

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly worker



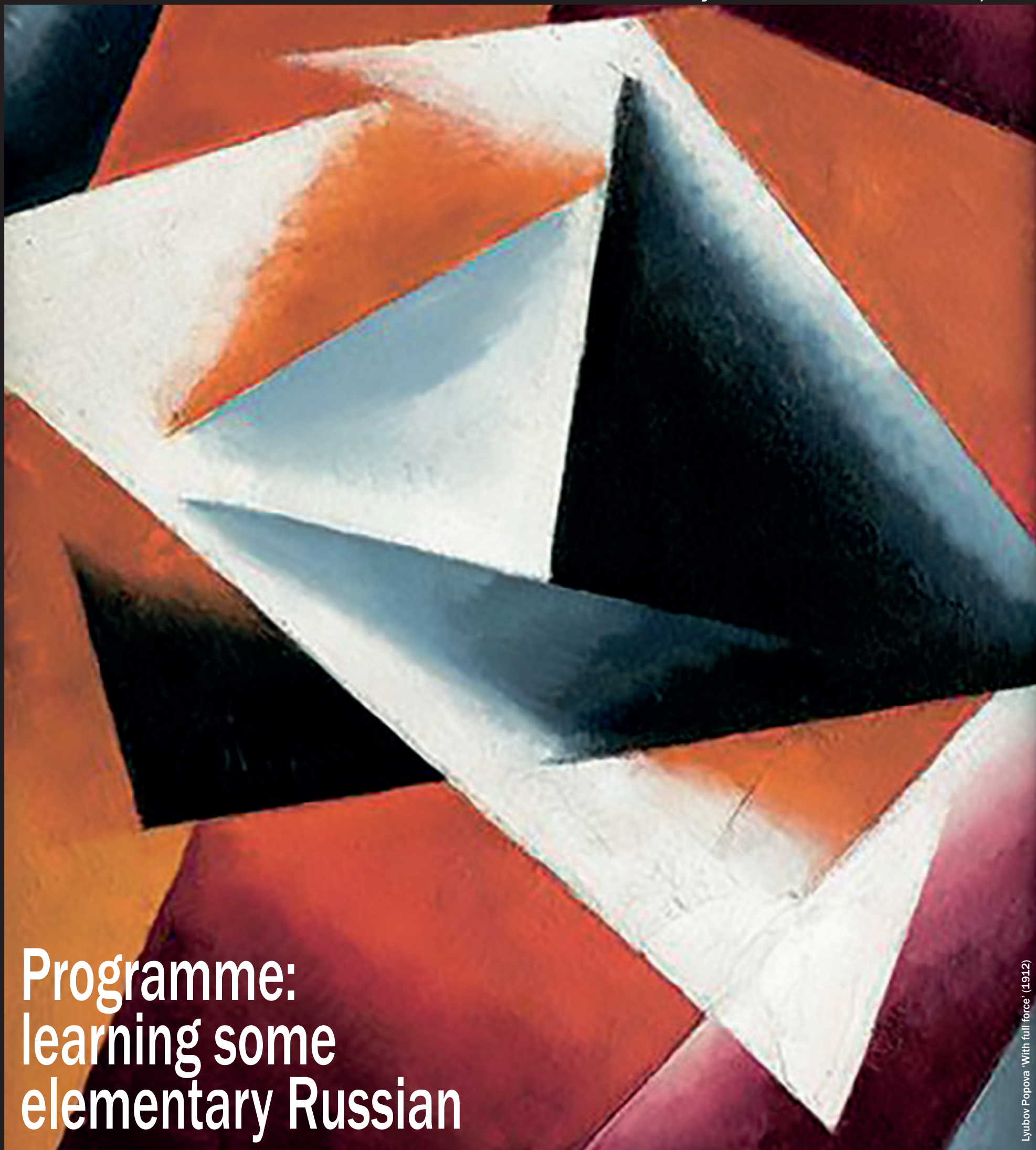
**Trump's LA escalation serves to distract but also shows the violence that lies at the heart of the constitutional order**

- Letters and debate
- Blasphemy laws
- Bancor and Keynes
- TAS polemic

No 1542 June 12 2025

Towards a mass Communist Party

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learning some  
elementary Russian

Lyubov Popova 'With full force' (1912)



# LETTERS



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

## Elaboration

Regarding my article, 'Soviet strategy and class collaboration' (June 5), several points require further explanation. Specifically, I should have elaborated on why the fronts advocated by the USSR were so popular initially and why similar tactics evoke considerable nostalgia today.

As noted, most of the popular fronts I discussed achieved short-term success in boosting support and confidence for the pro-Soviet communist parties. However, a significant problem was their short lifespan, often leading to their takeover by anti-working class forces.

In the case of Iran's Tudeh Party, I should have clarified that, while the pre-existing communist organisation was very small, Tudeh itself grew to become one of the region's largest leftwing parties by the late 1940s and early 1950s, commanding tens of thousands of members and supporters.

The core argument of this section was aiming to trace the party's trajectory: from its initial strategy of popular frontism to its later advocacy for a united front against the shah's dictatorship. In 1979 the 'anti-dictatorship' front involved allying with Shia fundamentalists - an alliance which ultimately led to disastrous consequences.

**Yassamine Mather**  
email

## Critical points

A few questions and observations on Mike Macnair's final article on the transition to communism ('Capitalism as a star fort' June 5).

First, while generalised nuclear exchange is a real possibility this century, Mike's quite pessimistic prognosis also misses out on the impacts of accelerating climate change as a real threat to established civilisations. That said, while being honest in our assessments is vital, it is also the role of Marxists and communists to try to turn the "small hope of a way out", as comrade Macnair puts it, through a "global alternative driven by an internationalist, proletarian communist movement", into a more likely outcome. We need to organise and inspire, otherwise we come across as mere armchair observers.

Second, given that Marxists need to organise in order to shift the probabilities in favour of the victory of an "internationalist, proletarian communist movement", the question of party instantly arises. In his letter to last week's paper - and elsewhere, comrade Macnair has said it is not the role of the party to "manage and coordinate the struggles" of the working class, but to "promote the idea of a political voice for the working class". However, to the extent a communist party becomes large and mass, its members will inevitably have to "manage and coordinate" communities, unions, workplaces, strikes and other struggles, as well as pose a general "radical democracy as an alternative to the ... regime in the state".

This will include "extending democracy into the workplace", as the CPGB *Draft programme* actually calls for in its immediate demands: "All-embracing workplace committees. Organise all workers, whatever their trade, whether or not they are in trade unions. Workplace committees should fight to exercise control over hiring and firing, production and investment."

So it is not a question of counterposing these, but of integrating them. If, as comrade Macnair argues, the emergence of communism starts within capitalism, then the working class and its party need to start coordinating and democratising this socialisation process.

Similarly, comrade Macnair's support for the idea that the trans theses are "written for communists" rather than an "attempt to attract trans people as members" is nonsensical. Replace "trans" with anything else here - 'unionists', 'Labour Party members', 'women' - and you see it is ridiculous. Again, it is not a question of counterposing, but integrating.

Third, while I accept that day-to-day trade unionism in advanced capitalist countries offers no spontaneous pathway towards communist organisation and working class independence, I wonder if comrade Macnair's formulation here is not dissimilar to the latter-day Healyite formulations of the World Socialist Website/Socialist Equality Parties that condemn the unions as thoroughly bourgeoisified and can no longer be regarded as workers' organisations: "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."

For the WSWS this means that the unions need to be smashed up by 'rank and file' committees and replaced. What is the logical outcome of comrade Macnair's formulation? That is unclear.

My overall concern in raising these points is to warn against a passive approach to partyism from comrade Macnair and the CPGB - one that merely observes and does not actively engage. Given that the alternative to the success of an internationalist communist, partyist strategy is nuclear war, environmental catastrophe and/or widespread barbarism, that would be a tragedy.

**Martin Greenfield**  
Australia

## Draft theses

Martin Greenfield's letter last week, headed 'Trans identity' (June 5), is primarily directed to correcting Ian Spencer's report of his intervention at the CPGB's May 25 aggregate discussion on the draft theses on 'Communism and trans liberation', which I drafted. There are, however, a couple of points in his letter which raise questions for me.

The first is as to "transracialism" and the case of Rachel Dolezal. For what it is worth, I think that the arguments of Adolph Reed on the Dolezal case are broadly sound: Europeans 'going native' was an imperial *fear* in the age of European formal empires; in contrast, the critique of Dolezal is *posed* by the conception in liberal intersectionality that the right to speak on an issue grows only out of personal experience (I also made the point in a different way in 2018, in 'Intersectionalism: the highest stage of western Stalinism', *Critique* Vol 46, pp541-58).

Secondly, comrade Greenfield says that "sex is binary (though manifests strongly bimodally)". I don't think this is exactly right. *Chromosomal* sex is also bimodal, though the bimodal character is so strong as to look like a binary: there is an intermediate form between XX and XY, XXY (and related forms), although only 0.04% of the population are affected. Rather more people, though still a very small minority, are not obviously male or female at birth, etc.

Rather more fundamentally, what *drives the significance* to human societies of the biological sex

binary/bimodal character is fertility. And about 7% of men and 13% of women are infertile. If we ask what the difference is between a trans man and an infertile cis man, the answer is effectively their different (gendered) upbringing. In this sense, the biological sex 'binary' is *definitely* bimodal rather than binary.

Thirdly, comrade Greenfield argues that "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". I formulated the draft theses on communism and trans *liberation* because it seems to me that the framework of 'rights' *inherently* posits both Ronald Dworkin's 'rights as trumps', which override debate, and competing 'rights', which is the frame within which the current witch-hunt against trans people is set (but also the frame of 'white rights', 'men's rights' and so on).

I don't think that we are going to have any sort of productive discussion about "why people are transsexual"; we have anthropological and historical evidence of the *presence* of minorities who wish to live in a sex they were not born in, going back to pre-class societies and through antique and medieval societies, so this is not a novelty which needs special explanation: I have suggested elsewhere that this minority is analogous to redheads or high-performance athletes ('Gender, class and capitalism' *Weekly Worker* February 23 2023); but I do not think that the 'aetiology' issue poses political tasks.

What I have just said about the biology in relation to comrade Greenfield's letter is, in my opinion, also a killer argument against Sean Carter's case in his letter (also June 5) for demanding a fixed, Aristotelian "definition of a woman". Comrade Carter claims that the draft theses are a "potential pivot to an anti-materialist position". On the contrary, it is the demand for an Aristotelian "definition of woman" that will produce a yes/no binary answer that is anti-materialist. The point is made in Friedrich Engels' 1895 letter to Conrad Schmidt. It is not only that it idealistically insists on the primacy of the 'concept of woman': it is also the case that lying behind this demand is actual rightist religious ideology of the relation between the sexes, based on Genesis 1.17.

The second half of comrade Carter's letter swallows whole the claim of the Republican Party political operatives, who in 2017 seized on 'gender-critical feminism' to be the basis of the latest culture-wars smear operation and their Conservative Party equivalents that trans people are a threat to women in general. This, too, is anti-materialist, because it is a plain falsification of material facts: it claims that less than 1% of the population, or around half a million, who are trans, without the sort of financial resources that back the Republican and Tory parties, are a real threat to the 51% (30.4 million) of UK population who are women.

As I put in the draft theses, this is the same method as the Tory press's exaggeration of the number of false rape claims. I can add that the same method is used by Republican and Tory press exaggeration of the frequency of criminal victimisation of individuals, or of the number of crimes committed by migrants.

**Mike Macnair**  
Oxford

## RCP's growth?

"Over the past two years, the RCI [Revolutionary Communist International] has grown exponentially", according to one of its leading members, Alan Woods, as

he looked forward with enthusiasm to its August congress. However, close examination of annual conference reports from its major affiliates suggests that the initial surge in membership between 2023 and 2024, generated by the 'Are you a communist?' campaign, has largely petered out.

The Revolutionary Communists of America reported a membership of approximately 800 in spring 2024 - an increase of "115%" over the past 12 months. Yet the recent 2025 conference also claimed that membership had "more than doubled" over the past two years, which means there has been very little, if any, growth since spring 2024.

Canada's Revolutionary Communist Party grew quickly in its first year, from 400 (May 2023) to 820 by May of the following year. But its most recent conference (May 2025) set out a plan to recruit "hundreds more communists" in order to reach a membership target of 1,000, implying that, as in the USA, membership growth over the past 12 months has been minimal or non-existent.

Britain's RCP grew from 800 members in spring 2023 to 1,150 by spring 2024, but one year later its membership total had increased only marginally, to 1,206. Finally, the Danish RCP has experienced a similar phenomenon: rapid growth between 2023 and 2024, from 100 to 247, but over the past year its membership has yet to reach 300.

For the past three years the RCI has been using dubious survey data to claim there are "millions of young people" convinced by the virtues of communism and that its vigorous recruitment drives will quickly build mass parties numbering thousands - and, before too long, tens of thousands of members. The evidence suggests that rapid growth has already given way to the pattern common to Trotskyist parties everywhere: the slow, patchy, incremental recruitment of very small numbers.

**John Kelly**  
email

## CPBer's advice

I think that in a lot of the exchanges between Talking About Socialism and the *Weekly Worker* group (WWG) there has been far too much talking at cross purposes, which doesn't help clarity and is not helpful in finding grounds for genuine political or organisational unity. This 'cross-talking' may or may not be deliberate, but does seem to be a bit of a sectarian habit, marking out why one group or faction is 'right' and the other 'wrong', but it doesn't really take the overall discussion forward.

One set of examples are the questions of defining socialism and communism. The TAS group (now) chooses to use the words interchangeably, but when they talk of socialism/communism, this does not appear to be what (say) the Socialist Party of Great Britain or the WWG in its *Draft programme* would define as 'communism': ie, a stateless, moneyless, free association of producers, where people would work voluntarily as a pleasure, choose to produce the necessary goods and services in relative abundance to enable all needs and wants to be met, and people would freely access all the goods and services they require. People would consciously choose to work responsibly and would equally consciously (and conscientiously) choose to access goods and services responsibly.

