

weekly worker



Hailed as a unique experiment in decentralised libertarian socialism, Rojava ends in tragic failure

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Towards a mass Communist Party

Free to Palestine marchers

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Trump's acolytes present glitzy AI images of Gaza

Israel continues to kill, imprison and dispossess the Palestinian population



LETTERS



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

Fighting miners

I await with great anticipation the rest of Jack Conrad's series of articles on the 1926 general strike and, inter alia, miners' strikes since. I hope the *Weekly Worker* will at least be better informed than most, given my own contributions to these debates in the paper over the last 40 years.

The Follonsby Wardley Miners' Lodge will be hosting its centenary symposium on Sunday May 3 at 12 noon, at Wardley Club, Palmers, Bank Wardley, Gateshead upon Tyne. This will review the political influence of syndicalism, George Harvey and other regional and national leaders, such as AJ Cook. There is a contemporary film and a presentation with slides of the derailling of the blackleg Flying Scotsman, and much else.

One of my earliest memories, as a 14-year-old communist at the Durham Miners Gala, was watching a born-again member of Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League telling a group of old miners, 'Now this is why you lost the 1926 strike'. Folk have been purporting to explain our history to us ever since, but hopefully Jack will be more sympathetic to the actual conditions and limitations at each decisive phase.

I must take issue with the inference in Jack's first article that Ron Todd was some sort of sell-out ('Approaches to the general strike' January 22), when he stuck with us to the limits of the National Union of Mineworkers membership's combativeness - and more. If the 1984-85 action was defeated anywhere, it was on the docks at Immingham, where local union dockers decided to break our strike - and their own solidarity blockade - amid mass violent scenes. Standing alongside the leader of Aslef, Ron pleaded with them to defend the union, the dockers and the miners. He was pelted with iron bolts - at least one of which struck him in the head. With blood streaming down his face, he continued to demand

they stay firm. That's what I call solidarity in action!

As our last stand loomed in 1992, we faced an uphill fight we hadn't done seven years earlier. We had major defeats in the numbers and morale of our forces, widespread victimisations, redundancy bribes offering small fortunes not to fight, and loss of bottle on our leadership. Our chance of a sustained fightback had come in 1987 - just two years after the defeat. Anger, loss of self-respect and jackboot management had so enraged the remaining miners that a 79% 'yes' vote had been the response to a national ballot for industrial action. The National Coal Board and our national executive committee crapped themselves, but the NCB withdrew its new disciplinary codes and increased the bribes.

By 1992 we were holding the line, but just days of action and joint national strikes with the RMT, Aslef and anyone we could sign up was as much as we could produce. It was really self-serving and delusional for the wild-eyed SLL paper sellers to urge us to all-out strikes - or, worse, suggest the NUM itself was holding back the tidal waves of rank-and-file resistance. If only! By the time they privatised (but still were unable to deunionise the industry), the back of national strike action and leadership by the miners - for half a century the vanguard of the class - was broken.

The irony is that, were the strike to take place now, all of these left groups would be against us, in support of anti-industry 'net zero'.

I will read the rest of Jack's series with interest.

David John Douglass
NUM

Depoliticisation

It was with interest that I read Eddie Ford's article, 'March to the right', which gives a useful synopsis of current developments on the British political scene (January 22).

In it he mentions the new Socialist Workers Party-sponsored 'front' group, the Together alliance, which has called a major anti-fascist demonstration in London on March 28. Together bills itself as a broad front against the rise of the

far right. Celebrities are much to the forefront in this group, but it also includes the TUC, various individual unions, Friends of the Earth, Zack Polanski of the Green Party and a host of others. 'So far, so good,' you may well be thinking, but, at a time when sharp politics are needed, this new alliance is devoid of actual politics. Its propaganda seems to consist of platitudinous slogans like 'Love is stronger than hate', 'Choose love' and 'Love, hope, unity'. In terms of vapidity, they could give Obama's 2008 presidential campaign a run for its money!

But should we really be surprised? The SWP has created a whole host of anti-fascist front groups (that it calls 'united fronts') since the 1970s, with one essentially replacing the other. The first, and most successful, was the famous Anti-Nazi League mark one, which existed from 1977 to 1982. Its story is well known, and the present-day SWP still 'dines out' on its impact almost half a century later. Now the defeat of the Nazi National Front was caused by a host of factors, but the ANL was clearly important in beating it back.

However, the seeds of the present-day depoliticisation was even apparent back then, with anti-fascist working class militants in the ANL arguing against the more liberal 'vicars and celebrities' faction, which prioritised events like carnivals and musical concerts. In one notorious incident in September 1978 a carnival in south London was prioritised by the SWP over confronting a large fascist demonstration in east London on the same day. Clearly the SWP's line of march had been indicated. The ANL was wound up in 1982 on the unilateral decision of SWP leader Tony Cliff (he made all the important decisions in the SWP, while occasionally consulting Duncan Hallas).

Things lay dormant in terms of the party's anti fascism for a decade until the SWP revived the Anti-Nazi League in 1991. This was outwardly prompted by the growth of the British National Party, although there was also the traction that rival anti-fascist campaigns were enjoying at the time - namely Militant's Youth Against Racism in Europe, Red Action's Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) and the black nationalist Anti-Racist Alliance.

This new ANL broadly followed the modus operandi of a decade before, but adopted the annoying habit of claiming other left group's victories for themselves - most notoriously AFA's victory against Nazi skinheads at Waterloo station in 1992. This ANL mark two was in turn replaced by the SWP's Unite Against Fascism and then Stand Up to Racism in subsequent decades. These twists and turns were usually prompted by whatever section of the Labour/trade union left and Muslim groups the SWP wanted its new campaign to appeal to at the time. The usual pattern was for the SWP to create the new organisation, state that its previous front group was sponsoring it, then allow the old group to essentially wither on the vine.

One key feature was that the politics in these groups became more watered down with each subsequent iteration, which brings us today to the Together alliance. It clearly is not what Leon Trotsky would recognise as a united front in any meaningful sense - it isn't even a popular front! While we may disagree with the politics of a popular front, at least it *had* politics! Together seems to be a more diluted version of the Live Aid 1985 campaign - heavy on bourgeois moralism and wholly establishment-focused.

Together seems to be the sort of set-up even Liberal Democrats and One Nation Conservatives would feel comfortable in - and thus a fitting testament to decades of the SWP's depoliticisation of its anti-fascist fronts.

Paul O'Keeffe
email

Michael Parenti

The death of US 'political scientist' Michael Parenti invites both appreciation and sober assessment. Parenti was never a Marxist of great theoretical originality, nor did he pretend to be. His importance lay elsewhere - in insisting, with uncommon clarity, that capitalism, imperialism and class power remain the central explanatory categories of modern politics at a time when much of the left was busy forgetting them.

At his best, Parenti stripped bourgeois ideology down to its operative assumptions, exposing the class interests concealed beneath liberal moralism. For many, particularly outside the academy, his work functioned as a first encounter with Marxism unembarrassed by cold war pieties (that pedagogical role should not be dismissed lightly).

Yet his limitations were real. Parenti's tendency towards a flattening anti-imperialism often slid into political campism, substituting structural critique with an overly indulgent attitude towards existing state power, so long as it opposed Washington. In this sense, his work sometimes mirrored the very instrumentalism he sought to criticise, offering moral inversions rather than dialectical analysis.

Parenti's death therefore marks the passing of a particular moment on the Marxist left: one shaped by cold war ideological combat, defensive anti-imperialism and the need to speak plainly against overwhelming hegemonic pressure.

If his work now feels insufficient, that is less a personal failing than a sign that Marxism must renew its critical ambitions rather than inherit ready-made positions.

Remembering Parenti properly means neither canonising nor dismissing him, but recognising his work as a provocation to think more rigorously about power, class and emancipation today.

Ewan Tilley
email

Coming collapse

Readers may be interested to know that I've updated my essay on the 'AI bubble' and the deteriorating condition of the US economy, which was published in the *Weekly Worker* ('Capitalism's structural rot', November 20 2025).

Since then things look to have entered an economic contraction that may well outdo the great recession of 2008-09. Silver has since raced up to \$100 an ounce and gold to \$5,000. A currency collapse and extreme inflation lie ahead.

The updated essay is comprehensively illustrated with charts and graphs that we can't fit into a newspaper. It makes for grim reading, but comrades may find it useful as an educational and agitational tool. You can read it at grossmanite.medium.com.

Ted Reese
DSYP

False claim?

According to the report in the *Weekly Worker*, at the CPGB's January 18 aggregate, comrade Carla Roberts made the remarkable assertion that "The Marxist Unity Caucus in RS21 seems in danger of imploding" ('At home and abroad' January 22). I am most curious to know what evidence there is for this claim, for it seems to me to be grounded upon absolutely nothing.

Talal Hangari
London

Fighting fund

Let's make sure

What an excellent week in terms of the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund! No less than £865 came our way, leaving us just £32 short of our monthly £2,750 target, with three days still left in January.

Let me start, first of all, with US comrade LA, who paid his annual subscription of £168, but then decided that it would be better if he read us online only. He believes that state officials have opened his mail at least a couple of times and perhaps, in view of the way things are going under Trump, he could be targeted for reading our subversive publication! So he said we should keep what he paid as a donation. Thanks very much, comrade!

Others who contributed via PayPal this week are comrades EG, JB and DB, who each paid us £50, as well as comrade DI, who chipped in with a fiver. But the largest number of donations came, as usual, via bank transfer/standing order - thank you, in

particular, comrades JC and LM for their *three-figure* payments. Then there were RL (£60), DD and JT (£25 each), GD, JN and PS (£24), RN, MM and AB (£20) and TT (£10). Finally comrade Hussein handed his usual £5 note to one of our team.

All that takes our running total for January up to £2,718, so I'm very confident we'll exceed that target again. But, to be honest, we could do with a bit more, especially because we still haven't made up for the shortfall of more than £500 two months ago in November. So you'd be more than welcome to chip in as soon as you read this - please donate by bank transfer or PayPal to make sure we get there by January 31 ●

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

Online Communist Forum



Sunday February 1 5pm
**Comrade Remi of Marxist Unity Group:
Trump, Minneapolis and ICE - with plenty
of time for discussion**

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Communistisch Platform (Netherlands): communisme.nu/en/about-us

For further information, email Stan Keable at
Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

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

GAZA

Dreamscapes and nightmares

While Trump's acolytes present glitzy AI images at Davos, Israel continues to kill, imprison and dispossess the Palestinian population. **Eddie Ford** looks at the new form of colonialism

Ran Gvili's remains - the last of the 251 'hostages' taken on October 7 2023 - were returned to Israel on January 26. Of course, 'hostage' is a complete misnomer, if not a straightforwardly propagandist lie. He was a former member of the IDF's Golani Brigade and served as a staff-sergeant-major in the police's special patrol unit, and was actually killed on that day.¹ Quite how a dead person can be taken hostage is never really explained. Many thousands of Palestinians are held in Israeli jails, including children under "administrative detention", but they are never referred to as 'hostages' by the mainstream media. Many have been imprisoned indefinitely, without charge or evidence, and have undergone horrible torture. But such selective misreporting is what we have come to expect.

In theory, the handover of his body marks the completion of a key initial demand of Donald Trump's so-called ceasefire plan that went into effect on October 10 2025, though at least 442 Palestinians have been killed since then. However, as soon as Gvili's body was returned, Benjamin Netanyahu said that the next step for Gaza would not be the promised reconstruction or anything like that, but instead "the disarmament of Hamas and the demilitarisation of the Gaza Strip". Donald Trump had made such demands on January 21 at Davos, stating that Hamas must disarm or be "blown away very quickly".

This ultimatum was issued a day before the formal signing ceremony for the so-called Board of Peace - a Trump-chaired body that was welcomed by the UN on November 17, when it adopted resolution 2803 that authorises the board to deploy an International Stabilisation Force to Gaza - the US Congress, of course, having no say. A naked power grab and ego exercise by Trump, many view it as a sort of potential 'alternative' to the UN, and Trump himself has said that the board "might" replace the UN, even if he wants it to continue in some shape or form.² In this way, we see a *recalibration* of US foreign policy as it seeks to reboot its global hegemony.

As many critics have pointed out, his BoP bears little resemblance to what was originally envisioned under resolution 2803 - more a grotesque body where only *he* has veto power and operates more as a 'pay-to-play club', centred on the personality of Trump, who gets to play king. So far, only 19 of the 62 invited states have signed up to the board's charter (all non-European, like Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia, which are more easily bought and bribed). Countries that wish to be permanent members of the BoP must pay \$1 billion into a fund controlled by Trump; otherwise each country will serve a three-year term which may be renewed at his discretion.

