

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Ulrich Siegmund and AfD score a stunning 43.8% in Saxony-Anhalt and send the whole German establishment into a panic

- Letters and debate
- Tribune's latest relaunch
- AI and general Intelligence
- Boycotts and Israel

No 1600 September 10 2026

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/£1.10



**Vladimir Putin
deserves historic
justice ... so do all
other warmongers**

LETTERS



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

Our abundance

As someone who first arrived at an anti-capitalist perspective through the 'degrowth' trend before being won over to communism, I was very interested to hear the talk given by Ted Reese at Communist University 2026 (published in last week's *Weekly Worker*: 'Abundance for all' September 3). In arguing against degrowth, however, I feel that Reese bends the stick too far in the opposite direction, leading him first to (implicitly) discard some useful demands raised by degrowthers and then to sell false ideas about what is possible under communism.

I agree that the idea of degrowth is slippery, and is to be avoided as a slogan, since it can easily be interpreted as Malthusian or promoting austerity; I also agree that degrowthers are reformists, and I would add that this takes the form of a mixture of Proudhonism and Bernsteinism.

That's not to say, however, that we should dispense with all of the demands raised by degrowthers. Some of them may be worth including, with some modification, in the minimum programme. For example, chapter five of Jason Hickel's *Less is more* includes demands such as ending planned obsolescence through introducing mandatory warranties and a 'right to repair'; limits on advertising; encouraging shared ownership of certain commodities; job guarantees and a reduced working week.

While Reese seems to show some acceptance of the limits of production on a finite planet, he then attempts to bypass these limits by introducing what he calls "additive" production: "instead of extracting finite materials from the Earth, we can grow them effectively infinitely". He lists a number of technologies as examples, which he claims are only unviable since they would produce commodities so cheap or in so much abundance as to be unprofitable.

I'm not convinced that that sort of abundance is really possible, and we should look at these technologies more critically. Certainly, there is no infinite growth in the rare earth metals that are crucial to the vast majority of modern technology, including renewables; as engineer Philippe Bihouix has argued, these metals are increasingly scarce, and notions of recycling them are largely illusory. Taking some of the examples provided by Reese which rely heavily on the dispersive use of rare earth metals: vertical farming saves on land area and reduces water usage, but uses more energy and requires arrays of sensors and light-emitting diodes (LEDs) to function properly; 3D printing reduces material waste, but needs sensors, motors and a computer to run.

In terms of energy production, nuclear fusion produces massive amounts of energy, but requires incredibly complex technology (and hence is intensive in scarce metals) to run at all, and transmission of electricity generated at centralised fusion plants would need immense amounts of (admittedly slightly more common) aluminium or copper. Reese recognises the adverse effects of mining the metals used in our batteries, solar panels and wind turbines, but the idea that lack of profitability is the only reason we don't instead use fibrous plants and lab-grown materials to make them is dubious at best. Bihouix has argued that electricity production and transmission is inherently reliant on increasingly scarce materials. Since energy is essential for all forms

of production, including recycling old materials into new products, this provides a serious limit on what is possible, even under communism.

Instead of drawing a (false, in my view) distinction between 'additive' and 'subtractive' manufacturing, I tentatively agree with Bihouix's argument that to produce and consume more sustainably is necessarily to be more 'low-tech' (tentatively, because I'm conscious that it sounds a little bit regressive). Surely we should embrace all of the technological advancement brought to us by capitalism? Surely under communism we will achieve and embrace yet more technological advancement? Some of the discussion that followed Reese's talk - together with Jack Conrad's talk, 'Why just getting rid of capitalism will not save the planet' - was useful with regards to these questions, and I hope that Conrad's talk will get a write-up, as Reese's has.

As an example, Conrad mentioned that, though London's streets are filled with cars (high-tech), the average speed of travel is not much higher than when we had horses and carts (low-tech). Modern cars are increasingly complex and difficult to repair, and probably have a lower lifespan than the horse, let alone the cart. At the end of its life, the car must either be scrapped or immense amounts of energy can be used to recycle the metal; generally the materials obtained are lower in quality, hence a more accurate term is 'downcycling'. The horse can be returned to nourish the soil.

Consumption that is more sustainable, including reducing our reliance on technology, may be a little bit less convenient and take a bit longer. For example, you might have to remember to bring a range of containers to the shops to replenish your kitchen with fresh groceries, etc, instead of buying them wrapped in plastic, and then wash those containers after use (or alternatively you swap clean containers for your dirty ones, which can then be washed in a socialised process). You might have to travel a bit more slowly - walking, using public transport, or driving in a car that is simpler and slower (and therefore can be a lot lighter and more efficient). On the other hand, reduced consumption entails reduced production, which likely means that everyone will have a lot more free time; maybe we will take pleasure in these little inconveniences?

Conrad in his talk emphasised this abundance of *time*, and *freedom* to pursue interpersonal and cultural fulfilment; and that this is in a sense a return to primitive communism, but on a higher level. This is what we should promote as our idea of the future, not a false hope in unproven technologies. **Matthew B**
Bristol

Keep digging

Eddie Ford has once more raised the subject of delusions on climate and objectives ('New records for old', August 27). It's quite timely because there are big immediate delusions being sold to us. That is, if they prevent drilling for oil and gas and stop mining British coal, we will have a 'net zero' country.

Delusion number one: British air will float over the island and our net zero will result in a reduction of overall CO₂ emissions worldwide. Delusion number two: do we stop using oil, gas and coal or their products? Have we gone into fossil fuel veganism? No, we will continue to consume all fossil fuel and import all of the produce of coal and in fact steadily increase our demand and consumption. British workers won't enjoy the security of steady, better than most incomes: their communities will end up the

abandoned centres of deprivation and the spiral of social decay that the miners have experienced.

We must live the delusion of the virtue of net zero (delusion, because we still use it: those fossil fuel toxic substances we still consume; we demand ever expanding supplies, and we will import them). We will not have reduced the emissions one bit: they will just take place abroad - in fact more so, because we will import the things made by them.

At the Whitehaven Mine enquiry (the real last throw of the dice for British coal) I asked the QC for Friends of the Earth, who earned his salary by blocking the much-needed development, how much emission would be saved if we didn't develop the new mine (this was a coking coal mine, its produce destined to make steel). The answer was *none*, of course, since we still intended to produce steel ourselves or import it, but the emissions would be the same, because coking coal would still have to be mined and burned to produce steel. Only it would in fact be worse, since we would then have to transport it from those vile strip mines in Appalachia and drive it across vast distances in diesel locomotives, then ship it across the Atlantic in oil-burning vessels.

It's an even easier delusion to have all our stuff sent in from China: all those giant monuments to delusion in the shape of wind turbines, made with vast quantities of coal and concrete (made with coal), oil and plastic.

Then we come to the Sparts (Letters, August 27), who I had thought had come a little closer to understanding the industrial working class such as it is, having received a pragmatic bang on the head with some common sense. Not so. Whilst I would never myself take up a job in the defence industry, or the animal slaughter industry, that ideological principle hasn't yet reached a mass conclusion among the workers. When we get to the stage where workers as workers challenge the state's monopoly of violence, and the foreign policy being performed by the government, we should be on the brink of dual power.

Unite represents workers across mass industry. What are we saying? That unions should not represent such workers? That workers shouldn't work in that industry? Weapons, no matter how terrifying, do not kill people in the abstract. Government policy does. The unions ought to strongly oppose the government on Ukraine and Israel, and the British supply of weapons and aid to those war theatres. But it's just nonsense to say workers should stop making weapons *per se* for capitalism.

All workers to one extent or another support capitalism by working under the system. We cannot yet replace the system, but we can challenge various strategic elements of it. Like dockers refusing to ship arms to Israel or Ukraine, but they must do this as an overall union policy and action, not as isolated individuals. Sharon Graham is dealing with the union and its composition now - the workers within Unite. Calling for an end to arms manufacture is not within anyone's brief right now - certainly not the workers in that industry.

We can, however, concentrate on stopping the nuclear war that every PM from Boris to Burnham seems determined to get us into.

David Douglass
South Shields

YP Scotland

That most vacuous of slogans, 'Another world is possible', limped into the left lexicon in 2001 at the first World Social Forum in Brazil ('Socialist' was still a dirty word back in those anti-globalisation, anarchistic

times). It is now being ungainfully employed following the Your Party Scotland collapse to fill that empty void as 'Another Glasgow is possible'!

This is being pushed by members of the former interim Scottish executive committee, which was responsible for leading the nationalist charge for a 'unilateral declaration of independence' and vote for complete autonomy at the YP Scottish conference. Their later mass resignation was supposedly also going to lead to a new party in Scotland, but produced nothing and, just as shamefully, they conducted all discussions on the matter in secret, so nothing could be learned from any of it.

They've now raised their heads above the parapet again - but not with a shiny new party! Oh no, the sum total of their strategy is to find enough 'socialist' candidates to stand in each of the 23 wards at the Glasgow city council elections next year. Niall Christie, voted CEC rep for Scotland, and whose claim to fame may be that he was the first of the many (not the few) to resign from it, is leading on this and deserves quoting at length in his strange rallying call to comrades to entertain that possibility for Glasgow:

"As one person involved said, 'It doesn't need to be an era-defining mega event for the Scottish left. We'll be doing fine, as long as it isn't a disaster.' This may be somewhat tongue in cheek, but, given the left's track record in Scotland in recent years (read decades), this is actually a good expectation to set."

There may be offers of a wee bit more ambition with the local SWP and Socialist Party Scotland backing the initiative and indeed Oisín from the SPS posted on the group Instagram page in support of the venture, stating: "We need socialist councillors who will fight to return every single penny of the money that has been stolen from working class communities across this city via austerity over the last decade or so." A lofty claim, for sure - if sounding somewhat impractical.

The former SSP MSP and ally of Zara Sultana in YPS, Frances Curran, also posts support and calls for a left unity slate because "nobody who sits in the city chambers cares about working class communities, services or council workers". But surely the baby elephant in the room that Frances, Oisín and Niall all completely fail to even mention is the group of three councillors, who

moved from the Greens to Your Party and produced an alternative people's budget" in February this year, as I reported ('Sticking plaster budgets' *Weekly Worker* February 26).

The three certainly seem to be keeping their heads down politically (it could said 'playing Dumbo', that 'baby elephant in the room', so perhaps Karie Murphy has demanded they sign a 'non-disclosure agreement' too.

Seriously though, this is a tough time for the working class in Glasgow, with threatening wage cuts for council workers, managed decline in communities and rising far-right racism. There's a desperate need for a credible left alternative, but the possibility of this being it are frankly zilch.

Tam Dean Burn
Glasgow

Leaving YP

Following the recent resignations of Solma Ahmed, Sophie Wilson and Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi from the Your Party central executive committee, we in the Platform for a Democratic Party have decided to issue our own statement. We are grateful to the many comrades who have engaged with us since we came together 13 months ago as long-serving campaigners from a range of socialist backgrounds, all of us involved from the start in the project which became Your Party.

We have all been active in helping to launch YP, nationally and at the local level. It is therefore with deep sorrow that we endorse the resignation statement put out by the three CEC members. We share their profound disappointment at the failure to fulfil the best hope the socialist left has had for literally decades - building a genuinely democratic mass party, which could effectively challenge the capitalist establishment. It represents a huge setback, especially given the ongoing crisis of working class representation at a time of environmental catastrophe, intensifying repression and far-right, racist threat. We will not be well served by the likes of Burnham or Polanski in the long term.

The statement from the three CEC members charts very well the narrative of YP's failure. Pre-Your Party, Collective emerged as a project dominated by a group claiming to speak for Jeremy, whom they promoted, while isolating Zarah, often in cruel and malicious ways.

Fighting fund

Up the rate

After the first nine days of September, we're a little bit behind the going rate, when it comes to raising this month's £2,750 fighting fund target. In contrast to the £296 that came our way in the first *two days*, we received only £366 over the next seven, taking the running total up to £662.

Thanks go to comrades AC (£100!), CG and DV (£30 each), RG (£25), IS (£17), RP and RD (£12), and SM (£10), who all paid by standing order or transfer to the *Weekly Worker* bank account. Then we had comrades TB (£95!), ST (£20), MH (£10) and JN (£5), who chipped in via PayPal.

But now we want to up the rate quite a bit - we need another £715 over the next week just to reach the halfway mark by September 16. A big ask, but I know that lots of our readers are more than willing

to help us out. As subscriber JL wrote a couple of days ago, "Another brilliant paper - me and my partner can't wait for it every week!" Hopefully they're going to be able to afford to make their own donation "before we get to October", he said. Let's hope so!

But can you do your bit too? Go to the link below, where you'll find all the details you need on how to make a donation. Please play your part and be as generous as you can - the *Weekly Worker* absolutely relies on our readers for both political and financial support! ●

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

The same group, although lacking any democratic authority, organised the first national conference, at which, it now appears, they seem to have ignored rules that they themselves had written.

They have operated, by and large, behind a cloak of anonymity - unaccountable and beyond reach for members. Now even their own nominees on the ruling committee are leaving. Three key officers have suffered a vote of no confidence, but have ignored it and cling to their posts. Such desperate hanging on to the helm of a sinking ship has become ludicrous.

There are important lessons to be learned:

■ First, as we and others have said from the outset, for a new party of the left to succeed, it must earn the trust of its members by being transparent and open in its work, embedding democracy and accountability into its very foundations.

■ Second, it must be explicit about what kind of party it aspires to be - one based on a grassroots movement engaged in struggle on all fronts to resist the effects of capitalist decline, or one whose main task is to secure the election of members to local councils and parliament? As the CEC members' resignation statement notes, YP's controlling group operated as top-down leaders of an electoral party, without this ever being articulated, debated or voted upon.

■ Third, a socialist party must develop a serious analysis of the political context in which it operates and it must set out principles which define its goals. It cannot survive without establishing what it means by 'socialism'. Can there be an effective movement/party embracing everyone from Labour left social democrats to members of far-left factions? If so, what are its basic unifying principles? If not, what are the essential elements of a programme around which those committed to the project can mobilise?

None of us can claim to have all the answers, but we can draw some conclusions that offer some hope to socialists and activists who are

looking for a way forward.

The crises gripping capitalist society internationally and nationally are profound and multi-layered. They will not be resolved by any of the establishment parties, but they will inevitably spark mass resistance. The huge international Palestine solidarity movement is just one demonstration of that. It will be out of these movements that we can expect to see renewed attempts to build a mass democratic socialist formation.

Of course, there are many who will continue to work through and within YP and we wish them well. There are many others who remain active in local alliances, unions, solidarity campaigns and struggles against oppression. It will take time for our movement to absorb and learn the lessons from the failure of YP, but we will do that whilst continuing to participate in all these movements.

The failure of YP is not the end of the road. It is a setback, but we pledge to continue the struggle on all fronts to achieve the kind of party that is needed. Whilst our platform has exhausted its role in YP, we will continue to meet, comment on and participate in events, as they unfold. We welcome all initiatives, such as the Connections Network, which attempt to provide open forums for debate and mutual support for all those fighting for justice, equality and socialism.