This would seem to me to require a very high level of socialist/communist consciousness and among a very high proportion of the population and I suspect would take a number

of generations of what communists would generally call 'socialist society' to be able to meet all these necessary conditions of full communism. (Incidentally, the question of full communist consciousness is one the SPGB comrades conspicuously fail to respond to, when challenged on their own version of the "world socialist revolution" and "immediate transition" to full socialism/communism).

What the TAS comrades describe as socialism/communism appears to be what I would term developed socialism: ie, it doesn't yet have the above features of full communism, but is where the great majority of the means of production and distribution are socialised and democratically controlled by the working class.

There does appear to be a genuine difference between TAS and the WWG on the question of the transitional period (I would generally favour the arguments of the WWG, and Jack Conrad in particular, on why this is the case), but the constructiveness of the discussion is hampered by the fact that the two groups are talking of transitions to two different stages of society. The WWG assert the TAS group are advocating a virtually instantaneous leap to full communism, when in fact they seem to be advocating (a still unrealistic) very quick transition to developed or full socialism.

I do feel the TAS people are being unfair when they characterise the WWG position as being to "manage capitalism" for a significant length of time. I think all the WWG are saying is that, at the point when the working class comes to power, capitalism will be the current social and economic system, which is taken over. The working class "as the new ruling and majority class" would move very quickly to expropriate the big capitalists and place the great majority of the means of production and distribution in the hands of the working class.

The 'commanding heights' and indeed the great majority of the economy would need to be rapidly socialised and in the hands of the working class, who would be able to start to plan the production of goods and services to meet needs. Obviously, as Jack in particular has stated in a number of articles, this does not mean that every single fish and chip shop or curry house will be immediately in state ownership or communally owned by local communities.

However, it would surely be incorrect and highly misleading to describe this stage of the revolutionary process as either 'managing capitalism' or 'capitalism coexisting with socialism'. One form - socialism - would clearly be very dominant and could heavily suppress, even redirect, the market impulses of any sectors remaining in individual or private ownership. The law of the plan would clearly predominate over the law of value.

The nature and content of any socialist revolution may be such that in the course of organising and asserting itself as 'a class for itself', the actual revolutionary struggle of the working class and the unfolding revolutionary process could itself result in severe, if not total, paralysis of capitalism and may well have *de facto* taken over large proportions of the means of production before assuming full state power.

The immediate steps for the working class in power would absolutely not be to 'manage capitalism', but to complete the necessary socialisation and democratisation of the economy, the state and its own class rule, and start to create a new planned socialist



system of production and distribution to meet needs. Naturally, one would hope - indeed expect - given the international and interconnected nature of current capitalism, that the socialist revolution would be fairly international, at least affecting a number of the major capitalist countries.

It would be (perhaps literally) fantastic if socialist revolution could take place simultaneously across the whole world, or at least across its major imperialist centres. However, one must at least provide for the case that the working class may find itself in power in some countries and not in others, and the new socialist economies would need for a period of time (years? decades?) to trade with countries which continued to be capitalist. The WWG with its very Eurocentric view of the world talks of a continental socialist revolution being required, but even Europe is hardly self-sufficient in even basic respects and does need to trade with countries right round the world.

Again, this would hardly amount to the working class in power ‘managing capitalism’ or, worse, for it to have to relinquish state power on the grounds that ‘the world proletarian revolution’ has not yet arrived - or not to have even bothered carrying out the socialist revolution in the first place.

Andrew Northall  
Kettering

Slander?

Maybe David Douglass could take some time to reflect on his reply to John Smithee last week (Letters, June 5) - most particularly bearing in mind the generally equivalent one made to a published letter of mine a few years ago.

I don’t remember all the finer details, but I do recall very clearly how the comrade replied to it with purportedly hard-nosed proletarian fury against ‘comfortable southerners’ - apparently people like me, who can have no concept of what it meant to live in circumstances where his own daughter as a child had to endure the indignities of having to use an outside toilet in their north-east England home.

All of this was in the context of my having tried to point out how his promotion of industrialised development and economic growth, irrespective of inevitably consequent social and cultural (and even spiritual?) damage caused, was not in fact a dandy idea - certainly not a progressive stance for anyone to hold in terms of the dangers presented by global warming, etc (even if in his case it was being made not by a communist, but a self-defined “anarchist”.

Now Dave Douglass virulently complains about being labelled as a supporter/promoter of Nigel Farage’s Reform, (calling it “completely unacceptable” and a “slander”, no less!) - an example of where expressions like ‘a pot calling a kettle black’ and ‘people in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones’ positively *leap* to any unfettered mind!

For his benefit, unashamedly I’ll admit here to being an example of a largely untrained Marxist. However, that hasn’t diminished any ability to recognise the historical need to secure for humankind genuine socialism: ie, a *non-Stalinistic* communism. Dave Douglass needs to learn how coming from a family background of well-educated, middle class ‘professionals’ does not preclude a seriousness or dedication to those things. On the contrary, as in my own case, it provides a *potential* capability to rise above the small-mindedness of petty ‘tribalism’ - the stuff that is so painfully typical of traditional, stale, stagnant, head-banging ‘working class’ politics!

Comrade Douglass should take a moment or two to think about what amounts to his ‘inverted snobbery’, his simple bigotry: most specifically of all, those undiluted industrialist stances he persists with to the exclusion of all more modernist understanding and *duly developed* class-consciousness. Down that road he would discover himself to be a hugely valuable ingredient in the creation of a newly relevant Communist Party - something that the easily maligned ‘Aunt Sally’ editor of the *Weekly Worker* and others in the CPGB seem to me to be committed to.

Bruno Kretzschmar  
email

Apostles’ creed

Following a rabid misinterpretation of one my posts, it becomes apparent that I needs must recite a form of apostles’ creed, before launching any comment on current affairs.

Firstly, I hold the principle that any worker who can’t get their worth in their own country can up stakes and move anywhere they think there’s a chance of improving their standards of life. I’d prefer they stay and organise, and fight for change where they are, but realise this isn’t always possible: they might be fleeing from repression following attempting to do just that.

The practical application of that principle however, needs organisation and attention. Huge influxes of hundreds and thousands of people, mostly young men, descending on communities and no plan to deal with them is the path of utter chaos and predictable tensions. Local people - not all of whom are white - are, of course, worried about housing, about schools, about cohesion. Shouting ‘racist scum’ and ‘fascist’ at them is hardly an intelligent plan. Worse, it inoculates people at large against such terms, to the point where such insults become meaningless. A dangerous development, when real racism and real fascist gangs are in the wings.

At the same time, in Palestine the time is long overdue when wounded children are evacuated wholesale to British hospitals. I wouldn’t advocate this for the general population as a whole, as this would play into the Israeli master plan, but in the case of wounded and crippled adults it’s long overdue.

I do not support parliamentary political parties, or the party form of organisation in general. Though obviously some are more progressive than others. I don’t vote in general - though that’s a tactic, not a principle. I am an anarcho-syndicalist and have been for 53 years in 63 years of active political revolutionary struggle. As such I believe in a world commonwealth, in which wealth and labour are shared - the regulation of things rather than the government of people. I’m against the state - all states, though I realise they are not the same and some are worse than others. All states have the potential of becoming rogue or oppressive.

Needless to say. I disagree with Carl Collins (Letters, May 29) and Lenin, that workers only achieve “trade union consciousness” in those organisations. I’ve written about this theory - as opposed to the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism and the fact that workers can and do achieve class consciousness, regardless of the formal structure of various kinds of organisational structure - in my book, *All power to the imagination*, published by the Class War Federation. It is available from me for £8, inclusive of post (contact me at [douglassdavid705@gmail.com](mailto:douglassdavid705@gmail.com)), so I will not repeat all those arguments.

I started this thread in response to reported plans of building a new

workers’ party, and the meeting in London (of course!) of various revolutionary left groups to elaborate a programme and theory, etc. I made the point that surely you must respond to the needs of the working class, with its own demands and perspectives - at least as an equal priority. Top of which is to address the ‘net zero’ obsession and its deindustrialisation effects. This might not ring any bells in London, but in the so called ‘red wall’ areas, the industrial communities, the rust belt of mining, steel, manufacture, it does.

The demands that reactionary doctrine be dropped is a workers’ demand. The fact that Farage and Reform have cynically adopted it doesn’t make it less authentic as a demand - likewise removing the cuts in welfare benefits and the nationalisation of essential utilities and services, such as rail, etc. A revolutionary programme declaring the abolition of capitalism and the institution of workers’ and consumers’ control of the means of production, etc is academic if there are no basic means of production and building infrastructure.

I was arguing that the new outfit meet workers and communities where they are, not just geographically and materially. Never in a million years did I think some poltroon would conclude I was in support of Farage and Reform by this observation. That level of cretinism I wasn’t expecting in the *Weekly Worker*. It’s clear that some people are only used to mouthing the latest slogan and see anything different as being in the enemy camp. I must be getting sensitive in my old age, because that remark hurt and upset me (‘Ah diddums’, I hear you say). My daughter - sensible lass that she is - has suggested that my posts do sometimes cause confusion and are not what would be expected (really?).

I was making the point that the migrant issue is not the cause of Reform’s surge of support, among those who were once the bedrock of trade unionism and socialism. The offshore oil and gas workers threatened with industrial genocide are not switching to Reform because of concern with immigrants - it’s not in these workers’ agenda. The surge in Durham and Doncaster, in mining areas and industrial centres - now places of social deprivation - is motivated by somebody (anybody) raising what seems obvious solutions.

I have personally campaigned for eight years for the proposed coking coal mine at Whitehaven, only to have climate secretary Edward Miliband withdraw backing for it and the 2,000 jobs in mining and associated projects. If Reform stands candidates in local council or parliamentary elections, do you think this would be their demand or ours? If they run on a ticket of opening the mine, do you think the job-starved area will then reject the mine and jobs because it’s Reform who’ve jumped onto the bandwagon? Of course not, but all I’m saying is it’s the left, whoever that is, who should be setting this agenda, not leaving the field open for opportunists. When you’ve finished shining up the revolutionary manifesto, leave some room for practical and immediate demands of the class itself.

Although I argue that the bulk of the surge to Reform isn’t prompted by racism, I am acutely aware that within their ranks (or behind their cloak) racists and outright fascists will use them as a beachhead and use that surge as a means of opening up their platform. But don’t, for god’s sake, lose all sense of perspective and proportion.

David Douglass  
South Shields

ACTION

Stop arming Israel - boycott Barclays Bank

**Saturday June 14:** Nationwide day of action. Demand the British government stops arming Israel. Demand Barclays stops bankrolling Israel’s genocide in the Gaza Strip. Join your local action.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:  
[palestinecampaign.org/events/boycott-barclays-day-of-action-4](http://palestinecampaign.org/events/boycott-barclays-day-of-action-4).

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](http://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 £9.38 (£3.96). Organised by We Demand Change: [wedemandchange.uk](http://wedemandchange.uk).

United colliers of Northumberland and Durham

**Monday June 16, 6pm:** Book launch, People’s Bookshop, Unit 19, Prince Bishops Place, Durham DH1. Marking the bicentennial of the Colliers of the United Association of Durham and Northumberland. A replica of the union’s banner will be on display.

Organised by People’s Bookshop:  
[www.facebook.com/PeoplesBookshop](http://www.facebook.com/PeoplesBookshop).

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](http://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](https://x.com/KNEECAPCEOL/status/1928162736657314159).

Soltanghaliev and the anti-colonial revolution

**Thursday June 19, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Mirsayet Soltanghaliev (1892-1940) and the anti-colonial revolution. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: [x.com/CCSoc/status/1905328514020053416](https://x.com/CCSoc/status/1905328514020053416).

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](http://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](http://www.facebook.com/events/742060295054790).

National march for Palestine

**Saturday June 21, 12 noon:** National demonstration. Assemble Russell Square, march to Whitehall. End the genocide. Stop arming Israel. Stop starving Gaza. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events/national-march-for-palestine](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events/national-march-for-palestine).

AL Morton and the radical tradition

**Thursday June 26, 7pm:** Book launch, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1 and online. Author James Crossley introduces his biography of communist intellectual AL Morton, who pioneered studies of English radical history. Registration free. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/504](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/504).

Swift blaze of fire

**Thursday June 26, 7pm:** Book event, Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford M5. Author Lin Rose Clark introduces this new book about her grandfather, *Robert Hilliard: Olympian, cleric and international brigadista*. Registration free. Organised by North West International Brigade Memorial Group: [www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4115723915338863](http://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4115723915338863).

Women chainmakers festival

**Saturday June 28, 11am to 4pm:** Family festival, Mary McArthur Gardens, Cradley Heath B64. Celebrate the 1910 women chainmakers’ victorious 10-week strike against starvation wages. Entrance free. Organised by TUC Midlands: [wolvestuc.org.uk/women-chainmakers-festival](http://wolvestuc.org.uk/women-chainmakers-festival).

Protest at Wimbledon - drop Barclays!

**Monday June 30, 10am:** Protest outside the tennis complex (opposite centre court), Church Road, London SW19. Demand the tournament sponsor, Barclays, stops bankrolling Palestinian genocide. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events/protest-at-wimbledon-drop-barclays-2](http://palestinecampaign.org/events/protest-at-wimbledon-drop-barclays-2).

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.



## USA

# A city occupied

Donald Trump's escalation of repression in Los Angeles serves to distract from recent embarrassments, but also displays the violence at the heart of the constitutional order, argues **Paul Demarty**

The last couple of weeks have given us a clear picture of Trump 2.0.

First there was the farcical chaos of Elon Musk's exit from his DOGE, and subsequent public tiff with the president over the 'One Big Beautiful Bill Act' - a typically American giant omnibus funding bill. Then came a wave of raids by ICE agents on, by all appearances, perfectly lawful residents, which were met in Los Angeles especially with spirited and militant demonstrations. Trump responded by sending 2,000 national guardsmen and, when that failed to calm things (fancy that!), there followed the deployment of the Marine Corps.

