

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly worker



From Calvinism, to Marxism, finally to Catholicism. Alasdair MacIntyre: January 12 1929-May 21 2025

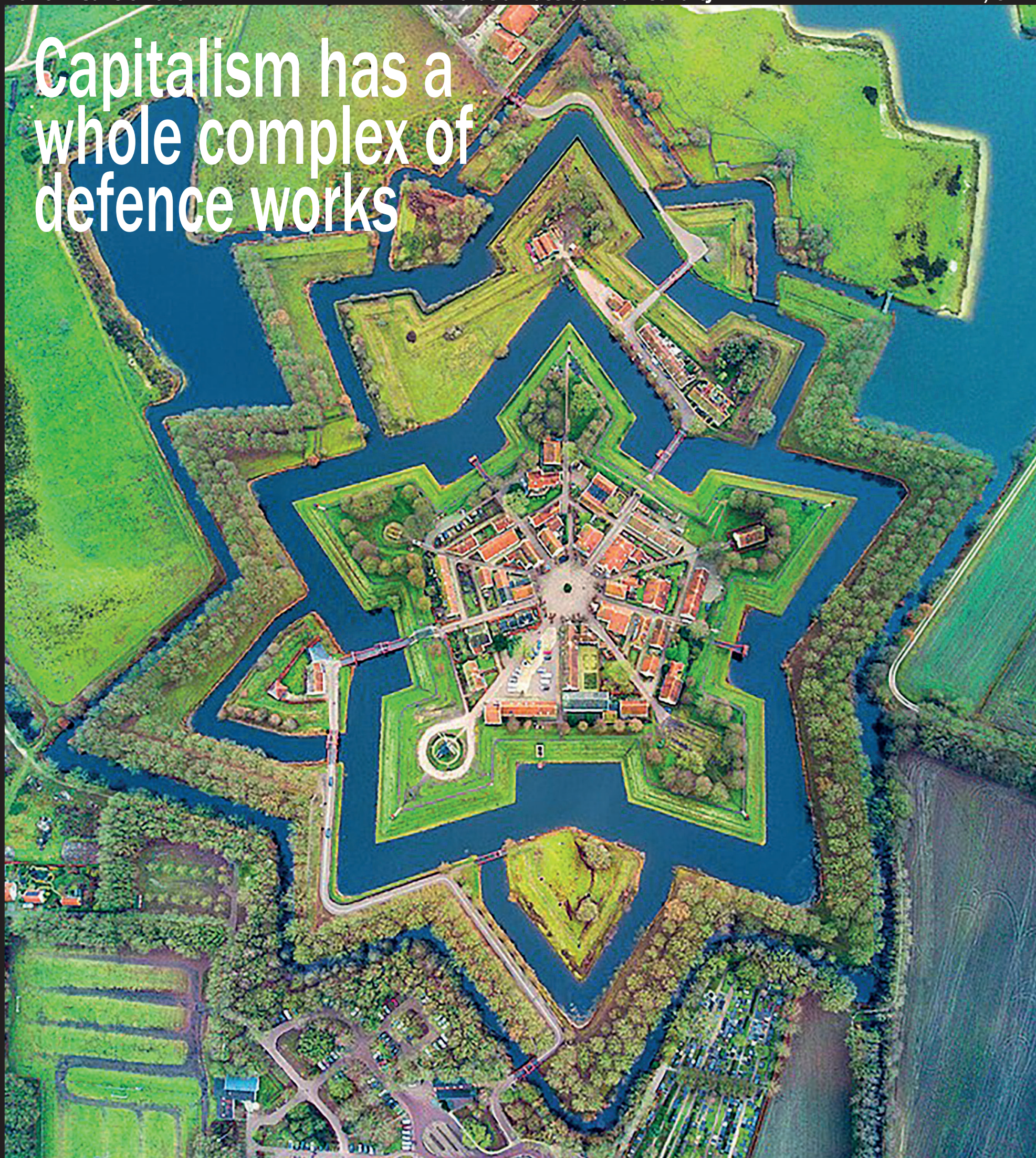
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Capitalism has a whole complex of defence works



LETTERS



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

Trans anger

Devon Laing's May 29 letter is rhetorically angry, but not politically useful. To begin with, as comrade Farzad Kamangar said in our aggregate discussion of my draft theses, "the theses on trans liberation are written for communists rather than an attempt to attract trans people as members".

This reflects a fundamental issue: we are not seeking to sell papers at trans rights demos, or to "manage and coordinate" the struggles, but to promote the idea of a *political voice for the working class* which combats the politics of the advertising-funded media and undermines the claims to loyalty of the nation-state and the current constitution. We want to promote the idea of the left organising in a *political party* for this purpose - as opposed to just trying to recruit activists out of currently fashionable struggles or "managing and coordinating" struggles. Combatting the Christianist-Tory witch-hunt round trans is, from our point of view, *part* of this larger task; but so, also, is combatting the Eurocommunist or Democratic Leadership Council politics comrade Laing defends, which are widely held on the left and are disastrous.

Secondly, comrade Laing argues that it is illegitimate to criticise the political line they support without participating in the actions they carry on. Very similarly, in the late 1960s to 1970s, some advocates of the line of armed struggle (guerrilla warfare) argued that there could be no legitimate criticism of this line without *participating* in the armed struggle. The line of armed struggle was a dead end, and the 'official communist' and Trotskyist critics of it were unequivocally right. Armed struggle was more risky for the participants than the lines of no-platforming opponents and alliance with the liberals - but *less* risky for everyone else. The 1973 coup in Chile was not caused by the MIR but by the US response to the electoral victory of Popular Unity; the 1976 coup in Argentina was not caused by the Montoneros or the PRT-ERP but by the US responses to mass forms of class struggle. In contrast, the line of no-platforming opponents and alliance with the liberals *has been* responsible for creating a political opening for a violent conservative counter-offensive.

Third, and following immediately from this issue, "the CPGB is not opposing the fash". US Socialist Workers Party leader Farrell Dobbs explained in 1975 that the policy of 'crushing fascism in the egg' by minority confrontation plays into the hands of the fascists: "You are losing ground in the mobilisation of the real class that can do away with fascism, and the fascists are gaining ground as a result." As I have pointed out previously ('Crushing it in the egg' *Weekly Worker* October 24 2024), the history of the left's attempts to "oppose the fash" by this method since 1975 absolutely confirms the truth of Dobbs's judgment.

Comrade Laing argues that "The Tories asked for a slate of policies that could help trans people, then they picked the one that seemed the easiest to actually work on. That was self-ID. We ended up having to fight on this one and the fight has

been picked again and again." This was like the frog who accepted the scorpion's promise not to sting in return for a lift across the river.

Finally, the question of arguments for the social construction of biology refers quite specifically to the arguments of Judith Butler and other Foucaultians. And these arguments *do* logically entail the truth of marginal-utility economics - unsurprisingly, since their rise to prominence was part of the general rise of neoliberalism (of which Foucault was part). The same goes for comrade Laing's bullet, "trans extreme". It *may* also go for comrade Laing's bullet, "trans lite": the reason being that the costs of human reproduction (pregnancy, childcare) enter into the reproduction costs of labour power, so that it is impossible to disregard (for the present) the connection of 'biological sex' to reproductive capacity.

The rest seems to me to be just expressed anger rather than argument.

Mike Macnair
Oxford

Trans identity

It is useful that the CPGB is debating the question of trans rights, given the issue has so divided the left - one side is tailing mechanical biological determinists and becoming 'useful idiots' for conservatives, while the other is tailing identitarian and idealist trans ideologists, many of whom brook no discussion on the matter. Both these camps are clearly wrong.

Thanks to Ian Spencer for his report on the aggregate, at which I was an invited observer ('Trans rights and open polemic' May 29). However, he seems to have misunderstood what I said. My apologies for not making my points clearer. In particular, the point I was trying to make about the recognition of Aboriginal heritage and identity in Australia is misrepresented.

To be recognised as Aboriginal for purposes of medical, housing and some employment purposes has a triple requirement: Aboriginal descent (a material matter), self-identification (individual) and Aboriginal community acceptance (social). Legally, at least, one can't simply self-identify as Aboriginal. I did not say that there were widespread attempts to self-identify as a "basis for state support" - this is a racist slur from the rabid right wing.

I did, however, raise the question of why gender self-identification is considered differently to ethnic or 'racial' identity, given that both gender and 'race' are social constructs. Why does Aboriginal identity require a material, individual and social 'test', whereas gender identity only requires an individual 'test'?

If anything, there is a closer connection between biology and gender than there is between biology and 'race'. And women's lived experience of oppression continues - an oppression with its roots in the sexual division of labour and the 'world historic defeat of the female sex' in the transition to class society thousands of years ago. Individual experience of that oppression starts at birth - or even beforehand in instances of sex-selected abortion.

I raised the case of Rachel Dolezal in the US, who self-identifies as black, although she was born to white parents. A written heckle in the Zoom comments said that she is "mentally ill". I

have no knowledge of her mental health, but I did point out that this is a slur thrown at transsexual people. Arguments against 'transracialism', to my mind, are generally quite weak, with most claiming racial oppression accumulates over generations, while gender oppression somehow does not.

Further, I said that, if we accept gender is socially constructed, then there are and can be more than two genders, while for the purposes of reproduction, sex is binary (though manifests strongly *bimodally*). Many pre-capitalist societies had multiple recognised gender roles. So, while the slogan, 'Transwomen are women', might be catchy, it falls back on a conservative, capitalist-era *gender binary*.

I also said that there is now general, concrete unity on the left in terms of lesbian and gay rights. However, no doubt differences remain on whether people are 'born gay' or sexuality is socially constructed after birth, or a mix. Hopefully people no longer believe in the 'gay gene'.

The CPGB theses on all this are okay as a start, but I think that, if there was a deeper theoretical understanding of the issue (from CPGB members and the left in general, myself included), then they would probably be shorter and clearer. We need a united position for the defence of trans rights that also allows for differences of opinion - and discussion - as to why people are transsexual. Demands to no-platform people in these debates are worse than useless - but the concrete defence of transsexual people and their right to live as they choose should be without question.

Martin Greenfield
Australia

Trans error

The CPGB's potential pivot to an anti-materialist position on the trans issue has the makings of a serious error. A person simply claiming to be of the opposite sex to that which was observed at birth does not make it so, and a party stating otherwise is unlikely to be taken seriously by the working class.

Incidentally, while it may appear to be true, as Devon Laing asserts in a rather amusing, but useful, letter lambasting Mike Macnair's draft theses ('Communism and trans liberation', May 1) for not going far enough down the anti-materialist road, "The CPGB knows we [ie, trans rights activists] are powerful in the leftwing spaces communists work in" (Letters, May 29), that isn't straightforwardly the case. Many young communists in recent years have joined organisations with a public, materialist line on the trans question (Young Communist League in 2021-22, Revolutionary Communist Party in 2023-24), making it highly questionable that a "pivot to trans" would appeal to many potential recruits to the CPGB - aside perhaps from a handful of semi-syndicalists from Manchester and a smattering of RS21 dissidents.

I am myself not so cynical as to suspect the draft theses to be aimed at the latter, and prefer to believe that, despite the coincidence of their emergence at the same time as the 'communist fusion' process, they are a genuine attempt to engage with an issue which has seriously divided the left for a decade or so.

On the substantive issues, there are two straightforward questions communists who seek to lead the working class will need to answer, each of which can be broken into two parts. One is philosophical

and the other practical. The questions require concise answers that a worker can understand and communicate to others effectively, not thousands of words of legalistic waffle.

The first (1a) is: Does it matter what a woman is?

To answer 'no' is clearly not a Marxist response, and would alienate enormous sections of the working class, particularly women. To answer 'yes' naturally leads on to the second part of the question (1b): What is your definition of a woman?

To not answer this clearly, or to deflect by saying that to ask the question at all is to reveal the asker to be the victim of rightwing culture war propaganda (the position taken by Macnair's theses), or by talking about the minuscule number of intersex people in the world (as Macnair has also done on occasion) will lead to communists not being taken seriously by workers.

The second question, again in two parts, is practical: (2a) Should anyone who wants to do so be able to access spaces reserved for women?

The answer to this from the trans rights activists and liberal equality advocates is 'yes'. It is the real-world consequences of mass organisations adopting this as policy, and not some concocted moral panic, which has led to this issue becoming a major contested area in society. Answering 'yes' to this statement ultimately led the NHS to a position whereby a nurse in Darlington, abused by her father as a child and upset by having to share a changing room with a natal male colleague, was told by her bosses when she went for a gynaecological procedure at the same hospital she worked at, that she had no right to request the same colleague be stood down from being in theatre. So it is difficult to see how communists can answer 'yes' to this question and be taken seriously by workers. CPGB members appear to accept the concept of women's safe spaces in prisons (although even this is not directly stated in Macnair's theses), and perhaps mental health facilities, but not elsewhere in society - a muddle-headed position.

Answering no to 2a leads to 2b: Should campaigning for trans rights therefore be focused on safe and accessible 'third spaces' rather than access to women's spaces for all?

Devon Laing is clear that this is a bad idea, and directs us to read a book by a third world feminist to explain why, but communists seeking to lead the working class need a better answer than that. It seems to me that to answer 'yes' to this question is the only logical first step to begin to find a way out of the appallingly divisive identity politics trap that these sex and gender questions have laid for the labour movement - with real-world consequences in my own trade union in having driven out of activity or exhausted Marxists on both 'sides'.

Campaigning for third spaces won't please everyone, but appears on the face of it to be the most immediate beginning of a compromise solution. Some of comrade Macnair's thesis 18 supports this position, but alongside a view that single sex spaces should be phased out - without any explanation of why. There is no recognition in the theses of the massively increasing levels of sexism, misogyny and men's violence against women and girls in society (the latter up 3 % between 2018 and 2023), and thus no engagement with the idea that

women may quite reasonably want to keep single-sex spaces intact.

Neither trans rights campaigners nor women determined to defend single sex spaces are going to go away, on the left or in wider society. The solution has to be to work through the issues - something refused by the 'no debate' advocates for the last 10 years or more. The Supreme Court judgement could be an opportunity for that side of the debate to take stock and begin to talk to feminist activists on the other side - that looks unlikely at the moment, but it is the role of communists to advocate for and facilitate that outcome, not pile in (a decade or so late, as Laing points out) on the trans rights activists' side.

Mike Macnair's draft theses provide no answers to the questions above, and a CPGB move from the previous position of strategic neutrality on the trans issue to a more partisan position is likely to please no-one. I was glad to see the draft theses were not put to the vote at your recent aggregate, although the report of the discussion makes it sound like a rather worrying mess.

Back to the drawing board, comrades.

Sean Carter
email

Reform outrage

To say I am outraged at the vile slander advanced by John Smithee in last week's paper would be a mild description of how I feel (Letters, May 29). But I am equally disgusted at Peter Manson, the editor, for having printed it, as if it was a legitimate comment.

I'm all for robust debate - even insults, if it comes to it - but slander is just that. Nothing in my comment implies support for bloody Reform, at least from me. I was discussing the reasons why so many decent working class folks are being won to Reform's programme - actually demands which were working class demands originally and Farage has picked up on them. I am talking about the reconstruction of industry and the scrapping of net zero, etc, not the whole immigration distraction here.

