

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly **worker**



**Your Party leadership election results.  
Shedloads of members' money has been  
spent on a red-baiting election campaign**

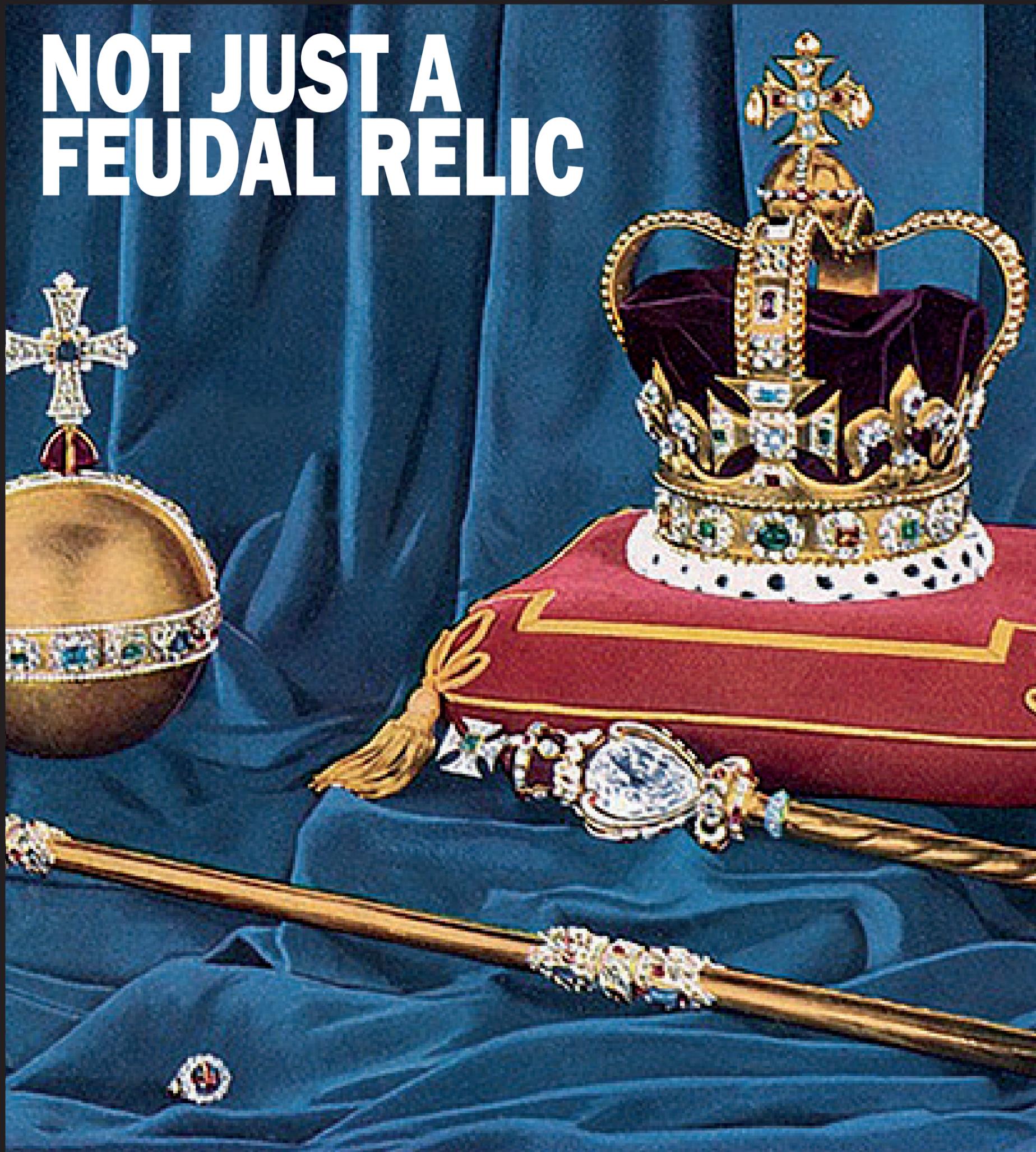
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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## NOT JUST A FEUDAL RELIC



## LETTERS



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

## Muslim voices

I subscribe to this paper, which I see has been inundated by articles and postbag items on YP. However, expression of attitudes towards Muslims are few and far between - except to condemn Corbyn's former allies at Westminster who withdrew from YP.

I refer to Noor Jahan Begum's and Ismail Uddin's online article for *Middle East Eye*, 'Your Party can be a political home for Muslims' (February 20). They remain upbeat about YP, but say that significant Muslim figures like Leanne Mohamad and Tower Hamlets mayor Lutfur Rahman have stayed aloof. Why? They write that for "Zarah Sultana's group" it has been "crystal-clear where they stand: 'There is no room for socially conservative views in a socialist, leftwing party, period' ... Her comments came as a deep affront to the many people in our communities who identify with that label."

Note the writers of the *Middle East Eye* article are standing for Corbyn's The Many group in the leadership elections. They have confidence in him, but not in the crass ideas pushed by Sultana. As for the *Weekly Worker*, attitudes displayed towards Muslims in this paper invariably display the superior position of sneering at the Socialist Workers Party's historic concessions toward Muslim views in Respect.

Can the left afford to be so choosy? Has YP really got to be purified for the reasons given? Will GL persist in this? **Geoff Nash**  
Durham

## Arm, arm, arm UK!

Jack Conrad has commented often on the cries of "Arm, arm, arm Ukraine!" coming from assorted 'left' groups, but I've noticed in the last two or three weeks a chorus for "Arm, arm, arm UK!"

This has come from mainstream politicians (especially the government), reporters, commentators and a few generals. The problem, apparently, is that we in Europe can no longer rely on the US to 'defend' us. We have to buck up, arm up (buying US weapons, of course) and be ready to defend ourselves against a pretty certain attack from Russia! Nattering with friends over the last year or two, I've often asked which is the greater risk to our lives - the defunding of the NHS or an attack from Russia? Not much in the way of reply.

We have in the February 20 edition of the *Weekly Worker* the front page, leading to the page 4 article, on climate change. I found it quite frightening - not because it's new, not because we can't read this story elsewhere, but because we know that the ruling class has no current plans to miss the tipping points outlined. They may be forced to act some time in the future - almost certainly too late - but for now we have, for instance, Rachel Reeves and her "growth, growth, growth", which we can read as "Fuck the climate!"

