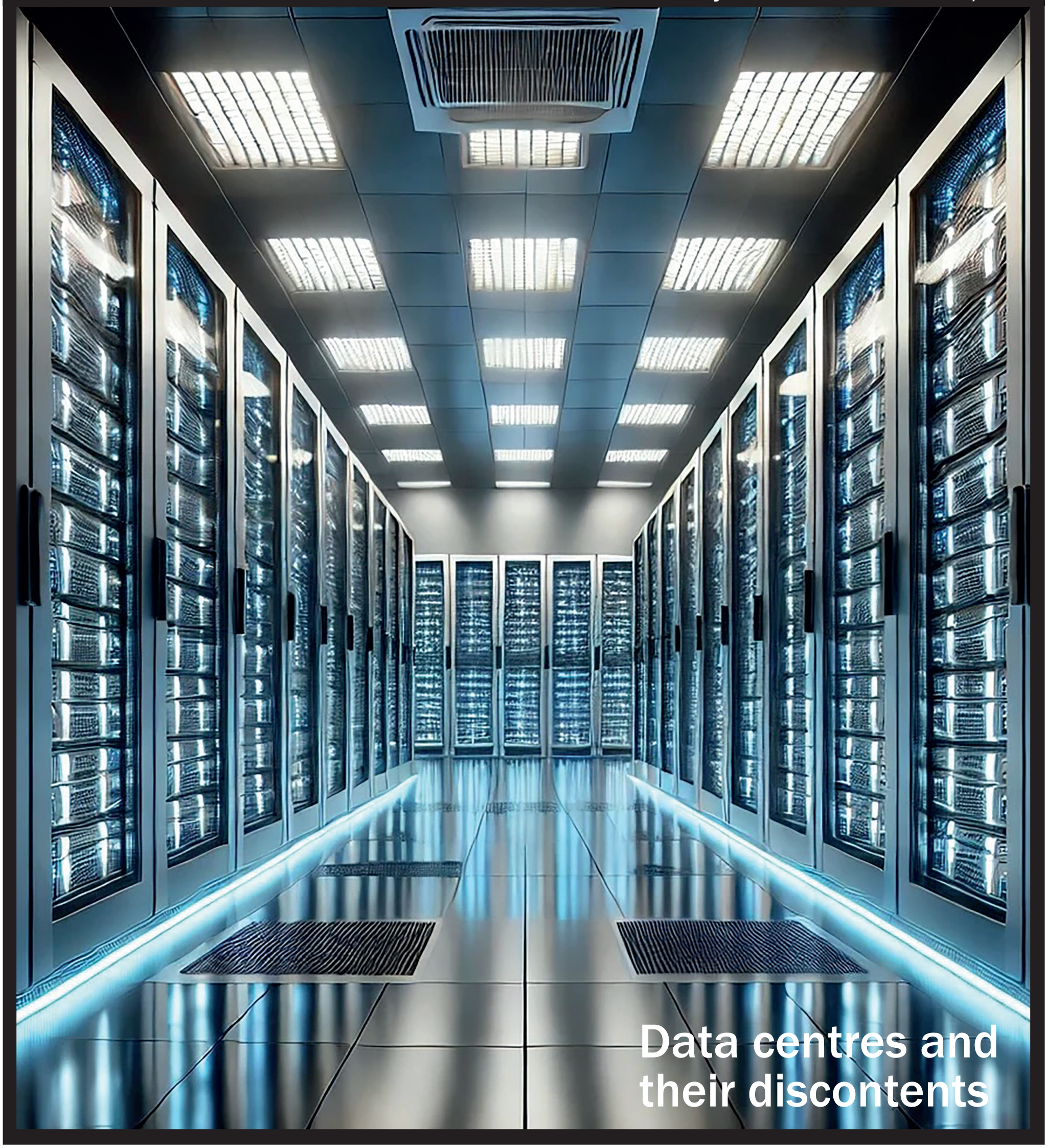
A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly worker

Alan Thornett, 1937-2026: a genuine rank-and-file leader, a cadre steeled in the class struggles of Cowley car assembly plant

- Letters and debate
- Russia: who we support
- Your Party Republicans
- London Film Festival

No 1606 October 22 2026 Towards a mass Communist Party £1/€1.10



LETTERS

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

RSP censorsists

I was quite taken back by the tone that Elise van der Doelen used in her letter of October 15. Not because I care much for tone, or other enforced 'comradely' behaviour, but because *she* does - even going so far as to sign an open letter calling for the censorship of unpleasant literature.

These censorists claimed that articles written for an external satirical magazine broke the code of conduct of the 'party', eventually leading to the authors being sanctioned by the party board. I can tell you that the letter of van der Doelen too breaks the bizarre code of conduct of our 'party' - perhaps she finally feels safe to do so outside of the safe space of the Revolutionary Socialist Party. This hypocrisy shows the nature of speech controls in general.

The support for the party as a 'safe space' is a common characteristic of both the 'partyist' factions that have appeared in the Netherlands recently. One of these factions - called Faction for a Revolutionary Strategy, after the book by Mike Macnair - even considers the above censorship affair to be the main reason for their foundation. They think that sanctions and censorship have not gone far enough and are presumably seeking expulsions. A few members of this faction also used this code of conduct to silence editors of the party paper, when they were on the national board - quite a novel interpretation of 'revolutionary strategy'.

It also seems that Filip Spijkerman (Letters, October 8) is correct in his assertion that our domesticated partyists are not at all interested - on either a national or international level - in engaging with the existing left outside of their own 'partyist' cosmos. In her letter, van der Doelen ridicules the argument of the Communist Platform to engage with the rest of the organised left, because those groups are 'sectarians' - contrary, of course, to us 'partyists', the non-sectarians, refusing to engage with the rest! The fact that two 'partyist' factions, being composed of the same arguments against the Communist Platform, exist side by side to each other illustrates their sectarian politics perfectly.

Sometimes I wonder whether there is a different 'revolutionary strategy' (by a different Mike Macnair!) that causes the confusion. The more likely conclusion, however, is that these Dutch partyists are slowly, piece by piece, reinventing Trotskyism from first principles.

Jules Maximus
RSP

SNP rightists

The Scottish National Party conference in Aberdeen last weekend was only notable for the further shift to the right under John Swinney with the 'presumed against' position on further oil and gas drilling being dropped in favour of 'climate realism'. The cover for this is a 'future generations fund', supposedly demanding all taxes raised from further fossil fuel exploration not going to the treasury, but straight into Scottish-based renewables. This oil pipe dream overwhelmingly won the conference vote rather than the amendment from the SNP Trade Union Group, calling for a windfall tax - that apparently would play straight into the hands of Scottish Tories, who scared the SNP by winning the Aberdeen South by-election on that issue.

That amendment was moved by TUG chair Simon Barrow, who is also a member of an organisation some comrades may remember from the fallout of the collapse of the CPGB - Democratic Left. It seems to be pretty much only active in Dundee now and made up of a few Scottish Green figures who can also somehow accommodate 'climate realism'. But then again there's no need to get real too quickly, as the SNP intends to further delay its energy strategy (already three years late) until after the UK government announces its plans. But it's clear they are all heading in the same 'pragmatic' direction of encouraging further drilling in the North Sea.

Another area where there's alignment, but plenty of hot air being burped up as supposed disagreement on how to keep Scotland safe, is 'defence'. There's been major joint developments with the announcement of shared funding on two specialist defence colleges and similar moves on a Defence Universities Alliance. This is part of the recently announced programme for government that aims to "maximise the economic benefits of increased defence spending".

Another example of such bipartisan behaviour is the "unprecedented" role which Scottish government officials are playing in drawing up a new 'War book' to prepare the UK-wide population for the potential of armed conflict with Russia by 2030. This was discussed in depth at a conference in Edinburgh last week. Details are sketchy, because it was convened under secretive Chatham House rules, but an official attending said it could be announced that both the UK and Scottish governments were working on this together. Stewart McDonald, former SNP Westminster shadow defence spokesperson (who set up a defence consultancy within a month of losing his seat in 2024), gave the opening keynote speech to the assembled military leaders, senior civil servants, defence analysts, academics and defence industry figures gathered over two days to assess Scotland's role in UK 'national security' and to discuss preparations for a large-scale conflict that military chiefs warned could erupt by 2030.

Now, if you were to look to Lewis Akers' report on the conference in Counterfire for any of this, you'd be wasting your time, as all he saw fit to provide was advice to Swinney on how better to present the case for independence and pathetically plead for "the best advertisement for the transformative potential of independence rather than another astroturf campaign".

Because he is a Unite branch secretary, it was no-go for Akers on oil and gas or defence, for fear of upsetting Sharon Graham or her Unite tops ilk. Clearly it's not just establishment politics marching rightwards. but virtually the whole kit and caboodle.

Tam Dean Burn
Glasgow

Two-way Greens

'Do you regret the defeat of the miners in 1985?' is a yes/no question to which the correct answer is 'yes'.

But the Green Party will never be able to give that answer. With deep reactionary roots, it is a party of anti-industrial Malthusianism and misanthropy, and therefore of Nato and the EU, of their war in Ukraine, of the conscription to which that is leading inexorably, of Scottish and Welsh separatism, of gender self-identification, of drug legalisation, of licensed prostitution and of Peter Tatchell.

It was all of those things on the day before its recent conference, yet, just as the old Greens are not making a fuss about its hugely significant abandonment of opposition to nuclear power, so there was no talk of a firewall until it passed a resolution stating the view of most of the relatively few people in Britain who had much of an opinion on Zionism.

Britain has named and condemned the Israeli ethnic cleansing of the West Bank, and an ideology that gave rise to ethnic cleansing must by definition be racist. Britain has welcomed the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Navi Pillay, who chaired the commission of inquiry that found Israel to be committing genocide in Gaza. No political party has to take dictation from its opponents as to what was or was not its proper concern, nor is any British political party answerable to any foreign state.

David Lindsay
Lanchester

DSA tankies

My hope is the Democratic Socialists of America will vote members of the Red Star caucus out of positions of leadership during our 2027 national convention. The faction identifies with Marxist-Leninism, which, for those who don't know, refers to Stalinism and its authoritarian, descendant ideologies, like Maoism. Currently, one of the DSA's two co-chairs is a member of Red Star. Meanwhile, there have been reports that members of the international committee have tried to develop connections with the Chinese Communist Party, and, as part of this effort, have sought to downplay the mistreatment of groups like the Uyghurs.

Fundamentally, I don't believe Red Star belongs in the DSA. There is no such thing as socialism without democracy. Marxist-Leninist regimes, past and present, have merely swapped private control of the means of production by elite capitalists with private control of the means of production by elite bureaucrats. On top of this, they have added a brutal police state. Even if there was such a thing as socialism without democracy, the DSA is very explicitly for democratic socialists. It's a sad state of affairs that such a qualification is necessary, but it's in the name.

I oppose purging Red Star for practical reasons. I fear such an effort could create a sectarian spiral that provokes a number of damaging organisational splits. Instead, I'd like Marxist-Leninists, or tankies, to be marginalised as much as possible through the DSA's flawed democratic process. As far as I can tell, this means supporting leadership candidates from the Socialist Majority and Groundwork caucuses, as all the other viable factions are unreliable or in an alliance with Red Star. I believe the DSA's internal democracy would be improved with direct elections for national leadership and some version of asynchronous voting that takes good-faith concerns into consideration.

Still, I wanted to hear from others who sought to push back against tankie influence in the DSA about what they believed should be done. Alexander Hernández has been a member of the organisation since 2017 and joined the North Star caucus the following year. He has been in the national DSA leadership as a working group co-chair, and, in addition to his organisational work around immigrant rights, he helped draft the 2021 national platform. Hernández co-founded the Pasco-Hernando chapter in 2023 and is currently a member of the Pinellas chapter.

He argued that a wide coalition of DSA members was required to defeat Marxist-Leninists: "I believe in building a broad, democratic socialist movement that can organise working people, win political power and actually govern," Hernández said. "I'm not interested in turning DSA into a small ideological organisation, where everyone has to agree on a particular interpretation of socialism to belong … This comes down to what kind of organisation we want. I joined an open DSA. I think some MLs want to close it down."

Maxine Kwiatkowski has been in and out of the DSA, quitting at one point for two years because of how toxic she found the organisation's internal culture. Kwiatkowski was a founding member of the Northwest Indiana chapter, but has also been involved in others. She runs a YouTube Channel called Buonapartista, which covers the sectarian left, and is planning to release a video series about the DSA after the midterm elections. Kwiatkowski seemed to believe the influence of tankies in the organisation would largely dissipate on its own.

"It is inevitable a baby leftist is going to get into some goofy bullshit," Kwiatkowski said. "Marxist-Leninism in the DSA is going to burn out. I think [co-chair] Meg Romer's frankly embarrassing performance is proof enough. It may win internally in a tight-knit group. It will not win as we grow. Normal working class people are appalled by war crimes. Many Americans where I live have family with very negative experiences under Marxist-Leninist regimes." She thought some basic reforms, such as moving certain responsibilities to staff and requiring caucus registration, would do wonders.

Meanwhile, Anthony P Teso has been a member since 2016 - at one point as part of the Portland, Oregon chapter, but now as a member at large. His writing has appeared in *LINKS - International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, *Against the Current*, *Platypus Review*, *Cosmonaut* and *Tempest*. Teso noted that reports of members of the international committee discussing going quiet on Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Taiwan in the hopes of gaining access to Chinese Communist Party officials were shamefully true. In practice, he said, this meant the DSA's foreign policy was whatever members on a working group call decide it is.

Teso argued in favour of a number of organisational reforms. "Members should be able to remove national officers and committee chairs mid-term, through a petition threshold and a vote," he said. "Working groups should act only on positions adopted by convention or the [National Political Committee]. That means no contact with a foreign ruling party, no delegations and no hosted travel without a mandate and public disclosure. Minutes should be published. Members should not have to learn what their own working group is doing from leaked documents in *Newsweek*." Teso added we should force votes on questions that are uncomfortable for tankies and build ties with exiled Hong Kong trade unionists and Uyghur organisations.

Like Kwiatkowski, Trevor Hauge has been in and out of the DSA. He first joined in 2015 with the now-defunct Portage chapter. Then Hauge was an unaffiliated member. Now he's involved in the Akron chapter, where he participated in a Starbucks union campaign. Currently, Akron has a Marxist-Leninist reading group, which Hauge finds alienating and depressing. He'd previously believed the notion that the DSA had a tankie problem was media hype. But Hauge has now come to the conclusion he was wrong, and is unsure whether he wants to renew his membership.

"I think the various non-ML caucuses have a moral duty to form a coalition and expel Red Star," Hauge said. "People may not like this answer, but I don't always think the right answer is the one people want to hear … Essentially the option is this - purge them now, or let them grow and purge everyone else down the line and see the DSA turned into yet another cultish, ineffective ML party." He didn't think the DSA had anything to gain by affiliating with tankies, as they turned off regular people and validated Red Scare propaganda.

Jon Hochschartner
Connecticut

Online Communist Forum

Sunday October 25 5pm

Chris Knight and Jerome Lewis introduce their groundbreaking book:
The revolutionary origins of language

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

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

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

TECH

Banking on moonshots

Much to the alarm of the AI industry and interested governments, data centres face a growing tide of local opposition. Is this a reactionary attempt to roll back progress or a defensible popular revolt? **Paul Demarty** investigates

Political controversy over artificial intelligence increasingly has one flashpoint - the construction of new data centres to power these vast and expensive systems.

