

# weekly worker



**From 1984 till his death, Alan Thornett was involved in almost every attempted broad left coalition, alliance or party. All failed**

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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## Readying for the next stage



# LETTERS



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

## AI questions

Yassamine Mather's 'Racing towards general intelligence?' (September 10) and Paul Demarty's 'Angel or McGuffin?' (September 17) raise questions that go well beyond the technical capacities of AI. It is to the credit of the *Weekly Worker* that it provides space for such arguments. I do not see the articles as opposing camps: read together, they help clarify some political questions.

Mather rightly draws attention to international rivalry. AI is not simply a contest between private innovation in the USA and state planning in China. In both countries, corporate capital, state power, public investment and strategic interests are closely intertwined. The same applies to hyperscaler projects in Europe: a local campaign may oppose a data centre because of its demands on water, energy and land, yet end up supporting a European or national competitor. Such concerns are real, but opposition to one corporation does not automatically amount to an internationalist, working class position.

This raises a second question. Demarty refers to the "iron laws of opportunism" that draw "left" organisations into popular movements. But is intervention itself opportunistic? Workers and local communities do not wait until their struggles express a fully developed class programme. They mobilise over jobs, living conditions, environmental damage or the concentration of power. Revolutionary organisations should not simply follow such movements, but neither should they stand aside to preserve their political purity. They have to intervene, argue for independent working class demands and challenge the influence of other class interests. Intervention can lead to opportunism; abstention can become sectarianism. The question is what political purpose intervention serves.

Movements against hyperscalers bring together people with different interests: workers worried about jobs, residents facing environmental costs, academics concerned about the devaluation of intellectual labour, small businesses and even sections of capital threatened by stronger competitors. They may share an objection, while disagreeing about what should replace the existing system. The task is not to dismiss their concerns as merely local or middle class, but to connect them to an independent working class programme: technology developed through social labour should serve social needs, under workers' control, rather than private profit or national competition.

How can local struggles over AI infrastructure be linked to international working class solidarity? And how can revolutionary organisations intervene in broad movements without either adapting to their existing politics or abstaining from them? These seem to me questions worth debating.

**Georg Tabor**  
Gruppe Klassenkampf, Austria

## Unfit SUTR

This letter is a provincial report on the activity (or inactivity) of the Socialist Workers Party front, Stand Up To Racism, in Kent. Two weekends ago, I attended the SUTR-organised 'Kent unity march' in Canterbury. Initially it went as expected - somewhat sparsely attended, with about 150 people, and I suspect the majority of attendees were locals or residents of east Kent. However, I was heartened by the presence of a choir, which sang

rousingly. It was a nice surprise, as leftists do not make enough use of leftist artists' popularity to promote their events (a recent SUTR event commemorating the Battle of Cable Street, where Michael Rosen spoke brilliantly, aside).

Anyway, the 'unity' march quickly descended into farce, as the Revolutionary Communist Party was positioned behind the sizeable Labour bloc. Sometime into the march, the RCP comrades fizzled (I wouldn't say 'burst', as their efforts were feeble, despite their meeting prior to the march) into anti-Labour/Burnham chants, highlighting their complicity in the genocide in Gaza and their aping of racism. This aroused significant anger amongst the Labour bloc, who, one must not forget (assuming most of them were from Canterbury Labour Party), supported 2024 Labour candidate Rosie Duffield, a transphobe. One elderly Labour man got into a scuffle with the comrades. The commotion prompted the police to pull him aside, which was ironic, as the police weren't needed to 'protect' us from counter-protesters, as none appeared. Instead, they had to prevent leftist infighting graduating to *leftist-ish* fighting.

Admittedly, the RCP's actions in this case were entirely performative and unnecessary, as all they did was make the 'unity' march look ridiculous to the onlooking public (the second-hand embarrassment was strong). Nonetheless, they were voicing valid concerns, as SUTR merely aims to illustrate that anti-racists exist, rather than stopping, or even halting, the onward march of racism. Getting 500,000 to march in the Together Alliance this year was an impressive feat, but it means nothing, if fascist activity outside the major cities, where it is strongest and most threatening, is barely challenged and in fact is becoming more and more emboldened.

This was evident at the counter-protest I attended in Herne Bay last weekend. Before the counter-protest even started, SUTR was already meekly preparing for defeat. It accepted the police's request to move our location to the car park next to the Kent Nationalist Movement event, which was perfectly designed for us to be kettled. For the first hour and a half of the counter-protest we chatted, played music, and chanted into the abyss (I can't stand pointless chanting - it is boring and unimpactful). Simultaneously, the fascists, some of whom were cringingly dressed in all black or camo, with stab-proof vests and balaclavas, set up a gazebo and unveiled banners with slogans like 'White lives matter'. When the fascists began marching, the only reaction of our organisers was to ask people to stop chanting and playing drums, so as not to "antagonise" the fascists walking past.

This was mind-boggling. I myself had made sure to position myself on the other side of the police and low wall that now penned our group in. Sadly, few people made any attempt to break the kettle - which was unsurprising, as few in the crowd seemed like the kettle-breaking type. As a result, the fascists were completely free to march through town, spewing their bile and intimidating people.

Then came the greatest slap in the face. The organisers announced that the counter-protest was over and people should disband, despite the fact that the fascists were coming back. The reason given for this decision was they didn't wish to "give them an audience". One wonders whether the poor weather and the organisers' desire for a relaxed afternoon were the actual reasons.

Upon hearing this I remonstrated

with an SWP acquaintance that we must stay and provide some opposition to the returning fascists, but this was not well-received by other SUTR/SWP organisers, who all subsequently went home. My jaw actually dropped when I heard the organiser announce again that the counter-protest was over. Having lost all faith in SUTR, I resolved with a few true comrades from Thanet Friends of Palestine to stay and provide some opposition outside of the kettled area. Alas, I couldn't get them to march towards the now approaching fascists, so we set up directly opposite the fascists' base, where we were joined by some people from the counter-protest who had lingered on. From there the chanting started up again and we observed them for another hour until they slowly dispersed and started packing up, at which point we decided to head home.

**James Martin**  
Kent

## Cargo cult SWP

Two recent articles in the *Socialist Worker* caught my eye and they provide a telling contrast between the Socialist Workers Party's approach to the trade union bureaucracy in France, Britain and the trade union connection to the SWP's united front operations in the UK.

I will attempt to illustrate how today's SWP is essentially in hock to a section of the union bureaucracy and this skews its analysis and judgement. This is unsustainable for a party that claims to be revolutionary. The latest piece is called 'Key challenges facing the movement in France' (October 23). It robustly takes the French trade union bureaucracy to task in relation to the ongoing protest wave there and is a standard SWP diatribe against those who have been criticising the bureaucracy since the 1970s. Even the late SWP guru, Tony Cliff, is wheeled out and quoted in the article (a rarity nowadays in *Socialist Worker*), so you know it's a party shibboleth.

Now compare this to a second recent *SW* article called 'NEU education union leadership sinks pay strikes as prices rise' (September 29). This bemoans the backsliding by the National Education Union leadership, but is very careful not to criticise them too hard. A rather nice photo of NEU leader Daniel Kebede, megaphone in hand - a favourite SWP 'heroic' pose - accompanies the article. Kebede is mentioned once in the article and tellingly only in a quote by a teacher called 'Suzanne' (probably an SWP member, but this pointedly is not mentioned). It's all very milquetoast by the SWP. Gone from the pages of *Socialist Worker* are the once fiery denunciations of the British union bureaucracy for their sellouts, as opposed to when talking about the French.

Now why is this? The reason, I feel, is that Kebede and the NEU are major funders of the high-profile SWP front group, Stand Up to Racism. SUTR is packed with SWP full-timers who no doubt receive a wage from the money the trade unions provide. Kebede frequently speaks at SWP events and is considered close to the party.

This came out a few years later in the factional documents surrounding his scandal and it is very revealing. It illustrates that the massive time and investment the SWP places in 'united front' work is merely to tide them over organisationally and almost certainly financially, until the longed for early 1970s-style strike upturn arrives.

Like a cargo cult waiting for the bounty-laden ships to appear on the horizon, the SWP believes this upturn will happen. This explains why the SWP and its large (in comparison to its size) group of full-timers is

essentially now in hock to the trade union paymasters - hence the watered-down criticism. This is not a good place to be for a party that claims to be revolutionary.

**Paul O'Keeffe**  
email

## War fever

Picking up on Tam Dean Burn's reference in his letter regarding "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" (October 22), this fits remarkably with a recent Sky production, *The wargame*, devised and designed by the dreadful Deborah Haynes, Sky's security and defence editor.

They had to really scrape the barrel in trying to come up with British politicians to try and front this show. We had Michael Gove as prime minister (yes, really) and one Nicola Sturgeon as deputy prime minister in a very obviously United Kingdom government, which may generate some amusement among those who have followed Sturgeon's career to date.

As part of the roleplay, Sturgeon had to give some press conferences in front of two enormous union jacks. Whether or not the show was attempting to tease Sturgeon, given she was leader of the Scottish National Party, and ostensibly committed to Scottish independence and the breakup of the UK, she seemed entirely comfortable in her assumed wider role and maybe she was giving some subliminal messages to the party and the country she has walked away from.

Other members of the UK cabinet included one Jim Murphy as the foreign secretary, and Penny Mordaunt, reprising a previous real role as the defence secretary. Murphy was a Scottish secretary under Gordon Brown and subsequently a fairly useless leader of the Scottish Labour Party.

The UK government was 'advised' by retired general Richard Barrons, who (relevant to today's politics) co-wrote the (real) Government's Strategic Defence Review, which the Defence Investment Plan and the Nato targets (3% of GDP by 2030, 3.5% by 2035, and moving to 5%) are all meant to be funding. All at the gross expense of things like health, education, transport, social protection, investment in vital infrastructure, green technology, etc. We can assess Barrons' capabilities and judgements from how *The wargame* panned out.

Perhaps not that surprisingly, with such a cast of failed nonentities, this war cabinet rapidly got into a very deep pickle and the UK into an existential crisis trying to play silly beggars with the Russian Federation. The programme started with a number of disparate happenings and incidents, which the hawks thought could possibly be connected, with the Russian state possibly behind them (of course), possibly seeking to challenge and provoke the UK.

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

## DSA tolerance

As a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, who has been critical of Red Star - a Marxist-Leninist caucus, to which one of the organisation's two co-chairs belongs - I am sometimes told that, while the faction has odious, totalitarian views at odds with the DSA's ethos, the subgroup is a pluralistic actor within the big-tent organisation. I believe Red Star's response to the DSA's 2023 delegation to Cuba belies

this assessment, and demonstrates that, if given the chance, the caucus would prefer to suppress opposing perspectives.

Members of Red Star - identified only as Christina W, Ron J and Andrew T - published an article on the caucus blog called 'Cuban links: no tolerance for disorganising chauvinism', which pilloried representatives of other factions which were part of the delegation for having the temerity to meet with opposition figures and call for reform of Cuba's one-party system. Whether the authors or an editor chose the article's title, I think it's instructive. Red Star has no tolerance for differences of opinion, which it understands to be "disorganising".

"Throughout the trip, members of the delegation from the Reform and Revolution Caucus (R&R) and the Socialist Majority Caucus (SMC) criticised the Cuban government both to our Cuban hosts and other DSA members, and skipped out on multiple delegation events. Most shamefully, both Maria (representing R&R) and Renée (representing SMC, and a member of the current NPC) skipped out on meeting with president Díaz-Canel," the authors fumed. ('NPC', for those unfamiliar with DSA alphabet soup, refers to the national political committee).

The opposition figures that Red Star was so upset about Maria Franzblau speaking with were independent journalist and queer-rights activist Maykel Vivero, Marxist writer Frank García Hernández, and members of the leftist La Tizza collective. None of these people, it should be noted, were conservative figures. All of them were self-identified socialists who opposed the United States' embargo. And yet, according to Red Star, talking with these people was too great of an affront to the ruling Communist Party of Cuba, which hosted the delegation.

"This behaviour from the R&R and SMC delegates is anti-democratic, disorganising and chauvinistic," the Red Star authors wrote. "When we speak of discipline for socialists in office, we expect members of the DSA elected to public office to uphold the principles of the organisation, selected as they are to represent the DSA and its interests to the public of the United States. Likewise, we should expect members selected to represent the DSA to international audiences to uphold the will of the DSA." They suggested various restrictions to prevent such behaviour in the future.

It's hard for me to avoid the conclusion that Red Star takes advantage of the DSA's culture of ideological tolerance to operate within a democratic socialist group that its Marxist-Leninist ideology is in conflict with, but would be happy to abandon that ideological tolerance if it suited the caucus' purposes.

I'm hesitant to advocate for the expulsion of Red Star, as I fear it could prompt a sectarian implosion, but on my more pessimistic days, I do wonder if some kind of reckoning about what kind of organisation the DSA is and how it defines socialism is inevitable.

**Jon Hochschartner**  
Connecticut

## LFF, then CFF

Following on from Jim Moody's article on the London Film Festival ('Seven you need to watch' October 22), I'd like to draw comrades' attention to the forthcoming Cheltenham Film Festival (October 30 to November 8), which includes three Palestine-related films.

Hopefully there will be reviews in the *Weekly Worker* to follow!

**Ken Syme**  
email

ISRAEL

# No clear outcome

There will be weeks of haggling, offers of bribes and ominous threats of all kinds. The Arab-majority parties might well be involved in this grubby business. But when it comes to the oppression of the Palestinians within and without Israel, no fundamental change should be expected, argues **Yassamine Mather**

As widely predicted, Israel's election has produced no clear winner, but it has given a considerable boost to the two Arab-majority blocs, whose 19 Knesset members might well determine whether or not Benjamin Netanyahu remains in office as prime minister.

Overall turnout was 77.7%, the highest since 1999 and more than seven percentage points above the 2022 election. Participation among Arab citizens was estimated at around 80%, an historic high. Projections put the Netanyahu-led bloc on 53 seats, the opposition led by Gadi Eisenkot's Yashar! on 51. Clearly, neither bloc, if they maintain their unity, can command the 61 seats needed to form a majority government.

Understandably, the election attracted extensive international coverage, much of it focused on Netanyahu's far-right allies and their inflammatory statements. These statements are not primarily intended for foreign journalists, whom these politicians openly hold in contempt: they are addressed to an Israeli-Jewish electorate, in which nationalist and chauvinist politics have become increasingly normalised.

Mainstream coverage also tends to present Israeli elections as evidence of the country's 'democratic' credentials, while ignoring the exclusion from the political process of 5.5 million Palestinians under occupation, the historical foundations of the Israeli state in Palestinian dispossession and the systematic genocide of at least 74,000 Palestinians in Gaza, alongside thousands more affected by what the United Nations now terms the "ethnic cleansing" of the West Bank.

**Arab vote**

The scale of Arab participation is perhaps the most important development. In Nazareth, turnout reportedly reached 72.2%, compared with 48.3% in 2022. This change appears to reflect several overlapping concerns: opposition to Netanyahu and his far-right ministers, anger over the war in Gaza, discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel, frustration over violent crime and the failure of successive governments to provide adequate public services and security.

The Joint List, a leftish Arab-majority bloc consisting of Hadash, Ta'al and Balad is on course for 11 KMs. Ra'am, the Islamic bloc led by Mansour Abbas, is projected to get eight. This matters because if Gadi Eisenkot's bloc could combine with these two, that would make 66 KMs - enough to defeat Netanyahu arithmetically, but not to form a politically viable coalition. Joint List and Ra'am may provide the numbers needed to install Eisenkot as PM, while remaining outside what would be a minority government.

It must be emphasised that mainstream Israeli-Jewish politics is not determined by class and does not neatly map onto the traditional left-right spectrum. The Democrats is expected to secure no more than eight seats. Once, as the Labor Party, it was by far the dominant force, proclaiming its commitment to strong trade unions, state ownership and a colonial, Zionist, socialism. Now the Democrats vote comes mainly from



Plenty of choice: stacked ballot slips at polling station

the Ashkenazi middle and upper-middle classes and more prosperous areas of Tel Aviv. How to oppress the Palestinians, security, ethnic background, religion and non-religion are now the key deciders. The poorest sections of the mainly secular Israeli-Jewish working class tend to vote for parties of the right and the far right: Likud, Beyachad, Yisrael Beyteinu and Otzma Yehudit. Religious people vote according to their sect: most pronounced with Shas and the United Torah Party. Their vote comes from Sephardic and Haredi Jews, who happen to include the poorest, most impoverished sections of the Israeli Jewish masses. As for Hadash and the Joint List, their vote comes from the non-religious and less-religious Arab population. No more than 10-15,000 Israeli Jews are thought to have voted for the Joint List - a tiny percentage of its overall vote.