I thought, until a few years ago that, although climate change is a terrible prospect and its causes (capital) need to be fought, I was too old to be badly affected by the impending damage. I'm not so sure now. Around the world we have, and have had for some time, wildfires, droughts, the heat and/or cold, wrecking agriculture (so famine for many). In the UK the biggest problem and danger that we see already is flooding.

We have had the, by now almost annual, picture of Tewkesbury

cathedral on a little island in the midst, apparently, of a massive lake. There have been many articles, interviews of people who have had their homes and/or their small businesses wrecked by flooding. They ask why flood defences were not put in place and why they are not being introduced for next time.

The reasons why I think we know: they are the same reasons for the sluggish rate of compensating sub-post office folk, the slow rate of compensating the Windrush generation, the slow rate of compensating any victims of government crimes - there's 'no money'! However, there is money for 'our' (totally dependent) nuclear deterrent. There is money for new aircraft, for army recruitment ads - for anything to prepare us for the 'imminent attack' from Russia.

A mass communist party of the working class is incredibly urgent. Otherwise, which will be first - climate ruin or war ruin?

**Jim Nelson**  
email

## Lavalette's mess

Michael Lavalette is a several times elected Preston councillor and much respected figure who stood for the Your Party CEC elections as an independent. Whilst his reasoning for not supporting the Grassroots Left slate is not clear, he presents himself as a man of the left (probably a Marxist on a good day - he does, after all, support the Counterfire outfit).

Hedging his bets, his recent 'plague on both your houses' approach towards Your Party represents serious misjudgement. Suggesting an equivalence between Grassroots Left and The Many, councillor Lavalette is effectively letting the bureaucratic dead hand of Team Corbyn off the hook.

The privileging of non-socialists in the formation process; witch-hunts and non-inclusion of the left (from the outset); Ayoub Khan's call for the army to sort out the Birmingham bin strike - it's not been pretty. Team Corbyn's red-baiting and bureaucratic manipulation has bequeathed us panto-Kinnockism - a clear example of how not to build a socialist party.

As The Many plans to expel potentially thousands who voted for Grassroots Left through their promise to crush 'the sects', the 'factionalism' won't magically stop. Seeking a place at the post-election dinner table or reflecting popular front impulses - the motivation isn't clear. Political differences in practice between Lavalette's international socialism and Corbyn's Labourite liberalism don't seem to be that great.

Our struggle continues to help rally comrades to our politics. Grassroots Left has unified a diverse layer of comrades towards partyism, anti-imperialism and Marxism. The post-CEC election situation will require a sober analysis of what's possible from a partisan viewpoint. Lavalette's muddle isn't therefore particularly helpful.

**Paul Cooper**  
email

## Welcome protests

This week has marked a welcome development in the protests we are witnessing in Iran's Islamic Republic. Since February 22 the student movement has been involved in demonstrations and sit-ins that are explicitly "anti-shah".

The dominant slogans on campuses like Tehran, Amirkabir and Tabriz universities now focus on a vision for a democratic future:

■ "No to the shah, no to the leader [Khamenei]!" This central chant signals that students are not looking

to return to the Pahlavi monarchy, nor are they willing to tolerate the current clerical rule.

■ "No to the reactionary Mojahedin!" - a clear rejection of the MEK (Mujahedin-e-Khalq), showing that students do not see the established exiled opposition as a legitimate alternative.

■ "Freedom, equality, a republic!" This slogan has become the foundational demand of the 2026 movement, shifting the focus from specific social grievances (like the enforced wearing of the hijab) to a total structural transformation of the state into a secular, egalitarian republic.

This current phase marks a significant shift: the student body is no longer just the "conscience of the nation", reacting to state overreach: leading figures are actively drafting the blueprint for a post-theocratic, post-monarchical Iran.

**Yasmine Mather**  
email

## Political science

Ted Reese's illuminating letter in last week's *Weekly Worker* (February 19) succinctly explains class and economics in a few paragraphs.

Ted explains capitalism's trajectory to zero profits and that we need a type of Marxist neuroscience as an antidote to our illiteracy. He also explains how Your Party's economic policy is bound to fail. Ascribed to Lenin, he said how "politics is the most concentrated form of economics" and, as bourgeois politics rules our lives, it controls the state and its subsidiaries, the police and army, etc. So it doesn't help that the working class have become disenfranchised and that Marxist politics generally is defensive following the past disaster of Stalinism.

To cap things off, we have a looming ecological catastrophe, where some leaders around the world choose a 'see no evil, hear no evil' approach to things.

With Marx's work on political economy being substantial and on appearance seeming to be a daunting task, the lexicon of his language is far superior to the evasive double-speak of economics writers we read today. I have no problem with Marxist politics of a Lenin type (polemical) as the trigger to organise the working class as future leaders to solve our economic and ecological woes.

Wherever Your Party ends up, the lack of seriousness in regard to Marxism as a political science will be its undoing - and Marxists that put 'movements' instead of 'party' first will either end in prison or - who knows? - maybe dead.

**Frank Kavanagh**  
email

## Republican ticks

1. Republic YP urged all members to vote for Niall Christie (Scotland) and Rob Rooney (South West) in the CEC elections.

2. RYP stood five candidates in the first round of the CEC election - alongside the Democratic Bloc with 14 candidates, and the two main platforms, The Many (TM) and Grassroots Left (GL), with full slates. It is unclear if Democratic Bloc continues. Hence there were three active platforms (TM, GL and RYP) and non-platform slate(s) of independents.

3. One RYP candidate was barred from standing and the remaining four did not receive sufficient endorsements to proceed to the second round of the election. RYP resolved to continue our campaign without candidates.

4. RYP came to focus not simply on our programmatic demands but on issues thrown up during the campaign

(eg, dual membership). These can be summarised:

- For a democratic secular republic.
- End to the union of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
- For an English parliament.
- For autonomous parties for England, Scotland and Wales.
- For dual membership.
- Opposition to the exclusion of any YP CEC candidates.