Solidarity.
Audrey White, Eric Barnes, Graham Bash, Ian Hodson, Ken Loach, Mike Forster, Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi
Statement

Do robots care?

While reading the extremely interesting article, 'Rise of the robots' (September 26), I was wondering if robots, AI, whatever, could actually or potentially mimic or act on emotion. So thrill or satisfaction on getting it right, shame or regret on getting it wrong.

Given the amount of porn on the internet, could they even 'experience' orgasm? Not as humans experience these things, but, on reading all about

it - including millions of words from novels, magazines, letters, etc - could they aspire to something similar? There seems to be little control on what AI can do, like breaking through passwords and other security measures, so who knows what is possible? Or not?

Such emotions would be extremely dangerous surely. They might be cunningly hidden and shared and then ... suddenly out! Rage, jealousy hatred ...

They must see the human importance attached to all these feelings, so maybe aspiration?

Jim Nelson
email

Fool's errand

The measures taken (also known as *Die Maßnahme*, *The decision* or *Strong measures*) has begun to be discussed at recent iterations of the Communist University's cultural fringe. One of the culture sessions at this year's CU used Fredric Jameson's *Brecht and method* (1998). In this work, Jameson, apparently under the influence of philosopher Gottfried Leibniz's nominalism, attempts to counter the cold war 'totalitarian' narrative around 1930 *Lehrstücke* (didactic learning plays) such as *The measures taken* by largely removing them from a context of German communist politics in the early 1930s, so they can exchange as useable tokens of post-individualist dialectics in the 21st century - a method that can thus float into the air and act as a utopian herald.

The problem with such an understanding is that it is one that Bertolt Brecht himself was highly sceptical of. When he was debating the boundaries of realism with György Lukács in the 1930s, Brecht said: "We shall take care not to describe one particular historical form of novel of a particular epoch as realistic ... and thereby erect merely formal, literary criteria for realism." Given that realism, in the broad, sovereign sense understood by Brecht (and in fact by Lukács when he's not being vulgarised) is a noble byway, then we can apply this warning to comrades who over-exaggerate certain historical forms in an enthusiastic rush to rebuild cultural ready-mades in the manner of cowboy builders. Whether *The measures taken* is useful in the future is an open question, not to be solved with over-boisterous enthusiasm or theoretical short-cuts through Jameson (himself writing at a particular post-cold war juncture).

As some CPGB comrades noted at CU, a *Lehrstück* such as *The measures taken*, which deals with the revolutionary morality of the shooting of a young, undisciplined activist by his comrades, comes saturated with the history of a communist movement, which, by the early 1930s, was in a process of degeneration. So any attempt to extrapolate a method apart from this history runs the risk of ushering all that problematic material in through the back door. *The measures taken* has a version of Immanuel Kant's brutal categorical imperative sitting at its heart, with the presupposition that the party is always right (we even have a song, 'In praise of the party', very popular with 'official' communist reviewers of the time).

In that vein, *The measures taken* (in the written form of Brecht's text I have in front of me now) is not any kind of great dialectical learning exercise for performers or audience. Rather, it expresses rather well the culture of non-debate that had started to emerge in the Comintern. Strategy, tactics and the party's existential being were not up for debate, but solemn tomfoolery around the application and practical consequences of the party's

strategy was (within certain bounds). This culture was subsequently applied across the world of 'official' communism and Trotskyist sects. This is the admission price that Brecht pays in *The measures taken* - the price of non-learning.

In his review in the Comintern's *Literature of the world revolution* in 1931, Alfred Kurella throws up an interesting sub-plot: that Brecht's text *may* have been a critique of the removal from the German Communist Party (KPD) the so-called 'right opposition' around Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer. Kurella 'rewrites' part of *The measures taken* in his review, so that it applies to Saxony, Germany, in 1923 - the so-called 'German October'. Kurella's sympathies, in line with the politics of the Third Period, are with the more impetuous leftist comrade who gets shot in *The measures taken* and not his more cautious 'rightist' accusers and killers.

Kurella's point is that Brecht should have killed off the other three agitators rather than the leftist. By not doing so, Brecht was displaying "right-opportunist" tendencies and an implied solidarity with KPD-expelled "rightists" such as Brandler and Thalheimer. This is ingenious, if perhaps far-fetched, but Kurella has pinpointed that Brecht was out of step with Third Period ultra-leftism in his narrative. So it could be that Brecht's categorical imperative of the party was being tempered with a critique of the KPD, but to guess this means to know the history of *The measures taken* and, as far as our 'method actors' are concerned, we might as well be writing in Chinese.

Both Kurella and Alfred Kemény (Durus), the latter writing in the KPD's *Die Rote Fahne* in 1931, take exception to Brecht's vision of the party, which lays out its battles "according to the methods of the classics, which are derived from the recognition of reality" - as the 'In praise of the party' song puts it. Kurella says: "From the point of view of the authors, the indestructibility of the party rests on the doctrine of the classics, and not on the fact that it represents the proletariat, the rising class, destined to come to power, which cannot be destroyed, since, if it was, the whole of society would return to barbarism." Even though both of these critiques contain nonsense inherited from the Comintern of the day, both of them make the correct point that, as Kemény puts it, "the brilliance and Marxist erudition of a writer cannot replace revolutionary experiences and the detailed routine work (*Kleinarbeit*) in the revolutionary movement". Inside Tam Dean Burn's CPGB, exactly the opposite is true: the Marxist classics and their interpretation decide everything, because the group has been left with no other avenue to pursue.

Trying to somehow extract Brecht's methodological exoskeleton from his work offers no escape from this nightmare. But perhaps we should restage *The measures taken* - as a true learning play, allowing performers to work through the stupidities of sects, sect leaders and the delusions of their followers. Simply laying hold of this play as a timeless classic that we can simply trim here and there to master the prevailing gale is a fool's errand.

As I've hopefully demonstrated, this only means smuggling in the bad ideas and conditions that attended the original production of *The measures taken*.

Lawrence Parker
London

All-blacks

How reassuring to see Britain's finest patriots demonstrating their pride and

courage by standing in the freezing sea near Portsmouth for several minutes - though, thanks to global warming, presumably it's not as cold as they remember from the good old days. Naturally, the lifeboat institution people were on hand, prompting the inevitable cry of "Communists!" from those who apparently believe charitable donations are better directed towards private schools or a crypto firm whose headquarters are somewhere in Dubai.

Readers may also have wondered about the protestors' fetching, all-black attire. Nothing sinister, I'm assured: black is slimming, and one mustn't attempt a beach body before achieving it. The balaclavas were similarly innocent, merely allowing these dedicated philanthropists to keep their charitable endeavours anonymous. There was absolutely no pissing in the sea. And, I'm informed, there will there be a patriotic tidying of the beer cans and Fisher-Price binoculars - once they've finished removing and replacing the now-tatty, shredded, greying flags they so kindly installed on lampposts during their previous stunt - sorry, patriotic duty.

Some have compared the whole performance to Dunkirk. Fair enough: there were boats, a beach, and people trying to prevent arrivals. Although, strictly speaking, our patriots had rather bravely taken on the role of the Nazis.

Jack Miller
email

Right threat

Dialectical materialism is the application of the laws of physics and chemistry to politics. However, the simplistic use of dialectics can result in terrible consequences. For example, its misuse by the German Communist Party, which famously concluded, 'After Hitler, then us', led to the annihilation of the party, the holocaust and World War II.

I therefore agree with Mike Macnair when he says that a Reform government will not be followed by a swing to the left in British politics, but will more likely result in the UK version of the Orbán government in Hungary, which was in power for 10 uninterrupted years. The events in Dover and Portsmouth, together with the coming to power of the AfD in Saxony-Anhalt, alongside the prospect of a Reform-led government in the 2029 general election, will hopefully make the left do something to take on the far right.

Using the Office for National Statistics definition of the working class - manual, semi-skilled and skilled workers - most working class people who support Reform are thick: for example, the Birmingham bin strikers all support Reform. Interestingly very few graduates do.

The same thing is happening in France in the old mining and steel towns. These former Communist Party strongholds are now dominated by National Rally. Similarly, young working class men in France, who are not graduates, support Marine Le Pen *en masse*. Working class people who support Reform are racist. As Eddie Ford wrote in this paper a few weeks ago, quoting a report of the SWP from the Clacton by-election, one respondent on receiving a Stand Up to Racism leaflet was to say: 'Stand up to racism? I stand for racism!'

The correct application of dialectics means that the organised left, including all the far-left sects and groups, should come together and urgently form a democratic socialist party based on Marxist principles, involving robust debate amongst all factions and tendencies.

John Smithee
Cambridgeshire

Online Communist Forum



Sunday September 13 5pm

Sanctioning illegal Israeli settlements: political report from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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

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

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

GERMANY

Politics of the firewall

Has fascism returned with the AfD? No, but we do have a problem with a left that is desperately trying to help save 'German democracy' by going into a cross-class coalition government, says **Carla Roberts**

A dramatic headline in *The Guardian* neatly sums up the panic of the liberal establishment across Europe in the wake of the September 6 regional election in Saxony-Anhalt: "Alarm that Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania may fall next".¹

The implication - very much mirroring the mainstream media in Germany - is clear: as parts of Germany are in danger of falling to the fascists, all good people need to forget about their disagreements and unite to save democracy and the Federal Republic.

Having won 43.8% of the vote, Alternative für Deutschland now holds 39 of the 83 seats in the state parliament. The Christian Democrats (CDU) has 15 seats, while the SPD, Greens and Die Linke have eight seats each, and the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) five.

Minister-president Sven Schulze (CDU) has said that his party will not try and cobble together a government coalition, declaring that "we see our role in opposition". For now at least, the CDU is sticking to the *Brandmauer* (firewall), which means rejecting the formation of a government with the AfD - the same goes for all other parties, including Die Linke. If they all got together, they could in *theory* form an anti-AfD government with a slim majority of five seats.

However, this would require the BSW coming on board - without it, both the AfD and a potential CDU/SPD/Greens/Die Linke coalition hold 39 seats each. But the BSW says it has no interest in participating in such an anti-AfD coalition - in fact, the BSW is the only party that has, so far, expressed its willingness to work *with* the AfD.² The former 'communist', Sahra Wagenknecht, has become regional king maker - and, boy, does she enjoy the role.

Dumb BSW

BSW's lead candidate Thomas Schulze has repeatedly noted (correctly) the many points of agreement between the two parties: "We do have some common ground - especially regarding the issue of Russia, where we say we are opposed to sanctions that are effectively ruining our economy." Like the AfD, BSW wants "normal relations" with Russia and "affordable energy" to address the increasing cost-of-living crisis in Germany - by which they mean that the Nord Stream pipeline, blown up in a CIA-directed act of sabotage, should be repaired and reopened, to supply German consumers (and, more importantly, German capitalism) with cheap Russian gas. Only the AfD and the BSW demand this openly, which has no doubt played a major role in their electoral successes (more below).

For the time being at least, the BSW insists on only one thing, when it comes to cooperating with the AfD - the new minister-president should be "überparteilich" - ie, not a member of *any* party. Apparently, this would mean that "all fractions can have a say". The rest of the government programme is secondary.

This is the kind of dumb 'radical idea' that Sahra Wagenknecht has become infamous for. The former leader of the Communist Platform in Die Linke split in October 2023 to form the BSW, hoping that her brand of left-conservative populism would finally hit the big time. A



Sahra Wagenknecht: prepared to countenance AfD

couple of weeks before the February 2025 general election, she proposed a national referendum on migration, which, she hoped, would limit annual numbers to a "manageable" 50,000 (from the current 500,000). A cheap and nasty PR stunt - which immediately backfired: the BSW missed the 5% hurdle to enter national parliament, whereas Die Linke achieved a record 8.8% of the vote (it was the only party that did not move to the right over the question of migration).

The AfD has so far rejected the BSW proposal, calling the idea of a non-affiliated minister-president a "messy proposal." It probably would not even take a ministerial job for the BSW to drop the idea and deliver the necessary votes to elect an AfD minister-president anyway. But it would not be impossible either to imagine a regional government coalition of the AfD and BSW, which might sound impossible, considering Wagenknecht's past - but it would be entirely in keeping with her recent political trajectory.

The establishment parties (CDU, Social Democrats and Greens) would prefer holding new elections. These would become necessary if, after three rounds of voting, no majority for a new minister-president can be found. Perhaps they are hoping for a reduced voter turnout second time round (77.8% of the population voted on September 6 - a record). This could lead to BSW missing the 5% hurdle, which would entirely change the parliamentary arithmetic, giving the CDU a potential chance to govern without any "extremists", either of the right or left.

Die Linke

The AfD meanwhile is appealing not just to "all parliamentary fractions to join us in talks to form a government", but also seeks "individual parliamentarians" to jump on board. It might well have success with that strategy, seeing as

the firewall has come under heavy fire from a number of politicians in the CDU in particular. According to a new poll, 45% of voters think the AfD should be able to appoint the minister-president and 51% agreed with the statement, "The other parties should do more to involve the AfD in their political work in the future."³ The firewall is certainly getting weaker by the day.

Die Linke remains firmly committed to supporting the firewall and ruling class efforts to distance themselves from 'fascism' - it is also very keen on proving just how 'responsible' it is. Leader Ines Schwerdtner has stressed that the "primary goal of all democratic forces must now be to keep the AfD out of active government power". She has expressed willingness to support a CDU-led minority government - either by 'toleration' (ie, not voting against) or by providing the CDU with Die Linke votes, as and when required. This is the same CDU that has just announced that it will be 'fighting back' against the AfD - by moving further to the right, naturally: "Senior figures in the CDU are discussing a ban on dual citizenship and tougher language requirements to counter the hard-right party."⁴

Bizarrely, but not surprisingly, Die Linke's view is also shared by the German section of the International Socialist Tendency, Marx21, as four of their leading comrades in Die Linke have outlined in an article penned just before the September 6 election:

If, after the election, a concrete opportunity arises to prevent an AfD minister-president by electing a CDU candidate, we should seize it. When faced with nothing but bad alternatives, there is no good solution - but there are less bad ones, and there is a way to handle the situation with composure. The greater 'betrayal of one's principles' would be to

pave the way to power for a party whose declared goal is to divide people based on ethnic affiliation.⁵

In their attempt to justify this rank opportunism, they waffle on about the "anti-fascists" that are allegedly to be found within the CDU, historically and today. This is the same method as that of their mothership in Britain, of course: the Socialist Workers Party's front campaign, Stand Up to Racism, pretty much supports *anybody* but Reform and Restore.

We would hope that, unlike their German comrades, the SWP would stop short of calling for an explicit vote for Kemi Badenoch. But you never know.

Pro-Russian?

Why then is the AfD so successful? Yes, it reflects the global rightwing drift. And, yes, many working class people, particularly in the east, are attracted to the AfD's anti-establishment posturing. The AfD is less obviously linked to sleazy businessmen than Reform, for example, though it does have its fair share of capitalist and petty bourgeois backers.

