

weekly worker



Maricarmen Abascal sparks a general election: but what about the democratic republic, Nato and working class rule?

- Letters and debate
- Israel is a racist state
- Houthis: not mere rebels
- French youth take lead

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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**THREE YEARS OF GENOCIDE
THREE YEARS OF ETHNIC CLEANSING
THREE YEARS OF ISRAELI TERROR
THREE YEARS OF COMPLICITY
THREE YEARS OF LIES
THREE YEARS OF RESISTANCE
THREE YEARS OF MARCHING
THREE YEARS OF NOT ORGANISING
A MASS PARTY**



LETTERS



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

Silly reply

Mr 'Filip Spijkerman' has sent in a silly letter (October 8). To reverse the words of Lenin, I have read it and I shall reply to it.

In his first paragraph, he posits that comrade Eddie Fischer and I argue we should "form yet another international, next to all the Trotskyist and Stalinist, etc internationals, but this time of partyists", and says we should instead "go through the existing Marxist left (nationally and internationally)". However, if Mr 'Spijkerman' had read comrade Fischer's and my letter, he would see we argue exactly for going "through the existing Marxist left (nationally and internationally)". From this we can conclude that he either did not read the letter (presumably due to the fact it was written by two women) or that he is unable to read, in which case he should go back to primary school to learn to do so (perhaps we should call him 'master Spijkerman').

In his second paragraph, Mr 'Spijkerman' posits that I did not attend the Online Communist Forum, probably because "part of the problem is in fact political". In fact, he just makes this up. In reality I was stuck waiting for an airplane that was delayed by three and a half hours in Barcelona airport, after a long weekend (ie, Friday-Sunday) of forging exactly those international ties he accuses me of refusing to forge! Of course, Mr 'Spijkerman' could have easily found this out if he had reached out and asked me about it. However, he is not known to reach out to women.

About the rest of the text, with respect to the usefulness of "partyism" as a label and "going directly to the class", I would simply like to point to the Movimiento Socialista and its success in Spain, and let that speak for itself. Those who are anti-Communist Platform in the Netherlands can talk to the sectarians of the International Socialists and the New Communist Party all they want - instead of doing any work in the Revolutionary Socialist Party (they don't!), they even refuse to put themselves up as candidates for the Utrecht local board - where they are a supermajority of active members! - in the hope that they will magically give in and unite. They can talk to them, but as of now they don't.

One may ask what it is they do at all.

Elise van der Doelen
RSP, Netherlands

Stand by Elise

On September 27 comrade Jack Conrad said on the Online Communist Forum that comrade Elise van der Doelen calls herself a "Macnairite", "opposes the minimum-maximum platform" and wishes rather to have a programme which "compromises with social imperialists".

All of this information can be traced back to Communistisch Platform, is thoughtlessly repeated by the CPGB in its podcast, and is patently false. Members of Communistisch Platform seem to have made it a hobby to spread lies about comrade Elise. I have in the last few months also heard that she opposes the right to form a faction and that she proposes a federal structure, which overrepresents smaller sections.

On the set of propositions repeated by Conrad, there is indeed a joke in the RSP to refer to oneself, in jest, as a Macnairite, tied into a larger in-joke

which pretends that comrade Macnair is not a contemporary figure. I'm sure comrade Elise may have done this, but to take such a satirical comment as a serious political description is nonsense.

She has also repeatedly defended the use of a minimum-maximum programme. It is ironic that the comrade mentions the historic examples of the Parti Ouvrier, the Communist Manifesto and the Erfurt Programme on Communist Forum, as they are the exact examples that we would argue both the programme of RSP and CPGB should resemble more, not less.

Regarding programmatic compromises with social imperialists, I will refer to the discussion surrounding taking a hard line programmatically and practically against the reformists and social imperialists, when de Socialisten (now the RSP) was in its infancy. In this discussion it was clearly us, including Elise, who developed this hard line and did as Conrad himself instructed us to do: rebel against Communistisch Platform's opportunism.

This, however, is not the only point on which Communistisch Platform's accusations are in fact confessions. Regarding federalism, it is precisely Elise who proposed that sections should no longer be represented according to their membership on paper, but according to how many people actually showed up to vote and join the discussion.

It is Communistisch Platform which argued that those who do not voice their opinion in any way ought to be "represented" (their opinions on things are to be retrieved through some sort of proletarian magic unknown to me, no doubt) through those who do vote within their section.

Young comrade Elise van der Doelen is, in my opinion, the most efficient and politically literate administrator the RSP has, and she is quite obviously perceived as such by many. No wonder then that Communistisch Platform feels it necessary to project its mistakes onto her, to prevent her from usurping the status of the more credible representative of partyism from the Netherlands.

Willem Gloudemans
RSP, Netherlands

DSA wrecker?

As I've publicly criticised the Democratic Socialists of America's Red Star caucus - a Marxist-Leninist faction to which one of the organisation's two co-chairs belongs - I've frequently been accused of being a 'wrecker' or engaging in 'wreckerism'.

First of all, I must note that those who criticise the DSA's more pragmatic caucuses are never accused of the same. But, beyond this, the word choice itself is revealing. While I'm sure 'wrecker' existed as a term of abuse in the socialist movement before the Stalinist era, the pejorative is deeply associated with it. For those who aren't aware, 'wreckerism' was an all-purpose crime used to arbitrarily persecute political opponents during that period.

I've spent a good deal of time in online and in-person leftist settings, ranging from Trotskyist milieus like the International Socialist Organization to more anarchist-influenced ones, such as Occupy Wall Street. During this time, despite having sharp disagreements with some of those involved, I was never once accused of being a wrecker. I can only assume it's because Trotskyists were the ones being accused of wreckerism during the Stalin era, and anarchists had already been crushed. It's only since joining the DSA,

where the most unapologetically authoritarian 'socialists' are welcome and have amassed disproportionate influence, that I've really encountered this insult.

Now, I certainly don't think all DSA members who use the term are crypto-Stalinists. Wreckerism can describe a real phenomenon, in which people needlessly stoke conflict. Of course, which conflicts are necessary and which aren't is a matter of personal opinion. I believe the fact that one of our co-chairs belongs to a caucus which lauds China as a positive example of real-world 'socialism' is a problem. Others disagree. The meaning of words changes and perhaps the Stalinist association with 'wreckerism' will dissipate. However, I do think the widespread use of the accusation in the DSA is the result of genuine Stalinists - like those in Red Star - injecting it there.

At the risk of engaging in too much armchair psychology, I believe many of the DSA members who use the term 'wrecker' with full knowledge of its baggage, do so because on some level they feel deeply powerless. Perhaps they're 100 pounds soaking wet or maybe they have profoundly low self-esteem. Identifying with a historical dictator, and imagining themselves putting enemies against the wall for spurious reasons, gives them a sense of power they lack in their real lives. I sympathise with these feelings of inadequacy, having dealt with my share of mental-health issues, but they're nothing to build one's entire politics around.

Genuine democratic socialists have fought for decades to disentangle their ideology in the mind of the public from that of Marxist-Leninism, which advocates a one-party state, where the means of production are privately controlled by a bureaucratic elite. They are just beginning to have some success, as evidenced by the growth of the DSA. If we must revive and redefine the term 'wrecker' there are no greater wreckers than those trying to sabotage this advance, by effectively telling the public, 'No, actually dictatorship and socialism are one and the same'.

I hope my fellow DSA members will vote Red Star caucus out of their positions of leadership.

Jon Hochschartner
Connecticut

Nord Stream 2

For anyone following the war in Ukraine and the powers behind it, a trial for the destruction of the Nord Stream gas pipelines is set to begin on October 14 before a special panel (*Staatsschutzsenat*) of the Hanseatic Higher Regional Court in Hamburg - 16 hearing dates are set through December 17.

A review of the press statements of Germany's federal prosecutors (case files are not publicly available) shows that a Ukrainian national now finds himself in the company of the following defendants, who were similarly brought before such panels at several higher regional courts in the past year: accused agents of Russia, accused agents of Iran, accused Islamists of different types, and accused *Reichsbürger* and other rightwing extremists. Plus a Kurdish confederalist and Daniela Klette (ex-RAF).

For the Nord Stream attack, prosecutors filed charges on June 30 against "Serhii K", a Ukrainian army officer in 2022, who was arrested in Italy in August 2025 and transferred to Germany that November. Of the four counts against him, three fall under the criminal code and one under the 'war crimes' chapter of the 2002 Code of Crimes Against International

Law. In Bojan Pancevski's recent book on the attack, Serhii K is anonymised as "The Captain". Pancevski anticipates that his legal defence will encompass the following points (pp289-91 of the book): Germany's lack of jurisdiction over the Danish and Swedish economic zones, where the explosions took place; combatant immunity under the Geneva Conventions; that Gazprom was itself a combatant; and that Nord Stream was a strategic war target.

The Federal Court of Justice had already rejected most of this at the detention stage. In December 2025, it held that German jurisdiction applies because the destruction took effect on German territory, where the pipelines come ashore; that functional immunity does not cover violent acts directed by an intelligence service; and that the combatant privilege does not cover covert action against what were civilian objects. It also found it highly probable that the defendant acted on the orders of a foreign state.

"No evidence of Russian involvement has emerged," write Holger Stark and Luisa Hommerich (translation) in the current edition of *Die Zeit* weekly, confirming what Germany's federal prosecutor said in February 2023 and assessments that appeared in the *Weekly Worker* and elsewhere in 2022-23, as well as debunking early reports that Russia was the chief suspect.

Stark and Hommerich outline the current parameters of the public narrative in Germany on the eve of the trial's start: the idea to attack Nord Stream arose in the US-oriented circles of Ukrainian intelligence (Pancevski reports, as early as 2017); the 2022 attack went ahead, even though Dutch military intelligence had learned of the plan and passed it to the CIA, which shared it with Germany; there was a simultaneous effort to attack TurkStream; the attackers are accused of having acted on behalf of and with the approval of state authorities in Ukraine; and Zelenskyy has denied official governmental participation in the attack.

In the US, one might begin the story in Texas and Louisiana rather than in Washington, and at the turn of this century rather than with the oft-cited remarks of 2022 and 2023 by Biden (pre-war: "We will bring an end to it"), Blinken (post-attack: "tremendous opportunity") and Nuland (post-attack: "very gratified," "hunk of metal"). That US sanctions on Nord Stream 2 were first enacted in 2019 under Trump I is a further clue to the 'bipartisan' interests at play.

Some events in the story, which have everything to do in the final instance with the production process, the world market and imperialist redivision:

■ Mitchell Energy's development of "slick water fracturing" in 1998

■ Devon Energy's combination of fracking and horizontal drilling in 2003

■ state approval of Cheniere Energy's LNG applications in 2011 (export approval to countries lacking a free-trade agreement with the US) and 2012 (plant approval)

■ and Cheniere's very first LNG export in 2016.

The latest turn: US and Russian officials have reportedly discussed bringing a US investor into Nord Stream, and Kushner and Dmitriev have discussed the sale of Lukoil's international assets to a consortium, including the US government's Development Finance Corporation. A patron of Ukraine and its enemy are now bargaining over the remains of the energy war.

Rivalry that took the form of

sanctions and sabotage now also takes the form of investment and purchase. As Lenin stated, "the forms of the struggle may and do constantly change", but its substance "positively cannot change, while classes exist."

Sam Moews
USA

Bolshevik fantasy

The cause of Scottish independence, as espoused by the Scottish National Party, is now merely a front for Scottish bosses like the distasteful owner of Ineos Group Ltd, Sir Jim Ratcliffe. The stance of the SNP-ruled Glasgow council towards its workers makes that clear. The Menshevik Labour Party are also pro-business and no solution to Scotland's woes.

Only a Bolshevik programme can transform the lives of workers, women, the poor and disabled in Scotland. That means land reform, where the vast lands of the rich are expropriated and shared with the populace. Let's institute workers' councils within every workplace, which will determine wage levels and strategic decision-making. Let's have a workers' militia to replace the police force and ensure justice for the working class. Let's kick the grouse-shooters out of Scotland and end the gulf in wealth and lifestyle, which condemns huge swathes of the Scottish populace to miserable lives.

K Sean
Kent

School students

The high school and university student protests taking place for the past three weeks in France are not an isolated expression of rebellion.

Even if they are supported individually by parents, teachers and wage-earners, high school and university student protests, left to their own devices, are bound to be nothing more than a flash in the pan - whether they take place in France or Belgium or anywhere else. The same is true of protests against rising rents in Spain and elsewhere. Not only *must we all join forces*, but, above all, it is the entire wealth-producing class - the proletariat - that must step forward, take the lead in these uprisings and give them a perspective for struggle: first, against the immediate attacks on our living conditions; and, second, for proletarian revolution to overthrow capitalism. There is no other path in the face of poverty first and war second.

In this sense, high school students in France and Belgium, protestors in Spain, as well as all the so-called popular uprisings erupting across most continents, *call upon* the proletariat as a whole. These protests highlight the proletariat's historical responsibility.

In France and Belgium, we therefore call on all the most militant workers to join and participate in the high school and university student demonstrations and assemblies. Above all, we encourage them to organise and form struggle committees - or any other form of active, militant group - to take collective action at demonstrations and assemblies; and prepare to enter the struggle and go on strike, based on demands that are as broad and unified as possible. We call on teachers in particular not to limit themselves to supporting their students, but to throw themselves into the struggle for their own demands, which, for the most part, align with those of high school students.