In the United States, this is now an extremely combustible element in the midterm elections. Within particular localities - overwhelmingly, given the price of land and other crucial inputs, in Trump-friendly 'flyover country' - fierce battles are raging over the proposed IT buildout. The movement is politically ambiguous: rightwing retirees worry about the effect on their real-estate values, and young workers about whether the extension of AI is actually in their interests. All worry about further pressure on spiralling energy prices from these gas-guzzling monsters, and the infamous noise levels associated with them.

Political candidates have been wrong-footed. Accustomed to the usual run of 'pork barrel' politics, and expecting to be rewarded for bringing investment into hard-pressed localities, they instead face enraged constituents. Stances against construction, principled or opportunistic, meet with approval. Something like 70% of Americans oppose data-centre construction in their areas. Legislation against it is proposed all over the shop, with New York state being the first to approve a statewide moratorium.

But it is not only an American phenomenon. In Ireland, whose 'Celtic tiger' prosperity was built on attracting tech investment with favourable tax arrangements, similar movements have sprung up, supported by the People Before Profit (PBP) left front, with a particular flashpoint emerging in Kilmeaden in county Waterford. In Britain, too, there are spots of resistance: residents of Torrington - a sleepy town in North Devon, not noted for its political radicalism - are up in arms at a monstrous project nearby.

Rare breed: data centre workers

Minimal benefits

Whence the opposition? It should be said, first of all, that these new data centres are rather different from previous sites built by corporations and cloud hyperscalers like Amazon and Google. The old, general-purpose data centre is admittedly a large, ugly building, which places some burden on the local power and water infrastructure. Yet its demands are comparatively modest. The great breakthrough in that generation of IT was the moment Google realised it was more cost-efficient to buy cheap, commodity computers in bulk than the specialised server hardware built by the likes of Sun Microsystems back in the 1990s. Seriously high-performance compute was always required, but as a small part of the overall mix.

A new-model AI data centre, by contrast, runs almost exclusively on exorbitantly expensive GPUs ('graphics processing units' - so called because the original use for chips of this sort was rendering 3D graphics, typically in computer games). The power draw of each of these units is enormously higher than a bog-standard server of the sort that might run a few websites. Therefore, the overall construction projects are larger, with louder equipment, and so on.

The local economic benefits of such sites are minimal. Of course, local workers and businesses get to work on constructing the data centre, but, once it is up and running, it requires only a skeleton crew of highly specialised workers. There is almost no ongoing economic stimulus. That is before we get to the bizarre world outlooks of the AI bosses themselves, who frequently threaten to put unemployment up to 25% or 50% in the next decade. On the whole, it is not altogether surprising that there should be resistance to such endeavours.

Political opposition is not the only, or even the most severe, obstacle to the AI buildout. The complexity of the projects, and most of all their requirements for bespoke power infrastructure, means they are extraordinarily expensive and prone to delays. The truth is that, for all the big talk of the industry, not much capacity - measured typically in mega- and gigawatts as a function of power input - is coming online. The construction must be financed with debt, the firms concerned issuing bonds for the purpose. Investors are increasingly concerned at the nature of these investments, with bond yields rapidly rising in the sector - indicating scepticism about being paid back.

This is, therefore, a delicate moment for AI, and moreover for the wider economy, which has become extraordinarily dependent on its promises. In the tech industry, wildly risky and speculative endeavours are called 'moonshots', in honour of Luna and Apollo - 'We do these things not because they are easy, but because they are hard', and all that. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the near-term prosperity of the world has somehow been staked on a moonshot - the idea that turning one lot of text into another lot of text (for that is all large language models do) shall revolutionise production in heretofore unimaginable ways.

That leftists, from the Democratic Socialists of America to PBP, should become exercised by it is spectacularly unsurprising, for good and bad reasons. The bad reason is simply that the matter exercises the broader population, and so, by the iron laws of opportunism, leftists will appear in the midst of things, to put their branding all over the resulting protests. The ambulance-chasing model of leftist politics dies hard. If that was *all* that was going on, the appropriate response would be to urge some intellectual caution.

Progress

But I do not think that is all that is going on. In the contemporary left, one finds, infamously, a great preponderance of downwardly mobile professionals - above all humanities graduates, whose interest in matters historical, philosophical and even merely literary drives them to radical conclusions in politics. For such people, AI is a plausible threat to direct class interests, in the automation of basically routine clerical work, but also to intellectual interests.

For the boosters of AI, it seems, much of the upside of this technology is the automation of more subtle forms of activity. Heretofore excluded from serious consideration in the arts, and extraordinarily resentful of this exclusion, the AI boosters herald every advance in the automated manufacture of prose, poetry, images and music as an upward-levelling boon. Those with some facility with the practices being automated are horrified; the human element was always essential for them, and now that essentiality rises to the level of consciousness, because we have before us - let's be honest - the absolute dreck produced by people with a vague idea of what poetry looks like using large language models (LLMs) to write it.

What is posed by all this, in the end, is the problem of progress. The concept of progress is ambiguous. It is plain that, with respect to text generation, LLMs are more capable than the Markov chains of old (this is the sort of algorithm that would power the toy text generators of a former stage of the internet, like my old favourite, the *Daily Mail* headline generator). In some respects, therefore, LLMs represent progress.

Yet the mere extension of power is not enough to constitute progress. Take, for example, the enormous 'progress' represented by the Manhattan Project. Before, it would take 10,000 bombs to level a city; afterwards, only one. For military planners, no greater progress could be imagined. For everyone else - and most of us, after all, live in cities - this "progress" must be in question. It is a probabilistically life-shortening form of progress - progress merely in the art of destruction.

On the other hand, I think nobody would deny that the invention of successively safer forms of anaesthetic represented progress. Nobody is in a hurry to go back to the days of the barber-surgeon, and bite down on the leather strap with a few stiff drinks inside you. The invention of anaesthetic, and of successively safer and more effective anaesthetics, is technological progress very much like the atom bomb, but progress which is not morally in question in the same way, save for a few marginal religious eccentrics.

The remarkable thing about the AI industry is that its spokespeople seem determined to argue, in the public square, that it is more of an atom bomb than it is gas and air. People at Anthropic may be found almost bragging about how likely they think it is that their products will extinguish human life, or at least render a plurality of the human population entirely economically superfluous. Yet they seem puzzled by the notion that one would therefore conclude that the best idea would be to cease development of these products. Of course, we have to build it - we are the good guys, and if we don't build it, the bad guys (principally, the Chinese) will.

Work

Leave aside the AI apocalypse talk, since we have discussed that at length recently, finding it to be largely sci-fi hokum. The question of mass unemployment is more interesting from the point of view, precisely, of progress. For it is hardly impossible to see massive reductions in the overall required labour time throughout society as a form of progress; indeed, many Marxists over the years have done precisely that.

For Karl Kautsky, for example, it was the main upside of the revolution, as he described it in *The day after the social revolution*: by spreading the most advanced factory techniques throughout society, and administering the economy democratically, spectacular reductions in the working week were already available. The work that was done, to be sure, would remain tiring drudgery for most; but there would be so much less of it that flourishing could be achieved anyway.

That is not the only view of the question, however. William Morris's utopian novel, *News from nowhere*, portrays instead a permeable boundary between work and pleasure: production has been substantially demechanised; everyday articles are well-crafted, durable and beautiful. The bulk of the narrative sees the hero accompanying some cheerful young companions up the Thames to help take in the harvest. This is no Khmer Rouge death-march - they are looking forward to it! Their greatest worry is that they are perhaps running out of work altogether.

Morris's book, of course, does not have the scientific pretensions of Kautsky's. It is certainly questionable whether, by his envisaged economic means, it would be possible to feed, clothe and shelter eight billion people. Nonetheless, we must think more seriously about how important meaningful work is to real human flourishing. Hunting and gathering was work, after all, and undertaken for most of human history by egalitarian social groups happier than ours. There has never existed a society of generalised human idleness, and there is no positive reason to believe that such a thing is really compatible with our flourishing as the kinds of social beings we actually are. 'Fully automated luxury communism' and the like are essentially bourgeois projects: capitalism in drag as socialism.

In my view, there is a grain of truth in what you could call 'spontaneous populism' (as opposed to the strategic gambits of modern opportunism) - the gut feeling, powering much of the anti-data-centre movement, that rendering large numbers of people economically superfluous is an offence against their dignity so great that no universal basic income scheme could be large enough to make up for the insult. The true benefit of socialism would be to get out from under the mute compulsion that forces the capitalist class to build it anyway, in the name of reviving growth or military competition. LLMs, or even smaller models running on commodity hardware, will continue to be useful for software development and some other purposes - tools like any other. Mass unemployment is not a good worthy of pursuit - unless, of course, you are a capitalist.

Not all will agree, but, in fact, in either of these models the essential thing is flourishing, whether in work or only at play. The mute compulsion of capitalism ensures that nothing could be further from the minds of the AI tycoons; and so the modern machine-breakers are right to obstruct this kind of 'progress' ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Subscribe: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/subscribe

GEOPOLITICS

Who we support in Russia

While it is correct to oppose Nato's proxy war in Ukraine, we cannot support Russia or ignore the reactionary nature of Putin's dictatorial regime. Instead, argues **Yassamine Mather**, we should look to the anti-war left

Russia's invasion of Ukraine allowed western powers to pose as defenders of small nations and their right to self-determination. It is a sham (as shown in no uncertain terms by Palestine).

Behind the talk of solidarity and standing alongside Ukraine's brave people, there is the drive to win public opinion to choose guns over butter and the grand strategy of defeating Russia and then breaking it apart and/or separating it from its 'no limits partnership' with China. Hence, in the imperialist countries we oppose Nato and its hugely dangerous geostrategic ambitions. We also reject out of hand the idea that Nato offers a progressive alternative. However, that does not mean supporting Russia or Vladimir Putin.

Several things shaped Moscow's thinking before February 2022. Russia was worried about its Black Sea fleet and Nato expanding eastward. But its lease on the Sevastopol base had already been extended to 2042, so fear of losing the base cannot on its own explain its invasion. Russian leaders have questioned whether Ukraine is really a separate nation and claimed a special right to influence its domestic and international politics. Together, all this points to a mixture of security worries, nationalism and regional ambition. Nato expansion is part of the background, but it is not the only reason for the current war.

In October Donald Trump decided to waive some sanctions on Russian fuel exports. Some people now accuse Washington of moving closer to Moscow. Former British defence secretary Ben Wallace reads Trump's approach as actually siding with Russia. But this overlooks the political and economic pressures on American policy. With the November midterm elections fast approaching, high fuel prices are hurting Trump at home.

The war with Iran disrupted Gulf energy supplies and problems with Saudi oil production and exports have made this worse. There is no sign that energy markets will settle down any time soon. The easing of restrictions on Russian fuel can be understood as an attempt to hold down energy costs at home, not a basic shift in strategy towards the Kremlin. True, the waiver may help Russian exporters and ease the economic pressure on Moscow.

The difference matters, because Washington has not given up on Ukraine. Despite disputes over weapons deliveries, sanctions and satellite communications, American intelligence remains central to Ukraine's war effort. On October 18, after talks with US representatives in Oslo, Volodymyr Zelenskyy confirmed that intelligence sharing on Russian missile strikes had resumed. He said it "works now" and thanked the Americans. This shows how much Ukraine still depends on US support, even as the Trump administration uses its control of key military capabilities to pressurise Kyiv.

European governments, including Britain, now provide a larger share of Ukraine's financial and military support. But they have not replaced what one Ukrainian official called the American monopoly over three crucial capabilities: intelligence, ballistic-missile interceptors and the Starlink satellite network, including its military version, Starshield. Reports of limits on Starshield, breaks in intelligence cooperation and delays in missile deliveries show how far Ukraine relies on systems the US controls.

Not simply a one-man dictatorship

They also show that Washington can change how involved it is without disengaging from the conflict.

These contradictions also reflect Russia's place in the world. Its economy is much smaller than the USA's, but it still has a large military, nuclear weapons and security institutions inherited from the Soviet era. Its capitalist ruling class is still tied into global markets. Russia depends heavily on oil and gas revenue and is vulnerable to attacks on its refineries and export facilities, which are real weak points in terms of its war economy. Higher world fuel prices can make up for some of these losses, which shows how events in the Middle East can shift the balance of the war in Ukraine.

The conflict consequently has wider geopolitical dimensions. Western military and intelligence assistance underlines that the Russia-Ukraine war is, in fact, a proxy war between Russia and Nato. Russia's political and economic relationship with China also links the conflict indirectly to the wider US-China rivalry. Washington's policy is shaped by several competing considerations: containing Russian military power, maintaining influence over European security, managing energy prices and limiting the domestic political costs of prolonged international confrontation. Trump's sanctions waiver and continued military cooperation with Ukraine are not necessarily contradictory, when viewed within this broader framework.

Sanctions

Sanctions have imposed substantial costs on Russian finance, trade, technology access and energy exports, without producing the immediate economic collapse that some initially predicted. Their effects are uneven: import substitution, rerouted trade and wartime production have allowed adaptation, while fiscal pressures, inflation and technological constraints continue to accumulate. The European Union adopted its 21st sanctions package on July 23, adding 218 individual and entity listings and measures affecting banking, crypto services, oil refining, dual-use goods and vessels associated with Russia's shadow fleet. The EU also paused automatic adjustment of the oil price cap until July 2027 amid exceptional energy-market disruption. Sanctions must therefore be assessed as changing political instruments, not as a single, unaltered blockade.

Sanctioned elites have tried to protect their wealth through complicated ownership structures, trusts, relatives, lawsuits and moving assets abroad. Meanwhile, trading networks have sent goods through third countries, and shadow-fleet tankers have kept oil exports going. Such practices show how global capitalism creates many loopholes around sanctions.

But the costs fall unevenly on ordinary Russians. Higher prices, less access to imported equipment and pressure on public services hit wage-earners and pensioners harder than the rich (some of the hardship comes from the Kremlin's own military spending, taxes and domestic restrictions, not just western measures). There is no such thing as pressure aimed only at the war machine: sanctions have affected most of the population, especially where access to medicines and healthcare is at stake.

The contradiction is clearest when Ukrainian attacks on Russian oil facilities threaten the income needed to keep the invasion going, while disruption to global fuel supplies gives Washington a reason to ease some restrictions. However, the October 2026 waiver did not end all US sanctions on Russia: US secretary of state Marco Rubio described a 60-day review period, while members of Congress from both parties criticised the easing of pressure on Moscow. Its longer-term consequences remain uncertain.

Repression

Russia did not arrive at dictatorship overnight. After the short, harsh crackdown of 1993, when former president Boris Yeltsin clashed with parliament, there was a return to fairly broad political freedom. Then came a step-by-step tightening. The Chechen wars and anti-terror campaigns gave the security services more power. The protests of 2011-12 led to new foreign agent laws and stricter rules on rallies. Meanwhile, the annexation of Crimea created acute tensions and not only with Ukraine. During the pandemic, surveillance expanded and opposition gatherings were banned. The full-scale invasion brought even tighter restrictions on opposition voices.