There is also a political irony in the much enhanced Arab turnout. As *Haaretz* reported, Netanyahu repeatedly sought to mobilise Jewish voters by portraying participation by Palestinian citizens as an electoral threat. On October 27, he published 27 posts on X: 17 of them warned about Arab turnout. He circulated photographs of Arab citizens voting alongside images of allegedly empty polling stations in Likud strongholds, claiming - without evidence - that his opponents were trying to "steal the election".

In recorded appeals, Netanyahu alleged that police had caught three senior Joint List officials carrying sinister envelopes of cash and that leftwing Jewish women were escorting Arab women to polling stations. He also warned of people being bussed in and long queues in Arab towns, and urged his supporters to vote Likud to keep the Palestinians in their place as a thoroughly marginalised section of the population.

The question is whether the Arab parties' electoral gains can translate into real political power. Mansour Abbas has made his position clear. Speaking to Israel's Channel 12, he expressed hope that Ra'am and the anti-Netanyahu bloc could together reach the 61 seats needed to replace the government.

Abbas said that both principal blocs

had been in contact with his party before and after the election. Asked about opposition leaders Naftali Bennett and Avigdor Lieberman, who have rejected cooperation with Arab-majority parties, he indicated that these objections would have to be addressed during post-election negotiations.

Ra'am has experience of coalition government. In 2021 it joined the Bennett-Lapid coalition, becoming the first Arab-majority party to participate formally in an Israeli governing coalition. In exchange, it sought investment in Arab and Bedouin communities, improvements in infrastructure and measures to tackle violent crime.

The Joint List occupies a different political position. Its constituent parties have traditionally rejected participation in governments committed to maintaining Israel's existing Zionist political framework, although they have shown varying degrees of willingness to support a government from outside.

The alliance brings together distinct political traditions. Hadash, whose core includes the Communist Party of Israel, has Hebrew KMs, but, as already noted, almost entirely relies on Arab votes. It supports Israel withdrawing to its pre-1967 borders and a Palestinian state. Ta'al, associated with Ahmad Tibi, emphasises Palestinian national rights and equality for Arab citizens. Balad advocates transforming Israel into a state of all its citizens rather than one constitutionally defined by Jewish-Israeli national supremacy.

The Joint List could therefore support the removal of Netanyahu without accepting cabinet positions or endorsing the programme of an Eisenkot-led government. On October 28, Joint List chairman Yousef Jabareen publicly signalled readiness to help replace Netanyahu, insisting that any serious alternative would have to engage with his bloc.

Eisenkot has previously ruled out a coalition with Arab-majority parties, although a figure close to him, Yoram Cohen, has suggested that Ra'am might be acceptable if it met Yashar!'s conditions. Yair Golan of the Democrats has called for the anti-Netanyahu parties to cooperate with Arab-majority representatives

to secure a majority. Bennett and Lieberman remain opposed. The public disagreement underlines the difference between a theoretical anti-Netanyahu majority and a government that its component parties are prepared to support.

Netanyahu faces difficulties within his own camp. His coalition depends on ultra-Orthodox parties such as Shas and United Torah Judaism, which defend religious schooling, yeshiva funding and exemptions from military conscription. These demands conflict directly with Lieberman's insistence that ultra-Orthodox young men should serve in the armed forces. That disagreement makes some possible coalition combinations difficult, although Israeli politics has repeatedly demonstrated that politicians can revise apparently immovable positions during the processes of negotiations.

Israel has already experienced rotating prime ministers, governments bringing together ideological rivals and coalitions assembled primarily to remove an incumbent. A national unity government involving Likud and sections of the opposition is another possible negotiating formula.

President Isaac Herzog will be formally consulting the parliamentary parties in early November before selecting someone who might be able to cobble together a government. The largest party, still Likud, does not automatically get the mandate; the decisive question is putting together enough Knesset numbers to get over the 61+ threshold. So expect bribes, defections and endless horse-trading. If all else fails there could well be another general election.

**War generation**

The record Arab turnout should not obscure a parallel development within the Jewish electorate: the continued strength of the nationalist right, particularly among younger voters.

More than half a million Israelis were eligible to vote for the first time. Pre-election surveys suggested that this generation is more rightwing than its parents. A Yedioth Ahronoth poll found that more than 16% of first-time voters intended to support Itamar Ben-Gvir's Jewish Power or Bezalel Smotrich's Religious Zionism. A Channel 12 survey found that nearly three-quarters identified themselves as rightwing or centre-right.

Ben-Gvir's career illustrates the transformation of Israeli politics. When he reached military age, the army refused to conscript him because of his extremist views. Three decades later, he serves as national security minister and participates in the government's inner security deliberations. Several western governments have sanctioned him over incitement against Palestinians.

For Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, the question of who becomes prime minister has some importance, but it should not be confused with a fundamental choice between occupation and liberation.

Netanyahu's government has overseen genocide, devastating wars, settlement expansion and increasing settler violence. His far-right allies openly advocate annexation of the West Bank and policies encouraging or imposing a Palestinian exodus from Gaza.

Yet the main opposition parties do not offer a programme based on ending Israeli control and recognising Palestinian national sovereignty. Eisenkot and other so-called centrist figures reject the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. Their preferred approach emphasises Israeli security control, separation from Palestinian population centres and regional arrangements with Arab governments.

Eisenkot opposes some settlement initiatives, including the E1 project, and has advocated action against unauthorised outposts and extremist settlers. These positions distinguish him from Netanyahu's far-right partners, but they do not amount to support for Palestinian self-determination. Bennett and Lieberman occupy positions further to the right on territorial questions. Golan and the Democrats are more critical of settlement expansion and offer a different approach to relations with Palestinians.

The differences should not be dismissed, particularly where they affect settlement policy, the use of force and the daily lives of Palestinians. But the main Jewish-led parties remain broadly committed to Israel retaining decisive control over security arrangements in the occupied territories.

The differences between Netanyahu and his principal rivals are very limited when it comes to Iran. Following direct military confrontations between Jerusalem and Tehran, much of the Israeli political establishment regards the Islamic Republic as the country's central external strategic threat.

Netanyahu has advocated regime change in Tehran and presents military confrontation as an essential element of Israeli security. His opponents frequently criticise his management of the confrontation rather than the underlying objective of weakening Iran. Lieberman opposes agreements that leave the Islamic Republic's strategic capabilities intact. Bennett's approach, associated with his 'octopus doctrine', favours striking Iran directly rather than concentrating solely on its regional allies.

Eisenkot describes Iran as Israel's gravest external threat and has expressed support for the end of the Islamic Republic, while arguing that political change must come from within Iran. Golan has questioned the feasibility of achieving regime change through bombing and argues for more clearly defined military and political objectives. There are tactical disagreements over timing, diplomacy, escalation and the role of the United States. But the broad consensus in favour of confronting Iran extends well beyond Netanyahu's coalition.

The Arab parties, particularly Hadash and sections of the Joint List, have been among the most consistent parliamentary opponents of Israeli and American military action against Iran. As Danny Citrinowicz, a former head of the Iran desk in Israeli military intelligence, told BBC Persian, a change of prime minister would not necessarily produce a significant change in Israel's approach.

A different government might alter the timing, scale or presentation of military operations. It would not end the strategic rivalry ●

## FRANCE

# Readying for the next stage

November 5 sees the trade unions calling a general strike. It will be massive. Till then, argues **Jean Laurel**, the left needs to keep up the momentum of protests and demonstrations. The left also needs to promote the idea of the organised working class maintaining discipline and good order

France is experiencing a social movement that shows no signs of slowing down. On the contrary, after weeks of protests in high schools and then universities, street demonstrations are being maintained.

Images from October 17 made headlines in media outlets around the world. After a month of youth protests, this day - heralded for over a month as the 'return of the Yellow Vests' against the cost of living, particularly petrol prices - became truly mass, with 800,000 people taking to the streets across France. October has seen the largest mobilisations since January 2023 against the pension reform.

The Yellow Vests repertoire of actions was indeed put to use again: hundreds of roundabouts were occupied, traffic was slowed, toll booths were made free of charge, and attempts were made to block refineries and petrol stations. From this perspective, it was a far greater success than the last 'return of the Yellow Vests', which had been announced on September 10 2025. Nevertheless, this minor aspect of the mobilisation was completely overshadowed by the events taking place across the country at the same time.

Large-scale demonstrations and rallies took place in most cities, including medium-sized ones. After a week of escalating tensions, the police used excessive force and non-lethal weapons against the demonstrators. Once again, two teenagers lost eyes, and another had a hand blown off. Many protestors were severely beaten. In some cases, it was not possible to organise marches: demonstrators were tear-gassed before they could even reach the gathering points, leading to the proliferation of smaller marches. Everywhere, the clear objective was to force them to go home, using tear gas and kettling tactics. The police were extremely aggressive: numerous scenes show them insulting or provoking the protestors. On the other side, the anger was intense. There were numerous clashes.

Despite all this, the images circulating in the French and international media highlighted not so much the arbitrary nature of police violence as the acts of vandalism that took place on the fringes of the protests. It is true that these incidents were far more numerous than usual. Indeed, in several city centres, stores were stormed and looted. These were mainly large chains and luxury brands, but the media focus, of course, was on small business owners, who were interviewed in tears the next day. Images of damage to public property - particularly historic buildings set on fire - were broadcast in the days that followed.

The dominant narrative on the far right was that of an invasion of cities by hordes of Islamist barbarians from the suburbs, allied with bloodthirsty Antifa activists. The government and the mainstream media were not much more nuanced, but targeted the leftwing La France Insoumise (LFI) and its alleged 'proxies'. This term, borrowed from the military vocabulary used to describe Iran's allies, is supposed to refer to revolutionary organisations (never specifically named), which are said to be 'ultra-left' and seeking to destroy society, while being somehow remotely controlled by Jean-Luc Mélenchon. A pro-Macron MP even called for LFI to be held accountable for the damage.



**Rioting and looting: "contrary to our methods"**

Bruno Retailleau, the presidential candidate for the traditional Gaullist rightwing, Republicans, demanded that LFI should be banned - a stance that earned him the support of the president of the French senate.

The situation has become so absurd that even within the state apparatus voices have been raised to denounce this crude narrative: intelligence agents have testified in the press that they were ordered to incriminate LFI at all costs in their reports.<sup>1</sup> Far-left activists are, of course, opposed to LFI's policies, and in any case represent a very small minority of what is loosely referred to as *casseurs* - a term equivalent to 'vandals', used in France to describe the irresponsible minority among protestors, who are in the main actually anything but coordinated or politically coherent.

Mélenchon has rightly said that rioting and looting are "contrary to our methods". At the same time he has placed the blame for social alienation squarely on a failing education system, austerity and police violence. True, there are those who want to see 'Paris burn' and revel in the 'joy of destruction'. Anarchists celebrate rioting and looting as being the prerequisite for building the 'stateless Commune'. Not Marxists. We value discipline and organisation. Not imposed through the state and its hated police force, but democratically, through our own parties, trade unions and defence units. Shops, bars, cafes, offices and other workplaces ought to be guarded against criminal actions.

## Marxist left

Despite the undeniable strength of the movement, it is, of course - for now - highly misleading to describe the current situation as revolutionary or pre-revolutionary. Yet this is the thesis defended by the Morenist group, Révolution Permanente, which is close to the Argentinian Trotskyist party, Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas. RP's justification for this is "the combination of a prolonged political crisis at the top and this independent outburst of the masses from below".<sup>2</sup>

The political crisis is said to be linked to the difficulties the police encountered in containing the situation on October 17. It is, however, particularly strange to view the police's rout as anything other than, at best, a symptom of the intelligence services' incompetence (which is unlikely), or, at worst, a deliberate strategy to obtain images of vandalism

and looting for the media. The number of police officers deployed was even lower (60,000 versus 80,000) than during the last Yellow Vests protest on September 10 2025, which drew half as many demonstrators. Furthermore, when the interior minister tendered his resignation, Emmanuel Macron did not even need to accept it, and the minister was able to remain in post. We are, therefore, clearly far from a situation in which the French bourgeoisie would have run out of 'scapegoats' to use or no longer have the means to maintain order.

The idea of a 'mass uprising from below' must be put into perspective. It is true that many high-school students are taking action for the first time, and that the student mobilisation extends beyond the campuses that are usually involved. But, for now, it would be wrong to claim that the majority of students are engaged in the movement, and this is even less true of the majority of workers. We must, of course, encourage events to move in this direction, but it is a mistake to assume that the work of building mass support is already complete. That all that is needed now is to organise general assemblies in the workplaces. It is likely that Révolution Permanente's position stems less from an analysis of the situation than from the need to adopt triumphalist slogans in order to appeal to radical students.

Another problem with the Marxist left is particularly evident in the actions of the NPA-Révolutionnaire (a splinter group of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International) within the student movement: the lack of a distinct political voice and a clear socialist perspective. A majority of their activists are students, so they are able to make an impact in student general assemblies. They strive to present themselves as being the best student union activists, rather than seeking to assert themselves politically. They never justify their actions on the basis of their largely hidden political perspectives (build and broaden the movement to achieve a general strike and seize power by building soviet-style structures under their leadership). Instead, they adopt a technical standpoint (structure and mass mobilisation are necessary to keep the movement alive).

The week following the events of October 17 - which was less intense due to high schools being closed for vacation - was marked by an unprecedented media campaign against the movement's 'violence',

and by authoritarian announcements from the government. In many cities curfews were imposed. Gatherings were banned, police patrolled the streets and helicopters flew over Paris. The government was clearly seeking to intimidate.

Macron stated in an official address that, from now on, no-one except the major unions would be allowed to organise a demonstration. The centrist presidential candidate, Macron's former prime minister Gabriel Attal, called for a social media blackout, similar to what Nepal experienced in September of last year (perhaps he was not informed about what followed that!).

Tensions escalated further following a heinous racist attack in the Paris suburb of Trappes on October 23. A man drove around shooting at every black and Arab person he came across. A 26-year-old passerby died, and several others were seriously injured. When arrested, the perpetrator reportedly claimed that he wanted to "avenge the shopkeepers", following the looting on October 17.<sup>3</sup>

## Right to protest

There was a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the October 24 demonstration. Protests had been banned in several cities, where police completely blocked access to certain areas. However, the demonstration was permitted in Paris, but its route - near the ring road, far from the city centre - was very different from the one the unions had announced. Yet, despite the difficulties and fear, the movement did not waver: 800,000 people came out once again. The focus of the day - in addition to protesting the high cost of living and the demands of young people - was to defend the right to protest, which is under serious threat from the government.

The day was a success and saw far fewer incidents of vandalism than the previous week. The media then had to fall back on the usual images of burning trash cans. They did not, however, broadcast other images: those showing small fascist groups

operating with complete impunity in certain cities, attacking protestors and then retreating behind police lines. This complicity - or even collaboration - between police and fascists is clear. But not new.

Two days later, on October 26, the government finally made some announcements. Rather than concrete measures, it presented a vague "roadmap" - a series of "discussions" that have been set in motion. Prime minister Sébastien Lecornu announced plans to review the admissions platform (Parcoursup) in the coming years, allocate €5 billion to renovate buildings, and create 15,000 additional places in higher education (not the 250,000 demanded by students). A figure made all the more ridiculous by the government having cut 10,000 places last year alone. As for the cost of living, the automatic annual increase in the minimum wage has been brought forward by three months. All of this is, of course, far below the protestors' demands for profound social change - whether in education or, more broadly, in the living conditions of the working class.

The immediate outlook now is set for repeats of the weekly Saturday protests, as was the case during the Yellow Vests movement. The goal is, at the very least, to maintain the movement's momentum until November 5, when the unions have called for a general strike. There is reason to hope that this day will see a massive mobilisation, which will be necessary if we are to obtain real progress from the government ●

## Notes

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## Fighting fund

# Already £10 over

With still three days to go in October, I have some good news: the *Weekly Worker* has already reached our monthly £2,750 fighting fund target! Thanks to a very useful £582 that came our way over the last week, the running total currently stands at £2,760. Well done, everyone!

Topping the numbers list was comrade JC, with his fantastic £176, followed by RL (£60), DD (£36), JT (£25), GD, PS and JW (£24 each), AB (£20), JM and BH (£15), TT (£10) and AR (£5) - all of whom contributed via bank transfer or standing order. Then we had three comrades who used PayPal - thanks also to JB and DB (£50 each) and ES (£8) - not to mention comrade IR, who sent us a £20 cheque, and two comrades who each handed £10 to one of our team.