Horribly, both the BoP executive and the Gaza Executive Board - announced on January 17 - include Tony Blair (of the dodgy dossiers and war crimes in Iraq), despite his involvement in an institute that supported the Gaza genocide. Repellent individuals like Jared Kushner, the son-in-law, and Steve Witkoff, US special envoy, are also members, naturally. The GEB is essentially there to support the National Committee for the Administration



Promise is of another Dubai ... without Palestinians

of Gaza. Under Trump's proposed 20-point peace plan in late September 2025 - accepted to one degree or another by both Hamas and Israel - Gaza will be supposedly administered under the "temporary transitional governance of a technocratic and apolitical" Palestinian committee, responsible for delivering "the day-to-day running of public services and municipalities" for Gazan people. In other words, the 20-point plan is little more than colonialism, albeit of a new type.

Imagined future

At Davos forum, Jared Kushner gave a jazzy slideshow that imagined a futuristic dreamscape of gleaming apartment blocks and office towers, with neat industrial parks and residential districts - even an airport. This sick real-estate dream will never happen, of course, but it represents the further disenfranchisement of the Palestinian people.

This was highly reminiscent of what we read about last year in the *Financial Times* about the Boston Consultancy Group plan, with the

active involvement of the Tony Blair Institute, for a 'post-war' Gaza that imagined kick-starting the strip with a "Trump Riviera" and an "Elon Musk Smart Manufacturing Zone" - led by Israeli companies under a redevelopment programme called the 'Great Trust'.³

This time round, the territory had a slice taken off it to create a buffer zone along the Israeli border, and was treated as a blank slate - ignoring the rights of Palestinians, who become even more invisible. The plan also laid out more goals or 'promises' for the next 100 days, telling us that it was achievable. This included the restoration of basic infrastructure - such as water, sewage and electric systems, hospitals and bakeries - together with a significant increase in the flow of goods entering Gaza.

Breezily, Kushner, in typical Trumpian fashion, said the US administration was brilliantly achieving its short-term goals. He went on to declare that in the next 100 days "we're going to continue to just be heads down" and "focused on making sure this is implemented". In

what will be news to the desperate and suffering Palestinians, Kushner further expounded on how the US will be concentrating on "humanitarian" aid and shelter, "creating the conditions to move forward".

Apparently, the BoP will be represented in Gaza by a "high representative" - a veteran Bulgarian UN diplomat, Nickolay Mladenov. But the plan, at least as spelled out in Davos, puts most of the onus for implementation on the NCAG - its chair being the "chief commissioner", Ali Shaath. He is a former deputy transport minister in the Palestinian Authority, which is hated, of course, by the masses for its *complicity* with Israel. Addressing the assembled world leaders in Davos by video link from Cairo, he promised them that "step by step with discipline and determination ... we will rebuild a capable Gaza" that is based upon "self-reliance". He claimed that the NCAG's mission was "to restore order, to rebuild institutions and to recreate a future" for the people "under the principle of one authority, one law and one weapon".

According to documents supplied at Davos, we discover that "one weapon" actually means that all weapons in Gaza will be "authorised by one authority only" - that is, the NCAG. This is because US and Israeli officials are insistent that any further withdrawals by the Israeli army - still occupying more than half of Gaza - cannot happen until Hamas comprehensively disarms.

Though it is not yet fully clear, Hamas has reportedly agreed "in principle" to hand over its heavy weapons, such as rockets and artillery, to a Palestinian administration, and is prepared to accept the NCAG - though the real test is whether Shaath and co will be allowed to enter Gaza with a Palestinian police force that has been trained in Jordan and Egypt over the past months. Interestingly, the plan presented in Davos made no mention of the ISF, which was a key part of Trump's 'peace plan' last year and endorsed in the UN security council resolution.

Israel, though invited, has not yet fully endorsed the BoP. The extreme right in Netanyahu's coalition are unhappy with Trump's proposals. They, of course, seek to uproot the bulk of Gaza's population and get on with the building of Israeli colonial settlements - therefore the very idea of a Palestinian interim government, however notional, is anathema to them. No, the plan does not say a future Gaza would be constituent part of a sovereign Palestinian state - which is only to be expected, given Trump's worldview. But it does not *exclude* a unified Palestine either, and it is unlikely the NCAG will be able to recruit Palestinians of any credibility.

Impunity

Steve Witkoff announced with great fanfare the "second phase" of the so-called peace plan on January 14, which is supposed to shift the focus onto "long-term governance" and marks the beginning - to use the special envoy's words - of "the full demilitarisation and reconstruction of Gaza, primarily the disarmament of all unauthorised personnel".

But, as Shockat Adam - one of Your Party's remaining MPs - writes, Palestinians are fully entitled to say: "Ceasefire in Palestine? What ceasefire?"⁴ Israel has violated the ceasefire agreement at least 1,193 times from October 10 to January 9 with near-daily attacks, killing hundreds of people - attacking Gaza on 82 out of the 97 days of 'ceasefire' up to January 14. Meanwhile, the occupied West Bank has endured the highest number of settler attacks ever recorded. Some 40,000 Palestinians have been forcibly displaced - the biggest act of ethnic cleaning since the 1967 war.

So, while the so-called 'international community' condemns violence in principle, it grants Israel total impunity in practice ●

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Notes

1. jpost.com/israel-news/article-884597.
2. timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/trump-says-board-of-peace-might-replace-united-nations-but-wants-un-to-continue.
3. See 'Tony Blair and the banality of evil' *Weekly Worker* July 10 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1546/tony-blair-and-the-banality-of-evil.
4. aljazeera.com/opinions/2026/1/17/ceasefire-in-palestine-what-ceasefire.

MIDDLE EAST

High hopes turn to ashes

Hailed by some on the left as a unique experiment in egalitarian, decentralised, ecologically sustainable self-administration, Rojava has ended in bitter disappointment. **Yassamine Mather** investigates

Giddy dreams for a libertarian socialist Rojava, inspired by the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan and Murray Bookchin, have ended in the bitter ashes of disappointment. Wider military, diplomatic and political shifts and developments simply squeezed the Kurdish statelet out of existence.

Abandoned by the US, they and their allies in the Syrian Democratic Forces were simply outnumbered and outgunned. Hailed by some on the left as a unique experiment in egalitarian, decentralised, ecologically sustainable self-administration, a late-2025 offensive by the Syrian transitional government - led by interim president Ahmad al-Sharaa (a former al-Qaeda commander) - captured the strategic hubs of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor.

By January 2026, the SDF had been pushed back to the province of Hasakah, weakened by years of Turkish pressure and the steady drawing back of US troops, air cover and intelligence support. On January 18, the SDF signed a definitive 14-point "integration agreement" with Damascus, mediated by US envoy Tom Barrack. The agreement mandated the full handover of security and administrative authority to the Syrian state and the individual integration of SDF fighters into the national army. In effect, this brought the Rojava project to an end as an independent political entity.

On paper, the Syrian government has pledged to recognise the Kurdish language and cultural rights, but, in practice, political autonomy has been eliminated. A limited form of local administration survives only in isolated areas, such as Kobani. A fragile ceasefire is currently in place, but the situation remains volatile. There is widespread concern about the stability of detention camps holding Isis prisoners and the risk of a new insurgency, as the SDF is absorbed into a central military structure that many Kurds continue to view - with good reason - with deep suspicion.

The collapse of Rojava was not simply the result of military defeat: it was the outcome of external power politics and internal contradictions. US support for the SDF was always described as "temporary and tactical". By late 2025, Washington had shifted its priorities towards backing a unified Syrian state under Ahmad al-Sharaa, partly to reduce tensions with Turkey. The US withdrew what it described as its "security umbrella" for the Kurds, arguing that the fight against Isis no longer required Kurdish autonomy. Damascus combined military muscle with negotiations, using a classic 'carrot and stick' strategy to reassert central authority.

Turkey's sustained military campaigns - including in Afrin, Manbij and 'Operation Peace Spring' - treated the US-backed SDF as an existential threat, not least because the People's Defence Units (YPG) constitute its organisational core. Suffice to say, the YPG is historically closely allied to the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) founded by Abdullah Öcalan. Changing global, regional and national realities have seen the PKK abandon its prolonged armed struggle and dissolve itself.

Despite claims of "stateless democracy", the project struggled with a Stalinist political inheritance and a powerful cult of personality centred on Abdullah Öcalan. Rojava faced severe limits, what with embargoes, military threats and isolation. While women's empowerment was a central claim,



Female YPG fighters: public face

critics say that much of the visible progress was tied to militarisation and participation in armed units. There were worker cooperatives and communal management. However, what little revenue that Rojava could obtain came from the (primitive) oil industry and agriculture. Living standards remained pitifully low.

Shift to right

The first phase of the PKK's armed struggle against the Turkish state began in the late 1970s and continued until 1998. During this period, Syria's rivalry with Turkey led then president Hafez al-Assad to provide the PKK with support, including training camps in Lebanon's Beka'a Valley. The PKK, under Abdullah Öcalan, operated from Syria until 1998, when Assad signed the Adana agreement ('Memorandum of Understanding') with Turkey and expelled the PKK.

Öcalan was captured in Kenya in February 1999 by Turkish intelligence, reportedly with CIA assistance, and remains imprisoned in Turkey. Here he developed his new ideological framework by drawing upon the likes of Murray Bookchin, the US eco-anarchist and advocate of libertarian municipalism. Öcalan redefined the PKK as post-Soviet, ecological, libertarian, feminist, etc, etc. He also said the PKK should settle for autonomy within Turkey. Not full-scale Kurdish independence.

This line of thought spread among Syrian Kurds in the early 2000s and culminated in the establishment of Rojava in 2012 under the leadership of the Democratic Union Party (PYD).

Bookchin's ideas are certainly found in Rojava's Charter of the Social Contract. However, journalists such as Andrea Glioti argue that this document was largely symbolic and was rarely followed in practice. Instead, governance was organised around ethno-religious representation - Arabs, Kurds and Christians - rather than class or popular democracy. Tribal leaders retained significant power. In 2014, Sheikh Humaydi Daham al-Jarba, an Assad supporter, was appointed governor of Jazirah canton. By 2016, his son commanded

the al-Sanadid Forces within the SDF.

The social contract explicitly recognised private property, reinforcing landownership and tribal authority. Despite rhetoric about control from below, key decisions were consistently unanimous and aligned with Öcalan's pronouncements - a pattern that contradicted claims of decentralisation. Andrea Glioti, who studied life in Rojava, described everyday life as dominated by economic hardship rather than political participation.

The PKK's Stalinist origins remained visible. Öcalan's portraits were everywhere, accompanied by slogans such as "There is no life without a leader". Criticism of Öcalan was unacceptable. Even in schools, his image was justified as philosophical rather than political - though no other philosophers were permitted similar visibility, according to Michiel Leezenberg.¹

Women's liberation was central to Rojava's self-image and much celebrated by international supporters - there is no denying the prominence of women in armed units. However, this mirrors earlier experiences in Iranian Kurdistan, where women's equality existed largely within military structures, but this rarely translated into improved conditions for civilian women. As in earlier Kurdish movements, progress among cadres did not dismantle patriarchal relations in rural life, where domestic violence and women's treatment as property remained common. The Mala Jin ('Women's Houses') often struggled to overcome deep-seated tribal laws in the rural Arab regions (like Deir ez-Zor) that the SDF controlled until recently.

US backing

What about US backing for this experiment in libertarian socialism? Pure calculation, of course. YPG/SDF served US regional interests in the same way that backing the Soviet Union during World War II served US global interests. Describing the US withdrawal of military and logistic support for YPG/SDF as a 'betrayal' is naive in the extreme. There has

been a long history of imperial powers adopting and dumping local actors. Britain and France did it post-World War I and the US has done it in no uncertain terms.

The rival Kurdish leaderships repeatedly sought backing from imperialist and regional powers. Each time, ordinary Kurds paid the price. The YPG was no exception. From 2014 onwards, it actively courted Washington, accepting air support, weapons and diplomatic backing. By 2015-16, PYD leaders were visiting Washington, US special forces were operating in Kurdish areas and the PYD had joined a coalition with Saudi-backed forces. Warnings that this would turn the movement into a US proxy were dismissed. Events since have amply confirmed those warnings.

When US priorities shifted, the SDF turned to Damascus - now under a new leadership - reinforcing the very forces it once claimed to oppose. For decades, various Kurdish parties and movements have followed the logic of supporting 'the enemy of my enemy'. This strategy has repeatedly ended in disaster. From Iran to Iraq to Syria, the big players have exploited Kurdish divisions, arming them when useful and abandoning them when convenient. I have said this on a number of occasions: one of the issues that played a role in the collapse and corruption of the Iranian left - not the most important factor, but an important one - was its prolonged sojourn in Kurdistan.