Over 25 years of Putin's presidency, Russia has moved from a corrupt bourgeois 'democracy' with significant authoritarian features to a repressive dictatorship of state-monopoly capital, with only decorative democratic institutions. The war, economic strain, rising discontent and the remaining potential of the previously crushed labour movement give the regime every reason to impose further oppression. Nevertheless, opposition still exists with initiatives such as the Solidarity Action Committee and the Leftwing Political Prisoners Foundation.

Putin's regime is not just the personal rule of one man. It rests on the Federal Security Service (FSB) and other security bodies, on a bureaucracy that rewards loyalty and on the interests of a capitalist elite closely tied to the state. This helps explain why the regime has lasted so long, and why it fears defeat or a settlement that falls short of total victory (or cannot justify the horrendous Russian losses on the front line). If the security establishment sees a concession as a strategic retreat, tensions within the ruling group could break out into the open. However, this does not mean the leadership will necessarily fall.

The invasion has accelerated a repressive system that long predates 2022. Laws against 'discrediting' the armed forces, draconian provisions against so-called extremism and terrorism, and 'foreign agent' designations have narrowed the space for political dissent. Victims include journalists, feminists, liberals and trade unionists. Socialists and anarchists have been a particular target. Various organisations have been severely weakened or forced to dissolve.

The movement known as Left Resistance has faced criminal proceedings against several of its activists, including Alyona Krylova and Igor Kuznetsov. Left Socialist Action has faced repression. One of its members, Yuri Chilikin, was detained in January 2024 for several months after receiving a 300,000-rouble fine for alleged 'justification of terrorism' in online comments. Artem Borodin,

associated with the Revolutionary Workers Party, was detained in Donetsk in 2022 over anti-war leaflets and subsequently fled to Kyrgyzstan, where he faced renewed detention and the threat of extradition. Anti-fascists have likewise faced serious prosecutions, including cases involving alleged membership of People's Self-Defence, which the Russian authorities designated a terrorist organisation in 2022.

Some have simply thrown in the towel. The Russian Socialist Movement announced its closure in May 2024 after being designated a 'foreign agent'. In May 2025, the Trotskyist organisation, Workers Power, also dissolved following police searches and the arrest of activist Garri Azaryan on charges of publicly advocating terrorism.

There are a few cases that have gained global attention. The Marxist historian Boris Kagarlitsky was given five years, Ilya Yashin, a former Moscow municipal councillor, eight and a half years. Then there is Sergei Udaltsov, one of the leaders of the *pro-war* Left Front (which is close to the Communist Party of the Russian Federation). Udaltsov is a convinced follower of Joseph Stalin. What he objected to was the corruption and vote rigging.

Independent trade union activity has also come under pressure. Kirill Ukraintsev, a leader of the Kurier union, spent more than nine months in pre-trial detention after organising workers and participating in protests. Another Kurier union organiser, Said Shamkhalov, was reportedly beaten following a demonstration. Anton Orlov, a coordinator of healthcare workers' union Action in Bashkortostan, was sentenced to six and a half years in prison on fraud charges in September 2022. Orlov denied the charges and maintained that his prosecution was connected to his trade union activity. Anatoly Bannykh, an independent union leader at the Ural vehicle plant in Miass, was detained for five days in January 2025 for allegedly displaying extremist symbols in an old social media photograph.

The authorities have also restricted international trade union solidarity. In September 2023, the International Transport Workers' Federation was declared an 'undesirable organisation', followed by the IndustriALL (sic) Global Union in January 2024. These decisions forced Russian-affiliated unions, including organisations representing seafarers and other transport and industrial workers, to break their formal international links. The International Labour Organisation has criticised these restrictions as blatant interference in trade union rights.

Despite these pressures, networks supporting political prisoners, independent workers' organisations and smaller socialist and anarchist groups manage to survive. This shows that political opposition and labour activism have not disappeared, even though their ability to organise openly has been severely restricted. International solidarity remains important, but it should be based on a realistic understanding of their limited organisational strength and the difficulties they face.

Russian repression is not a single policy, but a layered system. Targeted repression is aimed at activists and organisations judged dangerous or too non-conformist, with the aim of removing them from public life. Alongside this runs what can be called chaotic repression, driven by police quotas and by denunciations from zealous pro-war activists. An anti-war comment indistinguishable from thousands of others can bring a fine of 30,000 to 50,000 roubles (one or two months' wages for an ordinary worker) or a prison term. The case of paediatrician Nadezhda Buyanova, reported by a patient's mother over a remark about the war, became emblematic. The randomness is itself functional: people fear punishment without knowing how likely it is.

Two other methods do not involve criminal charges at all. First, the police raid places where certain groups meet, such as migrant workers' accommodation, gatherings where people are encouraged to write letters to political prisoners or even gay and lesbian bars. They detain people, check their documents and often humiliate them, usually without bringing any charges. The aim is to terrify people and spread fear throughout the population. Second, the police put pressure on known activists by visiting their homes or workplaces, calling them in for questioning and forcing them to sign formal warnings. This pressure often increases before elections, protests or visits by government officials. The aim is to wear activists down, so that only those who can cope with constant police harassment continue with political activity.

The system is built to escalate. Persecution typically begins with fines and short administrative arrests of five to 15 days, and turns criminal when the target persists. The 2014 'Dadin article', which made three breaches of protest rules within 180 days punishable by up to five years in prison, set the pattern. The charge of 'discrediting the armed forces', introduced in the first month of the invasion, works the same way: a first offence brings a fine of up to 50,000 roubles, while a repeat 'offence' is treated as a case demanding imprisonment. By September 2024 roughly 94,000 administrative cases had been brought under it. Charges for 'displaying extremist symbols' are equally useful to the regime, since an activist's social media history can almost always yield something, including satirical or critical uses of Nazi imagery.

Harsher forms of repression rely on criminal laws against spreading allegedly 'fake' comments about the army, repeatedly 'discrediting' the armed forces, 'justifying terrorism', high treason and sabotage. These offences can carry not only heavy fines, but prison sentences ranging from a few years to decades. People accused of 'terrorism' or 'extremism' offences can also be placed on the state's register of terrorists and extremists before conviction, restricting their access to bank accounts and employment. Some remain on the register for years after their release.

The scale of repression is considerably greater than official lists of political prisoners suggest. Memorial (one of Russia's best-known human rights organisations) listed 1,265 political prisoners at the end of 2025, but its wider database recorded 4,843 people deprived of liberty in politically motivated criminal cases, including many whose cases had not yet been assessed. Religious prisoners - particularly Muslims, prosecuted under anti-extremism and terrorism laws, and Jehovah's Witnesses - now make up a substantial part of the prison population. Treason and terrorism prosecutions have also increased sharply, often taking place behind closed doors.

Beyond those imprisoned, OVD-Info, another rights organisation that monitors police activities, documented more than 20,000 anti-war detentions between February 2022 and July 2025, alongside thousands of administrative cases. These figures reveal a system of repression extending far beyond the relatively small number of officially recognised political prisoners.

Mass protest can also bring severe punishment, when the authorities declare it to be 'dangerous'. In Baymak, Bashkortostan, between 5,000 and 10,000 people protested against the prosecution of the Bashkir nationalist, Fail Alsynov, in January 2024. The demonstration was treated as mass disorder and violence against officials - more than 80 participants were prosecuted and faced sentences of three to six years in prison, making it one of the largest political cases in recent Russian history.

The authorities are also moving more quickly towards criminal prosecution. Prosecutors increasingly bring criminal charges over online posts without first imposing administrative fines. A law passed in June 2025 makes this easier by allowing people accused of 'inciting hatred or hostility' under article 282 of the criminal code to face criminal charges without first receiving an administrative penalty.

As political repression increases, the Russian authorities are using more ways to silence critics, both through the courts and outside them. One is the 'foreign agent' law, introduced in 2012 and later expanded. People and organisations can be given this label on vague grounds, including alleged foreign 'influence'. Those listed face restrictions on standing for election, holding public office, organising public events and working in education. They must also label their publications and provide detailed financial reports. By late 2024, hundreds of individuals and organisations had been placed on the register.

Another weapon is the official list of 'terrorists and extremists', maintained by Rosfinmonitoring, Russia's financial monitoring agency. People can be added before they have been convicted of a crime. Once listed, their bank accounts and financial activities are severely restricted, making everyday life and employment difficult.

The authorities also ban groups by declaring them 'undesirable' or 'extremist'. In 2023, the Supreme Court declared the so-called 'international LGBT movement' extremist, even though no such single organisation exists. This allows the authorities to prosecute people accused of organising or taking part in its activities. Political pressure also includes dismissal from work, expulsion from university and criminal charges unrelated to political activity. Faced with these threats, some activists simply leave Russia. Though they make up only a tiny proportion of the 650,000 to 1,750,000 who are thought to have left Russia since 2022, they are thought to number around a thousand in total.

Armed forces too

The war has also brought growing repression within the Russian army, much of it hidden from public view. Mobilisation has often involved coercion. Prisoners have been recruited with promises of freedom and find themselves in assault units which are known to suffer particularly heavy losses. Desertion, unauthorised absence and refusal to obey orders have become major problems.

According to Mediazona, a Russia-based independent media organisation, Russian military courts received nearly 16,000 criminal cases involving refusal to serve between the beginning of the invasion and the end of 2024. Most concerned soldiers who left their units without permission. In the first half of 2024 alone, 6,088 servicemen were convicted of various criminal offences, with almost half receiving prison sentences. Outside the courts, independent investigations have documented soldiers who refused to fight being locked in basements and pits, beaten, deprived of food and medical treatment, and forced back to the front. By July 2026, ASTRA, another independent Russian investigative outlet, reported that there were 29 such detention sites.

There is also growing evidence of soldiers being killed by their own commanders or deliberately sent on missions from which they were unlikely to return - a practice known as 'zeroing out'. The full scale of these abuses remains unknown. Restrictions on military information, the reluctance of soldiers to report their commanders and the limited public attention given to their treatment have helped keep much of this repression out of sight.

Allies

The Putin government has important allies on the nationalist right, although their relationship with the state varies. The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), founded by Vladimir Zhirinovsky and now led by Leonid Slutsky, is a nationalist party despite its name. It has consistently supported the war in Ukraine and the Kremlin's main foreign-policy decisions.

'A Just Russia', led by Sergei Mironov, combines promises of greater social protection with conservative nationalism. Its 2021 merger with Patriots of Russia and the For Truth movement brought nationalist writer Zakhar Prilepin into its leadership. The party returned to the shorter name, A Just Russia, in 2025. Rodina and other smaller nationalist organisations also support a strong Russian state and an assertive foreign policy. Although these parties compete for votes, influence and positions, they do not fundamentally challenge Putin's political system.

Outside parliament, orthodox conservatives, monarchists and ultranationalists, such as Konstantin Malofeev and Alexander Dugin, promote the idea of Russia as a separate civilisation, opposed to western liberalism. Both have supported the war in Ukraine and advocated a more aggressive nationalist agenda.

But their influence should not be exaggerated. They are not identical to the Kremlin leadership, and some nationalists have criticised the government for failing to pursue the war more forcefully. Nevertheless, their emphasis on traditional social values, Russian nationalism and opposition to liberal democracy overlaps with important elements of official ideology. Kremlin-aligned politicians and organisations have also developed links with sections of the European far right, including Italy's Lega. Such relationships indicate political cooperation and ideological similarities, but do not necessarily establish direct control by Moscow.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation, led for decades by Gennady Zyuganov, remains Russia's largest so-called opposition party in the duma. CPRF campaigns for higher pensions, greater public ownership, reduced inequality and the defence of Soviet achievements. However, its model is now the People's Republic of China. It has sometimes challenged electoral irregularities and unpopular local government policies. Yet its leadership has generally accepted the political limits imposed by the Kremlin. Its criticism of market-oriented economic policies coexists with support for the state's main security and foreign-policy objectives, including the invasion of Ukraine.

But the CPRF is no monolith. Some regional deputies, younger members and activists opposed the invasion, describing it as an imperialist war. Some resigned, while others were expelled from party organisations or from the duma faction. The party has also provided an opening for socialist and protest candidates to stand in elections. These differences matter, but they have not affected the leadership's support for the war or its unwillingness to mount a sustained challenge to the political system. From an independent socialist perspective, the central question is not whether the CPRF uses old communist symbols, but whether it can defend workers' struggles, democratic organisation and international solidarity independently of the state.

The September 2026 State Duma election further strengthened the parliamentary dominance of Putin's United Russia. According to the official results, it won 349 of the 450 seats, compared with 37 for the CPRF, 23 for the LDPR, 19 for New People and 17 for A Just Russia. Rodina won one seat and independent candidates four. United Russia therefore retained more than the two-thirds majority required to approve constitutional amendments.

These figures, however, cannot be treated as an unrestricted expression of popular opinion. The election took place under severe restrictions on political competition, and on independent media and public opposition to the war. Yabloko, the only registered party openly opposing the invasion, was barred from contesting the federal party-list election in August. Independent election monitors also reported coercion, manipulation and other serious irregularities.

Public opinion is more complicated than either the government or its opponents sometimes suggest. It would be wrong to dismiss all Russian opinion polls as meaningless, but repression, fear of expressing dissent and the wording of questions make their results difficult to interpret. In January 2026, the independent Levada Centre reported that 76% of respondents expressed support for the Russian armed forces' actions in Ukraine, while 61% favoured moving towards peace negotiations. These findings suggest that expressed support for the military does not necessarily mean enthusiasm for continuing the war indefinitely. At the same time, support for negotiations should not automatically be interpreted as opposition to the invasion or support for Ukrainian sovereignty.

