the fall of Goliath results in freedom and a better life for those at the bottom, should we not welcome this? He concludes not: we live in a highly integrated world of nuclear weapons, climate chaos, artificial intelligence, killer robots and engineered pandemics. Collapse will not be regional and isolated: it will be global and existential.

To his credit, Kemp prescribes ‘radical’ democratisation as a solution to our current malady. However, he remains firmly within the paradigm of *capitalist* society. We will retain money, but individual wealth should be limited to £10 million! He calls for the use of online voting - a spreading rather than a deepening of ‘democracy,’ something this paper has repeatedly objected to.

Further, while he acknowledges the necessity of socialising the use of violence, he does not follow

the logic of that. There is no call for the abolition of the standing army and its replacement with a democratic militia. In the subsection, ‘Democratic control of information and the military’ (chapter 23), he naively calls for the abolition of the US Espionage Act (1917) and greater protection for whistleblowers. Much, much too little.

The book encourages people to “Be a democrat... join a union, join an activist group... advocate for workplace democracy.” All very worthy, but without a party these efforts will be pitiful in their impact. If we are to have any chance of implementing even the limited democratic changes Kemp envisions, we require activists to be organised around a programme which maps our route to the genuine, radical democratisation of society - a communist party, I would argue.

Without that, I fear Kemp’s prediction will come to pass: “I think it’s unlikely [we will avoid collapse]. We’re dealing with a 5,000-year process that is going to be very difficult to reverse.”³

Andy Hannah

Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/aug/02/self-termination-history-and-future-of-societal-collapse.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*

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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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China will surely not cooperate with US against Iran

Upping the sanctions war

Having predictably failed to overthrow the Tehran regime through air power, the US has turned to threatening Iran's trading partners, the most important being China, of course. Not surprisingly, says **Yassamine Mather**, there is no sign of a deal happening in the immediate future

Donald Trump's administration has shifted emphasis from directly attacking Iran militarily to blockading and sanctioning it: a different form of warfare. Treasury secretary Scott Bessent has described Washington's D-Day measures as an unprecedented attempt to isolate a country economically through possibly sanctioning those helping Iran to circumvent sanctions. Meanwhile, defence secretary Pete Hegseth says that the US navy can maintain the maritime blockade against Iran "indefinitely".

The purpose is clear: reduce Iran's oil income, restrict access to the international financial system and make confrontation progressively more expensive for Tehran. Washington has not abandoned its military options: American forces remain positioned in the region and Trump continues threatening renewed attacks. The situation is better understood as a pause in the large-scale bombing and missile campaign, combined with escalating economic warfare.

Bessent warns that countries and financial institutions which continue to trade with Tehran could themselves face punishing measures. Asked about Chinese banks, he declared that "no-one is above the reach of US sanctions".

China responded immediately. Foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian condemned "illegal, unilateral" sanctions and said Beijing would take "all necessary measures" to defend its interests. China is Iran's largest oil customer, but Washington's ability to pressurise Beijing is constrained by the broader US-China rivalry. China dominates important areas of rare-earth and critical-mineral processing and has restricted exports during trade disputes. Sanctions intended to isolate Tehran therefore risk becoming another source of confrontation between the world's two largest economies.

Iran's economy minister, Ali Madanizadeh, says Tehran has developed contingency plans for two years and predicts the sanctions offensive will end in "another defeat" for Washington. Such declarations are not evidence that sanctions are painless. Pezeshkian admits serious economic damage. Tehran's argument, rather, is that Washington will also pay an increasing price for attempting Iran's complete isolation.

This conflict also explains why neither side can separate military strategy from economic policy. Every decision over sanctions, shipping and negotiations now affects legitimacy, as well as the regional balance. Tehran must show that the sacrifices imposed on Iran have produced leverage, while Washington must show that its military and financial power can enforce the required results. That need to demonstrate success makes compromise harder, even as costs rise.

The confrontation has become a

contest over which side can impose greater costs for longer. Tehran uses Hormuz; Washington uses blockade, sanctions and the international financial system. Hardliners within Iran's leadership have little incentive to restore normal traffic without substantial concessions, because disruption maintains pressure, while preserving a bargaining instrument strengthened by the war.