International Communist Current
France

DEMONSTRATIONS

Three years of genocide

Millions marched worldwide, in London over 200,000. No one is fooled by Ed Miliband's weasel words, not least because of the continued arms trade with Israel and the ban on Palestine Action, says **Ian Spencer**

Saturday October 10 saw worldwide demonstrations against the genocide in Gaza. Millions marched in countries around the planet and London added over 200,000 to that in the 37th national demonstration in Britain. Throughout the last three years, the marches have been disciplined, determined and steadfast in their support for the Palestinians. Participants are also not fooled by foreign secretary Ed Miliband's weasel words - on the one hand, proclaiming that we are right to protest, but, on the other hand, doing nothing about the Israeli arms industry operating in the UK, the arms export licences to Israel or the assistance provided by the UK armed forces in carrying out the genocide.

Miliband's conference speech claimed that: "...under Andy's leadership, we have reset our approach. We call out ethnic cleansing by the settler terrorists in the West Bank. We call out the evidence of war crimes in Gaza. We call out Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine. And we will match words with actions."¹ However, the "actions" did not include lifting the proscription of Palestine Action as "terrorists". In fact, outside last month's Labour conference itself, Merseyside police arrested 15 people (the now familiar collection of retired vicars and people in wheelchairs) under section 13 of the Terrorism Act, for holding placards saying, "I oppose genocide, I support Palestine Action."

However, for all the delay, the failure to state that Israeli action amounts to genocide and the flaccid response, it was at least a response. It was at least a sign that, worldwide, vast numbers now recognise the nature of the Zionist regime and its US and UK supporters. After all, three years ago Sir Keir Starmer threatened to take action against any Labour MP who attended our marches. So, while we welcome the sanctions on the West Bank terrorist settlers, Israel needs to be completely economically isolated and all military cooperation must be withdrawn - otherwise Miliband's speech will be exposed as just another electioneering gimmick.

Arrests

On Saturday's demonstration, protestors were arrested for even carrying placards calling for lifting the proscription on Palestine Action. One, Kingston University professor Peter Hallward, was reportedly held for displaying a banner which read: "In the UK it's a crime to say I support Palestine Action". Even explaining the current repressive legislation in this way could mean detention under section 13 of the Terrorism Act, it seems. As Stop the War Coalition vice-chair Chris Nineham said, "If we were right and they were wrong, why are we still being persecuted?"²

I saw people marching with Prisoners for Palestine, a collective representing all those detained under charges related to Palestine liberation, being arrested for covering their faces. This is of course, in stark contrast to the anti-immigration demonstrators,



Claim that anti-Zionists are anti-Semites is yet another big lie

whose black-clad, face-covered thugs were left to their own devices. Around 11 members of the Revolutionary Communist Party, which had one of the largest single blocs on Saturday's demonstration, were arrested and taken to Walworth police station.

The Greens also constituted a sizable bloc, possibly buoyed by the recent conference resolution that "Zionism is racism" - or possibly as a reaction to the furore raised by the bourgeois press, which shows every sign of using the 'anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism' ploy that it employed so successfully against Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader. And perhaps because of that, and the way that he seems to be caving in to pressure, Zack Polanski decided to sit this demonstration out, as he did the conference vote on "Zionism is racism". Either way, there were a lot more Green Party banners than I have seen for a while. As for Labour banners, I did not see *any*. There were also very few from trade unions, although an honourable mention must go to the Fire Brigades Union and the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union.

There was, of course, the inevitable Zionist counterdemonstration and, as has been the case for the last three years, it was very small - made up of the

usual assortment of provocateurs, but ignored by what are now vast numbers who understand the truth about Zionism.

In fact, on what was a very pleasant day of warm sunshine, most of the demonstration had a buoyant, optimistic feel to it, which made a pleasing backdrop to a couple of newlyweds who joined us on Westminster Bridge - having photos taken in their wedding finery amongst Palestine flags!

Drive to war

Of course, this demonstration was also taking place against the background of Trump's continued attacks on the people of Iran, and its escalation to include Yemen. Retaliation against US allies in the Middle East threatens further escalation with its inevitable impact on energy security around the world. Thousands of placards denounced the brutality of the war and US imperialism, aided and abetted by the UK.

This also took place in the context of Andy Burnham's accusation that Iran played a part in the incident at RAF Fairford, whatever that was. It is an assertion that looks more incredible as time goes on. People can see this kind of unsupported accusation for what it is: a government determined to

support the US drive to war - a war that will be paid for with cutbacks on social expenditure in favour of arms production.

Ed Miliband's warm-up act at the Labour Party conference was, of course, followed by Burnham's tear-streaked main feature, promising jam tomorrow on a wide range of issues. This, of course, was pure electioneering and presupposes that he will have control over the direction the economy will be heading in the drive to war. The accusation of Russian interference in the Brexit referendum looks as desperate as the RAF Fairford conjuring trick.

On Saturday's march every single demonstrator was mindful of the urgency to stop arms exports to Israel, a country which violates its so-called 'ceasefire' daily. We were also mindful of other events in Europe, whether French students or Spanish activists on the housing question. We all know that the drive to war has the potential to unite us all as people making the obvious connection between burgeoning militarism and austerity.

Gaza

In the meantime, in Gaza, Israel's 'yellow line' moves a little further, dividing Israeli from supposed Palestinian control as part of

the October 2025 'ceasefire' agreement. Israel controls about 65% of Gaza, according to the United Nations - up from the 53% agreed a year ago. This means that 2.1 million Palestinians are confined to about a third of the strip. Nearly 1,500 of them have been killed in the last year.³

Saturday's demonstrators know there is no time to lose. The Gaza Strip was already one of the most densely populated places on earth before the genocide began and, with winter approaching, the mortality rate is only likely to rise. The Labour government's pledge of £88 million in aid will be entirely dependent on Israel's control over all resources going into Gaza, as it has been throughout the genocide.

The idea that the people of Gaza and indeed the West Bank can wait for the minimal sanctions applied against Israel to exert influence over Israel is risible. The measures announced by Ed Miliband were chosen to have little direct impact on its prosecution of genocide in Gaza and accelerated ethnic cleansing in the West Bank.

In the meantime, the Labour leadership knows that it faces challenges from left and right between now and the next election. If a week is a long time in politics, the next three years will seem like an eternity for Burnham and co.

Rally

The rally in Whitehall on Saturday was addressed by Zarah Sultana, Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, among others, including Maryam Eslamdoust, the general secretary of the TSSA, and Andrea Egan of Unison. All those who spoke gave their usual worthy speeches, although Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah carried a weight born of the role he has played as a plastic and reconstructive surgeon in Gaza. There have been over 6,000 limb amputations in Gaza - a quarter of which have been among children.

While Israel has obviously been the principal force in the genocide, it has acted as the tool of western imperialism - the same force that threatens war on a global scale. US attempts to cleave Russia from China are unlikely to be successful, even though Europe seems determined to keep arming Ukraine in order to weaken any rivalry to the US hegemon. Of course, the US mid-term elections may exert an influence, but Trump's mercurial leadership cannot last forever.

Nor can the quiescence of a world working class that has only increasing poverty and war to look forward to. In the UK, the Labour government can only maintain itself for so long with its current mere gestures in the direction of Palestine solidarity, which are flatly contradicted by its otherwise steadfast support for Israel.

Around the world things are moving fast. Only the working class, organised into a mass Communist Party, can ensure it is not in the direction of destruction ●

Notes

1. www.middleeasteye.net/news/we-hear-you-you-were-right-ed-miliband-tells-people-outraged-over-palestinian-plight
2. morningstaronline.co.uk/article/newlyweds-palestine-march-demo-solidarity
3. www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/10/13/gazas-yellow-line-advances-leaving-displaced-families-with-nowhere-to-go

OUR HISTORY

Why Israel is a racist state

We reprint this article by **Moshé Machover** in light of the media-amplified campaign against Green Party activists for daring to categorise Zionism as a form of racism. It most certainly is. As with any colonial-settler project, Zionism involves systemic discrimination against the indigenous population. First published in September 2018 by Labour Party Marxists

That Israel is a racist state is a well-established fact. On July 19 2018, it enacted a quasi-constitutional nationality bill - 'Basic law: Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people' - which was widely condemned as institutionalising discrimination against Israel's non-Jewish citizens.

As many have observed, this law merely codifies and formalises a reality that long predates it.¹ Within its pre-1967 borders, Israel is an illiberal semi-democracy. It defines itself as "Jewish and democratic", but, as its critics point out, it is "democratic for Jews, Jewish for others". In the territories ruled by it since 1967, Israel is a military tyranny, applying one system of laws and regulations to Jewish settlers and an entirely separate one to the indigenous Palestinian Arabs.

The ways in which Israel exercises racist discrimination are too numerous to list here. Adalah, the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, listed over 65 Israeli laws that discriminate directly or indirectly against Palestinian citizens in Israel and/or Palestinian residents of the occupied Palestinian territory. In addition to these laws there are countless unofficial bureaucratic practices and regulations by which Israeli racist discrimination operates in everyday life.

The conclusion cannot be denied: the state of Israel is structurally racist: an apartheid state, according to the official UN definition of this term.

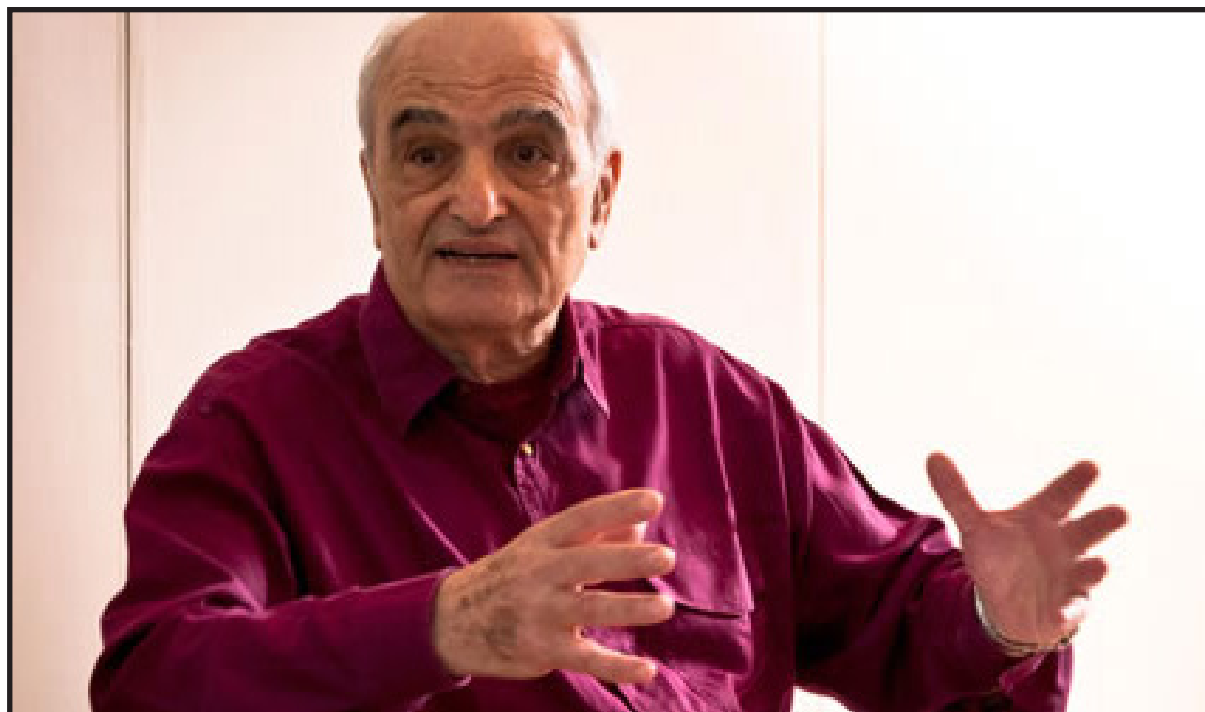
Public discourse

In Israeli public discourse, racist speech is extremely common, even at the highest echelon of politics. Some of this high-level racist discourse is almost casual, such as Benjamin Netanyahu's infamous 'Arabs voting in droves' video on election day, March 17 2015;² or the "We are not Arab lovers" declaration of president Isaac Herzog, when leader of Israel's Labor Party in 2016.³ At the most obscene end of the range there are statements by senior politicians containing barely concealed calls for ethnic cleansing.

Some of the harshest condemnation of Israel's racism has been voiced by two Israeli academics, who, as recognised experts on the history of fascism and Nazism, spoke with considerable authority.

Professor Zeev Sternhell was emeritus head of the department of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and one of the world's leading experts on fascism. In an article published in 2018, he referred to statements made by two senior Israeli members of the ruling coalition: Bezael Smotrich (then deputy speaker of the Knesset, Israel's parliament); and Miki Zohar (chair of one of the Knesset's most important committees). These statements, Sternhell writes, "should be widely disseminated on all media outlets in Israel and throughout the Jewish world. In both of them we see not just a growing Israeli fascism, but racism akin to Nazism in its early stages".⁴

This shocking comparison with Nazism was endorsed by Daniel Blatman, professor of history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem,



Moshé Machover: pioneering analysis

whose book, *The death marches: the final phase of Nazi genocide*, won him in 2011 the Yad Vashem International Book Prize for Holocaust Research. In an article published in 2017 he commented: "Deputy speaker Bezael Smotrich's admiration for the biblical genocidaire, Joshua bin Nun, leads him to adopt values that resemble those of the German SS."⁵

Blatman returned to this topic in a later article:

Deputy Knesset speaker MK Bezael Smotrich ... presented his phased plan, according to which the Palestinians in the occupied territories (and possibly Israeli citizens, too) would become, in the best case, subjects without rights with a status that reminds us of German Jews after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935. To the extent that they do not agree to the plan, they will simply be cleansed from here. If they refuse to leave, they will be uprooted violently, which would lead to genocide.