Economic hardship also does not automatically produce political resistance. Workers and other sections of society may be dissatisfied with living conditions without believing that collective action is possible or that an alternative government would improve their situation. The ability to organise, confidence in political alternatives and the personal risks of dissent are therefore crucial. A socialist analysis must recognise these contradictions without exaggerating either the strength of popular opposition or the depth of support for the existing system ●

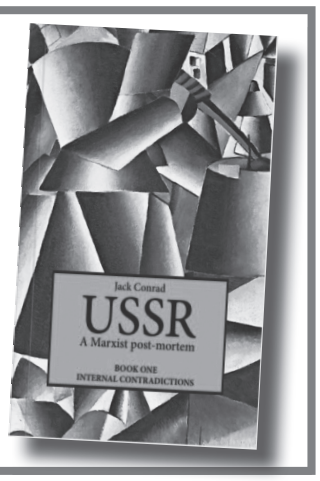
USSR - A Marxist post-mortem
Internal contradictions

Jack Conrad uses the logic of Marxism to lay bare the Soviet Union's inner laws

Having done that, we begin to understand why the system showed such initial dynamism and yet inevitably tended towards stagnation and eventual collapse

First of four books

Paperback, pp679, £20
from: www.lulu.com



YOUR PARTY

Programme for a kingdom

Among those expelled under the anti-communist proscribed list is Chris Williamson, the former Labour MP and former deputy leader of the Workers Party of Britain. **Steve Freeman** calls for his reinstatement and an urgent change of course

Republic Your Party remains steadfastly in favour of staying in Your Party and fighting for a new programme. We, therefore, call on all members to:

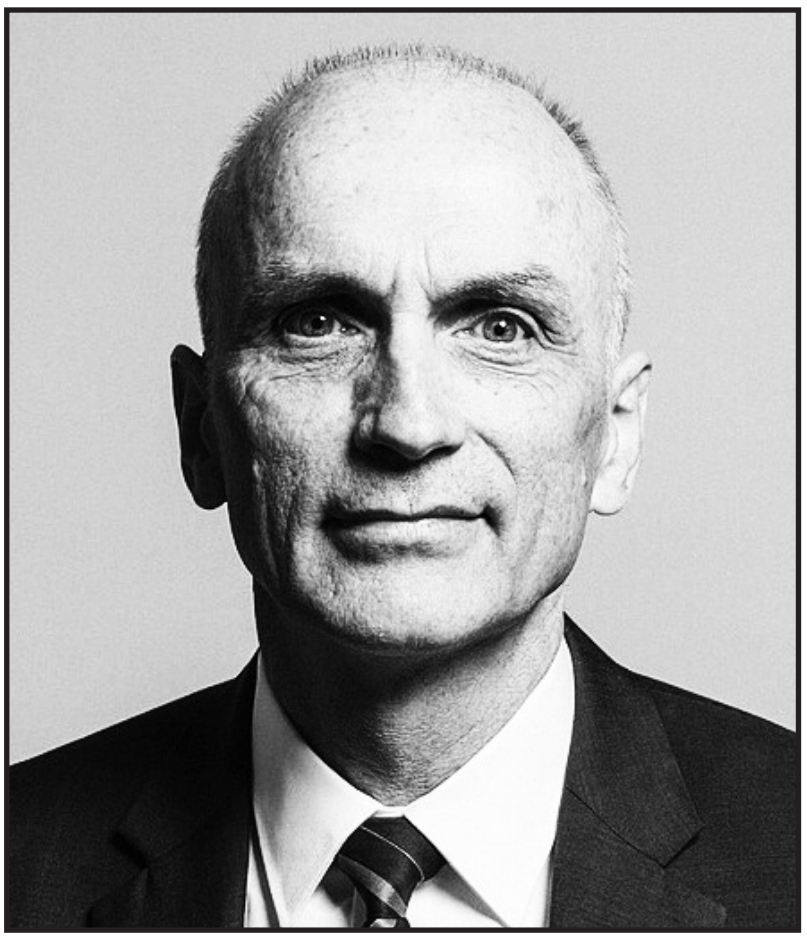
- Oppose the expulsion of Chris Williamson;
- Defend democratic rights in Your Party;
- Support the rights of dual members. An injury to one is injury to all.

Chris Williamson attended the launch of the Derbyshire branch of Your Party on August 13 and took minutes for the meeting. Two days later he received an email from the Your Party membership team informing him that he was expelled from the party by membership cancellation. They say: "As Your Party membership is not compatible with current membership of another political party, your membership has now been removed from the membership system."

Chris replied to the membership team on August 27 and appealed against his expulsion. He said: "I attended the inaugural conference of Your Party in Liverpool last year, at which dual membership was agreed. Consequently, your assertion that my 'membership is not compatible with current *membership of another political party*' is not consistent with the decision that was agreed at conference."

The allegation that Chris is a member of "another political party" is correct. It is no secret, because he has always been open about it. He was a Labour MP, unlawfully suspended from the Labour Party on February 27 2019. He resigned in November 2019. He joined the Workers Party of Britain in July 2023 and became its deputy leader in December. In August 2025 he joined Your Party as an openly declared dual member. He applied to attend the Your Party founding conference and was selected via the sortition process.

His first 'expulsion' [from YP] took place on November 28 2025 - the day before the Liverpool conference opened. He received an email expelling him for being a member of "another political party". However, he attended the conference and was allowed to participate as a full member. The founding conference then 'resolved' the issue by voting in favour of dual membership. In February 2026, Chris tried to stand in the central executive committee (CEC) elections. He was barred, but not expelled. He remained a dual member until the launch of the Derbyshire branch of Your Party on August 13 and his second expulsion.



Chris Williamson: a Bennite republican

Who and why?

At any political crime scene, the question is, who did it and why? Who carried this out? Who was responsible? It raises the question of the governance model. We know the membership team took this decision. Did they have the authority to ban the Workers Party? Did they act alone or did the CEC sanction it? Is it in the minutes of the CEC? Did Jeremy Corbyn know and support this? Were members consulted?

Of course, this is not a legal case. Nevertheless, Your Party has contractual relations with its employees and members. It entered a financial and moral contract with Chris. It took his membership subscriptions for 10 months in full knowledge of his membership of the WPB. A court would inquire whether there was a breach of contract, not least because there was no misconduct by Chris.

Courts demand accountability and transparency. They expect and require truthful answers about what was really going on behind the scenes. They would look carefully at the words and intentions of the constitution. As sovereign members, we expect no lower standard of probity than demanded by courts.

The first and most obvious explanation for the expulsion is that this action was not a political decision or anything to do with class politics. It was simply the application of the rule that says nobody can be a member of "another political party". The team, acting alone, applied the rules without fear or favour.

This theory stands in contrast to a political explanation, which locates this decision in struggle (ie, class struggle). Chris is a political activist and comrade, not simply 'member No567' on the membership spreadsheet. All political actors in this story are in struggle, driven by theories and motives. It is not simply whether we are 'for' or 'against' Chris's expulsion, but what we learn from this about Your Party's direction of travel.

Why has this expulsion taken place and why now? What is the political motive? It should not be assumed this is an isolated incident. There is a pattern of struggles; a chain of events that go back even before Your Party was launched. There is a wider context traced back to the Labour Party. This expulsion is a moment in a struggle over the future of the left and the attempt to build Your Party.

The first question is whether this expulsion is linked to the political-ideological struggle over the party programme. This possible motive seems absent from consideration. The programme was not discussed or fought over at the founding conference. It seems to be Your Party's 'elephant in the room'. Is the issue really about a programme concealed from members? We will have to go back to find the divisions over programme in the Labour Party now replicated in Your Party.

Constitutional struggle is the most obvious source for the motive. It is not simply that Chris is being expelled for allegedly breaching the constitution: the rules are being rewritten through conflict. The leadership of Your Party is redefining and reshaping the constitution by putting their boots on the ground some distance from where they should be. It makes common sense to locate the motives for Chris's expulsion here.

Labour origins

The great achievement of the 1945 Labour government was to establish a 'social monarchy' to restore stability in post-war Britain through a social contract with the working class. What became the Elizabethan welfare state is recognisable to the 'baby boomers'. The destruction of that settlement - begun by Margaret Thatcher and extended by Labour - lasted until the September 2015 election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader called it into question.

The origins of Your Party are from within the Labour Party. Its roots are in the crisis of Labour in the 1990s following the victory of Thatcher and the defeat of the National Union of Mineworkers and the trade union movement. New lines of demarcation were drawn between New Labour under Tony Blair, the defence of 'old Labour' or 'socialist Labour' (Scargill) and Tony Benn's Commonwealth Bill as the source of 'republican Labour'.

In 1997 New Labour was triumphant. Scargill had split from Labour to form the Socialist Labour Party. Benn was marginalised. His republican Commonwealth Bill was unrecognised and unloved by the working class movement. What was missing from this picture was an independent, working class republican party which would turn the idea of a 'commonwealth' into a class issue.

By 2005 the Socialist Labour Party had failed, but its programme idea had followers in the Socialist Alliance and Respect. New Labour ideology was destroyed in 2007-08 by financial crisis in the 'free' markets of the City of London. By 2015 New Labour was completely discredited. However, the idea of 'socialist Labour' made its great comeback through the joint leadership of Jeremy Corbyn/John McDonnell. A programme to restore the social monarchy presented itself in the Labour manifestoes of 2017 and 2019.

McDonnell was central to the Corbyn-Labour project. He described himself as a 'socialist' who aimed to become "the first socialist Labour chancellor". Like Corbyn, he believed in reforming the constitutional monarchy with an elected House of Lords, electoral reform (proportional representation), allowing a second referendum for Scotland and English devolution. In an interview with Iain Dale he said, "I describe myself as a socialist. I think I'm in the tradition of the Attlee government."

After 2017 the Corbyn-McDonnell programme of restoration came under the hammer blows of the Crown-In-Parliament, the BBC, the national press and the Zionist lobby. A split began to open in the Corbyn-McDonnell alliance. This was most visible in the divergence between John McDonnell and Chris Williamson.

Chris Williamson was Labour leader of Derby City Council and then a Labour MP for Derby North from 2010 to 2015, and 2017 to 2019. Under the Corbyn leadership, he was one of the staunchest defenders of Jeremy in the Parliamentary Labour Party. He promoted Labour Party democracy with his 'Democracy Road Show' tour. His politics stood broadly in the Labour tradition of Arthur Scargill, George Galloway, Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, etc.

From 2018 the crisis in the Corbyn-McDonnell Labour Party opened up a fracture between a 'Corbyn right' represented by Sir Keir Starmer and McDonnell and the 'Corbyn left'. Chris was a voice for the 'Corbyn left', acting in solidarity with falsely accused and slandered Labour members. He actively supported expelled members Tony Greenstein, Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth and Ken Livingstone and worked with the Labour Against the Witchhunt (LAW) campaign.

In taking this stance, Chris became a target for the Labour right and general secretary Jennie Formby. In February 2019 he was suspended from the party and had the Labour whip withdrawn by the Parliamentary Labour Party. He was reinstated in June, and this caused a huge furore inside the PLP. Around 150 Labour MPs signed a motion calling for the whip to be withdrawn for a year. Then Formby intervened and resuspended him. The High Court ruled that Labour's second suspension of Williamson was procedurally unlawful.

Formby continued to find new ways to frustrate the High Court and keep Chris suspended, so that he could not contest the seat for Derby North again. Despite being promised support by Jeremy Corbyn, this did not materialise. Some have said that Chris became the sacrificial lamb for the 'greater good' of fending off the Labour right and the Zionist lobby to win the 2019 general election. If so, then the tactic of throwing your allies under the bus failed spectacularly.

In February 2020 the Labour Left Alliance (LLA) was launched in Sheffield with delegates from LAW and local groups from, for example, Brighton and Bristol. Speakers included Jackie Walker, Tina Werkman and Jo Bird among about 130 delegates and over 1,500 supporters. The LLA voted to support Rebecca Long-Bailey for Labour leader and Richard Burgon for deputy leader.

The LLA set up a 'Republican Labour' working group to investigate republican ideas and policies, taking inspiration from Tony Benn's Commonwealth Bill. In September 2021 'Resist', a political campaign supported by Chris, organised a fringe meeting at the Labour Party conference on 'Socialists, republicanism and proportional representation".

Over the next two years, two trends - Socialist Labour and Republican Labour - emerged within the LLA. In January 2022 a section of the LLA set up the Socialist Labour Network through a merger of LAW and the Labour In Exile Network (LIEN). In January 2023 the Republican Labour Education Forum (RLEF) was launched by the working group as an independent organisation. The RLEF presented Benn's case for a republic to the Workers Party Political Committee.

In November 2025 the Corbyn-Labour movement gathered in Liverpool to launch Your Party without John McDonnell, Diane Abbott and Richard Burgon, etc. Supporters of the RLEF attended and issued the first Republic Your Party leaflet. Former allies in the Parliamentary Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn and Chris Williamson, were back together in the same party at the same conference. Jeremy Corbyn arrived as leader, while Chris arrived as an ordinary member, ready to consider a republican direction.

Both Jeremy and Chris were driven out of the Labour Party. The whip was removed by the Corbyn Labour Party to prevent Chris standing as a Labour candidate in 2019. In 2024 Corbyn suffered a similar fate at the hands of Starmer's Labour. They were joined by Zarah Sultana, who resigned the Labour whip to help found Your Party. Liverpool was also a magnet for a variety of socialist and communist groups, such as the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party in England and Wales, RS21, the CPGB, etc.

YP constitution

The dominant programme at the Liverpool founding conference remained the Corbyn-McDonnell (CMcD) Labour manifesto from 2017 to 2019. It was not discussed or its validity questioned. It was simply assumed. The most important fact about Liverpool was that it did not debate or agree a programme for Your Party. As a result, the CMcD manifesto remains the default. This

'elephant in the room' continues as the guiding hand of Your Party, from which subsequent events unfolded.

The main struggle in Liverpool became a conflict within the Corbyn Labour 'family' between a Corbyn-Murphy right trend and a left trend led by Zarah Sultana, supported by left Corbynistas and all the left groups. This bloc became the Grassroots Left, which played the Corbyn game of constitutionalism. The principal question of politics (ie, programme) was 'the dog that didn't bark'.

The YP founding conference 'reunited' two ex-MPs who led the Labour Party in 2019 or led the Corbyn 'left' opposition to Zionism and the witch-hunt. Now Chris was extending the 'Democracy Road Show' to Benn's criticism of the Westminster system and forming an alliance with some supporters of the Republican Labour Education Forum in recognising the importance of Tony Benn's 1991 Commonwealth Bill. At Liverpool, however, Republic YP was only an idea, not an organised platform.

Left unity was the spirit of Liverpool. Working class opposition to Labour from the left was fragmented into multiple groups. Left unity was an important objective for building a mass alternative to the Labour Party and against the rise of right populism. It made good sense for parties and groups to cooperate, pool resources and ultimately merge. If the left could work together, it could gain the confidence and the goodwill of working class activists.

Dual membership was welcomed and agreed by the Liverpool conference in the spirit of unity. This was the intelligence of the 'ordinary' working-class activists, not the politics of sectarianism. It was aimed at overcoming the fragmentation of the left. Your Party did not demand you simply give up your existing membership and commit to a party that does not even have a programme yet or a record of struggle.

The Liverpool conference voted for dual membership. This was made clear in the constitution, clause 4 xii. The principal part comes first - giving permission to hold membership in "other national political parties". The qualifications in the sub-section are not intended to abolish the primary purpose of this clause about encouraging left unity in a newly forming left party. The sub-clause is about an agreed process to facilitate the principle. Hence it concerns other parties, "where they have been *approved* by the CEC as aligning with the party's values, to include those with whom the party cooperates electorally" (my emphasis). It adds a democratic requirement that "The approved list shall be subject to ongoing CEC review and annual ratification by National Conference."

The socialist left in Scotland was inspired by Your Party and organised a founding conference of YP Scotland on February 7-8 in Dundee. By all accounts it was very good conference, well organised and conducted in a comradely way, with real policy disagreements decided by democratic means.

Republicanism is largely ignored by the left in England, although it is very present in Northern Ireland. It is inherent in the constitutional crisis in Scotland and Wales. A republican programme in the UK is indissolubly bound up with anti-unionism. Most of the socialist left in Scotland is in favour of Scottish independence and hence a Scottish republic, not a constitutional monarchy. This stands in stark contrast to the Corbyn-McDonnell unionist programme.

Unlike the Liverpool conference, YP in Scotland could not avoid the programme question. In Dundee, the anti-unionist republicans won a majority. To add insult to injury, the conference approved an interim Scottish executive committee (ISEC) with an anti-unionist majority. Corbyn and Sultana both spoke at the Scottish conference and it was rumoured that he was not happy. But, like all skilful politicians, he would bite his lip and wait.