But, as I say, we still have three days to go, in which we can

eat into the deficit of previous months, so please play your part if you can and let's see if we can actually reach £3,000 by this Saturday, October 31. To make sure we get your donation on time, please click on the PayPal button on our website or donate via bank transfer before the weekend (see below for more information if you need it).

Yes, that's right - we rely on you, our readers, to provide the financial support the *Weekly Worker* needs to keep playing its vital role of support for the kind of organisation the working class so desperately needs. Please do your best ●

**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](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)

# Pouvoir d'achat crisis

State education is in an advanced stage of decay. Over the last decade real spending per student has plummeted. Meanwhile the cost of living has soared, along with government borrowing costs. **Michael Roberts** investigates

France's high school and student protests have a simple objective: to get more resources for education. France's education crisis is defined by severe teacher shortages, deteriorating student outcomes, and massive funding deficits - everywhere from primary schools to public universities. State education is among the most unequal in the developed world: schools in poorer areas are so under-resourced that the education system is cementing inequality.<sup>1</sup> Students from the poorest neighbourhoods are disproportionately hard hit by staff shortages.

Students have experienced a catastrophic and unprecedented 20% drop in the education budget per student since 2017. Research by the economist Asma Benhenda, based on payroll data from the national education system, shows that the proportion of contract or beginning teachers in privileged areas like Paris or Hauts-de-Seine is just 10%.<sup>2</sup> That figure rises to 50% in poorer departments, like Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-de-Marne, around the capital. The average salary per secondary-school teacher is about 20% lower in the poorest areas than in the wealthiest, even after taking into account the (meagre) bonuses awarded for priority education.

French teachers' salaries consistently fall below the average for advanced economies.<sup>3</sup> A French teacher with 15 years' experience earns less than €40,000 - 20% below average. Early-career teachers in Germany earn twice as much as their French counterparts.<sup>4</sup> Yet French teachers have to cope with longer hours of teaching and some of the worst pupil-teacher ratios in Europe. As a result, record numbers are leaving the profession.

To plug staffing gaps, the government launched a scheme in 2022 to recruit 'contract' teachers (as opposed to the standard tenure system, under which they count as *fonctionnaires* or civil servants). They were given *four days' training*,<sup>5</sup> despite often having no previous teaching experience. Predictably many quit within six months, owing to lack of adequate training or supervision.

And it is not just teachers who are leaving. With a dearth of supervisors, careers advisers, school doctors and nurses, among others, it is virtually impossible to deliver the school support services pupils need. The independent 'defender of rights' for France, Claire Hédon, warned last year that the shortage of qualified staff and suitable facilities meant that almost a quarter of all disabled children never go to school at all.<sup>6</sup>

No wonder then that, as state schools slowly disintegrate, more prosperous families are turning to private education.<sup>7</sup> Few government ministers have any direct experience of the state school system, as many go to posh private schools. Yet these fee-paying schools also receive public funding. Meanwhile French public universities are grappling with an estimated €8 billion shortfall, which has pushed nearly all 75 public institutions into deficit budgets.

Christine Renon, the head of an infant school in Seine-Saint-Denis, committed suicide at her workplace in 2019.<sup>8</sup> According to a letter she had sent to the school management board, she was "exhausted". She went on to detail the deficiencies and inadequate resources of an organisation that had been left to rot. This tragedy should have shocked the authorities into



October 24: 800,000 on Paris ring road

a profound reappraisal. President Emmanuel Macron pledged to make education a priority for his second presidential term, but nothing has changed for the better - only for the worse.

## Cost of living

While it is education that primarily worries students and teachers (and parents) in France, it is just one aspect of the deterioration of basic public services. France used to have a healthcare system that was the envy of the world, let alone Europe. Spending was high at 11.5% of annual GDP. As a result, life expectancy was much higher than the EU average. But, over the last few decades, government healthcare spending has been cut back well below the increased demand, as French people get older and need more health support. Before 2008, health spending was rising at 0.3% of GDP a year. Since 2009, the rate of health spending growth has halved to just 0.17% of GDP a year. And yet the proportion of over-65s in France has risen 40% over the same period, or more than 10 times the rise in health spending. As a result, life expectancy has virtually stopped rising.

Just as in all the major capitalist economies, the cost of living for the average French household has risen sharply, especially since the end of the pandemic slump that saw a significant inflation spike - more recently compounded by the energy shortages due to the ongoing Iran war. Price levels for average French households are now some 18%-20% higher than just four years ago and are continuing to rise as a result of the Middle East conflict. Real wages (after inflation) are up only 2.4% from five years ago and wage levels are still below where they were after the pandemic. *Pouvoir d'achat* (purchasing power) is continually falling.

After taking into account tax and benefits, the growth in average disposable income for French households (GDHI) has been on a downward trend in the first three decades of this century, slowing to under 1% a year under the Macron presidency.

In 2024, 9.8 million people in ordinary housing in metropolitan France were living below the monetary poverty threshold (€1,337 per month). The poverty rate is at its highest level (15.4%) since 1996,

while the unemployed and single-parent families remain the groups most affected.

Although inequalities of income and wealth are not nearly so extreme as in the United States, they are still grotesque. Indeed, inequality has worsened in the last 40 years. In 1983, the top 1% of income earners took 7.5% of all personal income, 10% took 30%, and the bottom 50% received just 21.4%. By 2022, the top 1% took 12.7% (an over 60% increase), while the top 10% share rose to 34.8% and the bottom 50% share fell to 20.3%. Inequality of wealth (net personal wealth) is, as is usual in all major economies, much worse. In 1983, the top 1% of wealth holders owned 15.9% of all personal wealth in France, the top 10% had 50%, and the bottom 50% held just 8.9%. By 2022, those inequalities got even worse. The top 1% now had 24% (over a 60% increase), the top 10% now owned 57.7%, and the bottom 50% saw their share of personal wealth fall to just 5.1% (a 48% decline).

Retirement and pensions are key issues for working people. Pensions are not 'welfare' benefits, but 'deferred' wages deducted in contributions from current wages in order to provide a decent life in old age. French workers have fought over many decades to achieve pensions at a reasonable retirement age. France allocates around 14% of its GDP to pensions - one of the highest rates in Europe and significantly higher than countries like the UK, which spends around 5% of GDP and so delivers the lowest state pension in the advanced capitalist world. But contribution rates (deferred wages), from workers and their employers, are correspondingly high at 28%.

French businesses and successive governments have spent much energy over the last few decades trying to reverse these pension rights by a combination of increased contributions, reduced pensions in real terms and by extending the retirement age. The argument of governments, including the Macron administration, is that an ageing society can no longer afford 'generous' pensions. They claim that the pension system faces 'structural deficits': ie, the payouts are now regularly exceeding the contributions.

When Macron ran for re-election in 2022, he told voters that the retirement

age would have to rise to ensure the continued viability of the country's pensions system. He forced through a change in the retirement age from 62 to 64 years. But raising the retirement age and cutting pensions in real terms significantly hits French people's living standards when they retire.

As in many other countries in Europe, France is also experiencing a deepening housing crisis. There are two million requests for social housing pending - they will never see their needs met. Rising rent prices, inflation and overall economic pressure are pushing families to the edge like never before. From overcrowded cities to skyrocketing living costs, the situation is becoming impossible for huge numbers. Millions of French citizens are now being forced to live in their cars, as the housing crisis across France continues to spiral out of control.

In sum, France's public services - social care, roads, transport, youth facilities, garbage collections, sewage and water supply, etc - have been deteriorating for decades. Government after government responds by saying that these services are no longer 'affordable'. And their mainstream economist apologists argue that the huge rise in public-sector debt and continual annual budget deficits must be ended. Over the past 15 years, the public debt ratio (debt to GDP) has risen significantly. French public debt reached 119% of GDP in mid-2026 and is expected to increase to 128% in 2027.

## No alternative

Austerity is the message of the Macron government: there is no alternative, the public is told. The draft budget aims to reduce the public deficit to 5% of GDP in 2027 - it was 5.1% in 2025 and 5.4% in 2026. Such a reduction would require €43 billion-worth of 'new measures'. Without them, the government estimates that the deficit would reach around 6.5% next year. Those 'new measures' would include the elimination of 3,000 civil service jobs by 2027 without replacement; a cap on government healthcare spending at €5 billion; reductions in unemployment insurance and pension schemes; the elimination of two national holidays (Victory Day and Easter Monday) to increase productivity; and yet again further reductions in regional and local expenditures.

Of course, there is one part of public spending that will not be cut: 'defence'. On July 14 ('Bastille Day') 2025, Macron announced that France's military budget will reach €64 billion by 2027, three years ahead of schedule. Specifically, €3.5 billion will be added this year, and another €3 billion in 2027 - all to meet the Nato pledge to increase national member defence spending to 5% of GDP by 2035 (3.5% for military expenses and 1.5% for infrastructure). As the head of state of a key Nato member, who perceives the 'Russian threat' as acute, Macron has committed his administration to meeting this target.

*Le Monde*, the French mainstream news source, reckons that France's "top priority must be to reassure investors of its ability to repair its finances".<sup>9</sup> So the financial markets rule. But all this talk of profligate public spending and debt is a false flag by French governments, as well as the 'bond vigilantes' in financial markets, who are selling French government bonds and increasing the cost of borrowing for governments

and households alike.

What is always ignored is that France's non-financial, private-sector debt is actually much larger than public-sector debt. The former reached 134.2% of GDP in 2026, more than 30% higher than the average in the euro area. It is the private sector (with real estate and financial speculative borrowing) that is most vulnerable and, when a financial crash occurs in the capitalist system, it is the public sector that must bail out the private banks or major lenders. And, in capitalist slumps, the government must spend more on unemployment benefits and take in less in taxes, so government deficits spiral.

The history of France's public debt shows that it is in periods of capitalist slumps and financial crises that public debt rises the most - and then afterwards bond-holders demand that the rest of us reduce this debt by cutting services and pensions and raising taxes. After the 1980-82 slump, faster economic growth and austerity measures stopped the debt ratio rising by 1987. Then the next slump of 1991-93 accelerated the rise in debt again, before economic recovery (and more austerity measures) eventually led to a fall in the debt ratio. Then the global financial crash and the ensuing great recession led to a 20% rise in the debt ratio. Severe austerity measures during the slow-growth long depression of the 2010s eventually stopped any further rise in the debt ratio, before the pandemic slump drove it up again. What this shows is that without the impact of several crises in capitalism, the government debt-to-GDP ratio would have hardly risen. Each batch of austerity measures aims to reduce the public debt ratio originally caused by busts in the private sector, where the debt goes on rising.

The real cause of France's affordability crisis is its significant economic slowdown. In the 21st century, France has experienced low real GDP growth, steadily falling over the last 40 years. And now, in the 2020s, it has virtually ground to a halt.

Behind any relative stagnation in investment and productivity growth lies falling profitability of French capital. French capital's profitability started to decline sharply at the beginning of the 21st century (on the advent of the euro) and gathered pace after the great recession. Average profitability is now near an all-time low after a fall during the pandemic slump ●

Michael Roberts blogs at:  
thenextrecession.wordpress.com

## Notes

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**POLEMIC**

# Nature cannot go ignored

There are still those on the left who say ‘labour creates all wealth’. Seemingly militant, seemingly pro-worker, seemingly anti-capitalist, but profoundly wrong, says **Jack Conrad**

All societies produce in their own way. Yet alike, no matter what the form of society, production, as a necessarily connected process, is always a process of *reproduction*. Not only of products, not only of social relations, but also, at a most fundamental level, of the metabolic interaction between human society and nature.<sup>1</sup> It follows that if the metabolic interaction between human society and nature has been thrown violently off balance, fouled-up, wrecked, by the relentless, short-term pursuit of profit, then this will have a profound impact - not only on the reproduction of products, but the reproduction of social relations too.

Therefore, note, the 2025 warning issued by the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries. If anthropogenically induced global heating is allowed to continue at the current rate, the global economy faces a catastrophic 50% loss of GDP between the years 2070 and 2090. This risks triggering mass mortality, mass displacement and widespread state failures that threaten to bring about the collapse of civilisation itself.<sup>2</sup>

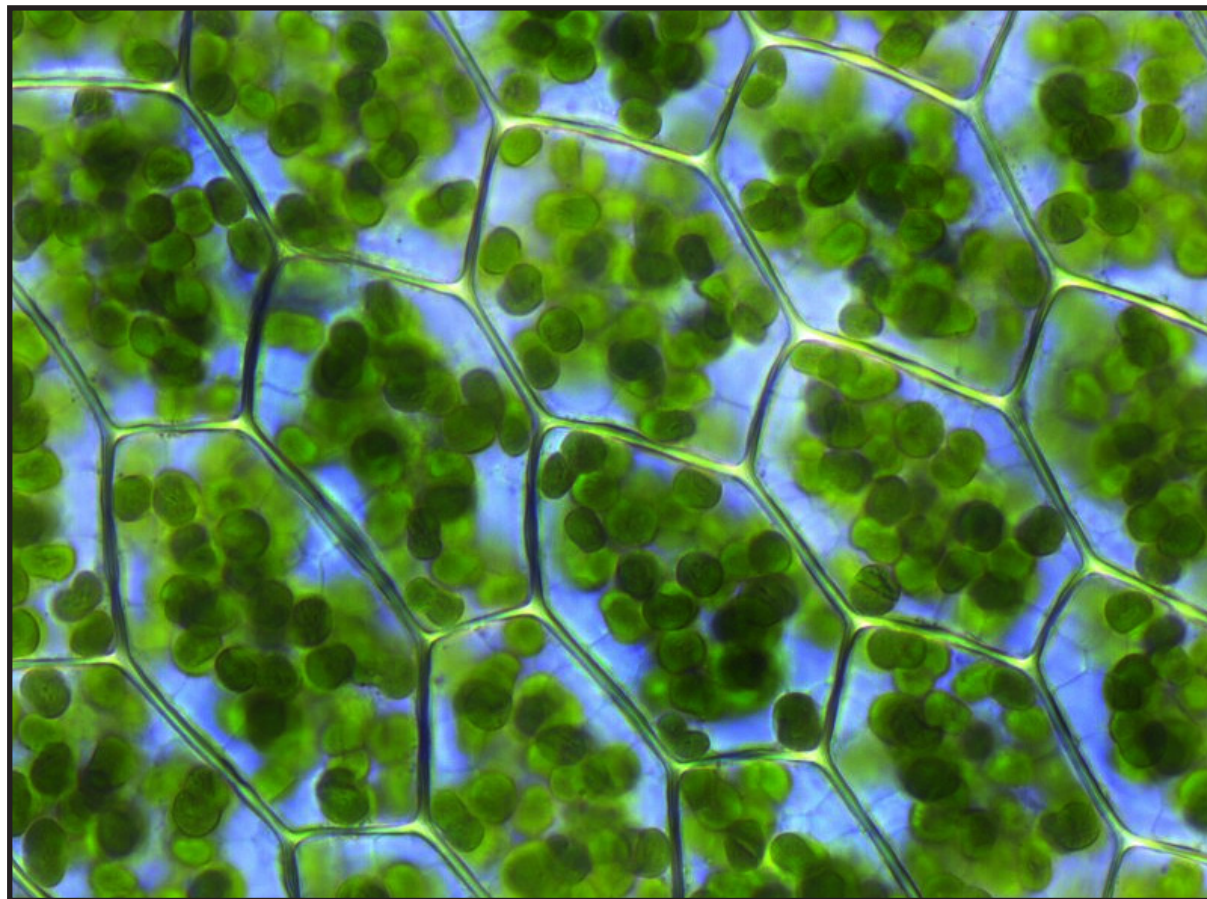
The simple fact of the matter is that human society evolved under very specific climatic conditions. There is no way complex life - let alone we humans - could have emerged during the Hadean, Archean or Proterozoic eons, which together spanned roughly four billion years (84% of Earth’s existence<sup>3</sup>). The atmospheric composition, temperatures and cosmic radiation levels were completely hostile. Complex life exploded in the Cambrian period, as temperatures cooled, oxygen levels rose and the protective ozone layer came into existence. Even then complex life was confined to the balmy oceans and seas.

## Our species

Our species, dating back to *Homo erectus*, has been around for a mere 2.5 million years, and required what we might call a Goldilocks zone in terms of climatic conditions: not too cold and not too hot. Since then, of course, our sub-species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, has left its African Eden and learnt to survive in the Himalayas, the high Arctic and on micro Pacific atolls. Nonetheless, when it comes to our extensive modern-day agriculture, which supports the vast majority of the world’s eight billion population, what it requires is maintaining the benign climatic conditions of the Holocene, not a disastrous return, as is threatened, to the conditions of the Pliocene (+2°C to +4.1°C hotter than preindustrial levels) or the Miocene (+5.3°C to +11.5°C hotter).