The two stories seem connected. Trump's political method, if you can call it that, is to drive the media agenda. It does not matter too much if the coverage is positive or negative: what matters is that *he* drives it, and the political currents of the country are thereby forced to shape themselves around him. The Musk fiasco was out of his control; the terroristic ICE raids gave him back the initiative.

## Musk

Musk's tenure at the highest levels of state administration was always likely to be short. Trump simply does not have room for another man with, as the kids say, main-character energy. Beyond that, their personalities are ill-matched. Musk is a precocious nerd of a type Trump despises. He is, according to persistent media coverage, a habitual drug user. A recent *New York Times* claimed that Musk was "taking so much ketamine ... that it was affecting his bladder", along with ecstasy, magic mushrooms and the popular prescription, amphetamine Adderall (which would explain his apparently 24/7 social media use, the most crippling addiction of his)<sup>1</sup>. Trump is a teetotaler. Musk makes his money from government subsidy of electric vehicles; Trump hates them and prefers to "drill, baby, drill". So it goes on.

DOGE immediately caused acrimony in Trump's cabinet by unleashing a bureaucratic tornado on what was, after all, the turf of every other appointee. Its destructive activities pleased the more deranged elements of the American right, but put every Republican congress member in a tricky spot, since many government agencies on which core voters depend (apart from social security, veterans' affairs) were rendered near inoperable. No amount of bluster about purging the 'woke' would compensate for such essentials.

After leaving DOGE, Musk denounced the Big Beautiful Bill as a monstrously wasteful handout and an "abomination" (it would also cut those precious electric vehicle subsidies). As things spiralled out of control, Musk declared that Trump was in the "Epstein files", concerning the activities of the late and strangely well-connected underage sex trafficker, Jeffrey Epstein (not exactly a bombshell; Trump's acquaintance with Epstein is already well documented). Rumours began to swirl that Musk had cuckolded homeland security advisor Stephen Miller, the long-time anti-immigrant ranter, who is



CA National Guard: Trump's playbook

one of the most repellent individuals in Trumpland (we will meet him again a little later). Trump, as is his wont, gave back as good as he got.

All this could have amounted to little more than a storm in the DC teacup, except that these were, after all, two 'main characters' going at it hammer and tongs, who represented distinct elements of the overall Trump phenomenon.

One of the great coups of the third Trump campaign was to peel sections of the tech elite off from their recent support of the Democrats. They all expected to get something in return; but Trump has a notorious habit of wriggling out from demands for payment. The *numerically* larger part of his electorate - leaving aside die-hard Republicans with nowhere else to go - is rust-belt, blue-collar and petty bourgeois. Punitive tariffs, especially on China, are a dagger to the heart of the tech bros' business interests, but a key part of Trump's sales pitch to middle Americans, whom he told that the US was being ripped off with the connivance of the Washington swamp. Musk's aggression against the federal government gives heart to old-fashioned Reagan conservative think-tankers, but - as noted - directly attacks Trump's core constituencies.

So the Trump-Musk feud was a more serious problem than, say, the extremely short tenure of Anthony Scaramucci as chief of staff in Trump's first term, because it punctured the illusion of a vast coalition of ordinary Americans against their internal enemies. To be asked to pick a side between the two men was to be robbed of the political promises of both. The rightwing mediasphere was wrong-footed.

## Flashpoint

What they needed, in the end, was some red meat, and got it with command over a heavily militarised ICE - a creation of George W Bush in his war-on-terror pomp, which has truly found its mission under Trump. The aforementioned Stephen Miller imposed arrest quotas on the agency, and so an escalation in its attacks on migrants ensued.

It found its flashpoint in LA on June 6, when ICE agents raided numerous downtown locations with their customary subtlety. Large groups of protestors appeared to confront them, at various points surrounding federal buildings in use by the agency. Protests continued over the weekend, during which time they were repeatedly and violently attacked by police armed with tear gas and rubber bullets. Two journalists were shot with such 'less lethal' rounds (lethality being very much a matter of degree in this case).

Instead of waiting for matters to die down, Trump deployed the national guard. By Monday, there were reports that he was preparing to send in 500 marines, and by Tuesday they had shown up. This is the sort of thing that gets called a dangerous escalation, and might be put down to the president's incompetence. Yet it seems to me that escalation is precisely the point, and has been throughout. Trump has chosen tactics that make militant opposition very much more likely and, as far as he is concerned, it is all part of the script - as is the effective declaration of martial law in LA, with the military not due to withdraw for 60 days. Now we are back to the glamour of Trumpism - the battle between 'real America', on the one hand, and migrant invaders, along with their treacherous 'woke' allies, on the other.

It is important to note that this really is a rather well-crafted trap for the left. Either numbers turn out to confront these outrageous attacks or they do not. In the first case, we get the scenes we saw over the weekend, and a show of absurd, wilting cowardice on the part of Democratic officials - including, naturally, the pusillanimous LA mayor, Karen Bass, and the narcissistic California governor, Gavin Newsom. In the second case, Trump shows he can raid even the bluest cities with impunity. It is a matter of 'Heads Trump wins, tails we lose'.

Traps, nevertheless, can be sprung. Suppose the movement was strong enough that even the Marines could not quickly restore order (order *will* be restored in the end,

outside of moments of revolutionary crisis), then Trump's victory would be Pyrrhic: the political costs of such assaults would be shown to be drastically higher than expected; morale in the ranks of the national guard and the Marines and even ICE would be affected; and so on.

## Bernie Sanders

Consider Sanders, who told his Twitter followers: "Dr [Martin Luther] King defeated racist government officials and ended segregation through disciplined, non-violent resistance. Defeating Trumpism, oligarchy and authoritarianism requires that same level of discipline. Violent protests are counterproductive and play right into Trump's playbook."<sup>2</sup>

He is both right and wrong. Protests turning violent certainly do "play into Trump's playbook", as I have argued (though the implication in Sanders's phrasing that it was protestors, rather than state forces, who *initiated* the violence, is unfortunate). Yet so does marching off like lambs to the slaughter. The truth, in any case, is that the civil rights movement was nothing like as "disciplined" in this respect as Sanders - and liberal opinion at large - seems to remember, with prudent self-defence measures frequently in evidence among the rank and file. King himself owned firearms for such purposes, as well he might.

It will be all too easy for this to turn into a sterile argument between soft-left legalists and anarchistic direct actionists about what works better: electoral campaigning and peaceful protests or militant direct action. The reality is that it is a matter of *tactics*. It is like arguing whether frontal assault or attrition is the 'right' way to fight battles. It depends on the battlefield, the strategic situation, the available forces, and so on. The British miners effectively brought down the government at the battle of Saltley Gate in 1972, which did not involve any actual fighting, because there were simply too many them (they were joined by a mass turnout from Birmingham's engineering factories). The same tactics of militant mass picketing failed to deliver victory in the longer strike of the next decade. It is no simple

matter to explain why: certainly not so simple as the contending dogmas of social pacifism and pseudo-Sorelianism would have us believe.

## Discipline

That said, what the movement lacks is precisely a kind of discipline. It is not clear *how* the various community groups, left organisations and single-issue campaigns - never mind the ordinary citizens swept up in events - could choose a tactical approach that would really be binding on all of them. Trump, again, has the power of initiative. The transformation of events into near riots was not (fortunately) a positive choice for an urban guerrilla strategy, but forced on the movement by the violence of the police and the determination of the ghouls in DC to make an example.

That discipline might be provided by obedience to a charismatic leader - like Martin Luther King perhaps (or indeed Trump ...). Yet such movements tend to have a shelf life. In the end, the leader - like everyone else - is mortal. Even before that, he (usually, indeed, *he*) is fallible. Whether via death or disgrace, the question is posed - who *next*? And we are back to the beginning: an irreducibly collective decision that we have no means of making in such a way that it is binding on all.

The more durable answer, regular readers will be unsurprised to hear, is a party, and one whose life is conducted according to radically democratic norms, which will not submerge divergent trends under a leader cult or an endless series of momentary expediencies, but will have them fight things out in the open to the moment of decision; and, if necessary, to the re-evaluation and overturning a decision. Such an organisation could really *try* different tactics, and synthesise the results. It could take bold initiatives, but also hold back and retreat in good order, if necessary (necessities badly underplayed by many on the far left, alas).

Such a party would confront a very dangerous situation in today's US. There can be little doubt that Trump's willingness to deploy armed force to crush protests and humiliate his enemies takes us into dangerous territory. Wherever one falls in the 'fascism debate', we must acknowledge recent events as a major step change, in a most unwelcome direction.

Trump's instruments, however, are just those provided him by the perfectly legal and ordinary progress of US state power over decades, even centuries. Defensive employment of constitutional provisions - particularly the first and second amendments, which the US left has rather fallen out of love with in recent years - is all well and good, but the fight must be to delegitimise and replace the constitution.

The Democrat mantra that 'this is not who we are' must be silenced: in an important sense, this really is what America is. But it need not be, so long as the American left recognises the historical depths of US tyranny and the scope of the tasks before it ●

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## Notes

1. [www.nytimes.com/2025/05/30/us/elon-musk-drugs-children-trump.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/30/us/elon-musk-drugs-children-trump.html).
2. [x.com/BernieSanders/status/1932148252800905415](https://x.com/BernieSanders/status/1932148252800905415).



## LAW

# Turning back the clock

No-one has the right not to be offended. The conviction of Hamit Coskun for burning the *Koran* is to revive the blasphemy laws by the back door. Not something the left should support, writes **Eddie Ford**

Free speech is fundamental to Marxism, as socialism can only be an act of self-liberation - of the great majority for the great majority - and members of the working class cannot be treated as little children, who are incapable of handling awkward and complicated questions. Therefore a recent case has disturbing implications for free speech, as it seems to represent blasphemy laws by proxy.

Hamit Coskun, 50, who was born in Turkey and is half Kurdish and half Armenian, set fire to a copy of the *Koran* outside the Turkish consulate in London in February. He is an atheist with a long history of protesting against the Turkish government, saying his demonstration was a protest against president Erdoğan for turning Turkey into a “base for radical Islamists”. He was heard shouting things like “Fuck Islam!”, “Islam is religion of terrorism”, “The *Koran* is burning”, etc. Not so widely reported was the fact that a passerby allegedly attacked Coskun and appeared to slash at him with a blade - then began kicking him when he fell to the ground. The man, who was apparently a Muslim, admitting that he assaulted Coskun, though he has denied using a knife in the attack. Since the protest, Coskun has reportedly faced death threats and has actually gone into hiding.

However, he was found guilty on June 2 of an offence under section 5 of the Public Order Act, which criminalises behaving or using words in a “disorderly” manner, or displaying material that is likely to harass, intimidate or distress others - which, of course, has been cynically deployed recently to warn Palestine protestors not to go anywhere near synagogues, for example. He was also found guilty under section 31(1) c) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which means that a public order offence can be “religiously aggravated” - which is a vicious attack on freedom of speech and the right to be offensive (or angular) in your criticism.<sup>1</sup> The National Secular Society and the Free Speech Union, who have paid Coskun’s legal fees, will also pay his fine - which is £240 plus a £96 surcharge - and they are also considering appealing against the verdict.

The presiding judge perversely claimed that Coskun knew that burning a copy of the *Koran* would be “provocative”, because in January Iraqi refugee Salwan Momika was assassinated in Sweden for doing the same thing. However, as Coskun was attacked, that rather seemed to prove his essential point about political Islamism - a fact which eluded the professional brains at the Crown Prosecution Service.<sup>2</sup> Coskun was originally charged with intent to cause “harassment, alarm or distress” against “the religious institution of Islam”, but, following an intervention by the NSS, the CPS retreated and said the wording of the charge was “incorrectly applied” and substituted a new charge. But the NSS correctly stated that any conviction based on the *facts of this case* would suggest “the reinstatement of an offence of blasphemy in English law by the back door”.

At this point, we should remember that the last successful prosecution for blasphemy was brought by the odious Mary Whitehouse in 1977 for James Kirkup’s poem, ‘The love



Perhaps best weapon is comedy

that dares to speak its name’ - which was published in the June 3 1976 issue of *Gay News*. This was not a particularly good poem, at least in the opinion of this author, but it fairly graphically described Jesus having sex with numerous disciples, guards, Pontius Pilate, etc. The jury delivered a guilty verdict with *Gay News* Ltd being fined £1,000 and its editor, Denis Lemon, fined £500 and sentenced to nine months suspended imprisonment. The last attempted prosecution under the blasphemy laws was in 2007 - when the evangelical group, Christian Voice, sought a private prosecution against the BBC over its broadcasting of the show, *Jerry Springer: the opera*, which includes a scene depicting Jesus, dressed as a baby, professing to be “a bit gay”.

## Abolition

Blasphemy was eventually abolished as a common law offence in England and Wales in 2008, Scotland in 2021 (and the Republic of Ireland formally abolished its blasphemy laws in 2020, following a referendum). That leaves Northern Ireland as the only part of the UK that still has blasphemy laws - so, for instance, in 2014 Newtownabbey Borough Council banned a play about the *Bible* on the grounds that it was “blasphemous”.

Unfortunately, there are those who want to resurrect blasphemy, especially in the guise of combating Islamophobia and racism. Last year, Labour MP Tahir Ali (a supporter of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, by the way) monstrously asked Keir Starmer to “commit to introducing measures to prohibit the desecration of all religious texts and prophets of the Abrahamic religions” - in effect calling for turning the clock backwards and smuggling in blasphemy laws. Indeed, some like Ali would like them extended beyond Christianity - at the moment the Church of England is the *state religion*, but presumably the likes of Ali want the monarch to become the defender of *faiths*, with an inferior

place for those of no faith or who are positively atheist.