At the time, Iranian Kurdish organisations such as the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Komala Party were already justifying connections with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. This followed a long-standing pattern, going back almost a century, in which Kurds in one country - Iran or Iraq - sought funding or logistical support from the rulers of the neighbouring state.

In Kurdistan, under conditions of extreme hardship and in an unequal war against the Islamic Republic, it was very difficult to see beyond immediate needs. Comrades were not only being killed by the

enemy's bullets, but also by the cold. Equipment had to arrive from the outside. Clothing had to arrive from the outside. Peshmerga fighters were losing their eyesight because of snow blindness - protective glasses were desperately needed. Supplies had to come through, somehow.

The justification for allowing goods to pass through Iraq - later sometimes revealed to be funded directly by Saddam's regime - was that defeating the Islamic Republic justified the means. Another argument was that this was being done openly, with the knowledge and approval of Iraqi Kurdish organisations, who themselves were facing similar repression and had the same hostile relationship with Tehran.

Disaster

This line of reasoning paved the way for disaster. I will not go into the details here. But I want to stress that this was not an abstract or theoretical issue. It had concrete political consequences.

I raised this argument during a debate on the BBC Persian *Pargar* programme with Kamran Matin of Sussex University, who is strongly supportive of Kurdish organisations. His response was that the Iranian left had been weakened precisely because it undermined Kurdish nationalism; and that large Kurdish organisations, because they supposedly had a mass base, would not be corrupted by receiving support from foreign powers.

That argument simply does not stand up to serious historical examination. We later saw the same organisations justify their reliance on Saddam Hussein, and then, once in exile in Europe, justify taking funding from the European Union, from rightwing Dutch parties and from openly reactionary organisations.

One Kurdish organisation, the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan (Mohtadi faction) has been a strong supporter of Donald Trump's policies in the Middle East since 2016. Its leader, Abdullah Mohtadi, has supported US 'maximum pressure' policies since the first Trump administration, arguing that regime change in Tehran is the only path to achieve Kurdish rights. Each step is defended as necessary, tactical and harmless; but, in reality, each step deepens the political bankruptcy.

This trajectory did not strengthen the left - Kurdish or otherwise: it hollowed it out. First of all the 'mass base' of many of these organisations has constantly been reduced. However, even when they had a base, that did not immunise organisations against corruption and dependence. What we are witnessing today is not new. Large Kurdish organisations have been compromised repeatedly - first through their relationships with neighbouring states, and later through alignments with imperialist powers. The pattern is evident, and the consequences appalling.

The lesson of Rojava is quite clear: there are no shortcuts to defeating reactionary forces in the region or building a genuinely independent anti-imperialist movement. The trajectory of the SDF - from alliance with the YPG, to alliance with the US, to integration into the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham Syrian state - illustrates this painfully well ●

Notes

¹ See 'The ambiguities of democratic autonomy: the Kurdish movement in Turkey and Rojava', www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14683857.2016.1246529.

SYRIA



US special envoy, Tom Barrack, with Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus

History repeating itself

Once protected by the US, Kurdish fighters have withdrawn to Kobane and Al Hasakah, but face annihilation. They no longer serve America's strategic interests. Trump is backing the former terrorist, Ahmed al-Sharaa. **Esen Uslu** makes a plea for lessons to be learnt

A year ago, paramilitary forces from the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) marched from Idlib province into Aleppo and Damascus. They found the seat of power had been vacated. Bashar al-Assad had fled to Moscow and Ahmed al-Sharaa was installed as the Syrian interim president.

He was quickly transformed from a 'terrorist', with a fat bounty on his head, into a well-dressed 'statesman' accepted by the west. No-one, including himself, thought he would survive for long, but his backers - including the Gulf States, Turkey and the US - ensured he stayed in power. He continued the suppression of minorities, such as the Alevis and Druze, while acquiescing to Israel's occupation of more territory adjacent to the Golan Heights - Mount Hermon and Al-Quneitra, along the UN buffer zone between Israel and Syria.

The Kurdish People's Defence Units (YPG), which formed a coalition with Sunni Arab tribes called the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), had been in control of territory from the Euphrates to the Iraqi border. The SDF has had the backing of the US military presence in the region since 2019. It kept activists from the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (Isis) and their relatives in prisons and guarded camps. The SDF also controlled some territory adjacent to the west bank of the Euphrates, just south of Aleppo.

HTS forces, as well as groups attached to the Turkish regime, tried to dislodge the SDF, but failed after intense fighting and US intervention. However, in the March of last year, the SDF and the HTS government signed a 'memorandum of understanding', which paved the way for an uneasy ceasefire.

The Turkish regime under president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was unhappy, and pressurised its HTS

client into confronting the Kurds. Turkey used its influence in the region to encourage Sunni Arab tribal forces to separate from the Kurds too. Turkey has also prevented the implementation of the measures agreed upon in the 'memorandum of understanding', such as the participation of SDF forces in the Syrian army as separate units.

After a year of hesitant probing and delaying negotiations, the HTS government felt that it was ready to attack the Kurds. The SDF coalition collapsed, and HTS forces quickly overcame Kurdish pockets in Aleppo. They then marched south along the west bank of the Euphrates, clearing SDF-held territory and river crossings. As SDF forces continued to retreat, HTS forces crossed the river and occupied the cities of Deir al-Zor and Raqqa. They then headed north towards YPG strongholds in Kobane and Al Hasakah.

As the HTS forces advanced rapidly, Tammy Bruce, the US deputy representative at the United Nations, made the shift in the Trump administration's policy crystal-clear. Addressing to the UN Security Council, she said this:

The United States has long supported efforts to defeat Isis and promote stability in Syria, including through Operation Inherent Resolve and our partnership with the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF, whose sacrifices have been instrumental in achieving enduring gains against terrorism.

Now the situation has fundamentally changed. The new Syrian government joined the global coalition to defeat Isis in late 2025, pivoting to cooperation with the United States on counterterrorism. Damascus is now both willing and positioned to take over security responsibilities,

including control of Isis detention facilities and camps.

We are working with the Syrian government and the SDF to reintegrate north-east Syria in a dignified manner that leads to a Syria at peace with itself and its neighbours.

We commend both sides on reaching a four-day ceasefire that will allow them each to work out the modalities of the January 18 agreement between Syrian president Ahmed al-Sharaa and SDF commander Mazloum Abdi.

President al-Sharaa has affirmed that Kurds are an integral part of Syria, and integration of Kurds into the new Syrian state offers full citizenship rights, including for those previously stateless, recognition as an integral part of Syria, constitutional protections for Kurdish language and culture, and participation in governance.

While risks remain, this integration, supported by US diplomacy, represents the strongest chance yet for Kurds to secure enduring rights and security within a recognised Syrian nation-state.

The YPG and the wider Kurdish freedom movement, facing annihilation, has withdrawn its forces to Kobane and Al Hasakah to fight for its survival. Its diplomatic and public relations efforts are ongoing, but the international alignment seems to be against them. The small Russian contingent in the vicinity of Al Hasakah, especially those at Qamishli airport, have hastily abandoned their positions, transporting their military personnel and equipment to the Khmeimim airbase on the Mediterranean coast.

A tentative two-week ceasefire was declared to allow US forces to take Isis members from the prisons and

camps that the SDF could no longer manage, and has moved them to Iraq.

The imminent danger is great, but international solidarity is growing. In Turkey's Kurdish cities and towns we are witnessing demonstrations and marches. The government has moved to forbid 'unlawful gatherings' - one person was killed in the Mersin province, when a demonstration was dispersed. The so-called 'Peace and Democracy Process', which has dragged on for almost a year without any tangible action by the Turkish parliament, is still ongoing. Meanwhile, the Ankara government coalition insists that the Syrian Kurds give up arms and surrender to HTS forces, claiming they are the legitimate Syrian army - a precondition, if the peace process in Turkey is to continue.

The oppressed cannot free themselves from the pressures they face unless they exploit the contradictions between the oppressors. It is the right and duty of the oppressed to do so and Kurds cannot be blamed for exercising this right. There should be no objection to the Kurdish movement taking advantage of the contradiction between the US and Turkey, but, in order to do so, it requires a specific programme, strategy, tactics and organisational efforts. Otherwise, they will simply be used by the oppressors. In this respect the Kurdish freedom movement should be criticised: the role of Iraq's Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani as a mediator is creating false hopes.

At the same time, it is sending messages to Israel pleading for help. The Kurdish movement must understand this: asking for help from the Zionist state - a racist state and the most aggressive proponent of imperialist policies - is tantamount to suicide. Yet these requests are increasing, alongside Barzani's

growing influence. In this way the Kurdish movement will invite the hostility of the Persian, Turkish and Arab masses. This will further intensify the isolation of the Kurdish movement within the region and among the global south. Those who support the Kurds as an oppressed people must also stand against Israel's massacres and support the Palestinians.

The YPG also needs to apologise to the Alevis specifically. On the day the Alevis were massacred in western Syria, Mazlum Abdi, the commander of the SDF, was in Damascus shaking hands with president al-Sharaa. This caused a major rift among the Alevis and other minorities. Abdi did this with the intention of fending off US pressure first and then protecting the Alevis later. But it was the wrong thing to do.

Something similar happened in 1937. Assuming that the Alevis knew about the Kurdish movement, Abdullah Öcalan, the founder leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), spoke positively of the strategic alliance the Ottoman sultan, Selim I, formed with the Kurdish principalities in the 16th century. In return for loyal military support they were granted considerable local autonomy. Understandably, however, this alliance talk caused consternation among the Alevis. They remember Selim as the murderer of 40,000 Alevis. Öcalan was trying to break down the prejudices of Muslims and Turks and create a rapprochement with them, but it failed miserably. After that, the Alevis remained largely unenthusiastic about the peace process and Öcalan then tried to make amends.

The same thing has now happened again. Therefore, an apology is necessary as the first step in making amends once again ●

OUR HISTORY

Classical Marxism and general strikes

Can the working class liberate itself through staging one big strike? That was the idea of Chartist leaders and is still the idea of left groups today. Marking the centenary of the 1926 General Strike, Jack Conrad looks at the Marx-Engels team and the international debates

Throughout their political lives Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels - the founders of scientific communism - intransigently argued against the proposition that the working class could liberate itself by the simple device of staging one big general strike. Given the division of labour that existed between them, it was usually the latter who took the lead in the associated polemics.

On a number of occasions, Engels, understandably, referred back to his brilliant book - published in 1845, when he was only in his mid-20s - *The condition of the working class in England*.¹ We will do the same. In it, after all, Engels touched upon how the world's first mass proletarian party, the British Chartists, attempted to stage what they called the 'holy' or 'sacred' month.

This month had nothing to do with celebrating "god's mighty works".² No, the goals were explicitly political. It was a proposed month-long holyday, or the general strike, which, alongside a consumer boycott and widespread civil disobedience, would - or so it was thought - be more than enough to bring the capitalist system to its knees and raise the working classes into power. The holy month was to be prepared by local and regional committees, mass meetings and a prolonged education programme in both means and ends. Strikers would have to save up enough money, food and other provisions to last out the month.

The phrase, 'holy month', seems to have been coined by William Benbow: a shoemaker, a non-conformist preacher, a coffee house manager, a journalist, a pornographer and a reform agitator. He suffered prison at least three or four times for his efforts. In 1831 Benbow joined the National Union of the Working Classes and in the following year published his little pamphlet: *the Grand national holiday and congress of the productive classes*.³ Showing that revolution was in the air, the Chartist convention, meeting in the summer of 1839, adopted Benbow's plan and determined to put it into almost immediate effect. It was to begin on August 12. So no prolonged period of preparation.

The weekly Chartist paper, *The Northern Star*, for August 17 and 24 reports local rallies, often with very large turnouts "comprising a majority of the working population of particular areas, which then proceeded to march to surrounding locations to pull others out in support of the sacred month".⁴ Nonetheless, the general strike failed. Dorothy Thompson argues that the authorities feared that "the limited actions" of the holy month would "soon have developed into an armed confrontation with troops and police".⁵ Note, many workers equipped themselves with muskets, rifles, bludgeons, pikes and knives. Even before it started, meetings were forbidden, rallies attacked and top leaders, such as Feargus O'Connor, Bronterre O'Brien and Henry Vincent, were rounded up. They were charged with seditious libel, conspiracy, etc (Benbow served nine months). *The Northern Star* writes about a "reign of terror".⁶ On the back foot, the Chartists called off the holy month after a mere three days.

Second test

Ironically, as explained in Engels' book, it was the bourgeoisie of industrial northern England who were consciously responsible for putting the holy month to its second test, this



William Benbow pictured in *Punch* 1848

time in July 1842. It was not, Engels said, that workers wished to quit work, but the manufacturers "who wished to close their mills and send the operatives into the country parishes upon the property of the aristocracy".