5. RYP has made programme our first demand and essential requirement. Without it there is no united party, but a coalition of rival tendencies. At present Your Party is no more than a political space where the struggle for programme is taking place and remains unresolved.

6. The central programmatic question revolves around the struggle between social monarchism and democratic republicanism. The Labour Party and the 1945 Labour government established the social and constitutional monarchy on the foundations of the Orange revolution and constitutional settlement of 1688-1707 with the union and the sovereignty of the crown-in-parliament and the various oaths of allegiance.

7. Social monarchism is the reformist ideology of the Labour Party whose right wing is Orange liberalism and whose left is Orange socialism. No socialist directly defends hereditary monarchy. Left social monarchism, therefore, generally ignores the monarchy as irrelevant, whilst adopting an anti-monarchy stance when necessary. Left anti-monarchism is not a step to democratic republicanism, but the last line of defence against it.

8. The three Platforms and three programmes are as follows:

■ The Many (TM) - social monarchism: TM is a platform and programme of social monarchism. It has its roots in Labourism or constitutionally conservative 'socialism'. The programme of social monarchism is to restore the post-war social contract with its welfare state, mixed economy and trade union involvement in the economy. TM puts the old Labour case on new populist foundations.

■ Grassroots Left (GL) - left social monarchism: The GL is the main alternative to TM. It is a coalition of various groups on the basis of a minimum left social-monarchist

programme - a united front from the Democratic Socialists YP (DSYP) through to various Marxist groups - Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Alternative, CPGB, Workers Power, RS21, Anti-Capitalist Resistance, Social Justice Party, etc. The Marxist groups are anti-monarchist with a long history of opposing a republican programme. Hence GL is opposed to the monarchy and House of Lords, but supports the union.

■ Republic Your Party: RYP is an independent, anti-unionist, republican YP platform, developing from Tony Benn's Commonwealth Bill. We are opposed to all forms of social monarchism, including left social monarchism, which conceals its avoidance of the republican programme through anti-monarchist rhetoric. We oppose both TM and GL platforms. The constitutional conservatism of The Many should be obvious. It is, therefore, important to expose, criticise and oppose the halfway-house politics of GL - stuck in a quagmire between the loyalist unionism of TM and the anti-unionist, democratic republican demands of Republic YP.

9. With the barring of Chris Williamson, Dave Nellist, April Ashley *et al*, RYP sent an Open Letter to Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana in defence of democratic rights. We set up a petition to demand the co-leaders reply to our concerns as rank-and-file members. We have had no reply. We cannot trust them.

Should RYP have an alliance to support GL on the grounds of their more leftwing anti-monarchism? No, on both programme and tactical grounds. If there is no dialogue, then there can be no electoral alliance. We have always been prepared to talk to either TM or GL and explore cooperation (as shown by the open letter). As an independent platform we do not compromise except through dialogue and due consideration.

10. Republic YP - who to vote for: RYP endorses two CEC candidates in stage two of the CEC elections. It calls on all members to vote for Niall Christie (Scotland) and Rob Rooney (South West) - Rob has been unjustly expelled, but if you can still vote for him you should.

**Republic YP**  
email

## Fighting fund

## Three days left

Can we do it? A week ago, I have to admit I was rather pessimistic about us getting anywhere near the *Weekly Worker* monthly £2,750 fighting fund target for February, but, thanks in particular to four brilliant three-figure donations, I know now that we'll at least be able to get somewhere near that.

Comrades SK, PM, LM and JC were those generous donors, while GR, RN and JP each chipped in with £20 and TT contributed a tenner. All the above paid by either bank transfer or standing order, while comrade Hassan came up with his usual £5 note. Unusually, there were no contributors via PayPal this week, but those few brilliant donations listed above totalled an excellent £926.

That means our running total now stands at £2,220, but, of course, there are, as I write, just three days left for us to raise the £530 we still need so urgently. Can you help, please? If so, in

order to make sure we receive your contribution by Saturday February 28, please chip in using either PayPal or bank transfer - in other words, do your bit *as soon as you read this*.

I can't stress enough how much the *Weekly Worker* relies on the financial support of its readers - especially now that our printing and postal costs have shot up so rapidly. But we're determined that this paper will continue to play its essential role in campaigning non-stop for the principled Marxist party that is lacking, so please play your part.

Go to the web address below for more information on how you can do that ●

**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)

## MONARCHY

# Not just a feudal relic

It is not enough to exploit occasional royal scandals, let alone adopt monarchical socialism, argues **Paul Demarty**. The left needs to consistently advocate a democratic republic as a matter of basic programmatic principle

Since he was humiliated and stripped of his titles, the disgraced prince, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, has been doing his best to keep a low profile. He has been hiding out on the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk, where King Charles had banished him. We assume he was waiting for the latest phase of the Jeffrey Epstein scandal to leak out of the news cycle.

Small chance of that. The release of millions of documents by the American justice department all but assured an unending drip-feed of embarrassment for the men who called Epstein a friend and, sooner or later, something bad was bound to come up with Andrew's sweaty paw-prints all over it.

Thus the remarkable scenes last week: police banging on the door, to request some hours of his company at the local police station, in the chocolate-boxy market town of Aylsham. We have all seen the now-famous photograph of him sinking into the back car-seat, stony-faced. The red-eye effect of the flash, alas, rather calls to mind the various snaps of Andrew in the company of young women at Epstein's various soirées.

That is probably not the reason the cops are interested, however. He is being investigated for "misconduct in public office" - the public office in question being his former position as a trade envoy. This particular sinecure was the bright idea of the Tony Blair government - although one man who, apparently, was not so convinced of the wisdom of the plan was Charles, who, according to Mountbatten-Windsor's biographer, Andrew Lownie, discreetly advised the government that his younger brother would spend his time abroad "playing golf and chasing women".

So, indeed, it largely proved. On one memorable occasion in 2016, again according to Lownie, Andrew booked out an entire floor of a Bangkok hotel, where he received visits from no less than 40 prostitutes in the space of a few days. He was in town to pay his respects to the recently deceased Thai king - grief can do strange things to a man's appetite, we suppose. His expenses in the role were consistently lavish, while the 'benefit' to the British exchequer remains unclear.