What needs to be noted is that Starmer neither rejected the proposal nor mentioned any specific response - something which the NSS and others called “deeply alarming”, as he did not reject it on principle.<sup>3</sup> Although the charge against Coskun of attacking “the religious institution of Islam” was not pursued, the court’s eventual ruling is effectively the same and could have a chilling effect on anyone who wants to protest vociferously against any religion.

This takes us back to Tony Blair. because he too, like Ali, wanted to court Islamic opinion - hence his Religious Hatred Act of 2006, which was an attempt to recover lost ground after ‘the war on terror’. Though, of course, he first attempted to pass religious hatred legislation in 2001 following the September 11 attacks, with his then home secretary, David Blunkett, shamelessly declaring that laws were urgently needed in order to crack down upon a rash of vandalism inflicted to Muslim properties and assaults - both verbal and physical - upon ordinary Muslims. But, while the Commons was an easy pushover, the House of Lords inflicted two defeats on the legislation, and the same again in 2005. Nor was it third time lucky for Blair after his sweeping election victory in 2006 - he was still facing determined opposition from the Lords.

There was also stubborn resistance by secularists - particularly comedians like the Irish comic Dave Allen and Rowan Atkinson of *Not the nine o’clock news* fame (and later *Mr Bean*). They protested against the very real danger of being prosecuted for making ‘offensive’ jokes about religion and the legislation was steadily amended, as the facts on the ground became apparent. With a certain amount of logic, the ‘holy books’ themselves had to be excluded from the legislation: otherwise a preacher might find themselves in the same situation - if you want to justify homophobia, misogyny, anti-Semitism or genocide, just

for starters, you will find plenty of material in the *Old Testament*’s Joshua, Deuteronomy and Leviticus, the *New Testament*’s Matthew and John - or the *Koran*.

That would clearly be an unacceptable situation to the establishment, which obviously wants to install in us respect for the authority of religion so we know our place in society. In the end, the only opposition party that was supporting Blair’s bill was Respect in the shape of its lone MP, George Galloway, who had no problems traipsing through the division lobby with his supposed nemesis, New Labour.

Blair and his minions, getting desperate to preserve their act, had a cunning plan - simply to add ‘or religious’ after ‘racial’ in the existing law, which would then have penalised the use of “threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour”. But that was shot down again by the Lords, which passed two amendments that essentially removed the ‘abusive’ and ‘insulting’ concept, and required the *intention* - not just the possibility - of stirring up religious hatred.

This was much to Galloway’s disgust, who claimed that the two successful amendments rendered the legislation “completely useless”, as “only cases of direct threats will even be considered for prosecution” - which was “an insult” to the Muslim community, “who face bigotry because of their religion and who only want the law to treat them in the same way as those who face racial discrimination”. Now, if words, actions, images, etc are considered “threatening”, not merely “abusive” or “insulting”, to followers of a particular religion or belief system, they are deemed to be against the law. Of course, in the real world, “abusive” words are frequently perceived as “threatening”.

Blair’s government, it goes without saying, attempted to overturn these changes, but lost again. Nevertheless, the religious hatred laws were a further consolidation of the culture of offence and, as we all know, religious people in the past went to extraordinary lengths to ban or repress anything that they considered immoral, salacious or irreverent. Apart from religious wars and inquisitions, people of a certain age will never forget the campaign against the ‘blasphemous’ *The life of Brian* by Monty Python, with those like Mary Whitehouse doing everything they could to get it suppressed.

## Provocative

But talk of Galloway reminds us of what is truly significant about the religious hatred legislation, which is not so much about the act itself - which has never been used against anyone so far, but the left’s disgraceful response to it. Shamefully, the Socialist Workers Party supported the 2006 legislation, as it was alongside George Galloway in an unprincipled alliance - an unpopular front, to coin a phrase. The SWP too only saw it in terms of religious intolerance and racism. That is, something that Muslims are vulnerable to, hence we can possibly recruit from among them (never mind the broader democratic issues).

We were invited to believe that there is a big difference between ridiculing a religion, such as the

establishment-backed Church of England, which is totally legitimate, and mocking the beliefs of the poor and oppressed - apparently Islam is above analytical criticism, sceptical questioning, let alone biting humour, and can never be the belief of the rich and powerful. That is profound ignorance, as religions are almost always cross-class phenomena. Regardless, Alex Callinicos sneakily said we should not “allow ourselves to be fooled by arguments about freedom of speech”, lining up with pro-establishment Muslims, who were asking the state to ban anything that causes them offence (*Socialist Worker* February 23 2006) - as Hamit Coskun will surely tell you. The SWP’s front organisation, Stand Up to Racism, has in the past issued propaganda saying “insulting the Prophet Mohammed is not freedom of speech: it is racist abuse” (original spelling).<sup>4</sup> That is utter garbage and led you to think that the SWP wanted to revive and extend the blasphemy laws - perhaps those who show a picture or cartoon of Muhammad should be imprisoned or stoned to death?

## Speech limits

In other words, you can only conclude that for these comrades freedom of speech must have definite limits - one of those being when it becomes allegedly a ‘cloak’ for racism or Islamophobia. In this way, the SWP and others on the left sowed illusions in the supposed neutrality of the state, which has to be persuaded to take the necessary powers to stop insults or offence to Islam. But you can be as sure as chips that laws such as the Religious Hatred Act would not be used to protect vulnerable minorities, but to further silence and scapegoat them - divide the working class into competing sects and groups.

Unlike the SWP, Marxists do not regard free speech as an abstract concept or an add-on extra. If socialism is ever to be realised, the overwhelming majority of the population has to master complex truths. The corollary of that is nothing is ever taboo and no-one has a right *not* to be offended, however deep their belief or faith. However, what spontaneously dominates under the current order are the ideas of the bourgeoisie and, therefore, the only way that Marxism can triumph over what is dominant, apologetic, absurd, diversionary and irrational is through an unrestricted fight over ideas. A *class* struggle that is necessarily conducted in the public eye, where everyone can gain a firm understanding, freely engage and eventually take sides.

Winning that battle for hearts and minds is why the Marxist left has historically advocated and defended free expression. As Rosa Luxemburg famously said, “freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently”, no matter how provocatively expressed their thoughts are ●

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## Notes

1. secularism.org.uk/news/2025/06/nss-coskun-guilty-verdict-is-surrender-to-blasphemy-laws.
2. spectator.co.uk/article/this-is-a-dangerous-moment-for-free-speech.
3. independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/keir-starmer-blasphemy-law-pmqqs-b2654819.html.
4. socialistworker.co.uk/news/protests-after-teacher-shows-racist-cartoon-to-muslim-pupils.



## ECONOMICS

# Bancor and trade imbalances

Can massive surpluses and massive deficits be ironed out by the simple device of yet another international bureaucracy? Michael Roberts pours scorn on the idea

Donald Trump's trade war has forced the governments of the other major economies to reconsider the whole international trading and monetary regime. The international trading 'rules' built up over the last 40 years of so-called globalisation have been wrecked and the international institutions (the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, UN) formed after World War II by the US (with the support of the UK) at Bretton Woods along with the World Trade Organisation, have been sidelined.

Last week, the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development, the think-tank of the top 30 advanced capitalist economies, met in Paris for its annual meeting. It was a sombre affair. Trump's unilateral action on tariffs and his attempt to compel countries to cut trade deals had rattled the attendees. Trump is suggesting that international trade does not require multilateral agreements, or agencies to function or as a means to settle disputes. According to the *Financial Times*, the US message was unmistakable: "We've got a big trade deficit we need to deal with; what matters is unilateral power, which we have," said a diplomat who attended meetings with the US trade representative Jamieson Greer. "This is the way the world is going to look, so you better get used to it."

Interestingly, many leftist economists have increasingly begun to accept that Trump and the US have a point: international trade and financial 'imbalances' (ie, surpluses and deficits, credits and debits) are bad news for capitalism and maybe it is time to end them. You see, crises in capitalism are not caused by falls in the profitability of capital or even by 'excessive debt' in any one country, but instead by 'international imbalances': some countries run too large surpluses on trade with others and some countries have too large deficits.

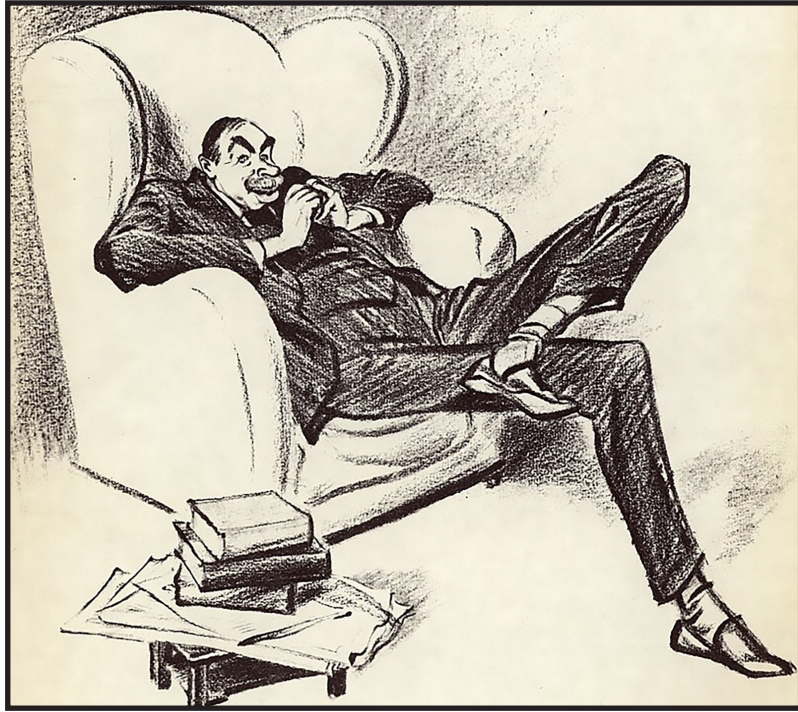
### Keynesianism

Robert Skidelsky, John Maynard Keynes's authoritative biographer, writing just after the end of the great recession, put it like this:

... global imbalances played a part in causing the severe credit crunch of 2008-09. But they are also dangerous *per se*. They can lead to disorderly reversals, triggered by large capital movements; and they can also provoke trade restrictions. It is a fair bet that a continuation of the global imbalances of 2006 would have led to a dollar crisis or a protectionist frenzy, if the credit bubble had not imploded first. The imbalances have now decreased, but could open up again when the world economy recovers. They thus continue to be a serious potential problem.<sup>2</sup>

Now the Keynesian left have attempted to revive the long forgotten idea of Keynes in 1941 that governments should establish an international 'clearing house' for countries where any trade surpluses or deficits are converted into credits and debits measured in a unit of international currency - named a 'bancor'. Such a clearing house would enable global economic stability in contrast to Trump's anarchic trade war.

The "principal object" of the international clearing union, Keynes said, "can be explained in a single



John Maynard Keynes caricature by David Low (1934)

sentence: to provide that money earned by selling goods to one country can be spent on purchasing the products of any other country. In jargon, a system of multilateral clearing." This would eliminate the need for bilateral clearing between countries. Instead, all national central banks would hold an account in bancors at this International Clearing Union (ICU) for their country's surpluses or deficits.

The essential feature of Keynes's plan was that creditor countries would not be allowed to hold on to the money from their outstanding trade surpluses, or charge punitive rates of interest for lending them out: rather these surpluses would be automatically available as cheap overdraft facilities to debtors through the mechanism of the ICU. Each national currency would have a fixed, but adjustable, relation to a unit of bancor, which itself would have a fixed relationship to gold as the internationally accepted measure of value.

Persistent trade surplus/creditor countries would be required to try and reduce their surpluses by revaluing their currencies and unblocking any foreign-owned investments. To force this, the ICU would charge them rising rates of interest on credits (surpluses) running at a certain level above an agreed quota. Any credit balance exceeding the quota at the end of a year would be confiscated and transferred to a reserve fund at the ICU. At the other side of the equation, persistent deficit countries would be required to depreciate their currencies and prohibit capital exports. They would also be charged interest on excessive debits (deficits) above a certain level. The target would be to achieve a perfect balance in trade for all countries at the year's end with the sum of bancor balances (credits-debits) at exactly zero.

Keynes pointed out a problem with trying to achieve an international balance of trade. In 'free markets', any trade adjustment was "compulsory for the debtor, but only voluntary for the creditor". If the creditor does not choose to make, or allow, his share of the adjustment, he suffers no inconvenience: while a country's reserves cannot fall below zero, there is no ceiling that sets an upper limit. The same is true if private capital flows are the means of adjustment: "The debtor must borrow; but the creditor is under no ... compulsion [to lend]".

This is a problem indeed. Why should countries making trade surpluses in goods and services relinquish those monetary gains to some international clearing bank that will pass them onto those countries running deficits, in order to reduce international capital flows that (apparently) are the cause of crises in production and investment globally?

At Bretton Woods in 1944, the US was the major surplus creditor and US representative Harry Dexter White vetoed Keynes's bancor plan. Now in 2025, it is China and Europe that are the surplus creditors and the US is the huge deficit nation. But would Trump or China support losing control over the distribution of the income from trade to an international bank run by some supposedly neutral group of bureaucrats?

### No balance

In 2025, both Trump and the Keynesians accept that imbalances in trade must be eliminated - Trump because he wants to sustain the global dominance of the American economy and its multinational companies in world markets; and the Keynesians because they think international trade and monetary imbalances are the *cause* of global economic instability.

Some Keynesians go so far as to accept the argument of Trump's Maga advisors that surplus trade countries - China in particular - are the culprits in this international instability. Michael Pettis argues that the likes of China have established trade surpluses because they have "suppressed domestic demand in order to subsidise its own manufacturing", so forcing the resulting manufacturing trade surplus "to be absorbed by those of its partners who exert much less control over their trade and capital accounts".<sup>3</sup> So it is China's (or until recently Germany's!) fault that there are trade imbalances, not the inability of US manufacturing to compete in world markets, compared to Asia and even Europe.