Another elected official from the ruling coalition, Likud's Miki Zohar, did not hesitate to state that the Arabs have a problem that has no solution - they are not Jews and therefore their fate in this land cannot be the same as that of the Jews ... Prof Zeev Sternhell wrote in this paper earlier this month that this racism is "akin to Nazism in its early stages". I think it is Nazism in every way and fashion, even if it comes from the school of the victims of historical Nazism.

He concluded that, "if a racism survey were held in western countries like the one on anti-Semitism, Israel would be near the top of the list".⁶

Exposing Israel's racism is all too easy. Mere denunciation, without explanation of its underlying context, may actually be misleading, if not counterproductive; it may appear as singling Israel out for some peculiar and exceptional moral defect of its leaders or, worse, of its Jewish

majority. In fact, racist structures and attitudes, wherever they occur, are part of the legal and ideological superstructure and cannot properly be understood in isolation from their material base.

In the case of Israel, that material base is the Zionist colonisation of Palestine - a process of which Israel is both product and instrument. That the Zionist project is all about the colonisation of Palestine by Jews is, once again, an indisputable fact. It is how political Zionism described itself right from the start. Thus, the second Zionist Congress (1898) adopted the following resolution (supplementing the Basel programme adopted at the first Congress a year earlier):

This Congress, in approval of the colonisation already inaugurated in Palestine, and being desirous of fostering further efforts in that direction, hereby declares, that:

"For the proper settlement of Palestine, this Congress considers it is necessary to obtain the requisite permission from the Turkish government, and to carry out such settlement according to the plan, and under the direction of a committee, selected by this Congress ...

"This committee to be appointed to superintend and direct all matters of colonisation; it shall consist of 10 members, and have its seat in London."⁷

The Congress also resolved to establish a bank to finance the activities of the Zionist movement. The bank was duly incorporated in London in 1899 - its name was the Jewish Colonial Trust.⁸ Well into the 20th century, Zionists continued to describe their project unabashedly, in a perfectly matter-of-fact way, as one of colonisation. Later in the 20th century this usage became a public relations liability, and the term was replaced by various euphemisms. But the practice of colonisation of Palestinian land has continued unabated and is going ahead at full steam to this day.

This context makes Israel's racism quite 'natural', in the sense of

conforming to a general law. Every colonisation of an already inhabited territory is accompanied by racism. This is the case whether or not the colonisers arrive with preconceived racist ideas. Colonisation invariably meets resistance by the indigenous people. This was clearly understood, for example, by Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940), the founder of the Zionist current that has been politically dominant in Israel for the last 41 years. In his seminal article, 'The iron wall' (1923), he wrote:

Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonised. That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing, and what they will persist in doing as long as there remains a solitary spark of hope that they will be able to prevent the transformation of 'Palestine' into the 'Land of Israel' ...

Colonisation can have only one aim, and Palestine Arabs cannot accept this aim. It lies in the very nature of things, and in this particular regard nature cannot be changed.

Zionist colonisation must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power [ie, Britain] that is independent of the native population - behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.⁹

In their conflict with the 'natives', settlers tend to develop a racist ideology as self-justification.

We can say more. Racism in general comes in many different variants, and colonisers' racism takes different forms, depending on the type of colonisation. In colonisation based primarily on exploiting the labour-power of the indigenous people, the latter are usually depicted by the colonisers as inferior creatures, deserving no better fate than working for their conquerors.

But in colonisation based on

excluding and displacing the 'natives' rather than incorporating them into the colonial economy as workers, they are usually depicted as dangerous, wild and murderous people, who ought to be ethnically cleansed. Zionist colonisation belongs to this category. In this respect, it is not unlike the colonisation of what became the United States, except that the Zionist organisation insisted explicitly and deliberately on denying employment to non-Jews.¹⁰

Freedom loving?

In the US Declaration of Independence, the 'freedom-loving' founding fathers - only some of whom were slave-owners - complain that the king of Great Britain "has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions". In today's terminology they would no doubt be described as 'terrorists'. The Palestinian Arabs are Israel's "merciless Indian savages".

When viewed against the background of the history of this type of colonisation, Israeli racist ideology and practices are par for the course. The annals of colonisation certainly have grimmer chapters, such as the total extermination of the people of Tasmania, to mention an extreme example. Zionist colonisation is, however, exceptional in being anachronistic: it continues in the 21st century the kind of thing - settler colonialism - that elsewhere ended in the 19th.

To conclude: apart from its anachronism, there is little that is exceptional about Israel's racism. It is rooted in its nature as a settler state. Uprooting colonialist racism requires a change of regime: decolonisation - which in the case of Israel means deZionisation!¹¹ ●

Notes

1. Thus, for example, Bernie Sanders remarked in passing that "the recent 'nation state law' ... essentially codifies the second-class status of Israel's non-Jewish citizens" ('A new authoritarian axis demands an international progressive front' *The Guardian* September 13 2018).

2. www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/binyamin-netanyahu-israel-arab-election.

3. www.middleeasteye.net/columns/when-israels-main-opposition-party-has-problem-countrys-palestinian-citizens-1878921672.

4. www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-in-israel-growing-fascism-and-a-racism-akin-to-early-nazism-1.5746488.

5. www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-the-israeli-mk-heralding-genocide-against-palestinians-1.5475561. The biblical reference is to the book of Joshua, which contains a mythical account of the conquest and ethnic cleansing of the land of Canaan (Palestine) by the Israelites. The account is, of course, purely fictitious, but is taken as inspiration and virtual blueprint by the likes of Smotrich.

6. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-international-holocaust-remembrance-day-an-israeli-hypocrisy-1.5768945.

7. www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2612-basel-program.

8. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-colonial-trust.

9. 'The iron wall' (*O Zheleznoi stene*), published November 4 1923 in the Russian-language journal *Rassvet* ('Dawn'); English translation: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/ironwall.html.

10. See the 1929 constitution of the Jewish Agency: www.jta.org/archive/zionist-congress-approves-text-of-jewish-agency-constitution.

11. See my article, 'The decolonisation of Palestine' *Weekly Worker* June 23 2016.

MIDDLE EAST

Modern wars, ancient myths

As the flame of war spreads across the region, **Yassamine Mather** looks at Saudi Arabia's vulnerability, the misinformation surrounding the Houthis and Marco Rubio's dangerous clash of civilisations nonsense

Saudi intervention in Yemen, attacks on Riyadh airport, strikes on pipelines and threats to Red Sea shipping - all demonstrate how rapidly the flames of war can spread.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump's energy deal with Russia, China's pledge to safeguard Iran's "legitimate interests", Vladimir Putin's offer to mediate between Iran and the US and Moscow's close relations with Tehran show that this is all part of a much wider geopolitical game of musical chairs.

Yet something else is happening alongside the expansion of armed conflict. There is an attempt to transform a thoroughly modern phenomenon - rival states, military alliances, access to oil, nuclear programmes, markets and imperial interests - into an ancient struggle between civilisations.

Marco Rubio's extraordinary speech in Athens provides perhaps the clearest example. By invoking Xerxes' invasion of Greece in 480BC and moving seamlessly from ancient Persia to contemporary Iran, the US secretary of state presented today's conflict as the latest chapter in a confrontation stretching back 2,500 years. History is being pressed into the service of propaganda.

The attacks on King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh expose another contradiction. Saudi Arabia was the world's eighth-largest military spender in 2025, reaching approximately \$83.2 billion - around 6.5% of gross domestic product - making the kingdom by far the biggest spender in the Middle East. Yet the airport serving its capital remains vulnerable to further attacks from Yemen's Houthis 'rebels'.

This should tell us something about the economics of modern warfare. Saudi Arabia has spent vast sums purchasing sophisticated US and European weapons, aircraft, missile-defence systems and surveillance technology. Its armed forces have benefited from decades of western training, logistical assistance and technical support.

Nevertheless, cheap drones and missiles can penetrate or overwhelm immensely expensive defence systems. As the US has itself discovered in its confrontation with Iran, the economics are absurd: a low-cost drone can be successfully intercepted by a missile, but that missile can cost millions of dollars.

But Saudi military expenditure serves purposes beyond defending its own territory. It represents a highly profitable relationship with the western arms industry and reinforces Riyadh's strategic dependence on Washington. Arms sales are not simply commercial transactions or technical decisions about defence: they bind ruling classes, military establishments and states together.

From 2015 the Saudi-led coalition, armed and supported by western powers, subjected Yemen to years of aerial bombardment and blockade. The consequences for the population were catastrophic. Despite overwhelming superiority in conventional weaponry, Saudi Arabia failed to defeat the Houthis (officially known as Ansar Allah or Ansarullah). Indeed, Sana'a, the capital city of the so-called 'internationally recognised government' has been in the hands of the so-called 'rebels' for more than a decade. And now the war is coming home to Saudi Arabia itself.

Almost every western news outlet describes the Houthis as 'Iran-backed'.



Saudi Arabian Typhoon Eurofighter raining death and destruction over Yemen

Sometimes the phrase appears so mechanically that it functions almost as part of their name. Iran certainly has relations with Ansar Allah and has provided support. But reducing the movement to an Iranian proxy distorts both its history and the present-day realities of the situation in Yemen.

Ansar Allah emerged from the political, social and religious conflicts of northern Yemen. Its origins lie in the Zaydi revivalist movement of the 1990s - not in some Iranian plan for regional domination. The Houthis seized Sana'a in September 2014 and subsequently consolidated their authority across much of northern and western Yemen, including its most densely populated areas.

Whatever else they are, after 12 years controlling the capital and governing millions of people, simply calling them 'rebels' makes less and less sense. They constitute a *de facto* state authority. Their rule is authoritarian, their opponents face repression and socialists have no reason to prettify their politics. But political analysis requires considerably more than attaching the words 'Iran-backed' to every organisation Washington or its allies dislike.

The terminology serves a purpose: Yemen's internal political conflicts, class divisions, regional inequalities and history disappear; instead, everything becomes another front in Iran's supposed expansion across the Middle East. Saudi Arabia and its western supporters can then appear as defenders of regional order rather than protagonists whose ill-considered intervention has helped to devastate Yemen.

Rejecting this narrative does not mean converting Ansar Allah into an 'anti-imperialist' force deserving automatic support. Such 'campism' has already badly damaged the left.

Ancient enemies

Rubio's Athens speech performs a similar ideological operation on a grander historical scale. He invoked Xerxes' capture of Athens, the destruction of temples and the Acropolis, before leaping to the Islamic Republic and contrasting supposed western notions of duty and loyalty with what he called the "culture of death", represented by Iran's hardline clerics.

The manoeuvre is crude. Two and a half millennia disappear. The Islamic Republic becomes the continuation of the Achaemenid empire and Washington appoints itself heir to Athens. There is, of course, no continuous 2,500-year conflict between an entity called 'Iran' and another called 'the west'. Nor were the

Greco-Persian wars simply an ancient confrontation between freedom-loving Europeans and oriental despotism.

The sprawling Achaemenid empire incorporated many different peoples, including a substantial Greek-speaking population in what is now Turkey. Hence many Greeks fought on the Persian side during the 'Greek wars'. No less to the point, projecting a unified 'west' and 'east' backwards onto the ancient world is historical nonsense. Neither Greeks nor Persians understood the innumerable wars of their day through Samuel Huntington's ridiculous categories.

There is another problem. As Pierre Briant has emphasised in his book *From Cyrus to Alexander*, our understanding of the Achaemenids comes largely through Greek sources, written by participants in, or inheritors of, conflicts with Persia. It therefore has an inherent 'Hellenocentric' bias and requires critical treatment. Rubio does the opposite. His version resembles the ideological universe of the 2006 *fantasy* action film *300*, which retold the famous battle of Thermopylae: Persians appear as representatives of an exotic, irrational and threatening east, while the Greek Spartans embody freedom and civilisation. This is not merely extraordinarily bad history: it has a contemporary political function. Once an opponent is recast from a state into a civilisation, war against it can be represented as something more than a political choice: it becomes the continuation of an ancient and supposedly unavoidable struggle.

Nowadays, of course, Iran increasingly occupies the place previously assigned to Islam as the civilisational enemy. This matters. Criticism of the Islamic Republic is one thing: threatening Iran as a country, a society and a civilisation is quite another. Trump's talk of reducing Iran's infrastructure to ruins or destroying an "entire civilisation" implies collective punishment.

There is an irony, however: the Islamic Republic has responded to Washington's civilisational mythology by producing one of its own! Instead of rejecting Rubio's attempt to turn ancient history into contemporary propaganda, Iranian officials have searched for more favourable historic episodes. Mohsen Rezaei (secretary of the Supreme National Security Council) invoked the Roman emperor, Valerian, kneeling before the Sasanian king, Shapur I. After the disastrous battle of Edessa (260 CE) he became the first and only Roman emperor to fall into enemy hands. He served as Shapur's living footstool and died a humiliating death.

This is a remarkable shift. For

decades the Islamic Republic treated much of pre-Islamic Iranian history with deep suspicion. Its legitimacy supposedly derived from Islam and the 1979 revolution, not Cyrus, Xerxes or the Sasanians. Now we see Achaemenid soldiers, patriotic songs and images of a defeated Valerian. Why? Because a regime suffering from profound internal contradictions and declining ideological legitimacy has rediscovered the usefulness of nationalism. The message shifts from 'Defend the Islamic Republic' to 'Defend Iran'. That enables the regime to obscure the difference between opposing imperialist aggression and supporting the existing state. Criticism of the Islamic Republic can be denounced as weakening the nation in wartime.

Washington and Tehran therefore feed each other ideologically. Rubio turns today's Iran into ancient Persia; the Islamic Republic responds by proclaiming itself heir to Persia's ancient greatness, replacing politics and class with mythology.