The English left was happy enough to ignore the national programme, being focused on local and regional politics. In Scotland it was not possible to ignore the programme issues carried over from the unionist CMcD manifesto. In England, the national question was ignored, but appeared in the disguise of the Liverpool constitution. Scotland and Wales were allocated one seat each on the CEC, while each English region was awarded with two. It did not occur to Your Party's English unionists that this might be provocative and insulting.

The next step was the CEC elections, whose results were announced on February 26. This was a key moment in the development of Your Party. After the election four platforms were represented on the CEC - The Many, the Grassroots Left, the Platform for a Democratic Party and Republic Your Party. The Corbyn-McDonnell Labour programme appeared as The Many. The main left-Corbyn alternative, the Grassroots Left, was led by Zarah Sultana and backed up by the various socialist/communist groups.

CEC candidate

Chris Williamson had tried to stand as a CEC candidate for Republic Your Party in the East Midlands, along with four other candidates in England and one new supporter in Scotland. Chris was a dual member, so he was barred from standing in the CEC election. This action was undemocratic, not least because it implied two-tier membership. It denied members in the East Midlands a chance to hear Tony Benn's case from a comrade with a strong record of supporting working-class struggles.

The result was a clear victory for The Many with 14 seats, while Grassroots Left secured seven. Three seats went to independents. Significantly, Niall Christie, a supporter of Republic YP, was elected to represent Scottish members. In The Many and Republic YP we have two opposed views about the democratic future of the United Kingdom.

The main conflict in Liverpool between Corbyn and Sultana ended with a constitution that *supported* dual membership. However, once the CEC was in place, it took up the struggle over programme. It began by moving against Scottish republicanism and the various socialist/communist programmes. These issues of programme were not debated or voted on: they were resolved by imposition 'from above' through expulsions and resignations.

There was no debate about the future constitutional relations between the people of England and Scotland. Instead, the new CEC planned a coup and simply overthrew the ISEC elected at the Dundee conference and set aside the decisions taken by the Scottish membership. This seriously undermined the credibility of YP in Scotland. In protest the ISEC resigned. CEC member Niall Christie resigned in solidarity with the Scottish executive. It was a major setback for supporters of the republican programme.

In April the CEC produced a paper called 'Dual party membership eligibility' and subtitled 'CEC governance paper - status: internal governance. Date: April 2026'. This document is long and complex. In section 3 on the 'Principle of organisational independence', the paper distinguishes between two kinds of party. The first is a broad left party ("a broad left approach and the values that underlie it"), in contrast to "a number of small, self-described revolutionary parties that operate according to principles of democratic centralism".

The practical conclusion of section 3 is found in section 5, 'Ineligible organisation'. It says: "Membership of the following organisations is deemed not to be aligned to our Party's values and proposed as ineligible for the purposes of Your Party membership rules (this is not an exhaustive list)": It lists the SWP, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Socialist Party, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (Tusc), the CPGB (Provisional Central Committee), the Scottish Socialist Party, the Socialist Equality Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party.

The distinction between "self-described revolutionary" and "broad left" parties should leave members of Tusc and the WPB as dual members. Indeed, because of an objection from CEC member Sam Gorst, Tusc was rightly removed from the banned list of 'revolutionary' parties.

The CEC governance paper contains an "Additional principle". This appears as a huge net designed to catch all the fish in the sea. It says:

> The constitution should also apply to: Any organisation that:
> ■ Operates as a democratic centralist party or organisation
> ■ Maintains its own national political membership structure
> ■ Requires political discipline and accountability to an external leadership or programme.
>
> Such organisations would automatically fall within the scope of the ineligibility rule.

The Liverpool conference supported dual membership in principle and left practical details to be worked out later. The door was left open for the new CEC to overturn the decision on membership. The constitution refers to an approved list, but nothing was 'approved'. Instead, a banned list was invented and grows longer. This is unconstitutional.

Any party in the UK that "maintains its own national political membership structure" will "automatically fall within the scope of the ineligibility rule" (ie, 'be ineligible' if you prefer fewer words). This catchall phrase about "national political membership" shows no intention of abiding by the spirit or letter of the Liverpool conference. Since every party has its own "national political membership", then dual membership is reduced to zero.

The constitution recognises an approved list for dual membership. It does not recognise a banned list. A banned list is unconstitutional. It is an idea outside the constitution and has no status in a party where the leadership abides by the rules. The members at Liverpool avoided a banned list for good reason. Many recognised this would create an atmosphere of 'reds under the bed' and fuel sectarian paranoia. It would give the impression of a party that is weak and lacks self-confidence in its programme.

The banned list was invented by the CEC not to draw working-class people towards the party, but to *exclude* people. It goes against the letter and the spirit of the Liverpool constitution. Even though the banned list is all about constitutional rules, its purpose was programmatic. It says, indirectly, that Your Party is not a communist party defined by a revolutionary programme. The revolutionary programme has been shown the door.

Democratic struggle

The question arises as to which parties are approved to allow dual membership. Should it include Labour, the Greens, the Workers Party or Tusc? If so, members of these parties are welcome in Your Party without having to give up their pre-existing party membership. This is a political decision and should be taken through a democratic process.

The CEC, as the elected leadership, may want to make a recommendation and provide members with a rationale. Nevertheless, the members must be consulted, with an opportunity to amend or reject any proposal. There should be a process and an effort to win a majority or consensus about whether Labour, the Greens, the Workers Party or Tusc should be on the approved list.

The decision is about parties first, not individual members. Once a party is put on the approved list or rejected, then Your Party members must be informed. A comradely discussion should take place with the member concerned. Individual comrades who are already dual members should be given the opportunity to discuss their membership and find accommodation, resign or refuse and appeal their case.

The struggle over democracy in the Your Party leadership led to crisis. Niall Christie was the first resignation. On July 3, three CEC members - Mel Mullings, Solma Ahmed and Naomi Wimborne Idrissi - were suspended by the national secretary. Sam Gorst resigned on July 17. Three officers and one CEC member resigned. A vote of no confidence in Jenny Forbes was carried and then overruled. On August 14, Solma Ahmed, Sophie Wilson and Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi resigned from the CEC. The next day Chris Williamson was expelled.

Programme

Chris was expelled by the membership team - this is a fact. We do not know who was behind it or why. Was it simply because of 'the rules' or the struggle by the party leadership to redefine the YP constitution, or a manifestation of the hidden politics of struggle for the YP programme. In the latter case the words 'Jeremy' and 'Chris' represent a struggle between different programmes.

In politics, motive and struggle are connected. In this we need to see the bigger picture, relating events inside Your Party to the wider crisis in the country and the political struggle within the left about the programme we need to confront it. The expulsion of the "self-described revolutionary" programmes of various communist groups will begin to reveal the real contradiction at the heart of Your Party. It is between the programme of social monarchy or 'socialism' as its supporters claim, and the social republic or 'republicanism'.

The United Kingdom is built on an historical fault line between conservative, loyalist unionism and democratic, republican anti-unionism. In Northern Ireland this fact is clear and obvious. The Good Friday Agreement was designed to paper over the cracks. In England, Your Party (UK) is being built over these constitutional tectonic plates. The current 'crisis of democracy' is a tremor that should alert us to the coming danger of a political earthquake.

The Corbyn-McDonnell movement won the leadership of the Labour Party in 2015 on a programme to restore the social monarchy. The 2017 Labour manifesto proved popular with voters. Yet in 2019, after the Brexit vote, it was defeated in the general election. Chris Williamson and Jeremy Corbyn were excluded as Labour candidates in 2019 and 2024 respectively. Both joined Your Party and attended the Liverpool conference in November 2025.

However, they drew opposite conclusions from their experiences. Jeremy had been a leading supporter of Tony Benn's republican bill in the House of Commons, but he set it aside in becoming Labour leader. Chris moved in the opposite direction. As a supporter of Jeremy, he opposed Zionism and promoted Labour Party democracy and mandatory reselection. Becoming a left critic of 'Corbynism' led him back to Benn's republic.

The Liverpool conference brought Jeremy Corbyn and Chris Williamson back together in the same party, but on different sides of the fault line running through British politics. The party needs a strong voice for a republican programme that alone can extend democratic public control over the economy and end the crown's imperialist policies. It cannot succeed by tying itself to the sinking ship of Labour's social monarchy, even with captain Burnham at the helm.

Support for Chris's right to continue as a member of Your Party is first and foremost political and programmatic. The republican ideas of Tony Benn and Chris Williamson must be freely available inside Your Party. We would have supported Tony Benn's right and necessity to bring his republican programme into Your Party as a member even if he retained his Labour Party card.

The democratic interests of the working class set out in the party programme come first. This is independent of constitutional rules, such as clause xiv. Dual membership is not a principle, but a tactic to gather the best advocates for working-class democracy into a new kind of party. It is not therefore a permanent rule. It should be implemented as intended, at least until a programme is agreed or a second conference is held.

Clause 4(xii) is useful if it permits or enables comrades like Chris Williamson and Tony Benn to be full members of Your Party, despite membership of the Labour Party or the WPB. This was the intention of the Liverpool conference, to enable more left-wing people to join Your Party. When all the obfuscations and interpretations of rules have been dispersed, the reality is that all working class republicans - like Chris - should be in Your Party and no rules should be put in their way.

However, the application of clause xiv by the membership team disregards the democratic norms of Liverpool. It is like the high-handed way the decisions of the Dundee conference were treated when the CEC overthrew the ISEC. They have turned it into a barrier or bureaucratic entanglement, whilst maintaining a fiction.

Clause 4(xii) has been stolen by supporters of social monarchy and unionism in the guise of The Many. Supporters of the republican programme do not need to demand a change in this clause, but its implementation as intended. Otherwise, it should be scrapped forthwith because it has become a deceit ●

OBITUARY

From militancy to the swamp

Alan Thornett, June 15 1937-October 9 2026, was one of those genuine rank-and-file leaders, a cadre steeled in the class struggles of Cowley car assembly plant. Having broken with the CPGB, he threw his lot in with Gerry Healy's increasingly crazy outfit. After that, one failed merger followed another till he found the 'lovely waters' of Mandelism. **Mike Macnair** begins a two-part article

Alan Thornett, who died two weeks ago at the age of 89, had a long and mostly honourable career as a Trotskyist political leader. A shop steward in the Transport and General Workers' Union (now part of Unite) at Morris's Oxford Cowley Assembly Plant (successively British Motor Corporation and British Leyland) between the early 1960s and his victimisation in 1982, and deputy convenor for a substantial part of that time, he was briefly notorious as a result of being targeted in an employers' and T&G bureaucrats' witch-hunt in spring 1974, as a result of which he has received a *Daily Telegraph* obituary that largely reprises the witch-hunt.[1]

A 'great British cars' website, 'AROnline', has a very similar obituary, with the author and those commenting within the obituary blaming leftwing shop stewards for the collapse of the British car industry.[2] One would imagine that the Ryder report on British Leyland had not already pointed out in 1975 that the company had been making losses and paying dividends out of capital for years. In my own time at Cowley Assembly (1976-78), every attempt to speed the lines up beyond 38 cars per hour to reach competitiveness with Ford Dagenham (44 per hour) failed due to the lines breaking down (*not* caused by sabotage). The British economy was already moving to the dominance of financial services crowding out industrial investment *before* Thatcher. Blaming Bolshie shop stewards was just a scam to cover up this underlying development.

The website of the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty offers a hatchet job from Sean Matgamna that displays his usual smear techniques against political opponents. We might be willing to believe that Thornett was at fault in splitting from Matgamna (and all the other sins of which Matgamna accuses him) if Matgamna and his co-thinkers had not played the same James P Cannon 'smashing centrist obstacles' games in their entry operation in the International Socialists in 1969-72, their short-lived fusion with Workers Power in 1975-76, and their short-lived collaboration with Labour Briefing in Socialist Organiser in 1979-80. Once three of your recent brides have drowned in the bath after you heavily insured their lives, we cease to be willing to believe in unfortunate accidents.

By their enemies shall you know them. I canvassed for Labour in east Oxford in the October 1974 general election (applying the line of the International Marxist Group, of which I was then a member), and encountered a number of people on the doorstep who did not intend to vote, but said that "if that Alan Thornett was standing, I would vote for him". They showed better judgment than Matgamna.

There are better obituaries/reminiscences from Thornett's comrades, Duncan Chapel, Tony Richardson and John Lister.[3] And Thornett wrote about his experiences as a leftwing trade unionist in his 1987 book, *From militancy to Marxism*. Equally, though I knew Thornett and spoke with him from time to time, I was not personally close to him and cannot say that I know the details of his political history. It is, however, worth contributing some thoughts about his career as a Trotskyist political leader. (What follows is going to be the first part of a two-part article, for reasons merely of time. I have had difficulty in constructing what I have written so far.)

I flag as the first point that I am *not* writing about Thornett either as a trade union militant or as specifically a *working class* political leader. Either approach celebrates him by diminishing him. Thornett was at the lower age end of a generation that produced numerous highly competent, militant trade unionists and working class political leaders (of very diverse politics).

The capitalist class has largely, though not completely, succeeded in managing out of existence this working class cadre, by a combination of offshoring production and financialisation; drawing more of the children of the upper layers of the working class into further and higher education; persuading the workers' movement and the left that 'news management' and the 'news media' could substitute for an independent working class press and media; and 'lawyerisation' of both trade unions and industrial relations, and local government, suppressing the democratic processes in which such a cadre can emerge.

There have been fewer British *communist* or *Trotskyist* political leaders, so we should take the ones we have had more seriously. Thornett in this context has the considerable merit of having resisted Gerry Healy's turn to lunacy in 1974-75, and having broken with Matgamna, as the Matgamnaites' social-imperialism became clear in the 1980s. The fact that Anti-Capitalist Resistance, of which he was a leader, has slid towards social-imperialism by way of supporting 'humanitarian assistance' in relation to Libya and Rojava in the early 2010s, and after 2022 arrived at the social-imperialist destination with calls to arm the US proxy regime in Ukraine, does not alter this historical merit.

Politics

Morris's (by the 1950s, BMC's) Cowley Assembly plant was unionised, very much against the will of management, by a group of militants with a communist core. Pressed Steel (later the Cowley Body Plant) had come first, in the 1930s.[4] Alan Thornett started work at Cowley, aged 22, in 1959 - two years after the formal recognition agreement, and the same year that management victimised the T&G convenor, Frank Horsman (the union settled for him to be transferred to Pressed Steel).

In the 1938 *Transitional programme*, the Trotskyists wrote that "Trade unions, even the most powerful, embrace no more than 20% to 25% of the working class and, at that, predominantly the more skilled and better paid layers." The sort of mass unionisation with closed shop agreements and shop-stewardism displayed in the unionisation of Cowley Assembly - and many other factories - reflected the politics of 'full employment' in Britain. This in turn reflected the politics of 'containment' of communism in the 'cold war' period between 1950 and around 1976: major concessions were made in order to prevent the spread of 'communism' into western Europe and Japan.