This is the central paradox. Both governments face mounting economic costs, yet those costs encourage each to believe the other will eventually give way. Tehran sees oil prices, American consumer discontent and failure to reopen Hormuz. Washington sees Iran's collapsing currency, inflation, falling revenues and social unrest. Each interprets the other's difficulties as evidence that pressure will eventually work.

For ordinary people, the calculation looks different. In Iran it means declining purchasing power, shortages, uncertainty and the possibility of renewed bombing. Elsewhere it appears in fuel prices, shipping costs and inflation. The war has moved from the battlefield into everyday economic life.

New phase

As of August 26, there are tentative signs of de-escalation around the Strait of Hormuz itself. Iran and Oman are discussing a temporary shipping corridor and joint mine-clearing operation, while US secretary of state Marco Rubio is reportedly signalling that no further US military attacks on Iran are planned for the moment. Markets have responded positively, with the price of oil falling 8% over the week to below \$90 a barrel.

However, this should not be mistaken for a durable settlement. The key language is explicitly provisional - "temporary corridor" and "for now." It therefore looks more like another phase of tactical de-escalation intended to reduce immediate military and economic pressures than evidence that the underlying confrontation has been resolved.

In fact, the conflict between Iran and the US has entered a new phase. Large-scale missile strikes may have subsided, but neither the war nor the conflict that produced it has ended. Instead, the confrontation has shifted towards economic warfare: sanctions, blockade, shipping routes, oil prices and pressure on ordinary people's living standards. Tehran and Washington are each trying to demonstrate that time is on their side and that the costs imposed on the opponent will eventually force concessions.

To understand why Tehran is not rushing back to negotiations, it is necessary to begin before the latest phase of the war. Iran entered the conflict with an economy already under enormous pressure. The January protests began in Tehran's Grand Bazaar after another sharp fall in the value of the rial and increases

in the cost of living. Initially, even the government acknowledged their economic basis. President Masoud Pezeshkian asked the interior minister to listen to protestors' "legitimate demands", while the government spokesperson acknowledged pressure on people's livelihoods. The protests soon spread beyond the bazaar and beyond purely economic demands.

The figures indicated the depth of the crisis. At the beginning of the January protests, the dollar traded at around 139,000 toman on the free market. By mid-August it had reached approximately 188,000 toman and, in anticipation of further sanctions, nearly 200,000 toman on August 24. According to Iran's Statistical Centre, annual inflation reached 66% in July, while food prices were 128% higher than a year earlier. These reflected structural problems predating the war: sanctions, declining investment, currency instability, corruption and growing difficulties for workers and sections of the middle class.

The war intensified these pressures. Factories and transport infrastructure were damaged, trade disrupted and alternative import routes became slower and more expensive. Yet deterioration did not automatically produce another wave of protests comparable to early 2026. There were, however, reports of at least 150 protests by workers and pensioners in July and August. On August 9, social security pensioners demonstrated in several cities. Some slogans explicitly connected hardship to the war: "Enough of warmongering, our tables are empty" and "Inflation and high prices - no to war and ruin." The Islamic Republic's hopes of prolonging the confrontation will increase pressure on Washington, but maintaining the status quo is becoming more expensive at home.

Against this background, Iran and the US reached a 14-point understanding in June, establishing a 60-day period to resolve questions concerning Iran's nuclear programme, sanctions and implementation. The deadline passed without a final settlement. Much of the period was consumed by renewed military clashes and disputes surrounding the Strait of Hormuz.

Before the conflict, the nuclear programme had been Washington's central concern. Five months later, reopening Hormuz had become one of its most urgent objectives. Before the war, around 130 to 140 ships crossed the strait each day. Recently, traffic on many days has fallen to roughly a tenth of that figure. Military attacks, naval escorts, port blockades and American diplomatic pressure have failed to restore previous levels. Hormuz's role in global energy trade is precisely what gives Tehran leverage.

Bargaining cards

Article five of the June understanding stipulated that Iran would guarantee safe and cost-free passage for commercial vessels for 60 days.

Afterwards, Iran, Oman and other coastal states would discuss the strait's "future management and maritime services". The text did not explicitly grant Tehran control over shipping, but the regime interpreted it as potentially giving Iran a larger role. Returning to the pre-war arrangement would mean surrendering one of the few major pieces of leverage produced by the conflict. Washington rejects any interpretation institutionalising greater Iranian influence over this crucial waterway.