Iranian left

For the Iranian left, accepting either narrative would be disastrous. Opposition to US and Israeli aggression does not require political support for the Islamic Republic, just like opposition to the Islamic Republic does not require support for Washington, Israel or their project for restructuring the Middle East.

There is another absurdity. While Rubio describes an almost eternal confrontation between Persia and the west, Vladimir Putin is attempting to present Russia as a mediator. Putin has spoken with Iranian president Masoud Pezeshkian and conveyed Iranian positions to Trump. Tehran says proposals have been exchanged concerning an end to the war and reopening the Strait of Hormuz.

But Russia is no neutral arbiter. Moscow has its own strategic relationship with Tehran and is simultaneously fighting a war in Ukraine. Russian calculations involve energy prices, relations with Washington, sanctions and its position within the international state system. Indeed, disruption to Persian Gulf energy supplies can benefit Russian energy exports, even while Moscow calls for peace. There is no reason for socialists to transform Putin into an 'anti-imperialist' statesman simply because there is a conflict of interest between Washington and Moscow. Russian state interests remain Russian state interests.

Trump, meanwhile, claims that neither Russia nor China is providing meaningful assistance to Iran, arguing

that Washington would know if they were. Yet this sits uneasily with the attention paid to Iran in US-China discussions. When Xi Jinping was in the US, both American and Chinese accounts indicated that China's relationship with Iran was high on the agenda.

The contradiction is revealing. Beijing and Moscow may oppose aspects of US policy and maintain close relations with Tehran, but neither operates according to some abstract principle of 'anti-imperialist solidarity'. Their calculations are those of states pursuing their own economic and geopolitical interests. This is why the conflicts cannot be separated into neat camps. Iran, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China and the United States (not to mention Gulf energy supplies) increasingly intersect.

Riyadh's dilemma

As the war expands, so does the mythology used to justify it. The current manoeuvring around Israel makes the contradictions even clearer. Benjamin Netanyahu is reportedly seeking Saudi agreement, through US mediation, for Israel to participate directly in military operations against the Houthis. Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, however, has resisted such a move - not least because of the potential domestic and regional repercussions of appearing to facilitate an Israeli assault on Yemen.

That disagreement should not be mistaken for some principled Saudi opposition to Israeli militarism. Riyadh spent years bombing Yemen itself. What has changed is the political calculation. Saudi Arabia now has to weigh its hostility towards Ansar Allah and its strategic relationship with Washington against the danger of becoming directly involved in a Yemen war alongside Israel.

Here again, talk of permanent camps becomes misleading. Israel, Saudi Arabia and the US share significant strategic interests, but those interests are not identical. Alliances between capitalist states are neither friendships nor expressions of common moral values: they are arrangements continually renegotiated according to changing circumstances and ruling class interests.

The people of Yemen, meanwhile, have no interest in becoming pawns in somebody else's story about an Iranian-Saudi confrontation, an Israeli-Iranian war or a supposedly ancient struggle between civilisations. Nor do Saudi workers have an interest in the billions transferred to western arms corporations in the name of a 'security' those weapons demonstrably cannot guarantee.

Our starting point must be working class political independence from all the rival camps:

■ Against US imperialism and Israeli aggression certainly - but without prettifying the Islamic Republic.

■ Against Saudi intervention and western arms sales - but without transforming Ansar Allah into a socialist or anti-imperialist force.

■ Against Washington's attempt to construct Iran as a civilisational enemy - but equally against Tehran's attempt to mislead Iranian workers with nationalist myths.

The central conflict is between the politics of competing states and ruling classes, on the one hand, and the interests of the working class and the poor, on the other. As the flame of war spreads, that distinction becomes more important, not less ●

SPAIN

Soft left strengthens Vox

Housing, migration and the prospect of the hard right entering government for the first time since 1975 are the dominant issues, says **Paul Davies**. But what about the democratic republic, Nato and working class rule?

Prime minister Pedro Sánchez has called a snap general election for November 29. This follows the defeat of his centre-left coalition's two emergency decrees on housing, which were, of course, triggered by the forced eviction of Maricarmen Abascal, an 87-year-old pensioner, from her Madrid apartment. Her plight sparked massive street protests across major Spanish cities (she has since died).

Junts, the centre-right Catalan independence party, broke its already fragile parliamentary arrangement with the *minority* governing coalition, dominated by Sánchez's Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), over accusations of corruption, cover-ups and incompetence. Junts has explicitly ruled out supporting Sánchez's re-election after November.

Housing is central to the PSOE election campaign (a rent cap, expanding legislation against evictions and restrictions on corporate ownership of the housing stock). Meanwhile, the reformist left remains glued to the PSOE, mainly out of fear of the right and the far right.

As for the country's right and far-right parties, the Popular Party and Vox, they are making anti-corruption, anti-immigration and anti-state controls their rallying call. The promise is that with tax incentives the free market will solve the chronic shortage of affordable housing.

At the moment it looks like neither of the two main parties - PSOE and PP - are likely to go past the 176 seats needed to gain a majority in the congress of deputies. However, Sumar, the PSOE's main left coalition partner over the past three years, is predicted to lose support, while the far-right Vox, which stresses family, Catholic values and a single and indivisible Spain, is predicted to make massive gains. Latest polls put it on some 18% of the vote and securing from 61 to 72 MPs (up from 33 in 2023).

If that turns out to be correct, the PP could end up forming a *majority* coalition with Vox - a first for the far right since the death of Franco in 1975. In recent years, Vox has gone from being unacceptable to acceptable in PP eyes: it is now in coalition in four regional assemblies.

It is this possibility of a right/far-right coalition government that is getting the left into something verging on blind panic. There are overexcited warnings about a return to the "dark stone of Francoism". Rallies and demonstrations ring to the "¡No pasarán!" (they shall not pass) republican slogan of the 1936-39 civil war. Of course, there are real dangers - to continued regional autonomy, women's rights, LGBT+ people, trade union collective bargaining, migrants, etc. Note, however, neither Vox, nor any other far-right party, has got a paramilitary wing. While it sometimes includes retired generals on its election lists, Vox's main emphasis is expanding the role of the state's military in dealing with illegal migrants. There is nothing like the Falange.

Sánchez poses the choice facing electors as a 'progressive government' or a 'coalition of reaction'. Obviously, going for a snap general election was a gamble, but it is hardly a new tactic. Sánchez is a canny political operator. He successfully brought in tow both Podemos and Sumar. He secured a deal with the Catalan separatists by getting the highly



Massive protest demonstrations

controversial amnesty law over all the parliamentary and legal hurdles (this allowed Junts leader and former Catalan president, Carles Puigdemont, to return from his Brussels exile). This is what got Sánchez the votes of the seven Junts MPs and allowed him to stay on as prime minister in 2023. And Sánchez wants to be seen to stand up against Israel and Trump. He has been vocal in his condemnation of Israeli expansionism and the genocide in Gaza. Unlike other Nato countries, his Spain has not gone along with demands for upping the arms budget to 3.5% of GDP.

Twin issues

Whether or not the electorate is convinced by the PSOE's radical promises remains to be seen. Of course, the housing crisis is hardly anything new - many working class people are being priced out of affordable housing. They find themselves spending half their incomes (or more in major cities) just to keep a roof over their heads.¹ The fact that Sánchez has been prime minister since 2018, but has failed to address the issue, will not easily be overlooked. It is not surprising that the country is still experiencing mass housing protests, with permanent 'tent cities' established in Madrid, Barcelona and Málaga.

Clashes with the police are reported regularly and the country's biggest unions, the Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the General Workers Union (UGT) last week announced a general strike on November 11 over the housing question. Sánchez will no doubt make some more concessions - he is clearly calculating that he can score points against his right and far-right rivals over housing.

The other main issue that will dominate the election presents him with something more of a challenge. PP and Vox have persistently waged a war against Sánchez over the question of migration, particularly since his

adoption earlier this year of what has been called a 'pro-migrant' stance. The granting of legal status to 500,000 undocumented migrants certainly enabled Sánchez and the PSOE to present themselves as the champions of human rights ... as well as helping to sustain Spain's relatively buoyant economic growth. But it caused a storm on the right, especially since the mass border crossing in July of 70,000 people from Morocco into Ceuta, Spain's enclave on the coast of north Africa.

The right paints immigration as a 'threat to Spanish society'. For PP, the continuing situation in Ceuta has graphically highlighted the weakness of Spain's borders and apparently put in jeopardy its 140,000 inhabitants. Calls from the party leader, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, for the "defence" of the territory against the "invasion", on the basis that "Ceuta is Spain", have been commonplace. That despite the fact that the majority of those who entered Ceuta eventually returned to Morocco voluntarily. However, the 5,000 who remain - a third of whom are children - live in squalor beside the enclave's small beach. There are frequent reports of verbal and physical (including sexual) abuse from anti-migrant vigilante thugs.

Vox has fuelled the fire no end. Essentially, its slogan is Make Spain Great Again. That means no more inward migration, an end to regional autonomy and rolling back civil rights. Vox, it should be added, shows a distinct fondness for the days of Francoism. For example, it strongly opposed the exhumation of Franco's body from the Valley of the Fallen and consistently demands the repeal of laws which brand his rule as a criminal dictatorship.

Sánchez's predictable response was to plead that Ceuta's migrants are not "invaders" but were "looking for a better life". Meanwhile, he has ordered the construction of a

500-metre maritime barrier and despatched 3,600 extra police and soldiers. Of course, neither he nor his PSOE party have raised the need for a Spanish withdrawal from this remnant of empire.

Left forces

What of the main organisations of the left? The United Left (IU - essentially, the 'official' Communist Party of Spain, the main force in Sumar) is readying to select candidates. Podemos is yet to commit itself to Frente Amplio ('Broad Front'), citing tactical differences as a problem.

When Sumar met earlier this year to start to plan an electoral alliance for the general election that was due to take place in 2027, the event was a top-down affair. Then it proposed (and decided) to call itself 'Un Paso al Frente' ('One Foot Forward') and omitted any time for debate on its political platform. Except for a name change, there is nothing to suggest that things are to be different this time around in terms of grassroots input. Indeed, its political aims - and its ways of 'achieving them' - appear to have already been established.

Soon after the election had been called, the parliamentary spokesperson for IU, leading Communist Party

member Enrique Santiago, had already stated the alliance's objectives: "Our task is to organise the Frente Amplio with a programme based on defence of the right to housing and the welfare state, guaranteeing social rights, labour and public freedoms in the face of the threat of fascism". Arguments that go beyond that, including the need for a principled, transformative political programme, get buried (if they are fielded at all).

Frente Amplio is committed to maintaining the coalition with PSOE and therefore lucrative ministerial posts.² The old Socialist International principle of not taking part in a bourgeois coalition is long forgotten.

Make no mistake. Sánchez and PSOE are not even republican when it comes to programme. Sánchez is committed to the post-1978 constitutional order, the monarchy, the two-chamber parliament, the Nato proxy war in Ukraine, etc. All in the name of stability. Yes, at its 2024 conference, PSOE voted to recognise the "historic" republican cultural tradition. Yes, half of PSOE's membership and half of its voters say they are republican. Yes, its youth wing, Jovenuts Socialistes, regularly pushes for the debate over the monarchy to be reopened. IU and Sumar also make a Platonic stand on republicanism. But to no effect. For Sánchez and PSOE the monarchy is non-negotiable.

Whether Sánchez's left monarchism is enough for those who will be mobilised in November's general strike is an important question. Small groups such as *Izquierda Revolucionaria* (the Revolutionary Left), have called for the general strike to be combined with an indefinite education strike (linking with the movement in France). The old idea being going from street protests to general strike and from general strike to soviets and from soviets to state power (the 'transitional method').

November 11, however, is not at all likely to be a prelude for an insurrection. How can it be? There is no mass revolutionary party. No armed popular militia. No revolutionary situation. Rather, the one-day protest strike will act as a safety valve and allow CCOO and UGT tops and the leaders of PSOE, IU and Podemos to adopt a radical pose.

PP and Vox will be hoping, on the other hand, that November 11 and the posturing rhetoric of the 'official' left will terrify the middle classes and have them rushing into their reactionary arms ●

Notes

1. Housing shortages are now said to be close to one million, while residents have suffered an average rent increase of 87% since 2016.

2. www.democrata.es/en/politics/expansion-the-sumar-parties-set-october-17-to-present-their-candidate-and-the-electoral-brand-broad-front.

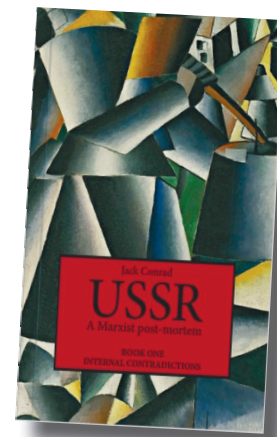
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FRANCE

Youth take the lead

High schoolers have blockaded their schools and taken to the streets in unprecedented numbers. They have been joined by university students, teachers and parents. And on November 5 there is the call for a one-day general strike and mass demonstrations. **Jean Laurel** reports

For the past few weeks, France has been in the middle of an intense youth social movement that has drawn international attention. The movement started at a high school in the Paris suburb of Créteil, beginning with a teachers' strike, before students joined in late September. They shared videos and pictures of their school's terrible run-down condition, showing, in particular, leaks in the ceiling and crumbling walls. These images went viral on social media and quickly spread the idea of blockading schools among students, many of whom face the same problems.

All over France, and particularly in the most disadvantaged areas, high school students are denouncing decrepit facilities, overcrowded classrooms that become unbearable in the heat, and a lack of staff of all kinds: teachers (with 10% of classes not being taught nationwide), but also nurses, social workers, school monitors, cleaning staff... They are also demanding an end to absurd schedules (some school days last from 8am to 6pm).