He also, however, fancied himself as a mover and shaker in the global elite. His preferred company was new-money rather than old. His dealings with the Nazarbayev clan in Kazakhstan attracted notice, when a junior member paid Andrew £3 million over the asking price for one of his many houses. He was also chummy with various arms dealers.

His emails with these people, however, remain private - not so those with Epstein. These contain extremely rapid notifications from Andrew to Jeffrey about his schedule on the trade-envoy circuit. In one notable case, in 2011, he forwarded Epstein a secret government document concerning unspecified "investment opportunities" in Helmand, Afghanistan, then under the administration of the British. Some of the profit on these investments would, of course, come from those UK government funds. (Meanwhile, Andrew took great pleasure in squandering on bunga-bunga parties and so forth.)



Too much for the social-imperialist 'left'

Needless to say, trade envoys are not supposed to do that. They are bound by the same confidentiality rules - not to say the various official secrets acts - as ordinary civil servants. This is the 'misconduct' spoken of by the police, and we shall see if charges arise. Peter Mandelson, whose habit of leaking confidential information had already been discovered, has since also been arrested on suspicion of the same crime. (Both men, needless to say, strenuously deny all allegations against them.)

Now, of course, insofar as trade envoys really are *seriously* engaged in drumming up business for Britain, some of the more eye-catching items on Andrew's résumé are just par for the course. Britain has not been terrifically choosy about its trading partners since the end of the empire. Corruption is simply the lubricant that allows this to take place; every splashy announcement is preceded by countless discreet gentlemen's agreements, and no doubt a little something is creamed off the top by an army of middlemen. Notoriously, the *al-Yamamah* deal for arms sales to Saudi Arabia was very likely obtained by extensive bribes paid to the Saudi royals and their agents - Blair canned the investigation on national security grounds. There is no reason to suppose it is not representative.

On the whole, though, it is a good idea not to get caught. The key word is 'discreet', and history has not produced a less discreet man than Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor for centuries. Even by the standards of his family, Andrew is a bad egg: conceited, mean-spirited, venal, lecherous and, above all, unfathomably stupid. They say you should be nice to everyone on your way up, because you'll meet them all again on the way back down. Andrew's disgrace is a perfect illustration: Lownie gleefully hops from interview to interview with stories like his Bangkok funeral entertainments, because there are no end of former flunkies desperate to

dish it on their hated old boss. We suspect that the Thames Valley police phone lines are now jammed with such people desperate to make witness statements.

Andrew could never have taken that advice, however, because the concept of 'the way down' was foreign to him - of course it was: he was a prince! And they don't go down in the world. They move up the line of succession until they are removed from it conclusively by Old Father Time. While we remain sceptical, to say the least, that Andrew's disgrace is a mortal threat to the monarchy - of which more below - what has befallen him now is near unthinkable. He is the first royal to face arrest since Charles I, for whom the whole thing ended famously badly.

### Stuart dignity

Charles Stuart, to give him his due, did his best to maintain his royal dignity on the long road to the scaffold. He contemptuously rejected the right of the commoners to put him on trial. On the day of his execution, he put on an extra shirt, so as not to be seen shivering. Royalists, however bruised they were by defeat to the parliamentary army, could take heart from that and regroup, as indeed they did. Andrew's connection with Epstein has been harder on today's monarchists. They must face the reality that the institution protected him, again and again, and particularly the late queen, Elizabeth. They had already shielded him from countless sex scandals over the years: what did another one matter?

### Not the first

So, we read in opinion polls, the monarchy is viewed with increasing scepticism among the general population, though a plurality still favours retaining it. On the other side, Republic - the principal anti-monarchy campaign group - has taken a victory lap, since it had threatened a private prosecution that maybe prodded the

cops into action.

Yet this is hardly the first time the royal family has faced sex scandals, which are as old as the mass media itself. There surely must have been a few financial scandals in there too. And such scandals alone do not bring down load-bearing institutions of the constitutional order: that is the domain of politics.

We wish to emphasise 'load-bearing' here. The royal family has its archaisms, but it is a perfectly 'contemporary' institution. It is the focus of the loyalty of the armed forces, the civil service and the intelligence apparatuses. Its powers allow governments to act with impunity in what, in theory, ought to be parliamentary matters. It anchors the acceptable range of political opinion in parliament, whose principal actors are, after all, *his majesty's government* and *his majesty's loyal opposition*.

The republicanism of Republic - which seeks to replace the monarch with an elected president - confronts this load-bearing nature in one way: by trying to keep the overall edifice standing and shaving off the remaining archaisms, such as costumes, religious rituals and vast landholdings at taxpayers' expense. What would result is a monarchical presidency - more or less the default mode of 'republican' government in the advanced capitalist west (though there are exceptions).

For genuine socialists, this is plainly not adequate. We seek a radically democratic form of republic, which entails the *overthrow* of the constitution as it stands. That includes the army, the Lords, even the civil service - and, of course, the deeply undemocratic norms that govern parliament (but perhaps we will keep the name, as a nod to the heroes of the 1640s).

Yet in reality it is a constant struggle to get the left to take any of this seriously. Of course, during scandals like the present one, we get 'Abolish the monarchy' copy flying around. The same when it

comes to, say, the death of the late queen. Where else? Where was the republican propaganda, when military sources leaked to the bourgeois press that they would not "stand for" a government led by Jeremy Corbyn? Where is the ongoing appreciation of the monarchy's structural role in the creaking British ship of state?

### ACR monarchists

We are reduced to this republicanism of opportunity, as you might call it, because - except in moments of deep scandal like this one, and the one that followed the death of Diana Spencer in 1997 - the monarchy remains generally popular. Those favouring its abolition make up 20%-25% of the population only. For leftwing organisations focused above all on getting the ball rolling somehow, this makes open republicanism an embarrassment. We can be grateful, perhaps, to the rapidly-degenerating cadre of Anti-Capitalist Resistance, for spelling it out. In the words of Dave Kellaway:

Socialists have correctly not attempted to push a republican position onto broad movements like the Corbyn project, for instance - the 2017 manifesto do [sic] not call for a republic. Given the existing majority for the monarchy, insisting on the broad movement to adopt such a position would not progress the struggle. However, we can raise demands that constitutionally and economically weaken the Royal Family's hold. Constitutional change should remove the powers the monarch retains, while retaining some ceremonial vestiges. The civil list could be severely cut, too.<sup>1</sup>

ACR is, to be sure, an organisation unusually afraid of its own shadow. These are the 'socialists', after all, that demand that any broad front they join does not talk about socialism, in order not to alienate people. We could ask comrade Kellaway: why not then adopt a restrictionist immigration policy, since the pro-migrant politics of the left are currently deeply unpopular? The answer, I expect, would be that this would cross a red line; but then the red lines are just a bunch of shibboleths (to be discarded when one has made peace with doing so).