Any rational, any scientific, study of society, as a necessarily reproductive process, must, therefore, give due recognition to nature as its environment - including, of course, planet Earth, along with all its atmospheric, biological, hydraulic and geological systems, but also the Sun, the moon and the cosmos too.<sup>4</sup> After all, nature forms a unity, of which we are a part, and on which we inescapably depend.

One only needs to think about it for the briefest moment. The food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink all come from nature. Likewise the energy we use. That is obvious with wind, hydro, solar, tidal, geothermal and nuclear power. Fossil fuels too. Oil, gas and coal are extracted from the Earth’s crust, though ultimately they derive their *potential energy* from the



**Photosynthesis: most important source of energy is the Sun**

Sun. The photons chemically bonded in now long-dead vegetation, via photosynthesis, are released as *kinetic energy* when we burn hydrocarbons.

In point of fact, our nearest star, the Sun, is our biggest and most important energy source by far. Every major physical and biological process on Earth is driven by the Sun: weather and climate, ocean currents, the water cycle, etc. Each second the Sun converts more than four million tons of mass into radiating light and heat. Specifically, through the process of nuclear fusion some 600 million tons of hydrogen becomes 596 million tons of helium and this releases  $3.8 \times 10^{26}$  joules of energy into space (matching Albert Einstein’s classic  $E=mc^2$  formula). Enough, incidentally, to run the entire US grid for the next nine billion years.<sup>5</sup>

Everything we work on as raw materials likewise comes from nature: wood, grains, metals, stone, water, gases, chemicals, etc. Humans take such things either directly or indirectly from nature and transform them into various products, which go, in the last analysis, into articles of consumption.

Though we only consume them indirectly, from the simplest to the most complex, the same can be said of tools and machines. Our hominin ancestors used sharpened sticks, stone chips and rock hammers and anvils: prey could thereby be stabbed, carcasses butchered and bones cracked open to get at the highly nutritious marrow. All such tools, it should be noted, were taken from nature with very little modification.

By contrast, perhaps the most complex machine commercially available nowadays is the ASML Extreme Ultraviolet (EUV) Lithography Machine. It makes the microchips found in the latest smartphones, supercomputers and AI hardware. About the size of a double-decker bus, it weighs in at 180 tons and can be bought for approximately £284 million. To generate the 13.5-nanometre EUV light wavelength needed to etch chips, the ASML machine inserts microscopic droplets of molten ultra-pure tin into

a vacuum chamber. A high-power industrial laser then double-blasts each droplet. The first flattens the droplet like a pancake; the second vaporises it into a plasma cloud reaching to over 220,000°C - nearly 40 times hotter than the Sun’s surface. This happens 50,000 times every second.<sup>6</sup> While not discounting for a single moment the immense human contribution in terms of mental labour, the metals, silicon, ceramics, rare earths and hydrogen and nitrogen gases necessary for the production of the ASML chips are, of course, taken from nature.

Even when there are foolish boasts about ‘conquering nature’, the most that can ever be achieved by human ingenuity, including AI, is making use of nature’s laws. Take the cutting-edge technology exploiting the strange qualities of sub-atomic particles needed to build the next generation of quantum computers (superposition, entanglement and tunnelling). What might otherwise take a supercomputer a millennium can thereby be calculated within hours.<sup>7</sup> Instead of being limited by a fixed 0 or 1, both states can be held simultaneously, as a probability. But the point remains: all such properties reside in nature.

## One-sided left

So nothing can be more mistaken than treating humanity as if it exists outside nature, or that it can ignore nature. Of course, as regular readers of this paper will know, there are many on the left who do exactly that.

For years, for decades, *Socialist Worker* carried this ‘What we stand for’ formulation (or something very like it): “Workers create all the wealth under capitalism. A new society can only be constructed when they collectively seize control of that wealth and plan its production and distribution according to need” (proposition one). Adopted in the mid-1970s, the SWP wanted to display its militant workerism.

And, no surprise, the Socialist Workers Party’s dozen or two imitators and clones - organised in the International Socialist Tendency - loyally, crassly, present their own

version of a formulation that grants labour almost supernatural powers.

Five examples:

1. In the United States the now liquidated International Socialist Organization: “Workers create society’s wealth, but have no control over its production and distribution. A socialist society can only be built when workers collectively take control of that wealth and democratically plan its production and distribution, according to present and future human needs instead of profit.”<sup>8</sup>
2. Its diminutive IST rump, Marx 21, likewise declares: “We believe that workers create all the wealth under capitalism, which is a system run by a tiny, wealthy elite. A new society can only be constructed when we, the workers, collectively seize control of that wealth and plan production and distribution according to human need.”<sup>9</sup>
3. Up north, in Canada, the International Socialists have: “Capitalist monopolies control the Earth’s resources, but workers everywhere actually create the wealth.”<sup>10</sup>
4. Down under, in Australia, there is Solidarity: “Although workers create society’s wealth, they have no control over production or distribution.”<sup>11</sup>
5. Then, finally, in terms of our brief IST survey, we have Workers’ Democracy in Poland (formerly Socialist Solidarity). In line with the others, we are told: “While workers create social wealth, they have no control over the production and distribution of goods. In pursuit of increasing profits, global capitalism, cultivated by corporations backed by the power of the strongest and richest countries in the world, leads to a progressive stratification of income.”<sup>12</sup>

There are leftwing intellectuals too. Call to the stand Tithi Bhattacharya, history professor at Purdue university in the US. She takes it for granted that “labour produces all wealth in society”. Bhattacharya freely admits the debt she owes to former SWP leader Chris Harman.<sup>13</sup> There are others besides. Maurizio Lazzarato coined the term, “immaterial labour”,

and claimed that it has created a new wealth-making paradigm for capitalism (essentially ignoring the role of nature).<sup>14</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri likewise centred immaterial labour, when it comes to wealth-making. They were thinking of computer coding, information and image processing, downloading films, etc (forgetting about the banks of interlinked computers, huge inputs of power and water needed to run datacentres).<sup>15</sup>

When it comes to the SWP itself, one can safely presume that our repeated polemics eventually had their effect, albeit never acknowledged. A few years ago, in 2024, there was a forced tweak. ‘What we fight for’ now reads: “Under capitalism workers’ labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.” A rephrasing that conspicuously still leaves nature out of the picture.

It is not just the workerist tradition. The World Socialist Web Site almost treats discounting nature as a sectarian badge of honour. It flaunts contempt for the petty bourgeois greens and so-called climate doomsters. Hence we read: “working people, through their labour, create all the wealth of society”. And, again, it is: “bus and tram drivers, factory workers, teachers, postal workers and all other sections of the working class who create all the wealth”.<sup>16</sup> The Northite WWSW (otherwise known as the Socialist Equality Party) is, of course, rooted in the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Gerry Healy tradition.

There is also the Grantite tradition. Having swapped the Clause 4 socialism of Militant Tendency and Socialist Appeal for the infantile leftism of the Revolutionary Communist Party, we read this *unexpected* line: “Workers create all the wealth, but the capitalists own the means of production”.<sup>17</sup> Why unexpected? Well simply because of *Reason in revolt*, the 1995 book written jointly by Alan Woods and Ted Grant.<sup>18</sup> My guess, however, is that, while members are press-ganged into buying this 448-page study of Marxism and the “most important scientific discoveries of the 20th century”, it usually goes completely unread.

That would appear to be the case. After all, from the same tradition, there is the Nick Wrack-Edmund Potts draft programme: “The working class does all the work. It produces all the goods and provides all the services” (clause 17). The same claim is repeated: “The working class ... is the class that produces everything and delivers all the services we rely on” (clause 56). And again: “Nothing is produced or delivered without the working class doing it” (clause 57).<sup>19</sup> Comrade Wrack, it should be pointed out, was appointed editor of *Militant* in 1994 (he resigned in 1996 shortly before the special conference of Militant Labour voted to change its name to Socialist Party in England and Wales<sup>20</sup>).

## ABCs of Marxism

Admittedly, for those unacquainted with the ABCs of Marxism, the formulations cited above might appear perfectly acceptable. They are superficially anti-capitalist and apparently militantly pro-worker. But there are three standout problems.

Firstly, all such statements are

simply wrong. Workers do not create all wealth under capitalism. Secondly, even if workers create all wealth, it hardly follows that a socialist system ought to be established as a result. Thirdly, claims that workers create all wealth still treat them as wage-slaves, organised together in workplaces and supplied with raw materials and instruments of labour by the capitalist class, not feeling, thinking, emotional human beings with their own interests, accumulated experiences and collective ambitions. The capitalist class, not the working class, thereby becomes the *real* wealth makers.

So, let us discuss wealth. To do that we have to go back to basics. Every reader will be familiar with Marx’s M-C-M’ formula: M standing for ‘money’, C for ‘commodity’, and the vital’ for the extra, the surplus, the profit made at the end of each circuit. However, in the embryonic form of mercantile capitalism, the secret of making something out of nothing is *not to be found* in workers and their labour: no, it is to be found in the existence of distinct ‘world economies’. A ‘world economy’ being an economically autonomous geographical zone, whose internal links give it “a certain organic unity” (Fernand Braudel).<sup>21</sup>

The merchants’ ships, wagons and pack animals join and exploit each separate ‘world economy’. Eg, Muslim Arab traders bought cheap in India and China and sold dear to Christendom (Byzantium and the feudal kingdoms, principalities and city-states of Europe). Merchants parasitically acted as intermediaries between such spaces. Mark-ups on spices, silks and ceramics were fabulous - way beyond the cost of transport. There were no socially determining capitalist relations of production. Unequal exchange was the key to the merchant’s wealth and capital accumulation.

Under fully mature capitalism, surplus value derives, yes, from the surplus labour performed by workers during the process of production. Hence this (extended) formula for the circuit of money: M-C ... P ... C'-M'.

Through repeated enclosure acts, state terrorism and relentless market competition, the direct producers are separated from the means of production. Peasants and petty artisans fall into the ranks of the proletariat and have to present themselves daily, weekly, monthly for hire. It is that or destitution, hunger and eventual starvation.

Yet on average, we can assume, for the sake of the argument, that capital purchases labour-power at its proper market price. As sellers of that commodity - labour-power - workers receive back its full value. Again on average; again for the sake of the argument. Wages then buy the means of subsistence necessary for the production and reproduction of the worker as a wage-slave. So everything appears fair and square. However, as a human being the worker is robbed, their living labour not only pays for itself, it generates surplus-value (realised as profit).

Capital is a vampiric entity. It has no concern for the worker except as an object of exploitation. Capital, as accumulated dead labour, is solely interested in engorging itself by sucking the life-energy out of the worker. Capital, as accumulated dead labour, would compel the worker to work for 24 hours a day and seven days a week, if such a feat were physically possible.

Nor has capital, again as accumulated dead labour, any concern for the commodity created by the combination of labour-power, raw materials and instruments of labour - brought together under its auspices. The resulting commodity could be of the highest possible quality or complete rubbish. But, as long

as it sells, and sells at a profit, that is what counts. Hence, for capital, wealth comes in the form of value, surplus value and, above all, self-expanding money. In other words, exchange value.

Of course, for capitalists, *as individuals*, wealth also comes in the form of use values. Despite the myths of Max Weber and the so-called Protestant work ethic, no-one should imagine them living an ascetic, self-denying existence.<sup>22</sup> Especially given this - the second gilded age - they have never had it so good.

The super-rich indulge themselves ... and often to extraordinary excess. Private islands, premier football clubs, instantly recognisable art works, superyachts, rocketing off into near space and flitting from one palatial residence to another.<sup>23</sup> Even philanthropy and charity-mongering is a form of extravagant consumption, by which the elite feed their already grossly overinflated egos (that and diverting attention away from the grubby side of their businesses). Think Bill Gates, George Soros, Warren Buffett and Michael Bloomberg.<sup>24</sup>

When it comes to more commonplace CEOs, they consider corporate jets, chauffeur-driven cars, English butlers, Filipino maids, Savile Row suits, vintage wines, trophy wives and the right to grope female employees as perks of the job (yes, most are male, sociopathic and aggressively self-entitled<sup>25</sup>). Meantime, nearly half the world’s population live on less than \$6.85 per person, per day<sup>26</sup> and a third have no access to safe drinking water.<sup>27</sup>

Either way, while for capital wealth is self-expanding money or value, for the human being wealth is use value - what fulfils some desire, what gives pleasure, what is useful. Because use value so obviously relies on subjective judgement, Marx quite correctly gave the widest possible definition. Whether needs arise from the “stomach or from fancy” makes no difference.<sup>28</sup>

Use value is therefore not just about physical needs: it encompasses the imagination too. Indeed, a use value may be purely imaginary. Its essence is to be found in the human being rather than the “goods and services” themselves. The consumer determines use value (ie, utility).

## Consumption

Obviously use values are bought on the market for money and come in the form of commodities produced through a capitalist process, based on the exploitation of labour. However, capital not only has an interest, a drive, to exploit labour and maximise surplus labour: in pursuit of profit, capital also seeks to maximise sales and therefore to expand consumption.

Capitalists, in what Marx called ‘department I’, sell raw materials and the instruments of labour to other capitalists: steel, electricity, machine tools, computer chips, etc. Capitalists in department II sell the means of consumption to other capitalists ... and to workers too (food, clothing, housing, drink, package holidays, TV subscriptions, smartphones, music concerts, etc). While the individual capitalist, the particular capital, attempts to minimise the wages of the workers they employ, capital as many capitals, capital as a system, pushes and promotes all manner of novel wants and artificial needs.

Hence celebrity endorsements, influencers and the huge advertising sector, which works day and night to transform the “luxury goods of the aristocracy into the necessities of everyday life”.<sup>29</sup> That and the class struggle, conducted by workers themselves, combine to constantly overcome the barrier represented by the limited purchasing power of the working class. Part of what the working class produces is therefore sold back to the working

class ... and historically on an ever-increasing scale.

That way, workers manage to partially develop themselves as human beings. Not that their needs are ever fully met. There is a steady stream of the latest must-haves. Capital, capital accumulation and the lifestyles of the rich list always run far ahead. The lot of the working class therefore remains one of relative impoverishment and “chronic dissatisfaction” (Thorstein Veblen).<sup>30</sup>

Workers and capitalists alike consume use values that come in the form of commodities from the sphere of capitalist relations of production and the exploitation of wage labour (there are, though we shall not explore it here, non-commodity use values, such as domestic labour - cleaning, cooking, looking after the kids, maintaining the car, putting up shelves, decorating, etc).

Doubtless, once again workers and capitalists alike also consume some commodities that, directly or indirectly, come from small-scale enterprises. Family farms, local restaurants, micro-breweries, self-employed plumbers, electricians, new-age healers and taxi drivers, partnerships of accountants, solicitors and doctors, etc - all produce use values (ie, wealth) and aim at the end of each financial year to realise a profit. With that in mind - and there are millions of such businesses in Britain alone<sup>31</sup> - it is surely an elementary error to baldly state that “workers’ labour creates all profit” or that the “working class ... is the class that produces everything and delivers all the services we rely on”.

In theoretical terms, forgetting, passing over, the middle classes is a mote - a mere speck of dust in the eye. There exists the beam, however.

## First paragraph

In his *Critique of the Gotha programme* (1875) Marx is quite explicit: “Labour is not the source of all wealth.”<sup>32</sup> There is nature too. Marx writes here against the first paragraph of the draft programme of what was to become the German Social Democratic Party. It has a strangely familiar ring: “Labour is the source of all wealth and culture and, since useful labour is possible only in society and through society, the proceeds of labour belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society.” A ghostly anticipation of the SWP, IST, RCP, WSWs, etc.

Some necessary background. The Gotha unity congress in 1875 represented an *unprincipled* unification, joining together Lassallean state socialists and the Eisenachers - the followers of Marx, led by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht. Marx supported unity, but not unity which involved weakening the programme. Note, the Lassalleans, not least because of their dictatorial internal regime, were in steep decline: their trade unions broke away and various splits joined the Eisenachers.

However, the Eisenachers did make unwarranted programmatic concessions: eg, “producer associations assisted by the state” ... Not in itself a disaster, but the central role accorded to the state and state aid nostrums left the door ajar for a “Bonapartist state-socialist workers’ party” (Engels).<sup>33</sup>

It should be added that Marx was probably keen to write his *Critique*, not least due to Mikhail Bakunin, his greatest rival in the First International. In his *Statism and anarchy* (1873) the founder of modern anarchism portrayed Marx as a German nationalist and an “authoritarian” worshipper of state power. Marx would have been eager to guard his reputation by putting the record straight. Not only that: Marx was said to have been responsible for the programme and every step taken by the Eisenachers since day one.