High schoolers are also opposing university selection. In France, college education is supposed to be free and accessible to anyone who has obtained a high school diploma. But successive governments have created cryptic selection platforms that mainly serve social selection. This is part of a wider trend of dismantling higher education, aimed at making it inaccessible to the working class. The blockades are also clearly politicised against President Emmanuel Macron, as well as the far right, with many slogans against the increase in the military budget (and the lack of increase in any other public sector).

High schoolers are rebelling against a sense that their future is sacrificed by the current system. During the week beginning September 28, the situation took on a whole new dimension. Since then, hundreds of high schools have been closed each day. The mobilisation is surprising, both because of its spontaneity and because of the scale of the state's repression against it. Police violence has escalated, with numerous images circulating showing mistreatment, unprovoked charges and the completely unjustified use of weapons. It was the riot police who were deployed in front of high schools to try to disperse the students. In addition to batons and shields, they are making extensive use of flashballs, tear gas and stun grenades. Flashball shots have horribly mutilated some students. One lost an eye, one a hand, and another all of his lower teeth due to a short-range shot in the face. Police vehicles have also been filmed driving aggressively toward groups of protesters.

Police arrests

The police are treating this like a civil war, with the goal of intimidating the youth. Some officers are clearly enjoying beating up non-white kids, and it feels like they are doing everything in their power to raise the tension. The cases have been referred to the police watchdog (IGPN), but, of course, we cannot expect any form of justice from it. More than 7,000 people have been taken into police custody, including 2,000 on October 1 alone, most of whom are 15-16 years old. Multiple accounts report mistreatment (and even sexual assaults) inside police stations, the



Blockading their decaying, understaffed, underfunded school

full extent of which remains unknown for now. For comparison, there were 12,000 arrests over the entire Yellow Vests movement in 2018-19 (over a full year, compared to just two weeks for the current movement).

Unsurprisingly, the repression is harshest in working class neighbourhoods and against youth from a migrant background. The arbitrariness and violence that can be seen online is revolting.

High school students have gradually been joined by college students throughout the week. The shocking nature of the images sparked support and solidarity in front of high school gates, with adults forming human chains to prevent riot police from charging at the students.

The mobilisation peaked on October 6, the day when education sector unions had called for a strike and a demonstration that drew 450,000 people. On that day, 90% of universities and 50% of high schools were closed (either blockaded by students or closed pre-emptively to prevent such actions). A week later, on October 13, more than 450,000 people again took to the streets.

The movement is not as massive as the opposition to the pension reform in 2023 (which brought 3.5 million people into the streets at its height), but it is different from usual mobilisations because of the unprecedented number of high schoolers in the protests. Amongst the youth, its support is also wider than usual: many universities and schools that usually never join social movements have joined this one.

The bourgeois media analysis focuses, as usual, on images of burning trash cans, which take up the vast majority of airtime, while journalists and politicians take turns condemning the so-called "violence" of the high schoolers. The few

students who get to speak are drowned out by representatives of puppet student organisations controlled by the government, reactionary commentators and police officers.

Organised left

The media also focuses heavily on the alleged responsibility of La France Insoumise (LFI - 'France Unbowed', the party led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon). Like other left-wing organisations LFI supports the movement, and it is the only political force outside the far left that does not unequivocally condemn 'student violence'. LFI leaders are accused of being behind the movement like puppet masters (the government even implied that it had insider info about their responsibility from the intelligence services). Despite that, it is clear that this is a spontaneous movement. In reality, LFI MPs are showing up on blockades, where they are quite popular, wearing their official tricolour sashes, in order to "defuse tension" between the students and the cops.

For its part, the Marxist left is struggling to find its place in the movement. Because of their presence in the education sector or in student unions, and despite their small numbers, the various Trotskyist groups manage to be heard in high school and university general assemblies. However, their only real message is often the need for a general strike of the entire working class for the movement to have any impact (sometimes without even thinking whether this is actually possible right now). And their sole short-term objective is actually to recruit young people into their own student union, or directly into their organisation. Their lack of unity does not help matters.

As for the Parti Communiste Français, confusion reigns. One day, PCF national secretary Fabien Roussel

calls for the creation of "people's courts" to put former education ministers on trial, and to "make the revolution now in the streets". The next day, he condemns the violence of the high schoolers as well as that of the police, calling for a "republican pact" that would bring together the right and the left around cross-party measures for education. This is symptomatic of the contradiction that drives the PCF - between the need to satisfy its

younger or more radical members and the desire of its leadership and elected officials to be accepted by the political and media establishment.

The inter-union coalition, outside of the education sector, has not called on its members to join the ongoing mobilisations, and is only calling for a strike on November 5, which is ridiculously far from the ongoing events. The more left-wing unions, like the General Confederation of Labour, wanted to join the movement starting on October 15, but they backed down to preserve "unity" with the more right-wing unions.

The government has not yet clearly responded to the movement, probably hoping it would die down. It has not. A "time for internal democracy" in every school has been announced, and 3,000 teachers have been urgently reassigned. High schoolers are asked to write down their problems and demands on forms, which is reminiscent of the empty "democratic" initiatives that led nowhere during the Yellow Vests movement. This satisfies no one.

The next big step will be the mobilisation on October 17. This date has been announced as "the return of the Yellow Vests" for two months now, mainly in reaction to the rising cost of living. Such a revival was attempted in September last year and was a relative failure, but this time it is blending into the already existing youth movement. So far, only the CGT has called on its members to join the demonstration.

This weekend also marks the beginning of a two-week school holiday, during which there will, of course, be no blockades. There is no certainty that the movement will continue after this break, but the lack of a concrete response from the government and the prospect of a cross-industry mass strike on November 5 gives reason for hope.

It is uplifting to see such a movement with roots amongst the youth, even though it still lacks a clear political perspective ●

Fighting fund

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Last Saturday's mass pro-Palestine demonstration in London was excellent in two senses: firstly, of course, for the huge numbers - including thousands of self-identifying Jews - expressing their opposition to the ongoing Israeli genocide; but also for the positive response from so many to the *Weekly Worker*. Though we did not ask for donations, we got more than a few.

In addition, there are the contributions to our fighting fund, either via bank transfer or standing order. Topping the bill was comrade AE with his fantastic £100, followed by PB (£80), OG (£32), DV (£30), PM (£15) and CC (£10) - all of whom donated by SO or transfer.

Then we had quite a lot who used PayPal this week. Thank you, comrade TB, for your excellent £95, PM (£50), MS and ST (£20 each), AB (£11), and AR and SO (£5 each). All that came to £486, taking our running total for

October up to £1,085 after exactly two weeks.

Our monthly target is, of course, £2,750, which means we need another £1,665 in the next 17 days. That's quite a lot, but I'm confident we can do it, thanks to the support of so many of our readers. For example, comrade LC writes in a note accompanying his resubscription: "You're doing a really good job - I can't thank you enough."

And thank you for your support, comrade! But how many others will now join him in not only subscribing, but also donating those essential contributions to our fighting fund?

Please do what you can ●

Robbie Rix

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RUSSIA

Prisoners in soft captivity

Does British promotion of European rearmament against Russia amount to a viable alternative to US domination? **Mike Macnair** does not think so. Europe is incapable of independent action

In the Cold War TV series *The Prisoner*, Patrick McGoochan, the show's primary creator and lead actor, played a British intelligence agent who, after resigning, is abducted by persons unknown and detained in a fictional pseudo-resort in Portmeirion. This is 'soft captivity' with the appearance of a resort, but still (high-tech) captivity. In a series of episodes, McGoochan may seem to approach escape, but, when in the last episode he finally does escape, it appears that he has all along been his own captor; the major puzzles of the series are left unsolved.

The Prisoner can in a sense stand for the relationship of the European countries (and Japan and South Korea) to the USA: 'soft' imprisonment, since the USA did not make its former imperialist rivals into colonies, but into privileged vassal states; and an imprisonment that is inescapable, and follows an increasingly surreal logic of lies.

This analogy struck me as a result of two news stories published in the mainstream press on October 14. The first, and the one which has been more widely reported and commented on, is Andy Burnham's claim that there was "Russian interference" in the 2016 Brexit referendum. This goes along with his open promotion of the idea that Brexit was harmful to the UK.¹ The second, which appeared on the front page of the *Financial Times*, is that Trump threatened Ukraine with cutting off weapons supplies in order to get them to stop attacks on Russian fuel infrastructure.² This was connected to his 'deal' to make Russian diesel available to the US in spite of the 'sanctions' siege warfare, in order to appear to be doing something about price pressures caused by his war of aggression against Iran (the 'deal' has been widely denounced by British and European politicians).³

It is symbolic that in the same week as these stories Germany should be putting on trial the first Ukrainian suspect in the bombing of the Nord Stream 2 Russia-Germany gas pipeline in 2022: an act officially blamed on "elements within the Ukrainian armed forces", but which cannot have happened without US authorisation and support.⁴

Interference

The pro-Brexit press has been quick to denounce Burnham's claim of Russian "interference" in the referendum. The head of MI5, Sir Ken McCallum, speaking on October 13, asserted that Russian disinformation was a major threat; on the Brexit issue, he said that there had been Russian attempts to intervene, but that they had not succeeded.⁵ Brexiteer papers treated this as proving that Burnham was wrong; *The Guardian* saw it as supporting his claim (which *The Independent* also supports).⁶

Morten Morland provided a cartoon in *The Times* which is a very appropriate comment on this controversy. The 'Leave' campaign's battle bus, with its slogan, "We send £350 million. Let's fund our NHS instead", is seen in a dilapidated state at a motor breakers' yard. Pasted on the windscreen is a 'for sale' notice, saying "several careless owners", with, pasted over it, "breaking for spares". Burnham, in overalls, stands in front; he says: "The only thing of use is the reverse gear - and a Russian instruction manual."

The point is clear enough. It was not fraudulent misrepresentations



Volodymyr Zelenskyy is a US puppet

from Russian troll farms which swung the Brexit vote, but fraudulent misrepresentations by the official 'Leave' campaign. The 'fund the NHS' slogan is one example. Another is Michael Howard's claim that EU legislation is made by unelected bureaucrats (in the EU parliament and the council of ministers, no doubt); if Howard honestly believed that claim, he should have lost his professional qualifications as a lawyer on the ground of incompetence. A third was that Brexit would "bring immigration under control": what actually resulted was the "Boriswave" - a massive increase in legal immigration with the explicit purpose of driving down wages.

Meanwhile, of course, the US was engaged in large-scale 'electoral interference' in European, including British, politics, through the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance demanding pledges of loyalty to the once-British, now US, settler-colony of Israel as a form of loyalty pledge to US policy, after the widespread opposition in Europe to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Mike Pompeo, when US secretary of state, said that the US would interfere to "push back" against the possibility of Labour under Jeremy Corbyn winning a general election.⁷

Nor was the US 'electoral interference' in European politics at all new. In the 1970s the US redirected funding that had been given to lobby groups of the right wings of the Labour and socialist parties to neoliberal think-tanks. The right social democrats complained about being defunded: after all, they had had US funding since the early Cold War. Their complaints provided direct evidence of long-suspected US funding.

'Electoral interference' is, in reality, normal to liberal constitutionalism (which the mass media falsely calls 'democracy'). This regime is the rule of capital in its money form through institutional corruption: by the advertising funding of mass media to drown out rival voices; by large-scale 'donations' to political parties and in support of individual politicians (including payments to retired politicians in consideration of their services while in office); by payments to commercial lobbyists for private access to government officials; by the free market in legal services as a form of sale of justice; etc. This

regime inevitably entails the effective interference of the reserve-currency state (now the USA; before 1940 the UK) in the politics of other states.

Russian threat

Burnham was, in essence, attempting to exploit the discourse of the 'Russian threat to Europe' to legitimise his aim of a closer relationship with Europe. This Russian threat is one of the dominant themes of our times, and recurred in McCallum's speech. It is curious that this was published the same day that the former Ukrainian commander-in-chief, General Oleksandr Syrskiy, claimed that Ukraine had fought Russia to a standstill by inflicting disproportionately high casualties and destroying Russia's offensive military capabilities.

On a superficial view, it seems that what is going on is Europe rallying to the defence of Ukraine on principle, while Trump betrays Ukraine for the sake of immediate electoral advantage (diesel prices). But there are two levels below this superficial appearance.

The first is that US administrations since Bush junior in 2001-09 have been demanding that Europe pay for more of its own 'defence'. This is not a Trump novelty, although the Trump administration has particularly emphasised its willingness to leave the Europeans to their fate in the event that they do not stump up. In this context, the Ukraine war and talking up the 'Russian threat' are useful to European governments seeking to raise arms spending in the face of sceptical populations.

The second level is perhaps particularly relevant to Burnham's deployment of 'the Russian threat'. It is that, from the point of view of European states - and European capital, so far as it is at all independent of US capital - the US now looks like a capricious ally, and one which is inflicting direct attacks on European competitors: as in the invasion of Iraq (which wrecked European trading relations with the country), the Aukus scheme (which involved a direct breach of contract with France by the Australian government), the sabotage of Nord Stream 2 (which was a direct US act of war against Germany, though covert) and the US-Israeli attack on Iran (which forces up oil prices at the expense of European countries, as well as China). Maybe, then, the 'Russian threat' can spur European

rearmament and deeper European military cooperation to obtain more independence from the USA?

From this point of view, Burnham, seeking a general policy of re-industrialisation and the revival of a British manufacturing *Mittelstand*, would naturally seek a return to closer relations with the EU. Europe could potentially stand up to America ...