It would be better to defend migrant rights, because it is in the interests of the working class to organise native and migrant workers *together*, not on the basis of some moral hunch; and it would be better to fight for a republic, because the working class can only rule under such arrangements, regardless of the present popularity of the demand. We should not ignore the current state of political opinion, but only because it is necessary to *convince* people to *change* their opinions.

Declaring *in its public press* ACR's intention to mislead people about its politics is its own, special, Mountbatten-Windsor level of stupidity ●

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### Notes

1. anticapitalistresistance.org/andrew-one-bad-apple.

**YOUR PARTY**

# Those who do the counting

Shedloads of members' money was spent on a red-baiting election campaign. Grassroots Left remains committed to fight for the kind of socialist, democratic and anti-Zionist party that is urgently needed. **Carla Roberts** reports

**Y**our Party election results are now in. After a short introduction by Steph Driver (wheeled out perhaps because she is a member of Counterfire), Andrew Jordan gave us the results. Basically, The Many won, with 14 CEC members. Grassroots Left got a very credible seven (plus two of the independents are closely aligned to the left). Naturally we will fully analyse the results and what they mean politically next week. Meanwhile, it is worth saying that Grassroots Left is committed to continue to fight for the kind of socialist, democratic and anti-Zionist party that is actually needed - without witch-hunts, red-baiting and purges. There are suggestions of organising a GL conference, with delegates from branches, etc. Whether that will be enough to rescue the Your Party ship is, though, an open question.

These elections have hardly been free and fair. Between the closing of the vote on February 23 and the announcement of the results there was that '3-day fuckery period'. We were told that HQ needed that time to go through all the candidates' expenses to make sure everything is 'above board'. Given that the faction running The Many slate has also done the counting, it is understandable why candidates, especially the so-called independents, feel cheated.

The long vote-counting period is just one of 'the many' (forgive the pun) bureaucratic tricks that the Corbyn clique has used over the last few months. They have expelled members, disbarred candidates and, with the 'imperial' system, have chosen the most undemocratic version of STV - but one which suits them best. They have organised the hustings and chosen which questions were put to which candidates.

## Spend, spend, spend

HQ also spent at least £25,000 on sending A5 postcards to members who did not vote within the first few days. This indicates that they were getting worried about the results and hoped to activate the more passive members - those who might have joined simply because they like Corbyn. This seemed to have worked: previously, during launch conference and in the Christmas referendum, just over 10,000 members voted, and this crept up to just over 11,000 endorsements for the CEC candidates; but the final number of those voting in the CEC elections went up to 24,000.

Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project, which resides in the same building as YP and for which Karie Murphy officially works, has acted as chief cheerleader for The Many. It sent out dozens of increasingly desperate emails and text messages: "Jeremy Corbyn needs your help", "A request from Jeremy", "Just three days left to back Jeremy", and an almost threatening one: "Do it for Jeremy!"

A final PJP email sent on February 22 borders on the unhinged:

Throughout years of abuse and attacks by the establishment, Jeremy never abandoned his unique approach to politics: always welcoming, always seeking to build the broadest possible support without wavering on his socialist convictions. He is, above all, relentlessly focussed on the issues. Your Party began with the same approach. But now it's in real danger of becoming something very different - an angry fringe



**Jeremy Corbyn: red-baiting**

party that conducts purity tests at the door and rails against potential allies. And, once again, Jeremy finds himself the target of abuse. There's only one way to support Jeremy's positive approach to Your Party - by voting for him and, vitally, for The Many, his team of candidates standing for the collective leadership.

Where to begin with this nonsense? For a start, Corbyn has already said he wants to do away with "collective leadership" and become the "parliamentary leader" - a position that does not exist in the YP constitution. As an aside, we have to admit that it was Zarah Sultana who came up with that particular idea in the first place and it was sneaked into the GL programme (which, as we previously reported, was merely waved through by the constituent groups for time reasons). We really do not see the need for such a position, which clearly goes against the spirit of real collective leadership.

Corbyn certainly used to have a reputation for being "always welcoming", "positive" and interested in building the "broadest possible" alliances, often to the detriment of political clarity. But you would have to have lived in a deep cave to have missed the fact that he has become something entirely different. As leader of the Labour Party, he could just about get away with claiming that his hands were tied, while his general secretary,

Jennie Formby, proudly expelled one after another of his supporters, in a futile attempt to appease the right and the pro-Zionist lobby. Of course, they only grew stronger.

But Corbyn has now taken on the role of witch-hunter general. It is in fact he who "conducts purity tests at the door": Are you now or have you ever been a member of the SWP, SPEW or any of the other left 'sects'? If so, you're out. He has justified and stands by the conference expulsions and the barring of candidates.

As an aside, we too call some of these organisations 'sects' - confessional sects, to be precise - because they insist that their members do not publicly express political differences they may have with their organisation's particular ideology. What the Corbyn clique, on the other hand, means by 'sects' is pretty much *all* organised left groups.

No wonder that many on the left are not just "angry" with those behind The Many slate. Add to that the fact that HQ has done absolutely nothing with the 800,000 supporters who have been begging Corbyn to launch a socialist party, and "fuming" would be the more precise word.

## Green Party

Corbyn has publicly declared that he wants to overturn even the limited rule permitting 'dual membership'. As we warned, HQ has been interpreting this as punitively as possible - ie, expel organised leftwingers before the first

CEC could even produce a white list of which groups will be allowed to participate. Should The Many have achieved a clear majority, there will be very few if any left groups on that list - but we could well imagine that it might include the Green Party.