Back in 2010, Skidelsky argued that "emerging countries [ie, China] ... have discovered the advantages of export-led growth. This strategy has yielded many benefits for these countries, but it suffers from a fallacy of composition: the export surpluses must have counterpart deficits elsewhere." In other words, China's surpluses have caused the US deficit and China's high savings

have caused too much consumption in the US. Skidelsky states:

This is certainly a plausible description of events in the middle of this decade: the 'glut' of savings in parts of the world evoked a Keynesian expansionary response in the US, which widened global imbalances. Of course, the day of reckoning has to come in the end and has the potential to be strongly deflationary for the world, since the burden of adjustment would fall on the deficit countries.

Skidelsky is really saying that capitalist market economies do not grow in any harmonious and balanced way. On the contrary, there is continual competition between 'hostile brothers' in global markets. Just as in domestic markets, the stronger, the better organised, and those with more productive technology, gain at the expense of the weaker. 'Imbalances' are the stuff of capitalist accumulation. The idea that they can be ironed out through some macro-management organised by a central bank has not worked *within* countries; and it is even less likely in *international* markets. International imbalances are the *symptom* - or result - of the uneven development of many capitals competing against each other; they are not the *cause* of economic crises.

Indeed, Skidelsky hinted at this:

There are both 'good' and 'bad' imbalances. On the one hand, the advantage of globalisation is that it allows savings to flow to where the rate of return on new investment is highest. On the other hand, imbalances can be a symptom of distortions to the price signals in the economy, leading to unsustainable patterns of capital flows and spending that are costly to correct.

That sums up the uneven basis of capitalist economic development. Such uneven development in profitability would not disappear even if each country's trade in goods and services was in balance with all others. There would still be an unequal *exchange of value* in trade, as the higher-technology economies and companies extracted surplus value from lower-technology countries and companies. The value dimension of international imbalances is totally missing from Keynesian theory.

### US v China

Under capitalism, there are always value imbalances among economies - not because the more efficient producer is 'forcing' a trade deficit on the less efficient, but because capitalism is a system of uneven and combined development, where national economies with lower costs can gain value in international trade from those less efficient. What really worries the US capitalists (and Trump in his own way) is not that surplus countries are forcing the US to issue dollars to pay for its deficits: it is that China is closing the gap on productivity and technology with the US and so reducing the transfer of profit to the US and threatening its economic dominance.

It is the same thing with the ludicrous, but continually repeated, argument that the slowdown in economic growth in the major economies is caused by the surplus countries 'saving too much'.<sup>4</sup> If their households, companies and

governments only spent more (consume, not save), the argument goes, then the imbalances would disappear and the world economy would grow faster. But it is not *excessive* saving by the emerging economies that is the cause of slowing economic growth in the major economies, but *too little* investment in the latter.

There has not been a global savings 'glut', but a *dearth* of investment. There is not too much profit (surplus savings), but too little investment. Since the 1980s, the capitalist sector in the advanced capitalist economies (the OECD) has reduced its investment relative to gross domestic product by four percentage points - and particularly since the late 1990s and after the end of the 'great recession'. Savings to GDP in the advanced economies fell only by one percentage point over the same period.

As profitability fell in the late 1990s, investment declined and growth had to be boosted by an expansion of fictitious capital (credit or debt) to drive consumption and unproductive financial and property speculation. The reason for the great recession and the subsequent weak recovery was not a lack of consumption or a savings glut, but a collapse in investment.

Back in 2011, just after the end of the great recession, the then governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, argued that "there is no world government to impose 'rules of the game' to internalise the externalities [ie, remove the imbalances]. So the solution can be found only in cooperation between nations ... Will we create a more stable world economy? The next few years will provide the answer. And they will, as our Chinese friends say, be interesting."<sup>5</sup>

Well, we now know the answer to that question. What country is going to agree to be fined or have its hard-earned export money confiscated because it has succeeded 'too well' in world markets? The Chinese? And what country is going to accept that it will be fined or forced to devalue its currency because it is running too large a trade deficit? The US?

Far from international cooperation looking to end trade imbalances, the major economies are facing an all-out trade war (to go along with their increasing preparations for a military war). How did the OECD annual meeting last week conclude on the chances of such international cooperation? As one observer remarked, "We're really where we were before the meeting, which is nowhere."<sup>6</sup>

The utopian idea of bancor was vetoed in 1941. If raised again by Keynesians now, it will suffer the same fate ●

Michael Roberts blogs at [thenextrecession.wordpress.com](http://thenextrecession.wordpress.com)

### Notes

1. [www.ft.com/content/03c86b1c-5563-4879-a9ab-78a576f9f474](http://www.ft.com/content/03c86b1c-5563-4879-a9ab-78a576f9f474).
2. [robertskidelsky.com/2010/06/23/keynes-global-imbalances-and-international-monetary-reform-today](http://robertskidelsky.com/2010/06/23/keynes-global-imbalances-and-international-monetary-reform-today).
3. [www.ft.com/content/a3fb6b82-4a51-4a5c-b831-f755518f5863](http://www.ft.com/content/a3fb6b82-4a51-4a5c-b831-f755518f5863).
4. See my previous article: [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2020/06/21/trade-wars-and-class-wars-part-one-the-global-savings-glut](http://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2020/06/21/trade-wars-and-class-wars-part-one-the-global-savings-glut).
5. [www.bankofengland.co.uk/-/media/boe/files/speech/2011/do-we-need-an-international-monetary-system-speech-by-mervyn-king.pdf](http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/-/media/boe/files/speech/2011/do-we-need-an-international-monetary-system-speech-by-mervyn-king.pdf).
6. [slguardian.org/trumps-unilateral-trade-strategy-casts-shadow-over-wto-talks-in-paris](http://slguardian.org/trumps-unilateral-trade-strategy-casts-shadow-over-wto-talks-in-paris).



## FCU

# Learning some elementary Russian

Worthwhile unity can only be forged around a democratically agreed programme. But that necessarily involves minorities accepting majority votes. Demanding that majorities discard their programme and compromise on their principles is a non-starter, says **Jack Conrad**



**G**iven that most of the left is still trapped within the narrow horizons of reformism, economism and tailing spontaneity, it is doubtless positive that the Talking About Socialism comrades have taken time out to write, debate, amend and agree a draft programme for the mass Communist Party in Great Britain that we in the Forging Communist Unity process are all committed to build.

Well, let us hope that is what the comrades have in mind. For us - that is, the CPGB - it needs emphasising that the communist programme is no pious list of election promises or a factional declaration, 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, as we shall argue, grows out of the programme, not the other way round.

Positively, the leading TAS comrades, Nick Wrack and Ed Potts, tell us that they now reject Trotsky's 1938 *Transitional programme* and the whole so-called 'transitional method'. Clearly, however, that does not include *all* TAS members. So the worth of what TAS can draft, debate

and agree over the course of just a few short weeks is very much open to question.

True, Karl Marx could dictate the whole of the maximum section of the *Programme of the French Workers' Party* almost without stopping to take breath. But he was a genius ... and moreover had decades of prior programmatic experience dating back to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and the *Programme of the Communist Party in Germany* (1848). No less to the point, the minimum section of the *Programme of the French Workers' Party* was a year in preparation ... and, of course, it had to be debated and agreed by the delegates of the November 1880 founding congress in Le Havre.

### Hodgepodge

My fear, though, is that the TAS comrades will produce a hodgepodge, an incoherent nonsense, a parody of the maximalism of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. After all, despite having a whole history of active involvement on the left, the leading TAS comrades have no history whatsoever of championing the need for, working towards, let alone drafting a Communist Party programme. So we are dealing with experienced comrades with *no* principled programmatic experience. Put another way, their draft programme has its origins in their factional response to our CPGB

### Members of the League of Struggle in 1897.

**Standing (left to right):**

**Alexander Malchenko,**

**P Zaporozhets,**

**Anatoly Vaneyev;**

**Sitting (left to right):**

**V Starkov,**

**Gleb Krzhizhanovsky,**

**Vladimir Lenin and**

**Julius Martov**

*Draft programme* within the context of Forging Communist Unity.

This article will use the Russian experience to shed light on, inform and take forward our FCU process. Why? Because the Bolsheviks, beginning as the majority faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, went on to successfully lead a revolution that shook - and still shapes - the world. Yes, that revolution eventually went down to defeat through the 1928-29 counterrevolution within the revolution and finally the 1989-91 counterrevolution within the counterrevolution. But that does nothing to diminish the historical significance of the Russian experience.

Obviously, Britain in 2025 is a very different country from Russia in 1900. Britain is reliant on finance capital and increasingly parasitic. Russia was a colonising semi-colony and dominated by peasant agriculture. The times are very different too. In 2025 there is not a single communist party worthy of the name anywhere on the planet. In 1900 social democratic parties were growing apace and, especially in Germany, with its trade unions, co-ops, counselling services, libraries, clubs, pubs and schools, constituted a state within the state. It seemed inevitable that working class power would be firmly secured within a matter of a few decades.

To get the idea, have a look at the opening scene - the 1900 new year's eve celebrations staged by the SDP - in Margarethe von Trotta's film *Rosa Luxemburg*. Its leading personalities exude supreme confidence in the future. Nowadays, "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism".<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the history of the Russian Revolution, because it was so intense, because it involved so many varied stages, because it drew on everything that was advanced in Europe, because it ended in victory, is packed full of unequalled lessons for communists that today we ignore at our peril. Of course, while seeking to learn, we cannot copy. That would be a fool's game.

### Plekhanov's group

The Emancipation of Labour group, the first Marxist organisation in Russia - actually they lived in Swiss exile - was acutely aware of the necessity of programme. It was founded, remember, in 1883, when there was no working class movement in Russia to speak of and the RSDLP was nothing more than a vague idea. The group, it should be added, consisted of Georgi Plekhanov, Vasily Ignatov, Vera Zasulich, Leo Deutsch and Pavel Axelrod. Together they produced some still classic texts, began a sustained polemical war against the Narodnik populists and published



# FCU

and distributed many works by Marx and Engels in the Russian language for the first time.

In 1884 Plekhanov wrote the ‘Programme of the Social-Democratic Emancipation of Labour Group’. Its opening point says it all: “The Emancipation of Labour Group sets itself the aim of spreading socialist ideas in Russia and working out the elements for organising a Russian workers’ socialist party.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, programme came first. The party would grow from the programme.

## 2nd draft

A second draft followed shortly afterwards. Like the first draft, what is noticeable is the discounting of the liberal bourgeoisie as the source of any ‘initiative’ against tsarism. That said, the socialist intelligentsia should continue with the attempt to rouse the bourgeoisie, including by means of terror: ie, individual assassination of tsarist bigwigs. However, unlike the first draft, now the leading role in the fight for political freedom is given to the working class. Note, the Plekhanov group discounted the idea of immediately introducing any kind of socialism. A break with the long held perspectives of the Narodniks - theirs was to be based on peasant communes and the nationalisation of all economic resources. Capitalism, for the Plekhanov group, would have to develop, alongside political freedom, before socialism appeared on the agenda. It other words a classic two-stage Marxist programme.

The Plekhanov group influenced a definite layer of socialist intellectuals in Russia, not least the short-lived League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, founded in 1895, by amongst others Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov and Julius Martov. It united some 20 workers’ circles in St Petersburg and issued agitational leaflets aimed at exposing factory conditions and readying workers for political action. However, before they could publish the first edition of their paper, *Rabocheye Dyelo*, the Okhrana secret police raided. Amongst those arrested was Ulyanov (Lenin).

The same fate befell five of the delegates to the 1898 founding congress of the RSDLP held in Minsk. They included all three central committee members - there were only nine delegates in total. The first congress agreed the party name, a federalist constitution and tasked the St Petersburg Union of Struggle with preparation of a policy document. That job was done by Peter Struve - soon to become a revisionist, then a liberal and eventually a supporter of the whites in the civil war. ‘The manifesto of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party’, was published in 1898 and outlined immediate political objectives ... and set the aim of equipping the party with a programme.

It was from prison, then Siberian exile, that Lenin began to systematically work on an RSDLP programme. As he explained, the party had to be (re)established and, to do that in the first place, “it is necessary to work for solid ideological unity”. Marxists in Russia were bitterly divided, especially over economism: that is, giving prime importance to economic struggles and therefore playing down, or ignoring, the centrality of the battle for democracy. Lenin not only fought a war of extermination against economism: he sought to “consolidate” ideological unity in a “party programme”.<sup>3</sup>

Towards that end, in 1899, he produced ‘A draft of our party programme’. Here Lenin argues that, with rapid capitalist development in Russia and the rise of an independent working class movement, the

programme needed to be “closer” to the 1891 *Erfurt programme* of German social democracy.<sup>4</sup>

He wanted to change the structure of Plekhanov’s 1884 draft programme, he wanted to discard the polemics against the now defunct Narodniks, he wanted to imitate the Erfurt programme, he wanted to borrow from the *Erfurt programme* ... but he did not want to copy the *Erfurt programme*. Russia and Germany had their own specifics which had to be fully recognised. Eg, in the 1890s the SDP in Germany could operate more or less openly, had a whole range of local newspapers and the beginnings of a strong Reichstag fraction. In Russia legal opportunities barely existed.

There are those who foolishly dismiss the *Erfurt programme*. It is stupidly described as reformist, as opportunist, as containing the seeds of the August 1914 great betrayal. Peter Kennedy of TAS appears to hold this view. But he shows little real understanding of the SDP. In reality to dismiss the *Erfurt programme* is not only to dismiss outstanding worker leaders, such as August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht: it is to dismiss Karl Kautsky, the ‘pope of Marxism’ ... and Frederick Engels too. While he had a few remaining criticisms of the agreed text, he enthusiastically welcomed it as a vindication of the position taken by himself and Marx. The Lassallians had been totally routed. The compromises of the 1875 *Gotha programme* left behind. Indeed, as shown by the work of Ben Lewis, Engels exerted a considerable influence, when it came to the final text of the *Erfurt programme*.<sup>5</sup>

To dismiss the *Erfurt programme* is also, as we have seen, to dismiss Lenin ... and not only in 1899. With good reason Lars T Lih describes him as a Russian Erfurtian - a package which not only includes acknowledging the *Erfurt programme* and Karl Kautsky’s extended commentary, *The class struggle* (1892). Lenin also saw the SDP as the organisational model to aspire to in Russia.