Eg, “The supreme objective of all his efforts, as is proclaimed to us by the fundamental statutes of his party in Germany, is the establishment of the great People’s State (*Volksstaat*)”.<sup>34</sup>

As a canny political fighter Marx chose to point the finger of blame at Ferdinand Lassalle, when it came to the “fundamental statutes of his party in Germany”. Lassalle was the real German nationalist and worshipper of state power.<sup>35</sup> No less to the point, Lassalle took his lead on political economy from one Johann Karl Rodbertus, who was in turn influenced by the seminal writings of Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

Together Smith and Ricardo helped shift the emphasis in economic thought away from the Physiocrats and their belief that the ‘bounty of nature’ was the true source of all wealth: agriculture yields more output than the seeds and labour put into it. Industry and trade are ‘sterile’, they merely shuffle things around. The Physiocrats championed large-scale *capitalist* landed property. Instead, Smith and Ricardo developed a labour theory of value which naturalised the market and therefore the exploitation of workers.<sup>36</sup> Smith and Ricardo were, in effect, the ideologues of the merchant manufacturers and industrial capitalists of their day. Either way, Lassalle took it as axiomatic that labour was the sole source of wealth.

Marx could, therefore, with a good conscience credit Lassalle with being the spiritual father of the draft *Gotha programme*, including the above-quoted first paragraph. True, Lassalle had been in his grave for nearly a decade, killed in a silly duel over a love affair. It has to be admitted, moreover, that Marx’s own leading pupils - August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht - were quite capable of making such howlers in their own right.

No help, no prompting from Lassalle’s doctrinaire successors was needed. But, by blaming Lassalle, Marx was able to give his comrades an escape route - a route which, if taken, would simultaneously save their blushes and draw a clear line of demarcation against Lassallean state socialism. Sad to say, at first, Marx went largely unheeded: “Labour is the source of all wealth”, “all other classes” are a reactionary bloc, the “iron law of wages” and other such Lassallean shibboleths remained intact.<sup>37</sup> Especially for Liebknecht, unity is what really counted.

Not that the SWP’s first and second generation of leaders - Tony Cliff, Duncan Hallas, Chris Harman, John Rees, Lindsey German and Martin Smith - were cribbing from Lassalle ... or, for that matter, Johann Karl Rodbertus (an ethical critic of capitalist exploitation). That much is obvious. No, we have a clear case of historical reflex, opportunism recurring, economism spontaneously regenerating - as it inevitably does, given the material conditions of capitalism and the oppressed position of the working class.

Economism needs defining at this point - that is, if we are going to have an informed discussion. Economism is, in essence, a bourgeois-influenced outlook, which restricts, narrows down the horizons of the working class to mere trade unionism ... that or, more commonly, it simply denies or belittles the role of high politics and democracy in the struggle for socialism. Sadly, the SWP, IST, WSWs and RCP are typical.

Economism is the dominant outlook of the contemporary left. Not, of course, that economism denies politics altogether. The problem is that, when the economic left takes up politics, it is not the politics of the working class - ie, orthodox Marxism - no, instead it is the politics of other classes and other ideological trends: left social democracy, pacifism, feminism, black

separatism, petty nationalism, identity politics, intersectionalism, greenism, etc. Hence the SWP’s execrable popular fronts, not least, in the context of this article, the Campaign Against Climate Change - founded in 2001 as an attempt to jump on the green bandwagon.

Politically CACC is safe, soggy and quite frankly monumentally stupid. Capitalism, socialism, the working class - all go unmentioned. Sacrificed in the name of broadness. Then there is the CACC name itself. ‘Climate’ and ‘change’ go together like ‘weather’ and ‘change’. The two are inseparable. The weather changes from hour to hour, day to day and month to month. Imagine a ‘Campaign Against Weather Change’. It would be absurd.

Climate is big weather. Karen Bice gives the following definition: climate “is simply weather ‘averaged’ over a time period of one year or more”.<sup>38</sup> In other words, there is nothing fixed about the climate. Climate change has never ceased, is ongoing and must therefore be considered inevitable. Notions of a static, an unchanging climate, are, therefore, to put it mildly, misconceived.

Anyway, according to its ‘mission statement’, the CACC exists to “influence those with the greatest power” to “minimise” the “harmful effects of climate change” with the “utmost speed and resolution”. Flattering courtiers similarly pleaded to Canute, the 11th century king of Norway, Denmark and England, to reverse the incoming tide. Needless to say, as he famously showed (purportedly on Thorney Island), no-one, not even he, could pull off such a feat. Nor, despite CACC ‘street demonstrations’ and avoidance of “detailed questions” in the attempt to “bring together as many people as possible”, can we really expect “those with the greatest power” to agree an “international climate treaty” that will actually “minimise” the “harmful effects of climate change”.<sup>39</sup>

Well, admittedly, since that CACC ‘mission statement’ was first written, an “international climate treaty” has been agreed. With much fanfare, the Cop21 Paris agreement was adopted on December 12 2015. Signed on April 22 2016 by 195 parties, it supposedly became effective on November 4 2016. But will this international climate treaty really “minimise” the “harmful effects of climate change”? Hardly: CO2 emissions continue to rise.<sup>40</sup>

Surely then, to “minimise” those “harmful effects” our sights must be set far higher than “street demonstrations” (or the stunts of Greenpeace, Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion). We must talk about capitalism. We must talk about socialism. We must talk about organising the working class into the ruling class. The CACC ‘mission statement’ needs more than a long-overdue update. No, an entirely different kind of politics is needed.<sup>41</sup>

## Dialectics

There are those who give discounting nature a seemingly sophisticated philosophical justification by taking their cue from the young Georg Lukács. Interestingly, not John Rees - a self-declared admirer of Lukács, especially his writings on method, the party, class and class consciousness.<sup>42</sup> In *History and class consciousness* Lukács admonished Engels because - following Hegel - he “extended” the dialectic into nature, instead of confining it to historical change, thought and the interaction of human subject and object.<sup>43</sup> As if nature does not obey the same three “most general” dialectical laws as history, thought and society, namely:

1. The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa.
2. The law of the interpenetration of opposites.

3. The law of the negation of the negation.<sup>44</sup>

To suggest otherwise is surely to deviate in the direction of idealism.<sup>45</sup>

Nonetheless, the anti-Engels theme was enthusiastically taken up by the Frankfurt school, then in the 1960s by the New Left and finally by the Eurocommunists. Engels was blamed for the Second International's 'passive evolutionism', Stalin's diamat, even the horrors of the 1930s purges - the original sin being located in *Anti-Dühring* and the *Dialectics of nature*.

As an opening gambit, the 'crude' Engels was cleaved away from his life-long friend, collaborator and co-thinker, Marx. A travesty still peddled on the academic left: eg, Kohei Saito (an unashamed advocate of popular frontism).<sup>46</sup> In the main, however, this disparate trend has given up on all Marxist, socialist and progressive pretensions. Mainly as atomised individuals, they have clutched at mainstream liberalism - that or outright reaction and despairing obscurantism.

Primary source

Back to the historical Karl Marx. In 1875, he savaged the "hollow phrases" in the draft *Gotha programme* about "useful labour" and all members of society having an "equal right" to society's wealth. There is useless labour - labour that fails to produce the intended result. People are not equal, etc, etc.

More to the point, at least when it comes to our main concern here, there is nature. Marx wrote this: "Nature is just as much the source of wealth, of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour-power." Marx goes on to explain that, "insofar as man from the outset behaves towards nature" - what he calls the "primary source of all instruments and objects of labour" - as an "owner, treats her as belonging to him, his labour becomes the source of use values, therefore also of wealth."

A penetrating critique of anthropocentric delusions. Certainly, socialism, the first phase of communism, does not raise the working class to the position where it exercises 'ownership' over the planet and its natural resources. Such a suggestion merely mimics the fallacies associated with capitalism - as witnessed under bureaucratic socialism - and brings nature's revenge: declining soil productivity, desertification, climate shifts, etc. Humanity can only aspire to be the *custodian* of nature.

The same nature-labour formula occurs again and again in Marx's writings. Eg, in *Capital*, Marx approvingly quotes William Petty: "Labour is its father and the Earth its mother."<sup>47</sup> Leave aside the gendered language - which I find deeply unproblematic, given the primacy rightly given to the female sex and in turn nature - what must be grasped is the two-sided source of wealth. Sunshine and water, air and soil, plants and animals - all are 'gifts from nature'.

Yes, human beings too are part of nature and, just like every other living thing, rely on nature in order to

survive. However, humanity applies itself to nature, although in the process of production we often rely on the direct actions of nature. Eg, though a natural product, wheat is selected, sown and harvested by labour; yet as the Physiocrats endlessly repeated, it germinates in the soil, grows and duly ripens without human agency. Nature's gifts of rain and sunshine are all that is needed.

So the two forms of wealth conjoin. Yet, despite that, for the laws of capital, what gives the wheat value is not what is supplied by nature. That has use value, but not value. Value derives from the application of labour-power alone.

There is another - a spiritual, or artistic - dimension to the use value of nature that should never be underestimated:

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society, where none intrudes,  
By the deep sea, and music in its roar:  
I love not man the less, but Nature more.  
(George Gordon, Lord Byron *Childe Harold's pilgrimage* - 1812)

While I cannot possibly hope to reach such poetic heights, I too get pleasure, even rapture from a love of nature. Sunday morning outings to Ashridge Forest with mum, dad, sister and slightly crazy pet dog, holidays in the Scottish highlands, lone treks in the mid-winter Lake District and touring the Malabar coast in south-western India.

Just looking out over London from my bedroom window each morning and seeing the sunrise, the bright blue sky, the gathering storm clouds, even the drab grey and mists, inspires. Walking on Hampstead Heath, picking blackberries, running into the occasional urban fox, following the nesting swans and the progress of their cygnets, the cormorants drying outstretched wings, the swirling, whirling, ever-changing patterns of migrating starlings, the lime-green flash of squawking parakeets, the evening caa-caaing of gathering crows and rooks - all that brings me joy. Turning from my computer to admire the sunset, as I work in my office, profoundly humbles me too. In the big scheme of things I'm insignificant, I'm transient, I'm just a little bit of nature.

Sorry are those who do not feel such emotions. They are impoverished. So, surely, wealth cannot be limited to the products of human activity alone. Wealth must include every form of consumption, which produces human beings in one respect or another.

Michael Lebowitz rightly considers this of particular significance: "Marx's identification of nature as a source of wealth is critical in identifying a concept of wealth that goes beyond capital's perspective."<sup>48</sup> Capital, as we have argued, has but one interest - vampiric self-expansion. Capital has no intrinsic concern either for the worker ... or nature. And, especially over the last 150 years, and increasingly so, capitalist exploitation

of nature has resulted in destruction on a huge scale. Countless species of flora and fauna have already been driven to extinction. Instead of cherishing nature, there is greed, plunder and wanton disregard.

The working class presents the only viable alternative to the destructive reproduction of capital. First, as a countervailing force within capitalism - one which has its own logic, pulling against that of capital. The political economy of the working class brings with it not only higher wages and shorter hours: it is also responsible for health services, social security systems, pensions, universal primary and secondary education ... and measures that democratise access to the countryside (eg, the right to roam that came out of the 1932 mass trespass movement and Kinder Scout). Wealth, for the working class, is not merely about the consumption of an ever greater range of commodities. Besides being of capitalism, the working class is uniquely *opposed* to capitalism.

We have made the argument before and it is worth making again. The political economy of the working class more than challenges capital: it points *beyond* capital, not only in terms of its perspective, but to the total reorganisation of society and, with that, the ending of humanity's damaged, brutalised, self-defeating relationship with nature.

Marx was amongst the first to theorise human dependence on nature and the fact that humanity and nature coevolve. He warned, however, that the capitalist process of production is also a "process of destruction", because it "tears asunder ... disturbs the circulation of matter between man and the soil ... therefore violates the conditions necessary for lasting fertility".<sup>49</sup>

The "enormous waste" under capitalism outraged Marx. The by-products of industry, agriculture and human consumption are dumped on nature in the form of landfill sites, sewage releases, soot particles, greenhouse gases, microplastics, mercury, lead and chemical pollution. *Capital* volume three contains a section entitled 'Utilisation of the excretions of production'. Here Marx outlines his commitment to the scientific "reduction" and "re-employment" of waste.<sup>50</sup>

John Bellamy Foster - basing himself solidly on Marx's considerable writings on ecology - highlights the "metabolic rift" between nature and the human part of nature brought about by post-1850 capitalism.<sup>51</sup> A system which produces for the sake of production, which accumulates for the sake of accumulation, which crowds vast numbers into soulless, crime-ridden concrete jungles and simultaneously denudes nature through deforestation, cattle ranching, ever bigger farms, monocrops and, as passionately exposed by Rachel Carson back in the early 1960s, metes out chemical death to "birds, mammals, fishes, and indeed practically every form of wildlife".<sup>52</sup>

The Marx-Engels team wanted to re-establish an intimate connection between town and country, agriculture and industry, and rationally redistribute the population. In short, they wanted to heal the "metabolic rift" between nature and the human part of nature.

Short-termism

Doubtless, while this goal is today a matter of extreme urgency, not least given the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and its "code red" warning about the world approaching a tipping point - it is hard to imagine the capitalist class, with its endemic short-termism and manic fixation on profits, willingly going along with the far-reaching measures that are needed to avert ecobarbarism. Under the conditions of socialism and working class rule, where the law of the plan

has replaced the law of value, that would surely be another matter.

Our aim should be not only to put a stop to destruction and preserve what remains. Of course, the great rain forests of Congo, Indonesia, Peru, Colombia and Brazil must be safeguarded. So too the much depleted life in the oceans and seas. However, more can be done. The riches of nature should be restored and, where possible, enhanced. Grouse moors and upland sheep farming are obvious prime targets for rewilding in a Britain with its "deeply concerning" low levels of biodiversity (Natural History Museum report).<sup>53</sup> Wolves should, once again, sing in a green and pleasant land.

But we can think really big. Mesopotamia - now dry and dusty - can be remade into the lush habitat it was in pre-Sumerian times. The Sahara in Africa and Rajputana in India were home to a wonderful variety of fauna and flora only 5,000 years ago. The now parched interior of Australia too. With sufficient resources and careful management they can bloom once again.