Putting aside their social contract with the aristocracy and their law-abiding creed of moral persuasion, the industrial bourgeoisie seem to have provoked, or taken advantage of, a general strike in order to use the working class as pawns. Letting loose proletarian anger was meant, in Richard Cobden's, words to "frighten the aristocracy", so much so that it would bow before demands for the repeal of the Corn Laws.⁷ This would bring the industrial bourgeoisie one step nearer to the day when it could finally crown itself *the governing class*.⁸

Predictably, because the industrial bourgeoisie and their Anti-Corn Law League led from behind; because for those below there was no clear goal in mind; because workers were driven into revolt by a plan hatched from above; because none wished to die for the sake of ending the corn laws; the whole thing did not take long to fizzle out.

For our purposes, however, what is particularly germane is not only the fact that at its height the general strike "involved up to half a million workers and covered an area which stretched from Dundee and the Scottish coalfields to South Wales and Cornwall".⁹ An independent working class politics was being forged - politics which went much further than those resulting from the simple antagonism that permanently exists between employer and employee.

Instead of striking against the corn laws, they acted in their own general - class - interests. They demanded

the 10-hour day, the restoration of wages to 1840 levels and the full implementation of the People's Charter. Led by Thomas Cooper, a minority argued that there ought to be a physical-force insurrection to carry through the entire programme. The majority around Feargus O'Connor agreed, but considered any such a move premature.¹⁰

Incidentally, as an aside, O'Connor was a dynamic, but mercurial, character. The majority of the industrial working class saw him as their natural leader - that despite the fact that he was what AL Morton calls a "strong opponent of socialism".¹¹ Marx and Engels, it should be added, admired O'Connor, not least when it came to uniting British and Irish workers. However, O'Connor's solution to the social question lay very much in the past, not the future. In 1845 he founded the National Land Company which was designed to facilitate workers purchasing little parcels of agricultural land. This would supposedly allow them to become independent of capitalism (needless to say, his 'land plan' failed). Of course, Marx-Engels had nothing but contempt for his 'smallholder socialism'.

Anyway, let us conclude our account of the 1842 general strike. For the industrial bourgeoisie it marked an historic turning point. The proletariat could not be as easily manipulated as was once believed. Having been unleashed as a weapon to frighten the landed aristocracy, workers showed themselves to be self-willed and uncontrollable. Horrified by their own creation, the industrial bourgeoisie abandoned its last Jacobin vestiges and adopted a thoroughly respectable constitutional stance.

Trusted retainers were armed and

sworn in as special constables. In Preston, when they failed to disperse the crowds, the 72nd Highlanders were given the command to open fire. Four died and many more suffered injury in the hail of shot. The unintentional general strike therefore stood opposed not only by the government, but all propertied classes: the propertyless were threatening "the destruction of those who had property" (Lord Chief Justice, Sir Thomas Denman).¹²

Arising from the events of July 1842, many Chartist leaders were arrested, convicted and sentenced. There was, however, a positive side. Crucially, the industrial bourgeoisie and the working class "decisively" separated.¹³ Chartism freed itself from bourgeois hangers-on and became a purely proletarian movement. The British industrial bourgeoisie had burnt its fingers trying to manipulate working class militancy. Chastised, it refused any longer to listen to physical-force talk. Fear of the working class now weighed more heavily than dissatisfaction with the governing landed aristocracy.

Anarchist polemic

Despite the negative experience of the Chartists' general strike, the idea was taken up by socialists in France and Belgium after the failure of the 1848 revolutions. Hence at the 1868 Brussels Congress of the International Workingmen's Association - the First International - the Belgian delegate, César De Paepe, proposed that a general strike should be used to prevent the outbreak of war. He considered war to be the principle means by which the ruling classes befuddle the masses. De Paepe also thought that trade unions themselves should constitute the constitutional foundations of the socialist order.¹⁴

Much to the astonishment of Marx, hearing about the proceedings back in London, De Paepe's resolution passed without division: "Since no society can exist when production is stopped for any length of time... it is therefore sufficient to cease work for a war to be made impossible." His resolution, therefore, called on workers "to cease work in the event of war breaking out in their country".¹⁵

Marx, writing in September 1868 to Engels, bluntly dismissed De Paepe's idea as "Belgian nonsense".¹⁶ De Paepe's ideas undoubtedly went on to exert a strong influence on revolutionary syndicalism. That said, it was the anarchists, under the leadership of Mikhail Bakunin, who, in the First International, made the general strike their own.¹⁷

Bakunin rejected the Marxist strategy of winning universal suffrage and using elections - even with the most restricted suffrage - to politically educate the working class and patiently build a mass party based on a minimum-maximum programme.¹⁸ He reasoned differently. The time for book-worming theorising, partial reform demands and stoically waiting for objective conditions to mature had gone. He called for 'propaganda by the deed' (later, after his death, to degenerate into desperate, despairing acts of individual terrorism). Exhausted workers, indebted peasants, ruined artisans, society's dregs and outcasts could not be convinced by fancy words. No, the best way to overthrow the capitalist system was via what appeared to be the shortest route of direct action. Attack the property, profits and privileges of the ruling classes through riot, boycott, sabotage and strike.

The "economic struggle" unleashes revolutionary instincts by jolting people out of their humdrum existence.¹⁹ With hidden leadership provided by Bakunin's secret organisation, events finally climax in the general strike. A minoritarian putsch follows, the state is ostentatiously abolished, but, according to Bakunin's *private* schema, power is actually exercised by the "collective dictatorship" of his secret organisation, headed - *quelle surprise* - by "Citizen B" himself.²⁰

If such a society had ever been realised by some horrible fluke, it would have been what Marx-Engels called a 'barrack room communism' of the kind that the Jesuits established in Paraguay during the 17th century: Bakunin admired this 'theological socialism'. Work was compulsory for the indigenous Indian population: they were housed in dormitories and ruled over by a self-appointed religious elite. There was, needless to say, no self-organisation. A more recent example of such a hell hole would be Kampuchea under Pol Pot ('Comrade No 1').

Note, Marx took the lead in the expulsion of Bakunin and his followers at the September 1872 Hague congress. Marx attended in person - a first. Behind the 'mask' of anti-authoritarianism, liberty and federalism, Bakunin was accused of running a secret, disruptive, conspiracy. This was, though, *not* drawing a line of demarcation against anarchism as such. Sincere anarchists were urged to stay and argue their corner. However, that did not mean some liberal 'live and let live'.

Engels mercilessly tore into the anarchist principles of federalism, opposition of political action and general strikism. "One fine morning," he mocked, the anarchists imagine "all

the workers in all the industries of a country, or even of the whole world, stop work, thus forcing the ruling classes either humbly to submit within four weeks at most, or to attack the workers, who would then have the right to defend themselves and use the opportunity to pull down the entire old society.”²¹

Events in Spain in 1873 gave an “unsurpassed example of how a revolution should *not* be made”. Here was a country where the anarchists enjoyed considerable influence. Confronted by a serious revolutionary situation, however, the anarchists were compelled to ditch virtually their entire programme. Instead of abstaining from political and electoral activity and abolishing the state, they constituted themselves as an impotent rump within an archipelago of patently bourgeois ‘cantonal’ governments. Finding themselves drawn into useless, senseless and uncoordinated uprisings, their only remaining principle of federation and local autonomy gave counterrevolution the initiative and allowed it to concentrate its forces and crush one town at a time, before turning to the next.

Obviously anarchist politics stood in flat contradistinction to the living economic and political struggle. In spite of that, even as the Spanish fiasco unfolded, there were still those anarchists who refused to let go of *the* general strike as their social panacea. Hence, at the September 1-6 1873 Geneva congress of the anarchist Alliance of Social Democracy, it was agreed that “the partial strike” should be renounced “as much as possible”. Yet, while there were different opinions and no firm final decision, there was a distinct current - crucially the Swiss centre - favouring *the* general strike.²² However, it was in effect admitted that to carry out this *strategy* there had to be an almost perfectly functioning global organisation presiding over almost unlimited funds.

Engels had no problem in pointing out that here was the “rub”. On the one hand - especially if the anarchists has persuaded people against political participation - no government would sit idly by while workers painstakingly accumulated their pennies for their project. On the other hand, almost by definition, the *real* class struggle would bring about the liberation of the working class long before any almost perfectly functioning organisation with almost unlimited funds had been built. Furthermore, if by some miracle such a global power had been built, then surely there would be no need for the “roundabout way of the general strike” in order to obtain the objectives of the working class.²³

Here was the reasoning that constituted the Marxist approach to the general strike strategy and which went on to inform the approach of the Second International.

Second International

Founded in 1889, the Second, Socialist, International expanded at a fantastic pace. By the early years of the 20th century it included within its ranks every mass working class party in the world (often newly formed). Unlike the First International, which was a smaller but very broad affair - embracing not only Marxists, but Proudhonists, Blanquists, Owenites, British trade unionists, as well as Bakunin’s anarchists - the Second International accepted Marxism as its *natural* world outlook.²⁴ Engels was elected honorary president.

The Second International grew in an extended period of social peace - fertile conditions for many leaders to be seduced by the specialised business of parliamentary procedure, trade union bargaining, party management ... and the lures of bourgeois respectability. Hence there was a considerable stratum of influential social democratic office-holders



Mikhail Bakunin: hidden revolutionary elite

who wanted to forget (even censor) the countless and very inconvenient revolutionary statements contained in the writings of Marx and Engels. How, for example, they had called for internationalism, arming of the people, smashing the capitalist state and proletarian dictatorship. Instead, all that was remembered was their stress on using elections and criticism of the anarchists - who were now almost totally irrelevant. Notwithstanding that, the general strike as a social panacea refused to die.

The first, 1889, Paris congress had before it an amendment, from a French delegate, to the successful resolution calling for the international celebration of May Day: he wanted it to be a day of general strike “to mark the beginning of the social revolution”.²⁵ Due to time constraints, discussion proved impossible. According to the records, only Wilhelm Liebknecht referred to it, dismissing the amendment because it “was an impossibility”, since a general strike required a degree of working class organisation “unattainable in *bourgeois* society”. The proposal was withdrawn.²⁶

The 1891 Brussels congress saw the Netherlands delegation, headed by Domela Nieuwenhuis, table a proposal urging workers to stop war with a general, mass, strike: “a threatened declaration of war should be answered by an appeal to the people for a general cessation from work”.²⁷ Delegations rejected the motion by 13 to three: the Netherlands and a majority of the British and French voting in favour.

The 1893 Zurich congress likewise had a motion calling for an international general strike against the threat of war. It too fell because of time. However, after preliminary discussion on the International Socialist Bureau, it was agreed that Karl Kautsky would draft a motion.

Ideas of a “world strike” were rejected as impractical due to the uneven development of the workers’ movement. That notwithstanding, a general stoppage called in particular industries “could in certain conditions be a most effective weapon of political as well as economic struggle”.²⁸

The 1896 London congress saw an overdue line of demarcation drawn. The anarchists were excluded because of their rejection of political action (eg. standing in elections). Nationwide strikes and boycotts were, though, it was agreed, perfectly legitimate tactics to advance the interests of the working class. Once again, however, the idea of an international general strike against

the war threat got nowhere.

At the 1900 congress in Paris there was a similar outcome. The reporters were Karl Legien (Germany) for the majority and Aristide Briand (France) for the minority. The congress adopted this resolution by a sound margin of 27 to seven:

The congress - taking into account the resolutions adopted by the international congresses of Paris and Zurich, and recalling the resolution adopted in London in 1896 that dealt with the general strike - considers that strikes and boycotts are necessary weapons to attain the goals of the working class, but it does not see how an international general strike is, under existing circumstances, possible.

What is immediately necessary is the organisation of trade unions by the masses of workers, since it is only the extension of organisation that makes possible strikes in entire industries or entire countries.²⁹

But then there was life itself. In 1891 - and then, crucially, in 1893 - Belgian workers staged general strikes to compel the government into conceding universal male suffrage. Called by the Belgian Workers Party - one of whose founding members was a certain César De Paepe - the 1893 general strike lasted from April 12 to 18, and was met by military force: a dozen or two strikers were killed.

The rapid spread of the strike apparently caught the BWP leadership, under Émile Vandervelde³⁰, by surprise. Approximately 200,000 took part. Wanting to avoid revolution, the Catholic-dominated government agreed to expand the franchise tenfold. Tax thresholds were abolished and all men over 25 gained the vote.

The first elections under the expanded franchise took place in October 1894. However, the BWP did not fare as well as might perhaps have been expected. Social Catholicism, launched with the 1891 papal encyclical *Rerum novarum*, considerably boosted the electoral fortunes of the Catholic Party. Despite that, over 300,000 voted BWP and 27 BWP MPs were returned (the third largest parliamentary fraction). Note, it was not until 1948 that universal suffrage was finally achieved in Belgium.