Corbyn has made a number of public overtures in that direction. While the official YP statement was very mealy-mouthed on the by-election in Gorton and Denton, giving no clear support for anybody, Corbyn has gone on to gush: "There is only one way we will defeat Reform: together." And: "I'm supporting Hannah Spencer, because we need to defeat Reform and we need to defeat the Right. The Greens are by far the best placed to do this and have the best record in opposing the rise of racism in any form in society."<sup>1</sup> The Greens have the "best record"? There is also a video of him popping up during a speech by Green Party co-leader Mothin Ali at a recent anti-racism rally in Manchester, to publicly give him a hug.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the Greens do *not* allow dual membership themselves and putting them on a YP white list would be little more than a symbolic offering to win back the tens of thousands who have become so disillusioned by the way the dithering Corbyn clique has run Your Party into the ground that they've joined the Greens instead. We argue *against* dual membership with the Green Party - it would create the

illusion that they are a socialist party of some kind. They aren't!

Yes, Polanski poses left and the Green Party (which is about to hit 200,000 members) is running rings around the shambles that is Your Party. Polanski has called for the legalisation of drugs and prostitution and supports motions to the Green's March conference that would allow "all applicants [for asylum] to take up employment" and be "treated by the NHS" - outrageous only to avid readers of the *Daily Mail*. But a lot less radical when you look at the detail: the Greens "want a world without borders", but "until that happens, the Green Party will implement a fair and humane immigration system of managed immigration where people can move if they wish to do so".<sup>3</sup>

An obvious contradiction - you cannot allow people to "move if they wish to do so" and at the same time call for "managed immigration". Unless you mean people are always free to *move away*. Until a few years ago, that is exactly the kind of programme the Green Party very openly fought for. It campaigned for a reduction of the population of Britain to no more than 30 million, a stance heavily influenced by the 1972 book *The limits to growth* and the work of 'overpopulation expert' Paul Ehrlich.

Only the naive would choose to ignore Polanski's colourful past as a Lib Dem who only joined the Greens in 2017, then fought publicly for the party to adopt the IHRA mis-

definition of anti-Semitism,<sup>4</sup> and criticised Corbyn and the Labour Party for being “rife with anti-Semitism”. The man is an arch-opportunist who has spotted the obvious ‘gap in the market’ on the left, thanks to the dithering Corbyn. But he is no socialist. He does not believe in the need for the working class to collectively organise to overthrow capitalism. He relies politically on the petty bourgeoisie and believes that capitalism can be reformed into a kinder, greener, caring version. In that, he is rather close to Corbyn and we would be surprised if Corbyn had not considered leaving politics through the green back door. Having been kicked out the Labour Party, he became a man without a political compass.

Some irony then that the anti-Semitism smear campaign has now been turning its focus on the Green Party - they currently look like a much bigger threat to the status quo than YP: “Israel condemns ‘hateful and racist’ Greens”, fumes the *Daily Telegraph*<sup>5</sup> about a motion going forward to the March conference, penned by British-Palestinian artist Lubna Speitan.<sup>6</sup> This is topped off by the headlines that “UK Green leader backs ‘Zionism is racism’ motion despite outcry”<sup>7</sup> and the claim that “an internal whistleblower” has reported his party to “counter-terror police” over “anti-Zionist elements”.

### One or two?

All very 2017-18. The motion is bog-standard left stuff, including its call for “a single, democratic Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital”. As Moshé Machover has explained, this demand is not so much wrong as “illusory” and therefore not very useful: “The problem with it is that the present set of conditions that prevail in the Middle East do not allow it to be implemented”.<sup>8</sup>

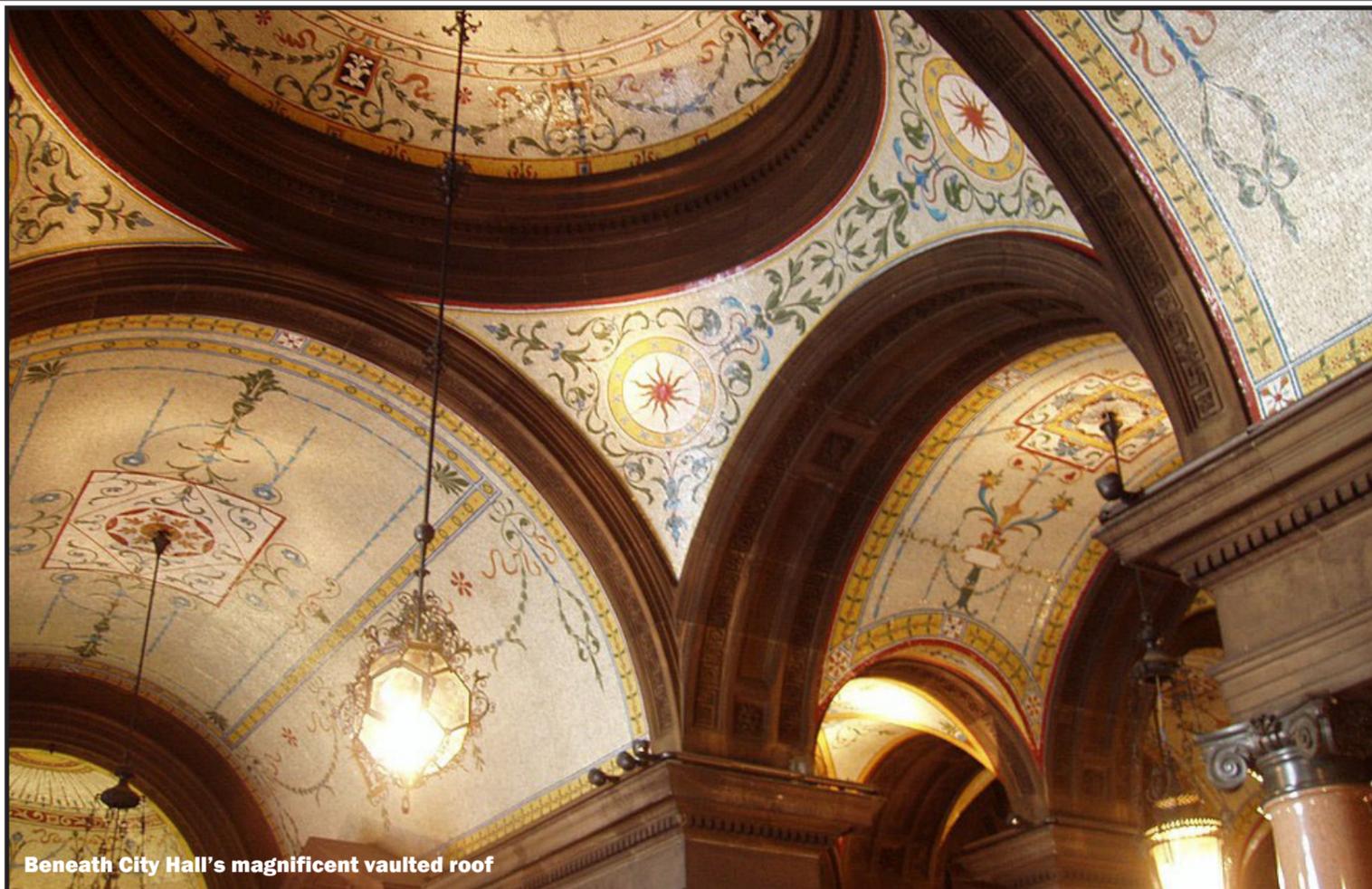
Contrary to the headlines, Polanski has not come out in support of the motion. Here he is equivocating: “Exactly what do you mean by Zionism? Terms are abstract, and this is a very abstract term, and it depends what exactly you’re talking about. If you’re talking about the original historical definition, no, I don’t think it’s racist. If you’re talking about the genocide of the Palestinian people under the definition of Zionism, then yes, it’s clearly racist.”