The resulting *impression* was one of the irresistible advance of socialism and of the working class: with the USSR at its core, many post-colonial regimes adopted extensive statisation and planning, and the strength of trade unions and welfare systems grew in the 'advanced capitalist countries'.[5]

On the other side, it would probably not have happened without the *local* strength of communists. 'Official' communist and revolutionary activists formed the core of organising efforts, and Thornett's books illustrate the complex tactics developed in order to win. In this context, it is unsurprising that Thornett rapidly joined the Communist Party after starting work at Cowley. The actual central leader of the unionisation, Bobby Fryer (in origin a Hungarian child refugee from Nazism), was more sceptical of the 'official' CPGB.[6]

In the mid-1960s a substantial part of the Communist Party group in Cowley Assembly T&G was won to the Socialist Labour League led by Gerry Healy. The SLL was not, as it later became under the name of the Workers Revolutionary Party, a crazy sect funded by money from Libya. Rather, it was the largest of the three major fragments of the 1944-48 Revolutionary Communist Party (mark I). Like the second largest, the International Socialists (now Socialist Workers Party), it had broken from a primary orientation to entry in the Labour Party to promoting a (broadly) mass-strikist orientation in the shop stewards' movement. It was in a stronger position to do this because it had recruited in the late 1950s ex-Communist Party members who had broken with the CPGB over the 1956 Hungarian uprising.

I have misplaced my copy of *From militancy to Marxism*, and I cannot now find in the online sources any explanation of Thornett's and his comrades' decision to go over from the CPGB to the SLL. The date means that it was clearly not part of the post-1956 crisis of the CPGB. It seems more likely that the character of the Wilson government undermined the plausibility of the strategic line of *The British road to socialism* of a succession of increasingly leftwing Labour governments.

After all, Wilson had been the 'left' candidate in the 1963 Labour leadership election against Jim Callaghan and George Brown, having resigned from government over NHS charges in 1951 along with Nye Bevan. Far from ushering in a further period of left development, Wilson's government was technocratic, and its 'prices and incomes policy' was mainly concerned with controlling strikes. In 1966 Wilson took this policy to the point of invoking a state of emergency and engaging in an anti-communist witch-hunt (which even Tory leader Edward Heath thought was implausible) against a seafarers' strike.[7]

In contrast, the successes of the trade union movement during the

'cold war' period made the mass strike strategy promoted by the Trotskyists appear more plausible.

SLL

Winning the Cowley group was a big coup for the SLL, and Healy put serious personal attention into working with them. By 1971 Thornett had become secretary of the SLL's All Trade Union Alliance (their imitation of the CP's Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions) and a member of the SLL's central committee.

Under the Heath government of 1970-74, the mass strike strategy was very much swimming with the tide. Though Heath defeated the postal workers in 1971, in 1972 he lost to the miners, and to a 'general strike wave' in defence of the Pentonville Five dockers imprisoned for defying Heath's anti-union laws. There was a wave of strikes. The SLL slogan, 'General strike to kick out the Tory government', had real attractive power. The period ended in Heath imposing a three-day week in December 1973 and calling a general election in February 1974 on the question of 'who rules', expecting thereby to defeat a second miners' strike.

In fact, Heath lost. Capital turned to its Labour 'second eleven': initially a minority government, and Heath at first wanted to try to assemble an anti-Labour coalition, but the 'men in grey suits' told Heath he must go. Heath's anti-union laws were *partially* amended in the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act and Employment Protection Consolidation Act, carefully designed to shift power away from shop stewards and local branches to the full-time officials of trade unions; in particular, the provision of 'industrial tribunals' was to take victimisation cases away from local negotiation, while the check-off system of deduction of union dues from pay gave more control to the central union offices. Substantial wage rises were conceded, but immediately taken away by price rises.

This was the immediate context of the witch-hunt of Alan Thornett as the 'Red Mole' and, going along with it, the T&G bureaucracy splitting the powerful 5/55 branch to create a new 5/293 branch, and campaigning for ex-SLL renegade Reg Parsons to replace Bobby Fryer as convenor.

In substance, the mass-strikist perspective had until the early 1970s provided an effective strategic orientation to link militant trade unionism with a perspective of workers' power and socialism. The local disputes could be seen as building up the framework of organisation and consciousness - this was especially true of secondary solidarity action.

Meanwhile, under Richard Nixon, the USA began the restructuring of its strategic management of the world economy and world politics, by taking the dollar off gold (August 15 1971) and the 1973 'oil price shock', in which the US's ally, Saudi Arabia, pushed sharp increases in oil prices; though this was in theory to 'punish' the US for support of Israel, it issued rapidly in the 1974 petrodollar agreement, under which Riyadh agreed to price oil only in dollars, while the money would be recycled into US treasury bonds.[8] The effect was to turn low-grade endemic inflation and mild foreign exchange risks into much sharper inflation risks, while runs on the currency became more radical tools for disciplining the working class and the semi-colonies.

The lesson was rammed home in Britain with the high inflation of 1974-75 and the 1976 sterling crisis. Under these conditions the state was driven to sharper controls on trade unionism and on local government; while union members were faced with stagflation (unemployment growing along with inflation), the sort of guerrilla struggle of 1950s-60s shop-stewardism became less attractive.

The SLL (in November 1973 renamed as the WRP), however, clung to the general strike *slogan*. With the Tories gone, this was decreasingly plausible. But the WRP argued that a military coup was coming (there was, indeed, talk of a possible coup within the British state apparatus in 1974) and could be defeated by a general strike. Militants were told that they should for the present avoid confrontations in order to save money for the coming general strike. (The idea that saved money would be useful in a general strike against a military coup is fantastical; under such conditions the capitalists would drive hyperinflation and the strike committees would have to impose rationing or collapse.)

Against this insanity, Thornett and his co-thinkers went into opposition to Healy and were expelled from the WRP in December 1974, rapidly proceeding to create the Workers Socialist League, with the newspaper *Socialist Press*.

Influences

Robin Blick claimed in 1980 that he and others in the *Bulletin* group - especially Trotskyist veteran John Archer - were responsible for the political content of Thornett's opposition document, 'Correct the wrong positions of the party, return to the Transitional Programme'. This claim has been adopted by Bob Pitt in his pro-Labour history of Gerry Healy and by David North's proprietary World Socialist Website/International Committee of the Fourth International.[9] It is at best a half-truth. There is no reason to suppose that Blick and his co-thinkers were lying outright when they said they had discussions with Thornett and his co-thinkers in 1974 (I heard the same story personally from John Archer). But it is clear that there were other influences on the Thornett group.

The starting point is that in the mid-later 1960s the SLL was collaborating, in a very loose way, with the French group, the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, led by Pierre Lambert. This collaboration claimed to be the continuity of the International Committee of the Fourth International that had been created in a split in the Fourth International (then, there was only one …) in 1953. In 1969-71 Healy organised a split with the OCI, the political basis of which remains unclear;[10] the Healy side emphasised that the Lambertistes had downgraded the importance of dialectical materialism, and Healyites in the early 1970s could be encountered waving copies of Lenin's notes on Hegel in *Collected works* volume 38. The insistence on 'dialectical leaps' and opposition to 'empiricism' and 'impressionism' that this focus emphasised supported the belief that Britain was about to encounter a revolutionary crisis, and that the SLL-WRP was about to break through on a mass scale as a result.

The launch of the WRP in November 1973 reflected this belief. But the belief itself was precisely - *impressionistic*. Healy and his co-thinkers were "dizzy with success" (to quote Stalin with heavy irony …): going from working in very small groups in the 1950s to organising meetings of thousands in the early 1970s - that must have seemed like being on the verge of mass politics. The phenomenon is not unique to Healy, since it affected Tony Cliff and his co-thinkers in 1976-77, Peter Taaffe and his co-thinkers in 1996-97, and Alan Woods and his co-thinkers in 2024; there are plenty of examples among Trotskyists elsewhere in the world.

The *Bulletin* comrades made up a small group of ex-Healyites and other Trotskyists who came together in opposition to the SLL's grandiose launch of the WRP, linked up with the OCI's international tendency (the Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International), and began publishing the *Marxist Bulletin* in early 1974, aiming it at what they expected to be dissent in the WRP.[11] As I have said above, there is no reason to suppose they are lying, when they say that they had discussions with Thornett and his co-thinkers in 1974.

However, the Thornett group *did not* go to the Lambertistes in 1975. Among the several other influences on them, it seems to me, there has to be included the International Marxist Group's Cowley cell, created in the IMG's first round of 'industrial colonisation' in 1971. The shop stewards were defeated in the imposition of Measured Day Work in 1971, though they did obtain a 'mutuality agreement'. The IMGers adopted Lutte Ouvrière's tactic of putting out a factory bulletin, using cell members on the plant to write the stories from the plant, and outsider supporters to duplicate and hand out the bulletin.

They focussed strongly on 'transitional demands' - especially workers' control (already in a sense present in the 'mutuality agreement') and in particular 'open the books': two IMG economists who later switched to the WSL, Bob Sutcliffe and John Harrison, did some work on exposing the falsity of management's financial claims. By 1974, the IMG's bulletin was very widely read; and one of the early things the WSL did after breaking free of Healy was to introduce a factory bulletin *of the TGWU 5/293* branch, which effectively marginalised the IMGers' bulletin.

Equally, the WSL (at least in Oxford) did not pursue the Lambertistes' line on Israel-Palestine, and did not pursue the Lambertistes' general practice of setting up fronts under their organisational control in competition with other fronts. Rather, they worked primarily through Oxford Trades Council and together with the rest of the Oxford far left in the usual solidarity campaigns, and so on. I think, therefore, that Thornett and his associates broke with Healy *into* an open engagement with the rest of the far left (including the 'Pabloite' IMG and the 'state caps'), and were not particularly attracted to joining up with another Trot caudillo in the shape of Pierre Lambert.

WSL

That said, the WSL was a lopsided organisation and at the end of the day an unsustainable one. *In Oxford*, its membership proportional to population would have equated to a national party of around 40,000, up at the scale of the old CPGB. Outside Oxford, it consisted largely of small groups of fans.

Its political orientation was largely to urge people to be like the Oxford WSL: oriented to the working class and the trade unions; in the Labour Party, but not deeply concerned with the inner-party struggle or building broad left formations. The WSL did serious work attempting to unionise Blackwells' bookshop and the local hotel trade. The Oxford Student Trade Union Liaison Committee it promoted in this context was a unitary local campaign group. It worked with the Oxford CPGB, the IMG and others in running a campaign for a 'leave' vote in the 1975 EEC referendum on an internationalist basis (both the CPGB district and the IMG branch were denounced by the national organisations for ultra-leftism); and in the anti-fascist campaigns.

Socialist Press, produced on a shoestring between 1975 and 1981, defended a broadly 'anti-Pabloite' Trotskyist political line with some serious arguments.[12]

But the advice to 'be like the Oxford WSL' was unrealistic in relation to the actual situation of the small groups of adherents outside Oxford, and also unrealistic in relation to its own historical origins: the core Cowley team had come from the CPGB to the SLL, not from a small group trying to do mass work directly in competition with the other left groups.

This difficulty resulted in the WSL being 'raided' by the Spartacists in 1978 and 1979 - a process that did not produce long-term gains for the Spartacists, but was demoralising for WSLers.

They were critical of the Parity Committee for the reconstruction of the Fourth International set up in October 1979, but attempted to engage with this short-lived lash-up between the Lambertistes and the Argentina-based Morenistas. The Parity Committee broke up in 1981; in the same year the WSL fused with the Matgamnaite *Socialist Organiser*. This was a choice that John Lister acknowledges as a mistake: it reflected the needs of WSLers outside Oxford, who were more deeply engaged in the Labour Party and needed a serious orientation and relations with other forces there. But it was still naive to hook up with Matgamna.

At the time of the fusion, the Matgamnaites were not, as they rather rapidly became, open Zionists and social-imperialists. But the problems emerged very rapidly. The South Atlantic war of 1982 produced an internal debate in which the Matgamnaites defended 'Falklands self-determination', and an opposition attached to the old WSL's international co-thinkers of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee adopted a 'Victory to Argentina' line, while Thornett and his immediate co-thinkers took an intermediate position. This led to the loss of a chunk of the former WSL-side base, weakening the position of Thornett and his co-thinkers in the fused WSL.[13]

By 1983-84, the Matgamna group was pushing hard its pro-Israel line, and Thornett and his immediate co-thinkers could not stomach the evolution and began to factionalise. The result was that the fused WSL NC voted in March 1984 to expel 35 members for "disruption". The expelled group constituted themselves as the Socialist Group and began, from autumn 1984, to publish *Socialist Viewpoint*.[14] They had clearly, as John Lister points out, suffered a severe setback by trusting to the Matgamnaites' good faith. They were now to move to fusion, in 1987, with the 'Pabloites' of the International Group.

This fusion would produce less bureaucratic repression, but meant merely that the distinctive features of the Thornett group's politics dissolved in the 'lovely water' of the Mandelite swamp ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.telegraph.co.uk/obituaries/2026/10/16/alan-thornett-trotskyist-shop-steward-cowley-died-obituary.
2. www.aronline.co.uk/people/alan-thornett.
3. Chapel: anticapitalistresistance.org/alan-thornett-1937-2026-a-working-class-leader-who-faced-the-apocalypse; Richardson: anticapitalistresistance.org/alan-thornett-key-militant-in-the-1960s-70s-80s-motor-industry/ (Oct 13); Lister: anticapitalistresistance.org/remembering-alan-thornett.
4. www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/edwards/1979/xx/tu1934.html.
5. Not just the imperialist countries, and not all of them, since the USA did not accept a christian-democratic/social-democratic policy *for itself*.
6. Fryer's origins: freizinger.co.uk/?page_id=28. Fryer sceptical of the CP: thornett.redmole.org/1981/the-real-record-of-the-communist-party-at-cowley.
7. K Thorpe, 'The "Juggernaut method": the 1966 state of emergency and the Wilson government's response to the seamen's strike' *Twentieth Century British History* Vol 12 (2001), pp461-85.
8. chaipredict.com/resources/expiration-saudi-us-petrodollar-agreement.
9. Pitt: www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/healy/pitt/Chap9.html; Northites: www.wsws.org/en/special/library/how-the-wrp-betrayed-trotskyism/06.html.
10. Parti-pris arguments at www.wsws.org/en/special/library/how-the-wrp-betrayed-trotskyism/04.html (Northites) and www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/healy/pitt/Chap8.html (Pitt). There did seem from these accounts to be substantive political differences, especially that the Lambertistes were dual-defeatists in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war (the Healy wing sought Arab victory), and about the conduct of Guillermo Lora and the Bolivian Partido Obrero Revolucionario in the revolutionary crisis and military coup of 1970-71.
11. Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Labour_Group) is useful on the history.
12. Available at www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/socialist-press-uk/index.htm. It went weekly in February 1978.
13. socialistfight.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/whathappenedwsl-1.pdf. That the author is a sectarian means that the text has to be read with caution, but does not alter the utility of the information.
14. Linked at splitsandfusions.wordpress.com/2016/12/12/the-socialist-group-socialist-viewpoint.

Fighting fund

Make up lost ground

What an excellent week for the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund. Incredibly, thanks to the support of our readers, we raised more in the last seven days than over the first two weeks!