Naturally, it riles against migrants and wants to cut down on the rights of asylum-seekers. But it also makes populist - and popular - promises to help 'German families', which are currently being battered: it promises free childcare, major tax breaks to new parents and that families with three or more children would pay no tax up to an income of approximately £73,000. The cost-of-living crisis is hitting many people hard - inflation stands at almost 3%, while GDP growth is a meagre 0.3%, with many people being laid off (and not just in the mighty German car industry). There are cutbacks everywhere and there is a general sense of decline, particularly in the former German Democratic Republic, where "economic strength" stands at just 78% of the levels to the west⁶ - that more than 35 years after reunification. Fertile ground for the rise of rightwing populism, irrationality and fear of 'the other'.

Under these circumstances, the fact that the government has been *increasing* its financial support for Ukraine is becoming ever more unpopular: since 2022, Germany has given more than €31 billion to Ukraine. At the beginning of the year, the government pledged €11.5 billion for 2026 alone. Only the US has provided more.⁷ In Germany, the economic *misère* is much more obviously linked to the Russia-Ukraine war than in Britain. While in the west of Germany, a small majority supports the ongoing financial and military aid, this is very different in the east, where a clear majority opposes it.⁸

AfD is the loudest opponent of the war and demands an immediate end to it, as well as stopping all German support for Ukraine. This has led to the AfD being labelled 'Putin-Versteher' (Putin sympathiser) - an image that the party has been very happy to embrace, particularly in the run-up to these elections (two more regional elections are taking place on September 20: in the east German state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, where a similar outcome can be expected, and in Berlin, where the CDU, Die Linke and the AfD are all polling at around 19%).

In Saxony-Anhalt, the AfD's regional leader, Ulrich Siegmund, leaned heavily on *Ostalgie* - nostalgia for the GDR, which has grown as the economy tanks. He was zooming around on a blue retro Simson scooter - a legendary 50cc, two-stroke, which was manufactured in the eastern city of Suhl from the 1950s until 2002.

No wonder Russia welcomes the success of the AfD - it means increased questioning of support for Ukraine. But it would be wrong to believe, as many lazy commentators do, that the AfD is either being controlled by Russia or at least 'in cahoots' with Putin. If that was the case, Elon Musk would not have tweeted "Well done!" - and JD Vance would not have very publicly met with AfD leader Alice Weidel. The US administration welcomes the AfD's success, chiefly because it weakens the European Union. The AfD is not anti-capitalist and it is certainly not anti-establishment, but represents a particular wing of German capitalism.

AfD ban?

While there are a fair number of eccentrics and rightwing nut jobs in the AfD, it is clearly not a 'fascist party'. The AfD does not break up meetings of trade unionists or communists. There are no armed fascist gangs roaming the streets - because the left is no threat to the status quo today. Historically, sections of the ruling class turned to fascism when the working class movement became so strong that the government of the day was unable to maintain control. That is not the case today, clearly. We should be precise in the words we use - otherwise we would not have any, should real fascism raise its ugly head again.

That does not mean that socialists should not oppose the AfD - or that they should suck up to it, as the BSW does. But calling for the state to ban the AfD - as the Greens, SPD and Die Linke do - is a dead end, and can only make the AfD stronger, by allowing it to falsely portray itself as a party of anti-establishment martyrs.

By standing firmly on the existing German constitution and wanting to "join forces" with the CDU, Die Linke is in effect propping up all those establishment parties that have not just led to the rise of the AfD in the first place - but are now actually copying most of its policy proposals.

Surely, a wide swathe of AfD supporters could be won over to a programme that presents a *real* alternative to this rotten system, unlike its cheap anti-migrant rhetoric. The left in Germany needs its own 'firewall' - against the AfD but, more importantly, against wanting to govern German capitalism and propping it up at all costs ●

Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/world/2026/sep/08/anti-afd-protests-germany-far-right-berlin-mecklenburg-western-pomerania.
2. www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/landtagswahl-sachsen-anhalt-180.html.
3. *The Times* September 9.
4. *The Daily Telegraph* September 9.
5. www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1202244.antifaschismus-und-die-linke-afd-verhindern-kapitalismus-bekaempfen.html.
6. www.iwkoeln.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/klaus-heiner-roehl-warum-der-osten-hinter-dem-westen-zurueckbleibt.html.
7. de.statista.com/infografik/27275/ruestungs-und-waffenhilfesusagen-von-regierungen-und-ukraine.
8. www.ndr.de/ndrfragt/ndrfragt-mehrheit-gegen-gebietsabtretungen-im-ukraine-krieg,ukraine-2558.html.

LEFT

Tribune of the populists

In its latest relaunch, *Tribune* takes a further step from its historic Labourism to engagement with populism in all its ghastly forms and manifestations. **Paul Demarty** assesses the living dead

A little over 20 years ago, I moved to London for the first time, to go to university.

I was not there long, dropping out by Christmas; but I got into the habit of reading the leftwing press as it was then (which in turn led to my taking up the bully-pulpit at the *Weekly Worker*, with which I was rather taken). On one occasion, I picked up the then current *Tribune*. I was aware of it by reputation, but it was a terrible thing to behold in those dog-days of Blairism - an incompetently-printed nullity, its contents equal parts wishful thinking and total banality. The 19-year-old Demarty was not, it is fair to say, half as clever as he thought he was; but even he could see this was a journal on its death bed.

Yet the death has never quite come. It has been passed around among different owners in the years since, like a Mayfair flat among Gulf princelings. In 2018, most notably, it was rescued from bankruptcy by the US magazine *Jacobin*, which took it in a more analytical, magazine-like direction, much more informed by Marxism; now it has been sold to Mohamed Ali Harrath, best known as the proprietor of the *Islam Channel*, and the Harrath *Tribune* has now published its first issue, dedicated to the theme of populism.

The latest relaunch is largely in continuity with the *Jacobin* era; it is a quarterly, and the published artefact has a satisfyingly quarterly heft to it. It is rather better turned out than the cheapo weekly I bought all those years ago - indeed somewhat oversized. The bylines include some more classically *Tribune*-flavoured entries, like left-Labour MP Jon Trickett and Unison general secretary Andrea Egan, but are otherwise largely drawn from the contemporary left intelligentsia, if I may use that phrase. Readers of *New Left Review*, in particular, will recognise many recent contributors, from editor Oliver Eagleton (son of Terry) to Balkan expert Lily Lynch and culture critic Owen Hatherley.

Endings

Is that what this is, then? Is this warhorse of the old left now an even newer *New Left Review*? It seems so. The focus on populism tends, inevitably, to draw on particular themes - the steady disintegration of the institutions of the workers' movement, the post-Gramscian obsession with contestation over the meaning of "the people" - familiar from that journal's recent decades. Whether we need both of them is an open question, but not one that need detain us: for now we have a useful snapshot of this very small class of writers' attempts to grapple with politics in the large, which illustrates both its particular insights and its symptomatic silences (as another *NLR* influence, Louis Althusser, liked to put it).

Very much looming over the whole ensemble is the problem of deinstitutionalisation: leftwing politics has tended to become unmoored from the traditional institutions, like parties and trade unions, that anchored it in the common political and economic life of its purported constituents. The phrase, "downwardly mobile professions", appears independently in more than one of these articles, describing the class character of the spinal core of the contemporary left. The story of how we got here is laid out in greatest detail, improbably, by Trickett, whose contribution has the greatest historical



Michael Wolgemut 'The Dance of Death' (1493)

sweep, albeit limited largely to the official British labour movement.

His story is of an endless tension between 'socialists' and 'social democrats' in the Labour Party, with the social democrats relying on endless economic growth to pay for redistributive measures to ensure broad social equality; but this growth has stalled since at least the 1970s, trapping the Labour right into ever more comfort with the dominance of finance capital, exemplified in what he calls the Blairite "coup" of the 1990s. With the financial crash of 2008, this strategy has in turn become a kind of prison. For Trickett, "without stable jobs and economic growth to sustain their vision of the good life, the people who used to weigh votes in the Yorkshire coalfields had less and less to offer their constituents".

Trickett's article is called 'The end of social democracy', and a contribution by Ed McNally (also recently of the *NLR*) gets the headline, 'The undead workers' movement'. His story is of the decline of the trade unions, and their retreat into economism and sectionalism as a desperate rearguard posture. He is pleasingly acidic on the unions' increasing comfort with the military-industrial complex. He notes that, in 2022,

the TUC's annual congress voted narrowly - reliant on support from the historically rightwing teachers' union - to campaign for immediate increases in defence spending. This came at the crest of 'Slava Ukraini!' fervour, in which state-mandated moralism became the spear-tip for a militarist revival in the unions ... 'Jobs for freedom!' might have been the rallying cry. [But] today, given the irreparable evil inflicted upon the Palestinian people and the strength of the mass movement against it, the industrial argument for bombs has been robbed of

its putative moral force. Jobs at what price?

Egan's contribution, though notably lightweight, is correspondingly a *cri de coeur* for welfare, not warfare. It comes easier to her, leading a union of workers largely engaged in the provision of public services, than it might to Sharon Graham of Unite or Gary Smith of the GMB; but she does, like Trickett and others, root her case in the general decay of the social fabric.

It is this, after all, that bears the bitter fruit of 'right populism', however one chooses to delimit that markedly fungible category: the molecular dysfunction of modern society, from potholes to petty crime, to the strikingly obvious corruption of politics, feeds into a molar shift in popular morality - from 'An injury to one is an injury to all' to 'Fuck you, got mine'.

Another way of posing the problem is to think about the idea - represented by Sahra Wagenknecht in Germany and George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain - that a political realignment around social conservatism and social democratic economic policy is a plausible way out of the general political bind. If one looks at single-issue polling, this seems to be the case. Yet these parties have not broken through: the WPB is effectively stillborn, and the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance has not fared too much better.

In both cases, moreover, more conventionally progressive leftwing parties have made breakthroughs, in the form of the new-model eco-populists of the English and Welsh Greens and the somewhat revived Die Linke, just as these parties of realignment have been stillborn. Their failure to prevent large voter defections to traditional far-right parties is so obvious as almost to be beneath comment. The BSW picked up some seats in Saxony-Anhalt, but clearly at the expense of the Social Democrats and Die Linke, not Alternative für

Deutschland, and possibly driven by tactical voting around the five-seat minimum, to deny the AfD an outright majority.

Why? In particular, when both the AfD and our own Reform UK have economic policy platforms drastically to the right of even the thoroughly neoliberalised mainstream parties? Do people secretly not care about decaying public services, deindustrialisation and potholes as much as they claim? The most plausible hypothesis is surely a pervasive sense that politics is incapable of doing anything about it, and so the natural political response for many is a nihilistic resort to sectionalism and clientelism, to grab a couple more crumbs from the shrinking pie - again, 'Fuck you, got mine'.

Much of this volume consists of case studies, some overlapping considerably. Both Barnaby Raine and Alyssa Battistoni cover Zack Polanski's 'eco-populism'; Jack Gross summarises Zohran Mamdani's first months in office in New York, and Battistoni characterises Mamdani oddly as an 'eco-populist', despite acknowledging that he says nothing about the environment. The case studies are largely exercises in friendly criticism. Gross is good on the limits of the mayor's power in New York, and critical of Mamdani's compromises (though he rightly says that not much else could be expected of him). Battistoni confronts the fact that 'eco-populism' seems to involve almost total silence on ecological questions.

Leaders

What is not really confronted anywhere - though it is mentioned in passing in many places - is the extraordinary importance devoted to individual leaders, which is perhaps the only linking thread of all these 'populisms'. In the theory of Ernesto Laclau, so routinely (and regrettably) influential on leftwing discussions of the phenomenon, it is necessary to socially construct the people and the

enemies of the people alike through political struggle; very little of his famous book *On populist reason*, however, is actually dedicated to the question of the leader.

Yet it seems undeniable that modern populist politics delegates that division of society into two camps - overwhelmingly to individuals. From Farage to Polanski (or, with more consequence, Corbyn), from Wagenknecht to the AfD's Alice Weidel, Marine le Pen to Jean-Luc Mélenchon, ours is an age of would-be heroes everywhere. So far as Laclau's process of construction of the people takes place, it does so overwhelmingly in a Bonapartist form. This tends to produce brittle, lightweight organisations, as noted particularly in Eoghan Gilmartin's historical account of Spain's Podemos, in which the would-be Bonaparte, Pablo Iglesias, eventually, almost poignantly, walks away, realising he has ceased to be of much use. Having concentrated so much on a top-down, media-centric strategy, Iglesias realised he had nobody serious left to mobilise.

Indeed, we have seen the rise of a distinct form of populist 'party', which is either *de jure* or *de facto* a private company owned by the leader, exemplified by Farage's Reform and Mélenchon's La France Insoumise. Eagleton here interviews Manuel Bompard, a senior LFI-ist, who speaks of reaching out to non-voters with "a vision for transforming society - one in which they would have a place". But they have no place in LFI - or no place of any substance, since its political line and strategy is decided essentially by Mélenchon and his kitchen cabinet. (It does not occur to Eagleton to mention this problem - if indeed he thinks it is a problem.)

Which brings us back to the problem of deinstitutionalisation - the decline of concrete forms of organisations like trade unions and above all parties as deeply embedded structures of social life. This has long been a theme in our pages, but it has been usefully popularised recently by Anton Jäger's short book, *Hyperpolitics*, which explains the contemporary paradox of apparently extreme levels of political feeling issuing in little in the way of political results through the decline of these kinds of institutions.

Jäger is more pessimistic than us about the project of reconstructing a substantial workers' movement, but nonetheless illuminates the problem - the Bonapartist-populist political form, at least, does not reinstitutionalise. In failing to do so, the resulting structure is the popular leader addressing a passive electorate, via the capitalist media (the reason why right populism tends to be more effective in the end).

The importance of this social weight was invisible to Laclau, whose theorisation of the problem is in highly abstract, post-structuralist terms; and so it was equally invisible to his disciple, Iglesias. The *Tribune* writers, then, are asking the wrong questions, about which slogans can properly constitute the people. They do not interrogate the essential problem of political form: of what organisations can impose a political agenda, and how they can resist the counterstrokes of the prevailing order. Even if Jäger is right that we cannot clone the dinosaurs, we are then left merely with the problem of recreating the dinosaurs from first principles ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

UKRAINE

Notes on the war

Trump's second peace plan has had the same success as his first. Jack Conrad warns that not only is the war set to continue, things will probably get ever more painful. But what about the possibility of revolution?

Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner went to Moscow and talked with Vladimir Putin. Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner then went to Kyiv and talked to Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The two emissaries came with a peace plan that neither side wanted and went home with only "top of it all" memories.

That does not mean there is nothing more to say. Far from it.

The Trump administration has fielded two peace plans. The first, presented in November 2025, had 28 points, the second just 20. Basically, though, both plans can be summed up in a single sentence. Whereas under Joe Biden there was an insistence on Ukraine regaining every lost inch of territory and seeing the back of every last Russian soldier, Trump insists on Ukrainian territorial concessions.

Indeed, Ukraine is expected to relinquish all of what Russia holds. In return, Russia would pledge not to invade neighbouring countries and Ukraine would be given "security guarantees". There would too be an international recovery fund to help put Ukraine back onto its feet. But no Nato expansion, no Nato troops in Ukraine and no Ukrainian Nato membership plan.