In fact, for Lenin, the *Erfurt programme* and *The class struggle* constituted a five-part package:

- (1) The ‘merger formula’ - those who refuse to accept the merger of socialism and the workers’ movement (eg, the economists) are considered arch opponents;
- (2) social democracy has to bring consciousness to the working class struggle: consciousness of its world-historic mission and role in leading the fight against tsarism for political freedom;
- (3) the party has to be solidly based on the working class and make use of the division of labour and specialisation when it comes to its members;
- (4) the party has to aspire to bring about working class leadership of the entire people - crucially the peasant masses;
- (5) the party has to be internationalist: it must be a worthy part of the Second (Socialist) International.<sup>6</sup>

In 1900, publication of *Iskra* began. It essentially represented a fusion between the Plekhanov group, on the one hand, and the Lenin-Martov group, on the other. Hence the editorial board: Vladimir Lenin, Dmitri Ilyich Ulyanov, Georgi Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, Pavel Axelrod, Julius Martov and Aleksandr Potresov. The paper, though its circulation was in the few thousands, proved to be highly influential. Dozens of local social democratic groups declared their loyalty to *Iskra*. Its staff - crucially Lenin, his wife, his brother and his sister - acted as a sort of “provisional central committee” through regular correspondence and attempts at coordination.<sup>7</sup> This is where Lenin

won the loyalty and admiration of the ‘practical’ workers in Russia (ie, the *praktiki* or ‘revolutionaries by trade’). Lars T Lih says Lenin’s identification with, and leadership of, the practical workers “made him a hero” for them.<sup>8</sup>

In no small part, *Iskra*’s success was due to Lenin’s polemics ... and his organisational plan. Besides torching economism, and other forms of opportunism, the immediate aim of *Iskra* was to organise worker-militants around the production, financing, smuggling and circulation of the paper in a way which overcame the past amateurism that got so many easily arrested. There would too be the drafting of an RSDLP programme and, then, convening a congress that would unite all social democrats in the Russian empire into a single, centralised organisation. Note, though, it promoted cultural separatism and the federalist principle that included the General Jewish Labour Union (the Bund), which had some real roots in Russia, organising as it did a good few local committees. Nor were the economists to be excluded. Indeed the Bund and *Rabocheye Dyelo* were represented at the 2nd Congress.

Not that there was any thought about drafting either rules or programme in the spirit of compromise that would meet them halfway, catering for their special needs and political sensibilities. Everyone, quite rightly, was expected to abide by majority votes.

## 2nd Congress

In preparation for the 2nd Congress the *Iskra* editorial board agreed to draft a programme. Lenin suggested Plekhanov write the theoretical section. The other editors agreed the minimum, immediate demands.

However, neither Lenin nor Martov were happy with Plekhanov’s first attempt. Lenin submitted a whole series of amendments. Plekhanov - a haughty individual at the best of times - grumpily produced a second draft. Again Lenin was unhappy. The second draft defined capitalism in a “textbook” fashion. There was too much commentary. What was needed was a militant “declaration of war” against capitalism. The draft also failed to provide direction for the party’s “day-by-day propaganda and agitation” concerning *all* manifestations of Russian capitalism. Perhaps worse, the contradictory character of the small producers was not properly evaluated.<sup>9</sup> The peasantry was always key, when it came to strategy in Russia. Lenin drafted his own programme. However, the EB stuck with Plekhanov’s, albeit with some amendments. Lenin called the result “pasted together” and a “mongrel draft”.<sup>10</sup>

Doubtless, that is a danger with any programme that has been subjected to substantial amendments. As they say, ‘A camel is a horse designed by a committee’. A classic current example would be America’s F-35 fighter-bomber: overcomplex, over budget, and underperforming. Nonetheless, despite his misgivings, Lenin had to live with what became the *Iskra* draft programme (published in issue No21).

The history of the RSDLP’s 1903 2nd Congress is well known. Suffice to say, there was an overwhelming *Iskra*-ist majority. Of the 51 voting delegates, 33 were for *Iskra*, five the Bund and two *Rabocheye Dyelo*. Six delegates formed an indeterminate centre (there were delegates with a double vote). Despite some protests the *Iskra* programme was adopted (after a few minor amendments not to the liking of either Plekhanov or Lenin).

Of course, the *Iskra*-ites split over the party’s rules. Martov wanted to appease the Bund, the economists

and the centrists. Lenin found himself in a *minority*. Incidentally he, therefore, strongly argued for minority rights. However, neither the Bund nor *Rabocheye Dyelo* abided with the ban on binding mandates. When the congress voted in what was for them the wrong way, as had secretly been agreed, they walked. This gave Lenin a majority, which he used to elect a 100% *Iskra*-ite central committee and an EB made up of Lenin and Plekhanov (both majorityists during the course of the congress), plus Martov (a minority *Iskra*-ite who refused to accept being a minority on the EB). The Bolsheviks (majorityists) and Mensheviks (minorityists) were born and would formally remain factions of the same party right up to the October 1917 Revolution.

My point here, though, is to stress the attitude towards programme. Whatever the shortcomings of the *Iskra* programme, there was never any thought of drafting it, amending it, to make it acceptable to the Bund or the economists or the centrist marsh. As already mentioned, they were supposed to abide by the congress vote (something Martov presumably expected - a miscalculation).

It should be added that in the summer of 1905, in the midst of the revolutionary storm that culminated in the December Moscow uprising, Lenin wrote his *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution*. There were two production runs in Russia during 1905 - the second of 10,000 copies. Another edition was published in 1907 (with additional notes).

Effectively *Two tactics* was the 1903 programme supplemented by Bolshevism, in that it envisaged a bourgeois revolution led by the workers, leading the peasant mass, in an anti-tsarist revolution that would *not* put into power the liberal bourgeoisie - that being the aim, the expectation, of the Mensheviks. On the contrary, the Bolsheviks were more than willing to participate in a provisional revolutionary government that was committed to sweeping away all vestiges of feudalism and spreading the flame to Europe (perhaps through revolutionary war). A perspective agreed at the 3rd (London) Congress of the RSDLP in April 1905.

## Fighting fund

# Step on the gas

Readers will recall that we narrowly failed (by just £3!) to reach our new £1,750 fighting fund target in May, but, to be honest, the way things stand at the moment, we’re way behind the going rate for June.

After a pretty good first four days of the month, when we picked up a useful £481, things aren’t looking quite so positive a week later. True, we received quite a few handy donations - thanks go to comrades BO (£35), DV (£30), RD (£12) and IS, SM, PM and CC (£10 each), who all contributed either by standing order or one-off bank transfer.

Then there were US comrade ST (£20), MH (£10), AK (£8), PE and JVS (£7 each), who used PayPal, and finally that comrade whose name regular readers will be more than familiar with - comrade Hassan, who handed his usual fiver to one of our team.

But I’m afraid all that only adds up to £174, taking our running total for June to just £655 - less than a quarter of the target with over a third of the

In algebraic terms the Bolsheviks fought for the ‘revolutionary dictatorship (decisive rule) of the proletariat and peasantry (a popular majority)’ which depending on progress in Europe, would proceed uninterruptedly to the socialist tasks of the maximum programme. This is exactly the programme that they, the Bolsheviks, put into effect in 1917 with the government of workers’, soldiers’ and peasant soviets and the coalition between themselves and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries.

Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that the Bolsheviks agreed, in 1919, at Lenin’s urging, to maintain the minimum section of the programme. Nicolai Bukharin had been calling for the Bolsheviks to abandon the minimum programme in the summer of 1917! Lenin called this premature - to put it mildly. The provisional government had not been overthrown. Bukharin renewed his call post-October 1917 ... Lenin successfully argued that even now this would be premature. The Bolsheviks might be forced to retreat and once again operate under conditions of capitalist rule.

Incidentally, both the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions only became mass organisations with the 1905 revolution. Put another way, going back to 1884, programme came first. It was not the masses first, or even gaining support from a significant number of worker-militants ... and then the programme. It was always the programme, then the class. The party being built *from* the programme outwards. Of course, as already illustrated, that does not mean that the programme is inviolate, cannot be amended or supplemented. It can be and, when circumstances demand it, it most certainly should be.

## Our programme

With Russia in mind, it is unfortunate that the TAS comrades characterise our insistence that the CPGB’s *Draft programme* be central to unity discussions - specifically our stated intention of presenting it for consideration of a fusion conference - as a rejection of “collaboration”. By the bye, we could have used Germany and the *Gotha programme*, France and the *Programme of the Workers’ Party*, etc, etc. Russia was chosen for the reasons discussed above.

Robbie Rix

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



Of course, we have not issued ultimatums. On the contrary, we have consistently said our *Draft programme* is open to debate and amendment. But we must be allowed to present it for consideration. Yes, we have rejected out of hand the proposal that we put our *Draft programme* aside, begin again from scratch and write an entirely new programme, along with TAS and the pro-talks wing of *Prometheus*, over perhaps a month or two. Nothing serious could come from such a presumably three-way commission (as proposed by the pro-talks faction of *Prometheus*).

Neither TAS nor the pro-talks *Prometheus* faction has any sort of consistent political record (except eclecticism). Leave aside the pre-history of tailing the Socialist Workers Party in the Socialist Alliance and Respect and the semi-anarchist Anti-Capitalist Initiative. Neither of the two organisations have a history of treating the programme question as central.

Where are the critiques of the programmeless SWP, the reformism of the Communist Party of Britain's *British road to socialism*, the Labourism of *Militant*, what we stand for, the economism of the 1938 *Transitional programme* or the maximalism of the Socialist Party of Great Britain? Maybe I am mistaken. Maybe that work has been done. But, if it has, such work remains a secret 'locked with seven seals'. Not unreasonably, I reckon that such necessary preparatory programmatic work remains undone. Programme for the comrades constitutes an afterthought ... brought about solely by engagement with the CPGB.

## Central

By contrast, 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' Alternative Economic Strategy.<sup>11</sup> James Marshall then dissected the 1978 *BRS* in *The Leninist* No4.<sup>12</sup> From these foundations we went on to tackle the Eurocommunists' *Manifesto for new times* and Peter Taaffe's *Militant: what we stand for*.

The 4th conference of the Leninists of the CPGB, meeting in December 1989, agreed the following resolution:

Neither the 1978 edition of the *British road to socialism*, nor the CPB's updated version, nor the Euros' *Manifesto for new times* represent any sort of communist programme. All are thoroughly imbued with opportunism and revisionism. Hence none of them can serve as any sort of guide to revolutionary practice.

The essence of the struggle being conducted by the CPGB (*The Leninist*) is to equip our party with a Marxist-Leninist



**Back to the future: a TASmobile**

programme. The provision of the CPGB with a Marxist-Leninist programme depends on reforging the party and then convening a congress.

Taking this into consideration, our conference resolves that the Leninist wing of the party must:

- Prepare a draft programme.
- Establish a commission for that purpose.
- Present the draft programme for discussion in party organisations and in our working class.
- Present the draft programme in the form of a proposal to the congress of a reformed CPGB.

That preparatory work took book form in 1991 with *Which road?* There were two concluding appendices. Appendix one, 'The communist programme', dealt with the necessity of a programme and its architecture. Appendix two, 'Outline of a draft programme', sketched out first thoughts and provided the bare bones.

However, having meticulously prepared a draft programme, not least using cell meetings and weekly seminars to draw up and debate every section and every clause, we finalised 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. Needless to say,

though, 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".<sup>13</sup>

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. Ours included. Consultation, discussion, coordination - yes, but nothing more. So, as with the RSDLP 2nd Congress, no binding mandates.

With that in mind, we have to rely on persuasion, education and political understanding within our ranks too. We have no wish to sire a Menshevik wing that looks for the middle course of compromise and conciliation. An ever present danger. But we are prepared to risk it. If the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB finds itself in a minority, we have no intention of walking. As long as proceedings are fully, unambiguously democratic, we will accept, if we must, being a minority ... and fight, perhaps as a public faction, to become a majority.

Frankly though, we expect to have a clear majority. Though in objective terms our forces are minuscule, they are greater than TAS and the pro-talks *Prometheus* faction. And we would expect to win them over too, or at least the best of them, through reasoned argument.

Even if we fail in this, we are not about to abandon our *Draft*

programme and begin with what? A bowdlerised version of the SPGB's 'Who we are'?<sup>14</sup> A lowest-common-denominator compromise? That would not be 'collaboration', but surrender to the dominant left culture of economism, unprincipled unity and diplomatic manoeuvring. That we shall not do.

## Our differences

The TAS Wrack-Potts leadership obviously have differences with us over the middle classes. How big? How important? That aside, there is, though, a related, but crucial difference. Should the transition between capitalism and full communism involve an extended phase, which we, following Lenin, call socialism?

We say 'yes'. Perhaps it will take a generation or two before we can realise full communism and the 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs' principle. We need to change people, as well as relations of production. But we leave the question open-ended. For TAS, however, there has to be the immediate nationalisation, socialisation, of all small to medium-sized enterprises: corner newsagents, pubs, fish and chips shops, curry houses, alternative health set-ups, hairdressers, little businesses of every kind. A recipe, in our view, for handing over millions of people to the camp of counterrevolution.

So, whereas we talk of taking things forward, post-revolution, voluntarily, 'as fast as possible, but as slow as necessary', the TAS comrades insist on 'as fast as possible'. Without that workers in the SME sector will remain exploited, they say. True, but, with a 'fast as possible' approach, the danger is that we go down to bloody defeat. That despite their delusion that a socialism starting in one country would see the workers in other countries finding "inspiration" in this and seeking to "copy what has been achieved". No. on the contrary, an isolated socialism, not least in Britain, would face chaos and dire poverty.