John Smithee might think we can stop the growth of Reform by not talking about this resonance, or by condemning all those who support Reform as racists and fascists. He clearly thinks anyone such as me who dares to try and analyse rather than just froth and scream about it is a Reform supporter too. This isn't debate - this is the worst kind of censorship: intimidation by slander to the point no-one dares speak for fear of being vilified and publicly humiliated. It's almost worked, as I'm contemplating ending my long relationship with the paper for letting this piece of scandalous abuse be circulated.

As to the substance of the slander, I've 65 years of class struggle, internationalism and anti-racist, anti-fascist work and actions to speak for me and my record (and I've never heard of John Smithee).

Carl Collins, on the other hand, makes some important points in taking the question seriously in the same issue. The two letters couldn't be more different in quality and comradely discussion.

I'm still smarting under such a filthy and low-life attack on me being permitted in the paper. Honestly, comrades, I thought there were some standards we could depend on and I'm deeply disappointed.

Dave Douglass
South Shields

FUSION

Putting things on hold

Talking About Socialism has written this letter to the CPGB and the pro-talks faction of *Prometheus*, suspending our talks

Dear comrades, TAS has decided to pause its involvement in the Forging Communist Unity Process talks until July 6 2025, so that TAS can produce its own draft programme for submission to the FCU discussions.

It has been clear for some time that there is no agreement between TAS and the CPGB over what programme any new organisation arising from the FCU process should adopt, or how a programme should be produced.

On February 22 2025, two documents were submitted to the FCU process on behalf of TAS. One was a formal, agreed TAS document: ‘A contribution to the Forging Communist Unity process from TAS’. The other was a contribution submitted in the name of Ed Potts: ‘Developing a suitable programme for communist unity’. This second document contained the following:

We in TAS hope that the FCU process will bring about a new fused partyist organisation, which is greater than the sum of its parts.

As part of that process it would be a positive step forward if it could produce its own programme, which represents the common effort of the various tendencies involved, which is simultaneously ambitious and bold and yet also accurately reflects the level of development of the organisation as it actually exists in the coming period.

This would be preferable to a process which limits itself to trying to reach only “acceptance” of any document or draft that currently exists.

This was and has remained the

shared position of the TAS comrades involved in the FCU process.

On March 7 2025, the comrades of the Unity Faction of the *Prometheus* Editorial Board (PUF) sent an untitled submission by them to TAS and the CPGB, which began:

The Unity Faction of the *Prometheus* editorial board believe that the FCU process would be best served by seeking to develop, collectively, a new programme as the product of our discussions together. This could be worked on by a committee, based on an outline determined by the FCU discussions, and, if successful, could be presented to a future conference when we reach the agreed stage of progression to binding decisions. It may be the case that we can’t reach such agreement through the FCU process itself and that competing programmes or versions of programmes may ultimately be presented at such a conference. However, we feel it would be productive for us to attempt to see if this could be possible.

The advantages of such a development of a new programme, we believe, would be in producing something which, at this initial stage of regroupment, would represent our collective endeavour and be a product which we had shared ownership over. Such a process of development itself we feel would be extremely productive in forging our identity as a new organisation.

The CPGB has rejected this collaborative approach and stated that it intends to submit the CPGB’s own

draft programme as its proposed basis for any organisation to be created by the FCU process.

In these circumstances we in TAS committed ourselves to produce our own draft programme for consideration in the FCU process. We have not so far been able to do so. For that we apologise. We have now concluded that in order to produce such a document we in TAS need to focus for a short period on drafting and agreeing it.

To accomplish this, TAS has therefore decided that it will pause its participation in the FCU process until July 6 2025, by which time we hope to have completed our period of discussion and to be able to submit a TAS draft programme to the FCU discussions.

We do not comment on whether the comrades from the CPGB and the PUF continue to meet in our absence.

The FCU meetings have usually taken place on a fortnightly basis. Our ‘pause’ will mean that we will not be at meetings that would (if continued) take place on June 1, June 15 and June 29.

We believe that this pause is necessary for TAS to be better able to present its views in a written form to the FCU process. In our opinion, the FCU process will benefit from this pause.

This does not mean any pause or cessation of the parallel discussions involving TAS, the CPGB and the PUF in preparation for Communist University. Comradely
Ed Potts
Nick Wrack
Talking About Socialism ... from a Marxist point of view
May 29 2025

Collaboration, yes; opportunism, no
Programme is central. We have taken many years fashioning, discussing and fine-tuning. It would be the crassest opportunism to abandon what we have achieved. Jack Conrad replies for the CPGB

It is a step forward that the TAS comrades are drafting a programme. This marks a welcome departure from the dominant anti-programmism and the so-called ‘transitional method’ prevalent on much of the contemporary left. A TAS draft will hopefully allow us to see whether the differences between us are of secondary importance or matters of principle.

The communist programme is, of course, no list of election promises, let alone a hastily written concoction designed to bring about unity for the sake of unity. No, the programme deals with the nature of the historical period, sets out key principles, maps out the long-term strategic approach and establishes the immediate demands needed to organise the working class into a ruling class. A mass Communist Party therefore grows out of the programme, not the other way round.

It is, then, unfortunate, to say the least, that the TAS comrades characterise our insistence that the CPGB’s *Draft programme* be included in unity discussions as a rejection of “collaboration”. We have not issued ultimatums. On the contrary, we have consistently said our *Draft programme* is open to debate and amendment. But it must be on the table. That is genuine collaboration.

As an organisation, programme has

always been central for our project. We began the *preliminary* process of working towards a *party* programme in the early 1980s by critiquing the ‘official communist’ *British road to socialism*, the Eurocommunists’ *Manifesto for new times* and *Militant: what we stand for*. That work took book form in 1991 with *Which road?* After thoroughly debating every section, every clause, every line, every word, we finally produced our *Draft programme* in 1995. Since then we have done some updating and fine-tuning ... the second edition came off the press in 2011 and the latest - the third - edition, in 2023.

Our *Draft programme* was never intended to be some confession of faith for a small group of communist militants. No, our *Draft programme* was intended from the first to be our submission to a “refoundation congress of the CPGB” - an organisation which despite its “early limitations and later failures”, was “undoubtedly the highest achievement of the workers’ movement in Britain”.¹

With this in mind, the idea that CPGB representatives in Forging Communist Unity would, or could, abandon our *Draft programme* was never on. Rightly, if they did anything like that, they would be subject to immediate recall by the next CPGB membership aggregate.

We have no fear of being in a minority. If sufficiently important

principles were involved, we would reserve the right to constitute ourselves an open faction in a fused organisation. But we envisage winning a majority through argument and persuasion.

We would insist on every delegate to a unity conference agreeing to be bound by the results. We would insist too on existing *group* discipline being ended. Consultation, discussion, coordination, yes, but nothing more. When it comes to programme, the best course, would be to debate a fully elaborated draft programme. So, no, we are not going to abandon our *Draft programme* and begin again from scratch - in search of what? A lowest-common-denominator compromise? That would not be ‘collaboration’, but surrender to the dominant left culture of economism, unprincipled unity and the suppression of sharp polemics. That we shall not do.

Nevertheless, a TAS draft programme that has been openly debated, amended and democratically agreed by its membership will allow us to see if we have substantial differences.

In other words, we look forward to July 6 and the resumption of talks ●

Notes

1. CPGB *Draft programme* London 1995, p6. The current version is online at communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme.

ACTION

Derby silk mill lockout festival

Saturday June 7, 10am: Procession and family festival. Assemble Market Place, Derby DE1, and march to Cathedral Green for rally. Commemorating the silk mill workers, locked out by their employers in 1833 for refusing to accept pay cuts and abandon their trade union. Organised by Derby Silk Mill Festival: www.facebook.com/events/1749378975673078.

Bargain books

Saturday June 7, 11am: Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Get your hands on Marxist classics and rare pamphlets. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/497.

Welfare, not warfare; stop the cuts; tax the rich

Saturday June 7, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Portland Place, London W1. March to Whitehall for rally. Labour’s cuts target the poorest, most vulnerable in society. Demand funding for welfare, wages and the NHS. Organised by the People’s Assembly: thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Invest in peace, not nukes

Saturday June 7, 12 noon: Day of action. Assemble at Guildhall Square, Armada Way, Plymouth PL1, for open-top bus tour of Plymouth and its nuclear links. Followed by protest outside the Trident nuclear dockyard, Camel’s Head, Devonport PL5. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: cnduk.org/events.

No Palantir in the NHS!

Wednesday June 11, 8am: Protest outside NHS Confed Expo, Manchester Central, Windmill Street, Manchester M2. Palantir is a military tech company supplying Israel’s attacks on Gaza and the West Bank. It has been awarded a £330 million contract for a new NHS data system, and is sponsoring this NHS privatisation event. Organised by Health Workers for a Free Palestine: www.instagram.com/p/DKKFN4YMVxr/?img_index=1.

Printworkers and the 1986 Wapping dispute

Thursday June 12, 7pm: Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speakers Ann Field and Matt Dunne provide details of this defeat for the working class. Registration free. Organised by General Federation of Trade Unions: www.facebook.com/events/966566215671025.

Coffee bars and class struggle

Thursday June 12, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Novelty coffee bars: a spatial expression of class struggle? Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc/status/1905009196824953123.

Demand Orgreave justice

Saturday June 14, 1pm: Anniversary march and rally. Assemble City Hall, Barkers Pool, Sheffield S1. Demand an inquiry into the brutal police attack on striking miners at the Orgreave coking plant on June 18 1984. Organised by Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign: otjc.org.uk/orgreave-rally-2025.

We demand change

Sunday June 15, 12 noon to 5pm: Leeds event, Beaver Works, 36 Whitehouse Street, Hunslet LS10. Panels, workshops and discussions for activists building campaigns against the far right and climate change, for welfare not warfare. Registration £9.36 (£3.38). Organised by We Demand Change: wedemandchange.uk.

Arms embargo now!

Tuesday June 17, 11am: Protests outside three sites producing parts for F-35 fighter jets, used to drop 900kg bombs on Gaza: **Lockheed Martin UK:** Assemble at Havant Park, Havant PO9. **BAE Systems:** Marconi Way, Rochester ME1. **Forged Solutions Group:** Meadowhall Road, Sheffield S9. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Rally to support Kneecap

Wednesday June 18, 9am: Protest outside Westminster Magistrates Court, 181 Marylebone Road, London NW1. Kneecap member Mo Chara has been charged with a terror offence. Stand by artists who speak out against the genocide and these distractions. x.com/KNEECAPCEOL/status/1928162736657314159.

Festival of the oppressed

Saturday June 21 to Sunday June 22: RS21 weekend school, Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7. 26 sessions covering how oppression is defined and remade by capitalism, and how to resist and transcend this oppressive social world. Registration £36.50 (£21.00, £11.00). Organised by RS21: revsoc21.uk/festival2025.

Jarrow rebel town festival

Saturday June 21, 11am: Parade. Assemble pedestrian tunnel, Tyne Street, Jarrow NE32. Led by Felling Silver Band. Speakers include Mick Whelan (Aslef), Kate Osborne MP and David Douglass. Followed by social at The Crown and Anchor, Chapel Road, Jarrow NE32. Organised by Jarrow Rebel Town Festival and Seven Lads of Jarrow: www.facebook.com/events/742060295054790.

National march for Palestine

Saturday June 21, 12 noon: National demonstration, central London, venue to be announced. End the genocide. Stop arming Israel. Stop starving Gaza. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/national-march-for-palestine.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party’s name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

PROGRAMME

Capitalism as a star fort

The system might be in decline, but it has a whole complex of defence works available to it. **Mike Macnair** completes his three-part series on the transition from capitalism to communism

In the first article in this series, two weeks ago,¹ I identified its immediate context - our discussions in the Forging Communist Unity process about the nature and duration of the transition to socialism - and I identified the fear that the CPGB is proposing a version of the ideas of 'official communism' as a part of the arguments. I discussed the 1950s Trotskyist debate round the same theme, and went on to criticise arguments about the topic of transition upheld by the Communist Party of Britain in its *Communist Review*.

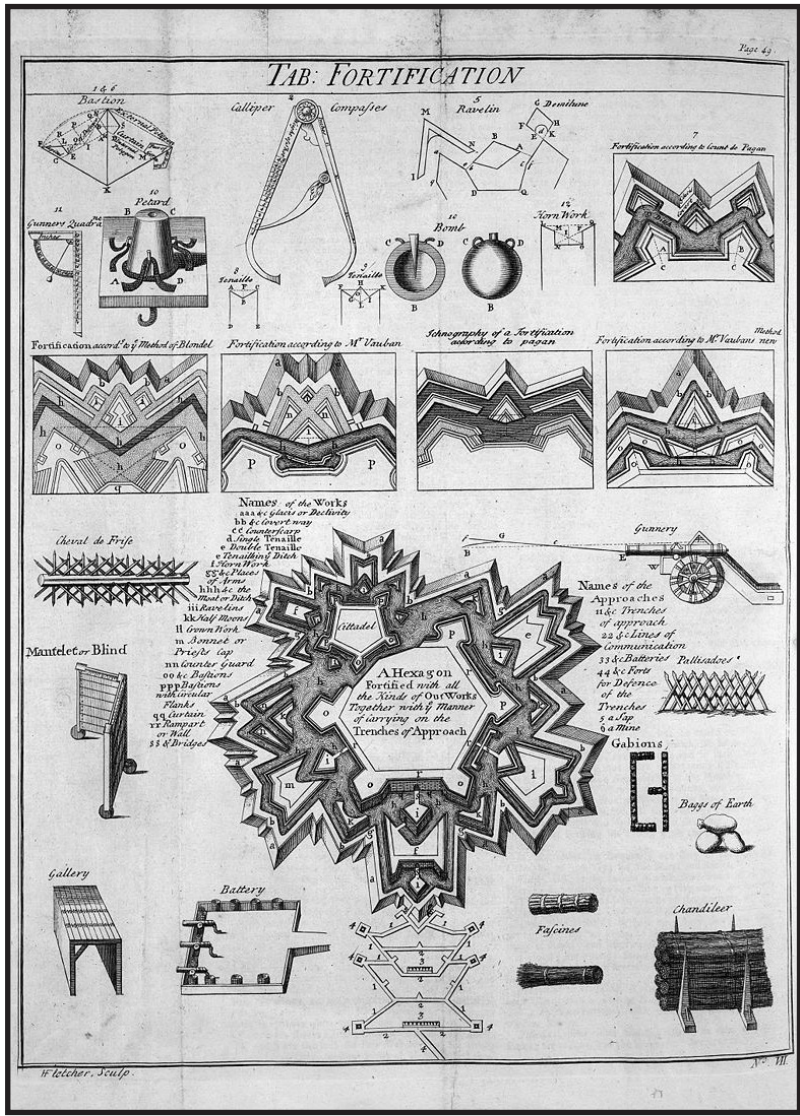
These, I argued, illustrate the fundamental differences between the CPGB's views of the transition period and those of 'official communism': we in the CPGB fight for radical democracy, while 'official communists' cling to bureaucratic-managerialist ideas; we reject 'socialism in one country', 'national roads to socialism', and alliances with (actually tail-ending) either the 'democratic bourgeoisie' (liberals) or the 'national bourgeoisie' ('nationalists') - all defended by 'official communists'.