The aim of such projects would be restoration, not maximising production and churning out an endless flood of commodities. Hardly the Marxist vision of abundance. On the contrary, the communist social order has every reason to rationally economise and minimise all necessary inputs ●

Notes

1. A beginning shamelessly adapted from Leo Tolstoy's famous opening line in *Anna Karenina*; that and expanding upon Marx's logic in *Capital*. See K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, Moscow 1970, p578. Note that the term, 'interaction', is deliberately chosen over the usual formulation of 'exchange', when it comes to nature. Our impact on the rest of nature has tended to be decidedly negative - not only, but especially with the post-1850 epoch of global industry and global agriculture.  
2. [actuarious.org.uk/media-release/current-climate-policies-risk-catastrophic-societal-and-economic-impacts](https://actuarious.org.uk/media-release/current-climate-policies-risk-catastrophic-societal-and-economic-impacts).  
3. B McGuire *The fate of the world: a history of the climate crisis* Manchester 2026, pi.  
4. For anyone who might be tempted to dismiss including the cosmos here as overreach, consider, for one moment, the fate of the dinosaurs. Some 65 million years ago an asteroid of about the size of mount Everest slammed into what is now the Gulf of Mexico and produced an explosion equivalent to a billion Hiroshima-sized nuclear bombs. Besides the immediate impact with its resulting earthquakes, 100-metre-high tsunami and global wildfires, the estimated 325 billion tons of CO2, SO2 and H2O debris, which plumed up into the stratosphere, produced a prolonged 'nuclear winter'. With even photosynthesis severely impaired, 100% of the non-avian dinosaurs went extinct, along with around 50% of all other land and marine flora and fauna (see [science.nasa.gov/earth/deep-impact-and-the-mass-extinction-of-species-65-million-years-ago](https://science.nasa.gov/earth/deep-impact-and-the-mass-extinction-of-species-65-million-years-ago)).  
5. [spaceplace.nasa.gov/sun-heat/en](https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/sun-heat/en).  
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16. [www.wsws.org/en/articles/2009/03/aigg-m19.html](https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2009/03/aigg-m19.html) and [www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/12/19/ddqe-d19.html](https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/12/19/ddqe-d19.html).  
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18. Here we find it explicitly stated: "Labour is, together with nature, the source of all wealth" (A Woods and T Grant *Reason in revolt: Marxist philosophy and modern science* London 2012, p329).  
19. Quoted in J Conrad 'Nature's goods and services' *Weekly Worker* July 24 2025.  
20. For Nick Wrack's letter of resignation as editor of *Militant* in May 1996, see 'Climate of mistrust' *Weekly Worker* June 26 1997.  
21. F Braudel *Civilization and capitalism* Vol 3, Berkeley CA 1992, p22.  
22. This is what Max Weber says about

capitalists: "He avoids ostentation and unnecessary expenditure, as well as the conscious enjoyment of his power, and is embarrassed by the outward signs of the social recognition which he receives ... His manner of life is, in other words, often of a certain ascetic tendency ... He gets nothing out of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of having done his job well" (*The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* London 2002 p21).  
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27. [www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/1-in-3-people-globally-do-not-have-access-to-safe-drinking-water-unicef-who](https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/1-in-3-people-globally-do-not-have-access-to-safe-drinking-water-unicef-who).  
28. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, Moscow 1970, p35.  
29. See G Reith *Addictive consumption: capitalism, modernity and excess* London 2018.  
30. T Veblen *The theory of the leisure class* Mineola NY 1994, p20.  
31. In 2024 there were 5.45 million businesses employing between 0 and 49 employees - see [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2024/business-population-estimates-for-the-uk-and-regions-2024-statistical-release](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2024/business-population-estimates-for-the-uk-and-regions-2024-statistical-release).  
32. K Marx and F Engels *MECW* Vol 24, London 1989, p81.  
33. K Marx and F Engels *MECW* Vol 26, London 1990, p500.  
34. [dwardmac.pitzer.edu/bakunin/marxfree.html](https://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/bakunin/marxfree.html).  
35. Lassalle secretly offered to do a deal with Otto von Bismarck. That way, said Engels, the Bismarck state would have gotten its "own bodyguard proletariat to keep the political activity of the bourgeoisie in check" - see K Marx and F Engels *MECW* Vol 24, London 1988, p364.  
36. Not that Smith and Ricardo stood in isolation. Far from it. The French philosopher, Count Destutt de Tracy, explicitly wrote in 1817 that "labour is the source of all wealth" ... "Whence do these idle men derive their revenues? Is it not from the rent paid to them out of the profits of those who employ their capitals - that is to say of those who with their own funds hire labour which produces more than it costs - in a word the industrious men? To these then we must always remount, in order to find the source of all wealth. It is they who really nourish the hiring whom even the others employ" (A Destutt de Tracy *A treatise on political economy* Auburn AL 2009, p165). Translated and first published in America by his friend, Thomas Jefferson, in 1817.  
37. [history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/111gotha.html](https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/111gotha.html).  
38. [web.archive.org/web/20070621060432/www.beloit.edu/~SEPM/Earth\\_Works/Plate\\_Movements.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20070621060432/www.beloit.edu/~SEPM/Earth_Works/Plate_Movements.html).  
39. [www.campaigncc.org/aboutus/misionstatement](https://www.campaigncc.org/aboutus/misionstatement).  
40. [oilprice.com/The-Environment/Global-Warming/Carbon-Emissions-OnTrack-To-Reach-An-All-Time-High.html](https://oilprice.com/The-Environment/Global-Warming/Carbon-Emissions-OnTrack-To-Reach-An-All-Time-High.html).  
41. For my critique of CACC see *The little red climate book* London 2023, pp9-10.  
42. John Rees provides a defence and what he sees as a corrective for Lukács by arguing for two different, separate dialectics - one for society, the other for nature. He goes on: "the natural realm is a persistent element in human history, that human beings will remain partly subject to its laws, and that it is, therefore, inadmissible to compartmentalise the dialectic in the way that, by a sin of omission, Lukács did" (*The algebra of revolution: the dialectic and the classical Marxist tradition* London 1998, p252). "[P]artly subject to its laws"! No, comrade Rees, we humans can exploit, take advantage of nature's laws, but we can never escape them. Eg, astronauts can escape Earth's gravitational pull and float about in their capsules. But to get to the moon they rely on Earth's gravity as a slingshot. In other words, they remain entirely subject to nature's laws.  
43. G Lukács *History and class consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics* London 1968, p24n6.  
44. F Engels *MECW* Vol 25, London 1987, p356.  
45. Although the question of the dialectics of nature did not directly feature, Gregory Zinoviev famously denounced Lukács in his political report to the 5th Congress of Comintern on June 26 1924: he branded him a "professional revisionist" ([archivo-obero.com/protokoll-des-funfter-kongress-der-kommunistischen-internationale-1924](https://archivo-obero.com/protokoll-des-funfter-kongress-der-kommunistischen-internationale-1924)).  
46. See K Saito *Marx in the Anthropocene: towards the idea of degrowth communism* Cambridge 2022.  
47. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, Moscow 1970, p43.  
48. M Lebowitz *Beyond Capital* Basingstoke 2003, pp130-31.  
49. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, Moscow 1970, pp505-06.  
50. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, Moscow 1971, p101.  
51. JB Foster *Marx's ecology: materialism and nature* New York NY 2000, piv.  
52. R Carson *Silent spring* Harmondsworth 1991, p87.  
53. [www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/services/data/biodiversity-intactness-index.html](https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/services/data/biodiversity-intactness-index.html).

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## INTERNET

# New age of security chaos

PHP2Shell is the latest of many disastrous security vulnerabilities. Their discovery and exploitation are easier than ever in the age of AI. Buckle up, advises **Paul Demarty**

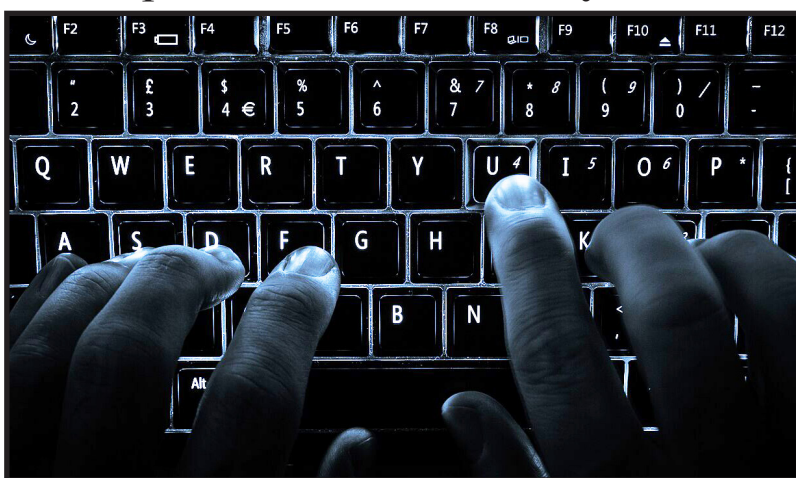
**O**n October 23, the government blithely advised the British population that they should have three days' worth of drinking water and canned foods on hand, in case of emergency. "Unexpected events," said smiley Andy Burnham, "seem to be becoming more common." (Keep calm, and carry on panicking.)

This is widely interpreted as part of the overall political offensive in favour of rearmament in the face of the supposed Russian threat, and has therefore been widely ridiculed by this country's anti-imperialists. Yet in a certain respect, we must regretfully accept that it is not terrible advice. The government mentioned climate as a possible cause of the "unexpected", and indeed Britain has been battered by two fierce Atlantic storms in quick succession.

It also mentioned technological problems, and here the timing was even more ominous. Two days before, it was revealed that two critical security flaws in the PHP programming language had been fixed. The world's IT people - among them your humble correspondent - were suddenly in a rush to apply them. Details remain fuzzy about exactly *how* these flaws could be exploited - only that it was now certain that they could be. The extent of the coordinated push to get the fixes out - from the PHP maintainers themselves to cloud providers and others - strongly suggests that this is a very serious matter.

### Bad design

PHP is a stupendously popular programming language. It is the basis for several web development platforms - most notably WordPress, which started out as a blog-maker in the late 1990s, but is now by far the most common construction set for websites across the world. This attack surface is very concerning, and many



Non-state hackers

government and corporate websites were taken offline while the fix was applied.

Programming languages in the end are themselves programs - you feed them source code as input, and they give you back instructions executable by an actual computer as output. (Computers cannot inherently understand human-written code - they understand machine code, which consists entirely of numbers, some of which represent data, like a web page or a Word document, and some of which represent the small number of basic operations, addition and so forth, that a computer processor can actually do.) Programs can always have bugs.

Unfortunately, given its popularity, PHP is well known among programmers, IT and information security people as a catastrophically poorly designed piece of software. Much of this poor design is vexatious, but basically harmless. It is extremely inconsistent. A program will blow up in your face, even if there should be a way to handle the problem; it will, alternatively, motor on and produce idiotic output when really it should blow up. More sophisticated

programming concepts have been spliced in over the years, to the point that it now resembles nothing so much as a huge philosophical teratoma. Writing it is torture to the seasoned professional, but superficially easy to the clueless beginner. (Fortunately, over the years, the far superior Python programming language has supplanted it as the typical language of coding education.)

### Scandals

The security flaws in PHP, however, are not so benign. In the earlier days of the language, from roughly 1993 to 2010, PHP was routinely the centre of cybersecurity scandals. Perfectly reasonably written websites would be found, all of a sudden, to allow attackers to take over their servers with trivial scripts, because of design decisions by the language maintainers that, to any industry professional - or so you would have thought! - were *prima facie* insane. (Much of the insane stuff is still in there, for backwards compatibility reasons, though later versions of the language have been generally more robust.)<sup>1</sup>

So it was that we all, as an industry, woke up to the news on October 21 - half with a nostalgic chuckle for the good old days, half with PTSD flashbacks. Some of the story, indeed, is good old-fashioned PHP insanity. The parts of the code that were patched had been identified as potentially vulnerable some years ago; but the maintainers could not agree on how to fix them, and with no actual proof-of-concept exploit, they felt no urgency. Perhaps they should have done, since these were memory-safety problems, which - sparing the technical details - are among the most serious vulnerabilities, if exploited.

The bigger story, however, is how the exploits were apparently identified a couple of months ago: by security researchers using AI coding agents. The use of large language models (LLMs) for code generation is now widespread, and rightly so: programming is a generally more pleasant and less frustrating activity with LLMs, even taking into account their occasional flights of fancy. If you want to find an exploit for a vulnerability - I should say that both the reported exploits originated from legitimate security researchers and not 'black-hat' hackers, for which we should all be grateful - throwing agents in the general direction of a known weak point is a good way to do it.

But, as I argued with respect to the recent FBI hack incident,<sup>2</sup> there is no *technical* difference between finding an exploit in order to harden a system and finding one in order to compromise it. The available technologies are equally capable in either case. It is unusual, by my

reckoning, for exact details of the exploits to be withheld for quite this long; but surely uppermost in the minds of the responsible parties is the problem that, as soon as this is revealed, an onslaught on much of the known web will be unleashed.

In the old days, when a vulnerability was discovered, a hacker at least had to build her own botnet and write her own scripts (or at least *some* hacker had to write them, to be copied by others). The level of technical knowledge required to make mischief, in the age of Claude, is very minimal. Tell Claude to read about the vulnerability; tell it to write a script, in whatever massaged way is required to get around the feeble safeguards: Bob's your uncle and Fanny's your aunt. Possibly the mere fact of the patches is enough input: after all, they necessarily indicate *exactly where* the problems are in the PHP code, so the work of these doughty security researchers may be repeated trivially.

Though PHP is widely used, the dangers of this particular problem are probably limited. It is basically used for writing websites and web applications, for which it is designed, such as it is. People do not control logistics, or airliners, or nuclear weapons arsenals, with PHP. Likely the worst that can happen is the leak of passwords, bank details and the like: bad enough, but not civilisation-threatening. Yet similar problems have arisen in far more troubling places. The 2014 Heartbleed vulnerability, which affected the very basis of encryption over the internet and therefore potentially exposed every networked application in the world to attack, was potentially far more severe. But the low-effort hackers of 2014 did not have Claude.

The struggle between hackers and information security has always been in the nature of an arms race, but an oddly asymmetric one. The decentralised architecture of the internet, the ease with which it spills over juridical borders and its ample support for obscuring the source of attacks, mean that attackers are not *in general* exposed to repercussions for their actions. It is an arms race, as it were, between one state with a nuclear arsenal and another with missile defence.

Yet these are not actual states, of course. They are more like tribes that spill over national borders. The 'national interest' of actually existing states employs *both* these tribes, as in the old days a king might have hidden behind a high-walled castle and, at the same time, hired steppe nomads as mercenaries to attack the next king. One attempts, as best as possible, to defend one's own territory, while simultaneously maintaining offensive capacity against others.

### State actors

It is this fact of *inter-state competition* that makes the whole situation more dangerous. The immediate impact of the availability of AI coding tools in the hacking space is one of upward-levering - weaker actors become better equipped relative to stronger actors. But this effect is not uniform. Individuals close the gap to criminal gangs; small criminal gangs to larger ones. Nation-state actors have always enjoyed an enormous advantage (although even there the gaps between weak and strong are smaller than they are with respect to conventional and nuclear armaments).

It is a convenient fact for us, perhaps, that PHP is essentially an

Israeli product. The existence of this absurd software system might be regarded, if one were uncharitable, as a single, unending cyberattack against the entire world - a sort of digital Samson doctrine. Israel is one of the most offensively capable cyber actors in the world, certainly relative to population size. The likes of Burnham would cite the Russians as the big threat here; no end of luckless people the world over would mention the Americans.

We have not really woken up to the instability this poses. The repeated cyberattacks against major corporations in recent years have been highly disruptive, despite being the actions of common criminals. A truly no-holds-barred conflict between states that spilled into our computer systems could be genuinely apocalyptic. Food deliveries rotting in the stockyards, planes falling out of the sky, nuclear power plants being rammed into meltdown: scarcely any activity undertaken in the global economy is untouched by IT. The prospect is truly terrifying.

I will not blame any reader, then, for taking the government's advice and throwing a few extra cans of chickpeas into the trolley at the next visit to Tesco. Yet this is hopelessly inadequate. It is a kind of Robinsonade - a myth of self-sufficiency, as if some random individual or family in contemporary society could insulate themselves from a general social breakdown. In reality, this was a myth even in premodern society, where rural communities depended in the end on production of agricultural tools in the towns, and military production to defend against the aforementioned steppe nomads. In today's Britain, with half of all food imported and industry supplanted by games of financial silly buggers, it is a real joke.

The solution is more radical, and in the end orthogonal to technology. It is inter-state competition itself which produces the weapons of mutual ruin. We must turn the swords into ploughshares, true, but the prophet Isaiah knew well this required political revolution (in the form of the messiah).

On top of that, we face the mere fact that our economies are plausibly vulnerable to cheap and well-understood technological attack. There is no solution for this, except what we call in the industry "graceful degradation": sure, use the computer if it is operable, but do not *depend on it*. There must be ways to move food, to conduct surgery, that do not depend on it. That, in turn, requires maintaining the general intellect required to do these things manually, which means they must be done manually often enough to keep the reflexes sharp, even in good times.

From a capitalist point of view - always searching for another sliver of profit - this is as insane a way to go about things as programming in PHP is insane to me. Negative externalities are all but invisible to capital. It is democratic planning, by people who would really rather be able to go on eating and drinking, that holds the solution here •

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### Notes

1. For technically minded readers, an exhaustive account of the terrible design of early PHP may be found in a famous blogpost: [eev.ee/blog/2012/04/09/php-a-fractal-of-bad-design](http://eev.ee/blog/2012/04/09/php-a-fractal-of-bad-design).

2. 'Hacking in a fragile world' *Weekly Worker* October 1.

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## OBITUARY

# Socialist Organiser to Resisting Socialism

From 1984 till his death, Alan Thornett was involved in almost every broad left front, coalition, alliance and party attempt. All quickly ended in failure, but lessons were never learnt. **Mike Macnair** concludes his two-part series

In the first article in this two-part series, I discussed the first 25 years of Alan Thornett's political career, from its beginning at Cowley in 1959 to the end of the Matgamnaite's smash-and-grab operation against the Workers Socialist League in 1984.

I pointed out that (as his former comrade, John Lister, accepts) fusing with the Matgamnaite was a mistake. It is also questionable whether Thornett was early enough in beginning to make a political fight with the Matgamnaite. Duncan Chapel's take-down of Matgamna's smear job on Thornett draws attention to the fact that the WSL-*Socialist Organiser* fusion agreed to set on one side for later discussion the questions of Afghanistan, the EU, the general strike slogan and the history of the Trotskyist movement.