Production is global. We not only rely on huge imports of food: when it comes to industry, (say the car industry), there is a reliance on imports too. An isolated socialism in Britain could, for example, produce cars. But

without German or Japanese engines and gear boxes these TASmobiles would have to be horse-drawn.

On this 'as fast as possible' basis the TAS comrades unwarrantedly charge us with wanting to limit the revolution to the immediate programme and what we call 'extreme democracy': ie, the form we envisage for the rule of the working class. Obvious nonsense, as any objective reading of our *Draft programme* will show. Here we emphatically state that communism, the realisation of human freedom and full individual and collective development is "what we want to achieve".<sup>15</sup>

Then there is the criticism of Mike Macnair and his recent articles on transition.<sup>16</sup> Because he raises the distinct possibility of a generalised nuclear exchange, he stands accused of failing to "inspire the international working class".<sup>17</sup> Presumably the same goes for the distinct danger of civilisational collapse between 2070 and 2090 due to climate change (raised by, of all people, insurance actuaries<sup>18</sup>).

But this is no different to Rosa Luxemburg writing about humanity facing a choice between 'socialism or barbarism' in her 1915 'Junius pamphlet'.<sup>19</sup> To complain about that failing to "inspire" workers is surely to give the game away. Presumably what is preferred is 'official optimism'. Not our approach in the CPGB. Our *Draft programme* starkly, honestly, warns about the danger of global war and capitalism's degradation of nature in two short opening sections (1.3 and 1.4). It is, yes, either socialism or barbarism.

Yet another reason to recommend our *Draft programme* for consideration at a fusion conference ●

## Notes

1. A phrase commonly attributed to Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek - see M Fisher *Capitalist realism: is there no alternative?* London 2009, p2.
2. G Plekhanov *Selected philosophical works* Vol 1, Moscow 1977, pp359-63.
3. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 4, Moscow 1977, p354.
4. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 4, Moscow 1977, p235.
5. See Ben Lewis (ed and trans) *Karl Kautsky on democracy and republicanism* Leiden 2020, pp307-28.
6. LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered: 'What is to be done?' in context* Chicago IL 2008, pp113-14.
7. R Mullins *The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, 1899-1904: documents of the 'economist' opposition and 'Iskra' and early Menshevism* Leiden 2015, p36.
8. LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered: 'What is to be done?' in context* Chicago IL 2008, p29.
9. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 6, Moscow 1977, pp56-58.
10. *Ibid* p70.
11. F Grafton 'The road from Thatcherism or the road from Marxism' *The Leninist* No1, Winter 1981-82.
12. J Marshall 'Some thoughts on the British road to socialism' *The Leninist* No4 April 1983.
13. CPGB *Draft programme* London 1995, p6.
14. www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/who-we-are.
15. CPGB *Draft programme* London 1995, p48.
16. *Weekly Worker* May 22, May 29 and June 5 2025.
17. Nick Wrack, Facebook, posted June 6 2025.
18. actuaries.org.uk/news-and-media-releases/news-articles/2025/jan/16-jan-25-planetary-solvency-finding-our-balance-with-nature.
19. She attributed the origin of the slogan to Friedrich Engels, who apparently once said: "Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads: either transition to socialism or regression into barbarism." "Until now," she wrote, "we have all probably read and repeated these words thoughtlessly, without suspecting their fearsome seriousness ... Today, we face the choice exactly as Friedrich Engels foresaw it a generation ago: either the triumph of imperialism and the collapse of all civilisation, as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration - a great cemetery. Or the victory of socialism - that means the conscious, active struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism and its method of war" (R Luxemburg *The Junius pamphlet* London nd, p16). However, according to Ian Angus, the phrase most probably comes from Karl Kautsky - for his original article, see climateandcapitalism.com/2014/10/22/origin-rosa-luxemburgs-slogan-socialism-barbarism. For his follow-up comments, see johndiddell.com/2014/11/21/following-up-on-luxemburg-and-socialism-or-barbarism.

## Communist University

Jointly organised by CPGB, TAS and *Prometheus*

Thursday July 31 until Thursday August 7 inclusive  
Central London venue, a short walk from Great Portland Street tube  
Details of speakers and sessions will be posted here:  
communistuniversity.uk

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Weekend, including one night's accommodation: £60 (£30)

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Single session: £5 (£3)

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## POLEMIC

# Socialisms have prevented communism

Peter Kennedy, a member of Talking About Socialism, responds to Mike Macnair. Obviously what he writes represents his own take on the contemporary situation and historic issues

I would like to thank Mike Macnair for taking the time and effort to read and offer commentary on my paper, 'Differentiating socialism and communism'.<sup>1</sup> I enjoyed reading his critical reflections<sup>2</sup> and here are my own in reply.

First, on terminology. He states: "... there is no consistency in Marx's and Engels' usage of the terms ['socialism' and 'communism']". This is not correct. Marx was consistent with his view that communism would replace capitalism. There is some argument to suggest that Engels was less consistent. However, he more often conflated socialism with the socialisation of the economy, as he did in his *Socialism: utopian and scientific*, when making his materialist case for a socialist science of capitalism.

Mike states: "... there are historical shifts in the use of the terminology, and these are important to understanding the present issue". He cites the conviction of communists in Cologne in 1852, after which "the Eisenachers used the term, 'social democratic', to emphasise their insistence on political democracy".

## Democratic limit

This may be one reason, but bear in mind that the 'social' in 'social democratic' does not limit itself to "political democracy": it embraces the social and economic moment of democracy. However, the essential point is that the seeds are laid for a tussle between socialism and communism that originates from class struggle. As we know, social democracy was a loose, hold-all category, presenting opportunities for a broad church of 'socialisms', some of which were potty-trained reformists, some genuine communists, fighting for communism, while many walked the middle line and subsequently fused within various parties 'representing' labour, but gradually as a means of compromising with capital.

Mike then states: "... the 'people's front' turn of Comintern led Trotsky to judge that the communist parties were



Cologne communist trial in 1852 saw six members of the Communist League sentenced to prison for up to six years

now to the right of the left elements among the socialist parties ..." This is true and confirms my point that socialism was not so much a mode of production, but a mode of class conflict within capitalism. Moreover, what is equally true is that the Comintern in this period represented 'socialism in one country', while those "left elements" of the socialist parties at least represented international socialist aspirations. Nevertheless, the currency is now 'socialism', not communism. The latter remained beyond the pale in this period - indeed soon after Marx died.

When Mike addresses the usages of 'socialism' and 'communism' in Marxist reflections on the "first [initial] phase" of communism, his overall point gets tangled in jumps between historical periods. Interesting stuff we mostly know, but the point made gets lost, I feel.

His point appears to be that Marx used the term 'socialism' as a synonym for the first phase of communism (I would have to say fleetingly, because he more consistently used the term, 'initial phase of communism'). Later Lenin argued that both terms meant the same - before the slide into the usage of 'socialism' as a first phase, which then became caught in the headwind of 'socialism in one

country' - socialism initiating in one country, but spreading internationally by necessity, if it is to succeed? Good point!

## Socialisation

Comrade Macnair and I have different grasps of the meaning of 'socialisation' of capital and labour other than by engulfing small household production, peasants and artisans. The latter are middling groups, still very much alive and kicking today, in a capitalism overripe with socialisation. In which case they cannot be solely or even most importantly what Marx meant by 'socialisation' - and the socialisation I was referring to in my short paper.

Marx writes at length in *Capital* Vol 3 how capital transitions into a social power across society (what Hilferding and Lenin would later call 'finance capital'). The combined effect of concentration of capital into fewer hands and the centralisation of capital in production, distribution and exchange develops a dominant capitalist class that has increasingly less to do with any specific product or industry and much more interest in (a) the running of the capitalist economy and state policy, and (b) monitoring the risks to its rule posed by its arch enemy, the working class.

The working class by the same forces also becomes highly collectivised - a political threat: the labour-power it alienates as value to capital is a social power that requires containing. A point is reached where considerations about maximising profits (surplus value extraction) are joined by considerations about maintaining control over the working class. All of which necessarily embroils the state in effecting class containment and class compromise. Brushing this away as 'statist' only confuses what is at stake.

In relation to the above Mike states: "The capitalist class struggles for control of the socialised forces of production, in order to hold the working class in subordination and thereby maintain a flow of surplus value" (by which I think he may mean maintain that flow of surplus value at a mass and rate necessary to maintaining profit rates?).

That is correct, but this in no way diminishes my point that the capitalist class will adapt to class-compromise forms of 'socialism' to win this struggle. Nor does this adaptation eliminate the risk it will fail to maintain a "flow of surplus value". In fact, one of the principal causes for initiating the termination of social democracy from the mid-1970s was the threat to flows of surplus value necessary to maintaining profit rates, posed by the partial suspension of commodity fetishism as a control over the working class, and the consequential politicisation of workers, demanding

more use value, rejecting the logic that use values ought first to take the commodity form.

If we agree:

■ that capitalism has been ripe for worker revolution and transformation to communism for more than a century;

■ that the period up to the mid-1930s was a period of capitalist stagnation;

■ that the period between the 1940 and 1970s revived capitalist growth and this period heavily involved Stalinism/social democracy;

■ and, finally, agree that the period post-80s to the present has been characterised by capitalist stagnation and financial parasitism ...

then we can agree that 'socialisms' have prevented communism; socialisms are inherent to the class struggle against the working class.

Mike claims I argue that 'municipal socialism' is "an ingenious capitalist device for preventing communism, rather than becoming able to play that role only after workers' organisations themselves promoted it as a means of what were then called 'palliatives'".

I never wrote this. My point was that 'municipal socialism' (the development of public goods, public infrastructure) was necessary for capitalism: as industries, cities and so populations grew, municipality was open to socialisation, which presented opportunities for class compromise and collaboration at local and national level.

Much like the above points, a whole paper would be required to present this case. But my paper was more about drawing together the broader trends and direction of travel, as I see it. Shelton Stromquist wrote an exceptionally good book on the struggle for control over the municipal space, *Claiming the city*: how local politics had an international impact, in which socialists and existing urban elites struggled to define this space as 'capitalist' and/or 'socialist'.

## Party

Mike takes issue with my reading of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) as a top-down bureaucratic party, bent on the evolutionary transformation of capitalism into state socialism. He claims this reading is contradicted by the SPD perspective that capitalism would collapse and that the party held a clear commitment to promoting self-organisation in co-ops, clubs and so on.

It is true that I should have phrased this in less sweeping terms. However, what remains true is that the SPD held contradictory views. The *Erfurt programme* less than 20 years later extended the range of immediate demands towards reforms that would benefit the working class if enacted. However, we should not forget that the broader context within which the SPD and other 'Labour Parties' in Europe operated, the Second International, was one of opportunism. Kautsky was more a puppet of the right than a pope of the Marxist left. Theoretically he won some battles (with Bernstein), but in practice he toed the line. The broader context within capitalist society was the development of monopoly capitalism embroiling the state, which set the scene domestically for class compromise to defeat the working class and internationally for imperialism to transform and extend pre-existing colonial dominance.

Both internal and external contexts established the seeds for elevating the minimum programme into the politics of evolutionary social change and class compromise, and subordinating the maximum programme (the

means become all, the end becomes meaningless). We all know this. Just as we all know what occurred later: war credits, ostracising the Bolshevik revolution, suppressing the revolutionary momentum in Europe.

Mike comments: "Comrade Kennedy says of Marx's *Critique* [re the *Gotha programme*]: 'The strident, venomous, trenchant and blunt tone of Marx's critique - usually reserved for the inhuman degradation of capitalism and the ruling class - arises here among fellow socialists because he sees in the programme the hallmarks of class treachery'."

According to Mike, this is part of the "normal sharpness of Marx's polemics among 'fellow socialists'". This is a matter of interpretation and judgement. What is true is that Marx wrote with anger, but also irony and humour, when exposing the limitations of bourgeois economic and political theory and practice, but he reserved his most trenchant criticism for those - both left and right of the class spectrum - whose actions threatened to dilute the power of the working class in their historic mission to overthrow the capitalist class and create a communist society. The tone of writing directed towards the Gotha Programme and what would become the SPD clearly reveals Marx was of the view that this brand of socialism represented this sort of threat.

## Transition

I wrote, "... short of the working class taking power, then socialism, as an unstable transitional relation with a missing pole of communism, will inevitably lead the working class back towards a declining capitalism." Mike asked: "But what does the working class *taking power* mean in this context?" The nearest statement I made towards this was:

Socialism becomes the transition from capitalism to communism under the democratic rule of the working class, through communes and through the state. Which is to say, working class power, exercised through its network of communes and the state, will provide the means through which most of the population will be engaged in some form of administration and management and with the building of democratic control over every sphere of life: 'the state and politics, work and economy'.

Mike is not happy with this. He claims that I leave out the previous overthrow of the capitalist state order.

This is not true. My point is that the transition from capitalism to communism under the democratic rule of the working class, through communes and through the state, overthrows the capitalist state order. It will provide the means for the population to engage in self-administration and management and the building of democratic control over every sphere of life: "the state and politics, work and economy. The latter will overthrow the capitalist economic order."

There is a whole lot more, which can be discussed in Communist University.<sup>3</sup> For now, I look forward to reading and responding to Mike's "attempt to address the question of transition positively in the light of the negative arguments in last week's and this article" ●

## Notes

1. talkingaboutsocialism.org/differentiating-socialism-and-communism.
2. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1540/questions-of-communism.
3. See communistuniversity.uk.