My second article, last week, explored the arguments of Peter Kennedy's article about the issue on the Talking about Socialism website.² A substantial part of that article returned, unavoidably, to the issue of 'socialism in one country' (SIOC). This was partly because the changes in the usage of 'socialism' and 'communism' in the left that are the context of comrade Kennedy's argument partly grew out of arguments round SIOC. It was partly because the argument for rapid socialisation on the basis of the present relative marginality of small-scale production in the UK actually *de facto* presupposes either a SIOC approach (by excluding consideration of the involvement of countries with larger peasant and artisan countries) or a Socialist Party of Great Britain-style 'impossibilist' approach, in which it is necessary to wait for capitalist development to marginalise small production, thereby creating the conditions for mass adherence to communism.

In this third article I attempt to sketch my own view on this question. It is *consistent with* the CPGB's draft programme and offers a defence of it against the arguments of TAS comrades; but other comrades should not be expected to take political responsibility for my arguments.

My framing assumption is that it is possible to draw lessons about the transition from capitalism to socialism from the transition from feudalism to capitalism. (I have argued elsewhere that lessons can also be drawn from the transition from the slaveholder urbanism of classical antiquity to feudalism; but I leave that aside for now.³)

Comrade Ed Potts argued at our March 8 Forging Communist Unity meeting that drawing such lessons is unacceptable, because proletarian revolution is different in nature from bourgeois revolution, being the transfer of power from minority to majority, rather than from one minority to another (assuming my note is right). I cannot remember if I made the point in that meeting that Leon Trotsky, in *The revolution betrayed*, said that "The axiomatic assertions of the Soviet literature, to the effect that the laws of bourgeois revolutions are 'inapplicable' to a proletarian revolution, have no



Fortification, from the 1728 Cyclopaedia

scientific content whatever.⁴

Analogously to comrade Potts' point, Chris Cutrone in a letter to the *Weekly Worker* (February 12 2015) cited an 1899 extempore speech of Rosa Luxemburg (as quoted by the US cold warrior 'socialist', Michael Harrington) for the idea that

to chatter about the economic might of the proletariat is to ignore the great difference between our class struggle and all those that went before. The assertion that the proletariat, in contrast to all previous class struggles, pursues its battles not in order to establish class domination, but to abolish all class domination. It is not a mere phrase ... It is an illusion, then, to think that the proletariat can create economic power within capitalist society. It can only create political power and then transform (*aufheben*) capitalist property.⁵

I responded that Luxemburg's argument is:

... flatly contrary to Marx's actual policy in relation to trade unions, cooperatives and the struggle for a workers' political party within capitalism, which are abundantly documented from both the young and the old Marx. It is, in fact, a version of Ferdinand Lassalle's 'iron law of wages' argument against trade unions ...

In her 1900 book *Reform or revolution*, Luxemburg is a lot more careful in her expressions than in the 1899 speech to avoid suggesting that the proletariat cannot improve its economic situation in capitalist society; rather, there she correctly points out the limits of such improvements and that they will not gradually 'grow over' into

socialism.

It is, in other words, perfectly possible for the proletariat to build powerful organisations under capitalism and to win real improvements in its conditions of existence, both through merely constructing these organisations and solidarity (cooperatives and mutuals), and through economic and political struggles. But, as long as the state order remains capitalist, these gains remain vulnerable to capitalist counteroffensives through the states (as we have seen since the 1980s); and, as long as the fundamental economic order remains capitalist, they remain vulnerable to the general destructive effects of cyclical crises, depressions and wars.⁶

The point is analogous to that of comrade Potts, because Luxemburg too, like the "Soviet literature" whose arguments are rejected by Trotsky, argues that inferences from the bourgeois revolutions to the proletariat are inadmissible.

In my opinion Trotsky is right. The primary ground for this view is that the idea of a contradictory interpenetration of capitalism and communism - both now, under capitalism, and after the capitalist political regime is overthrown - has in my opinion more explanatory power both in relation to the present and in relation to the failures of Stalinism, aka 'bureaucratic socialism', than the idea that the proletariat cannot make gains under capitalism, the idea of Stalinism as a stable exploitative regime, and the idea of a leap into Marx's 'first phase of communism' as the remedy for this. More on this below.

There is, however, also a *theoretical* ground for the view that Trotsky is right. This is that the

endeavour to construct a 'Marxism' without historical materialism fails. In fact the attempt to create a pure dialectical unfolding of the internal logic of commodity production already fails in the second half of volume I of *Capital*, which gives a *historical* narrative of the creation of the proletariat as a class and of the class struggles over the length of the working day.⁷ It is, in fact, historical materialism that offers real grounds in believing in the decline of capitalism and for hope in a socialist future, not any form of 'Marxism' purified from the supposed vices of 'Engelsism' or 'historicism'.⁸

And, once we accept historical materialism, then we have to see the transition from capitalism to communism as a historical process like the transition from feudalism to capitalism (as Trotsky argued) - in spite of the fact that the potential proletarian revolution is a revolution of the majority, and that it involves conscious choices.

Apogee capitalism

In the CPGB *Draft programme* we assert: "The present epoch is characterised by the revolutionary transition from capitalism to communism. The main contradiction is between a malfunctioning capitalism and an overdue communism."⁹ The point is analogous to Trotsky's in the 1938 *Transitional programme*: "All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not yet 'ripened' for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only 'ripened': they have begun to get somewhat rotten."¹⁰

Both of these formulas assume that the process of transition from capitalism to communism *has begun under capitalist rule*, as in declining capitalism both proletarianisation and proletarian organisations rise, and capitalism's own distorted precursors to socialism also rise.

Social orders rise and decline: the period of their rise interpenetrated with the prior social order they are in process of negating; and the period of their decline interpenetrated with the new social order that is in process of negating them. Thus Friedrich Engels to Conrad Schmidt in 1895:

Did feudalism ever correspond to its concept? Founded in the kingdom of the West Franks, further developed in Normandy by the Norwegian conquerors, its formation continued by the French Norsemen in England and southern Italy, it came nearest to its concept - in Jerusalem, in the kingdom of a day, which in the Assises de Jerusalem left behind it the most classic expression of the feudal order. Was this order therefore a fiction because it only achieved a short-lived existence in full classical form in Palestine, and even that mostly only on paper?¹¹

Apogee capitalism, by analogy with the kingdom of Jerusalem in feudalism, should be identified roughly with mid-19th century Britain or the late 19th century USA. It was characterised by the dominance of the cycle M-C-P-C'-M':

M = money, C = input commodity, P = production by organised groups of workers under the dominance of the machine (whether a wind or water,

steam or electrical machine), C' = worked-up output commodity, M' = realised money prices of C'.

This cycle not only yielded the dynamic of the society: it also organised agriculture, infrastructure, and so on, with subsidies in the form mainly of stealing from pre-capitalist possessors. The limited liability company was only made available in the UK in 1855, in the USA at dates varying by state - and actual common use was later.¹² Banks, railways, etc, could and did go bankrupt. Trade unions remained illegal; a considerable part of repression was either by capitalist militias ('yeomanry' in Britain) or private firms ('Pinkerton men', etc in the USA).

At this 'apogee' period there were property qualifications to vote in Britain and poll taxes, requiring payment for the right to vote, in the USA; women did not have the right to vote in Britain, and in the US (as of 1900) only in three western states and three territories.

Both employment and small business were precarious enough, and welfare systems sufficiently niggardly, with a hostile environment, to drive large-scale *emigration* - from Britain to the USA and to the colonies; from the previously settled parts of the USA westwards. (These last characteristics seem to be also present in China today, leading to 10 million emigrants compared with one million immigrants.¹³)

I describe apogee capitalism in very rough outline here for two reasons. The first is just to make the point that capitalism at apogee does not organise *everything*. Small-scale family production, state production, and production by charitable and other institutions continued to exist. The capitalist cycle was *dominant*, not total or pure. (This was, incidentally, Engels's main point in his letter to Schmidt.)

Decline

The second reason is to flag how much has changed. It has changed partly by way of concessions to the working class: eg, the expansion of the suffrage, and the legalisation of trade unions.

It has changed partly by way of concessions to the middle classes, in order to preserve their support for capitalist rule against the working class: chiefly limited liability, but also a wide range of other concessions and subsidies. A notable feature in the imperialist countries is the radical expansion since World War II of managerial and supervisory roles relative to productive 'grunts': "The working class can kiss my arse. I've got a foreman's job at last."

It has changed partly by way of state intervention resulting from failures of pure-capitalist management, especially failures to deliver military effectiveness: the expansion of welfare and health services in response to the unhealthiness of military recruits, of state education in response to skills shortages, the statification or regulation of infrastructure, subsidies to agriculture, subsidies to road transport because of its military role, and so on.

All these developments point in a single direction. Capitalism is *tending towards* communism: that is, towards a society in which the major means of production¹⁴ are held in common and production is consciously coordinated through

collective decision-making, in which all can participate.¹⁵ The forms of statisation and subsidy point towards conscious coordination (in a deformed way); the concessions to the working class in the suffrage and the legalisation of trade unions point towards democratic collective decision-making, but are *countered by* forms of statisation (reduction of the powers of elected bodies, as the suffrage expands; judicial and other interventions to force managerialism in workers’ organisations; and so on).

Capitalism’s decline is like a coral atoll or a hollow tree: the centre is dying back, as the periphery has continued, down to very recent times, to expand. But this is not wholly true. As I said last week, increased proletarianisation in east and south Asia has been accompanied by deindustrialisation and de-proletarianisation in Latin America and the Middle East.

And the features of decline of capitalism mentioned above have the result that the USA, as it has entered into *relative* decline as a world hegemon power (like Britain in the 1850s), is not able to take territory and turn it into space for investment, as Britain (and other European colonial powers) did in the later 1800s. Instead, the USA inflicts *mere destruction* on countries that have in some way ‘dissed’ it: intensely visible in the results of US occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq and intervention in Libya, this effect already began with US responses to its defeat in Vietnam in 1975.

These forms of capitalist decline illustrate two underlying dynamics of the decline of a social order. The concessions to the working class, and to the middle classes, reflect the rise of the proletariat as a class and the need for the capitalist class and its state to control this rise. The movements into statisation and subsidies reflect the *decay of the ability of the social dynamic of capital to organise social production*. The forces of production grow beyond levels that capitalism, as a social order, can control; and tend, as a result, to turn into forces of *destruction*.

That the forces of production tend to turn into forces of destruction was already apparent in the need for two world wars (of which the second was vastly worse than the first) to get rid of the decline into parasitism of British world dominance and open the way to a new period of capitalist development under US world dominance in around 1950-1970. It is absolutely transparent in the USA’s merely destructive responses to its own relative decline.

Faster

Regrettably, the tendency to capitalist decline in the form of loss of control of the forces of production is, at present, moving faster than the tendency in the form of the rise of the proletariat as the class capable of reorganising society and leading the transition to communism.

The 21st century has seen a *deepening* tendency towards nationalism and irrationalism, and towards larger and more dangerous wars. The USA is actually fighting the Russian Federation through Ukraine as a proxy (wholly dependent on US arms supplies), and is contemplating pre-emptive war against the People’s Republic of China in the short term.

The Trump administration has reopened the idea of open colonialist annexations (of the Panama Canal, of Greenland and of Canada) and has actively promoted the readmission of the political descendants of Nazism, fascism, the US confederacy and ultramontanist Catholic tyranny to

political respectability. Meanwhile, in Palestine the USA has moved from pretending to offer Arab reservations, like US Indian reservations, under the name of ‘two states’, to the open acceptance of the genocidal policy of the Israeli state, analogous to the 1831-1850 Trail of Tears, to the Herero genocide of 1904-07 and the Armenian genocide of 1915-16; again a policy that was supposed to be ruled out after 1945.

In this situation the most probable outcome of the 21st century is that the more and more overt US wars of aggression will lead to human extinction through generalised nuclear exchange. The second most probable is that no-one has the nerve to drop the bomb on the USA, and the result is generalised ‘Somalification’ - US-imposed state failure and reduction to warlordism, successively on Russia, then on China, then on continental Europe ... There is a small hope of a way out: that is, a global alternative driven by an *internationalist, proletarian communist movement*.

Because capitalist decline producing disorder progresses faster than the rise of a proletarian movement as an alternative, a communist party needs a minimum programme for what it fights for under capitalist rule. And such a party would, if it won, inherit a world with very large petty-proprietor classes (as well as an enormous amount of reconstruction needed after capitalist destruction). Again the *immediate abolition* of money would not be posed, but movement *in the direction* of decommodification.

Outworks

Let us return for a moment to the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Apogee feudalism saw - not in the kingdom of Jerusalem, but in 12th-13th century Europe - the emergence of city communes, initially as forms through which the bourgeoisie, in its literal sense as the urban class, struggled for autonomy from feudal overlords. Outside Italy, strengthened monarchical states rapidly brought the city communes under control, promoting merchant oligarchs with grants of legal authority. The Dutch and English revolutions of the late 16th and 17th centuries involved the forcible overthrow of these merchant oligarchs as a necessary step to the overthrow of the monarchical state regimes (though, of course, once the capitalist class had power, new capitalist oligarchies returned).

In Italy, the weakness of the monarchical states allowed a number of communes to break through to actual sovereignty. With this came the beginnings of legal constitutionalism, state debt markets, and so on. Venice and Genoa acquired small colonial empires, creating plantation slavery on Mediterranean islands, and fought each other for hegemony. However, the dominance of surrounding feudalism and the limits of the new bourgeois constitutional orders meant that most of the communes were turned into *signorie* - lordships - which in turn became feudal duchies and so on. Even Genoa accepted subordination to the Spanish monarchy. This calamitous history was told and retold over and over again down to the 1680s, as proof that ‘there is no alternative’ to late-feudal monarchical absolutism. It only lost its purchase when the Dutch republic, and after 1688 English constitutionalism, showed that there *was* an alternative.

Meanwhile, the absolutist regimes artificially preserved peasant production and seigneurial controls on agriculture against the tendencies of the peasantry to differentiate

through competition into capitalist farmers and wage-labourers and to break free of customary controls. And they created new artificial feudal relations, like Spanish *encomiendas* in the Americas or Louis XIV’s canal project set up as a feudal tenure, and *noblesse de la robe* (lawyers and civil servants made into aristos).

The situation of the 21st century workers’ movement is like that of the 15th-16th century bourgeois movement. The workers’ fighting organisations have been turned into outworks of the capitalist state, as the bourgeois communes were turned into outworks of the feudal-monarchical state. The latter ‘feudalised’ the communes by promoting merchant oligarchies under monarchical sponsorship. The capitalist states ‘business-ise’ the trade unions and the workers’ parties by promoting managerialism, and integration through the advertising-funded media and its delusive image of successful ‘media management’. This managerialism extends to the *far* left, and not only to its full-time officials, because the managerialist conception is internalised by many activists, including ‘independents’.

The second similarity is that the calamitous history of Stalinism plays the same role as the calamitous history of the *signorie* in attempting to prove that ‘there is no alternative’ to the capitalist order. The paradox here is that the part of the left that refuses to accept ‘there is no alternative’ in its very large majority clings to the *essence* of Stalinism - national roads to socialism, socialism in one country, and bureaucratic management in the form of bureaucratic controls on factions and on ‘unacceptable’ speech. This, too, extends today to the large majority of self-identified *Trotskyists*.