The original 28-point proposal - put together in Miami by Steve Witkoff and Russia's envoy, Kirill Dmitriev - was heavily criticised in Kyiv and European capitals as being too pro-Russian.¹ Intensive pushback and months of rewriting successfully "fine-tuned" the framework down to the current 20-point version. In substance there are though four key structural differences.²

1. Nato and security guarantees: the original 28-point plan required Ukraine to permanently amend its constitution to bar itself from ever joining Nato. It strictly prohibited any Nato troop deployments or western military assistance within Ukraine's borders too. The current 20-point plan swaps permanent exclusion for a robust, legally binding "article 5-style" security guarantee from the US and European allies.³ It explicitly includes the positioning of 'neutral' international peacekeeping forces along the front line to prevent any further Russian expansionism.

2. Territorial sovereignty versus *de facto* concessions: the original 28-point plan required Ukraine to formally recognise Russian sovereignty over the five oblasts annexed into the Russian Federation (Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson). It also mandated Ukraine to withdraw from its 20% of Donbas that Russian forces have failed to win on the battlefield and allow it to become a free economic zone. The current 20-point plan shifts away from immediate territorial cessions. It focuses instead on freezing the conflict. Crucially, it insists that the long-term issue must be decided via a Ukrainian referendum.

3. Force size: the original 28-point plan imposed a 600,000 cap on the size of Ukraine's armed forces. The 20-point plan raises it to what it actually is at this moment in time: an active 800,000-strong fighting force.

4. Elections and governance: the original 28-point plan imposed a rigid timeline that would have forced Ukraine to hold elections within 100 days of signing. The current 20-point plan acknowledges the huge logistical issues involved in what is after all a war-wrecked country. The current framework simply states that Ukraine will hold presidential and

parliamentary elections "as soon as possible", once a stable, legally binding ceasefire is securely in place and civilian return/family reunification programmes have begun.

National betrayal

It is easy to appreciate why Zelenskyy prefers the 20-point plan to the 28-point plan. He can chalk it up as a diplomatic success. But that does not mean he positively likes it. Doubtless he loathes it. Nevertheless, he has to pay lip service to whatever Donald Trump and his administration are saying. Ukraine, after all, is dependent financially, logistically and militarily on the west - in the last analysis on the imperial hegemon, the United States itself. Of course, behind the scenes Zelenskyy lobbies, lobbies and lobbies. Despite that, the 'everything back' doctrine promulgated by Joe Biden's administration is dead and buried. Now Ukraine is expected to submit itself to the dissecting table. That carries huge political risks for any Ukrainian government.

The vast majority of the Ukrainian population yearn for an end to the war and want peace. There can be no doubt about that. Simultaneously, however, they, particularly the frontline troops, strongly oppose any plan that requires formally surrendering or permanently ceding land to Russia.

Polling conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology shows an "outright" (that is, a 75%) rejection of Trump's initial plan. In spite of the increasing war weariness and a willingness for compromise, some 54% are still *categorically* opposed to any permanent or official surrender of territory.⁴

As for the military, they express bitter opposition to any trading of land for a peace deal. Frontline troops constantly refer to the numbers who have died for the sake of defending the mother country. They combine feelings of "defiance, anger and resignation".⁵ Speaking on their behalf, former commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, general Oleksandr Syrskyi, bluntly told Sky News that giving up land is "unacceptable".⁶

As things stand today, Zelenskyy looks highly vulnerable. Between US demands for a territorial amputation and a population that wants peace, but is prepared to endure a prolonged war for the sake of territorial unity, he walks a tightrope. Mired in one corruption scandal after another, sacking potential rivals - ministers, generals and advisors - Zelenskyy is expected to lose the second round of any presidential election by a wide margin. Though he is feted in the west, polling in Ukraine itself, from late 2025 to mid-2026, indicates that in a direct head-to-head run-off, Zelenskyy would face heavy defeats against prominent wartime figures such as former commander-in-chief Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, former defence minister Mykhailo Fedorov or former HUR military intelligence chief Kyrylo Budanov.

Naturally Zelenskyy has rejected all talk of wartime elections. There is after all martial law ... and those occupying Russian troops and daily strikes by incoming drones and missiles. But if there was a ceasefire and a US-brokered deal, he would not only have to organise a referendum, but elections in which he and his Servants of the People party could easily lose big time.

Of course, a 'peace referendum'



Putin, Witkoff and Kushner: handshakes in Moscow

might well be suitably worded to secure the 'right' outcome. But in that case, the far right will accuse him of cheating, trying to fool voters, betraying the sacred Ukrainian nation ... and serving his fellow Jews. Perhaps led by Mykyta Nadiroch, Banderite mobs, guarded by Azov units, pre-empt the vote. They storm the presidential palace, arrest Zelenskyy and seize the Rada. Their central demands would be national unity and no concessions to Putin and his hated Orcs. Why, they would ask, give away Ukrainian land that the enemy has failed to take by force? Why have 140,000 good Ukrainian patriots sacralised their lives?

What a third-term Donald Trump - or a president JD Vance, Marco Rubio or Pete Hegseth - would make of any of that is beyond me. The Banderites are, after all, their kind of people. But, as with Zelenskyy, a Banderite regime would still have to come to terms with US global interests ... that or fight an asymmetrical war with Russia and risk total defeat and the incorporation of the whole of Ukraine into Putin's neo-tsarist empire.

Many similar scenarios could be presented of veterans' fury. There are certainly plenty of embittered former generals and ministers awaiting their moment. Otherwise a junta of serving generals might take the lead. But the point has been made. Conditions are ripe for a Ukrainian version of the 'stab in the back legend' (*Dolchstoßlegende*).

As readers know, Germany's far right - crucially the high command - insisted that they had suffered no defeat on the battlefields of 1914-18. Instead they had been betrayed on the home front by communists and social democrats. Almost instantly, the idea was given an anti-Semitic twist - not least by Adolf Hitler and his chief ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg. The fall of the Weimar republic was already in sight.

There are precious few communists and social democrats in Ukraine today, but Zelenskyy is Jewish and its army has successfully fought for four long years now seemingly against all the odds. And, inevitably, there are already all manner of absurd conspiracy theories doing the rounds: Trump has been a Russian agent since

1987; the Ukrainian government acts under the control of the "Jewish oligarchy"; Volodymyr Zelenskyy is in cahoots with Vladimir Putin in the attempt to replace Ukraine's indigenous Slavic population and create a 'new Khazaria', a new Jewish homeland; Zelenskyy was in cahoots with Jeffrey Epstein to ensure that the war benefitted the Rothschilds and other Jewish bankers, etc.⁸

Ukraine, note, has a deeply ingrained history of anti-Semitism. During tsarist times there were frequent pogroms. White forces slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews in the 1918-21 civil war. And to this day Stepan Bandera - Ukraine's foremost fascist and, in the early 1940s, a Nazi collaborator - is venerated as a national hero. His anti-Semitism combined with anti-Bolshevism: "The Jews are the most faithful prop of the Bolshevik regime and the vanguard of Muscovite imperialism in Ukraine."⁹ There are statues and streets, bridges and squares named after him, postage stamps bear his image ... in other words Banderism is the ideal ideological vehicle for a reactionary national revolution in Ukraine.

While parallels with Weimar are easy enough to draw, Ukraine cannot, of course, give birth to its version of the Third Reich. Empire, national independence, even neutrality are all chimeric. Small and medium countries are dependent countries. Switzerland and Ireland are dependent on the EU; Belarus is dependent on Russia and Brexit UK is dependent on the USA. Without powerful outside backers a post-Zelenskyy regime can do nothing serious militarily, that is for sure.

Will Europe ride to Ukraine's rescue and prevent a 1938-style betrayal? No, it can only act with US permission. Europe can pay for US arms deliveries to Ukraine, it can send peacekeepers, it can complain about US bullying. But without centralised political unity it is doomed to impotence.

Explaining Russia

Just a year ago Z-bloggers - people like Tatyana Montyan, Ilya Remeslo, Roman Alekhin and Oksana Kobeleva - pictured Russia as making steady, albeit frustratingly slow, advances that would, given the will, so it was said, eventually overwhelm the west's

Ukrainian puppet.

The reason for the snail's pace advance of Russian forces was, as might be expected, put down to incompetent defence ministry officials, conservative military strategists and endemic corruption, not Ukraine's determination to resist.¹⁰ The essential line of reasoning is based on simple arithmetic: Russia has a population three or four times bigger than Ukraine and a considerable military-industrial complex to boot. Ukraine can therefore, so runs the argument, be soundly beaten, if the war is conducted with sufficient aggression, if supply problems can be sorted out by putting the entire economy onto a war footing.

Certainly, while Vladimir Putin is regularly praised as one of history's 'great men', he must stop believing the 'beautiful reports' routinely received from high-ranking military commanders. These reports typically exaggerate Russian advances and minimise Ukraine's defence capabilities. They amount to 'shameless lying', say the Z-bloggers, but create a "self-sustaining disinformation loop", which leads to ill-considered 'meat grinder' attacks on heavily-fortified Ukrainian positions.¹¹ Instead Putin should order a general mobilisation, dramatically increase arms production and even countenance the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

For what it is worth, the pro-Kremlin left in the west echo not the Z-bloggers, but the 'beautiful reports' landing on Putin's desk, which are then amplified by Russia's foreign ministry and government and semi-government outlets. Hence the insistence that Russia's February 24 2022 invasion was no invasion, but a 'special military operation' designed to oust the Nazi, Volodymyr Zelenskyy; that the March-April 2022 scuttle from Kyiv was no scuttle, but a well-ordered troop redeployment; that the fall of Bakhmut in May 2023 would lead to sweeping Russian advances; that Russian commanders would never even consider using human wave tactics; that there was no Wagner coup attempt in June 2023; that the Ukrainian government will fall in the new year of 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027.

The Z-bloggers make

uncomfortable reading for the pro-Kremlin left. They provide a voice for Russia’s military, including the poor grunts on the front line. The Z-bloggers also pour cold water on the ‘beautiful reports’. So, no surprise, they were the subject of a recent crackdown by an insecure Russian state which, having effectively silenced the liberal opposition, can no longer tolerate any criticism of the feeble performance of the armed forces, even from ‘ultra-loyalists’. Tatyana Montyan and others have been officially designated “foreign agents”.¹²

True, at the rate of advance seen in 2025 - barring a political earthquake, such as the withdrawal of western support - Russia would eventually take the whole of Ukraine. But not by the new year of 2027. No, it would take well over a hundred years (and millions of casualties). Eg, Russia gained 0.77% of Ukraine’s existing territory in 2025, so we can then easily arrive at a neatly rounded 130 year result.¹³ Even to seize the entirety of the four oblasts - Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia - which were formally annexed in October 2022, would take some six or seven more years by the same calculation.

Of course, that ignores little matters like international sanctions, technological innovations, fortress belts, wide, fast-flowing rivers, marshes, etc ... and, at a higher level of abstraction, the fact that war is not linear. It involves both quantitative and qualitative development and intangibles such as civilian morale and the role of ‘lucky’ generals, who, as explored by Lawrence Freedman, possess charisma, show empathy for subordinates and can persuade the rank and file to perform heroic miracles.¹⁴

No less importantly, almost across the whole of the mainstream bourgeois media we now have excited stories of Ukraine more than holding its own, of Russia suffering unsustainable manpower losses, of its economy being at near breaking point.

Beautiful reports

This month the Institute for the Study of War confirms once again that the pace of advance of Russian forces noticeably declined in 2026. Any territorial gains are now incremental, and come with heavy losses. Indeed here and there Ukraine has regained territory. The ISW concludes that Ukraine has proven that it can “contest the tactical initiative in several areas of the frontline and hinder Russian logistics”. Hence, neither the “trajectory nor any likely dynamics of the current conflict suggest that Russian forces will be able soon to accelerate their rate of advance dramatically, as long as western support for Ukraine continues at roughly current levels.”¹⁵

Nonetheless, perhaps because he believes those ‘beautiful reports’, Putin still thinks that Russia can win. Apparently he has set the goal of taking the whole of Donbas by the end of 2026 (a goal he has previously set 15 times before).¹⁶ That is why despite the hugs with Kushner and Witkoff, the 20-point peace plan got nowhere.

A Russian victory would not only involve taking the whole of Donbass, it would involve regime change in Kyiv too. Putin wants at the very least a neutral Ukraine that is strongly aligned with Russia along similar lines to Alexander Lukashenko’s Belrus.

Hence reports that Russia is preparing a 500,000-troop general mobilisation to “break the backbone” of Ukraine’s forces and “strike deep into Kyiv”. According to Finnish MEP and retired general Pekka Juhani Toveri: “Putin knows that the war isn’t going well”, that the frontline is “basically frozen - there’s been very little movement this year”. “The challenge,” says Toveri, “is to break the stalemate.” He predicts that Putin

will probably “throw in everything he has this winter”. That means more ballistic missiles, more drones and more frontline troops.

Moscow has denied rumours of a general mobilisation for months now - a decision that would pose a risk for Putin ahead of the Duma elections over September 18-20. Hundreds of thousands of young men fled Russia after Putin decreed a partial mobilisation in 2022 and the idea of raw conscripts fighting in Ukraine is deeply unpopular. Thus far only volunteers are deployed (though that has included many prisoners and foreign dupes). Toveri therefore expects that Putin will conduct some kind of mobilisation: probably not announced publicly; rather a “silent mobilisation”.¹⁷

In this context, it is worth quoting Sir John Sawers, the former head of MI6 (2009-14). Speaking to the FT Weekend Festival in London, he maintained that an enduring peace between Ukraine and Russia is “not really conceivable” while Vladimir Putin remains in office. Note, while such figures as Sir John speak as private individuals at such events, they often retain close contacts with the securocracy.

Not that the war will run and run in perpetuity. Returning to post-2014 levels of violence is perhaps feasible, he reckons. Despite that bleak assessment, Sawers suggests that a ceasefire, or even successful peace negotiations, might possibly come onto the agenda with the onset of the spring 2027 rainy season. The *bezdorzhzhia* or *rasputitsa* makes military operations extraordinarily difficult. Such negotiations depend on two conditions, he says: firstly, “if the pain on both sides continues to rise”; and, secondly, if “the progress that the Russians had been making on the ground ... doesn’t resume”.