The Belgian general strikes had a definite impact on the Second International. After all, the BWP had shown that “Belgian nonsense”

worked - well, in the limited terms of expanding the franchise. Nor was a *nationwide* general strike an “impossibility”, as Liebknecht *seems* to have maintained (he might, after all, have been rejecting a “world strike”). Anyway, Belgium’s workers had staged a mass strike that succeeded in smashing open the hitherto closed doors of parliament.

There was also the 1905 Russian revolution - the great dress rehearsal - with a massive strike wave, which culminated in two general strikes in October 1905 - the subject of our next article.

In closing, it is more than worth noting that, despite Ignaz Auer’s famous adage, “*Generalstreik ist Generalunsinn*” (general strike is general lunacy), he and other leaders of Germany’s Social Democratic Party closely paid close attention to the Belgian and Russian events. Moreover, they began *active* preparations for an anti-constitutional *political* general strike in the first half of 1914 (an inconvenient fact which totally blows apart the bog-standard academic and leftist narrative of a reformist, non-revolutionary SDP, mired in bureaucratic inertia³¹).

The objective was to *force* an extension of the franchise in Prussia (the pre-eminent and by far the largest political unit in the German empire). Its ‘three-class’ system favoured Junkers and big capitalists and ensured that their interests easily dominated Prussia’s indirectly elected Abgeordnetenhaus (lower house). The Herrenhaus (the upper house) was largely appointed by the kaiser.

Even the likes of Friedrich Ebert and Eduard Bernstein were up for the fight. In May-June 1914, the SDP actively geared up by creating its ‘suffrage reform fund’ (originally named ‘mass strike fund’). Prussia’s interior minister, Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell, expressed his grave concern about the looming general strike, and the central government made ready for criminal proceedings against SDP leaders.

The outbreak of World War I in late July 1914 abruptly halted all such plans. Party leaders agreed the *Burgfrieden* (castle peace) with the government.³² War credits would be supported in the Reichstag and there would be no strikes for the duration. An act of monumental betrayal ●

Notes

1. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 4, London 1975, pp295-96.
2. www.marxists.org/history/england/chartists/benbow-congress.htm.
3. *Ibid*.
4. kmflett.wordpress.com/2014/08/16/175-years-since-the-sacred-month-of-august-1839-how-the-chartists-planned-to-bring-down-capitalism.
5. D Thompson *The Chartists: popular politics in the industrial revolution* Aldershot 1984, p77.
6. *The Northern Star* August 24 1839.
7. The Corn Laws were first introduced in 1804 by a parliament dominated by landed interests. War with France perpetuated conditions whereby the most parasitic elements could hang on to governing power and push through legislation that ran counter to the ‘national’ interests of the bourgeois nation. Though big landlords maintained their enormous and bloated wealth by levying a protective duty on corn imports, for the mass of the population that meant a high price for bread, and, for the industrial capitalists, an upward pressure on the price of labour-power. A combination of Anti-Corn Law League agitation and the famine in Ireland was eventually responsible for their final repeal in June 1846.
8. The industrial bourgeoisie secured full *voting* entry into the parliamentary political system with the Reform Act of 1832. Edward Thompson suggests that this resolved a revolutionary situation in Britain and hence prevented an explosion that would have undoubtedly gone way beyond the Jacobin Year 1 of France, maybe even putting political power into the hands of a British version of the *enragés* (EP Thompson *The poverty of theory* London 1981, pp257-66). Though *real* capitalism was now the dominant mode of production, even at this decisive *reformist* moment the industrial bourgeoisie failed to constitute itself as an independent, let alone dominant, political force in parliament. Except for the handful of Radicals, the industrial bourgeoisie lined up behind the Whig *Party* (a

- prefiguration of the *reformist* entry of working class voters onto the political scene less than half a century later). Capital exercised power not through a bourgeois political class, but socially as a dominant mode of production. The landed aristocracy - which had, through capitalist farming and charging capitalist ground rent on mines, become bourgeoisified - continued to staff the governing caste throughout the 19th century. Between 1818 and 1900 there was no discernible increase in the number of commoners in British cabinets. Indeed, before Edward Heath most Tory leaders boasted a long aristocratic pedigree.
9. M Jenkins *The general strike of 1842* London 1980, p21.
 10. See D Thompson *The Chartists* Aldershot 1986, pp271-98.
 11. AL Morton *A people’s history of England* London 1974, p433.
 12. Quoted in M Jenkins *The general strike of 1842* London 1980, p15.
 13. F Engels *The condition of the working class in England* Harmondsworth 1972, p259.
 14. See R Graham, ‘Anarchism and the First International’ in M Adams, S Matthew S and C Levy (eds) *The Palgrave handbook of anarchism* London 2018, pp325-42.
 15. www.marxists.org/archive/braunthal/history-international/vol1/19gstrike.htm.
 16. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 43, Moscow 1988, p101.
 17. Mikhail Bakunin (1814-76) - Russian anarchist and one of its leading ideologists. He took part in the February 1848 revolution in Paris, was imprisoned in Saxony in 1849 and handed over to the tsarist authorities, who sent him into exile in Siberia. He escaped in 1861. As a member of the First International, from 1864 he waged a fierce factional struggle against its general council led by Marx.
 18. The maximum programme is the final aim of communism. The minimum programme includes reform, such as universal suffrage, the eight-hour day, a progressive income tax, universal free education, the nationalisation of the banking system and replacing the standing army with a popular militia.
 19. M Leier *Bakunin the creative passion - a biography* New York NY 2006, p249.
 20. Bakunin wrote to Albert Richard in April 1870. explaining his organisational schema: “like invisible pilots in the thick of the popular tempest, we must steer it not by any open power, but by the collective dictatorship of all the allies - a dictatorship without insignia, titles or official rights, and all the stronger for having none of the paraphernalia of power” (M Bakunin *Selected writings* New York NY 1973, pp178, 180).
 21. F Engels *MECW* Vol 23, Moscow 1988, p584.
 22. “The congress, considering the actual state of the International, does not regard the question of the general strike as a complete solution for the workers’ movement, but believes it should be presented to the workers as an active part of socialist propaganda” (Quoted in P Goodstein *The theory of the general strike from the French revolution to Poland* Cambridge 1984, pp44-45). Over the next few years, anarchists mostly moved away from advocating the revolutionary general strike, instead embracing what the Italian anarchists called ‘propaganda of the deed’. The concept was in many ways a continuation of the general strike strategy, in that its goal of fostering workers’ consciousness of their oppression and their power would thereby prepare the way for revolution (See N Pernicone *Italian anarchism, 1864-1892* Princeton NJ 1993, pp118-28, 41-45).
 23. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 23, London 1998, p585.
 24. Bakunin and other anarchists were expelled from the First International at its Hague congress in 1872. A similar fate befell the anarchists at the Second International’s 1896 congress in London.
 25. It is worth pointing out that the workers’ movement in France was deeply divided between Marxists on the one side and on the other those organised in the Fédération Nationale des Syndicats Ouvriers. Unions strongly favoured the general strike, but not as a weapon for securing political objectives: they rejected all forms of parliamentarism too. The general strike was their lever of social revolution.
 26. www.marxists.org/archive/braunthal/history-international/vol1/19gstrike.htm.
 27. www.marxists.org/archive/braunthal/history-international/vol1/19gstrike.htm.
 28. *Ibid*.
 29. www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/second-international-resolutions-book/ch05.htm.
 30. Émile Vandervelde joined the BWP in 1886 and had a long parliamentary career. Widely respected, he served as president of the Socialist (Second) International from 1900-18. However, with the outbreak of inter-imperialist war in August 1914, he urged national defence against the Germans. In 1916 he became a minister of state in the de Broqueville government.
 31. See CE Schorske *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: the development of the great schism* Cambridge Mass 1955; JP Nettl *Rosa Luxemburg* Vols 1 and 2, Oxford 1966; D McLellen *Marxism after Marx: an introduction* London 1979.
 32. The leadership of the SDP’s Reichstag faction voted by 4:2, the entire Reichstag faction by 78:14. Observing party discipline, the *entire* Reichstag faction then voted unanimously for the *Burgfrieden*. Karl Liebknecht was the first to rebel, but only in December 1914. Others soon followed.

ECONOMY

Behind the bombast

Growth exploding? Productivity surging? Incomes up? Is the US economy really booming, as Trump claimed in Davos? **Michael Roberts** paints a rather more nuanced picture

Amid all the bombast and threats over Greenland in his Davos speech, Donald Trump made a series of boasts about the success of the US economy, which was, of course, down to him: "Growth is exploding, productivity is surging, investment is soaring, incomes are rising, inflation has been defeated," he told the gathering of the world's political and financial elite. "We are the hottest country anywhere in the world" (and he was not referring to global warming).

Trump said that the US economy was growing "phenomenally" at over 4% a year in real terms and the forecast for the next quarter was even higher - over 5% a year. Inflation was falling fast, allowing the Federal Reserve to cut its policy interest rate, which it should have done but for the reluctance of that 'dumbo' Fed chair, Jay Powell, whom Trump was keen to say would be replaced very soon. Under his presidency, he had reduced the bureaucracy of the federal government, getting rid of 270,000 jobs. The federal fiscal deficit was coming down fast. And, above all, he had stopped the influx of 'illegal' immigration that rocketed under Biden. Now the US was 'enjoying' net emigration.

Well, let us consider these claims. US real growth of gross domestic product in the third quarter (Q3) of 2025 came in at annualised rate of 4.4% - the highest in two years and much higher than expected. This 4%+ growth seems tremendous - but the devil is in the detail. First, this is an annualised rate, meaning that the quarter-over-quarter increase was about 1.1%. On a year-on-year basis (Q3 24 to Q3 25), real GDP growth was only 2.3% - slightly up from 2.1% in Q2.

Second, final sales to private domestic purchasers excludes trade and government, and so measures the state of the domestic private sector economy. That rose only 3% on an annualised basis. And year over year, growth was just 2.6%, down from 2.7% in Q2. So the apparent acceleration in real GDP growth was mainly due to net trade, and that was due to a reduction in imports from Trump's trade tariff hikes.

Third, the growth in real GDP hides the fact that investment growth slowed to just an annualised rate of 1% in Q3, mainly due to a sharp decline in house purchases. And it was actually down 0.2% year-on-year (yoy). Business investment growth also slowed sharply from 9.5% in Q1, and 7.3% in Q2, to 2.8% in Q3, with investment in buildings falling absolutely and growth in information investment slowing by two-thirds after the breakneck pace of Q2 (15.0%). On a year-on-year basis (Q3 24 to Q3 25), productive investment growth was 4.0% yoy.

And then there is the comparison between real GDP growth and real gross domestic income (GDI) growth - the latter measuring income actually received by workers and capitalists. GDI rose only at a 2.4% annual rate in Q3, compared to the headline GDP figure of 4.3%. The GDI yoy rate was 2.4% - the same as real GDP growth yoy. As for the average American income, as measured by real personal disposable income (ie, after tax), that was flat in Q3 and is up only 1.5% yoy - the slowest rate in three years. So the headline growth figure that Trump boasted



Nasdaq is booming, but what about the 'real economy'?

about is misleading. Underlying real GDP growth is much more modest, running at just above 2% a year - not bad, but hardly a blockbuster. And income growth for working families is slowing to a standstill.

It is true that the Atlanta Fed 'GDPNow' model estimate for real GDP growth for the fourth quarter of 2025 is an annualised 5.4%. And the year-on-year figure is likely to be higher than in Q3 because of the significant contraction in GDP in the first-quarter of 2025 due to the 'front running' of companies buying goods and services in advance of Trump's Liberation Day tariffs that were imposed last April. Even then, year-on-year real GDP growth is likely to be under 3% a year, not 5%-6%, as Trump boasted.

K-shaped

Moreover, this real GDP growth does not transfer into real income growth, especially for the majority of Americans. As many have argued, the US economy is 'K-shaped', meaning that rising incomes are confined to the top 10% of US income earners. Figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics released earlier this month¹ show that the labour share of the nation's GDP hit the lowest point since the BLS began measuring such things in 1947. In that year, the labour share - that is, the pay and benefits that American workers claimed - stood at 70% of the nation's income: "... had the bottom 90% been able to retain their 1975 share of the nation's taxable income, each of those workers would have seen their annual income boosted by \$28,000." No wonder consumer confidence among the bottom third of earners has dropped to its lowest on record.

The reason that most Americans

do not feel the same as Trump boasts about the US economy is because of the rising cost of living, squeezing incomes. Trump claims that "inflation has been defeated", yet the official consumer price inflation rate remains stubbornly high at 2.7% yoy - still some way above the US Federal Reserve target of 2%. The so-called 'core' personal consumption expenditure inflation rate, closely followed by the Fed, is actually even higher at 2.8% yoy. Food price inflation remains above 3% a year. And, as I have previously argued,² the official inflation rate underestimates the real rate.