True, it's that time of the month when some substantial standing orders come our way and October has been no exception. We received no fewer than four *three-figure* contributions - tremendous thanks to comrades LM, JC, SK and PM. On top of that, other SOs or bank transfers came from comrades TW and MM (£75 each), TR (£40), GB (£30), DR (£20), IS (£17), MD and JL (£10 each). Finally comrades KS (£50), GP and RD (£5 each) clicked on the PayPal button on our website.

All that came to a remarkable £1,093 - which, when added to the £1,085 raised in the first fortnight, comes to £2,178. So, with 10 days still to go, as I write, I am confident we will easily reach our monthly £2,750 target. But last month we were over £200 below that (not to mention other months earlier in the year, when we were also short of target).

So, as I wrote two weeks ago, we should really aim for a nice, round £3,000 this month - that would really help us make up for lost ground. Please help us get there, preferably by making a transfer or using PayPal - that way, we would be sure to get your donation before October 31. But you never know - we might even get a cheque you send, provided you post it to us very soon after you read this.

The *Weekly Worker* depends on you, our readers and supporters, to ensure we keep playing our vital role in the campaign for a single, genuinely democratic-centralist, Marxist party, which the working class so badly needs. Please do what you can, comrades! ●

Robbie Rix

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

ECONOMY

Rewarded for total failure

New Keynesian predictions about future economic activity have been way out of line. They have consistently got one thing wrong after another, says **Michael Roberts**. It is, therefore, fitting that Robert Hall and Michael Woodford have been handed this year's Nobel prize in economics

This year's Nobel prize went to two American mainstream economists, Robert Hall and Michael Woodford, for their work on the "microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation".[1]

According to the Nobel Academy, Hall and Woodford won the prize "for developing new economic models that help governments and central banks stabilise their economies to minimise the impact of external shocks … the laureates have helped us smooth out the economy's peaks and troughs", adding that their models have been "extremely helpful in dealing with the economic downturns that have affected us".

Their work "has provided us with a stable theoretical foundation for the models that are now used by central banks and governments around the world," claimed John Hassler, the chair of the Committee for the Prize in Economic Sciences. "With them, we are better equipped to deal with shocks in the economy, such as energy crises or sudden changes in how much households consume." Central to their models was the insight that households and businesses are "forward-looking" when making decisions about savings or how to price products. Governments and central banks can influence this view of the future when communicating their plans for fiscal and monetary policy, respectively, and so "move the economy in the right direction", the academy said.

Really? There are a number of things here. First, have the models developed by Woodford and Hall really provided a "stable theoretical foundation" for helping central banks make the right decisions about interest rates and monetary injections, or governments about taxation? Second, are central banks really "better equipped to deal with shocks in the economy", thanks to Woodford and Hall? And even more important for the majority of us, have the monetary and fiscal policy proposals of Woodford and Hall actually enabled central banks and governments to get "an economy moving in the right direction"?

Woodford and Hall are from what is called the New Keynesian school of economics. When Keynesian-style macro-management failed in the 1970s in "moving the economy in the right direction", the New Keynesian school emerged. They dropped Keynes's basic approach of what happens to aggregate demand in an economy. Instead, the New Keynesians concentrated on explaining 'business cycles' or 'fluctuations' in capitalism from what they called its 'microfoundations': ie, the behaviour and expectations of individual businesses and households.

The job now was not to look at macro or aggregate data, but to work out a 'model' that starts with some premises of agent (consumer) behaviour or preferences; incorporate some possible 'shocks' to the 'general equilibrium' of the market; and then consider the number and probability of possible outcomes. Thus were born Dynamic Stochastic General Equilibrium (DSGE) models. They had 'equilibrium' because they started from the premise that supply would equal demand ideally; they were 'dynamic' because the models were incorporated for changing behaviour by individuals or firms (agents); and they were stochastic, as 'shocks' to the system (trade union wage pushes, government spending action) were considered as random with a range of outcomes.

Nobel prize in economics, also known as Riksbank prize (after Sweden's national bank)

This is now what most New Keynesian economists spend their time doing. Forget empirical evidence, forget macro data, find a 'micro' foundation (model) that might help to offer a guide to what possibly might happen. The New Keynesians followed another 'Nobel' prize winner - the neoclassical economist, Robert Lucas ('the problem of depressions has been solved'). Lucas argued that just looking at economic stats provided no theoretical base and thus was open to the distortion of spurious correlations. You needed to have firm micro theory. But, as Lars Syll has pointed out,

> The almost quasi-religious insistence that macroeconomics has to have microfoundations - without ever presenting either ontological or epistemological justifications for this claim - has put a blind eye to the weakness of the whole enterprise of trying to depict a complex economy based on an all-embracing representative actor equipped with superhuman knowledge, forecasting abilities and forward-looking rational expectations.[2]

DSGE models have been proved to be worthless in explaining anything. They failed to predict before or explain afterwards the causes of the great recession (2007-09) and were unable to explain the subsequent weak recovery (or long depression).

Natural rate

Woodford's work is based on the idea that there is a 'natural' rate of interest, at which desired investment in new structures, equipment and technology matches desired saving by households and firms in a 'general equilibrium' situation. This idea comes from the economist from the late 19th century, Knut Wicksell. He argued that, if investment exceeded savings in an economy, the natural rate would rise, so that savings would then increase to match investment and vice versa. If, for some reason, the natural rate did not rise, then there would be 'overheating' in the economy, in the form of inflation. In the recession example, savings would be greater than investment and, if the natural rate did not fall enough to reduce the desire to save, then there would be less than full employment.

Now you can see why this concept of a 'natural rate' might be useful to economic policy under capitalism. Maybe current market rates are too high compared to the natural rate and that explains why we have a 'glut of saving' (hoarding of money) and not enough investment - stagnation. But maybe market rates are too low, below the natural rate, so that we have inflation due to investment exceeding saving. What we need to find is the natural rate of interest that avoids inflation and stagnation.

But is there such a 'natural rate' of interest? Keynes dismissed the idea,[3] arguing that there was not one static natural rate, but a series of rates depending on the level of investment, consumption and saving in an economy.[4] And there was no reason to assume that the capitalist economy would 'correct' any mismatch between investment and savings, particularly in a depression, by market interest rates adjusting back to the 'natural rate' in some automatic process. In a depression, where investment returns are too low, compared with the rate of interest, capitalists will hoard their money rather than invest in a 'liquidity trap'.

Marx too denied the concept of a natural rate of interest.[5] For him, the return on capital, whether exhibited in the interest earned on lending money, dividends from holding shares or rents from owning property, came from the surplus value appropriated from the labour of the working class by the productive sectors of capital. Interest was a part of that surplus value. The rate of interest would thus fluctuate between zero and the average rate of profit. In boom times, it would move towards the average rate of profit and in slumps it would fall towards zero. But the decisive driver of investment would be profitability, not the interest rate. If profitability were low, then holders of money would increasingly hoard money or speculate in financial assets rather than invest in productive ones. What matters is not whether the market rate of interest is above or below some 'natural' rate, but whether it is so high that it squeezes any profit for investment in productive assets. Ironically, Wicksell agreed. According to him, the natural rate is "never high or low in itself, but only in relation to the profit which people can make with the money in their hands, and this, of course, varies. In good times, when trade is brisk, the rate of profit is high, and - what is of great consequence - is generally expected to remain high; in periods of depression it is low, and expected to remain low."

Nevertheless, the idea of a natural rate of interest (R*) was promoted by New Keynesians like Woodford. The central proposition of Woodford's book, *Interest and prices* (2003), was that central banks could stabilise economies by adjusting interest rates relative to a 'natural' rate and by managing 'inflation expectations'.

Two problems here. The first is that R* cannot be directly observed. Secondly, household expectations appear heavily influenced by past inflation, everyday prices and political affiliation, and households pay remarkably little attention to central bank policy announcements. As Federal Reserve economist Rudd concluded,

> Economists and economic policymakers believe that households' and firms' expectations of future inflation are a key determinant of actual inflation. A review of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature suggests that this belief rests on extremely shaky foundations, and a case can be made that adhering to it uncritically could easily lead to serious policy errors.[6]

And it has. That has not stopped central banks adopting Woodford's models to make monetary policy decisions. For example, European Central Bank official Isabel Schnabel is very keen on R*. However, she has admitted that "The problem is that it cannot be estimated with any confidence, which means that it is extremely hard to operationalise ... What we really care about is the short-run R-star, because it is relevant in determining whether our interest rates are restrictive or accommodative. The problem is we don't know where it is precisely." (!)[7]

Post-pandemic

Minneapolis Fed president Neel Kashkari recently stated: "our various workhorse models for the economy have struggled to explain and forecast the pandemic and post-pandemic periods, given the extraordinary changes and disruptions the economy has experienced. So I also look to measures of economic activity for signals to try to evaluate the stance of policy."[8] In other words, the New Keynesian theory cannot be applied to reality, because the reality is that economic activity drives inflation and money circulation, not vice versa.

The predictions of the New Keynesian models on future economic activity have been way out of line. Woodford argued in a 2007 paper just before the global financial crash that "globalisation, even of a much more thorough sort than has yet occurred, is unlikely to weaken the ability of central banks to control the dynamics of inflation". That turned out well. Central bank monetary policy, based on the theory of a natural rate of interest and 'inflation expectations', failed to get inflation rates up to the 2% target set for the 2010s and it has failed to bring them down to that target in the current inflationary spike.

In 2012, central banks were worried that their policy of monetary injections (quantitative easing) was not working according to the New Keynesian model in achieving economic growth and modest inflation. Woodford presented a paper in which he argued that if central banks could persuade businesses and households that interest rates were going to stay very low for a long time, then that would inspire 'confidence' and thus lead to increased spending and investment.[9]

This led to the central bank policy called 'forward guidance'.[10] This was an attempt by central bankers to persuade businesses and consumers that they do not have to worry about rising interest rates for years ahead and so they can start spending now. But such guidance, designed to stimulate expectations, was also a miserable failure. QE measures had little or no effect on boosting the real economy. As a result, the current Fed chair, Kevin Warsh, has been less than enthusiastic towards using 'forward guidance'.

The Woodford New Keynesian models do not include the key investment driver, which is profitability rather than a natural rate of interest or 'forward guidance'. In the New Keynesian models, everything starts with consumer preferences and Keynesian aggregate demand is reduced to just consumption.

This is where the work of Robert E. Hall, the other Nobel prize winner, comes in. Hall offers an economic model founded on the 'micro-foundations' of consumer behaviour. And it is this that determines the level of consumption in an economy and thus economic growth.

But Hall's contribution is odd, to say the least. He argues that changes in consumption are not driven by changes in a person's income, but are either unpredictable or in the long run determined by the 'natural' real rate of interest. Hall is more interested in tax policy than monetary policy. According to him, consumption is not affected by taxes, so that taxes like VAT should be the main government revenue earner, allowing taxes on profits and income to be reduced. In the 1980s, Hall developed a 'flat tax' proposal.[11] All workers would pay tax at a single rate, while interest, dividends and capital gains would not be taxed. Flat taxes have been adopted by 'free market' governments in the Baltic states and are often proposed by 'libertarian' parties, in opposition to taxes designed to reduce inequality.

In sum, Woodford and Hall offer theoretical models based on individual agent behaviour and on a quaint belief in some equilibrium natural rate of interest. But "moving the economy in the right direction" using their predictive models has been a total failure.

Maybe that's worth a Riksbank prize, if not a Nobel one! ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. www.ecb.europa.eu/press/blog/date/2026/html/ecb.blog20261019~b833d15fce.en.html.
2. mainlymacro.blogspot.com/2012/07/heterodox-and-mainstream-macroeconomics.html.
3. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/f2401-16-broadbent3.pdf.
4. See www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/wp_817.pdf.
5. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch22.htm.
6. ideas.repec.org/p/fip/fedgfe/2021-62.html.
7. www.ecb.europa.eu/press/inter/date/2024/html/ecb.in240207~f5dd364a89.en.html.
8. www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2024/policy-has-tightened-a-lot-how-tight-is-it.
9. www.kansascityfed.org/research/jackson-hole-economic-symposium.
10. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2013/08/13/a-blind-guide-dog.
11. www.hoover.org/research/flat-tax.

FILM

Seven you need to watch

Over 200 feature films and shorts were showcased over October 7-18 at the 70th annual London Film Festival. As with every year, there were some duds, a few shocks, but many treats. **Jim Moody** picks his particular highlights

Danny Boyle (director) *Ink* UK 2026, release January 8 2027
The fact that the failed labour movement newspaper, *The Daily Herald*, was transformed into the similarly dull broadsheet, *The Sun*, produced hardly a blip on most people's radar in 1964. But when in 1969 Australian media tycoon Rupert Murdoch (Guy Pearce) wanted the printing presses of his newly acquired Sunday broadsheet, *News of the World*, to be used every day of the week, he looked around for a daily paper to print on them. The *Daily Mirror* stable's second-rate *The Sun* fitted the bill, so Murdoch bought it to became the *Mirror*'s main competitor. While the 'hands' operating the *News of the World*/*Sun* press stayed, restaffing the *Sun* editorial side often meant going below par.

However, with talented editor Larry Lamb (Jack O'Connell), an ex-*Mirror* sub-editor, *The Sun* grabbed an audience with its increasingly crass, lurid approach. It is just the job for women's page writer Jules Davies (Claire Foy), whose role blends several female contemporaries. As Murdoch says, "It's a business", and as such must make a profit - the bigger the better. *Ink* depicts the changes as shocking to the existing British national newspaper scene - then still centred on London's Fleet Street.

The film ends with Lamb being replaced by a more reactionary editor to better fit Murdoch's subsequent move to Docklands and the de-unionisation of production (printworkers had struck against particularly reactionary editions) and editorial staff.

Never mentioned explicitly is that the mass media acts in the interests of the capitalist state, even when not a 'pillar of respectability'. After all, to bourgeois minds 'public opinion' means the mass media. So it was that, peering from behind the normal cloud of obfuscation, *The Sun* felt able to headline its front page in 1992 "It's *The Sun* wot won it", following the Tory election victory.

Asmahan Bkerat (director) *Concrete land* Jordan, Palestine 2026, released
Afro-Palestinian Bedouins were kicked out of their homeland during the war which founded the state of Israel. The Najars are one such family, living down on their uppers near Amman in Jordan. Elder Abu-Awad Najar is one of the last: he still herds sheep on squatted agricultural land with no security. But his son, Awad, drives a cement truck for the very construction companies that are creeping toward them, building luxury villas. Awad's bright 10-year-old daughter, Eman, is bullied at school as a Bedouin: even though the bourgeois society in the form of the city offers education, it requires cultural erasure.

Suddenly, a government eviction notice arrives, demanding the family cleans up its animal yard or be removed within five days. Thus, the Najar family again faces eviction and displacement. Selling their animals destroys Abu-Awad's very self - it literally kills him. A racist neighbour, possibly in the pay of developers, slashes their canvas dwelling. With a newborn in the family and perceiving threats to their lives, the remainder of the Najars, unable to resist, have to leave. With Eman's education sacrificed, she now faces an uncertain future. They disappear into a concrete landscape.

Films from many countries

The film won the Grierson Award in Documentary Competition at the 2026 London Film Festival.