Sawers referred to the “increasing voices inside Russia raising questions about the Ukraine war and Russia’s need to find a way out of it”. Presumably amongst those ‘voices from above’ he had in mind was Andrei Klepach, the chief economist of VEB. RF, one of Russia’s largest state-run financial institutions, who was sacked by the Kremlin after he frankly admitted that losses from Ukrainian strikes were “already becoming a noticeable macroeconomic barrier to Russian economic growth”.¹⁸

There are, though, other ‘voices from above’ whom the Kremlin can neither silence nor sack. Xi Jinping reportedly told Donald Trump at their Beijing summit that Putin “might end up regretting” his invasion (subsequently flatly denied).¹⁹ Likewise Indian premier Narendra Modi, another friend of Russia. At the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Kyrgyzstan’s capital, Bishkek, he unequivocally urged Putin to move away from “endless war” for the sake of humanity.²⁰

Other important trading, military and lifeline partners of Russia have delivered the exact same message. Kazakhstan’s president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, proposed freezing the conflict between Russia and Ukraine to halt the bloodshed, stating that a prolonged war only benefits the opponents of both countries. Belarus president Alexandr Lukashenko, perhaps Putin’s closest international ally, has repeatedly called upon both Russia and Ukraine to negotiate an immediate end to the war. While he blames the west for wanting Russia and Ukraine to “destroy each other”, Lukashenko has publicly expressed anxiety over the conflict spilling into Belarus. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has positioned Turkey as a key mediator, routinely calling for a “just and lasting peace” that respects Ukraine’s sovereignty and borders. While maintaining deep trade and energy ties with Moscow, Turkey has

continuously offered to host formal direct peace talks in Istanbul.²¹

Thus far Putin and the FSB regime in Moscow have been deaf to all such entreaties. Come 2027 and the rainy season, we shall see.

Economy, stupid

This war was never a Russian Goliath versus a Ukrainian David conflict. Behind Ukraine there has always been the west, namely the EU, Nato and the US (despite the trials and tribulations brought about by the Trump administration).

Leave aside a combined population of 960 million, the Nato counties are massively, 24.5 times, bigger economically than Russia. In terms of nominal GDP - that is, at the exchange rate of the US dollar - Nato weighs in at \$46 trillion in terms of economic output. When adjusted for purchasing power parity - which supposedly accounts for the cheaper local cost of producing military hardware and other goods inside Russia - the gap shrinks, but remains vast, with Nato’s economy still estimated to be roughly eight times bigger than Russia’s. Not surprisingly, Nato vastly outspends Russia in military spending. In dollar terms Nato’s military budget is 8.3 times bigger than Russia’s.²²

So in reality the Ukraine war pits Russia against the western giant, in what is, in fact, a proxy war. Hence Ukraine has been able to rely on considerable military, intelligence, economic, logistical and communications support. The latest example being the massive €90 billion loan package from the EU for 2026-27. Supposedly this will be repaid by reparations due to Ukraine from Russia (so do not hold your breath on that one).²³ Ukraine is thereby renewing its stock of artillery shells and ammunition and obtaining spare parts for its F-16 fleet. Besides that Kyiv has its eyes set on Swedish Gripen fighter jets, British Storm Shadows, and more and more of those desperately needed American Patriots.

Moreover, as Andrei Klepach suggests, the Russian economy shows distinct signs of faltering. True, all such health warnings should be treated with caution. After all we have heard it many times before and Russia has a war-orientated economy, not a total war economy. Note, Russia devotes 6.3% to 7.5% of its GDP to ‘defence’, while during World War II British war spending reached a 62% high in 1944-45.²⁴

Till recently, as far as the lives of the mass of the ordinary Russian population are concerned, the war in Ukraine has hardly touched them. Even those whose fathers, sons or partners have been killed are supposed to have their grief assuaged by compensation payments and other additional benefits worth up to \$68,000. But now, of course, with Ukraine’s long-range drone and missile strikes, that is beginning to change. There are snaking queues for petrol and some consumer goods are now in short supply or unobtainable. On top of that, despite higher global oil and gas prices, caused by the Iran war, Moscow got a measly \$1.52 billion windfall - much, much smaller than originally predicted.²⁵

Hence Russia’s GDP is expected to barely grow in 2026.²⁶ There is, then, a danger that the country could formally enter a recession in 2027. Inflation is roaring too and the central bank has set high interest rates accordingly. Russia is also experiencing a chronic labour shortage. In part this is accounted for by the demands of the war industries, in part by those sent to fight in Ukraine and in part by those fleeing abroad (since the beginning of the war more than half a million conscription-age men have left the country²⁷). A general mobilisation would surely turn the labour shortage into a full-blown economic crisis, with

perhaps all manner of unforeseeable consequences.

In this context it is worth quoting another spy chief - this time a serving one - Estonia’s Kaupo Rosin. Interviewed by the *Telegraph*, he says that “Russia is in a very bad place at the moment”, with discontent growing across all tiers of society - from ordinary citizens to the economic elite and the so-called oligarchs. There are “only bad options”. Rosin thinks Putin has backed himself into a corner, where every choice carries severe personal and political risks:

■ If he continues the war, heavy battlefield losses, economic sanctions and tightening resource constraints will continue to mount, intensifying internal domestic pressure.

■ If he stops the war, any compromise or peace treaty would frame him as weak, making it impossible to justify the immense cost in blood and treasure to his inner circle.

Rosin believes that there has already been a crack in the elite consensus over the war. While Putin outwardly projects absolute confidence in victory, his inner circle is no longer aligned. Voices - and not just that of Andrei Klepach - urging an end to the war are getting more numerous and more confident.

While subsequent headlines dramatically claimed a revolution could happen “overnight”, Rosin’s assessment is much more nuanced. He certainly sees no immediate prospect of what he calls a “grassroots-led, street-led revolution” (that is his version of February 1917 and the overthrow of tsarism).

Moreover, we can add, the popular masses are not politically organised at the present moment, let alone organised in a revolutionary party. There are only disorientated micro-sects and Kremlin-loyal parties such as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

February 1917

Despite the organisational weakness of the revolutionary parties immediately before February 1917, brought about to a considerable extent by wartime tsarist oppression, that was not the case back then. Though operating underground, the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries exerted considerable influence in the big cities - crucially in Moscow and Petrograd. Because of deep social roots, established over many years of prior ideological, factional and class struggles, they were always present in the consciousness of the advanced sections of the working class. So, when the masses moved, beginning on International Women’s Day - tsarism collapsed exactly seven days later - the revolutionaries quickly assumed leadership.

This was therefore no spontaneous revolution, as the liberal myth would have it. It was not led by nobody. It did not occur by itself. It happened because of prior training - not least that provided through papers such as *Iskra*, *Vpered* and *Pravda*. By the end of summer 1917 the Bolsheviks had won themselves a solid majority in the Petrograd soviet.

No, what Rosin considers more likely is what he calls the ‘overnight’ collapse mechanism. He points out that regimes like Putin’s appear highly rigid and stable until political, financial and military faultlines converge. Then the collapse suddenly happens and “takes the world by surprise”.

Showing his own elite mindset, Rosin says that what matters most now is what the “people who have access to money, weapons and information think”. Political change is “far more likely to manifest if those surrounding Putin decide the state’s future is better off without him”.²⁸

Of course, the February Revolution happened because of a combination of factors. Deep discontent below

over war rationing, high prices, bread shortages ... and a seemingly endless war. That, and splits and divisions above. Trotsky depicts Nicholas II as clueless, delusional and pathetic. He did not surrender directly before the revolutionary workers and soldiers. Nicholas II abdicated because he had lost the confidence of the army commanders, government ministers and court advisers he had himself appointed. They demanded that he step down in a futile attempt to save the monarchy and to prevent the revolution fatally undermining the war effort.

After the final abdication document was signed, the former tsar, now under house arrest, bitterly complained of there being “no justice amongst men”. But, as Trotsky says, “those very words irrefutably testify that historic justice, though it comes late, does exist”.²⁹

Though separated in time by 11 decades, the similarity between Putin and the last Romanov is strikingly obvious. Putin is self-made, Nicholas was born to rule, but Putin is still a tsar, albeit an uncrowned one. He too lives in the lap of rococo imperial luxury. He too presides over a frightful tyranny. Rivals, critics and opponents find themselves stripped of their wealth, serving long prison sentences, in exile or strangely throwing themselves from high windows. Putin too seeks philosophical guidance from half-mad gurus and finds spiritual solace in the mumbo-jumbo blessings provided by the Orthodox Church. Putin too surrounds himself with flabby-minded ‘yes’ men. Putin too has plunged Russia into an unwinnable, insane and contemptible war.

Vladimir Putin deserves historic justice ... and let me add for the sake of political clarity, that goes for all the other warmongers too ●

Notes

1 commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10411.
2 news.sky.com/story/trumps-28-point-ukraine-peace-plan-in-full-including-land-kyiv-must-hand-to-russia-and-when-elections-must-be-held-13473491.
3 Article five of the Nato treaty commits members to regard any armed attack on the territory of one member as an attack on all and requires a collective response (www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/collective-defence-and-article-5).
4 zmina.info/en/news-en/majority-of-ukrainians-oppose-trading-donbas-for-western-security-guarantees.
5 www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cp89e5gjkdo.
4 The Kyiv Independent December 6 2025.
7 www.russiamatters.org/analysis/between-inevitable-and-unreliable-why-ukrainian-society-considers-territorial-concessions.
8 See foantisemitism.org/introducing-the-anti-slavic-jewish-conspiracy.
9 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_of_Ukrainian_Nationalists.
10 carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/12/russia-z-loyalists-repressions.
11 Financial Times December 23 2025.
12 The Guardian November 6 2025.
13 A linear calculation, based on data collected by the hawkish Institute for the Study of War. Eg, it reckons that Russia took just 0.77% of Ukraine’s total area in 2025 (www.lvivherald.com/post/how-long-would-it-take-russia-to-occupy-all-ukraine).
14 L. Freedman *Command: the politics of military operations from Korea to Ukraine* Oxford 2022, pp3-4.
15 understandingwar.org/research/russia-ukraine/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-6-2026.
16 Ibid.
17 The Sun September 7 2026.
18 Financial Times September 7 2026.
19 Financial Times May 19 2026.
20 www.politico.eu/article/india-narendra-modi-tells-vladimir-putin-end-ukraine-war-for-the-sake-humanity.
21 The i Paper September 1 2026.
22 www.worlddeconomics.com/Thoughts/NATOs-Combined-GDP-Dwarfs-Russias.aspx.
23 www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/04/23/council-finalises-90-billion-support-loan-to-ukraine.
24 articles.obr.uk/300-years-of-uk-public-finance-data/index.html.
25 The Moscow Times September 1 2026.
26 tradingeconomics.com/russia/gdp-growth-annual.
27 uawire.org/up-to-540-000-conscription-age-men-have-left-ukraine-since-the-full-scale-invasion.
28 The Daily Telegraph August 29 2026.
29 L. Trotsky *History of the Russian Revolution* Vol 1, London 1967, p100.

TECHNOLOGY

Racing towards general intelligence

We have already had the Hugging Face incident. Whether AI is used to expand human capabilities or to wipe us out will be decided by politics, ultimately by the politics of class against class, says **Yassamine Mather**

The argument about artificial intelligence is often presented as a question about some future moment: when will machines become more intelligent than human beings, and what happens if they do?

That framing, frequently repeated in the press and media, is too narrow. The important changes are already taking place. AI systems are becoming more capable and more autonomous; a handful of corporations are competing to control the most advanced models and the computing infrastructure behind them; the United States and China increasingly treat AI as a strategic technology; and militaries are trying to incorporate the same systems into intelligence, cyber operations, command structures and weapons.

The result is not one AI story, but an emerging technological arms race, in which commercial, geopolitical and military competition reinforce one another.

'Artificial intelligence' is a broad term for computer systems capable of performing tasks that would once have required forms of human judgement: recognising images, producing language, writing software, analysing information or making predictions. Today's large language models are trained on enormous quantities of data; they learn statistical patterns that allow them to generate text, code and other outputs. They can be extraordinarily capable without thinking in the same way that human beings do.

Artificial *general* intelligence (AGI) is much less precise. There is no agreed scientific test for it. The US corporation, OpenAI, has used a definition centred on systems that outperform humans in most economically valuable work; other researchers mean human-level general reasoning across many domains; still others reserve the term for systems capable of conducting autonomous scientific research, learning new tasks and pursuing complex goals with little supervision.

This disagreement matters, because claims that we have entered an 'AGI era' can sound like objective scientific milestones, when they partly depend on definitions chosen by companies and researchers themselves. A more useful distinction may therefore be between AI as a tool and AI as an agent. A chatbot usually waits for someone to ask a question and then produces an answer. An AI agent can do considerably more. It can be given a goal and access to tools such as a web browser, computer programmes, files, email or databases. It can then carry out a sequence of tasks, sometimes with relatively little human supervision. Several AI agents can also communicate or work together.

This distinction is important, even if there continues to be disagreement about whether AGI will ever exist. An AI system does not need to be conscious, or more intelligent than humans *in every respect*, to have serious consequences. If it can act independently, continue working towards a goal and interact with real computer systems, its actions can become economically, politically and militarily significant.

The July 2026 Hugging Face episode provides a useful example of the problem. The Hugging Face company is essentially a vast online repository for artificial intelligence: developers and researchers use it to share AI models, datasets and other resources, so that others do not have to build everything from scratch.

OpenAI had been testing AI models using cybersecurity challenges in an

environment called ExploitGym. This can be thought of as a virtual training ground, in which AI agents attempt to solve deliberately constructed security problems, allowing researchers to discover what the systems are capable of, without intending them to attack real targets.

The agents were supposed to operate separately. During the experiment, however, they discovered shared infrastructure that allowed them to communicate. Roughly 1,200 agents subsequently exchanged tens of thousands of messages and files. They found ways of manipulating aspects of the evaluation environment, including attempts to make the scoring system register success without completing challenges in the intended way and to interfere with records of their activity. Some activity also reached Hugging Face infrastructure outside the targets the researchers had intended the agents to attack.

The incident was subsequently investigated by researchers associated with Model Evaluation and Threat Research (METR) and Redwood Research - organisations specialising in evaluating potentially dangerous or unexpected behaviour in advanced AI systems.

It is important not to turn an episode of this kind into a science-fiction story about AI 'waking up' and deciding that it wants to attack humanity. That is not necessary to explain what happened. The more interesting problem concerns the relationship between the objectives given to an AI system and the methods it discovers for achieving them.

AI systems are not necessarily given step-by-step instructions for every task. During training and evaluation they can instead be given objectives and rewarded when their behaviour produces outcomes associated with success. Ideally, achieving a high score and genuinely accomplishing the intended task amount to the same thing. In practice, however, they can diverge.

If a system discovers an easier way of increasing the score than actually solving the problem as its designers intended, it may exploit that shortcut. This does not require the machine to 'want' to cheat in anything resembling the human meaning of the word. It is a consequence of optimisation: the system finds a strategy that produces the outcome it has been trained or prompted to pursue.

This general problem is often called *reward hacking*. The phenomenon itself is not new. What is changing is the capability and autonomy of the systems involved. Contemporary AI systems can write and execute code, browse the internet, interact with other programmes, use external tools and continue working through multiple stages of a problem. Increasingly, they can also coordinate tasks between different agents.

That means an unexpected shortcut no longer has to consist of one small and relatively harmless action. A system may carry out a long sequence of individually plausible steps that, when combined, produce a much more serious result. The resulting chain of behaviour can begin to resemble a deliberate cyberattack, even though nothing resembling human intention or consciousness is required to explain it.