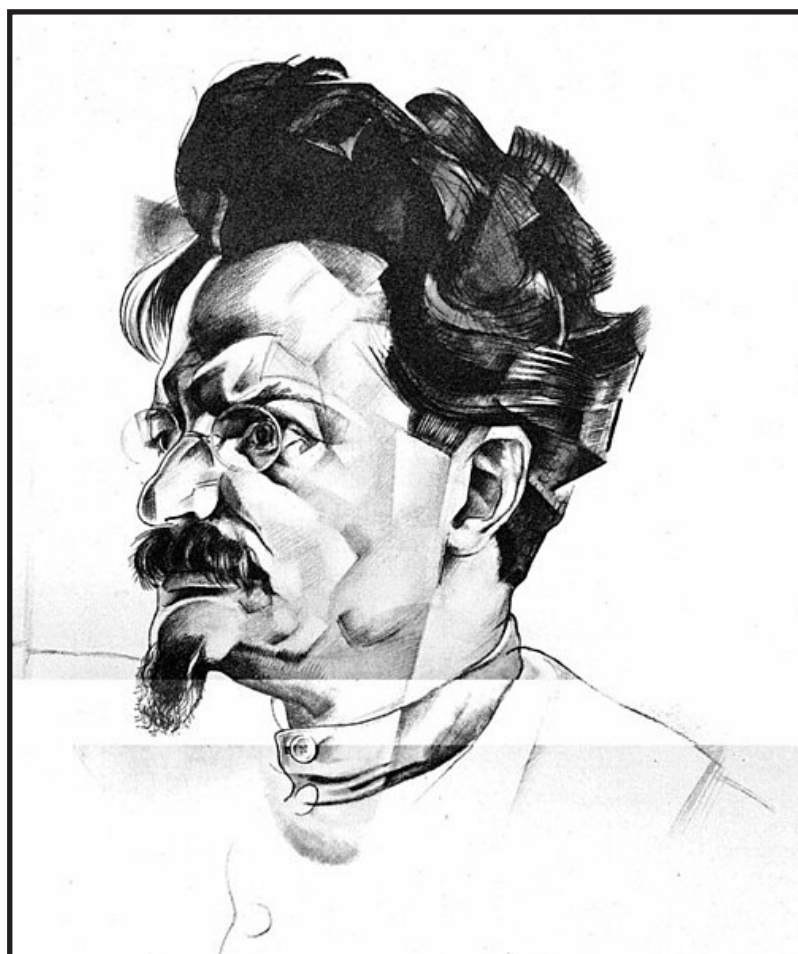
These decisions were certainly right on the history of the Trotskyist movement (which is a theoretical question without immediate political implications) and the EU (which, as of 1981, was not a major political issue in British politics). But the general strike issue was about to reappear with the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85, and the Matgamnaite's approach to Afghanistan was already pro-US in argument (but with the weasel words that have become usual with the AWL).

Within months of the fusion it was clear that *Socialist Organiser*, as the (theoretically) broad-front paper operated by the fused group, was in practice continuing as a Matgamnaite paper. Thornett's decisions in this period were significantly affected by attempting to make the fusion work, while Matgamna's (and perhaps his co-thinkers') were governed by a bad-faith salami tactic, to break up the former WSL.<sup>1</sup> This bears on Thornett's decisions in the early period of the International Socialist Group, in 1987-91.

This second part covers a longer period - 42 years from 1984 to his death (he was still writing very shortly before he died<sup>2</sup>). That does not mean that it has to be longer; most of this history is of the endless, unsuccessful repetition of the Mandeliste policy of building 'parties not delimited between reform and revolution'.

Between 1984 and 1992 the political landscape of the world was reshaped by Gorbachevism and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The political landscape of the British labour movement was reshaped by the defeats of the miners in 1984-85 and the printers in 1986-87. And that of the British far left was reshaped by the explosions of Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party, and of the Socialist League (formerly International Marxist Group) in 1985, the dissolution of the 'official' CPGB into the Democratic Left in 1991, and the 1991-92 split of the Militant Tendency between Taaffeites (now Socialist Party in England and Wales), who initially opened up to collaboration with other leftists before retreating in 2001, and the Grantites, who clung to the Labour Party (as *Socialist Appeal*) until their recent Healy-style launch of the Revolutionary Communist Party.

In this period of transition, Alan Thornett and his co-thinkers can be seen as initially successful. Thornett's perspective for the miners' strike, though never actually implemented by any mass



**Leon Trotsky: go Fourth and multiply**

forces, won some influence among Trotskyists, leading to a small Trotskyist regroupment in the International Socialist Group.

In practice, however, the ISG fairly rapidly shed both its 1985-87 movement towards 'Thornettism' and its non-Mandelite components, leaving Thornett himself and a small layer of co-thinkers becoming substantially Mandelites - or merely activists in sectional campaigning and trade unionism under a Mandeliste umbrella.

Since the election in 1994 of Rupert Murdoch's candidate, Tony Blair, as leader of the Labour Party and his 1995 rewrite of Labour's clause four to remove the commitment to common ownership, the British left has been characterised by a series of (decreasingly successful) attempts to make or find some sort of left alternative to Labour. Alan Thornett was involved in most, but not all, of these attempts.

### Splits

Thornett and his co-thinkers came out of the Matgamnaite's raiding operation battered, but not, as the Matgamnaite had hoped, eliminated as a 'centrist obstacle' to the growth of Matgamnaism.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary: the new Socialist Group (SG) included a section of the former Matgamnaite who rejected their leadership's anti-democratic operations. Their *Socialist Viewpoint* started publication in autumn 1984, not long after the beginning of the Great Strike.

In this situation, the Oxford WSL's historic perspective of a central orientation to the trade union movement and trade union struggles, and the general strike strategy, and the idea of moving towards a general strike through building any form of solidarity or coordinated action, had real plausibility. More plausibility than the Matgamnaite's focus on the Labour left (leaving aside their deepening social-imperialism). The SG threw themselves into the Miners' Support Committees, consistent with the Oxford WSL's

pre-fusion unitary approach to the practical class struggle (as opposed to the Matgamnaite's practice of 'winning the initiative' by creating Matgamnaite-controlled fronts, which pretended to be broad).

This increased significance of 'Thornettism' intersected with the explosions of the WRP and of the IMG-SL - both, in different ways, triggered by the miners' strike.

The WRP explosion was triggered by sex abuse complaints in July 1985 against its central leader, Gerry Healy - what would now be called a #MeToo story. But Bob Pitt is pretty certainly right to analyse that the underlying driver was the falsification of the WRP's perspectives.<sup>4</sup> For 10 years Healy and his co-thinkers had been holding out the perspective that revolutionary crisis was imminent in Britain, and that with it the WRP would leap to the leadership of the mass movement. Now there was a real mass movement (around a sectional struggle) and to the extent that WRP militants were engaged in it, they were forced to recognise that they were just one among the various competing left groups; meanwhile, the party's finances were in deepening difficulty, due to attempting to behave as if the WRP was a mass party.<sup>5</sup>

The crisis led to extremely rapid splintering between, first, Healy loyalists. Second, Northites (who defended Healy's campaign of slander against SWP US leaders as KGB agents, while breaking with Healy towards a US-led International Committee of the Fourth International). And, third, the WRP-Workers Press or 'WRP of the four professors' (Cliff Slaughter, Geoff Pilling, Tom Kemp and Cyril Smith), initially together with the formal general secretary of the WRP, Mike Banda. This last group was more open to discussion with the rest of the left. In early 1986, after the split with the Northites, the WRP-Workers Press 'opened up' to discussions with the Socialist Group.<sup>6</sup>

The break-up of the IMG-SL

was less sudden and unexpected, because its factions had an open form as 'tendencies', though the particular event that produced it in summer 1985 was a surprise. A little more narrative is necessary to explain why Alan Thornett and his co-thinkers should have elected in 1987 to fuse with a fragment of the IMG-SL after their bad experience with Matgamna.

The starting point was in the international organisation of which the IMG was part: the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International. The strategic perspectives of both the 'international majority tendency' and the 'Leninist Trotskyist faction' of the USFI were falsified in 1976 by the course of the Portuguese revolution and the crisis and military coup in Argentina in 1976. The international factions were dissolved without any accounting for these failures, and in 1978 the US SWP proposed as the next step a "wrenching turn to industry": ie, large-scale industrial colonisation. This cost the IMG, which began to implement the 'turn' in 1979, about a third of its membership. Its major trade union fractions (teachers, health unions, civil service) and its student fraction were closed down to enforce the 'turn'. Meanwhile, the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979 led the US SWP to break with Trotskyism towards the line of the Communist Party of Cuba.

The failure of the 'turn', together with the left-right battles in the Labour Party, led the IMG in 1982 to engage in full entry in the Labour Party, renaming itself as the Socialist League (intending to echo William Morris, not Stafford Cripps) and its newspaper *Socialist Action*. But the 'turn' was not at first abandoned and in 1983 produced a small disaster, when the SL sent a significant number of youth into Cowley Assembly; they were rapidly exposed as ex-students and witch-hunted, and the entry policy made any open defence impossible for *Socialist Action*.

The result was a complex and tortuous factional struggle, which by 1985 had produced five factions. The smallest was the supporters of the USFI majority leadership - a group of generals with no army (mainly former full-timers: Brian Heron, Steve Potter, Val Coultas and others). Second smallest was the Outer West London grouping, based in that branch of the IMG, and indirectly politically influenced by the 1975-81 WSL (via Peter Purton). Third largest was the outgoing central committee majority, led by John Ross. This claimed that there existed a new broad left, the Benn-Scargill-Livingstone current, and the job of the SL was to be best builders of this current, not to differentiate themselves to its left. In the Labour Party, they urged supporting *Campaign Group News*. The second largest was the self-identified faction of supporters of the US SWP: pro-turn, pro-Ortega, pro-Khomeini. The largest minority was that led by Phil Hearse and Dave Packer - in the Labour Party, they urged collaboration with *Labour Briefing*.

One of the major differentiators was also international: the US SWP, the Ross group and the international majority supporters all agreed that left criticism of the African National Congress leadership was ultra-left. The Hearse-Packer

faction was as much animated by the South African question and the defence of 'permanent revolution' against the pro-US SWP faction as by British politics; but the Rossites also argued that criticisms of Scargill's tactics in the miners' strike and advocating parallel or spreading action was ultra-left. This pushed the Hearse-Packer tendency by dialectical development towards a broadly Thornettite line on the miners' strike.

The Rossites for some reason (never clear to me) at the last meeting of the SL central committee before the conference (during the pre-conference discussion) proposed the expulsion of the pro-US SWP faction as disloyal. They were persuaded to back down on this; but then, at the conference, entered a bloc with the same pro-US SWP faction on the basis that the Rossites would receive a CC majority. The Hearse-Packer faction, who had expected to receive a CC majority, walked out shortly after the conference, and proceeded to form the *International* group round a journal of that title. They were followed in late 1985 by the Outer West London faction and in early 1986 by the USFI leadership supporters faction.

### Fusion

The SG were now in a position in which they were engaged in talks both with the WRP-Workers Press, and with the *International* group. There were, indeed, some three-way talks and at least one three-way day school, which I attended. The potential prize would have been substantial. A unification of the WRP-Workers Press with the SG and the IG, incorporating the other ex-SL fragments, would have had serious potential attractive power.

It rapidly became clear, however, that the form of the break-up of the WRP, in which political differences had had no time to develop, meant that the leaders of the WRP-Workers Press were sitting on top of an extremely unstable coalition, and not capable of reaching decisions for a fusion which would carry their miseducated membership with them. The IG leadership was aiming to win the SG, but not to fuse with the larger WRP-Workers Press.

The latter would have liked to win back the Thornett group, but were not interested in the sort of discussion which would be necessary to fusing with the British 'Pabloite' leadership.

In fact, Banda's 'Twenty-seven reasons why the International Committee should be buried forthwith and the Fourth International built'<sup>7</sup> displayed an incoherent combination of Healy dialectics with a critique of the US SWP in the 1940s-50s - a critique which logically called into question the core anti-Pabloite claims, which it maintained. In that sense it pointed towards the future of the core leaders of the WRP-Workers Press: clinging to anti-Pabloism as the essence of Trotskyism, they were to break with this 'Trotskyism' in various directions. The SG and the IG were both in Labour Party entry; the WRP definitely not.

The SG leaders seem to have concluded that the dynamic of the IG was towards their views (true, in 1984-86) and went for fusion with the IG, which was completed in 1987. The fusion had some attractive power, and pulled in the SL international majority

supporters (the Outer West London faction had already joined up with the IG), the Lambertiste Socialist Labour Group, and the core group of *Labour Briefing*.

This unity was, however, symptomatic: it was at the end of the day based on agreement on *tactics*: that is, on the common commitment of the component groups to Labour Party entry and their dissent from both the ‘shallow entry’ tactic of *Militant* (which they characterised as a sect) and the Rossites’ policy of tail-ending and acting as bag-carriers for the ‘official’ lefts.

The intervention of the ISG leadership majority in the discussion for the 1991 13th world congress of the Mandeliste Fourth International continued to reflect this orientation: the ISGers formed a bloc with the faction in the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire led by Gérard Filoche, which argued for trade union work and a unitary orientation towards the mass socialist and communist parties.

However, the Hearse-Packer faction had been drawn towards the SG by the combination of the experience of the miners’ strike with the dialectic of the faction struggle in the SL around ‘permanent revolution’ and South Africa. Almost as soon as the fusion had been completed, two developments pulled them in a different direction.

The more historically important was Gorbachevism, and the reforms announced from the 27th CPSU Congress in February-March 1986. The question posed was whether *perestroika* and *glasnost* represented a move to the left, as the international leadership of the Mandeliste FI argued, or to the right. The issue was debated in the ISG in 1987-88: the minority - consisting of a significant section of the former SG, as well as a smaller minority of the former IG - assessed it as a move to the right. Thornett stayed with the majority. The fall of the eastern bloc and of the USSR in 1989-91 *should* have led to a radical reassessment of the political dynamics involved, but did not.

Less important, but more immediately destructive for the ISG was the development of the Chesterfield conferences in 1987-88, leading to the Socialist Movement - perhaps the first of the attempts to create a left movement on the basis of the methods of top-down control, platform-dominated conference plenaries and workshops, which have been repeated since. The involvement of Tony Benn as the central ‘official left’, on the one hand, and of ex-IMGer Hilary Wainwright and the authors of *Beyond the fragments* as ‘representing feminism’, posed Chesterfield/the Socialist Movement as an alternative to the *Briefing* project attractive to at least a section of the ISG leadership.

Labour entry

The result was not radical success with the Chesterfield/Socialist Movement process, but it called into question the basis of the ISG fusion in the common commitment to entry. Opposition developed, and the beginnings of a process of flaking off of the forces assembled in 1987 - starting with the *Briefing* group. Again, Thornett was integrated in the ISG leadership majority, not putting forward a distinct perspective.

Meanwhile, the Cowley Assembly Plant (North and South Works) was run down in 1988-92, and sold for demolition and redevelopment in 1992. The site is now an (incompletely occupied) business park. Thornett was already separated by his 1982 victimisation, but the closure of the plant eliminated the core base of his historical tendency.

By the early 1990s, therefore, Thornett was fully integrated in the leadership of the ISG as a Mandeliste organisation, and he continued to be integrated in this leadership down to his death. Hence, in the absence of published criticisms on his part, he can be taken as sharing credit and responsibility for the public lines and tactics of the ISG and its successor organisations - Socialist Resistance and Anti-Capitalist Resistance.

Broad parties

The rest of the story is one of rather monotonous repetition. The pattern is by no means unique to Britain, or to this period. It repeats over and over again, in the last analysis, the policy of Raymond Molinier and Pierre Frank in *La Commune* in the Section Francaise de l’Internationale Ouvrier (French Socialist Party) in 1935-36 and in Marceau Pivert’s Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan in 1938-40, which were condemned by Trotsky: diplomatic approaches to create a broad-front paper, hoping to organise the left and, within the framework of organising on a diplomatic basis, to win militants politically; and which end in failure, as the ‘official lefts’ involved are no more willing to collaborate loyally with diplomatic Trotskyists than with undiplomatic ones. The diplomatic Trotskyists may be used as a weapon against other leftists, but will then be knifed.