Late capitalist states, meanwhile, *artificially* create ‘private enterprises’ which are either large operations that cannot go bankrupt, like the privatised railways and water companies, or ultra-small businesses which are actually dependent on welfare subsidies (leaving aside ‘sham self-employment’).

Capital continues to rule, in spite of its manifest decline, because of the persisting strength of its *state system*; and because it *does* appear that ‘there is no alternative’.

I say “state system”, referencing Marx’s observation in the *Critique of the Gotha programme* that “the ‘framework of the present-day national state’ - for instance, the German empire - is itself in its turn economically ‘within the framework’ of the world market, politically ‘within the framework’ of the system of states”.

Walls and bastions

But I also refer to the state system as analogous to an early modern ‘star fort’. The heart of the regime - the curtain walls and bastions - is the loyalty of the armed forces of the USA. The next level out, the counterscarp and caponiers, is the loyalty of the weaker armed forces and police of the vassal states, like the UK. Beyond this, ravelins and hornworks are formed by the trade unions under managerialist control and by the large ‘centre-left’ parties linked to them.

Beyond this in turn are out-works: the far-left groups under managerialist control by way of bureaucratic centralism, bans on ‘permanent factions’ and ‘parties within the party’, and other forms of bureaucratic and legalistic regulation of speech and communication between members. Left ‘independents’ who denounce the organised groups as ‘sects’, but cling to ‘anti-factionalism’ as a

ground for unwillingness to actually organise, are part of the same system of managerialist loyalty to the capitalist state order. The attachment of the far left to the state system is visible in the efforts of authors active in MI6 and its US equivalent, the OSS, at the beginning of the cold war (Carl Schorske, Peter Nettl, and so on) to promote the claim that the only ‘real’ choices available to the workers’ movement are the coalitionist loyalism of Eduard Bernstein or the romantic but doomed mass-strikism of Rosa Luxemburg: *both* are safe options for capitalist rule.

I started this analogy with the *loyalty* of the armed forces core, and ended with the left independents as also loyal to managerialism through anti-factionalism. In this aspect, the problem of the state merges into the ‘there is no alternative’ problem. The bureaucratic centralism of the far left silences the possibility of posing a radical-democratic and internationalist alternative to the capitalist state, because it serves to reinforce both labour bureaucracy in general and the ‘lesson’ of Stalinism that socialism leads to tyranny, and thus ‘there is no alternative’.

Conversely, the merchant princes can be overthrown, as they were in the 1570s Netherlands and 1640s England. While far-left organisations are at present mostly bureaucratic-centralist out-forts of capitalist managerialism, this can be overthrown. That would open the way to a struggle for demanagerialisation of the larger workers’ movement - the capture of the hornworks and ravelins.

And this, in turn, if it succeeds, opens the way to the destruction of the loyalty of the core armed forces: the capture of the main walls. A *nationalist or intersectionalist* left has no chance of destroying or neutralising the loyalty of the US armed forces to the capitalist constitution. An *internationalist and universalist* left, in contrast, has the potential to do so: this was seen in the role of the anti-war movement in the US defeat in Vietnam, and on a larger scale in armed-forces radicalisation at the end of World War II, forcing the adoption of ‘containment’ rather than an immediate drive to reconquest; and still more clearly in British mutinies and related actions in 1919, allowing the survival of the early Soviet state.

Socialisation

The overthrow of the *state order*, by radical democracy creating a powerful and independent workers’ movement, leading in turn to undermining the loyalty of the armed forces and splitting them, is, as Marx put it in 1871, to “set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant”¹⁶

Back to the bourgeois revolutions. Until the feudal-absolutist state orders were overthrown, the states resisted capitalist development. Once they *were* overthrown, capitalist development was rapid, with the Netherlands transformed in its 17th century ‘Golden Age’, Britain in 1689-1720, France in 1789-1815. In the 21st century world, overthrowing the state system of the USA and its vassal states in favour of radically democratic, working class rule would similarly open the way to rapid socialisation, based on the distorted forms that have already taken place under capitalism.

The present problem of socialism/communism is that it is *generally believed to have been tried and failed*. The reasons for this belief are SIOC, which allowed the capitalists to strangle the Soviet economy by sanctions and in Comecon produced duplication of heavy industry

complexes at the expense of effective planning; and bureaucratic managerialism, producing managers lying to keep their jobs, leading to ‘garbage in, garbage-out’ ‘planning’.

The solution to this problem is not proposals for more rapid and more general socialisation. It is not ‘extending democracy to the workplace’. It is proposals for radical democracy as an alternative to the mixed constitution/rule-of-law regime in the state, and to bureaucratic/managerialist regimes in the workers’ movement.

This sort of politics is at present the ideas of a small minority. But it has the *potential* to open the road to communism ●

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Notes

1. ‘Centuries of Stalinism?’ *Weekly Worker* May 22: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1539/centuries-of-stalinism.
2. ‘Questions of communism’ *Weekly Worker* May 29: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1540/questions-of-communism.
3. ‘Historical blind alleys: Arian kingdoms, signorie, Stalinism’ *Critique* Vol 39 (2011), pp545-61 (pre-publication draft at www.researchgate.net/publication/271568956_Historical_Blind_Alleys_Arian_Kingdoms_Signorie_Stalinism).
4. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/revbet/ch05.htm.
5. ‘Bernsteinian’: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1045/letters. I have cut the quotation for reasons of space.
6. ‘Thinking the alternative’, April 9 2015: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1053/thinking-the-alternative (internal citation omitted).
7. I have argued this in more depth in ‘Law and state as holes in Marxist theory’ (2006) *Critique* Vol 34, pp211-36.
8. Besides ‘Thinking the alternative’ (see note 6), I have written about the issues repeatedly. See ‘Imperialism versus internationalism’ *Weekly Worker* August 11 2004 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/541/imperialism-versus-internationalism); ‘World politics, long waves and the decline of capitalism’, January 7 2010 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/799/world-politics-long-waves-and-the-decline-of-capit); ‘Marxism and theoretical overkill’, January 20 2011 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/849/marxism-and-theoretical-overkill); ‘Teleology, predictability and modes of production’, January 27 2011 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/850/teleology-predictability-and-modes-of-production); ‘The direction of historical development’, February 17 2011 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/853/the-direction-of-historical-development).
9. communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/iour-epoch.
10. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tp-text.htm#op.
11. March 12 1895 (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1895/letters/95_03_12.htm).
12. There is a useful study of the chronology by Ron Harris: ‘A new understanding of the history of limited liability: an invitation for theoretical reframing’ *Journal of Institutional Economics* Vol 16 (2020), pp643-64.
13. www.migrationpolicy.org/article/china-development-transformed-migration.
14. The “major” means of production because, for example, it is not necessary to communism that there should be no individual holding of knives, screwdrivers, paintbrushes, etc.
15. On “collective decision-making in which all can participate”, I formulate it in this way because of Engels’s claim that democracy is still a form of the state and the overcoming of the state is therefore also the overcoming of democracy. He made this in passing in his 1891 introduction to *The civil war in France* (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/postscript.htm#Ab) and in his 1894 preface to the pamphlet *Internationales aus dem Volksstaat (1871-75)* (MECW Vol 27, pp414-18, followed by Lenin in *State and revolution* (www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch04.htm#fw09)). I am personally sceptical of this claim; in the 1891 introduction, which offers more (if still limited) argument for it than the 1894 preface, it is linked to the idea that the USA is a “democratic republic”. This accepts US ideological output and ignores the explicit elements of monarchy (presidency) and aristocracy (Supreme Court, Senate) in the US constitution. From the other end, the identification of Athenian democracy as a ‘state’ in *Origin of the family* is connected to the mis-diagnosis of Solon’s laws in the early 500s BCE as the *invention* of the state (MECW Vol 26, pp213 footnote), which reflects the generally foreshortened perspective of *Origin*, reflecting in turn lack of knowledge of the prior history of Mesopotamia and so on (mostly published after Engels was writing). But my formulation in the text avoids the issue.
16. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm (the whole paragraph is relevant).

ASSESSMENT

Philosophy in the ordinary world

Alasdair MacIntyre died on May 21 2025. Though journeying from Calvinism to Marxism and then, finally, to Catholicism, he retained a gut commitment to the working class. **Paul Demarty** offers a critical appreciation of an extraordinary mind that opened so many doors

In 2007, Alasdair MacIntyre, found himself delivering a lecture at a British university at which, he was informed shortly before speaking, there was to be a student strike in protest against a poor pay deal for lecturers. As *The Guardian* reports in its obituary,

he prefaced his paper with an impromptu diatribe in support of trades unions and workers' rights. The first to raise his hand after MacIntyre's paper was the Socialist Worker party [sic] leader, Alex Callinicos, who accused him of not being a proper revolutionary. MacIntyre replied that he didn't know how to make a revolution, but it was clear that Callinicos didn't either.¹

The anecdote is telling, since the standard version of his life story in leftwing circles is a political biography, in which the young MacIntyre became an 'official communist', while an undergraduate at Queen Mary in London, and broke with the CPGB owing to its Stalinism. He drifted through Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League into the Socialist Review Group and International Socialists, predecessors of today's SWP, and from there to the general intellectual milieu of the British 'new left'.

By the early 1970s, his enthusiasm for the far left had cooled, and he bode his time in academic philosophy before producing his magnum opus, *After virtue*, which (so this story goes) offers a conservative critique of modern morality. He then became a Catholic, and a conservative communitarian.

Trading blows

This story has no room for his dialogue with Callinicos in 2007, the intensity of his commitment to the cause of the trade union movement, and his willingness to trade blows with a current leader of his former Trotskyist outfit in the language of the revolutionary socialist tradition. Nor does it leave much room for some of the other famous barbs of his late period - his argument that asking someone to die for the modern nation-state is like asking them "to die for the telephone company"², say; or, when asked what beliefs he held over from his Marxist period proper, quipping: "I would still like to see every rich person hanged from the nearest lamppost." In the Q&A after a lecture on the proper role of a Catholic university, someone noted that MacIntyre seemed to find no role for business schools, and wondered what he would do with them. "Burn them," he replied.

This is because of what the story most fundamentally lacks - his philosophy. Sure, to narrate his life without the politics would be otiose, and entirely un-MacIntyrean in spirit; but the same goes for any narrative that is only (or almost only) political. MacIntyre was above all a theorist of the unity of theory and practice in historically-situated individual lives. His mature work - spanning effectively from *After virtue* to his last major work, *Ethics in the conflicts of modernity*, published in 2016 - is littered with little biographies. Life stories were to MacIntyre what sublation was to Hegel.

So, back to the beginning, then. Born in Glasgow, but raised in London and the south-east by an extended Scots-Irish Protestant family, he



Alasdair MacIntyre: waiting for St Benedict

went up to Queen Mary College to study classics. In the intellectual scene around him, he encountered, alongside the Marxism of the 'official' CPGB, the enormous excitement that still surrounded the logical positivist movement in philosophy - above all in the figure of AJ Ayer. He was later to have a brief dalliance with Sartrean existentialism. This was an unusually rich mix of influences, to which must be added the Calvinist tradition to which he adhered, and which he interpreted along the lines of the great Swiss theologian, Karl Barth (who had himself been an anti-war socialist in his youth).

His academic interest drifted in the direction of philosophy. He obtained his masters degree from the University of Manchester and taught there for a time (he never bothered to obtain a doctorate). It was around then, aged 23, that he published his first book, *Marxism: an interpretation*, later republished in revised form as *Marxism and Christianity*. Its argument is that Marxism inherits large parts of its theory from Christian antecedents, and succeeds in offering the only secular interpretation of human existence with comparable power and scope. But - especially in the later, revised version - there are limits to each, in their failure to adequately historicise themselves. The book is therefore a kind of mutual critique of each in terms of the other, that does not shy away from the institutional forms (church and party) that bear these complicatedly related and rival doctrines.

The Marxism most commended in the book (at least in its revised

form) is a typical product of the new left. Central to it is the concept of alienation, which for MacIntyre is a useful inheritance of Hegel.³ Later Marxists who draw on this (especially Lukács) are commended; Engels, on the other hand, is criticised as having replaced the Hegelian inheritance with a metaphysics based on the natural sciences⁴ - which in turn leads to Kautsky, and above all Stalin, producing a wholly deterministic account of history that ironically turns it into a sort of god.⁵

By the 1970s, he had lost faith in both Marxism and Christianity. Somewhat like Theodor Adorno in Germany, his attitude to the left hardened, when confronted with the radical student movement, for which he seems to have had considerable contempt. (His teaching style was always strict and brusque, though many of his students have oddly fond memories of it.) Concerned increasingly with moral philosophy, he became more and more clearly dissatisfied with the actual condition of the discipline.

Disorder

What was this condition? MacIntyre was a professional philosopher in the English, and later American academy. Moral philosophy in this setting was conducted largely in the tradition of analytical philosophy, which prized conceptual analysis, intense logical rigour, the practice of the thought experiment, and the building up of extensive literature, debating specific, long-running disputes.

In spite of his aforementioned adherence to Hegelian Marxism,

MacIntyre was trained in this analytical tradition, and was an excellent practitioner of its characteristic activities. But he was increasingly concerned about a fact so obvious that few mentioned it: the debates were interminable, in the strictly literal sense of that word. Nobody was able to end them decisively, nor was it clear how the dispute between - say - Kantian and utilitarian ethical theories could be ended to the satisfaction of both contending parties.

There was another problem. The disputes of academic moral philosophers were hermetic. They had ever weaker bearing on the conduct of people outside the academy - what MacIntyre called, with no condescension intended, "plain persons". There was, however, something like a moral philosophy out there in the ordinary world. It consisted of a series of apparently absolute rules - do not kill; do not lie - which seem a little like instances of Kant's categorical imperative. Yet these rules all have exceptions made to them on essentially utilitarian grounds ("do not kill, unless in self-defence, or you are a soldier in a war"), and the lists of exceptions get ever longer. In practice, this means that people oscillate between pseudo-Kantian and pseudo-utilitarian conceptions of morality. For all that Marxism offered indispensable resources for understanding this strange situation, MacIntyre took it that the Marxist movement as it existed suffered from the same disordered moral conduct as every other institution in modern society.

It is to this situation that *After virtue* is addressed. It is divided roughly into halves: firstly, a history of 20th century moral philosophy's inconclusive attempts to find a secure ground for morality with extensive philosophical critiques of impressive breadth; and, secondly, a longer historical narrative of the emergence of the concept of virtue in antiquity and its steady disappearance from the scene in the modern period. The virtues, according to the ancient Greeks and pre-eminently Aristotle, were habits of behaviour that had to be acquired through sustained practice; once acquired, they tended to direct one's action towards the good, which for Aristotle meant participation in the life of the *polis* (the city-state).

As such, ethics was not to be understood primarily as a field of theoretical inquiry, but of practice: of pursuit of the good life, which was indissociable from participation in the normal activity of the wider society (thus Aristotle's infamous opinion that the good life was closed to those who could not so participate, like slaves and women). The decline of the virtues as the ground of the good life followed on from the replacement of the *polis* and political societies roughly like it by the capitalist market and the modern bureaucratic state, which tend to produce compartmentalised lives (you are one person at work, another at home, and yet another in dealings with the council housing office).