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday June 15 5pm

**Britain continues to facilitate Israel's death machine - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion**

Use this link to register:  
[communistparty.co.uk/ocf](http://communistparty.co.uk/ocf)

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](http://communistparty.co.uk) and  
Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at  
[Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)



## IRELAND

# Pro-Palestine symbolism

Rival demonstrations brought large numbers on to the streets of Cork. Some want to drape themselves in the Irish tricolour, others raise the red flag of internationalism.

Anne McShane reports

**S**olidarity demonstrations for Palestine have taken place every Saturday in Cork since Israel attacked Gaza in October 2023. The marches have become part of the city's political culture. With attendances of between 600 and 1,000, they are loud, disciplined and militant, bringing together activists and their families. They not only include Palestinians, but other migrants in the area.

For Derek Blighe, a prominent rightwinger, the Palestine solidarity movement is a problem. He mocks its participants as "loony lefties" and foreigners. When he announced a national mobilisation for an 'Ireland Says No' demonstration in Cork on Saturday June 7, assembling close to the Palestine protest, it was clearly a provocation. Another rabid racist, martial arts fighter Conor McGregor, sponsored the march and provided a bus to ferry demonstrators from Dublin to Cork. Boosted by the warm reception he received at the White House on Patrick's Day, McGregor has declared his intention to run in this year's presidential race on an anti-immigration platform. He has adopted a version of Trump's 'MAGA' slogan: 'Make Ireland Great Again' (or the rather unfortunate 'MIGA').

Cork Palestine Solidarity Campaign called on activists from the other five counties of Munster to join us on the day. And they came in large numbers, waving Palestine flags and banners, along with placards declaring opposition to the scapegoating of migrants. The march of more than 4,000 was a loud and very empowering experience, with Palestinians from Gaza among the speakers. They spoke about the experience of being a refugee - the trauma of watching from afar, as their people are subjected to relentless genocidal attacks, starvation and denial of healthcare. But they refused to give up fighting and had immersed themselves in the solidarity movement and thereby achieved a real sense of belonging.

## Saying no

The Ireland Says No protest assembled just as the Palestine demonstration was setting off. MIGA hat wearers chanted, "Send them home!" and "These streets, our streets!" One was waving an Israeli flag and another had a large placard of Putin and Trump, with McGregor sandwiched between them. A large section had travelled from Dublin, with a few overseas supporters and locals. The main symbol was the Irish flag. About 3,000 set off down the South Mall waving



Finding a sense of belonging

the Irish flags - it was, as reported by the far right's social media platform *Gript*, "a sea of tricolours".

At Cork City Hall, Blighe spoke about his determination to bring Irish emigrants back - to give them a "homeland to return to." He was a migrant himself - leaving for Canada after the collapse of the period of rapid economic growth in Ireland, known as 'Celtic Tiger', in 2008. When he returned in 2019, with his Canadian-born wife, he had become a supporter of Marine Le Pen, Viktor Orbán and Matteo Salvini, advocating far-right conspiracy theories, "such as the Great Replacement, alleging that Europe is overrun by immigrants from Africa and the Middle East".<sup>1</sup> Unlike his father, Denis Blighe, who had been a supporter of the Workers Party, as well as a trade unionist and fighter for refugee rights, Derek is deeply antagonistic to migrants, claiming that Ireland is "under a sustained assault" from "unvettable fake refugees". He claimed in 2022 that the Ukraine war was also fake, aimed at pushing Ukrainians to become fake refugees in Ireland. These 'fakeugees' are allegedly paedophiles and rapists.

Blighe is a thug and a fascist, as are many of his supporters. But he is mobilising working class people who are not fascists - those frustrated and stressed with the ongoing housing crisis and blaming migrants for their

misfortune. Many are angry with Palestine solidarity activists for "not looking after our own", for not "being patriotic". There is a sense among them of being forgotten, unable to get housing and access to healthcare. Blighe and Gript pump out ridiculous myths and misinformation about "undocumented male migrants" posing a threat to Irish women and children. The migrant bogeyman is like a monster waiting to pounce.

The ghettoisation of asylum-seekers as part of the government's 'direct provision' (DP) policy is a key problem. There are approximately 50 DP centres in converted hotels. Single men have the worst conditions, crammed into dingy accommodation with up to 15 others. Single women are not much better off, and families have to share one room. There are usually no cooking facilities. Asylum-seekers are not allowed to work for the first six months in Ireland and if their application is refused in that time then they will never be allowed to do so. DP centres are often opened in small towns, where there are not enough resources for this additional population, and the stress on services produces even greater enmity towards them. Once news gets out of a centre opening, Blighe and other rightwingers turn up to stir up locals into angry opposition. Arriving DP residents are subjected to vitriolic and racist attacks.

The Irish government, along with other EU states, is determined to create a 'hostile atmosphere'. Over the last two years it has introduced one scheme after another to stymie inward migration from the poorest countries. Some on the left argue that the government is giving in to the far right in accelerating deportations, but it is the opposite. It is the state which is setting the agenda, and has plans to implement the European pact on migration very soon. This will mean holding asylum-seekers in 'no-man's land' vetting centres, with deportation procedures put in place even before appeals are heard. If refused, they will be held like prisoners in 'reception centres' until they are deported.

## Tricolour

Some in the Palestine solidarity movement have argued that, by promoting the tricolour at our demonstrations, we can show that Irish people are pro-Palestine. At the moment it is mostly Palestinian flags, although some people bring their tricolour. It is true that the experience of British colonialism both historically and now, with the continuing occupation of the Six Counties, is something that connects us Irish deeply to the Palestinian struggle. There were strong bonds of solidarity between republican prisoners and their Palestinian comrades, especially during the hunger strikes. This connection is expressed in songs and poetry, linking the struggles.

In the Six Counties the tricolour continues to symbolise the struggle for self-determination. But in the Twenty-six Counties it became the flag of a deeply reactionary capitalist state, which has oppressed the working class since its inception, and persecuted the republican movement in the south. Now, despite claiming formal support for Palestine, the government is actually complicit in the genocide, having buckled under to pressure from Biden, Trump and the EU. US planes transporting weapons to Israel use Shannon airport as a stopover.

The government refuses to inspect them and instead the Gardaí arrest and prosecute peaceful protestors. In addition, the Irish Central Bank is the designated authority for the sale of Israeli bonds in the EU. In May the government voted down Sinn Féin proposals to end this practice. The Occupied Territory Bill was passed by the Dáil in 2018, but successive Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael governments have refused to implement it.

## Our flag

The tricolour has now most definitely become the flag of the far right. They claim to stand in the legacy of the 1916 rising and patriotic republicanism. Their nationalism is exclusionary and deeply conservative. But is the most effective way of combating it to drape our movement in the same colours? The reason we raise the Palestine flag is to call for its self-determination and freedom from colonial oppression. To me that makes us internationalists and not nationalists. The campaign fights for the rights of Palestinians as refugees, both to remain in Ireland and to return to Palestine. As was seen on Saturday's demonstration, a large section of our campaign support freedom of movement.

My flag is red, symbolising international workers' unity and the struggle to overthrow this brutal capitalist system, symbolised today by antagonism towards migrants everywhere. People who are displaced due to genocide, famine, poverty and war are being blocked and deported back to a living hell. 'Fortress Europe' is overseeing pushbacks of those in boats to Libya, with people being deported to Somalia, Congo and Syria. The ugly rejection of those desperate for a new life, to escape the conditions caused by imperialist exploitation and war, is a stain on our humanity.

Those of us who want to overthrow this system need to recognise that there is no national solution. An Irish revolution would not last candlelight, without at the very least being part of a European movement which can assert itself against the attacks which would surely come from the US and its allies. We need to inspire and win over the US working class to challenge their state. We have seen the tragedy of the Russian Revolution - how it could not last in isolation. It became a prison-house of peoples, repressing rather than liberating its citizens.

Nationalism means borders, it means exclusion. Internationalism means defending freedom of movement and bringing migrants into our trade unions, our socialist parties and our solidarity movement. And ultimately, if the international working class can get its act together, it means rising up together in world revolution ●

## Notes

1. [www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2023/03/11/profiling-an-unlikely-far-right-irish-activist-who-is-seeking-to-stir-anger-toward-immigrants](http://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2023/03/11/profiling-an-unlikely-far-right-irish-activist-who-is-seeking-to-stir-anger-toward-immigrants).

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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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## Summer Offensive

### Donate, donate, donate

**T**his year's Summer Offensive was launched at the CPGB aggregate on May 25 and will last until the end of Communist University.

For the uninitiated, the SO is a period of intense fundraising conducted by members and supporters of our organisation every year. During this campaign, comrades take initiatives to raise funds. They contact sympathisers and people even on the most distant periphery of the party for donations. As well as raising essential funds and supporting

the political work of the CPGB, the campaign aims to cover the increased costs of printing and posting the *Weekly Worker*.

We have set a target of £20,000, and pledges made at the aggregate already cover half of this amount. However, we still need to raise more.

If you support our ideas and want to help us reach an even wider audience, why not visit [communistparty.co.uk/donate](http://communistparty.co.uk/donate) and contribute to the Summer Offensive today? ●

Linda Carr



**Government is  
trying to sow  
divisions**

## Full pay restoration

Will resident doctors vote for another round of pay strikes? **Richard Galen** looks at the complex issues involved in the upcoming membership ballot



**Our lives in their hands**

**O**n May 27 the British Medical Association opened a ballot for industrial action for its 'resident doctors' (formerly known as junior doctors) in England. This came as a result of government inaction on the promises made in the aftermath of the 2023-24 strikes, even though health minister Wes Streeting had committed the Labour government to an agreed timetable on pay announcements from the review body on pay. This initially led to the BMA's Resident Doctors Committee voting to go back into dispute with the government in April.

Since then, the review body published its recommendations and the government's initial pay offer was announced - an uplift of 4%, plus another £750 consolidated. As the BMA stated, this fails to make up for years of pay erosion in the public sector, which was the trigger for the previous industrial action. The offer is below the Retail Price Index of inflation over the last year (4.5%), which the BMA uses to back up its pay demand - it encompasses housing and food costs a lot more accurately than other measures. These are major considerations for its members, who are often contending with 'rotational' training, meaning they have little control over where in the country they are employed.

The stated aim of the previous BMA campaign on pay was 'full

pay restoration' (FPR) - a return to the inflation-adjusted salary levels for doctors in 2008. Even with the current offer, the erosion to pay amounts to more than a fifth of their salary being lost (20.9%) over the last 17 years. Some progress was made last year, as negotiations with the new Labour government resulted in an effective pay rise of 13.2% over the 2023 salary, but only nebulous commitments were made to actually fulfilling FPR. The success of the previous campaign had the effect of emboldening the RDC and the BMA in general.

### Rebranding

Another change brought about at the same time was the rebranding of doctors not yet at the level of a consultant from 'junior' to 'resident' - the former was regarded as infantilising and was often used by the right-leaning media to try to discredit the campaign and the union's efforts. The change was welcomed by the membership as long overdue, especially given that many 'junior' doctors have been practising for upwards of a decade and are often performing complex procedures and surgeries.

Another area where the union has seen success is in the reforms to the 'exception reporting' system - the way resident doctors log whenever they are forced to work beyond their scheduled hours for patient safety

reasons. This system is supposed to both identify areas of unsafe staffing levels and ensure doctors are compensated for the extra work they are putting in. However, many NHS trusts have made the process time-consuming and onerous - often buried in inaccessible IT systems - and there was an ever-present fear of repercussions from seniors.

Through negotiation with the government, the agreed reforms ensure that systems are easily accessible, simple to use and backed up by robust enforcement - including fines for employers who fail to resolve the issues. The responsibility for dealing with exception reports has also been moved away from residents' clinical supervisors, which goes a long way to addressing fears around whistleblowing.

Resident doctors are not the only BMA members considering strike action, with both the BMA consultant committee and the Specialty and Associate Specialist Committee (formed of senior doctors outside the traditional career progression pathway) also in formal dispute with the government, though neither have yet announced a membership ballot. They too are aiming for FPR, with consultant salaries having decreased by over a quarter (26.4%) of their real-terms value since 2008.

However, the first major obstacle in the union's plan is getting the ballot to pass 'lawful requirements' -

the oppressive requirements brought in by the previous Tory government mean that what is required is a 50% turnout, the mandatory return of ballot papers by post, and a 'yes' vote from a minimum of 40% of eligible members.

An issue that may end up having a negative impact on the ballot is that of International Medical Graduates (IMGs) - doctors who gained their primary medical qualification outside the UK. A major concern for resident doctors is that of specialty training places - the most common and straightforward way to progress a doctor's career, as they specialise in a particular area of medicine (surgery, general practice, cardiology, etc).

### Post-Brexit

One of the results of Brexit was that the Resident Labour Market Test for skilled workers - essentially a government policy that meant that employers had to initially offer training places to UK and EU citizens before advertising the job worldwide - was scrapped, allowing doctors from anywhere in the world to apply on an equal footing for NHS jobs, which massively increased the number of applicants from abroad.

Although this can be seen as a positive, with a shortage of doctors being a major issue for the NHS, the corresponding increase in the number of job posts simply did not

happen, due to a general lack of funding in cash-strapped NHS trusts, leading to the inevitable conclusion of hundreds of applicants for each job vacancy. This has resulted in the previously unheard-of situation, where hundreds of UK-trained doctors are likely to find themselves without a job in August, when most are expected to move forward to the next stage of training.

This has led to calls from within the membership for UK-graduate or citizen prioritisation in the current job market, with many noting that almost every other country in the world operates a similar scheme, especially given the level of government subsidy for medical training. This has been driving a wedge between the IMGs and the union, with some IMGs calling for a boycott of the ballot until their concerns are acknowledged.

Interestingly, the department of health has recently expressed interest in supporting such a scheme, with cynical posts from doctors on social media speculating that this may be a deliberate move to try to sabotage the ballot - although it may also be jumping on the anti-migrant bandwagon in an attempt to pander to right-leaning voters. Either way, the BMA will have to tread very carefully in order to win enough support for the ballot to pass (voting ends on July 7) and the threat of strikes to be added to its arsenal ●