Negotiations

Other provisions require cooperation from actors not entirely under Tehran's or Washington's control. Nuclear commitments require the International Atomic Energy Agency, while provisions concerning Lebanon depend partly on Israel. For sections of Iran's leadership, returning to negotiations before these issues are resolved risks surrendering pressure without receiving anything substantial. Failure to implement the June understanding has strengthened opponents of negotiations: why enter another agreement when the previous one failed to deliver?

Pezeshkian freely acknowledges the economic pressure: "Problems have multiplied, while our income has also decreased." Iran is selling less oil, tax revenues have fallen and alternative import routes are more expensive. Yet foreign minister Abbas Araghchi insists Tehran has made no decision to resume direct negotiations.

Tehran has concluded that the ability to disrupt the strait is one of its strongest bargaining cards. Its calculation also assumes that time imposes costs on Washington. As long as normal traffic is not restored, the Trump administration cannot convincingly claim that the war restored the previous regional order. US gasoline (petrol) prices have risen around 29%, compared with a year earlier. Tehran is also taking into account US domestic politics, the expense of military operations and concerns about stocks of some interceptor missiles.

Former US diplomat Alan Eyre, speaking to BBC Persian, offers a different interpretation. He does not consider the US midterm elections decisive in Trump's thinking. In his view, Trump's central problem is presentation: he does not want an agreement that cannot be portrayed domestically as an American 'victory'. Nevertheless, Eyre acknowledges Republican concern about prolonged disruption of Hormuz and higher consumer prices.

Hormuz also allows the Islamic Republic to challenge Washington's narrative of military victory. The US possesses overwhelming conventional superiority, but, while a major energy route cannot operate normally, Tehran can argue that American military power has failed to restore the status quo. The strategy is costly and

dangerous, but Tehran is attempting to convert geography into economic and political leverage.

The consequences of the US-Iran war are spreading far beyond the Persian Gulf. Disruption in Hormuz is reshaping global shipping routes and increasing pressure on other strategic waterways, notably the Panama Canal.

The 80-kilometre canal links the Atlantic and Pacific, allowing ships to avoid the voyage around Cape Horn. Its capacity is limited, partly because its locks depend heavily on freshwater, so drought can restrict crossings. According to figures cited by the BBC, transits had risen 8% by the end of May compared with the previous year, averaging 38 vessels a day, close to maximum capacity. During the five weeks after the Iran war began, traffic was 16% higher than in the equivalent period a year earlier.

The connection with Hormuz is clear. As Gulf shipping became more hazardous, Asian buyers increasingly looked to the US Gulf Coast for crude oil and refined products. Many cargoes travelling between the Atlantic and Pacific depend on Panama. A conflict thousands of kilometres away has therefore added to congestion, with some shipping companies reportedly paying millions of dollars at auction for priority passage.

The canal has simultaneously become another arena of US-China rivalry. Washington argues that China's growing economic presence around it threatens international trade and US security. Beijing accuses Washington of invoking a Chinese threat to extend its own influence. For its part, Panama continues to assert its sovereignty and the waterway's neutrality.

The contrast demonstrates how regional conflict reverberates through global capitalism. Hormuz is primarily an energy chokepoint; Panama is an artery for broader flows of commodities and manufactured goods. Orlando J Pérez of the University of North Texas notes that Panama handles only around 5% of global maritime trade, but nearly 40% of US container traffic.

In conclusion, what began as a struggle centred on Iran's nuclear programme and the military balance between Tehran and Washington increasingly extends into a contest over chokepoints, energy routes, sanctions, markets and commodity circulation. It is also a struggle over which states can impose the economic costs of conflict on others.

As Luis Barrucho, writing for BBC World Service, argues, Hormuz is fundamentally an energy bottleneck, while Panama is a strategic gateway for the supply chain of the world's largest economy. The comparison goes beyond shipping. The Iran conflict shows how quickly a regional war can impact the global economy: from missiles over Iran to tankers in Hormuz, from oil prices and sanctions to congested passages through Panama; and ultimately into the wider US-China confrontation ●