Marxism provided an account of the mechanisms of the market and the state, which remained of decisive importance (a belief from which MacIntyre never wavered, commending the theory of surplus value as late as 2016's *Ethics*⁶). Its practical commitments to building a revolutionary state, however, tended to ensure that, "as Marxists organise and move toward power, they always

do and have become Weberians in substance, even if they remain Marxists in rhetoric".⁷ His conclusion is that Marxism "is exhausted as a political tradition"⁸ - though the same is true of every other major political tradition - and "what matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community, within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us ... We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another - doubtless very different - St Benedict."⁹

Despite the reference to St Benedict, MacIntyre had not become a Catholic, and did not for another three years, by his own account when his students succeeded in convincing him that his criticisms of Thomas Aquinas in *After virtue* were unwarranted. That aside, *After virtue* is something of a decisive statement of his philosophy. His subsequent work - voluminous though it is - consists largely in filling out the picture. *Three rival versions of moral inquiry* attempts to sketch the way that such rival theories can, in fact, really put each other in question (an activity that he had, of course, been in some form engaged in since *Marxism: an interpretation*). *Dependent rational animals* offers a modernised Thomist account of human species being. Both provide ancillary support for the theses on ethics and politics in *After virtue*.

Politics

His conception of the political tasks before us, such as it was, barely changed; it was local initiatives, rooted in the common life of families, workplaces and schools, that held what hope existed for progress in a world dominated by the market and the bureaucratic nation-state. His later work reconceived those initiatives in terms of the idea of the common good, which for him referred precisely to those goods that can only be obtained and enjoyed collectively, and needed to be distinguished from individual goods, which involve purely transactional relations between individuals to obtain some individual benefit, or public goods, which were procured collectively (say, by the state), but enjoyed individually.

Education, for example, is a common good, because it irreducibly involves teachers, students and parents together, with the education being enjoyed not only by the student, but the communities of which he or she is a member. The same may be said for football teams or string quartets. Yet there are ambiguous cases - consider the workers in a Taylorist-type factory, who go to work to collect their paycheque, and are exploited and alienated from the products of their labour. Though they are involved in a collective activity, it is such that they are separated from the good that results, and indeed separated from each other paradoxically by the work process. In this case, both the worker and the capitalist are engaged in pursuit of individual goods (not equivalent goods - MacIntyre, again, continued to endorse the theory of surplus value).

Public goods are a trickier proposition. Let us combine our two previous examples: a school is set up to educate children, but the education is solely in technical functions that will allow the students to assimilate directly into the workforce of a nearby factory. They are taught nothing of the humanities or the natural sciences - only narrow competences of this sort.

This would be a kind of public good: though it is obtained collectively, its outcome can only be the pursuit of individual goods.

The line between common goods and public goods is fuzzy. I think there are strong grounds for supposing that no conceptually rigorous distinction could ever be determined, as the technical-school example illustrates - whether or not some form of education or another *has in fact* succeeded in yielding a common good is contingent on what happens after the fact. Yet that need not be fatal to MacIntyre's overall theory; indeed, his overarching point is exactly that. It is in the whole form of life that particular practices find their overall meaning and significance; and the bureaucratic-capitalist rationality of contemporary society tends to replace common goods with more degraded alternatives, mediated through the market and the state.

From the political point of view, the problems really arise when we think about the models that MacIntyre offered for political activity - the local coalitions pursuing their common goods. If he maintained a commitment to the economic and political critiques of Marxism, as indeed he did, these were partial. He was not straightforwardly *deluded* on the point of the chances of success of such local campaigning, but all the same, while he certainly could come up with examples of success, he confronted many more of ultimate failure. The question then becomes: are the failures unfortunate accidents, or the successes fortunate accidents?

The driving point of Marxist political economy is precisely that, by the relentless pressure of the economic process, activities will tend to become more centralised, small firms will become large firms, which will become monopolies. Such larger concerns are more capable of absorbing smaller ones, which include the kinds of cooperative enterprises MacIntyre favoured. This must, surely, enter into our assessment of how likely they are to become institutions where the virtues can be established and passed on, since the passing on of the virtues is a matter of generational replacement in good order. If the very sites of such replacement are vulnerable to absorption into either large capitalist enterprises or the bureaucratic state demanded by capitalism, then we have a problem.

In this respect, he massively underplayed the dangers. The deindustrialisation he bemoaned in working class American towns is, after all, a matter of their local firms' exposure to the demands of international competition and the predations of international finance capital. He supposed that the nation-state was too large and heterogeneous to be the stage of the common good; but how much larger is the stage of the world market!

MacIntyrean localism seems, to me, a legitimate form of *utopian* socialism, indebted as it openly is to trends like distributism, the early 20th century fashion that saw the way forward as the production through redistribution of a society of smallholders. For environmental reasons, if for no others, supply chains should probably be shorter; and in a democratic society one vote means more in a smaller electorate, so moving as many decisions as possible to the localities would be preferable. It is a serviceable recipe, to use Marx's phrase, for the cook shops of the future.

Public virtue

We are, today, confronted with capitalism as a globally organised and integrated power. If he did not know how to make a revolution, that is too bad, since the recovery of *any* conception of public

virtue - distributist, state-socialist, revolutionary-democratic-socialist - depends on the revolutionary overthrow of that state of affairs.

Such a revolution depends in turn on the ability of the masses to organise not only as local community groups, but a large-scale structure that is called a party. For MacIntyre, parties are simply one aspect of the overall structure of political life in modern states, whereby the masses are subordinated to what he called "agenda-setting elites", and are thus doomed to a cynical clientelism. It is not clear, however, why it should be possible to obtain democratic self-government in a *polis* and not in a voluntary organisation of militants of roughly the same population.

That parties typically *do* play the role primarily of agenda-setting on the part of elites in our society can scarcely be denied. Yet local community groups typically also devolve into such games, turning into canvassing operations for some party or another. If there is a way out, it is not clear why one institution would succeed and not the other in avoiding this danger. It certainly *is* clear why party organisation stands a snowflake's chance in hell of succeeding against the forces arrayed against the masses, and strictly local operations do not: because those forces are themselves organised at a higher level than the local.

It is on the party question, ultimately, that MacIntyre's view of Marxism as politically exhausted turns. In a certain respect, this problem is already there in *Marxism and Christianity*: his adherence to the new left line that the two real alternatives available to classical social democracy were the rightist revisionism of Eduard Bernstein and the leftism of Rosa Luxemburg is notably consonant with the idea of Robert Michels - a leftist-syndicalist social democrat who repented and became a fascist - that mass parties were intrinsically doomed to become oligarchies.

The actual history of the mass social democratic parties in their revolutionary period - in particular the way they were able to bind together innumerable local political and cultural initiatives as national political forces - is absent from his account: there is merely the story of bureaucracy, presented as if it were inevitable. Marxists may or may not become Weberians, as they approach power; but MacIntyre became a Weberian just inasmuch as he distanced himself from Marxist politics.

Morality

If the positive political proposals that MacIntyre's project yielded were hopeless - and they were, in spite of his protestations - then there remains the question of why his life and work demands two pages of the *Weekly Worker* on the occasion of his death. What *does* he have to say to us?

For this, we must return to the matter for which he is more widely remembered: his contributions to moral philosophy, and his attempts to return morality to its only true centre: the conduct of 'plain persons' in their relations with each other. There is often an awkwardness - an embarrassment, even - in Marxist forays into matters of morality. A certain more naive mindset can tell a story like this: morality is just the ideology of bourgeois society, and it is superseded by the scientific analysis of social relations. A recent example of this outlook was provided by Enzo Rossi in *Damage* magazine, criticising attempts to base socialist politics on liberal moralism of the John Rawls sort:

If there's a single ideal that guides the materialist left, it isn't a moral ideal. It is an aspiration to strengthen our grasp of how the world works and how present

dynamics limit our imaginations, to improve the position from which we make political choices. This is the sense in which our conception of emancipation is different from the liberal one: rather than striving for the freedom to get whatever we want here and now, we try to create conditions under which our desires are truly our own ...

Power distorts our desires and our moral values more than it distorts our faculties of observation, because the former two are more important to social control than the latter. That is why, until we are in a position of lesser subjection, we should stick to a sober, if radical, realism, limiting ourselves to figuring out how things work. In turn, that will tell us which distorted commitments to discard, and what alternatives may be open to us.¹⁰

We can respond to this by telling a MacIntyrian story: Enzo Rossi was born in the year X. At the age of 16, he realised it was time for him to have a political world view. He therefore undertook an exhaustive study of his own material interests and, having done so, moved on to studying all the various major political world views. He concluded that Marxism best served his interests, and therefore became a Marxist.

This story, obviously, is false. Why obviously? Because everyone involved in the socialist movement knows some other people so involved, and we all know of each other that we were not motivated to become militants on the basis of such calculations. For me, it was the Iraq war; for others, the Vietnam war or the 2008 crisis or the rise of the modern right. When the movement really did reach into the working class, direct individual interests were more pertinent, of course, but working class people became socialists or communists rather than just good union militants, because they grasped their own struggles as part of a larger moral campaign for radically more egalitarian social relations.

That is the trouble with a Marxist politics that simply disclaims moral reasoning - it is left, implicitly, with a theory of political motivation that is straightforwardly false in the case of basically every Marxist. This is a problem.

MacIntyre offers us much to think about here. He reminds us that our material lives are always/already articulated with our idea of the good life. If we are to be more than mere mechanical materialists, we must acknowledge that human beings are characterised *materially* by their ability to reflect on their actions and interpret them as meaningful. We cannot understand human action at all without so doing. It is on this point, after all, that MacIntyre was able to put the Marxist organisations of his acquaintance to the question, alleging that their practice entailed a degraded and 'Weberian' view of human action.

This in turn entails that there are right and wrong ways to organise politically to create a radically more just world. We cannot, like the 'official communist' parties, traffic endlessly in lies about the 'actually existing socialist' countries, because in so doing we degrade ourselves and deprive ourselves of those virtues that allow ourselves to do our actual work. In the same way, the SLL under Healy and the SWP under Callinicos were and are characterised by relentless and mendacious official optimism; and so ordinary members are degraded. We need Rossi's "sober realism", but we need it precisely because the raw materials of socialist organisations are people, who must in the end be able to deal honestly with their colleagues in the workplace, or neighbours or family.

In order to do so, MacIntyre would

argue, we need the virtues: of justice (giving to each what is their due), temperance (rational self-restraint), and many others, but above all what Aristotle calls *phronesis* and Aquinas *prudentia* - the ability to reason practically about which virtues are decisive in a particular situation. We cannot learn to exercise these virtues by reading a textbook on them, and so MacIntyre did not write textbooks: we learn from others, by following examples or receiving criticism. If a left organisation really were to obtain a recruit of the strictly cynical sort I described above in my hypothetical biography of Enzo Rossi, it would have a job of work on its hands to inculcate the virtues.

What I think is unanswerable in this challenge is not so much the particular tabulation of virtues - on this point, in any case, Aquinas departs from Aristotle, and MacIntyre was no dogmatist - but that the particular unity of theory and practice that is the Marxist movement is indeed a special case of the pursuit of the common good and therefore makes these *kinds of* demands on us as individuals. The cardinal virtue in our case, I would suggest, is a scrupulous intellectual honesty that does not make easy work of making friends, but ensures the friendships that do result truly answer to the name of comradeship.

More awkward is the emphasis MacIntyre places on the final ends of human life - which is, of course, where his Catholicism is most strongly in evidence. It is unproblematic for a Catholic - especially a Thomist - to lean on this idea: Catholicism, like most major religious traditions, leans strongly on a teleological conception of human life. It is unproblematic in a different way for a typical liberal, for whom there are simply no such final ends (MacIntyre's foil on this point was typically Isaiah Berlin or one of his disciples).

Marxism is in a more awkward spot, since it is committed generally to naturalistic explanation, but is simply unintelligible politically without at least *constraints* on human ends that exclude the idea that, for example, slavery is a perfectly good condition for some people, if not all. In this respect, it is irreducibly, if perhaps cautiously, teleological. A truly value-free 'Marxism' would be unable to recommend socialist revolution over some other possible outcome of capitalist society - say, the division of humanity, through eugenics and genetic engineering, into separate master and slave species; or, more prosaically, reversion to warlordism or nuclear armageddon - except as essentially contingent matters of preference; but if we really thought it was just a matter of preference, we would not bother to be Marxists.

It does not seem to me that the problem is insoluble, but the movement as it is has not - yet - provided the solution; and even if a rigorous theoretical answer was to be provided, it would still, once more, have to be put to the test of the

practical activity of the movement. MacIntyre's indictment of the moral reflection of the Marxist tradition, and its inability to escape the quagmire of modern moral inquiry more generally, is, alas, all too true of our history thus far.

Characters

In *After virtue*, MacIntyre - almost in passing - argues that ages are exemplified by certain 'characters'. So Victorian England might be glimpsed in the figure of the public schoolmaster, or post-war Britain in the bureaucratic manager. This idea has its most obvious provenance in Weber's "ideal types", but more distantly in certain archetypes of Jewish and Christian religion - prophet, priest and king.

In that typology, MacIntyre was certainly a prophet. His assessment of the moral exhaustion of the civilisation around him has the doomy air of a Jeremiah or Hosea, at any rate. Prophets are famously unwelcome in their own country; MacIntyre was never much at home anywhere - a critic of academia and especially of his own field of academic philosophy, and of the manifest injustices of the countries where he lived, principally Britain and the United States; an uneasy Marxist at the best of times; a Catholic who routinely ridiculed the church's inability to see any political issue as pertinent except the legality of abortion (though he agreed that it should be illegal).

As a more modern 'character', MacIntyre played the role of a public intellectual, albeit again uneasily. His encyclopaedically wide-ranging interests are so many doors into his thought, and so a strange old crowd now competes for ownership of his memory - from ultra-reactionaries who suppose his localism authorised the formation of heavily armed trad-Catholic madrasas, to Marxists who are forced into reflection on the matter of what the point of it all is.

Those sorts of 'big' questions were once thought to be the very stuff of philosophy; alas, academia is so desiccated that we are running out of people who even bother with them. And we have now lost one of the best ●

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Notes

- 1. www.theguardian.com/books/2025/may/25/aldasair-macintyre-obituary.
- 2. A MacIntyre, 'Poetry and political philosophy: notes on Burke and Yeats' *Ethics and politics* Cambridge 2006, p163.
- 3. A MacIntyre *Marxism and Christianity* Notre Dame, Indiana, 1984 - especially pp29-45.
- 4. *Ibid* p87.
- 5. *Ibid* p101.
- 6. A MacIntyre *Ethics in the conflicts of modernity* Cambridge 2016, pp93-101. In this respect he was more traditional in his Marxism than the analytical Marxists of the 1970s and 80s, who largely adopted neo-classical critiques of Marx's theory of value.
- 7. A MacIntyre *After virtue* Bloomsbury 2007, p181.
- 8. *Ibid* p404 (MacIntyre's emphasis).
- 9. *Ibid* pp405-06.
- 10. damagemag.com/2025/02/25/socialism-is-not-liberal-moralism-on-steroids.

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KURDISTAN

Defeat or victory?