The third level is displayed by Trump's reported threat to cut off arms to Ukraine. The point is how this works: the threat is to cut off intelligence sharing (which implies drone targeting capabilities) and "PURL - the Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List for procuring US weapons for Ukraine". That is, though the US has dumped the cost of the Ukraine war on the Europeans, the US is the ultimate weapons supplier to Ukraine, through the European countries.

This third level shows that the second level as well as the first is delusional. Europe is nowhere near a revival of an independent arms industry to the point of being able to support Ukraine without US backing - let alone rearmament at the level of the creation of an effective European army, plus naval and aerospace operations and sufficient supplies of munitions. The war in Ukraine is a US war, and the Europeans' belief that it is in some way in their interests reflects the level of US electoral interference in European politics.

US threat

There is yet another deeper level to this: the USA is pursuing a policy of aggressive encirclement of China (like the UK's policy towards Germany in 1900-14), and denial of hydrocarbons essential to industry (US policy towards Japan in the late 1930s and down to 1941), with a view to pre-emptive war before China can become too strong to be conquered, but with the Chinese being forced to strike the first blow - like the Germans in 1914 or the Japanese in 1941.

The war with China would inevitably be on the scale of 1914-18 and 1939-45 in terms of US production and expenditure. On the basis of history, there was - until 2014 - a danger that the continental Europeans would 'sit out' the war with China and sell arms to the US, as the US did to Britain and France in 1914-17 and to Britain in 1939-41, thereby becoming the new world hegemon.

In 2014, the US deployed its

covert ops and news management capabilities to force the European powers into war with Russia through the 'Euromaidan' coup. This was a classic strategic ploy, in which anything less than outright defeat would be strategically advantageous to the US. Full success, leading to regime change in Russia, would allow the Russian state to be disarmed by a new Yeltsin and broken up, allowing US control of central Asia through a series of small states. Partial success would allow the US to deny Russia warm-water shipping access and naval bases (so far, apparently, achieved). Even a static war - which we seem to have in Ukraine - would force the Europeans into long-term semi-war with Russia, thus freeing the US's hands for a war with China without the threat of the Europeans doing to the US what Britain did to the Netherlands in 1710-13 and the USA did to Britain in 1914-17 and 1939-41.

2014 itself did not work: the Russians took the Crimea and the eastern Donbas. Trump, in 2017-20, in diplomacy and talks, held out the hand of friendship to Putin, while, behind these deceptions, Ukraine was rearmed with anti-tank and anti-air munitions, which meant that the Russian strike in Kyiv in 2022 (analogous to Russian strikes deep into Georgia in 2008) failed.

The US operation is pre-emptive, because the European states are forced into war with Russia before they can take any steps to overcome the political mechanisms of subordination to the US, or to build up independent arms production and military capabilities independent of the US; so that increased arms spending means merely increased tribute to US capital.

Burnham's Europeanism is thus delusive. The European states remain politically subordinate to the US. As long as they cling to nation-states, as opposed to a real, radically democratic European union, remain within the Atlantic alliance and remain 'democracies' (ie, plutocracies), they will remain subordinate to the US.

Europe could break free of the death-grip of US imperialism in decline. But to do so would require a universalistic political project, one which broke decisively with the plutocratic regime: that is, a project of European communism, able to unite Europe and pose a real alternative which could appeal to the American masses ●

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Notes

1. 'Burnham says it is "clear" Russia interfered with Brexit vote': www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c6jdm3zgg10ko; 'Rejecting closer EU ties would be dereliction of duty, PM to say': www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c6lyk8e3lxz0o.
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ECONOMICS

Achieving the good life

Did Keynes really have the solution to economic slumps, stagnation and mass unemployment? The majority of liberal left economists, trade union leaders and politicians think so. But, says **Michael Roberts**, it should not be back to Keynes, rather forward to Marx

There is a new play in London's West End at the moment, called *Graham*, about the famous British economist, John Maynard Keynes. The character, Graham, is fascinated by this "genius economist". Being an artist rather than an economist, Graham is more concerned with Keynes's apparent belief in the Socratic philosophy of "What makes a good life?" Keynes's answer, according to Graham, is that "the most valuable entities in life were not money, purchases or success, but relationships, love and 'aesthetic appreciation'". In one essay, Keynes defined the human problem as "how to live wisely, agreeably and well".

Graham thinks that Keynes offers an alternative to our money-making, profit-led society:

I'm absolutely convinced of that. You always feel that you have to fight for it, but most people from my post-industrial working class community accept the intellectual argument that he [Keynes] made all those years ago: that [there should be] subsidy on something that doesn't instantly make direct profit back; a painting, a play, a ballet, a song that doesn't have a value that is easily quantified on an Excel spreadsheet, but adds to the value of a nation and to the meaning and happiness of it.

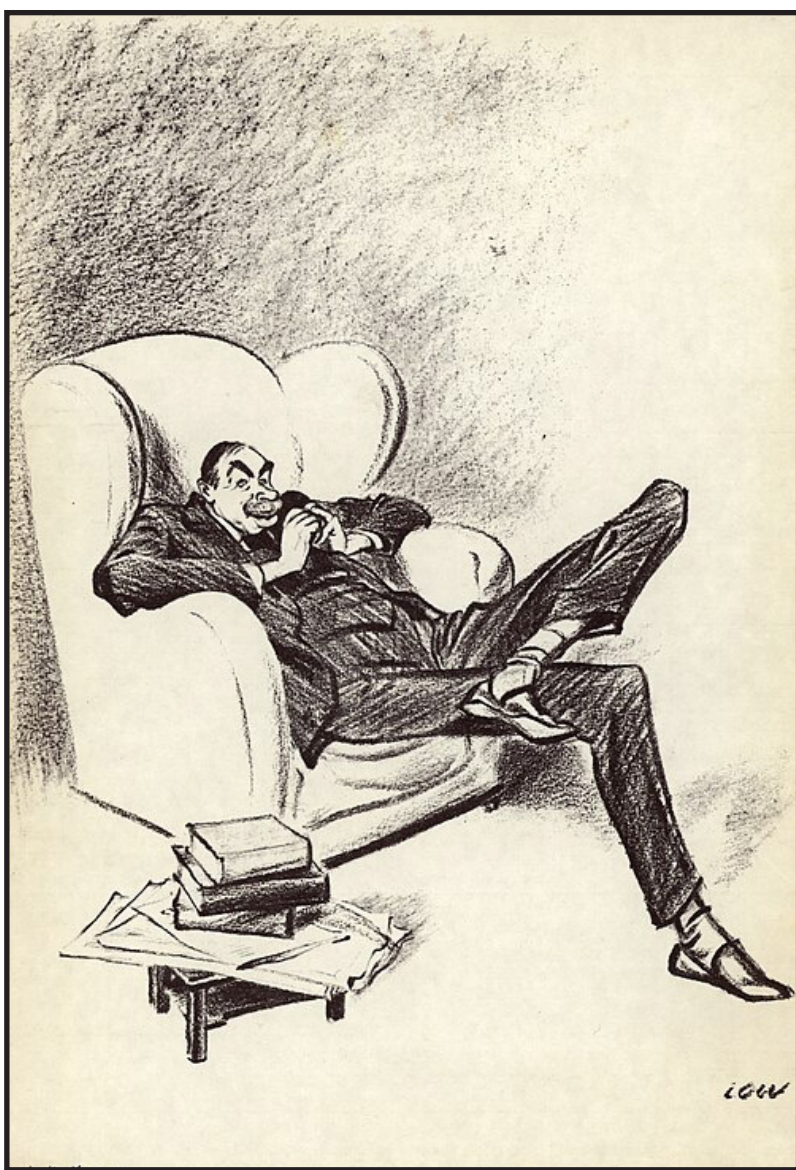
But, unfortunately, we live in a world where "money, purchases and success" dominate. Indeed, seats for Graham's play are going for up to £298 (although there are some for the under-30s at just £25). You need a very good 'standard of living' to get a seat at a play about the 'good life'.

Most people in the world and even in the so-called 'global north' cannot "live wisely, agreeably and well". So economics cannot be ignored in the search for the 'good life'. Graham reckons, like many others, that Keynes had an answer to this 'economic problem'. Following Keynes, governments needed to act and do

away with convention, and, instead of saving and cutting in the bad times, we spent and invested in the downturn instead, lessening the human suffering and also, potentially, saving money long-term by arriving at growth earlier? What if governments worldwide finally let go of Adam Smith's "invisible hand" of the free market and began intervening directly in their economic systems instead?

Indeed, Graham hopes that market crashes, global pandemics or foreign wars "shouldn't be seen exclusively as crises, but also as opportunities. Indeed, perhaps the only opportunities the universe hands you for big, ambitious reforms, as the dust settles and the rebuilding begins."

In the play, Graham brings in the 'free market' economist, Friedrich Hayek, to confront Keynes. They expound their supposedly alternative theories: from Hayek, the belief that the market should rule; from Keynes, the suggestion that governments can stimulate revival. Then they dance (a dance that Graham dramatises, because Keynes had married a ballerina). "We must raise interest rates to encourage saving," says Hayek, as he dips into a backbend. "We want to lower interest rates to



John Maynard Keynes: Low cartoon

discourage saving and encourage spending," counters Keynes, as he swirls around the floor.

Graham is clear who wins this 'Strictly Come Dancing' competition: "Keynes is a beacon, because, although his ideas were constantly rebuffed, he kept offering them as a better alternative. His thinking comes from a place of morality." He adds: "And, while I liked writing Hayek's speeches in defence of market forces, my heart is with Keynes and the idea that, in dark, difficult times, you intervene. You don't let the universe pass you by without getting involved."

Turn to Keynes and his philosophy and economics, says Graham:

I am aware that painting and poetry are not going to overturn the whole of our national malaise, solve the housing crisis and get the young back into work, but I do suggest - as proposed not by a bohemian guru, but by a level-headed genius economist - that, in our disconnected communities full of isolated people, whose potential for discovery, enrichment, contribution and surprise is being wasted, a big national project to rebuild better could factor in how we might live more happily together, enjoying personal growth, as well as the economic kind.

Pro-Keynes

It is a fine aim. But did Keynes really have any answer to achieving the 'good life' for humanity? The majority of the liberal left economists, trade union leaders and politicians think so. For example, "The theories of John Maynard Keynes provide the sound intellectual framework for the views

which trade unionists had always instinctively held and known to be right" (TUC document 1968, p85).

Take the views of Larry Elliott, former economics editor of *The Guardian*. In the economic crisis now facing many major economies, the rightwing, neoliberal economists and politicians call yet again for austerity, cuts in welfare and public services to 'balance the books'. Elliott says that instead we need to destroy these rightwing economic myths by "looking to Keynes":

Some new economic thinking is required and, if ever there were a time for an iconoclast like Keynes, it is surely now. He would certainly have no truck with the wrong-headed economic policies of the past half-century and the seemingly commonsense phrases such as maxing out the credit card that have been used to disguise just how nonsensical they are.¹

Elliott concludes that "Today, Keynes and Hayek are still revered by their followers on the political left and right respectively. Yet, the past two decades have showed the enduring nature of Keynes's insights, first in 2008 and then during the global pandemic of 2020."²

But did Keynes come up with such enduring answers to crises in capitalism? After his death in 1946, post-war governments followed Keynes in the belief that they could 'manage' a capitalist economy with a judicious mix of monetary and fiscal policy, and suitable regulation of industry and finance - namely what became called a 'mixed economy' of a capitalist sector, backed by

government support. That came to be the ideal of social democratic leaders as an alternative to both 'free market' capitalism and socialism.

The myth developed that the post-war 'golden age' of economic growth and relatively full employment in the global north was a product of successful Keynesian policies. But it was a myth. In the 1960s, Keynesian economics was all the rage and government management of the economy, with central banks and government spending, was the order of the day. Even president Nixon declared that we are "all Keynesians now". But by the end of the 1970s, the strategists of capital had ditched Keynes and opted for what we now call the 'neoliberal' policies of Hayek, as in Graham's play: namely cutting back on the size of government, privatising, weakening the trade unions, liberalising markets (including financial markets), and imposing tight monetary and fiscal austerity (or at least in part - austerity did not apply to 'defence' and wars!).

Why was this? It was because Keynesian policies had failed to avoid new crises - namely the biggest worldwide economic slump in capitalism since the war in 1974-75 and then a deeper and more damaging slump in 1980-82. How could there be these new crises if Keynesian economic management was in operation everywhere?

Profitability

Keynesian economics had no answer: Marxist economics did have. The reason was that the 1970s had seen a collapse in the profitability in the productive sectors of the major capitalist economies. This was a crisis that only Marxist economics could explain, not Keynes. Indeed, in a way, the strategists of capital recognised that too. Their aim was to raise the profitability of capital at all costs as the only way out, not to revert to Keynesian 'demand management'.

In contrast to Keynes, Marx's analysis shows that the capitalist system is not just suffering from a 'technical malfunction' in its financial sector, but has inherent contradictions in the production sector: namely the barrier to growth caused by capital itself.³ What flows from this is that the capitalist system cannot be reformed or corrected in order to achieve sustained economic growth without booms and slumps: it must be replaced.

Even Keynes in his later years seemed to think that his policies were only to be used temporarily before reverting to traditional neoclassical economics: namely government stays away from interfering in markets and capitalist production and lets the market do its work. He wrote in 1946:

I do not suppose that the (neo) classical medicine will work by itself or that we can depend on it. We need quicker and less painful aids. But, in the long run, these expedients will work better and we shall need them less, if the classical medicine is also at work. And if we reject the medicine from our systems altogether, we may just drift on from expedient to expedient and never get really fit again.