Ashley Walters (director) *Animol* UK 2025, release October 30
Fifteen-year-old Troy (Tut Nyuot) and Krystiyan (Vlad Baliuk) enter a young offenders' institution on the same day on remand; Dion (Sekou Diaby) demands Troy anally smuggle a phone, but later he loses it to his threatening cellmate, Mason (Ryan Dean). Later, Troy attacks Mason in defence of Krystiyan. Dion gets Troy to pick up contraband dropped by drone; Krystiyan helps Troy and their relationship deepens. Mason films them kissing to blackmail Troy; Mason stabs Krystiyan, but not mortally, when he tries to grab the offending mobile. Troy gets homophobic abuse, but, soon after DNA evidence rules out Troy as guilty of the crime of which he was accused, he is released.

What this excellently directed and acted film exposes are key parts of the foul prison system of the UK state. Ashley Walters was himself an inmate of a youth prison, which clearly raises the credibility and impact of the film. Their inescapable duty of care means prison authorities must safeguard the wellbeing of every single inmate, protecting them 100% from harm from any quarter; failure should mean disciplinary action and the release of the prisoners affected.

At a lower level - that mobile phones should be prohibited and indeed that anything a prisoner does legally outside is hedged around or prohibited in a prison - all this is a basic denial of human rights. Some youth prisons, like the one portrayed, refuse to allow remand prisoners to wear their own clothes. Over 80 years ago, the chief prison administrator of the UK made clear that prisoners were sent to prison *as punishment, not for punishment*. While we still have prisons, which is moot, pressure for prisoners' rights on a par with those outside prison must to be fought for by all who consider themselves democratic, let alone socialist.

Alex Huston Fischer, Eleanor Wilson (directors) *Wicker* USA 2026, release October 30
Imagining a pre-bowdlerised Brothers Grimm story might nowadays produce something like *Wicker*. Here you have it: magical wickerwork from the local basket weaver (a compellingly thoughtful Peter Dinklage) in an isolated medieval village. There is bawdiness of a 21st century kind too, but with an apparently near-horizontal social ladder - no doubt supposed to keep modern mass audiences good-natured. Here everyone speaks slightly different versions of modern English.

Be that as it may, class appears subsumed into simple individual distaste: when the local, aptly named Fisherwoman (Olivia Colman, excelling) sells her daily catch around the village, she is despised for her smell, infused from her work. But the Fisherwoman's unlikely outsider status changes when a bride's mini-basket (standing in for the modern cliché bouquet) lands at her feet, and she is next in line to be married.

Soon after, Fisherwoman pays the basket weaver to make her a wickerwork fiancé - he promises delivery in a month. Wicker Husband (Alexander Skarsgård, creaking majestically) duly marries Fisherwoman: his usefulness and pure devotion to his wife undermines the chauvinist approach of village husbands. Simplistically, this so romantic expression of married life unsettles villagers, especially husbands, and all is in disorder. Village grand dame, the Tailor's Wife (Elizabeth Debicki, Diana in *The Crown*) is so put out, she drips lies into receptive ears that Wicker Husband is unfaithful, causing catastrophe. Not a hallmark romance, thankfully, but the bittersweet charm of modern whimsy … with notes of unauthenticity.

(The film is adapted by the directors from the short story *The Wicker husband* by Ursula Wills-Jones).

Biljana Tutorov, Petar Glomazić (directors) *To hold a mountain* Serbia, France, Montenegro, Slovenia 2026, release November 27
This documentary opens in the summer pastures of the Sinjajevina plateau in Montenegro, one of Europe's last great pastoral highlands. And it is where we join families - Gara and her sister's 13-year-old daughter, Nada, in particular - in a glimpse of what it is like to live and work there. Sheep, cows, cats, dogs, horses - all part of this hard, contradictorily idyllic life. But all is not good in Eden, near the mountain they all call Mother: the Montenegrin army wants to use the area for NATO military exercises. A reconnaissance helicopter periodically disturbs the quiet, so locals make sure that they are constantly present to thwart the military. Gara even challenges army representatives on television.

There are suggestions that local customs tend toward 'mother right' in the Engels/Morgan sense. Interwoven is the fact that Nada's father murdered her mother. So Nada's adolescent awakening and the armed forces' potential violence on the land reopen questions from her past and for her future; and an expectation that she can help break the cycle of harm. In the end, the army backs down, following a countrywide campaign of opposition, particularly by the people of the mountains.

Florian Zeller (writer/director) *Bunker* UK 2026, release February 19 2027
Famed, prizewinning architect Miguel Moreno (Javier Bardem) lives in a swish London pad (production designer Alain Bainée constructed the house *in toto* on a Madrid soundstage). Miguel can now choose whatever work project he likes. Although his wife, Sofia (Penélope Cruz), has her own career in book publishing, she cannot progress in her London job. She is shackled in luxury to her husband's career (even if not to him).

Miguel ponders his future; then a tech billionaire (Paul Dano) approaches him (after Miguel signs a non-disclosure agreement), offering a golden handshake for designing a 30-person luxury bunker in Hawaii. (This relates to real-life news about Mark Zuckerberg building just such a bunker in Hawaii.) Sofia challenges him about being unjustly jealous, then her *cri de coeur* calls him out on his work choices: he could be building hospitals, schools and other socially useful things. Fractious relations develop. Meanwhile, Miguel fumes over another problem: next-door neighbour Toby (Stephen Graham) has bashed a hole in their garden wall for a window, driving Miguel frantic. Toby is in an otherwise lightless garage without a house attached.

But, when gun-toting burglars arrive and menace Miguel's family, it is Toby who notices and intervenes - at the cost of getting shot, though not mortally. Miguel at last gains insight, in part from recalling a stark video message that "No one will remember you within 50 years of your death".

Rodrigo Sorogoyen (director) *The Beloved*, Spain, France 2026, release March 5 2027
Director Esteban Martínez (Javier Bardem) meets his daughter estranged for 13 years, Emilia Vera (Victoria Luengo), who is now an actor, and wants her in his next film. But all does not bode well. He offers her the female lead, but without "favouritism", he assures her: he will be as hard on her as he is to anybody else in the production. And that is not an idle boast, since his machismo proves a heavy burden to all around him, daughter included. The director is not beloved, hubris not serving him well.

Self-destructing on set, Esteban reduces Emilia to tears, perhaps as a proxy for other actors and crew (or maybe out of guilt for abandoning her). Everyone is appalled, despite knowing his reputation. This has been a massive misstep too far, resulting in the director of photography leading her team off set forthwith. Others leave too, leaving a much-reduced production team. Most of the actors stay, including Emilia, gritting their teeth, but Esteban's redemption seems remote. Some individuals just should not be allowed power over others: a microcosm of capitalist relations.

This is the end to any hopes of father/daughter reconciliation after all these absent years. Esteban is without shame, deluding himself to the end that Emilia or anyone else remaining do not see him in the worst possible light. What was that about work/life balance? ●

Sign up to CPGB news
CPGB
bit.ly/CPGBbulletin

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ISSN 1351-0150

No 1606 October 22 2026

weekly worker

Marxists defend all democratic gains

How to steal an election

Donald Trump's Department of Homeland Security is conspiring to throw out millions of mail-in ballots under the guise of 'election security'. Socialists must defend the right to vote, argues **Nick D** of the Marxist Unity Group. Socialists must also oppose the undemocratic system which enables the presidential dictatorship

The 2026 midterm elections are fast approaching and, as they do, the crisis of the American republic, such as it is, grows more acute. Trump and the Republican Party are historically unpopular,[1] their favourability ratings dropping with every additional cent paid at the pump and every bomb or missile that lands on the Middle East. With frantic desperation, Trump and the Republicans search for ways to salvage their prospects for the elections in November.

In this article we will begin to unwind the flurry of plots the Trump administration has hatched to steal the midterms - specifically the recently defeated executive order targeting mail-in voting and the attempts of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to infiltrate every part of our national election infrastructure.

Back in March, Trump issued executive order 14399, compelling the United States Postal Service (USPS) to overhaul the vote-by-mail process.[2] The order required all states to create and submit new state citizenship lists to the DHS, which would use the data to determine who would receive a mail-in ballot. In short, the DHS would supervise voting by mail as Trump and the Republican Party saw fit.

Executive order

Trump's executive order was challenged in court, unleashing a "whipsawing legal battle" over its implementation.[3] First, Judge Indira Thalwani issued a temporary restraining order (TRO) halting the order's implementation. The Supreme Court then overruled that order on a technicality. When the case landed back in Thalwani's court a few weeks later after civil society groups refiled their motions, she issued another TRO. The federal government then appealed once again. On September 13, another federal judge blocked states from complying with the DHS-supervised USPS policy. On September 14, the Supreme Court upheld Thalwani's second TRO, effectively striking down EO 14399.

Some are celebrating the Supreme Court majority's decision. But it is cold comfort, when disenfranchising potentially millions of voters was stopped not by a mass movement or a democratic congress, but by a one-paragraph emergency decision handed down by a handful of unelected judges.

Before the Supreme Court struck down the executive order, a USPS whistleblower revealed that the Trump administration had ignored Thalwani's TROs and continued scheming, as the legal battles raged.[4] Working through the legal fog and under impossible time constraints - some states are already mailing out ballots that would be counted as defective under Trump's new standards - produced a chaotic 'shitshow' within the USPS.

The shitshow has only intensified. *The New York Times* recently uncovered that a record-breaking number of mail-in ballots are being tossed out by the post office due to late arrival.[5] The practice started with the 2024 presidential election and has worsened with subsequent elections. These delays - and the *de facto* disenfranchisement they cause - are driven by decades of USPS austerity imposed by both Democratic and Republican administrations. In one particularly egregious case in Washington, a state with universal mail-in voting, 75% of ballots sent through USPS (as opposed to being left in a drop box) were thrown out due to late delivery.[6]

Banner displayed on Department of Justice HQ

The DHS under secretary Markwayne Mullin is also looking for other ways to put itself between voters and the ballot box. Trump's executive order 14399 contained the threat of "prosecution of individuals and public or private entities engaged in, or aiding and abetting, the printing, production, shipment or distribution of ballots to individuals who are not eligible to vote in a federal election". This is a reiteration of threats made publicly by Trump and Mullin.

Trump has made a number of baseless claims about foreign (namely Chinese) interference and allegations of hundreds of thousands of non-citizens on the registration rolls (now walked back by some DHS officials) to insist that our elections are "insecure". These claims also tie 'election integrity' to national security and immigration enforcement, placing the response to these issues under the jurisdiction of the DHS. Not only was this a justification for placing the USPS under DHS supervision, but, with the effort to disrupt mail-in voting stalled, it also justifies the DHS's efforts to get its hands on voter registration rolls and its agents into polling places. The former was already outlined in 14399, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) offered $5 million for compiling all publicly available voter registration information into a single database under its control.[7]

It has been standard practice for Republican state governments to purge their voter rolls in the run-up to an election, often targeting black and Latino voters, as Greg Palast has spent a career documenting.[8] These efforts have only escalated in the Trump era. In the first administration, infamous Kansas secretary of state Kris Kobach was tapped to run the Presidential Commission on Election Integrity. This commission's task was nominally to 'prove' that Trump had really won the popular vote in 2016, not merely lucked into an Electoral College majority, but its real work consisted of uniting disparate Republican efforts to disenfranchise voters into a single federal policy. Now this push has returned - this time under the auspices of a cabinet department, as opposed to an ad hoc presidential commission.

Trump's executive order called for compiling state citizenship lists to be used by the DHS to control the USPS's dispersal of mail-in ballots, and prevent non-citizens from receiving them. Before 14399 was struck down, the DHS was already pursuing other legal routes for using its databases for the purposes of 'election monitoring'. The department of justice filed a formal request with the Supreme Court to use its databases to engineer a sort of federal CrossCheck system, which was recently granted.

Harassment

Failing the weaponisation of data systems and the postal service, the DHS can always resort to good old-fashioned harassment and intimidation at the polling station. On June 23 in Syracuse, New York, ICE agents entered a polling station and, in full view of those lined up to cast their ballot in person, began to question and harass poll worker Paigelynne Gonyea about an Instagram post she had made in January about ICE agents' murder of Nicole Good in Minneapolis. About a month earlier in San Antonio, Texas, a man was pulled over by police for a traffic infraction in front of a polling station. Minutes later, ICE agents arrived and detained the man, using their infamous 'swarm tactics'.

Concern about ICE agents maintaining an aggressive presence in and around polling stations has only grown, as election day draws nearer.[9] The Democratic Party members of the House Homeland Security Committee sent a letter to Mullin, informing him that federal law prohibits federal agents, especially armed ones, from entering polling places unless they are fighting an invading enemy. On September 10, the Latino civil rights groups LULAC and UnidosUS, along with Common Cause and the City of Denver, took the DHS to court, hoping to secure a ruling explicitly blocking ICE from carrying out any enforcement operations near polling stations.

All these issues raise the fundamental problem with the department of homeland security. What purpose does it serve? What does 'homeland security' even mean? Most of the agencies that comprise the DHS are, at least nominally, federal law enforcement agencies. The US Customs and Border Protection and ICE enforce immigration laws and customs regulations. But the policies that they enact have often been described as 'border security' - and now 'election security', which is legally considered a question of 'national security'. Annexing these roles into the jurisdiction of the DHS moves the act of voting into a state of exception: everything is permitted in order to secure the 'national interest', regardless of existing law.

ICE is a paramilitary force that reports directly to the president to carry out his every whim - and he has many whims! The Supreme Court - the same nine people who will supposedly protect our voting rights - has declared presidential decisions to be 'official acts'[10] and therefore presumptively legal. And the DHS is far from exhausting all avenues at its disposal to interfere with the election. It is hard to believe that the Supreme Court, which gutted the Voting Rights Act and has given so many victories to Trump, would suddenly wield its immense power to defend voting rights and close off the Republicans' last chance of securing an electoral majority.

In the coming weeks, *Light & Air* will continue to track the Trump administration's attempt to disenfranchise millions of Americans. As socialists, we must defend the right to vote at the same time that we ruthlessly criticise the lack of democracy in our country and demand a new constitution that places all power in the hands of the working class majority.[11] ●

Article first published by the Marxist Unity Group's *Light & Air* on October 16

Notes

1. www.economist.com/interactive/trump-approval-tracker.
2. www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/03/ensuring-citizenship-verification-and-integrity-in-federal-elections.
3. www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/judge-again-blocks-trump-mail-ballot-executive-order-in-ruling-thats-likely-to-be-swiftly-appealed.
4. www.nytimes.com/2026/09/01/us/politics/whistle-blower-voting-by-mail.html.
5. www.nytimes.com/2026/08/31/us/politics/postal-service-mail-ballots-delays-midterms-voting.html.
6. www.kuow.org/elections/2026-09-02/record-number-of-wa-mail-in-ballots-uncounted-after-primary-election-report-finds.
7. www.the-independent.com/news/world/americas/us-politics/ice-voter-data-fraud-investigation-b3044410.html.
8. Eg, www.gregpalast.com/trump-lost-vote-suppression-won; and www.gregpalast.com/floridas-flawed-voter-cleansing-program-saloncoms-politics-story-of-the-year.
9. The midterms will be held on November 3.
10. www.politico.com/news/2024/07/02/trump-immunity-murder-navy-sotomayor-00166385.
11. See program.dsausa.org/?ref=marxistunity.com#democracy.