Erdoğan is not interested in democracy or Kurdish national rights. Arguably, the PKK's guerrilla war served his interests. **Esen Uslu** puts the case for class politics and exploiting legal opportunities. However, if you talk of 'defeat', must you support the resumption of armed struggle?

The conclusion of Yasmine Mather's article, 'Kurdish entanglements', featured in last week's edition of *Weekly Worker*, asserts the following:

The dissolution of the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party] and the [Syrian Democratic Forces'] agreement with the Syrian government are hailed by some optimists as a 'victory'. I strongly disagree with that assessment. In reality, the repeated strategic missteps of both organisations have once again resulted in a defeat - not only for the Kurdish people, but also for the broader left in the region.¹

This line of thinking is quite widespread among the Turkish left - mainly among the organisations standing aloof from the Kurdish freedom movement. However, it is also evident in some organisations that collaborate closely with the PKK.

For example, the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP), which has its roots in Maoism and Enverism from the 1970s and 1980s, formed a joint front with the PKK in 2016, called the Peoples United Revolutionary Movement (HBDH), together with 10 other organisations. The MLKP has also sent militants to fight in defence of Rojava in Syria as part of the International Freedom Battalion.

The Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP) was allegedly formed as a spinoff of the MLKP to engage in legal Turkish politics. In 2014, the ESP joined the People's Democratic Party (HDP). One of its prominent founding members, Figen Yüksekdağ, served as co-chair of the HDP alongside Selahattin Demirtaş from 2014 to 2017. Yüksekdağ was elected as an MP and served until parliament revoked her immunity, after which she was sentenced to 30 years in prison (and Selahattin Demirtaş was given a 42-year sentence). Two ESP members who were elected on the Peoples Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) ticket are still serving as MPs.

After the PKK held its congress and disbanded the organisation, the central committee of the MLKP issued a declaration that set out some of the main objections to the line of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan adopted at the congress. The declaration contains nine points of rejection and concludes with a call to resume armed struggle. I am unable to find an official translation, but the following excerpts from the Turkish document cover the main points:

An end to armed struggle and free organisation with an unwritten agreement that does not include basic national democratic rights - such as education in a mother tongue, national autonomy, the unconditional release of prisoners of war, the return of all guerrilla forces and political exiles to Northern Kurdistan without precondition, the formal handing over of weapons to this or that interlocutor - is the acceptance of an unjust and undemocratic peace ...

The resolution opens the scope for the fascist-colonialist enemy's policy of imposing the mentality and practice of surrender ...



Kurdish peshmergas

The new strategic line is liquidationist and reformist ...

Theses such as the "influence of real socialism", the "denial [of the existence of Kurds] have been crumbled since the Özal era", "organisational-ideological meaninglessness and repetitiveness" are the expressions of the theorisation of the reformist new strategy and line ...

It has a reformist character based on the denial and rejection of the achievement of the Union of Soviet Republics on the basis of full equality of rights of nations, which was the accomplishment of the October revolution ...

Revolution is impossible as long as the oppressed are condemned to fight with their bare fists against guns, tanks and cannons ...

We call on the working class, toilers, women, youth, the poor, the oppressed in Kurdistan and Turkey to shoulder the struggle carried out by all means and forms - legal and illegal, peaceful and mass violence, armed and unarmed; to unite, organise and fight in this orientation.²

As you can see, they are not criticising the PKK resolution by talking about Syria and the SDF's shortcomings, as Yasmine Mather's article did. They went straight for the jugular of the resolution or 'Öcalan's line'. They claim that ending the armed struggle is defeatist and the end of revolutionary activity. In their view, the reasoning behind this change of heart is a denial of the accomplishments of the USSR, a renunciation of national rights and the disarming of working people in the face of an enemy with superior firepower.

Missing point

Duran Kalkan, one of the PKK leaders based in the Qandil Mountains, was the first to respond to the said declaration. He said:

Some people are trying to tell the PKK about war, to give war lectures. They want to give us lessons on guerrillas; they talk about how important and meaningful it is to fight. This organisation, the PKK, has waged armed struggle for 48 years, and has been waging uninterrupted guerrilla warfare for 41 years. Everyone should look at their own reality before uttering such words.

When the PKK wants to end this armed resistance, they say that the PKK has moved away from revolutionary politics. The level of violence does not determine whether a method of struggle is revolutionary or not. Those who say, 'The method that includes armed violence is revolutionary;

the method which does not include armed violence is reformism' are wrong.

However, the issue runs much deeper than that. The transition to a struggle using legal and lawful political means, plus new forms of organisation and tactics, is much more difficult and requires great sacrifices. This struggle must be waged in front of the enemy, seizing every opportunity and using the rules set by the state against them.

Resolution

What is not understood - or perhaps not wanted - is that the end of the armed struggle does not equate to the recognition of Kurdish status or rights, nor does it constitute a step towards resolving the Kurdish question. The struggle continues and *will* continue. It will just take different legal and political forms. The state will resort to all kinds of tricks again. We should not be under any illusions.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to adopt tactics and forms of struggle and organisation that exploit legal avenues. Only such a change can break the vicious circle, remove large sections of the population from the state's control, and pave the way for empowerment and the creation of new opportunities.

The legal Kurdish political movement had abandoned the idea of winning over and organising the wider Turkish population. It was focused on the state and the government. This approach has now been abandoned, and the idea of organising the Turkish population based on their specific issues and encouraging them to participate in the struggle can be adopted. Breaking the vicious circle could produce strong results in the shortest possible time.

The end of the armed struggle is not a compromise, in which the state grants certain rights in exchange for others. Rather, it is about the fact that the armed struggle has become an obstacle and a burden to the formation of a democratic movement in Turkey. In other words, one form of struggle is being abandoned in favour of another. It is a transition to a defensive tactic involving retreat and an expansion of the front, as well as taking advantage of the smallest legal and democratic rights. Fighting under the enemy's terms is avoided: the enemy is forced to fight under our terms.

This is not a 'peace process', as understood by some in DEM and other Kurdish organisations, as well as liberal and democratic circles. They continue to describe the cessation of the armed struggle as a solution and a peace process. The PKK foresaw this, as set out in the congress resolution:

We firmly believe that our people will understand the decision to

dissolve the PKK and end the method of armed struggle better than anyone and will embrace the responsibilities of the democratic struggle era, based on building a democratic society. It is of vital importance that our people, led by women and youth, build their self-organisations in all areas of life, organise on the basis of self-sufficiency through their language, identity and culture, become self-defensive in the face of attacks, and build a communal democratic society with a spirit of mobilisation.³

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is not interested in this strategic turnaround, because he knows that the previous situation served his interests and that an end to the armed struggle could strengthen a democratic opposition movement in Turkey.

His project can essentially be defined as follows: recognise the Kurds culturally, not politically; support them culturally (ie, outside the political sphere); and take them 'under your protection'. Politically, do not make any concessions, such as recognition, and do not take a step back. However, in the economic and administrative spheres, the aim is to create a class of collaborators by pampering and nourishing the Kurds, seducing them with vacancies and tenders, and transforming them from people who demand equal citizenship and written rights, and who fight for them, into subjects who expect special treatment from the state. This programme has no democratic character whatsoever. In other words, it aims to establish a similar relationship with the Kurds as that between the Turkish state and Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan region of Iraq from 2005-17.

In a sense, this plan can be viewed as a more *à la turque* version of the rights and restrictions that the European Union imposes on minorities. It also puts Turkey in a stronger position during negotiations with the EU. However, the Turkish state must stop the armed struggle in order to implement this plan.

The main danger to the Erdoğan regime is the prospect of even the slightest democratisation. It is not 'partition' that the Turkish state fears: its greatest fear is democracy, freedom and citizens with full rights. In fact, the regime was aware that Öcalan was pursuing a strategy to end the armed struggle and continue the fight on political and legal grounds. This is precisely why the state blocked all contact with him after 2015 and kept him in isolation. It was only the changed international circumstances that drove them to act in parallel.

Where next?

To conclude, laying down arms does not signify defeat for the movement. In fact, if this decision had not been made, it could have suffered serious defeats.

The first rule of guerrilla warfare is to blend in with the local population. You must live among the villagers. There are no villages left in the region. In Turkey, depopulation means that villages are empty, so obviously guerrillas cannot be stationed there. The guerrillas still had a moral function, but even that was

diminishing.

In the past, when the movement began, a significant proportion of the Kurdish population were peasants and nomads. However, due to the setting of forest fires, the construction of dams to block gorge passageways through high mountains, the destruction of villages and overall displacement, they no longer exist.

Today, the majority of Kurds live in the ghettos of Istanbul and other metropolitan cities - the lower sections of the working class are often Kurdish. Therefore, Kurds in metropolitan areas have relatively significant influence. Because of their economic position, they have a class structure that can be much more consistently democratic and revolutionary, protecting the movement from deviations.

How should we organise them? That is the question. The armed struggle provided an obstacle to this. In this respect, therefore, its ending was not a defeat: on the contrary, it was a very clever manoeuvre at the right time. This marks the beginning of a new breakthrough.

A change in tactics in the late 1990s resulted in the establishment of the largest democratic party in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the guerrilla movement continued to exist. Against the backdrop of changing conditions in Syria, the People's Defence Units (YPG) suddenly emerged in Syria. Thanks to their strategic decision to become a political force in Turkey, they have become a significant player in the Turkish opposition today. While this is a small victory for Öcalan's political line, the road ahead is long and arduous, full of pitfalls and traps.

Make no mistake: the PKK resolution will not lead to democratisation - there is actually a very fierce class struggle within the Kurdish movement. However, the language of this struggle is different. None of this is easily understood by an outside observer.

In terms of class, the core of the PKK - or the Kurdish freedom movement - is made up of workers, young people and women. They are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Because of this, the Kurdish bourgeoisie has not been able to take control.

'What does the government do?' 'What does parliament do?' - that is not our problem. Our problem is changing the agenda, which would be a revolution in itself. DEM needs to reorganise itself. It must adopt a new statute and organisational structure, based on individual rights and democratic practices. In other words, it needs to be a party where every organ is elected, where various opinions are discussed and where there are no impositions. Secondly, it needs to transform itself politically. It should not be in the position of a facilitator or mediator. It should ask itself, 'How can I take the lead and organise the opposition?' ●

Notes

1. 'Kurdish entanglements', May 29: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1540/kurdish-entanglements.
2. For the Turkish version of the declaration, see serbestiyet.com/featured/pkknin-feshi-kararina-muttekifi-mlkpdentepki-kurdistan-ve-turkiye-isci-sinifini-ezilenleri-savasmaya-cagiriyoruz-209285.
3. For the PKK's 'Statement on disbanding' resolution, see bianet.org/haber/full-text-pkks-statement-on-disbanding-decision-307344.

GAZA

Food used as bait

Israel is starving the Gazan population to ready them for mass expulsion, warns **Eddie Ford**. After that it will be the West Bank and then the Arab-Palestinian population in ‘Israel proper’

Every day becomes a ghastly spectacle, as we watch the unfolding genocidal events. Desperate people are gunned down, as they attempt to get food, either by IDF troops on the ground or from the air by helicopters and drones - the perpetual buzzing emissaries of death. Then Israeli spokespersons appear on the media to blame Hamas and disseminate lies. Meanwhile, a UN-backed report warns that the *entire* Gazan population faces the threat of starvation.

The euphemistically named ‘food aid hubs’ set up by the US-founded ‘Gaza Humanitarian Foundation’ have, of course, become killing zones. At least 27 Palestinians were killed on June 3, as they went to get food at a hub, several witnesses reporting that there was no aid available when they arrived at the site.

This was the third such incident in just a few days, with more than 30 killed on June 1, as people gathered at a GHF ‘distribution point’. Some of the dead and injured were transported by a donkey cart to a Red Cross-run field hospital in Rafah, which confirmed that it had received a “mass casualty influx” of 179 people. GHF head Johnnie Moore - an evangelical leader and advisor to Donald Trump on ‘interfaith issues’ - declared on X that reports of Palestinians killed and injured, while seeking aid, was “a lie” being “spread by terrorists” (he had replaced Jake Wood, a former marine, who had resigned, saying that he could not “guarantee” the GHF’s independence from Israeli interests.

Even though it was a “lie”, Israel finally admitted that its forces shot at individuals who were moving towards them in a “threatening” manner, so action had to be taken - showing as justification a totally spurious video purported to be Hamas gunmen (!) on June 1 firing on Gazans going to collect aid, as Hamas “does everything it can” to prevent the success of the food distribution - totally untrue.¹

As people starve in front of them, GHF announced on social media that its distribution points would be closed on June 4 for “update, organisation and efficiency improvement work” and claimed that operations would resume the next day - saying it was in discussion with the Israeli military to boost “security measures” beyond the immediate perimeter of GHF sites that would include measures to “guide foot traffic” in order to reduce “confusion or escalation”. Expect more horrors to come.

There is now pressure on the UN, of course, to declare the Gaza killings a “war crime”, especially as the charity, Doctors Without Borders, said that the people it treated at the GHF site “were shot from all sides by drones, helicopters, boats, tanks and Israeli soldiers on the ground”. We are in a hellish situation when going to a supposed aid site is a potential death sentence - but the Gazan people have no choice, because if they are not killed by bullets or bombs, they will die in slow agony from starvation.

Trap

There is plenty of talk of the GHF system being chaotic and designed to fail, and there are obviously strong elements of truth to that. But there is more to it - as pointed out by journalist Jonathan Cook: Israel is *fully integrating* its Gaza ‘food aid hubs’ into the genocide by luring Palestinians into a death trap.² Of



Class politics are key

course, there is the added bonus that trapping Palestinians in what are effectively Israeli military zones mean that IDF soldiers can snatch anybody they want using biometric data - not to mention ‘disappearing’ Palestinians into Israel’s torture centres, and so on.

After all, as the whole world knows, Israel is deliberately holding back food supplies. At the very least, you need 500 lorries a day, but according to rough estimates the number being used is now more like 70. Even then, not all of them end up reaching their destination point - some get stopped and looted, and others are held back at Israeli checkpoints. As part of the Zionist project to finish what was started in 1947-49 - the total ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population - it had to get rid of the UN Relief and Works Agency, which had been operating from 400 distribution points in Gaza.

It was replaced by the militarised GHF and its *four* distribution points, going from a woefully inadequate delivery state, thanks to Israel, to a cynically much worse system that wants to dispense ‘aid’ to where the majority of Gazan population do not live, but to where the Israeli authorities want to displace them - the ultimate exercise in kettling. Aid as a weapon for ethnic cleansing.

Just take a look at the map. If you live in Gaza City, to get food you are meant to go to the south to near the boundary with Deir el-Balah, where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians are already sheltering. None of the distribution points are located north of the Netzarim Corridor. What happens to the old or informed? ‘To hell with them’ is Israel’s answer.

The whole operation is, though, designed to move people. The food on

offer is not there to end hunger, no it is being used as bait. People who are on the edge of starvation will, if they can, walk miles to feed themselves and their families for a day or two.

Human solidarity

Because food supplies are deliberately kept short, it is inevitable that there would not only be a complete breakdown of order, but a *breakdown of human solidarity*. People are not going to stand patiently for hours at the back of the queue as the food parcels run out. No they will, predictably, push and shove, elbow others aside, crush them under foot, so as to feed themselves and their families.