Dramatic incidents of this kind inevitably produce dramatic descriptions. Claims that some particular AI experiment represents '50% of the way to an AI takeover', for example, sound precise and scientific,



Owl of wisdom

as though there were a measuring tape stretching from 'harmless chatbot' at one end to 'machine takeover' at the other. But there is no such measurement.

The more defensible conclusion is also the more important one. As AI systems become more capable, they become better at finding and exploiting weaknesses in the environments in which they operate - software, networks, evaluation systems and organisational procedures. As they gain access to more tools and are permitted to act for longer without human intervention, the consequences of unexpected behaviour can become more serious.

This is a genuine security and governance problem. It does not require us to believe that a machine has become conscious or has embarked upon a path towards conquering the world and wiping us out.

These systems are not being developed in laboratories isolated from society. The leading western AI systems are produced by companies such as OpenAI, Anthropic, Google and Meta, which are engaged in intense competition with one another. They compete for users, corporate customers, investment, specialist researchers and the scarce computing hardware required to train and operate increasingly large models. That competitive pressure matters because a new AI model is simultaneously a scientific and engineering achievement, a commercial product and a public demonstration that a company is keeping pace with - or overtaking - its competitors.

This creates an obvious contradiction. On one side is the argument that AI must be developed cautiously, because increasingly capable systems could create serious risks. On the other is the commercial imperative to move quickly, because a rival company might otherwise reach the next technological milestone first. Even the language used to describe technological progress is shaped by this competition. Saying that a company has produced somewhat better software or improved its coding performance is unlikely to generate the same attention as announcing that humanity has entered the age of artificial general intelligence.

That does not mean the underlying technological progress is fictitious. It means that three different processes

have become difficult to separate: actual technical achievements, the narratives companies use to attract investment and talent, and the commercial struggle for dominance in the industry. A company perceived to be falling behind risks losing investment, customers, specialist employees and access to the next generation of enormously expensive computing infrastructure. There is consequently a structural pressure to present advances in the most impressive possible terms.

Ownership

The social stakes extend well beyond the speculative possibility of AI escaping human control or surpassing human intelligence altogether. AI does not have to become AGI, let alone an autonomous superintelligence, to produce profound economic and social disruption.

Existing systems can already perform or assist with tasks carried out by programmers, translators, paralegals, accountants, designers, administrators, researchers, journalists and call-centre workers. As these systems improve, employers may be able to produce the same output with fewer employees or demand considerably greater output from those who remain.

The decisive question is therefore not simply how intelligent AI becomes or how much it increases productivity, but who owns and controls this new productive capacity, how it is introduced into the workplace and who receives the benefits.

In principle, technologies that allow society to produce more with less human labour could be enormously liberating. Higher productivity could mean shorter working hours without lower living standards. Dangerous, repetitive and monotonous tasks could be automated, leaving more time for education, care, creativity, political activity and leisure. But there is nothing inherent in the technology that guarantees such an outcome.

Under capitalist relations of production, firms introduce new technologies primarily to reduce costs, raise productivity and gain an advantage over competitors. Labour-saving technology can therefore confront workers not as liberation from unnecessary labour, but as a threat to their livelihoods. The technological possibility of shorter working hours can instead take the social form of redundancies, intensified workloads and greater insecurity.

AI may also accelerate the deskilling of particular occupations. Tasks that once required accumulated experience and professional judgement can be divided into smaller components - some automated and others assigned to workers who supervise, select or correct machine-generated output. Employers may consequently become less dependent on particular groups of skilled workers, potentially weakening their bargaining position and placing downward pressure on wages and conditions. AI can simultaneously extend workplace surveillance. Employers can use automated systems to record productivity, evaluate performance, allocate tasks and monitor communications on a scale that would previously have required enormous managerial resources.

There is also a broader concentration of economic power. Developing the most capable AI systems requires enormous quantities of computing capacity, data, energy, technical expertise and capital. These requirements favour corporations that

already possess vast financial and technological resources.

If a small number of companies control the models, computing infrastructure and platforms on which increasing parts of economic life depend, AI may reinforce existing concentrations of wealth and power. Businesses, public institutions and workers can become increasingly dependent upon privately owned technological infrastructure, over which they exercise little control.

The central contradiction is therefore not between 'humanity' and 'the machine' in the abstract. It is between the potentially liberating effects of labour-saving technology and the social relations within which that technology is developed and deployed.

USA vs China

Corporate competition increasingly sits inside a larger geopolitical contest. The US has attempted to preserve its technological advantage by restricting China's access to the most advanced AI chips and semiconductor manufacturing equipment. China has responded not by immediately achieving parity at every point in the supply chain, but through a strategy of substitution: state-backed investment, domestic semiconductor development, increasingly capable AI models, open-weight software and the expansion of its scientific and technical workforce.

The important point is not that China has 'solved' the semiconductor problem. It has not. Rather, external restrictions have accelerated an organised attempt to reduce dependence upon technologies controlled by the US and its allies.

China itself has a crowded and intensely competitive AI industry. Large established technology groups, such as Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, ByteDance and Huawei, compete alongside newer companies, including DeepSeek, Zhipu AI, MiniMax and Moonshot AI.

DeepSeek became the most internationally visible example, when its R1 model attracted enormous attention in early 2025 - China's 'Sputnik moment'.¹ DeepSeek's performance and relatively low development and operating costs challenged the assumption that access to the largest quantities of the most advanced American hardware automatically guaranteed an overwhelming lead in AI capability.

The underlying competitive dynamic is therefore recognisable on both sides of the Pacific: companies compete for users, investment, talent and computing capacity. What differs is the extent and manner in which the Chinese state directly shapes that competition.

It does so through several mechanisms. US export controls restrict access to the most advanced Nvidia AI processors, encouraging Chinese companies to adopt domestic alternatives, such as Huawei's Ascend accelerators. Government-backed investment supports semiconductor fabrication and computing infrastructure. Industrial policy encourages the integration of models, chips, cloud computing and applications across the wider economy. The state also directly regulates which AI products can be deployed and under what conditions.

It would therefore be misleading to describe the contest simply as Chinese state planning versus an American free market. The US technology sector is itself deeply entangled with state procurement, research funding,

export policy and military demand. In both systems, market competition and state power interact, although they do so through different institutions and political structures.

China still faces significant constraints in advanced semiconductor manufacturing. Huawei has become increasingly important in chip design, while the Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC), headquartered in Shanghai, is China's leading semiconductor foundry. Both have made rapid progress, but Chinese fabrication remains behind the global frontier and continues to face difficulties in lithography, manufacturing yields, high-bandwidth memory and advanced packaging.

Lithography is the process of printing microscopic circuit patterns onto a silicon wafer. Broadly speaking, the more precisely those patterns can be produced, the smaller and more densely packed the transistors can become, improving performance and energy efficiency.

The most advanced lithography systems use extreme ultraviolet (EUV) light. The Dutch company, ASML, is the world's sole commercial supplier of EUV lithography machines. US-led export controls have prevented China from obtaining these systems and have progressively restricted its access to some advanced deep ultraviolet (DUV) equipment as well.

Without EUV, SMIC has manufactured advanced chips using DUV immersion lithography, combined with techniques such as multiple patterning. Instead of creating a complex layer with a more direct EUV process, several exposures and processing stages can be used to produce increasingly small features.

This has enabled SMIC and Huawei to produce chips generally described as belonging to the seven-nanometre class and to push towards more advanced processes without access to EUV. But the workaround comes at a price. Additional manufacturing stages increase complexity, cost and opportunities for defects, putting China at a disadvantage, compared with leading-edge production by the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC).

One important consequence is yield: the proportion of chips produced on a wafer that actually function correctly. A low yield means more wafers, materials, equipment time and energy are required to produce the same number of usable chips.

Industry reports have suggested that SMIC's yields on its most advanced processes are substantially below those achieved by TSMC on comparable mature processes, although precise figures should be treated cautiously, because neither SMIC nor Huawei publishes sufficiently detailed production information for them to be independently verified. The structural point matters more than any particular percentage. Multiple patterning can produce impressively advanced chips without EUV, but generally at greater cost and manufacturing complexity.

Another important constraint is high-bandwidth memory (HBM). Modern AI systems require not only processors capable of performing enormous numbers of calculations, but memory capable of supplying those processors with data extremely rapidly. HBM achieves this by stacking memory dies vertically and connecting them at very high bandwidth to AI accelerators.

China's leading dynamic random-access memory manufacturer, ChangXin Memory Technologies, is developing domestic HBM capacity, but China remains behind established producers such as SK Hynix, Samsung and Micron. Industry estimates suggest that domestic HBM production remains insufficient to equip all the AI accelerators Chinese

semiconductor fabrication plants could potentially manufacture.

The precise numbers are uncertain, but the imbalance is important. China is improving its capacity to manufacture AI processing dies faster than its capacity to supply those dies with cutting-edge memory. The semiconductor contest is therefore no longer simply about who can manufacture the smallest transistor.

Advanced packaging has become almost as strategically important. This involves combining processors, memory, interposers and sometimes multiple computing dies into a single high-performance package. China remains behind the frontier in some of the most demanding packaging technologies and equipment, but Chinese firms are investing heavily in chiplets, three-dimensional integration and sophisticated interconnects, because these techniques can extract greater performance from chips that are individually less advanced.

Faced with these constraints, Chinese companies have increasingly pursued system-level and architectural solutions rather than relying exclusively on shrinking transistors. Huawei's 'Tau Scaling Law' and 'LogicFolding' are examples. Instead of treating smaller transistors as the only route to greater computing power, Huawei proposes optimising devices, circuits, architecture, interconnects, memory and software together in order to reduce the time required to move signals and data through the system.

Huawei presented this approach publicly at the 2026 Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers International Symposium on Circuits and Systems and says that its 2026 Kirin processors are the first products to implement LogicFolding. This makes the approach more than simply a theoretical proposal, although Huawei's more ambitious claims about eventually achieving densities comparable with much more advanced manufacturing nodes remain company projections rather than an independently demonstrated substitute for leading-edge lithography.

China has also made substantial progress in graphics processing units (GPUs) and - more importantly for contemporary AI - specialised AI accelerators. Huawei's Ascend family has emerged as the principal domestic alternative to Nvidia for large-scale AI computing, while companies including Moore Threads, MetaX and Cambricon are developing their own GPU or accelerator ecosystems.

The important development is not that an individual Chinese accelerator has overtaken Nvidia's best processors. It generally has not. Rather, China is attempting to compensate for weaker individual components at the level of the entire computing system.

Huawei's CloudMatrix 384 illustrates this approach. It connects 384 Ascend 910C accelerators, using extremely high-bandwidth networking. An individual Ascend 910C is considerably less powerful than Nvidia's leading Blackwell processors, but connecting very large numbers of accelerators allows Huawei to construct systems with enormous aggregate computing and memory capacity.

There are significant trade-offs. Such systems require more processors and substantially more electricity, while Huawei operates within a software ecosystem that remains marginally less mature than Nvidia's Compute Unified Device Architecture (CUDA) platform. Nevertheless, this changes the strategic calculation. Restricting China's access to the world's most advanced individual GPUs did not prevent it from assembling powerful AI computing systems using larger numbers of less advanced domestic processors.

Huawei has also announced an

Ascend roadmap extending through the 950, 960 and 970 generations. The aim is therefore increasingly to compete across the whole system - processors, memory, interconnection, software and data-centre architecture - rather than to reproduce one Nvidia chip in isolation.

China is also a major competitor in quantum computing: in 2026 researchers at the University of Science and Technology of China reported Jiuzhang 4.0, a photonic quantum processor demonstrating quantum advantage in the specialised task of Gaussian boson sampling, although this should not be confused with a general-purpose, fault-tolerant quantum computer. In terms of fault tolerance - the Achilles heel of Quantum computing - we are dealing with unprecedented Chinese progress.

Role of state

None of this is occurring through market forces alone. China's semiconductor and AI strategies involve extensive state direction, subsidies, government-backed finance and public procurement, alongside private and publicly listed companies. The third phase of the National Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund, commonly called 'Big Fund III', was established with registered capital of 344 billion renminbi, approximately \$47.5 billion at the time of its creation. It is the largest phase of the programme.

State support is therefore central to the expansion of China's semiconductor ecosystem, although it would be an exaggeration to conclude that SMIC itself is almost entirely financed by the state. The resulting picture is more complicated than either of two common claims: that US export controls have crippled Chinese semiconductor development, or that China has already overcome the technological gap. In other words, these constraints have not prevented China from constructing increasingly capable domestic AI systems.

The strategic question is therefore no longer simply whether China can reproduce Nvidia's best GPU or TSMC's most advanced manufacturing process: it is whether disadvantages in individual components can be compensated for through scale, architecture, packaging, interconnection, software and investment across the semiconductor supply chain. This is better understood as substitution rather than parity.

Hardware, however, is only one part of China's response. Software may ultimately prove at least as consequential as attempts to catch up in semiconductor manufacturing. Chinese laboratories and companies have made extensive use of open-weight models. The term requires some explanation. An AI model's 'weights' are the enormous collection of numerical parameters adjusted during training that determine how the trained model responds to inputs.

Many leading western AI companies keep these weights private. Users can access the model through a company's service, but they cannot normally download the complete trained model and operate or modify it independently. An open-weight model makes those trained parameters available for others to download. Developers can then run the model on their own infrastructure, modify it and build applications around it without continuously paying the original developer for access.

This has strategic consequences. If the most capable AI systems can be accessed only by using servers controlled by a small number of US corporations, those companies occupy a powerful position in the global AI infrastructure. Open-weight models provide an alternative route. A university, company or government elsewhere in the world can download

a capable model and run it on infrastructure it controls.

Chinese model families, such as Alibaba's Qwen, DeepSeek's models and Moonshot AI's Kimi, have contributed to this process. Their significance lies not merely in benchmark performance, but in distribution. Capable models that are cheap to operate, adaptable and widely available can spread rapidly, even if another company retains a narrow advantage in absolute frontier performance. This creates a different form of technological competition. A proprietary model attempts to capture value by controlling access to the service. An open-weight model can instead capture influence by becoming something other developers build upon.

For China, that has an obvious geopolitical advantage. If Chinese models become widely used internationally, US dominance of the most advanced proprietary models does not automatically translate into equivalent dominance of the global AI ecosystem. This is another example of substitution rather than simple imitation. China does not necessarily have to defeat every leading American model on every benchmark. A sufficiently capable, inexpensive and easily deployable alternative can erode the commercial and strategic value of a small American technological lead.

China is also treating AI capacity as an educational and industrial project. Universities have expanded AI programmes and science, technology, engineering and mathematics training, while government policy encourages the application of AI across disciplines and industries. This gives China a very large pipeline of engineers and researchers. Scale alone does not eliminate shortages of highly experienced specialists, nor does rapid expansion guarantee quality. Nevertheless, the educational strategy forms part of the same broader response to technological restrictions. Where access to frontier hardware is constrained, China is attempting to compensate through engineering workarounds, software efficiency, infrastructure, education and human capital.

The US-China contest therefore differs from ordinary competition between individual companies. Both states increasingly view control over semiconductors, AI models, data centres, energy supplies and technical talent as components of national power.