Contrary to the 'good life', the profit motive must remain: "The loss of profit may be due to all sorts of causes, but, short of going over to communism, there is no possibility

of curing unemployment, except by restoring to employers a proper margin of profit." As Keynes argued that "Economic prosperity is ... dependent on a political and social atmosphere which is congenial to the average businessman."

Under capitalism?

In his later years, Keynes even praised the very *laissez-faire* 'liberal' capitalism of Hayek that Graham portrays in his play. In 1944, he wrote to Friedrich Hayek in praise of his book, *The road to serfdom*, which argues that economic planning inevitably leads to totalitarianism. Keynes wrote: "morally and philosophically I find myself in agreement with virtually the whole of it; and not only in agreement with it, but in a deeply moved agreement"(!) As for Marx, Keynes reckoned *Das Kapital* was "an obsolete economic textbook, which I know to be not only scientifically erroneous, but without interest or application for the modern world."

For Keynes, only the intelligentsia can recognise the value of the 'good life' (as Graham portrays in his play, namely that which Keynes's rich bohemian friends in Bloomsbury and Charleston, Sussex were living). His friends' life style was 'the good life', which Marxism would destroy: "How can I adopt a creed which, preferring the mud to the fish, exalts the boorish proletariat above the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia, who, with all their faults, are the quality of life and surely carry the seeds of all human achievement?"

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Keynes argued that 'the economic problem' of scarcity and toil could be overcome and the 'good life' could be achieved under the capitalist mode of production: "I draw the conclusion that, assuming no important wars and no important increase in population, the 'economic problem' may be solved, or be at least within sight of solution, within a hundred years. This means that the economic problem is not - if we look into the future - the permanent problem of the human race."⁴

Well, nearly 100 years later, the capitalist mode of production has not avoided poverty for the majority of the world. It has not ended grotesque inequalities of income or wealth. It has not avoided endless wars, including ones that have involved the whole world. Indeed, within a decade of Keynes's comments in the 1930s, there was a world war that killed millions of armed and unarmed people and destroyed the livelihoods of millions more. And, since 1945, there has not been a day where there has not been armed conflict somewhere in the world. The good life is still not with us.

So, perhaps, rather than back to Keynes, it should be forward to Marx •

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

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REVIEW



The last man of ideas

Francis Fukuyama **In the realm of the last man** London 2026, pp304, £20

In 1989, *The National Interest* - then the house journal of the American neoconservatives - published a long essay by one of that movement's bright young things: Francis Fukuyama.

'The end of history?' - later expanded to book length as *The end of history and the last man* - made Fukuyama's name, and rapidly joined that dubious fraternity of texts which get namedropped without ever being read. Thus it is usually taken to be a triumphalist herald of the collapse of communism and the entry of the world into an endless, prosperous peace under the sign of liberal capitalist democracy.

In fact, the book was as much a warning as a victory lap. Drawing on Alexandre Kojève's extremely influential reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of spirit*, at the centre of human life, as he saw it, was the struggle for recognition, and indeed liberal democracy was the only form in which this recognition could be distributed more or less equally. However, part of what people wish to be recognised for is exceeding the abstractly equal condition of all: they sought to exceed the norm. This pride is ultimately rooted in what in premodern philosophy they used to call 'the passions', although Fukuyama prefers *thymos* from Plato's Greek. He predicted that this would prove difficult to manage.

Experience suggests that, if men cannot struggle on behalf of a just cause, because that just cause was victorious in an earlier generation, then they will struggle *against* the just cause. They will struggle for the sake of struggle. They will struggle, in other words, out of a certain boredom - they cannot imagine living in a world without struggle. And if the greater part of the world in which they live is characterised

by peaceful and prosperous liberal democracy, they then will struggle against that peace and prosperity, and against democracy.

This quote is pointedly revisited in the final chapter of Fukuyama's latest book, *In the realm of the last man*, which is a kind of intellectual memoir. He is self-critical of aspects of the earlier book, but alert to the irony that exactly the same phenomena widely taken to refute its argument seem to him to vindicate it. Liberal democracy is the end of history, because no further progress is possible. *Regression*, however, is always an option.

Apologies

In the course of *In the realm of the last man*, Fukuyama introduces us to his family, various of his hobbies, and a number of mentors, but above all this is a story of how he got from youthful liberalism to the highly philosophical conservatism of *The end of history* - and from there, finally, to the rather technocratic political outlook he now endorses, and whose retreat in the face of 'populist' backlash he sincerely fears. In that respect, it is formally reminiscent of John Henry Newman's *Apologia pro vita sua*, in which the infamous Catholic convert attempted to show that he got to his conclusions honestly.

But Newman and Fukuyama are not very much alike as companions for the reader. Fine writer though he was, Newman was self-serious to the point of comedy. His conversion, as retold, is a matter of an exceptionally gifted and stubborn pedant finally losing patience with the philistine chumminess of broad-church Anglicanism. Fukuyama is rather more consistently likeable, strange as it is to say. This book is very grateful and gracious, even to people with whom he has politically broken over the years. He shows himself capable

The fall of the Berlin Wall did not announce the end of history - rather a brief moment of US triumphalism that ended in the hubris of Iraq

Francis Fukuyama: oft quoted oft gone unread



of self-criticism. His enthusiasm for his hobbies is affectingly childlike; his unending tour of the government, think-tank and development world, with such a relentlessly sunny attitude, leaves one with the impression of a globalist-technocratic Forrest Gump.

That world, of course, seems to be fading from view - drowned, as Fukuyama sees it, in the rise of identity politics of left and especially right. It is not clear whether he intends his comments on this turn of events as a polemical call to arms or an elegy for a cosmopolitan future foreclosed. So the book poses the question of the place of the author of *The end of history* in history - and, more broadly, that of the class of liberal technocrats, of which he has become an admirably tenacious member and defender.

Born into a family of recent immigrants to the US from Japan - his grandfather had emigrated to avoid enlistment in the Russo-Japanese war, while his mother was born in Kyoto - Fukuyama initially inherited the strongly liberal politics of his father. Several members of his family were interned during World War II, which no doubt shaped his father's outlook. The family was also academically inclined on both sides - it was no surprise when young Francis went up to Cornell University.

Strauss waltz

There he encountered Allan Bloom - a crucial link between Leo Strauss and the Straussian movement in philosophy and later neoconservatism. Strauss was a fascinating and obscure figure in 20th-century philosophy, whose practice was focused on close reading of the classical texts; his hermeneutical method was to assume that great philosophical teachers had both an exoteric, outward-facing sense and an esoteric sense, which was communicated directly to disciples,

but might perhaps be discerned in the subtle contradictions in the texts themselves.

The resulting philosophy, of course, had the defects of other such 'esoteric' reading styles - one could mention Althusser's 'symptomatic reading' as a slightly later example, or some of Freud's more tendentious exercises in literary analysis - but it also had a vision of what the practice of philosophy really meant, which was a pursuit of the examined life among friends, like Plato's *Symposium* or others of his chamber-piece dialogues between Socrates and several interlocutors. It tended, that is, to produce local 'symposia', focused on charismatic individuals - whether Harry Jaffa at Claremont College, Harvey C Mansfield at Harvard or Bloom at Cornell.

Though impressed by the Straussians, Fukuyama also became entangled with the great excitement over 'French theory' in American humanities departments at this time - above all, the key influence was Jacques Derrida. He travelled to study in Paris with the master, but rapidly became disillusioned with the poststructuralist credo of absolute relativism, radicalised Nietzschean scepticism and the rest. When he returned to the States, it was to study political theory under Mansfield at Harvard. He fell in with the first generation of neoconservatives, as they agitated for the US to get on the front foot in the cold war.

The end of history is plainly a product of this scene. As he tells it here, he had become fascinated by the polemical exchanges between Strauss and Kojève in the 1950s (Bloom had been a student of both at different times), Strauss rejecting Kojève's historicism in favour of the eternal truths of philosophical reflection. Fukuyama attempted to chart the

middle way, accepting in moderated form Kojève's schema that saw history end, essentially, in the Napoleonic destruction of the *anciens régimes* of Europe; the eternal truths of the tradition prized by Strauss yielded, again, the ambiguous prognosis of potential regression.

Such a prognosis fitted neatly into the 1990s triumphalist neoconservatism of the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), of which Fukuyama was a founding signatory. It authorised an American self-conception as the summit of human achievement, past and future; but this victory was permanently under threat by its enemies, the old gods of tribe and patronage, the fury of misdirected *thymos*.

Break

The bloody history of this creed need not be recited in full here, but some attention must be given to Fukuyama's strange role in it. He was working as a Middle East analyst for much of the years leading up to 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. By his account here, he had become very sceptical of the ability of America to construct a stable order in Iraq, should it invade and topple Saddam Hussein, and told his colleagues so. He owns up to having believed in the 'weapons of mass destruction' stories, but insists that there were good reasons to do so, and Saddam had in fact been bluffing to imply he had such weapons as a crude measure of deterrence. It is rather thin stuff, admittedly, but he has no reason to lie about it at this remove, and so I take it that he believed it at the time.

Despite his misgivings, apparently, he signed on to an open letter from various PNAC luminaries, drafted by Bill Kristol, calling for a full-scale attack. Why? His account of this is stunning in its naivety: "I have to admit that I did this rather casually; Bill was an old friend of mine and I hadn't been paying close attention to the situation in the Middle East in that period. While I had doubts about his anti-China positions, I had few qualms about the desirability of removing a bloodthirsty dictator from power."

Bill *must* have had a good reason to write this letter. Later he pleads

that he had taken Paul Wolfowitz to be trustworthy on this, since he was incredibly intelligent, and has learnt the lesson that even the very smart can be disastrously wrong: "When I first worked for him I assumed that, if he said something I didn't understand or disagreed with, it was I who was in the wrong. And yet it sometimes takes an extremely intelligent person to convince themselves of something implausible." No shit.

To Fukuyama's credit, he reversed course very rapidly, becoming the first major neocon to break ranks, as early as 2004. Though too late for the Iraqis, who would suffer the consequences of the dreams of Wolfowitz, Kristol *et al* to the tune of millions of deaths, this was still early enough that the hawks could delude themselves that everything was going to work out all right. Fukuyama, however, had already begun the studies of political dynamics that would shape his later work. He knew that state capacity counted for something and, having destroyed the Iraqi state, the Americans could only bring warlordism. He had the intellectual honesty to say so - and alienate many of his old friends.

The lessons learned from this episode are not uninteresting, but extremely partial. The central problem exercising him since the 1990s is international development, which for him certainly means constructing liberal-democratic polities with a strong rule of law wherever possible. He comes to the conclusion, after the Iraqi state failure, that state capacity is an essential piece of this: the state must be able to provide at least elementary services like transportation, law enforcement and so on. The legitimacy of the regime hinges on this; without it, rule of law will inevitably be replaced by "patrimonial" (ie, tribal or otherwise clientelist) rule. The neoliberal approach of mass privatisation thus failed to produce functioning capitalist democracies; governments were denied the capacity to build institutions that could support it.

Warlordism

There is a real insight here. We are so accustomed, as Marxists, to quoting the famous "All that is solid melts

into air" as a kind of panegyric to the revolutionary power of capitalism that we forget that this, like all tendencies of capitalism, has hard and immovable limits. *Truly* melting every old institution into air would simply plunge us into the state of nature envisaged by Thomas Hobbes. But in reality we could never get there; the true terminus is, precisely, clientelist warlordism, since warlords have greater 'state capacity' at least than random individuals. The natural outcome certainly is not communism, as some foolish accelerationists seem to think.

Yet it sits oddly in his overall theory. He insists on the transhistorical character of human nature, again correctly, and gives us a brief rundown of his account of it here. Yet the salient features he highlights, such as the preference for family groups over out-groups, set against the theory of liberal democracy as an abstract-universal form of recognition, must lead one to ask: on what grounds can liberal democracy be the telos of history? How, indeed, can it ever have emerged and stabilised at all?

In spite of everything, Fukuyama still views the world essentially as a drama of opposition between liberal democracy and 'authoritarianism'. He is a centrist technocrat, after all, and he notes that the rise of Donald Trump has finally reunited him with some of his erstwhile neocon comrades, notably Bill Kristol. The great baddie today is, above all, Russia; Trump is denounced for being too friendly with Vladimir Putin, and Putin relentlessly denounced for his invasion of Ukraine.

Who, then, are the good guys? Late on, in a fusillade against young leftists taking up the cause of Palestine, he gripes that "This is not to deny the plight of Palestinian civilians trapped in Gaza, but these students are not similarly outraged at the situation of Ukrainians besieged by Russia or of victims of the civil war in Sudan". This is in aid of insisting that student protest is, above all, a mindless pursuit of *thymos*; but every accusation is a confession. Apart from being a childish argument at the best of times, it invites the immediate retort that Fukuyama says *nothing at all* about the plight of Gazans in this book except, exactly here, that he does not "deny" it; but plenty about suffering Ukrainians.

The hopeless, tragic faith of Fukuyama - the object of his *thymos* - remains in the vision of the USA as an indispensable nation. Thus his self-criticism can only extend so far: it cannot cultivate in him any real sympathy for the Palestinian cause (as opposed to Palestinian *plight*), since they have been ground down, after all, under the heel of the US-led international order, apparently to be exterminated under that order's successor, whatever grim beast that turns out to be.

What became of the neoconservatives? Some, like Fukuyama and Kristol, have turned themselves into pious centrists, defending American prestige against the American carnage of Donald Trump and confreres. But many others still simply float around Washington DC, pursuing with increasing cynicism their old grudges. The strategic sweep of the PNAC, never mind the literary seriousness and liberality of an Allan Bloom, is largely missing.