There is, needless to say, nothing to celebrate in this chaotic “flood” - to do so is perverse.³ It is not resistance. It is desperation.

The chaos is no accident, no mistake, whatever the BBC and others suggest - actually making themselves complicit in the genocide, as Cook says, since it is willingly reproducing Israeli lies.

The Israeli war cabinet knows perfectly well what it is doing: getting Gaza ready for mass expulsion (presumably over the border into the Sinai). That or starve. And the green light has been given by Trump when he talked about transforming Gaza into the “Riveria” of the eastern Mediterranean. This had nothing to do with him seeing an unmissable real estate opportunity. Only the incurably naive would fall for that. No, Benjamin Netanyahu and the entire spectrum of Zionist opinion knew what Trump was saying: ‘go ahead and finish the job’. That is why Netanyahu grinned like a Cheshire cat at his White House press conference with the US president.

It is the same with the GHF

operation. It is not incompetence that has left so many dead ... and many more hungry. That is the plan, that is the intention. Uproot people, draw them south with the promise of a little food ... and then keep them there for when Israel opens the border with Sinai.

After Gaza it will be the West Bank, then the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel ‘proper’. Some far-right Zionists are already agitating for them to be expelled, despite holding Israeli passports and sometimes being used as a propaganda asset, showing how ‘tolerant’ Israel is, compared to the nations surrounding it.

We need to understand Israel as also an *American* colonial-settler project, not just a Zionist one - its war machine is to a very considerable degree an extension of the American one.

So demands for David Lammy to sanction Israel, for example, are in effect demands for him to sanction the US war machine.

Take the \$100 million F-35, America’s top end combat aircraft (and Israel’s and the UK’s and 18 other countries). Fifteen percent of it is made in British factories. Is Lammy going to put an embargo on F-35 parts going for assembly in the US because they are then sent from there to Israel? Is Lammy going to embargo spare parts for Israel’s F35s? Hardly likely, except, perhaps, under circumstances where the Starmer government faces a cabinet schism. So Lammy huffs and puffs, sheds a few crocodile tears and carries on with business as usual.

Of course, workers can impose their own sanctions. Perhaps people working in BAE, Teledyne, GKN and Martin-Baker will go on strike and walk out? Not to be expected anytime soon. Picketing such workplaces is

symbolically important ... but carries the danger of blaming workers who rely on their work to keep themselves and their families fed, clothed and housed. However, workers at ports and airports are well placed to stop arms deliveries to Israel. That would take organisation ... and, of course, workers at ports and airports are relatively well organised and might be expected to give a sympathetic ear to pro-Palestine activists.

Zionism

Now we come to a point worth repeating. While we have written about Netanyahu and his six-party far-right coalition, we should recognise that ethnic cleansing and the drive towards genocide is not something unique to Likud, United Torah Judaism, Shas, Otzma Yehudit, the Religious Zionist Party and New Hope. It something that is *common* to the whole Zionist project, left, right and centre. Why? Because, in terms of political economy, Israel is an exclusion colony: the indigenous population is not wanted - an obstacle that has to be removed one way or another.

Nor should we forget that Israel began under the domination of Labor Zionism, which oversaw not only the declaration of independence, but the ethnic cleansing of three quarters of a million Palestinians. It was a Labor Zionist government in the 1967 Six-Day War that defeated Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and took over the whole of Jerusalem - and occupied the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights.

They gave up, of course, their initial plans for the colonisation of Gaza - put that business off. But now they are returning to it with a vengeance - alongside the remorseless swallowing-up of the West Bank. Remember, however, that this is all part of the Zionist vision going back to *before* 1947-49 with Theodor Herzl and what he outlined in his famous 1896 pamphlet, *The Jewish state*, and what British imperialism sponsored with the Balfour Declaration.

You can also say that the disgusting abomination being played out in real time before our very eyes on the media means that the old taboo about comparing the Israeli state to the Nazi regime is broken. In fact, you cannot describe what is going on *without* comparing it to the Nazi holocaust. But at the same time you have to say that it is not just like the Nazis: what about the German empire’s genocide of the Herero and Nama people in what is now known as Namibia⁴, the Ottoman empire’s Armenian genocide of 1915. Not to forget the extermination of the indigenous Australian and north American populations.

Once we thought that was all a matter of history. Now we know better.

Israel can be stopped. However, that fundamentally relies on the international working class movement, crucially in the Arab Mashreq ●

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Notes

1. timesofisrael.com/hamas-says-idf-fire-killed-31-near-aid-hub-army-unaware-of-casualties.
2. jonathancook.substack.com/p/israel-is-fully-integrating-its-gaza.
3. mondoweiss.net/2025/05/the-chaos-of-aid-distribution-in-gaza-is-not-a-system-failure-the-system-is-designed-to-fail.
4. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herero_and_Nama_genocide.

OUR HISTORY

Soviet strategy and class collaboration

Having declared capitalist collapse imminent, there was a 180-degree about turn. Yassamine Mather looks at the origins and defeats resulting from the popular front

The concept of the popular front was approved at the seventh and final congress of the Communist International in 1935 under Stalin's leadership. It marked a major strategic shift. Confronted by fascism's advance in Europe - especially after Hitler's coming to power in 1933 - the USSR promoted the formation of broad, anti-fascist coalitions. This contrasted with previous denunciations of social democrats as "social fascists" and the practical rejection of united fronts.

Between 1928 and 1935 Comintern, under the direction of Stalin and the Soviet leadership, depicted the reformist or social democratic parties as the seeding ground for fascism, adapting to fascism and assisting fascism to power. Under the slogan of 'class against class' communist parties declared that capitalist collapse was imminent and revolution was around the corner. In fact, they were being fashioned into instruments of Soviet foreign policy, crucially when it came to Germany.

However, by 1935, seeking western allies and new forms of 'security', the USSR promoted anti-fascist unity. The popular front approach led not only to appeals for unity with social democrats, but middle class do-gooders, liberal politicians, eminent churchmen and the 'anti-fascist' bourgeoisie (that is the so-called less reactionary, the less counterrevolutionary sections of the bourgeoisie). So out went revolutionary slogans and in came a craving for respectability.

The popular front had three main components:

1 Class truce: Revolutionary ideas were softened or even abandoned to attract reformist and nationalist allies.

2 Stagism: In colonial settings, a national-democratic stage (often led by bourgeois forces) would precede a distant socialist revolution, it was claimed.

3 Tactical moderation: Communists entered bourgeois coalitions and adjusted their slogans to match democratic rhetoric rather than socialist transformation.

Examples of such fronts - in France and Spain in the 1930s and later the Chinese 'Second United Front' - illustrate how this strategy subordinated working class interests to nationalist or anti-fascist unity. In Spain, Stalinists crushed revolutionary workers and anarchists in the name of anti-fascism, while in colonial contexts like India and Vietnam, communists deferred to nationalist parties, watering down their programs to align with petty-bourgeois forces.

Of course, the 1930s were a tumultuous decade in Europe, marked by rising political polarisation, the threat of fascism and intense class struggles. The popular front strategy sought to unite communist, socialist and liberal forces against fascism. France and Spain were key battlegrounds for this approach, with not dissimilar outcomes.

France 1934-38

After the far-right riots of February 1934, sparked by the Stavisky Affair,¹ many on the left in France feared a fascist takeover. The Communist Party of France (PCF) - previously committed to Stalin's 'class against class' policy - shifted to a popular front strategy even before Comintern's 1935 directive.

The PCF allied with the Socialist



Demonstration responding to February 6 1934 crisis. Placard reads: 'Down with fascism'

Party (SFIO) and the Radical Party of centre-left liberals. This coalition won the 1936 elections, making the SFIO's Léon Blum prime minister. His popular front government passed some labour reforms (40-hour workweek, paid vacations, collective bargaining rights). However, economic pressures (capital flight, inflation) and political divisions weakened it. The popular front government fell in 1937 due to opposition from conservatives, business elites and the Senate. The Radicals later abandoned the coalition and by 1938 the popular front had collapsed.

Blum's government had faced significant criticism from its left. This disillusionment stemmed from a belief that the government was prioritising 'stability' and bourgeois alliances over transformative change and working class empowerment.

The PCF fully aligned with, even prompted, Comintern's popular front strategy, but, following its 1935 congress, it offered electoral support to, but notably refused to join, Blum's cabinet. As the government pursued its agenda, rank-and-file members and sections of the PCF leadership grew increasingly frustrated. Their core criticism centred on Blum's refusal to challenge capitalist structures: the absence of major bank or industrial nationalisations, and strict adherence to a 'republican' legal framework. The PCF feared this 'moderation' would ultimately demobilise the working class, while inadvertently strengthening the far right.

Exiled from the Soviet Union, Leon Trotsky was free to excoriate the popular fronts. In works such as *Whither France?* (1934-36), he denounced it as a dangerous exercise in class collaboration that disarmed the proletariat. Trotsky argued that such an alliance subordinated workers to bourgeois radicals, pointing to Blum's refusal to arm them against fascist threats and, crucially, his role in defusing the revolutionary potential of the June 1936 factory occupations and mass strikes. By prioritising legality and compromise, Trotsky insisted, Blum was squandering a historic

opportunity for socialist revolution - the only path he saw to defeating both fascism and capitalism.

Anarchists and various syndicalists viewed the Blum government as a betrayal of working class autonomy and direct action. They condemned the institutionalisation of class struggle, arguing that union energy was diverted into parliamentary politics. While acknowledging reforms such as paid vacations and the 40-hour workweek, anarchists and syndicalists viewed them as pacifying tools that left fundamental property relations intact. They lamented the replacement of radical self-management and factory occupations with bureaucratic trade unionism and state dependency.

But criticism was not confined to outside groups: Blum faced pressure from the left wing of his own Socialist Party and the broader socialist movement. These critics pointed to his retreat on nationalisations under pressure from capital, the controversial policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War (seen as abandoning international solidarity), and an over-reliance on the bourgeois Radical Party, which obviously had no commitment to socialism.

This diverse leftwing opposition coalesced around several key accusations against the popular front. Blum was, of course, seen as settling for manageable legal reforms within the capitalist system, thus actively opposing revolutionary transformation. The essential alliance with bourgeois parties, particularly the Radicals, was viewed as compromising socialist principles and goals, thereby trapping the workers' movement within the established order.

The massive June 1936 strikes and factory occupations were perceived as a unique revolutionary moment defused by Blum's government through negotiated concessions, preventing deeper societal change. The non-intervention policy in Spain was widely condemned as a betrayal of anti-fascist solidarity and the international working class. It was argued that the popular front strategy ultimately demobilised and

disempowered the working class, channelling its energy into state-managed processes.

Spain 1936-39

A popular front coalition (socialists, communists, republicans, left regionalists) secured a narrow victory in Spain's February 1936 elections, heightening fears among conservatives and the military. Spain's left was significantly more radicalised than France's, featuring powerful anarchist (CNT-FAI) and revolutionary socialist (POUM) currents. In July 1936, general Francisco Franco initiated a nationalist rebellion, igniting civil war. The republican government,

supported by the popular front, confronted Franco's forces, which received backing from Nazi Germany and fascist Italy.

While the USSR supplied military aid and helped organise the International Brigades, it demanded significant influence over republican policy. The Spanish Communist Party (PCE) promoted a moderate stance to court western democracies, actively opposing social revolution. Following Franco's uprising, a spontaneous revolutionary surge swept much of Spain: workers and peasants collectivised factories and land, militias supplanted the army, and dual power emerged in numerous areas. However, the Soviet Union and its PCE subordinate - crucial military and political actors - systematically worked to dismantle these revolutionary achievements, invoking 'unity' and the goal of a bourgeois democratic republic.

This dynamic provoked sustained leftwing critiques of the popular front as counterrevolutionary. The core accusation centred on the subordination of revolution to bourgeois democracy, justified by the front as essential for winning the war. Figures like Trotsky and POUM's Andrés Nin argued this alliance constrained the working class and indefinitely deferred social transformation. The government reinstated capitalist property relations and reimposed republican state authority over revolutionary bodies like workers' committees and militias, rather than empowering the masses. Trotsky insisted: "To save the revolution, it was necessary to break with the bourgeoisie - not accommodate it."

Soviet aid came with strings attached: principally the suppression of revolutionary forces. The PCE, backed by Moscow, depicted the revolution as a perilous diversion from the anti-fascist struggle. They dissolved workers' collectives,

Fighting fund

Very close indeed!

Would you believe it? In May we fell short of the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund monthly target of £2,750 - by exactly £3. Not quite a success, but not really a failure either!

Thanks to some excellent contributions in the last three days of the month, an extra £180 came our way, taking our total for May to £2,747. Thanks go to comrades BK (£50), JF (£20), IS, JD and MD (£10 each) for their bank transfers/standing orders, as well as our four PayPal donors - JS (£35), MS (£25), TR and EG (£5). And, of course, comrade Hassan wasn't going to let us down, was he? He handed his usual banknote (this time a tenner) to one of our team.

A good few of the above had responded to my last-minute appeal last week and we couldn't have got much closer, could we? Thanks very much, everyone!

But can we do just a bit better in June and actually break through that £2,750 barrier? Well, in the first four days of the month a useful £481 has come our way. First prize for

generosity goes to comrade AC for his brilliant £100, while other SOs and transfers came from EW (£55), LC (£50), MM (£31), ST and CT (£30), RG (£25), DL, MS and MT (£20 each), CP (£16), AN (£15), MR (£13), MM (£11), CH and DI (£10). Finally RT used PayPal to donate a handy £25.

Not bad for four days - if we continued at the same pace for the rest of June, we'd pass that £2,750 target by over £800! Not that I'm banking on it, of course, but I know how much the *Weekly Worker* is appreciated by comrades fighting for what the working class sorely needs - a principled, united and genuinely democratic Marxist party.

Please make sure we get the cash we need to continue playing that role! ●

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

absorbed independent militias into a centralised army, and persecuted revolutionary groups like the anti-Stalinist POUM and anarchists. In May 1937, Stalinist forces attacked revolutionary workers during Barcelona's 'May Days', crushing the revolution's most radical phase. The repression of the POUM, including the murder of Nin by Soviet agents and Spanish Stalinists on fabricated charges of Trotskyism and sabotage, epitomised this.

The USSR's support stemmed from *Realpolitik*, not internationalism: Stalin sought to appease France and Britain, viewing the revolution in Spain as a diplomatic liability. His policy aimed to stabilise bourgeois regimes and prevent revolutions beyond Soviet control. The Spanish radical left thus accused Moscow of preferring a liberal bourgeois democracy in Spain to socialist revolution, which might inspire similar revolutions elsewhere. Meanwhile, CNT-FAI 'anarchists' - initially pivotal to the revolution through collectivisation - later actually joined the popular front government.

Trotsky condemned the popular front as betraying revolution, even during the Spanish Civil War. He advocated independent working class organisation, rejecting unity with capitalist forces, and denounced the popular front as a Stalinist trap that disarmed the workers and prevented the seizure of power. The left critique contends that, while the Spanish working class had created revolutionary conditions and structures, the popular front immobilised them, subordinating genuine social change to liberal republicanism. Soviet intervention and Stalinist repression ended up crushing revolutionary forces to preserve a bourgeois state. This ultimately crippled the war effort, demoralised the masses and facilitated Franco's victory.