Will the inflation rate fall from hereon in 2026? This is disputed. It seems that, so far, Trump's import tariff hikes have not had a significant effect on consumer price inflation. But goods price inflation has reached its highest level since 2023 - higher than at any point in the 2010s. Trump's claim that these tariffs are paid by foreign exporters is, of course, nonsense. Tariffs are charged on imported goods when they land in the US, so US importers pay the tariff. A recent study found that of 25 million import shipments, worth nearly \$4 trillion, foreign exporters absorbed just 4% of the tariff increases. In other words, for every \$100 in tariff revenue, \$96 comes from American pockets. But it seems that importers (US manufacturers, etc) are not yet passing most of this rise in tariffs onto American households.

The Peterson Institute reckons that in 2026 this will change and consumer price inflation will not fall, but accelerate to 4% a year:

The pass-through of tariffs to consumer prices has been modest to date, suggesting US importers

have been absorbing the bulk of the tariff changes. That will change in the first half of 2026. The many reasons for the lagged pass-through include businesses pricing based on when their inventories arrived (and have since run out) and concerns around being seen as raising prices too rapidly (so they are instead gradually increasing them).³

If such acceleration were to happen, the Federal Reserve would be forced to consider *raising* its policy interest rate - not reduce it, as Trump is demanding. Because inflation is "defeated", he is demanding that the Fed cuts its policy interest rate, which sets the floor for all borrowing rates in the US. He wants the current Fed chair, Jay Powell, out of his job. Powell finishes his term in May and the likely replacement is to be BlackRock executive Rick Rieder, who, along with other Trump supporters, will aim to cut rates in the latter half of 2026. But, if inflation is rising by then, US treasury bond yields will also rise and the dollar will come under downward pressure - hardly good news for Trump just before the mid-term Congressional elections.

Anyway, contrary to the conventional wisdom that central bank monetary policy can 'control' inflation, all the evidence shows that monetary policy has little effect on inflation, because price rises depend much more on changes in supply than demand.⁴ What the Fed can do is to lower borrowing rates for more speculation in financial assets - and this is what Trump really wants.

But maybe inflation will not accelerate despite the import tariffs. The US job market has slowed down significantly. In 2025, payroll employment rose by 584,000, corresponding to an average monthly gain of 49,000 - only one-quarter of the increase of two million in 2024. Indeed, in the latter half of 2025 there were zero job increases and the unemployment rate ticked up.

Trump boasted that his import tariffs would bring back manufacturing jobs from overseas to the USA. But US industrial jobs are down by 65,000 over the last year - a dramatic reversal from 2024, when it went up by 250,000 jobs. A major slowdown has hit all blue-collar sectors this year, including construction, mining and utilities - though manufacturing and transportation are driving the vast majority of US job losses.

Trump claims that his draconian visa restriction policy and the horrendous ICE attacks on American citizens would end the flow of immigrants into the country. And he was right. Deportations reduced the US population by between 600,000 and 1.1 million people in 2025, compared to increases under Biden of 2.5 million people each year in 2022 and 2023, and by 1.5 million in 2024.

But this is not leading to more jobs for native-born Americans. Employment in the sectors most dependent on migrant labour - agriculture, food processing, residential construction, health and childcare - has remained essentially flat. There is no evidence of native-born workers filling these positions. On the contrary, while Trump argues immigrants have stolen jobs from American workers, labour market data says otherwise. The native-born unemployment rate worsened last year, while the rate for foreign-born workers held steady!

What about corporate profits? Will this boost investment and thus economic growth? Corporate profit mark-ups (profits per unit of output) remain near historic highs at 22.4%. And corporate profits in Q3 2025 were up sharply by \$166 billion. But again the headline figures are misleading. Despite the sharp Q3 rise, non-financial corporate sector profits are still down 2.5% from Q3 last year. Most profits are concentrated in the tech, banking and energy giants, while the rest of the US corporate sector is making little.

More hits

But what if the productivity of labour were to rise sharply? That would lower unit labour costs for American companies, enabling them to absorb rising import prices and still sustain reasonable profits growth. US labour productivity rose at an annualised 4.9% in Q3 2025 - the strongest pace in two years. As a result, unit labour costs fell 1.9% in Q3, following a decline in Q2, the first back-to-back declines since 2019. So has the AI productivity boom started to arrive and save the US economy and Trump through 2026, as companies can then effectively grow without the need to add new workers?

Once again, this headline quarterly figure is misleading. Productivity is up only 2.3% yoy to Q3 2025 - less than half the annualised rate. Still, that is a much better pace in productivity growth than the US has experienced up to now. Growth in labour productivity per hour is quite volatile. The average annual rate of productivity growth in the 2000s was 2.7%, but only 1.3% a year in the long depression of the 2010s. It has since recovered to 2.1% a year so far in the 2020s, but that is an average rate still below the 2000s.

Real GDP growth depends on two factors: growth in both the number of employed workers and their productivity. In 2025, US employment growth staggered to a standstill, as net immigration reversed and no new jobs are being created. Indeed, if AI is having any effect, employment may fall in 2026. So, even if annual labour productivity rises (because jobs are being shed) to say 2.5%-3%, the US economy will hardly be booming. Moreover, all the income gains will be snuffed up by the top 10%.

And there are more hits to come for the majority of American households. Trump's so-called "big, beautiful" fiscal bill is now in operation. He talks of no taxes on tips and other small measures, but the big hits are cuts to corporate profit taxes and to Medicaid and food stamps. The Congressional Budget Office reckons the bill will reduce the incomes of the 40% lowest-income Americans, while the top 20% make large gains.

Finally, if the AI bubble should burst later this year,⁵ all bets are off! ●

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Notes

1. See prospect.org/2026/01/19/american-workers-labor-bureau-labor-statistics-gdp-redistribution-wealth.
2. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/12/09/stagflation-and-the-k-shaped-economy.
3. www.linkedin.com/pulse/risk-higher-us-inflation-2026-peter-orszag-c6z8e.
4. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/02/19/inflation-supply-or-demand.
5. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/10/14/the-ai-bubble-and-the-us-economy.

YOUTH

Freedom comes with thorns

Australia has done it, France has done it too, the Tory frontbench and teaching unions want to do it, the government might do it. They all want to ban under-16s using social media. But should we go along with such kneejerk draconian restrictions? We certainly should not, argues **Baris Graham**

In the last few months, the proportionate increase of accusations in the press against social media and general internet usage in relation to 'online harm' and the 'mental health of young people' has reached a definite tipping point. Of course, anyone who knows the bandwagon tendency of the rightwing media and their hand-wringing centre-left alter egos, will know the kneejerk reaction to any social problem: bans, state control and clampdowns.

You only need to type in your browser the web address of the *Daily Mail* - or, for the pearl-clutching audience, *The Guardian* - to see headlines mentioning the latest 'expert' banging drums about 'mental health' or a minister extolling the virtues of the Online Safety Act.¹ Of course, what I intend to do in this article is not brush away any concern you might have with the online world and its negatives - a matter, I believe, Scott Evans covered well in his recent *Weekly Worker* article² - but to examine why these matters are at the forefront now, when one could produce similar claims of the same intensity five years ago. Who is the establishment blaming, when these panopticon-like measures are being introduced, and why are they actually doing it?

The position of the *Weekly Worker* has been defiantly clear, when it comes to the regulation of speech and expression, including state oversight and restriction: we are against it - not least because, the greater the power a bourgeois government has to regulate life, the more it can use such power to impose restrictions on forces hostile to it (not least working class militants and Marxists), but also because, as Engels put it in 1865, "Without these freedoms [the proletariat] will be unable to move freely itself; in this struggle it is fighting to establish the environment necessary for its existence, for the air it needs to breathe."³

Not a class

Of course, children and under 16s do not constitute a class. But the majority of them are working class, ie proletarian. They are born of working class parents and will become sellers of labour power. Nonetheless, while we favour protective legislation - that almost goes without saying - we also recognise that children and young people should, themselves, actively participate in their passage to adulthood as self-making individuals. That should happen in school, at home, in society ... and online. Hence we favour empowerment, not treating them as somehow being born outside history, outside capitalism with all its commercialised horrors and perverted values. As with adults the answer lies in organisation ... and building an alternative culture that exist within capitalism but also points beyond capitalism.

Hence, we want to radically transform what passes for 'education'. Schools should not be police-guarded prison houses dedicated to achieving exam results and imposing a suffocating liberal conformity. The arts, music, sports, creativity need to thrive (and not only in the better so-called public schools). Hand-in-hand with that there needs to be, yes, self organisation: school councils and unions, spaces and clubs of all kinds and discussion groups ... and young communist leagues.

Of course, that comes with risks. The world is horrible and



Social media: adults only?

full or horrible people. Racist non-racists, sexist morons, nationalist demagogues, crazies of every kind and variety will push their values and ideas, not least on social platforms. Capitalists will certainly use every device, every opportunity to make a fast buck. But you cannot have free development without the thorns.

Meanwhile, we have a tidal wave of laws, starting with the aforementioned Online Safety Act 2023, plus Australia's and now France's⁴ restrictions on youth in relation to social media, have been passed regulating *internet platforms* - and thus both large tech companies and individual internet users. But none of this should come as a surprise.

However, what surprise there is, as mentioned before, is why these measures are being taken now. There have been talks on 'online harm' from government mouthpieces, plus the spectacle of the mass media and the NGO bureaucratic complex, going back as far as the mid-2010s. However, these concerns are largely a product of the post-Covid era and have been written into law in a relatively short time ... and in many countries too.

As certain people from the tech pseudo-libertarian sphere might claim, this is not merely because of some imagined or real technological illiteracy of national governments. Even if there are a million bureaucratic hoops and checks that legislation has to go through before it can be passed (as examples, such as the Computer Misuse Act of 1990 or the recent pollination of 'AI safety' legislation in national and supra-national legislation, show), governments still have far-reaching powers at their disposal to use as they see fit.

Now, the seemingly benign reasons governments have given for pushing the latest tranche of legislation have been focused on various forms of 'online harm'. They include the atomisation of children, the encouragement of self-

harming, 'political radicalisation', with a particular focus on young men embracing the racist far right ... that and murderous misogynistic attitudes (with the recent TV series *Adolescence*⁵ providing a particular cultural mark on popular consciousness).

As previously stated, I do not think that this concern is totally unfounded - just as 'hate speech' legislation, which has been used to clamp down on expressions of solidarity with Palestine, does not mean that there is no actual hurtful and racist speech. Similarly, the state's dictatorial regulation of online platforms and communication does not mean that the online world cannot have negative effects on people. But what is crucial is that people should not for a moment think that what goes over the heads of senior lawmakers and civil servants when drafting these laws is genuine concern for the safety of people and particularly children.

Two-faceted

There is a two-faceted issue here, when discussing why governments might suddenly jump at the opportunity to impose online regulations. Firstly, as careful business observers have noticed, the market value of big tech companies in indices such as Nasdaq are the highest they have ever been, with the surge in value especially marked since Covid and the 'AI boom'.

This is a sector of the economy which has seen a stupendous expansion after the pandemic unlike any other, meaning that control over this sector is now considered more essential than ever. It should be no surprise, then, that in a period of history that many have dubbed "economically and geopolitically unstable",⁶ governments - as players in a field contested by other governments, as well as economically and culturally influential corporations - are seeking to preserve and expand their power rather than risking the loss of their

relative grip and their state capacity. That is to say, these measures are not a product of parliamentary gerontocrats who remain unaware of the internet's key role, or government ministers passing legislation as part of a reaction to what constituents have been writing to them in response to the latest shock horror tragedy in the news, but a direct attack on the influence of tech corporations *vis-à-vis* that of national administrations.

The second, and somewhat simpler, facet of this is the ever-increasing clampdown on personal privacy in the face of mounting civil discontent and protest movements. On the 'physical' frontier, there already has been an increase in the use of various police forces around the world of technologies such as facial recognition - the Labour government has just announced such measures to be enforced over the whole of England and Wales.⁷

It is not surprising then that governments now wish to extend their possible use into the online world. The main focus of these measures has been on trying to essentially de-anonymise online users. Internet platforms usually already hold data associated with their users' personal identity, such as IP addresses which can reveal their real-life location, or personal email addresses.

Secondly, and more odiously, however, are the measures to end, or 'bypass', end-to-end encryption - a cryptographic measure which allows users on the internet to communicate with each other completely anonymously (essentially the digital equivalent of speaking with someone in the privacy of your own home).