Perhaps the break came when an anonymous Republican operative - widely believed to be Karl Rove (not a neocon by background, but frontman for the neocon-dominated Bush administration) - famously told Ron Suskind that "we're an empire now and, when we act, we create our own reality". This was not *thymos*, but - to follow that transliteration style - *hybris*. No accounting for the reality so created has ever been forthcoming: merely more insane adventures

resulting in countless deaths and several further state failures.

The broader Straussian universe is hardly in better shape. Strauss, as Fukuyama insists, kept his nose out of politics; but his followers have not, and every political movement this school has yielded has been of the right. Besides the neocons, the 'west-coast Straussians' - descendants ultimately of Harry Jaffa - have become the intellectual shock troops ultimately of Trumpite national conservatism. Strauss must deserve some blame for all this - it is a fine thing to read the great books in depth, but the exoteric/esoteric formulation is precisely a licence for creating your own reality. For Paul Wolfowitz, that meant the insanity of reshaping the Middle East by main force; for west-coaster Michael Anton, it meant treating Donald Trump as the last best hope for American civic virtue.

Reality

Fukuyama was able to detach himself from this madness because he is, in the end, a member of Rove's hated "reality-based community". So much of the intellectual story of this book is his journey from high philosophy to economics, management theory, and - as a special treat - the 19th-century social theory of Weber and his contemporaries. But in the end, his break with the neocons was always partial. His criticisms are technical - they failed to understand what they needed to do, and therefore they failed Iraq disastrously. The evil we do, we do accidentally; the evil Putin does radiates directly from his black heart. The last war may be condemned; the current one still offers hope, if only of a desperate and narcotic type.

And so we must assess the technocratic politics now espoused by Fukuyama. He tends to blame its failures on exogenous interference - the successful counterstrokes of "repatriationalisation". Yet this is question-begging about technocracy in the way it is not about simple rival ideologies. We might say of Mussolini's victory in Italy that he won, so to speak, in a fair fight with the Italian left. He had the state in his corner, but that was only to be expected: the communists could either split that state or they couldn't (and they couldn't). Communism was not *refuted* by this defeat, as grave as it was.

The whole technocratic worldview is just fatally undermined by contingent failures of this sort; it proposes sensible government by experts, and simply cannot account for the apparently 'perverse' resistance to it, because it sees the class of experts, somewhat in the fashion of Hegel's *Philosophy of right*, as a universal class above narrow interests, but all that is required is for some other class or class fraction to demur from that view to *make it false*. Either the technocrats must concede to the narrow interest, and give up on the value of their expertise, or they insist on the expertise, and irreducibly then enter into a *conflict of interest* with their enemies.

Can Fukuyama make one more grand change in outlook? One chapter ruminates on the nature of changing one's mind, noting it gets harder as one gets older. I hope to reassure him - it also gets easier with practice! ●

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

**We demand
complete
openness**

Postcard from the future

A Godzilla El Niño could persist until at least early next year, bringing record temperatures along with more flooding and drought. But there is also a possibility, paradoxically, that it could trigger a deep freeze in Europe, writes **Eddie Ford**

Officially known as the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), the El Niño event that is happening in the Pacific is reaching what scientists are calling “unprecedented levels” weeks before its expected peak in December. Likely this will be the strongest in living memory. This, of course, is piling extra heat into an atmosphere, where temperatures are already rising rapidly, meaning that 2027 is very probably going to blow away all previous records - becoming the hottest year we have ever known and in turn pushing extreme weather to new highs.

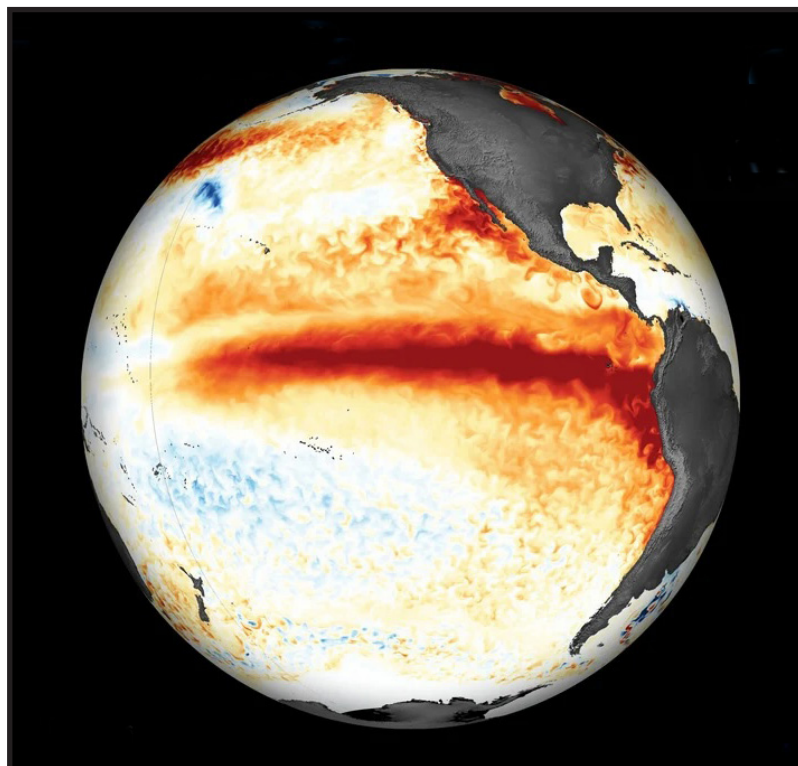
We can see this from spikes in the sea-surface temperature across the central-eastern equatorial Pacific, the region at the heart of El Niño.¹ The preferred measure of most meteorologists uses a 30-year rolling average as a reference, therefore taking account of human-caused global heating, and this metric, known as the Niño 3.4 index, has increased markedly from an average +1.6°C above normal in June 2026 to +2.5°C above normal in August. But for the last quarter of this year, the seasonal average sea surface temperature is forecast to reach approximately +3.7°C around December - the highest since observations began - which would be stronger than the previous record of +2.6°C in November 2015-January 2016.

Any temperature rise above 2°C is officially called “very strong” - often dubbed a ‘super’ El Niño, while others have referred to the now strengthening El Niño as “Godzilla-level”. According to the latest seasonal guidance from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts - related to the Niño 3.4 index and based on it in “both relative and traditional modes” - El Niño could even get to a temperature of 4.0°C, and some “probabilistic models” are predicting values as high as 5°C.² But, whatever forecast or model you use, El Niño is ratcheting up the climate crisis even further and obviously has alarming implications.

Supercharge

For example, very strong El Niño events like those in 1997-98 and 2015-16 were associated with hundreds of billions of dollars in damage globally - but what we are seeing now is “leaving those past ones in the dust”, according to climate scientist Zeke Hausfather, whose analysis was published by *Carbon Brief*.³ Another climate scientist described the El Niño event as a “huge redistribution of energy in the climate system”, making it dangerous precisely because it is unfolding on top of a much warmer, anthropogenically influenced climate system.⁴

Thus many places around the world will undergo heat extremes they have never experienced before, inevitably having an impact on health, food security and water stress. If we continue to burn fossil fuels in the same way, El Niño events will occur



El Niño: constantly reoccurring, constantly changing

on an increasingly hotter *baseline* - making it much more difficult, of course, for communities to deal with the consequences, which are often completely devastating.

World Meteorological Organisation forecasts indicate “a near 100% likelihood” that El Niño will persist until at least February 2027.⁵ That figure is not being derived from one model: rather a scientific *consensus* across 13 national and international centres, from Washington to Tokyo to London to Pune, built on real-time exchange of ocean buoy, satellite and radiosonde data. It has to be stressed that no two El Niño events are ever the same: they vary wildly - each having its own pattern and ‘evolution’, which needs to be studied concretely.

Naturally, there is ongoing debate about the impact of global heating on the ENSO pattern itself, it being well understood that it typically brings a huge rise in temperatures, hence further amplifying the escalating climate crisis. But new research from climate researchers at the University of Michigan has strongly indicated that the reverse is also the case: human-caused global heating is making El Niño itself more intense when it does arrive.⁶ “Our findings suggest El Niño can supercharge global warming, but also global warming can supercharge El Niño,” says Julia Cole, who led the new study published in *Science*.⁷ “We are seeing a shift where El Niño doesn’t look like what it did prior to industrial times,” and that is very bad news indeed for those who have been badly impacted by the climate crisis and yet have done nothing to cause global warming themselves.

Basically, the research painstakingly analysed the composition of large boulder-like deposits of coral fossils found on the Galápagos Islands. These

old corals date back to 1,000 years ago and contain chemical compositions that indicate what the sea surface temperature was like when they were alive. They are situated off the coast of mainland Ecuador right in the heart of the El Niño area, where surrounding waters heat up during such an event. While El Niños remained fairly stable for most of this long period, things started to change around the time the world started to industrialise in the late 19th century on a mass scale.

However, the process has become even more extreme over the past 40 years, with El Niños’ variability now around 37% higher than during pre-industrial times. Cole’s research team managed to rule out any random or naturally occurring reason for this switch, and she has expressed surprise at “how consistent” the data was - there was “just such a large, distinct difference” between what has been happening in the last 40 years and what happened in pre-industrial times. The logical deduction, if the research is broadly correct, is that really large weather events like the one that appears to be brewing right now in the tropical Pacific might become *more common* in the future - it is not a freak occurrence: rather an unwanted glimpse of the future.

Whatever the exact case, Godzilla or otherwise, El Niño is expected to cause widespread crop failures, with a Goldman Sachs analysis predicting that it could contribute to a 15.8% surge in global food commodity prices - which, of course, would have a knock-on effect worldwide, including for consumers in Europe, where it is predicted food prices could rise by 1.3% across the euro zone. Having said that, the full effect will take time because of how the cost of climate impact percolates through global food supplies, which could take

until the second half of 2028 to be fully realised.

Then there is the chance that it could increase the danger of severe flooding and drought, wildfires and cyclones - not to mention civil war and military conflict - developing in countries already facing a “triple shock” from the energy crisis, El Niño and surging borrowing costs.⁸ The World Food Programme has warned that 50 million people are likely to be pushed into acute hunger.

In a sobering report by the Climate Impact Lab, it has been estimated that the extra heat from El Niño alone will cause the deaths of 450,000 people by February, from Nigeria and Indonesia to the USA.⁹ This figure is on top of the early fatalities resulting from global warming and many further deaths are expected from the droughts, wildfires and flooding that El Niños bring. Researchers from the CIL say the El Niño event is also a “postcard from our future”, pushing up temperatures to the level the climate crisis is projected to deliver in 20 years’ time.¹⁰ A major El Niño in 1877-78 led to more than 50 million deaths due to drought and famine, with India, Brazil and China severely affected, and “was arguably the worst environmental disaster to ever befall humanity”.¹¹ What cannot be denied is that the ramifications from El Niño will be felt far away, increasing drought risk in a large swathe of the world, while increasing rainfall elsewhere. India has already experienced a 50% shortfall in essential monsoon rains this month, affecting crops, while in Sri Lanka reservoirs for drinking water are running dry.

Vortex

Generally in Europe, El Niño’s weather impacts tend to be much more indirect and less severe, increasing the chances of more unsettled conditions later in the year, such as a milder, wetter and windier autumn and early winter. But there is speculation that the supersized El Niño could actually, perhaps counterintuitively, trigger a ‘deep freeze’ in Europe.

The explanation lies in the fact that every year in winter, strong westerly winds circle around the pole high up in the stratosphere - which extends from an altitude of about 10-50 km above the Earth’s surface and is referred to as the stratospheric polar vortex (SPV), circulating around cold air high over the Arctic.¹² However, following a peak in El Niño, the SPV can become weaker and thus can increase the likelihood of a Sudden Stratospheric Warming (SSW) event, which would subsequently increase the potential for cold weather.¹³ An SSW is an event in which temperatures rapidly increase (from -50°C to 0°C or more in just a couple of days) in the stratosphere and, as the cold air from high up in the stratosphere disperses, affects the shape of the jet stream, as the cold air sinks from the stratosphere into the troposphere.

Will this phenomenon affect a

country like the UK, once famous for its mild climate?¹⁴ It is extremely difficult to predict, if not nearly impossible, as the links are unclear and the evidence is mixed. The so-called Big Freeze of 2009-10 was, at the time, the coldest winter in three decades - and, yes, it coincided with an El Niño. However, 2006-07 was also an El Niño winter and was unseasonably warm, and the supposed ‘Beast from the East’ in 2018¹⁵ actually occurred during a *La Niña* year - effectively the opposite of El Niño. This means that, while El Niño is already having big impacts on global weather, and may influence the polar vortex later in winter, snow and ice in the UK is far from guaranteed. Fundamentally, weather is a chaotic system, so that small changes in initial conditions can lead to vastly different outcomes, making a weather forecaster’s job an arduous one.

But what we do know for sure is that governments do not want the masses to have access to the necessary information about what is really going on - it could breed discontent. After all, we recently discovered that the Keir Starmer government suppressed a report on the national security implications of the climate crisis by the Joint Intelligence Committee for being “too negative”. Similarly, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - which is meeting this week in Addis Ababa to discuss its seventh assessment report - is under pressure from some petro-states and major ‘developing countries’ to delay its publication.¹⁶ Led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, and including India and China, they are pressing for publication of the report to be pushed back to 2029, using the argument that this is “necessary” to allow developing countries to have “more input” into the scientific findings.

A blatant attempt to fiddle the figures, while human civilisation hurtles towards climate breakdown ●

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Notes

1. [wmo.int/news/media-centre/sea-surface-temperatures-reflect-strengthening-el-nino](https://www.wmo.int/news/media-centre/sea-surface-temperatures-reflect-strengthening-el-nino).
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