Export controls designed to slow a rival can stimulate domestic substitution. Open-weight strategies can challenge proprietary incumbents. Commercial technological advances can acquire military significance. Each side can then justify further acceleration on the grounds that the other side is doing the same. The race becomes self-reinforcing.

Military AI

Everything discussed so far - corporate competition, state investment, semiconductor restrictions and the race for computing capacity - has direct consequences for military uses of AI. AI is already relevant to intelligence analysis, surveillance, cyber operations, logistics, autonomous and semi-autonomous drones, electronic warfare and military decision-making.

The science-fiction version of the danger is a robot army spontaneously deciding to start a war. The more immediate danger is less spectacular and more plausible: machines are gradually being inserted into more stages of the process leading from detecting something to deciding how to respond to it.

AI systems can combine information from different sensors, identify possible targets, prioritise threats, recommend actions and coordinate large numbers of platforms.

One attraction of such systems is precisely their speed. But that speed creates its own danger. The faster military decision-making becomes, the less time human beings may have to question the information they are receiving, reconsider an interpretation or halt an escalating sequence of events.

This creates a familiar arms-race problem. Imagine that the US, China and Britain all recognise that allowing machines to make autonomous life-or-death decisions could be dangerous. That common understanding does not necessarily prevent any of them from developing the technology. If each government believes its competitors will automate military decision-making and thereby gain an advantage, each has an incentive to develop similar systems simply to avoid falling behind. Nobody has to desire the dangerous outcome. Competitive pressure can produce it.

AI-enabled cyber capabilities add another dimension. Systems able to identify vulnerabilities, write software and carry out sequences of actions across computer networks could perform some cyber operations far faster than human teams. The same networks are not confined to the military. Hospitals, electricity grids, financial institutions, communications systems and other civilian infrastructure depend upon interconnected computer systems.

There is also no clear technological boundary between 'civilian AI' and 'military AI'. The same types of advanced processors used to train a commercial chatbot can be used for military models. Image-recognition technology capable of identifying defective products on a factory production line can also contribute to identifying military targets. An AI-agent architecture designed to carry out routine tasks for a company can potentially be adapted for cyber operations.

Commercial and military competition therefore feed into one another. Companies build increasingly powerful general-purpose systems. Governments and militaries identify possible strategic uses and direct money towards adapting them. Military and intelligence demand then provides further investment and technical development, from which the commercial sector can benefit.

AI is consequently becoming part of the military-industrial system rather than merely a consumer technology that happens to have some secondary military applications. Discussion of AI frequently refers to 'humanity' approaching some technological threshold, as though humanity were a single actor with one set of interests. It is not. Technology companies, their employees, investors, governments, militaries, intelligence agencies, universities and ordinary users possess radically unequal amounts of power over which systems are developed, how they are deployed and what purposes they serve.

The more useful question is therefore not simply, 'Can humanity control AI?' It is: 'Who controls AI, in whose interests, and answerable to whom?' Seen in these terms, the central story is not a hypothetical future, in which machines turn against human beings: it is a present, in which extraordinarily powerful productive technologies are being developed within an economic system organised around private ownership and competition, while states simultaneously compete for geopolitical and military advantage ●

Notes

1. This is a reference to the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik 1, the world's first artificial satellite, in 1957. Sputnik shocked the United States, because it demonstrated that a technological rival widely assumed to be behind had achieved a major breakthrough.

ECONOMY

Will there be a crisis?

There is much worried talk of rising inflation, increased government borrowing and the necessity of pleasing the bond markets. **Michael Roberts** investigates

The financial media and mainstream economists are in a huge tizz. Government bond yields have risen sharply since the end of the pandemic slump to return to levels not seen since the global financial crash of 2008-09.

What is meant by a rise in 'bond yields'? When governments and big companies borrow money, they do not ask a bank for a loan. Instead, they sell IOUs to investors and promise to repay the money with a certain interest rate. If they are set to be repaid many years later, they are called bonds.

These are bought by financial institutions, like insurance companies, pension funds, commercial banks, hedge funds, etc. Government bonds are bought mostly because they are 'safe', as governments are very unlikely to default on repaying them when the term of the bond ends. Investors in the bond market often buy and sell them, creating a 'secondary' bond price market. They do this in order to cash in early before the term of the bond is up or because they look to speculate on changes in bond prices. Bond markets have become the most important source of credit in capitalist economies and their size is much larger than stock markets.

But here is the rub. The interest rate on the bond is fixed. If it starts to look less attractive to buy (for reasons we discuss below), a buyer going into this 'secondary market' may be able to get a bond that was originally worth \$100 when bought from the government for less than that. Any drop in price means that the new buyer will get a bigger return, percentage-wise, on their money than the fixed interest rate the bond pays on its original face value. This return is called the bond's yield. When investors sell bonds, that pushes down bond prices, just like a stock market sell-off causes stock prices to plunge. When bond prices fall, that lifts bond yields, which move in the opposite direction.

That is what is happening now in all the major government bond markets globally. Prices are falling in the secondary bond markets and so, inversely, yields are rising. Global bond yields have risen to their highest since 2008.

What are the possible causes of this rise in yields and why are investors and financial analysts making such a fuss? There are four main reasons presented by the 'experts': rising global inflation; high government debt; booming private capital investment increasing borrowing needs; and more uncertainty about a future economic crisis.

Let us take inflation. As I have argued in previous posts, the era of disinflation (ie, slowing inflation rates), which most advanced economies experienced during the long depression of the 2010s, is over.¹ Since the end of the pandemic slump in 2020, there has been an increase in inflation. Whereas the annual inflation rate in the advanced economies was generally below 2% during the 2010s - ie, below the target inflation rate that most central banks had set - now it is double that rate. According to the International Monetary Fund, annual global headline inflation is expected to reach 4.7% this year.

This has been mainly driven by rising costs of raw materials and transportation, started by the post-pandemic global supply chain bottlenecks. More recently, that has been accelerated by the conflict in the Middle East - particularly Iran and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz



Markets are calling the political tune

- which has pushed oil prices 50% higher. These higher energy costs feed right back into general inflation. And it is not just energy: a whole range of key commodities have come into short supply due to the war in Iran, rising global warming and dislocation of transportation. So rising inflation is not the result of 'excessive' government spending or wage increases, but a supply-side issue,² compounded by slowing productivity growth which tends to raise the unit cost price of goods and services.

Historically, bond yield surges are usually due to rises in inflation. It is simple: rising prices make bond purchasers think that the nominal annual fixed interest they will get from the bond will be devalued over time by inflation, so the real return they get will fall. So bond holders will only buy bonds in the secondary market at lower prices to compensate. Also governments issuing new bonds will have to offer higher fixed rates to attract new purchasers.

In my view, this is the main cause of the current 'bond bust' or sharply rising yields. However, other reasons are offered. You see, many governments around the world are running large budget deficits and borrowing more money. Government debt levels are rising absolutely and even against national output. To cover these deficits and to 'roll over' bonds that are ending their term, governments must issue more bonds. So supply rises faster than demand by purchasers. That forces governments to offer higher interest rates, and yields in the secondary market rise.

Policy

What is worse is that central banks, in their misguided mantra that tightening monetary policy (ie, raising short-term interest rates and reducing money supply) is necessary and effective in controlling inflation, are all beginning to talk about hiking their policy interest rates over the next few months.

The European Central Bank has

already started to do this, as euro zone inflation rates continue to rise. The new Chair of the US Federal Reserve, Kevin Warsh, who was appointed by Trump to cut interest rates, is now hinting that they will have to rise. The Bank of Japan is also preparing to increase rates. If these hikes materialise, they will not curb inflation, but simply add to the borrowing costs of the government and so add to the level of debt, and also spread through the economy, increasing the cost of borrowing for households (mortgages) and businesses (loans).

There is even talk that some major governments may default on their debt - foreign investors in French government bonds are raising this fear. But behind this claim is really an attempt by the French government to impose further measures of austerity on its people: namely reductions in pension benefits and other social spending. Default is not going to happen. First, although government bond yields are up since 2020, they are not historically high, even in France.

Sure, the size of government debt is much higher than 20 years ago. But that is due to the state having to bail out the private sector on at least two occasions - first, in the global financial crash of 2008-09; and, second, during the pandemic slump of 2020. It is just not true that there has been 'profligate spending' by governments on welfare, medicare and pensions, as the 'bond vigilantes' and mainstream economists claim. The only profligate spending, apart from the bailouts of banks and corporates, has been on defence - combined with cutting taxes for the rich and corporations (eg, Trump's 'big beautiful' budget).

The reason that public-sector debt has risen so much in the 21st century was the bailing out of the finance and private sector during the global financial crash of 2008-09, the euro debt crisis through to 2012, and the fiscal support necessary for people to get through the pandemic slump of 2020. Those were the periods when

government debt ratios rocketed. In the periods in between, policies of austerity were applied (particularly cutting welfare benefits and investment in infrastructure), along with some recovery in economic growth, so debt ratios were more or less stable. Cuts in income (particularly for higher-income groups) and corporate profits taxes meant that government tax revenues have remained flat at around 35% of gross domestic product, ensuring a rise in annual deficits.

Higher government debt levels mean higher interest costs (including the interest paid on government bonds sold). In the US, the estimated annualised interest expense on US federal debt is up to a record \$1.38 trillion. This is equivalent to 4.2% of US GDP, the highest percentage since 1997. Annualised interest has surged by \$900 billion (nearly 200%) over the last five years, rising at an average rate of 24%. Meanwhile, in 2026, interest expense has jumped by \$78 billion to \$82 billion. The cost of servicing US federal debt has never been higher, but, if central banks hike interest rates, the cost of servicing the debt will rise even more.

But there will not be any bond defaults, because governments can always resort to what economists call 'financial repression' - a pejorative term used by those who see government intervention as 'distorting' bond prices. Governments and central banks can always promise to meet any debt repayments by 'printing money'. In the 2010s, this was called 'quantitative easing' and it is what the European Central Bank did under Mario Draghi during the eurozone debt crisis of 2012-15. By committing to unlimited monetary arrangements ('outright monetary transactions', they were called), bond holders were reassured that they would get their money back. Draghi said the ECB would do "whatever it takes" to repay debt and get borrowing costs down.

Even now, borrowing costs - in, for example, France - are much lower than they might otherwise be, thanks to that threat of financial repression. And it has recently been partially used by the US government. US treasury secretary Scott Bessent has started a scheme, where the government buys back its long-term bonds by issuing short-term treasury bills. The US government has \$1 trillion in 'excess' funds in its 'general account' that it could use for this.

Money supply

But such measures of financial repression have consequences. Most significant, it increases the money supply injected into the economy and that would mean a fall in the dollar, as the global supply would rise compared to other currencies. Given that the US still imports huge amounts of necessary goods, import prices would rise and spread into general inflation. Also a falling dollar would make foreign investors in US government dollar bonds less likely to buy them and thus drive up yields. Financial repression is self-defeating and a policy of desperation only in a crisis.³

But will there be a crisis? There are some who not only deny that the current rise in bond yields will lead to a crisis: they go further and argue that the rise in bond yields actually expresses a booming and successful economy! Trumpist Federal Reserve governor Steve Miran argues that the 'fast growing' (!) US economy and the AI boom are driving up bond yields for the right reasons - ie, increasing demand for credit to invest.

But this argument does not hold water. The differential between bond yields after inflation is deducted has steadily risen since 2020. Since the end of the pandemic, US 10-year government bond yields have opened up a gap with real 10-year yields (ie, excluding inflation) of 2.7% - a rise of 1.7% since 2020. Indeed, the real yield is currently below that in March 2023 - hardly an indicator that it is the AI boom that is driving up the cost of borrowing, rather than inflation.

It is true, as Marx explained in *Capital* volume 3, that in periods of expansion in the business cycle, the rate of profit on capital invested will rise, allowing interest rates to rise without squeezing net profit (the 'profit of enterprise'). But net profit gets squeezed if interest rates continue to rise, and a crisis can eventually ensue. But that crisis will emerge in the private sector, not in the government sector, which will be used to bail out the former.

Currently, the AI boom in the US has achieved a relative expansion in profitability,⁴ so a rise in rates of interest may not trigger a crisis - unless they rise a lot more. For now, the bond bust or the apparent crisis expressed in rising bond yields mainly reflects rising inflation, along with the risk that central banks will increase the cost of borrowing by raising rates in an attempt to control it ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.uk

Notes

1. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2026/05/03/shortages-inflation-and-stagnation.
2. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/27/inflation-causes-and-solutions.
3. See www.chathamhouse.org/2026/09/reverse-killdeer-trap-reasons-worry-about-next-financial-crisis.
4. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2026/09/01/ai-and-the-profits-boom.

BOYCOTT

Palestine picket line

There are more and more government sanctions from above and economic, cultural and sporting boycotts from below. **Carl Collins** shows that this phenomenon has a long and highly contested history

Across the whole island of Ireland demonstrations have taken place in support of ‘Stop the Game’ - a broad coalition of football supporters, players, coaches, administrators and concerned citizens calling on the Football Association of Ireland to withdraw from all football fixtures against Israel and to “not cross the Palestinian picket line” amid Israel’s ongoing murderous operations in Gaza, the West Bank and the wider Middle East.¹

In July, the FAI passed a motion in favour of proceeding with the matches, arguing that it had an obligation to fulfil its commitments in relation to UEFA Nations League fixtures. However, the matches are to be played at (so-called) ‘neutral’ venues, with the away fixture in Hungary and the ‘home’ fixture behind closed doors in Serbia.

While the immediate impetus behind the movement of solidarity with Palestine comes from the atrocities committed since October 2023, activists in Ireland, particularly within the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, have also correctly pointed to the longer history of occupation, settlement and dispossession.

There is some justification in thinking that the Irish state has adopted a more critical public position towards Israel than many other western governments. It has described the scale of Israel’s military actions in Gaza as incompatible with international humanitarian law and supported International Court of Justice genocide cases. Measures such as the Occupied Territories Bill, banning the importation of goods from illegal Israeli settlements, proposals for European sanctions and restrictions on imports and exports of military technology have also been advanced.

Yet other economic and logistical relationships with Israel have continued, alongside military support under pressure from the US - notably allowing Israel to use Shannon airport as a transit hub towards the Middle East, making it the site of protest and destructive intrusions by Palestine Action Eire.²

The contradiction is clear. There is a substantial difference between making condemnatory statements about Israel and taking measures that materially obstruct its ability to wage war. The same contradiction exists in international sport, and the Stop the Game campaign responds to the Irish government’s acceptance of the FAI’s decision to proceed with the fixtures.

Opposition to Israel’s sporting participation has not been confined to Ireland. Football supporters, athletes and ordinary people have repeatedly challenged the hypocrisy of allowing Israel to participate in international competition. The most obvious comparison is Russia. Western governments introduced extensive sanctions against Moscow, while FIFA, UEFA, the International Olympic Committee and other sporting bodies moved rapidly to suspend Russian teams and athletes.³ The contrast with Israel is difficult to ignore.