However, the potential effect of the internet on enabling not just individual, but mass, communication obviously prioritises this feature for policing and security organisations of many countries as something which should be suppressed. There already are measures in the Online Safety

Act which, if the government wanted to enforce them, would allow it to restrict in the UK any provider of end-to-end encryption messaging,⁸ if it did not permit the government to bypass such measures, thus making them redundant (the EU also has plans to enact similar legislation⁹).

We communists must reiterate that we oppose any legislation or measure which bars people from expressing their views or which infringes on people's right to privacy. Even with the common refrains from other leftists in mind - that opposing regulation in this instance means giving more power to the bourgeoisie, to Elon Musk (how dare you not protect people from harmful speech?) - there is a clear principle here that, in a society where governments operate as viceroys to the bourgeoisie and are dedicated primarily to the ultimate preservation of the current political and economic order, giving them an inch in terms of control means they could go a mile in terms of the preservation of their rule.

Do not be lured in the wrong direction by the bogey of online safety. ●

Notes

1. For some recent examples, see Paul Demarty's very good article, 'No trust in the state' (*Weekly Worker* January 15 2026: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1568/no-trust-in-the-state).
2. 'How not to overcome anxiety and depression' *Weekly Worker* January 8 2026: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1567/how-not-to-overcome-anxiety-and-depression.
3. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/02/12.htm.
4. www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jan/27/france-social-media-ban-under-15s.
5. www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/18/ban-smartphones-for-uk-under-16s-urges-adolescence-writer-jack-thorne.
6. [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/729374/EPRS_STU\(2022\)729374_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/729374/EPRS_STU(2022)729374_EN.pdf).
7. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cp37lryxq4eo.
8. www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/mar/09/whatsapp-end-to-end-encryption-online-safety-bill.
9. www.eff.org/deeplinks/2025/12/after-years-controversy-eus-chat-control-nears-its-final-hurdle-what-know.

REVIEW

A little flame snuffed out

M Farrar and K McDonnell **Big Flame: building movements, new politics** Merlin Press 2024, pp356, £30

This book tells the story of a small revolutionary socialist organisation called Big Flame. BF flickered briefly in the 1970s, but it was snuffed out in the early 1980s - starved of the oxygen of a militant class struggle against Stalinism worldwide.

The authors edited the narrative, so that it is broken up by the memoirs of over 50 former members. These are used to illustrate or exemplify aspects of the story, from its origins in the activities of a group of students radicalised by the class struggle in Italy, to its collapse - members either joining the Labour Party or prioritising the single-issue campaigns associated with the liberation movements of the period.

The authors will impress readers with the depth and extent of their research. For an organisation that never had more than a hundred members, BF writers were remarkably prolific. They left behind 29 pamphlets, 15 journals, a monthly newspaper, 15 periodicals, a monthly internal bulletin and 12 conference bulletins. BF members and sympathisers wrote about the struggles of workers in the UK and elsewhere in the world. They discussed feminism, racism and the nature of the former Soviet Union, amongst other topics. The authors write about BF's publications in the second chapter (pp66-67). Copies of these and the archives which contain them are listed in the appendices.

BF came into being, briefly flourished and passed away during the cold war. This exercised control over the militant struggle workers undertook against Stalinism - not only in the capitalist west, but elsewhere in the world. The Vietnam War saw groups on the left giving critical and uncritical support for national liberation movements, depending on how far they agreed with Soviet foreign policy.

BF members had active roles in the anti-apartheid, anti-colonial and anti-nuclear movements of the time and, following from the influence of Trotskyist groups, criticised the Stalinist two-stage theory of national liberation. According to this, the first stage was the completion of the tasks of decolonisation in alliance with an oppressed bourgeois class; the second stage was the struggle for socialism - the false idea being that, if the left mobilised the working class around a nationalist programme, it would be in a stronger position to move on to socialism.

This was consistent with the notion that it was possible to confine the struggle for socialism within the boundaries of the nation-state. In other words, 'socialism in one country' was a desirable and necessary stage in itself. Orthodox Trotskyists relentlessly challenged this doctrine. Other Trotskyists, such as the followers of Ernest Mandel, adapted their thinking and accepted the two-stage idea - in effect tail-ending movements for national liberation in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere. The Stalinist two-stage theory was flexible and could be adapted to every movement of the oppressed.

The authors state that, for members of BF, the debate over the nature of a socialist society was "arcane" (p131). They imply that few members of the group were interested in the question of whether the Stalinist regimes were workers' states, state-capitalist or some other social formation. A political culture dominated by Stalinist ideas and practices had related consequences. These included avoiding any discussion of the



socialist goal that might include "a definite blueprint for how socialism might be achieved" (p261). BF was a revolutionary socialist group because it believed in a "traditional restatement of the insurrection model". It was distinctive in its attitude to the new social movements of the time rather than in its thinking on the nature of socialism or communism.

Farrar and McDonnell believe that the group's characterisation as "soft Maoist" by members of the Socialist Workers Party was mistaken. The authors are at pains to argue that, even though BF was "too soft in its public criticism of the Chinese variety of communism" (p258), this softness had nothing to do with ideas on the nature of the Chinese Stalinist regime. This may be true. In 1976, BF members had written that China was in the process of "building socialism". By 1980, BF's national conference had adopted the position that Stalinist regimes such as the former Soviet Union and China were "neither capitalist nor (deformed) socialist" (p133). In other words, the group was moving away from a Maoist analysis towards a heterodox

They wrote about the struggles of youth, black people, the Irish and workers. They debated China, feminism, racism and the nature of the former Soviet Union. They then disappeared into the Labour Party

Trotskyist one. This is reminiscent of Hillel Ticktin's work on the political economy of the former USSR in the journal *Critique*. The agents of this transformation were Moshé Machover and John Fantham, two non-members who had written a pamphlet for BF on the nature of Stalinist regimes.¹

BF held unique positions for the left of the period. It argued that workers' struggles had created a partially formed anti-capitalist class consciousness. It recognised that mass communist parties are needed to support the growth of class consciousness, but denied that the historical period was conducive to building such parties. It denied that BF was the embryo of a political party, but called for the creation of revolutionary socialist organisations. These had the potential to intervene and generalise class consciousness. Members upheld the notion of the autonomy of the working class and applied this to the struggles of the oppressed and exploited worldwide - in particular, the movement for women's liberation. BF members were encouraged to prioritise building movements of the

oppressed over the party, and, if the organisation is remembered at all, it is as much feminist as Marxist in inspiration.

Unity in diversity

It can be argued that BF was a failed example of what Mike Macnair calls "unity in diversity".² This is a necessary condition for the collective action of the working class in the process of its self-emancipation. Without a unity that respects the diverse opinions and wills of the oppressed and exploited, there can be no class - just fragmented and atomised collections of individuals.

Readers will appreciate the critical observations about this failure in chapter 8. Farrar and McDonnell draw our attention to the weakening influence of the Italian school of Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s to explain the failure of policies of unity in diversity. This included the collapse of the Italian "sister party", Lotta Continua, under the double impact of an inability to respond to the sexism of male members and the turn to the urban guerilla movement by a section of the Italian left. Nonetheless, Italian theory and practice had a "very significant influence" (p252) on the organisation. For example, BF borrowed the idea from the Italians that "communism is inside the struggle of the masses". This position challenged ideas associated with Lenin and Kautsky that class consciousness was developed outside the workplaces and communities. There was therefore no need to recruit the most class-conscious leaders of struggles to a vanguard party.

Notwithstanding BF's overall failure to realise unity in diversity, it did attract the attention of some other groups. BF fused with two groups, one of which had split from the International Marxist Group (IMG). This was called the Revolutionary Marxist Current. The other evolved out of anarchism. It was titled the Libertarian Communist Group. These groups joined on the basis of BF's 'Draft manifesto', published in 1977. This addressed the problem of the role of the party in overcoming barriers to socialism. It argued that the chief impediment was the existence of divisions within the working class - the major ones being between women and men, black people and white, the waged and unwaged and between young and old (LGBTQ+ people were not mentioned).

In order that unity within the class can be achieved, organisations are needed that prioritise the various movements for liberation. As the authors state, "The abiding principle was 'The movement comes first, the party second'" (p257). This meant that unity "would emerge when the oppressed groups had increased their strength". A party would come into being at some point in the future when the liberation movements of the oppressed had acquired a status equal to the organisations workers had created through the class struggle. BF was not the embryo of such a party. Nonetheless, it showed how a party could be built with an uncompromising commitment to movementism and autonomy.

Autonomy

The notion of autonomy adopted by Big Flame was taken from Italian Marxism in the 1960s. This informed militant workers' struggles in what is known as the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969, when workers organised outside the trade unions and battled with the police. This led to the emergence of new political groups such as Lotta Continua ('The Struggle Continues').

BF copied the methods of LC, forming ‘base’ groups. These created links between external militants, worker activists organising within workplaces and community organisations.

BF started life as a rank-and-file newspaper that reported local industrial struggles critical of the opposition of trade union shop stewards. This had a limited programme, calling for work-sharing, opposition to productivity deals, unionising the unemployed, housebuilding for the homeless, and the creation of a “socialist Britain” (sic, p48).

BF understood working class autonomy in various ways, including support for workers’ action independent of the trade unions - such as wild-cat strikes or a refusal of work (p103). Autonomy was a form of political independence from capital’s constant attempts to “restructure the way in which it rules” (p102). The assertion of workers’ autonomy challenged every form of political and economic oppression facing workers, including those imposed on workers’ struggles by self-proclaimed Stalinist or Trotskyist ‘parties’ corrupted by Leninist ‘theories’ of organisation.

The authors tell the story of an organisation with a deeply ambivalent attitude to Leninism. This was, on the one hand, a belief that there were real barriers inhibiting the growth of class consciousness. These needed to be overcome at some stage through the creation of Marxist parties. On the other hand, if these parties adopted a Leninist form, they would be centralising and repressive. They would turn the dictatorship of the proletariat into a dictatorship of the party.³

Farrar and McDonnell point out that BF was quite confused about the nature of revolutionary organisation. It vacillated between two poles. On the one hand, the organisation was “neither Leninist nor libertarian” (p1). On the other, it was not “completely dismissive of Leninism” (p97). They argue that libertarianism was more influential on the group than Leninism, and list various themes the group adopted. These were derived from libertarianism and included prefigurative politics, non-hierarchical organisation, direct action, local organisation and an openness to feminism (p38).

Women in BF were quick to embrace the notion of autonomy and to apply it to strategies for women’s liberation. Like other socialist feminists, they distinguished between autonomous organisation - independent of the influence of men - and separatism. Autonomy enabled safe spaces for women to meet, free from the influence of overt sexism. Separatism, on the other hand, entailed, wherever possible, ending all relationships with the oppressor - including sexual relationships. It became the dead end known as ‘political lesbianism’.

The authors define autonomy as the recognition that “those whose form of oppression is not your own have the right to make their own decisions”. This included the right to reject joint work with others (p256). The justification for this politics was that the forms of organisation revolutionaries adopt should in some way “prefigure” the communist society of the future. This led to some BF men’s involvement with anti-sexist politics, such as organising creches for women’s conferences and support for childcare generally. It led others to argue that it was not right to have anything to say to the social movements, since they were autonomous. This was compatible with self-censorship and the censorship of others (p255).

It is arguable that this interpretation of autonomy undermined the rationale for having an organisation that prioritised building social movements over building a revolutionary



Leftwing politics in Italy: big influence

socialist party in the first place. If so, the commitment to autonomous organisation contributed to BF’s ultimate demise in the early 1980s, when activists abandoned the notion of involvement in revolutionary organisation for a deeper involvement in the single-issue campaigns of the movements and the Labour Party.

Readers interested in the role of feminism within BF will turn first of all to chapter 5, in which three women former members discuss BF and feminism. They recall that the struggle for democracy “appeared to be unique to BF” (p181). They highlight the idea of “prefigurative politics”. This involved a commitment to collective and shared childcare, cooking and other household tasks. BF women were active in struggles around health and sexuality. The writers mention the organisation’s opposition to paedophilia, rape, other forms of violence to women, and moves to restrict or ban access to abortion facilities. They were drawn into debates about the Labour Party in the early 1980s. They conclude that they “no longer believed that it was possible to create a revolution that would fundamentally change the status quo” (p200).

The subsequent abandonment of revolutionary socialist politics was not unique to the female members of BF. Many members were influenced by the so-called downturn of the class struggle in the 1970s. This coincided with a growth of the left of Labour after the election of the Conservatives in 1979. In 1981, a group previously close to the project of creating a new revolutionary organisation argued that BF should dissolve itself into the Labour Party. Their reasoning was that Labour was a more supportive environment for the development of mass politics and that the aim of revolutionaries should be to turn the party outwards towards the movements. A former member who joined the Labour Party recalls how relieved he was “not to be a revolutionary, chasing impossible dreams” (p301). He writes in his memoir proudly of his role in the witch-hunt against the so-called “hard left” of the Labour Party in the 1980s (p302). He later abandoned socialism and became the editor of a social democratic journal titled *Renewal*.