Just like Corbyn, Polanski cannot publicly state that he is an anti-Zionist. Perhaps both of them still think they can appease the pro-Israel lobby, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Zionism is Israel’s foundational ideology - a racist ideology with origins in a misguided reaction to the blood-and-soil nationalism of late 19th century European reaction. As a state Israel began with the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of indigenous Palestinians. The nakba. Zionism predictably oversaw an apartheid state with a political economy that seeks to exclude the Palestinian population. That means ethnic cleansing and ultimately genocide.

Clearly what is needed is a socialist party that can proudly call itself anti-Zionist, with no ifs and buts ●

### Notes

1. x.com/jeremycorbyn/status/2026721580848451734.
2. www.facebook.com/reel/1597719864604767.
3. www.dailymail.co.uk/galleries/article-15590575/Greens-plan-hand-illegal-migrants-free-house-wage.html.
4. www.jewishnews.co.uk/green-party-elects-jewish-non-zionist-zack-polanski-as-new-leader.
5. *The Daily Telegraph* February 23.
6. Full text here: x.com/kennardmatt/status/2015725442653639107.
7. www.politico.eu/article/uk-green-zack-polanski-zionism-is-racism-motion.
8. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1489/one-state-two-state-illusions.



Beneath City Hall’s magnificent vaulted roof

# Sticking plaster budgets

We want a democracy for the people that works through the people. Tam Dean Burn reports on the ‘people’s budget’ initiative proposed by Your Party councillors in Glasgow

In the most important Glasgow City Council meeting of the year on February 24, the YP councillor for Govan, comrade Dan Hutchison, moved a motion on council spending for the next year. This was presented as a “people’s budget” and was no small achievement, as any proposed budget must pass strict legal scrutiny in order to be deemed fit for purpose. Such a task proved beyond Reform councillors, for example, who were therefore notable by their absence. So a party that hardly exists yet in anything but (daft) name has, in the hallowed grandeur of Glasgow’s City Chambers, proposed how to run Scotland’s largest city.

Comrade Hutchison and two other former Green councillors, Seonad Hoy and Leòdhas Massie, defected to YP back in the heady days leading up to Zarah Sultana’s sold-out rally in my neighbourhood of Maryhill in late October 2025. Since then the councillors have been meeting regularly with Glasgow YP activists and trade unionists to formulate the budget presented this morning.

Understandably, given the timescale, it could not be a genuine “people’s budget”, but afterwards comrade Hutchison stated that they were looking forward to beginning work on next year’s budget right away. This needs to be an exercise in local democracy - reaching into communities across Glasgow for connections and ideas that reflect the city’s needs. I suggest this could be a far more fruitful engagement with communities than the rush job of superficiality that a May Holyrood election campaign will likely be (if it happens at all). An acceptance of this reality is becoming more apparent by the day in statements from leading figures in YP Scotland.

Of course, a focus on such a budget campaign could appear to be a futile exercise, as there is no chance of such a budget passing, with a solid Scottish National Party-Green majority proposal also on the table. But it does make excellent

propaganda. We can demonstrate that a Your Party council budget can offer genuine and radical alternatives to the pro-capitalist party offerings: for example, instigating research into how a four-day working week with no loss of pay can be introduced for all local authority employees in Glasgow.

This follows on from the experience and advice of South Cambridgeshire council, which made such an arrangement permanent for staff after a trial period. Shamefully, Labour minister Steve Reed criticised the scheme, throwing baseless accusations against it. But it is now looking like Reed will be the next member of Starmer’s cabinet to exit after the debacle over the cancelling of the now forthcoming English council elections.

The Glasgow YP council budget claims to fulfil the mandate given at the recent Scottish conference for members in positions of such authority to insist on the principle of only tabling or supporting ‘no cuts’ budgets and other such measures. This is clearly an area that needs debating and fleshing out - just what does that mean and should it be a principle? For example (and I may be off the mark here), doesn’t the council tax increase of 5% proposed in the budget mean a cut in working class living standards? And shouldn’t our councillors be demanding an end to the council tax and indeed adopting the slogan, ‘No tax on the working class’?

This is where we could get into debate about whether we should be taking part at all in the anti-democratic charades that pass for local governance. The answer is, of course, yes. But not because we think that with clever accounting, eg, borrowing from next year’s budget, everything will be fine and dandy. It is widely recognised that councils, and not only in Scotland, are run by appointed officers rather than elected councillors, with senior executives on exorbitant salaries and facing

little scrutiny. It is hardly surprising that voter turnout is so low across council elections, reflecting apathy and little hope for change.

Moreover, if councils behave in a manner that is deemed to be irresponsible, the government can intervene directly, using section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999. External commissioners take over decision-making from elected councillors in specific areas (eg, finance) or in terms of overall governance.