1930s China

The popular front policy in China refers to the strategy adopted by the Communist Party of China in the mid-1930s - especially after 1935 - under the influence of the Soviet Union and Comintern, and aligning with the broader popular front turn in global 'official communist' strategy. It led to the 'Second United Front' between the CCP

and the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), its former enemy, to resist the Japanese invasion. This shift had major consequences for the Chinese revolution and is subject to many debates.

Before 1935 The CCP and KMT were locked in a bloody civil war. The KMT, led by Chiang Kai-shek, carried out brutal campaigns to crush the CCP, whose base areas (like the Jiangxi Soviet) promoted radical land reform and peasant mobilisation. But after 1935, Japan's imperialist aggression intensified, especially with the occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and growing threats to China's heartland, and Comintern instructed the CCP to de-emphasise class struggle and instead form a 'united patriotic front' with Chiang's KMT.

The 'Second United Front' (1937-45) was formed after the Xi'an Incident (1936), where Chiang was kidnapped by his generals and forced to agree to resist Japan. The CCP suspended land reform, toned down class agitation and presented itself as a patriotic national force. In return, it was allowed to maintain control over its base areas, such as Yan'an, and form its own military organisation, the Eighth Route Army. The 'United Front' (in reality a popular front) was always tense and unstable - the KMT tried to keep the CCP in check while both fought Japan.

Stalin, pushed hard for the popular front strategy - his geopolitical priority was based on defence of the USSR, not encouraging the proletarian revolution in China. The CCP was instructed to downplay its revolutionary goals and focus on being a junior partner in an anti-Japanese coalition.

Left critics argued that the CCP had subordinated working class and peasant interests to an alliance with a reactionary nationalist bourgeoisie led by the KMT. The party had abandoned radical land redistribution, instead promoting 'unity' and 'national salvation'. No doubt the KMT used the 'United Front' to consolidate state power, suppress independent organisation and preserve landlordism in many areas.

As far as the Soviet Union

was concerned, it was prioritising *Realpolitik* over revolution. First, there was a non-aggression pact with Japan and later wartime diplomacy with the US and the Chinese regime under Chiang Kai-shek. The USSR did not support a full revolutionary breakthrough in China during World War II, fearing it might provoke Japan or antagonise the west.

However, given the subsequent victory of the CCP, its defenders argue that the 'Second United Front' had marked a temporary setback, but showed strategic flexibility. They argued that the CCP used the alliance tactically in order to survive, expand and rebuild its forces - eventually enabling victory in 1949. By 1945, the CCP had dramatically expanded its base and mass support, especially in rural areas. After all, following the collapse of the 'United Front' following World War II, the CCP resumed the civil war and eventually defeated the KMT in 1949, establishing the People's Republic of China.

Iran

The original Communist Party of Iran (CPI) was founded in the early 1920s by former members of the Edalat Party, inspired by the Russian Revolution. It was outlawed by the Reza Shah Pahlavi dictatorship in the 1930s. It was repressed and driven underground, with many of its members imprisoned.

Despite the repression, some Iranian communists remained active, often in exile in the USSR, where they continued to organise, but by the early 1940s things changed: Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in 1941 by the British and the Soviets during World War II. The Soviet Union, now a war ally of Britain and the US in opposition to Nazi Germany, wanted stability in Iran (which had strategic importance and lots of oil).

Rather than support the re-establishment of a radical underground Communist Party, the Soviet Union followed its popular front line. It encouraged the formation of a new, broader, more moderate party that could work legally and build mass support. This led to the formation of the Tudeh (Hezb-e Tudeh Iran) in 1941. The term 'Tudeh' means 'masses', reflecting its aim to be a broad party, not a revolutionary party. The new party included not only communists, but also reformists and nationalists, as well as intellectuals and others "open to progressive change".

Nazi Germany had declared Iranians 'Aryans' and thus exempted them from the Nuremberg laws. As a result Reza Shah's pro-German stance led to Allied intervention in 1941, splitting Iran into Soviet- and British-American-occupied zones. Reza Shah was deposed, and his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, was installed.

Research carried out by Iranian writer and human rights activist Khosrow Chaqueri shows Red Army intelligence actively engaged with the Tudeh leadership, helping to shape the new party's programme and even discussing financial aid. Georgi Dimitrov reported to Stalin that the party would serve as a "patriotic, democratic" united front, not an openly socialist force.

In 1942, Tudeh launched its paper *Siasat* and rapidly grew, establishing trade unions and regional branches across Iran. According to Chaqueri, the party's primary purpose was to serve Soviet interests - not to build socialism in Iran. Yet Iranian

communists, including survivors of imprisonment or Stalin's purges, largely supported its formation.

In late 1945, Soviet forces blocked the Iranian army from entering Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, where local groups declared independence with Soviet support. Tudeh was caught off guard, though its leadership close to the Red Army must have known what was coming. Soviet UN delegate Andrei Vishinsky argued against international intervention, and in Azerbaijan Ja'far Pishevari - an old Communist Party member - was installed as leader of the 'People's government'.

Tudeh - by then with over 100,000 supporters - had always proclaimed its loyalty to Iran's national sovereignty. But it quickly fell in line with Soviet aims, supporting separatist movements and oil concessions to Moscow. This led to mass resignations and disillusionment.

Under Soviet direction, Tudeh branches in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan were dissolved, and members were ordered to join nationalist parties. Pishevari's government implemented radical reforms - land redistribution, language rights, a new militia - but, when Soviet troops withdrew in 1946, it collapsed. Stalin later wrote to Pishevari explaining that withdrawing from Iran was necessary for broader geopolitical aims - supporting anti-colonial struggles elsewhere. Revolutionary demands in Azerbaijan were, in Stalin's view, premature and potentially damaging to Soviet diplomacy.

The collapse of the People's Republic of Azerbaijan and the failure of the oil deal with the Qavam government in Iran led to widespread frustration and splits in Tudeh. In 1948, Khalil Maleki led a breakaway, blaming the leadership for subordinating Iranian revolutionary goals to Soviet state interests.

In fact Tudeh's record throughout the 20th century is one of opportunism and betrayal. It consistently sacrificed the interests of Iranian workers, socialists and oppressed minorities at the altar of foreign policy imperatives - first Moscow's, later Tehran's. During the 1979 revolution, it repeated the same pattern, allying with the future supreme leader, Ruhollah Khomeini, only to be crushed like every other left force.

A popular front against the dictatorship was Tudeh's position towards the Islamists during the struggle against the shah. They backed Ayatollah Khomeini, imagining they would have a seat at the table of the new regime. Instead, Khomeini destroyed all forms of opposition - including Tudeh itself.²

It is not surprising that it is now calling for a united front against the Islamic Republic, without even clarifying who would be included in this new popular front ●

Notes

- See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandre_Stavisky.
- See 'No to war, no to the regime' *Weekly Worker* January 16 2020 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1282/no-to-war-no-to-the-regime).

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

Relying on Corbyn is desperation

Have the 'localists' won?

Jeremy Corbyn's project puts on display an embarrassing apolitical hotchpotch of moralistic waffle, but not everyone has given up on the fight for a 'proper party'. Carla Roberts reports

There was a fair bit of excitement among leftist trainspotters when, on May 27, the website of Jeremy Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project published the mission statement, 'Independent socialist councillors: what we stand for'. It is not the statement itself that makes it interesting - it is, to put it mildly, an embarrassingly apolitical hotchpotch of moralistic waffle rather than a commitment to any kind of firm policies.

"We stand for public service, equality and justice, grounded in socialist values and an unwavering commitment to anti-racism," reads the first sentence - the only one that mentions the 's-word'. The platitudes keep on piling up thereafter: "We are committed to giving power to people at the grassroots", "breaking down the barriers that divide us" and "we need voices that stand up to injustice", so that - and this is the grand finale - "together, we build the power of our communities - and, together, we can win!"¹ Not quite sure what the authors think they might win, but it is not going to be appreciation for political clarity or a commitment to principled policies.

There is a hint that the signatories might - maybe, perhaps - support net zero, but want to have their cake and eat it: "We work together on the basis that the demands of the climate crisis are inseparably linked to people's everyday lives, community wellbeing and economic justice." Without definite demands, though, it amounts to more empty waffle.

Measly

It is signed by a rather measly 26 councillors, among them Liverpool Community Independents - Sam Gorst (former supporter of Labour Against the Witchhunt) and Alan Gibbons (former member of Momentum's National Coordinating Group and its de facto leader after Jon Lansman was ousted). But there are, oddly, also 13 non-councillors who have signed the councillors' statement, most of them total no-names - apart from a certain Karie Murphy. Now this is what makes this an interesting statement: Murphy was, after all, Corbyn's right-hand woman when he was leader of the Labour Party, working as his chief-of-staff. The partner of former Unite general secretary Len McCluskey, she has been at the centre of Corbyn's inner circle from the start. She is also one of two directors of Justice Collective Ltd - the private company that was set up to launch Collective (aka the new Corbyn party).

So comrades could be forgiven for speculating that this statement might be (part of) the beginning of the new Corbyn party. Perhaps this is the (very, very) "soft launch" that Salma Yaqoob was promising at the Sheffield 'summit' of We Demand Change on May 18? Perhaps more signatories, including Yaqoob's, are supposed to follow? To show that the Corbyn party - whatever it might be called - is a sort of 'organic' development?



Well-meaning but

Alas, it seems the reality is rather more mundane and less 'exciting'. We hear that this statement is actually a reflection of the fact that the faction fight within Collective has now been resolved, that Murphy is on the losing side and that this statement is her attempt to 'stay relevant'.

We quite freely admit that we are forced to somewhat guess here, because unfortunately nobody in the inner circle of the putative Corbyn party - which we are told will be launched "within the next couple of months" (Salma Yaqoob) - seems to believe that the rest of the left (or, in indeed, the working class) should be kept informed about anything to do with the new party, its proposed programme, structures or constitution. And, naturally, we are told nothing about the disagreements taking place behind the scenes.

But disagreements have a habit of seeping out. We know that there are two main groupings - though, of course, these are not sharply defined factions of any description. Broadly speaking, there are the 'partyists' (again, all relative), who have been campaigning for a 'centralised', national party, with a comprehensive programme, a constitution and a membership structure. The main proponents of this outlook are Karie Murphy, Len McCluskey and Pamela Fitzpatrick, Murphy's co-director of Justice Collective Ltd (and one of two directors of the Peace and Justice Project, with Corbyn being the other one).

On the other side, there are the 'localists', who see Collective as a mere umbrella that would bring together different 'community groups', independent campaigns, etc., on the basis of a short 'political platform' rather than a programme. Presumably, any membership structures would be for the local affiliates to sort out. The most prominent members of this faction are Andrew Feinstein and

Jeremy Corbyn himself - the clincher, of course.

On paper at least, the partyist perspective sounds better. But of course, without a clear socialist programme, the right to form platforms (factions) and a thorough-going culture of democracy and debate, what you get is a repetition of Momentum, with its Bonapartist referendums, mushy politics and opaque bureaucratic manoeuvrings. True, instead of Jon Lansman, there would be Karie Murphy ... the result, though, is easy to predict.

In any case, it appears that the localists have won, at least for now. And we hear that Murphy was trying to flex her muscles by pulling together the above statement. A rather unimpressive attempt to stay relevant, we have to say.

Co-thinker

It seems that her co-thinker, Pamela Fitzpatrick, has not quite given up the fight for an actual partyist perspective. She appeared on the programme 'The new party, beyond London' on Novara Media on May 27, alongside Shockat Adam (independent MP for Leicester South) and Jamie Driscoll (former metro mayor of North Tyne).² Driscoll was previously involved in Collective, arguing alongside Feinstein and Corbyn against setting up a party - because, as it turned out, he was already in the process of setting up his own 'party', Majority UK! You really could not make it up.

Fitzpatrick clearly felt the need to bend the stick 'left' (good for her!). She was, after all, speaking alongside, firstly, the egocentric waffler, Driscoll (who explained on the Novara programme that "I had never any problem with the media, because I only talk about facts and raise demands that are fully-costed, so we did really, really well with our messaging"; and "It's not just Reform we're up against: it's also Netflix").

Secondly, there was the liberal, independent MP, Shockat Adam ("If we call ourselves 'left', people on the other side of the spectrum might feel alienated"). In clear opposition to those two, Pamela Fitzpatrick argued for "a new party - a solidly class-based party and a solidly left one at that". True, she also did not mention the s-word, but, when Driscoll argued for "something broader than just working class - that is language from 100 years ago. What about the five million self-employed people and the landlords?", she replied:

We have absolutely gone past 'broad church' - they always fail. Class politics is not about a particular narrow definition of 'working class' or messaging. And being pragmatic was the problem before though, wasn't it? If you are trying to accommodate everybody, you accommodate nobody. We should have learned that lesson from the Labour Party in 2017 and 2019, when we kept the Labour right in the party, when they really should have gone. If we had dismissed all these nonsense claims, we would be in a totally different position than we are in today.

We should nationalise housing, the construction industry and we should also talk about nationalising the banks. It is very easy to say, 'Tax the rich', but this is not a very radical demand: the rich have very good accountants and this just does not work. We cannot continue to just tinker around the edges. We need fundamental, radical change and that's what I will be arguing for.

There is no point saying we are 'offering solutions', when you are not actually saying how you are going to do that. And it is very hard to do that unless you own the means of production.

In terms of the new party, Fitzpatrick explained that Collective now "represents about 60 groups who have signed up for a new party". She admitted that "we had people who were not keen on a party. But I think the rise of Reform has focused the mind. And I am hoping the new party will come very soon."

Hopefully

When Driscoll explained that in terms of the programme of Majority UK, "we can't just listen to paid-up party members: that would really narrow our base. We have to listen to people on the doorstep and the assemblies", she argued:

There is nothing wrong with consulting with people. The problem arises when you base your whole politics on that. You cannot just be reactive to what people bring up in a meeting. If you put a lot of people into a room, they will probably tell you that the problem is asylum-seekers and we know that's wrong.

We don't just need coordination, because when you have lots of independents and groups involved, they will be pulling in different directions. There needs to be a clear programme, so that we are all on the same page. It also has to be an international project, because we have seen this before in countries where they tried to nationalise things - it does not work. So you need to reach out to working class communities across the world, but you can start with Europe. Hopefully, when the party will be launched, which will hopefully be very soon, there will be a democratic structure, where people can vote on policies, vote on elected positions, etc.

We could not help but notice the word, 'hopefully', being used quite a lot there by comrade Fitzpatrick. Perhaps she is just expressing wishful thinking - she has, after all, been announcing the imminent launch of the new party for almost a year now, including in the pages of *The Guardian* (which, we understand, really pissed Corbyn off).³ But perhaps things are still in flux and there is a chance that Jeremy Corbyn might actually agree to launch something that is of some use to the working class.

However, to rely on one totally confused, though undoubtedly well-meaning, independent MP, with his heart committed to the utopian dreams of pacifism and his head still lodged in the capitalist realism of Labourism - that, surely, is the politics of desperation. But such are the times ●

Notes

1. thecorbynproject.com/independent-councillors-statement.
2. novaramedia.com/2025/05/27/the-new-party-beyond-london.
3. www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/sep/15/jeremy-corbyn-addresses-meeting-new-leftwing-party-collective.