There was a palpable sense of disappointment after BF’s last two attempts to create unity out of diversity. Firstly, in the 1979 election, BF formed an electoral alliance with the IMG called Socialist Unity. This had a minimal effect on the results, candidates losing their deposits.

Secondly, in 1980, when 1,500 activists in the autonomist movements met at the ‘Beyond the Fragments’ conference - organised and promoted by BF - they showed no interest in BF’s project. The conference convinced some that militants should continue to reject the Leninist far left: either, from a libertarian perspective, BF was too Leninist; or, from a Trotskyist point of view, BF was insufficiently Leninist. Its attempts to build a party “from the bottom upwards without definite programmatic bases or secure organisational structures” was therefore bound to fail.⁴

Marxism

Some members found BF to be anti-intellectual, fearful of being denounced for “talking a language others would find difficult to understand” (p271). In one of the more amusing anecdotes, a former member recalls a summer school in 1978, when a comrade tried to explain Marx’s labour theory of value to a group of members. He picked up a frisbee people had been playing with and used the toy to illustrate that its value as a commodity was determined by the labour involved in its production. The audience was impressed, even though it was a hot day and some of the listeners had difficulty staying awake. When the comrade asked for questions and contributions, the first asked: “What is a frisbee?” (p191).

This story reflects an ambivalence within BF about the relationship between theory and practice. BF had a careless attitude to Marxist education. The identity of ‘revolutionary’ did not include the acquisition of political economy or a recognition of the relevance Marxism may have to developing theory and practice in general (p98). The links with Italian Marxism were abandoned, and in 1981 it was argued that BF should join the Labour Party.

The need for an education programme for new members was acknowledged, but never realised. Members’ primary commitment was “embedding themselves in ... everyday struggles” (p98). On education, the focus externally was involvement in the everyday struggles of teachers within the education system. Internally, responsibility for an education programme for members was given to four different education officers, none of whom was successful in getting a study programme off the ground (pp77-79). The authors comment that “lack of an agreed body of theory” and suspicion of ‘intellectuals’ were, among other influences, reasons why the

organisation failed to promote or advance Marxist theory or practice.

This book will interest students of the left during the period of the end of the cold war. It also offers a challenge to Marxists today - to explain the mistakes BF made and assess whether these are likely to be repeated in contemporary struggles to achieve unity in diversity amongst Marxists. Farrar and McDonnell say, in chapter 8, that BF showed that it was an organisation which could operate as a “dialogic collective”. I take this to mean that the group was thoroughly democratic and non-sectarian in its practice. This is attested both in the personal memoirs and the factional disputes the authors record.

The group’s rejection of embryonic Marxist party status, its ambivalence to what was understood to be ‘Leninism’ and its abiding hostility to Trotskyism were diverse expressions of the consciousness of the period. These days it is easier to refute the false doctrine that Lenin and Trotsky built a repressive party called Bolshevism, shaping the Soviet state in the image of the party and turning the dictatorship of the proletariat into a dictatorship of one man. Fifty years ago ideas such as these were taken for granted both within and outwith the Stalinised culture of the left.

Given that BF’s notion of creating revolutionary organisation never got as far as designing or delivering what might have been recognisable as a Marxist educational programme, it is no surprise that the group would be quickly and easily devoured by the twin beasts of a disintegrating Stalinism and a sectarian Labourism ●

Paul B Smith

Notes

1. J Fantham and M Machover *Century of the unexpected Big Flame* 1979.
2. M Macnair *Revolutionary strategy* London 2008, pp108-10.
3. Stalinist historians created the myth that Lenin’s greatest contribution to Marxism was his theory of the party. This was of a ‘new type’ called “democratic centralism”, found in Lenin’s *What is to be done?* This now discredited doctrine dominated both left and rightwing understandings of Leninism during the cold war. See LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered* Chicago 2008, p17, n21.
4. P Hearse *On Trotskyism and the Fourth International: two essays* IMG (1978), p36.

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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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Half vanity project, half future threat

All above board

Donald Trump's 'Board of Peace' is a goulash confection, but confirms the US intends to completely sideline the old global institutions, writes **Paul Demarty**

What with all the other excitement in world events, Gaza has fallen a little outside of the spotlight. Yet the main actors in that murderous drama tread on.

Donald Trump has unveiled his 'Board of Peace', which is supposed to govern the devastated territory in some form, when, supposedly, things have calmed down (and the mass of the population readied for expulsion). He is to chair it - for life (succession planning is, at this point, a little unclear). There is a bunch of activity concerning who is in and who is out. Most of the core European countries, including Britain, are presently out - presumably as a move in the great game being played over Greenland. Canada has been kicked out, thanks to Mark Carney's *lèse-majesté* at Davos last week.

The individuals involved in prominent positions are a strange old crew. Formally in charge of Gaza is Nikolay Mladenov - a Bulgarian politician with dubious financial arrangements exposed in the Panama papers, who few outside of Bulgaria will have heard of. There are the Trump creatures - son-in-law Jared Kushner and New York real-estate fixer-turned-diplomat Steve Witkoff among them. There is Marc Rowan, a hedge-fund billionaire, and Ajay Banga of the World Bank.

Trump seemed to vacillate over whether to appoint Tony Blair, a rather divisive figure in the region for obvious reasons. But he is there now, grin intact. He seems increasingly stiff and parched, as if he had skipped directly to rigor mortis - one thinks of Dickens's description, in *Bleak house*, of the Smallweeds: "a couple of sentinels long forgotten on their post by the Black Serjeant, Death".

It is not clear, retrospectively, exactly when Blair *developed* a world view - his early years in parliament were characterised by entirely vacuous opportunism - but, when he did, he hit on the set of ideas now more commonly associated with the 'tech right'. Progress means unleashing the forces of innovation, which in turn means the fusion of the state and the tech industry, pervasive surveillance and the naked dictatorship of the entrepreneur class.

Leopold II

In that respect, he is among friends. Kushner used the launch of the board to propose his vision of post-reconstruction Gaza, which is basically to turn it into a Dubai, with any remaining Palestinians reduced effectively to semi-free guest workers on their own land - after the fashion of the Gulf's notorious *kafala* system. The American outlet *Dropsite* has come upon a leaked resolution on how this is all to work:

The draft resolution formalises a hierarchical structure for the Board of Peace, with Trump as the



Donald Trump attends sick Board of Peace charter announcement at Davos

chairperson and an executive board that has "the same authority, powers and ability to make all delegations necessary and appropriate to carry out the Comprehensive Plan as the Board of Peace". The Executive Board has the power to "enact new laws, or modify or repeal prior" civil and criminal laws in Gaza.¹

In effect, Gaza will become the personal possession of Trump, as the Belgian Congo belonged to Leopold II. Palestinian involvement in all this will be limited to a "vetted, technocratic, apolitical committee", subject to the supervision of Mladenov.

Can this possibly work? It is hard to say. Certainly history offers examples of similar set-ups that have failed dismally - the Coalition Provisional Authority in post-invasion Iraq succeeded only in enriching a lot of Dick Cheney's mates and kick-starting a fearsome Sunni insurgency, before dissolving itself a year later. Gaza is not Iraq, however: it is impoverished, already ground down by years of occupation even before it was flattened by Israel after October 7. Militant groups may be able to continue limited guerrilla resistance, but they will have their work cut out making the Strip ungovernable.

There is, perhaps, a question over how on board Israel is with the whole thing. The strategic objective of Israel *vis à vis* the Palestinians is to be rid of them. Observers generally assume that Israel's recognition of Somaliland - a breakaway territory of Somalia on the Red Sea - is at least partly to obtain a dumping ground for the refugees from a third Nakba. (It is also conveniently located for striking against the meddling Yemenis.) To a domestic audience, Benjamin Netanyahu has indicated that he will not accept any further steps in the ceasefire process until Hamas is disarmed, hinting

perhaps at obstructionism. Finally, whether the Gulf states involved can truly weather the opprobrium from participation in all this remains to be seen.

New order

Yet the bigger picture is the more interesting one. Successful or otherwise, the Board of Peace is plainly an attempt to exclude historic organisations like the United Nations from what would usually have been their purview - of peacekeeping, reconstruction and maintaining some kind of fragile order in a situation like this. Poetically, Israel has also chosen this moment to demolish the old headquarters of the UN Relief and Works Administration, which was set up to do such work in Palestine. Its effective suppression during the Gaza onslaught - supported by Israel's allies - was a significant moment that leads naturally to outfits like this Trump creation.

The reconstruction of order falls, then, to a coalition of rogue businessmen, and their willing accomplices like Blair. The checks built into the UN, of course, tended to render it ineffective, with the veto powers of the permanent Security Council members tending to ensure that decisive action took place outside its purview. The Board of Peace sweeps all this machinery aside in a vulgar display of power. Its logo is plainly an insult to the UN - a copy of its globe-and-laurels design that only shows the Americas and switches blue for a Trumpian gold, with that slightly greasy look that betrays the use of AI in its creation. The unity of raw state power and technological kitsch - a picture of the grim world to come.

This is the context, as much as the Greenland crisis, in which we must place Carney's intervention at Davos. One could hardly but be struck by

this event - Carney is the very image of the *Pax Americana* technocrat: a former central banker turned centrist politician. Yet here he was, announcing to his tribe that the world order they knew was at an end. Perhaps, indeed, it had never existed: "We knew the story of the international rules-based order was partially false: that the strongest would exempt themselves when convenient, that trade rules were enforced asymmetrically. And we knew that international law applied with varying rigour, depending on the identity of the accused or the victim."

Yet "this fiction was useful, and American hegemony, in particular, helped provide public goods, open sea lanes, a stable financial system, collective security and support for frameworks for resolving disputes". So they went along with it - he compared this to Vaclav Havel's description of ordinary people making empty gestures of support for the Stalinist regime in Czechoslovakia. But this is no longer possible: there is a "rupture" afoot, and the world is moving to a period of great-power conflict. "Middle powers" - meaning Canada, Europe and the like - must stick together and box clever in a dangerous new international order.²

It may have been easier for Carney to break kayfabe in Davos because he owes his position, arguably, to the perverse consequences of Trump's blundering expansionism. He triumphed in an election the Canadian Liberals were long expected to lose badly, in part because Trump was threatening to annex the country, and his Tory opponent, Pierre Poilievre, was a Trump sycophant. Sure enough, his approval ratings have soared since he poked the bear once more, even if it resulted in yet another tariff spat. He nevertheless deserves credit of some kind for even daring to think

strategically at all, in which respect he outclasses the politically rudderless European governing class, and the sentiments he expressed will find an echo there.

War danger

Whether it will work is another matter. There are certainly opportunities for lesser powers at transitional moments like the present. Observe the ability of the Gulf states to influence events in Africa, for example; or even, on a smaller scale, the revival of Vatican diplomacy. Yet capitalism is intrinsically global, and thus tends towards the *centralisation* of key instruments like reserve currencies and systems of arbitration, and thus finally to *unipolarity*. Multipolarity is a feature of periods of transition, and invariably a prelude to great power war.

Trump's Board of Peace may, in itself, be slightly silly - a rogue's gallery of grifters and cronies, headed by a quite possibly senile and certainly mercurial tyrant. Yet it is the way things are going. In a brewing great-power conflict, the chief protagonists cannot waste time standing on ceremony, on polishing the old, beautiful lies. If Trump is replaced with someone more 'sensible' in the opinion of the Davos elite, that person will find it hard to give up the freedom Trump has won for the US executive in this period. One could not ask for a better image of what that means for the rest of us than Jared Kushner's Gaza-lago horror show. Canadians and others should not imagine that they are immune from such indignities.

The left, plainly, must oppose any involvement of our own governments. But we must also address the deeper problems. Particularly among 'official' communists and left social democrats of the *Jacobin* stamp, there has been a drift towards a variant form of foreign policy 'realism' that supposes that there can be a managed decline of US supremacy and a smooth transition into a multipolar order. As we have argued, this is an illusion - and one that tends in the end to unite the working class with their rulers in pursuit of sectional advantage in the global hierarchy.

Instead, we need a revival of proletarian internationalism, solidarity between national sections of the class and - as rapidly as possible - united action to *coerce* our rulers: to prevent, where possible, great power conflict from breaking out and, ultimately, turning it into the battle of class against class. It is, paradoxically, precisely because we are excluded from this great game that we can be a real actor within it •

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Notes

1. www.dropsitenews.com/p/leaked-board-of-peace-resolution-gaza-trump-us.
2. www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/davos-2026-special-address-by-mark-carney-prime-minister-of-canada.