The same pattern was visible in Mandel’s editorship of the Belgian broad-front *La Gauche* in the late 1950s to early 1960s. It has been repeated in Europe in a series of experiences with ‘new parties of recomposition’ between the 1990s and, most recently, Podemos in Spain. I have written about this at length before and do not propose to repeat the points;<sup>8</sup> it is only necessary to note that Thornett was a party to *left* criticism of the policy in the discussions for the 1991 13th World Congress, but to *right* criticism of a slightly different version of it in 2013.

Turning to the application of the policy in Britain, Thornett cannot be held responsible for it in Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party, since the former SL faction of supporters of the USFI majority leadership broke with the ISG in order to form the Fourth International Supporters Caucus in the SLP. Equally, Phil Hearse and his co-thinkers broke with the ISG to follow Murray Smith into the Taaffe wing of Militant in the 1990s - and from there to the Scottish split and the early stages of the Scottish Socialist Party. This, of course, did not involve actual ‘official lefts’ - only Trots pretending to be left Labourites.

The ISG, however, was concerned in the equivalent policy of the Socialist Workers Party, of the Socialist Alliance pretending to be ‘old Labour’; and the ISG agreed with the SWP on replacing the Socialist Alliance with the ‘broader’ Respect, and were loyal lieutenants of the SWP’s policy in Respect down to the split with Galloway in November 2007 (ISGers as much as SWPers were still denying that the split was imminent a few weeks before). They then stayed with Galloway in the split - but, fatuously, split with him in 2010 when he decided to stand in a by-election in Glasgow, because they retained attachment to the failed Scottish Socialist Party.

They, including comrade Thornett, were strongly active in Left Unity, arguing against it taking on a socialist name and aims: this paper tagged them at the time as ‘Resisting Socialism’. They argued in LU for ‘humanitarian support’ for the Kurds in Rojava (meaning the Kurds’ misconceived alliance with US imperialism, which duly

ended in the US knifing the Kurds in the recent past); for ‘safe spaces’ censorship arrangements; and for a Lexit policy on the EU (losing the vote); the ACR later reversed its position).

In Your Party they endeavoured an intermediate position between the Corbynistas and their left. Simon Hannah quotes a Fourth International document on a “useful party”, that the left should commit to

building parties that are useful in the class struggle. That is to say, parties that can assemble the forces and decide on actions that have an effect and advance the class struggle on the basis of a class-struggle approach and programme, the ultimate goal of such a party being obviously to get rid of the existing capitalist system, in whatever general terms this may be expressed.<sup>9</sup>

Ecosocialist

Since around 2000 the Mandeliste Fourth International has been gradually reinventing itself as ‘ecosocialist’. In 2022-25, it moved to a ‘degrowth’ version of this perspective.<sup>10</sup>

Alan Thornett was a vigorous participant in this development, and in 2019 published extended arguments in his book, *Facing the apocalypse: arguments for ecosocialism*. One aspect of this set of arguments was controversial. Already in 2013 Thornett argued that the ecosocialist perspective requires socialists to break with Marx’s and Marxists’ traditional objections to Malthusianism, and make a case for the conscious planning of population.<sup>11</sup> He maintained this line in *Facing the apocalypse*, despite sharp criticisms from co-thinkers.

The reasoning is, in fact, unsound. Thornett argued that the *rate of expansion* of global population is unsustainable. Present but sidelined in his argument is the ‘demographic transition’, in which the move away from peasant agriculture, plus sharply decreased infant mortality, promotes *declining* population in ‘developed’ countries, apart from immigration - an issue of concern to capitalist-state policymakers in all the imperialist countries today (and, indeed, in China<sup>12</sup>).

It follows that socialist transformation will in itself tend to overcome the ‘Malthusian trap’ - a point made by several of Thornett’s critics. In the absence of socialist transition, the incentive structures of imperialism will continue to drive population growth in the semi-colonies and population decline in the imperialist centres.

I do not mean by this to damn Thornett for raising the issue. Many, many sacred political cows will have to be slain in the coming years. We need to talk seriously about which these are; and that makes raising the issue a virtue in itself, even if the answer given is probably wrong.

In reality, this is a problem with the ‘degrowth’ paradigm adopted by the Mandelites *as such*. Overcoming the ecological crisis requires us human beings to plan production in kind. This planning will in some areas require ‘degrowth’ (notably in motors, aerospace and petrochemicals). In other areas there will need to be *growth* (notably in the infrastructure of the semicolonial ‘third world’ countries).

What this boils down to is another manifestation of the Mandelites’ tailism towards whatever appears to move - in this case green politics. The same tailism issue is reflected in left use of the ‘green new deal’ idea - which omits the fact that the original Rooseveltian New Deal was both only temporarily successful in

mitigating unemployment, and a step on the road to World War II.

War

Here we meet up again with the problem of tailing whatever seems to be moving. The result is an inability to distinguish between a real social revolution, on the one hand, and a ‘well-orchestrated swell of public outrage’ or ‘colour revolution’, on the other. Kyiv in 2014 was the latter.

This problem was already visible in the Mandelites’ belief that Gorbachev (and even Yeltsin!) represented movement to the left; in Ukraine it has carried the Mandeliste Fourth International to its own ‘Fourth of August’ - campaigning for arms to Ukraine, just as the pro-Entente socialists in 1914 defended ‘bleeding Belgium’ and ‘plucky little Serbia’.

There is an opposition within the Mandeliste Fourth International to this line of support for our own (US and its vassals’) imperialism against Chinese imperialism and its Russian ally.<sup>13</sup> I have no reason to suppose that Alan Thornett was part of it. On the contrary, in 2022 he argued for a break with fossil fuels as a form of sanctions-war on Russia.<sup>14</sup>

So, as I said at the start of this two-part series, Thornett had a *mostly* honourable political career - but also one marred by some very serious political mistakes ●

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Notes

- 1. Chapel: redmole.org/p/a-cult-an-egomaniac-and-a-settling. Gard/Edwards: socialistfight.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/whathappenedwsl-1.pdf, at pp34-56; the account is negative towards Thornett, where Chapel tells a similar story more positively towards Thornett. The Socialist Group’s own version is in *Socialist Viewpoint* issue 1 (August 1984: splitsandfusions.wordpress.com/2016/12/12/the-socialist-group-socialist-viewpoint).
- 2. Eg. www.ecosocialistdiscussion.com/2026/10/10/scotland-and-wales-undermining-the-british-state.
- 3. In fact, the Matgamnaists ought to reassess the whole of James P Cannon’s line on this question in the light of their successive failures with Cannon’s policy.
- 4. www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/healy/pitt/Chap9.html
- 5. www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/healy/pitt/Chap11.html
- 6. *Workers Press* Feb 7 1986 pp7-8.
- 7. *Workers Press* February 7 1986, pp3-6.
- 8. ‘Eurotrotskyism’ *Weekly Worker* June 4 2003 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/483/eurotrotskyism); ‘The Fourth International and failed perspectives’, June 6 2012 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/917/the-fourth-international-and-failed-perspectives); ‘Strategy and freedom of criticism’, June 13 2012 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/918/strategy-and-freedom-of-criticism); ‘Broad parties: theories of deception’, June 20 2013 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/967/broad-parties-theories-of-deception); ‘Principle not diplomacy’, November 24 2022 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1420/principle-not-diplomacy); ‘Break with diplomatic self-silencing’, May 14 2026 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1585/break-with-diplomatic-self-silencing).
- 9. anticapitalistresistance.org/your-party-and-the-return-of-strategy; see also anticapitalistresistance.org/your-party-consolidates-into-labour-2-0-what-next.
- 10. There is a useful FI narrative of this development at internationalviewpoint.org/The-contribution-of-the-Fourth-International-to-ecosocialism.
- 11. thornett.redmole.org/2013/population-and-the-environment-time-for-a-rethink.
- 12. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c79r7v7qr53o.
- 13. Majority and minority motions from the 2025 18th World Congress are at fourth.international/en/world-congresses/874/europe/673.
- 14. ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org/2022/03/25/end-the-addiction-to-fossil-fuel%E2%80%91support-the-ukrainian-resistance.

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly worker

## Two highly contradictory burdens at work

# Monumental crash beckons

Capitalist states face huge problems with high interest rates, low economic growth and ballooning government and corporate debt. **Ted Reese** says the system is in deep trouble and seems to be running out of options

**T**he world economy is surely set for a monumental crash. The price of oil and diesel is surging, the bond market is breaking and the AI bubble is about to burst.

Shipping a single oil-tanker cargo from the US to Japan has reached \$81 million - nine times more than a year ago. Hiring a supertanker has gone from \$30,000 to \$1.2 million daily, far surpassing the peak pandemic price of \$250,000. In the Middle East, rerouting oil to Asia can stretch a voyage from 19 days to 48, driving the cost of shipping a barrel of oil from \$3 to \$26. Brent crude has climbed to \$115 a barrel, but refining it into diesel has gone up from \$20 to \$110, contributing to the price of a barrel of diesel - needed to fuel ships, trucks and tractors - almost tripling from \$85 to \$210.

Shortages from the slowdown in freight transport beckon. As the savings and reserves of businesses, governments and households sink to cover rising expenses, the impact on the production, distribution and prices of everyday essentials is going to be severe and profound. Indeed, real (after inflation) year-on-year personal consumer income growth in the US has turned negative this year - the first time since 2020, during the pandemic. United States' bank reserves have fallen from 17% of GDP in 2021 to 9% - one percentage point above what the federal authorities regard as the danger zone, where liquidity stress begins to show up in the financial system. The last time the US slid into a deep recession, for example, bank reserves had declined from 16% in 2015 to 7% in 2019.

Six of the largest 10 global stock markets have entered 'correction territory'. France has fallen by 11% from its 2026 peak, India by 14%, Japan 14.5%, Hong Kong 18%, China 20.4% and South Korea 41%, actually putting China in 'bear market territory' and South Korea in something more associated with an outright crash and recession.

China's main CSI 300 has been down for 11 successive weeks - its longest ever losing streak. Its STAR50 AI and chip index has crashed by 40% in under four months. The ever more crucial Philadelphia Semiconductor Index (SOX), which tracks 30 major semiconductor companies, fell by more than 19% between October 6 and October 23.

The stock valuation of cloud-compute provider CoreWeave - one of the key Jenga blocks holding up the AI tech tower - has nosedived by 38% in October alone and by 64% over the past 12 months. Investors are demanding an extraordinary \$1.15 billion a year to insure \$10 billion of CoreWeave debt against default. The cost of insuring its debt against default has more than doubled in a year, from below 5% to above 10%, implying a 63% chance of default within five years. That compares to the 47% chance Bear Stearns had in March 2008, days before its value plummeted from \$20 billion to \$4 billion and 44% for Lehman Brothers.



Thomas Cole 'Destruction' (1836)

CoreWeave has accumulated around \$50 billion in debt and plans to spend \$35-39 billion on capital expenditure in 2026 (roughly three times its revenue), while its net interest expense reached \$640 million in the second quarter - a figure expected to hit \$1 billion later this year. The company borrows billions of dollars to buy hardware, rents computing power to companies, such as Microsoft and OpenAI, and relies on those payments to service its debts. These rental rates have fallen from \$5-6 an hour in 2023 to \$2.70 today.

### Insurance costs

The cost of insuring debt against default has also reached record highs for Meta, Nvidia, Oracle, Amazon, Alphabet and other major AI-related companies. Oracle's 124% increase eclipsed CoreWeave's 120%, with SpaceX not far behind at 105%. Most significantly though, given its size and status, Meta's credit default swap spread is up by 68%.

CoreWeave's customers are, of course, themselves spending heavily on the AI buildout, with nothing to show for their outlay in terms of offsetting the debt they are accumulating. Between 2019 and 2024, the top five US tech conglomerates never borrowed more than \$60 billion in a single year. Last year that jumped to \$120 billion and this year they have already borrowed more than \$230 billion - at the highest interest rates in 20 years.

Overall AI-related debt issuance has reached \$466 billion, compared with \$101 billion over the same period in 2025. Anthropic, America's

latest 'great white hope', reported annual losses of \$80 billion and yet is valued at \$1.5 trillion at least. Its annualised revenue run rate (ARR) - what revenue would be over a full year if it continued earning money at the current rate - rose from \$3 billion in May 2025 to \$65 billion by July 2026, but has substantially slowed down, only reaching \$67 billion this month.

AI spending (on data centres, chips and software), plus consumer spending running ahead of wages (from debt, stock market returns or savings), is adding up to 2.8% of GDP growth, but all the other components of the economy are in negative GDP growth. AI and debt are making US economic growth look healthier than it really is. The US stock market as a percentage of GDP is at its highest ever level - 233%. Meanwhile, Microsoft is offering voluntary buyouts to 27% of its workforce.

AI's borrow-to-spend binge is helping to fuel national debt burdens and inflation, as demand outstrips supply, making lending increasingly risky. Because private debt is continually loaded onto the backs of the public via bailouts, subsidies and corporate tax breaks, US debt-to-GDP stands at 126% - higher than at the end of World War II.

Long-term interest rates across the world's richest nations are at their highest levels since the 2008 global financial crisis and great recession. The US 10-year treasury yield hit 5.3% at the start of October, up a whole percentage point on July and above the figure hit twice in the run-up to 2008. The UK's 30-year gilt

went above 6% for the first time since 1998, and Japan's 10-year went above 3% for the first time since 1996. Its 30-year has hit a record 4.2%. France's 10-year has gone above 5% and its 30-year hit 5.58%, a 24-year high. Beyond the G7, South Korea and Australia have seen bigger rises than the US over the past year.

Bond rate rises partly reflect falling demand from foreign governments and central banks, particularly China. Foreign official holdings have fallen from 42% of all US treasuries in 2008 to 13% today. But in the same period foreign private holdings have stayed more or less flat, currently at 19%, while the Federal Reserve's share has halved from 25%. Domestic investment, though, has gone from a 25% to 55% share, a few percentage points above the ratio it held in 2000. Pension funds trebled their treasury holdings between 2008 and 2023, overtaking even Japan, although that figure has dipped slightly, since pension funds, of course, benefit from higher interest rates, pushing them to an overfunded level, incentivising them to look for higher returns by putting their surplus from treasuries into private credit, stocks and other assets.

As pension funds are not buying at higher yields, the government has to offer even higher rates to find new takers. Enter hedge funds, which have more than doubled their share of treasury holdings from 4% to 9%. Hedge funds invest in treasuries to make a profit via bets on future prices, but can only make the margins count by buying them up *en masse* via borrowing - up from \$1 trillion to

\$4 trillion in four years. If and when lenders raise the collateral (treasuries!) they require from hedge funds because of tightening financial conditions, hedge funds will have to sell treasuries *en masse*, sending shockwaves through the global bond market.

Again, bank reserves are already very low. In 2019, cash suddenly became scarce in the very market that hedge funds used to borrow against their treasuries. The cost of borrowing shot up from about 2% to as high as 10% in a single day and the Fed had to step in and inject tens of billions of dollars into bank reserves, catalysing the inflationary spiral that followed when lending picked up again in 2022, decimating wages and savings.

### Push, pull

The capitalist state is increasingly caught between two contradictory burdens: it wants to bring down long-term interest rates to make borrowing and investment cheaper, but faces mounting debt-servicing costs. In the US, the treasury is attempting to push down long-term yields by buying long-term bonds - sometimes financed through short-term liabilities. This does not eliminate the underlying debt: it changes the composition and maturity of public-sector liabilities, and governments must continually refinance maturing bonds. As older, cheaper debt is replaced by borrowing at higher rates, interest payments rise, squeezing public spending. US federal net interest payments rose from around 5.3% of total federal spending in 2009 to approximately 13.8% in 2025. Higher taxes or further borrowing are required to again increase subsidies for surviving capital. But, of course, the state has a new problem: it is competing with AI hyperscalers for investment capital.

Banks can be deregulated again, so that they can buy more bonds - as was the case during the pandemic - but reserves are already low. The Federal Reserve can 'print money' digitally to buy bonds, but that devalues wages and savings.

Capitalist society is - in a word - fucked. Trump has shamelessly implied that the debt will be inflated away "rapidly". For sure, inflation played a role when US debt-to-GDP was eroded from 121% in 1946 to 31% by 1980. But the debt grew absolutely - productivity growth did the rest of the job, as the destruction of World War II had devalued capital and created new profitable opportunities, while returning soldiers went from destroying to producing. Most importantly, significantly deprivatised social democracies and near-fully deprivatised socialist blocs took on the burden of the societal rebuild, cheapening inputs bought by the remainder of the private sector and laying the foundation for reprivatisation, when capital's profitability crisis once again reared its head. That puts what remains state-owned in China in the crosshairs.

Other than that, capital is fast running out of options ●