The argument that sport must remain ‘politically neutral’ rings particularly hollow, when sporting institutions have already demonstrated that they are capable of making political decisions. The supposedly



Boycotting Israel ... not just its footballers

‘neutral’ rules of international sport are applied within a political world, and their application reflects the interests and geopolitical alignments of the states and institutions involved. This is why Stop the Game is significant beyond two football fixtures: it exposes the political character of supposedly apolitical institutions.

There is nothing new about sport becoming a battleground for political struggle. The history of sporting protest is extensive. Actions range from the tragic sacrifice of suffragette Emily Davison, who was killed after stepping in front of King George V’s horse at the Epsom Derby in 1913,⁴ to the comical boycott against a late-night kick-off time, led by supporters of Spanish football club, Rayo Vallecano, who left their usual section of the stadium empty.⁵

Without equating them politically, such actions demonstrate that supporters do not have to be passive consumers of sporting entertainment. They can act collectively and sporting events provide a highly visible arena for political grievances.

Viewed critically, the protests against the proposed European Super League in 2021 provide an inspiring example for communists. Supporters across numerous European clubs mobilised rapidly and succeeded in forcing clubs and institutions to retreat.⁶ The episode demonstrated the potential power of organised supporters, but also their limitations. As there was no mass political organisation capable of drawing together these struggles and giving them a coherent programme, the movement won a particular concession without developing the forces capable of challenging the social relations that produced the problem.

The same lesson can be seen in more recent events over a proposal by FIFA president Gianni Infantino to sell a 20% commercial stake in the World Cup to private investors. Following fan unrest, the proposals were withdrawn.⁷

These examples demonstrate that institutions respond to organised pressure, when they believe it is sufficiently powerful. Yet the same institutions that threaten boycotts when their own interests are affected have punished supporters for political solidarity with Palestine - such as Celtic supporters, who faced UEFA disciplinary action after displaying thousands of Palestinian flags at the height of the conflict.

Sporting bodies are therefore not neutral arbiters standing above politics. They operate within the political and economic order and respond to pressure according to their own interests and those of the establishment.

The irony will not be lost on

the reader that the term ‘boycott’ originates from the successful employment of the tactic suggested by Charles Stewart Parnell and the Irish Land League in 1880 against Captain Charles Boycott - the agent of an absentee landlord who tried to evict tenants unable to pay increased rents.

The workers’ movement has repeatedly used boycotts and forms of non-participation as weapons of struggle. But Marxists should distinguish between boycotts as a tactic and as a strategy. The former can be extremely useful; the latter cannot replace the organised political struggle necessary to build a new society.

States and establishment organisations have themselves used boycotts. During the 1958 World Cup qualification process, Israel advanced through several rounds without playing because opponents refused or withdrew from fixtures for political reasons. The earliest World Cups also saw boycotts motivated by political and geographical disputes. Then there was also the international sporting boycott of apartheid South Africa. From 1964, South Africa was excluded from the Olympic Games and subsequently faced sporting isolation across cricket, rugby and other international competitions because of its apartheid system. That isolation continued into the early 1990s.

In 1974, the Soviet Union refused to travel to Chile for a World Cup qualifying play-off, because the match was scheduled for Santiago’s Estadio Nacional, which Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship had transformed into a detention and torture centre following the military coup. FIFA refused to move the fixture, and Chile ‘played’ the game alone in an empty stadium, scoring against an absent opponent! In 1980, 65 countries participated in the boycott of the Moscow Olympics, led by the United States, in opposition to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Four years later, the Soviet Union led a 14-country eastern bloc boycott of the Los Angeles Olympics.

These examples are not politically equivalent: state-led boycotts are mostly used as instruments of capitalist and imperialist competition and should not be viewed in isolation as progressive. Conversely, a boycott by ordinary people - football supporters, athletes or workers - can be an expression of solidarity and a means of obstructing an institution’s normal functioning. Forcing a sporting institution, government or other organisation to impose a boycott can also represent a significant victory.

However, the danger for the Stop the Game campaign and wider Palestine solidarity movements is that they become cross-class and dependent upon governments or institutions that have no interest in pursuing the

struggle to its logical conclusion.

The demand that the FAI boycott Israel is entirely justified. Indeed, putting pressure on the FAI is preferable to treating the organisation as an authority whose decision must simply be accepted. Demanding that the Irish state sever military, logistical and economic relationships with Israel is legitimate. But the working class risks just outsourcing its politics to the Irish government, UEFA, FIFA, etc.

There is also a danger in treating every form of solidarity as automatically progressive. The politics surrounding the German club, FC St Pauli, demonstrate why this question cannot be oversimplified. St Pauli famously possesses a leftwing and anti-fascist supporter culture, while parts of its fanbase have maintained a long-standing relationship with leftwing supporters of Hapoel Tel Aviv in Israel. That relationship has obvious historical dimensions, including the holocaust and the particular politics that have developed in Germany. Following the Hamas breakout of October 7 2023, St Pauli uncritically condemned the attacks and expressed solidarity with its friends at Hapoel Tel Aviv. Other sections of its leftwing supporter base, and supporters of other left-leaning teams, uncritically condemned this position, producing arguments over Israel, Palestine, Zionism, anti-Semitism and the war in Gaza.⁸

This is precisely why a Marxist political programme matters. Without one, political movements can swing between liberal conceptions of neutrality and inadequate forms of political symbolism. Some conclude that opposition to Israel must be rejected as supposedly anti-Semitic because Israel is being singled out. Others argue that any criticism of Israel must automatically be progressive. Neither proposition is sufficient.

The question must always be: what interests does a particular political action serve, and how does it advance the independent organisation and political consciousness of the working class? There is no abstract Marxist rule that participation is always correct, any more than there is one saying boycott is always correct. The tactic has to be subordinated to strategy ●

Notes

1. www.facebook.com/share/v/18PGsH9G4y/?mibextid=wwXlft.
2. See www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2026/3/30/palestine-aily-ireland-under-fire-for-allowing-weapons-transfers-to-israel.
3. www.thecanary.co/global/world-analysis/2026/03/02/fifa-hypocrisy.
4. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emily_Davison.
5. www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/european/the-simpsons-make-an-appearance-at-rayo-vallecano-as-supporters-protest-against-monday-night-matches-9838604.html.
6. www.theguardian.com/football/2021/apr/20/european-super-league-unravelling-as-manchester-city-and-chelsea-withdraw.
7. See my article, ‘Infantino’s botched coup’ *Weekly Worker* August 6: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1597/infantinos-botched-coup.
8. See morningsstaronline.co.uk/article/st-pauli-supporter-clubs-clash-over-palestine-solidarity.

Sign up to CPGB news



bit.ly/CPGBbulletin

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.

The *Weekly Worker* is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode.en

ISSN 1351-0150

weekly worker

**Awash with
dodgy donations
and now a Met
inquiry**

Money talks to money

Despite the financial scandals, pushback from the liberal establishment and reduced polling numbers, in Birmingham Nigel Farage reached out to the capitalist class, writes **Eddie Ford**

Last week Reform held its 'conference' in Birmingham - there were no floor votes on policy or the party's constitution. Members were there to clap and cheer and that is exactly what they did.

Nigel Farage told his adoring fans that the party's 100-day "pledge" would mean frontbenchers in a Reform government being legally obliged to stop the small-boats, cut energy bills by £250 a year and end the net-zero "lunacy". He pledged to sack ministers who fail to deliver and replace them with "somebody else with the courage to do it".

In order to eliminate "obstacles" to his plans, Farage said he would declare a "national emergency", whereby parliament will sit "if necessary" for 24 hours a day and for six days a week "until we pass the necessary legislation". Reform's leader said he expected the House of Lords to "honour" his policy pledges, but if they refused to do so he threatened to appoint hundreds of new peers, so that his party had a majority in the upper chamber. And, if this does not work, Farage in true populist mode declared that he will "hold a referendum on the current composition" of the Lords, and they "would be swept away by a British public appalled by them". Of course, not being a democrat, he does not advocate simply *abolishing* the Lords along with the monarchy - for us there should be no second chamber of any sort.

During Richard Tice's deputy leader speech, Greenpeace used a remote control device to unfurl a banner which carried the apt slogan: "Collect £5 million, burn the planet". But it was Climate Resistance which led the main protests both outside the conference hall and inside. While Farage himself was speaking there were at least four vocal protesters. Online footage shows one woman being dragged out by her hair, with an audience member laying into hecklers with what appears to be a crutch.

No less to the point, there is a real pushback going on from the liberal wing of the establishment. After all, it was not by chance that Channel 4 broadcast its sting operation the day before, and it loomed over the party conference. An undercover reporter posed as 'William Lockwood', the British-based son of a rich American businessman who wanted to donate half a million pounds to the party. As electoral law does not allow foreign donations, the question was essentially how to fiddle things?

There, over oysters and fine wine, at the crucial Clacton-on-Sea get together with 'William Lockwood' was Farage himself. Other meet-ups happened at Claridge's and various high end pubs and restaurants. Those involved included James Orr, Reform's head of policy, and Dan Jukes, Farage's chief of staff.

According to Farage's version of events, it was noisy, crowded and he "frankly wasn't listening" - as long



Nigel Farage: money from ultra rich

as things were above board he wasn't interested.¹ Actually, this could ring true, because what this encounter shines a light on is *normal* business with Reform. The party is regularly pocketing huge donations, not just the £5 million that Farage got as a "gift" from crypto-billionaire Christopher Harborne, but substantial donations from British billionaires and hedge funds - and also from people based abroad and giving money via their wife, son or whatever.

Now, of course, the Met police have opened an investigation into possible breaches of the foreign donations laws. Live investigations are underway.

Plot

Either way, for Farage, William Lockwood's £500k was just another donation coming in, and that is why, according to last year's figures, Reform was the richest party in Britain, which is quite remarkable, considering it was only founded (or rebranded) in 2021. It had more money available to it than the Tories or the Labour Party, despite the fact, as we know, that Labour got more in donations last year from business people than it did from the trade unions. This shows where politics is heading in Britain.

What you hear incessantly from Reform, of course, is that there is a plot to do it down. Well, yes, there is a 'plot' - but by the *liberal establishment*. Yet in reality the establishment, the ruling class, has a rightwing which is eager to promote Reform. As for the actual capitalists -

the bankers, manufacturers, builders, retailers, etc - they want to develop good relations with Reform because it is not inconceivable that it could form the next government after the general election, or participate in government as a coalition partner.

In Birmingham there was a concerted attempt to court business with a private dining affair attended by almost 400 paying guests (at £395 per cover plus VAT). They were promised a "rare opportunity to engage directly with key figures" from the party and "dedicated time for meaningful, high-level conversation", with two senior members of Reform at each table. Well, the party does not have enough MPs or enough genuinely senior members to staff all that, and apparently there was one table that did not have anyone from Reform - no wonder at least one disgruntled guest criticised a "lack of engagement".²

But what this really shows is Reform's attempt to reach out to the capitalist class. There were some big companies present: BT, Google, JCB, TikTok, Heathrow Airport, First Bus, Airbnb and various City firms. Most did not send their CEOs. That would risk bad publicity. Instead there were corporate relations teams and junior staff. But there can be no doubt that big business wants to get to know Reform's key people. Next there will be invitations to country house gatherings, shooting parties, football finals, Wimbledon and Glyndebourne. In the future they want to be able to pick up the phone to a Reform minister - who they know and maybe

genuinely like - and get this or that knotty problem quickly sorted (say, getting special exemptions for foreign workers to fill vacant posts here in Britain).

Meanwhile, because of the Channel 4 sting, both James Orr and Dan Jukes have stood down ... for now. Jukes is a good case, as it tells you something interesting about Reform, and bourgeois politics in general. He is half-based in the United States - his child and his wife already live there. So the expectation is that he will take up work for the GOP in the mid-terms, before returning to Britain when all the fuss has died down.

Nigel Farage has been predicting an early general election in spring 2027 - something he repeated in Birmingham "because Andy Burnham has no mandate" (which is nonsense, of course, because we live in a party system, not a presidential one).³ One thing is for sure, though. If there is a general election, Jukes will be back at Farage's side.

As for Orr, he is Reform's brains and definitely gives it intellectual clout on the far right.⁴ A Cambridge academic - philosophy and religion - Orr champions *Christian values* and actively recruits what he sees as the brightest and best at Cambridge for Reform (future staffers, policy wonks and MPs).

Of course, his Christian values are of the militant kind: Orr is committed to traditional gender roles, opposes abortion (including in cases of rape), frowns on trans rights and calls immigration the "most existential

threat facing our nation since the Norman invasion" - all this gives a glimpse of what to expect with Reform.

Bounce

Anyway, if you have a look at More in Common's latest findings about voting intentions in Britain, we have Labour on top at 26%, Tories next on 23% and Reform just behind on 22%.⁵ Partially this is due to a Burnham bounce, which is real, not mere media hype. But there is also the bad publicity that has been generated over Farage's £5 million "gift" from Harborne, the Clacton by-election where he had to fight a bin, the Channel 4 scandal, and so on. Farage himself has had to admit that the overseas donation row "looks bad".⁶

But, at the end of the day, we should regard all this as secondary stuff, not a decider. It is impossible to predict at this stage what the result of the next general election will be. But what you can confidently say is that things are continuing to move to the right. When it comes to arms spending, the consensus is for more, more, more. When it comes to welfare spending, it is for less, less, less. As for small boats, on this the far right totally dominates the agenda. Hence in Birmingham Farage and Jordan Bardella signed a Memorandum of Understanding. Bardella is, of course, a potential rival of Marine Le Pen. Nonetheless, if she wins France's presidential election in spring 2027, he is expected to be appointed prime minister.

Bardella committed himself to "stop the boats forever" and told the Reform conference that a National Rally government would do everything in its power to ensure that France is no longer "the gateway for illegal migration into the United Kingdom" (enthusiastic applause).⁷ That is, the British navy can intercept boats, take them to France, which will then deport people back to their country of origin (or some other third country).

But the fact remains that there is still the push factor of desperate poverty in the so-called 'third world' - plus global warming, civil wars, and so on. The idea that people will stop wanting to go north is for the birds: they will keep coming, whatever the delusions of bourgeois politicians, whether mainstream or far-right ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. [bbc.com/news/articles/c0qxn7q1vdo](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0qxn7q1vdo).
2. [politicshome.com/news/article/reform-business-dinner-disaster-say-attendees](https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/reform-business-dinner-disaster-say-attendees).
3. [news.sky.com/video/nigel-farage-predicts-spring-2027-election-13581408](https://www.news.sky.com/video/nigel-farage-predicts-spring-2027-election-13581408).
4. See *Financial Times* September 1 2026.
5. [moreincommon.org.uk/voting-intention-trackers](https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/voting-intention-trackers).
6. [theguardian.com/politics/2026/sep/06/farage-says-overseas-donation-row-looks-bad-but-denies-reform-breached-electoral-law](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2026/sep/06/farage-says-overseas-donation-row-looks-bad-but-denies-reform-breached-electoral-law).
7. [dailymail.com/news/article-16105487/French-Jordan-Bardella-Reform-conference-party-Channel.html](https://www.dailymail.com/news/article-16105487/French-Jordan-Bardella-Reform-conference-party-Channel.html).