So our councillors need to combine using elections to spread socialist ideas and build party organisation with what might be called ‘legislative propaganda’. This helps ready minds for mass mobilisations and demonstrations, not just locally but, crucially, nationally in Scotland and across the whole of the UK. Hence, rightly, the YP Glasgow budget demands a clampdown on landlords and states the need to bring housing stock back under control of the local authority. Not because YP can deliver. But because YP wants the population to look beyond the ‘official’ SNP-Green document, which, even in its own words, relies on a “sticking plaster” of a year’s borrowing contingent to deal with the homelessness crisis ushered into Glasgow by Starmer’s Labour policy of clamping down on the accommodation needs of asylum-seekers.

Meanwhile, the Glasgow Labour group proposes a budget with draconian cuts, hiding behind a lower council tax rise, which it knows should not be put into effect. The SNP-Green budget is hiding its cuts for the present, but, as comrade Hutchison states about the relationship between both SNP governing bodies, “I think if a government, in their own election year, isn’t even going to provide enough money for councils to run, then what are they going to do after the election?”

Indeed it does not bode well for

future years and makes it all the more important that Your Party gets its act together in defence of working class communities and their services.

We should look at the bigger, even bleaker picture, as represented by the eminent climate scientist, Bill McGuire, who said in the *Weekly Worker*: “If we are to prevent the very worst that climate breakdown can bring, then an enlightened programme of action has to be enacted by a different form of government that works for the people through the people.”<sup>1</sup>

Later Bill stated: “Most likely then, we are going to need to plan, at a local scale, how we might best cope, as society and the economy crumble - at the level of town, village, street ... block of flats even. Today would be a good time to start. When tomorrow comes, it may well be too late.”<sup>2</sup>

We too favour a radical redistribution of power downwards to the local level. Britain is extraordinarily over-centralised. As our *Draft programme* states, when it comes to local democracy: “Service provision, planning, tax raising, law enforcement and funding allocation to be radically devolved downwards as far as possible and appropriate: to ward, borough, city and county levels” (section 3.1.1).

But, and this needs emphasising, we also recognise that power needs to be *democratised* at all levels in society - regional, national, continental and global. Necessarily that means democratising what is called the economy. Without society - the collective producers - taking over the economy, beginning with the commanding heights, we cannot have a form of government that really works “for the people, through the people” ●

### Notes

1. ‘Going beyond protest politics’, February 19: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1573/going-beyond-protest-politics.
2. billmcguire.substack.com/p/tomorrow-will-not-be-like-today.

## POLEMIC

# Beware of Sparts bearing gifts

We have a common view that open polemics, as sharp as may be necessary, are essential to any lasting, any worthwhile unity. However, there are those who object. **Mike Macnair** replies to Vincent David of the Spartacist League

Comrade Vincent David's letter ('Unpack the crap' February 19<sup>1</sup>) raises issues that are important enough to be worth discussing at more length than just an exchange of letters. This article, therefore, tries to take the argument to a little more depth. A reply to this article from the Spartacist League comrades would be welcome if it, also, developed the arguments in more depth.

The core of the political difference is the meaning of 'proletarianisation' and, conversely, comrade David's argument that: "One of the biggest problems of the socialist movement today is that it is totally divorced from the working class." This argument is a partial, but overstated, truth: the far left is not "totally divorced", but it is marginal in the working class; because it is *generally* politically marginal. The Spartacists' proposal for this problem is, however, a quack remedy.

Before getting down to this, there are a couple of other issues posed by comrade Vincent's letter that are, in fact, equally important. These are the relationship of the question of unity to open polemic; and the relevance of "digging up examples from 50 years ago".

Comrade David complains that in my February 12 letter, 'Spart Cannonism',<sup>2</sup> I have "written a quite demagogic letter", where "Macnair still feels the need to pillory [the Spartacists' defeated 'proletarianisation proposal'] as crap" and that:

The merger of the RCO and the Spartacist League of Australia is a massive win for the communist movement there and beyond. After years of talking about communist unity in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*, this merger is actually the first real achievement of this perspective. So we are puzzled as to why comrade Macnair wrote a letter (again) essentially bashing the Sparts by digging up examples from 50 years ago.

All of these comments contain two elements. The first is objections to the tone of my writing, as excessively sharp - and, conversely, failing to celebrate sufficiently the unity of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation and the SLA as a "massive win" and so on. The second is objections to my discussing now the Spartacists' practices of the 1970s to early 1980s.

### Official optimism

The claim that "The merger of the RCO and the Spartacist League of Australia is a massive win for the communist movement there and beyond" is a classic piece of self-deceiving 'official optimism'. The RCO and the SLA are both seriously small organisations. Their fusion is a *potentially* positive development; but whether it will give rise to a 'snowball effect' has yet to be seen.

I personally encountered similar talking-up of the historic significance of agreements among small groups from Nahuel Moreno, Pierre Lambert and Fausto Amador in the context of the split in the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International in autumn 1979. The agreements (which I did not join) proved to produce no more than a fairly short-lived international bloc (the 'Parity Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International'). In the 1990s I was involved in discussions with Cliff



Please forget our sordid past

Slaughter plus his co-thinkers and Michel Varga (Balázs Nagy); these showed Varga playing the same game of overstating the significance of our discussions in the hope of getting rapid agreement without careful thought.

The Spartacist League (Britain) was founded as a result of a 1978 split from the Oxford-based Workers Socialist League, led by Alan Thornett, which then fused with the London Spartacist Group to form the Spartacist League/Britain. The first issue of the new *Spartacist Britain* paper (April 1978) commented:

This fusion is one of the largest and most important in the 15-year history of the Spartacist tendency. The new organisation already has close on 50 members and a presence both in London and the Midlands. By its comprehensive Leninist programme and clear internationalist perspectives the SL/B is exercising a strong attraction on remaining dissident elements inside the WSL. The same will soon prove true as well toward the numerous small centrist organisations, which will find in the Spartacist League a solidly programmatically based unity - in striking contrast to the short-lived, politically promiscuous unnatural couplings which pass for fusions in the highly fragmented British Trotskyoid milieu.

Triumphalism of the same sort appeared in *Spartacist Britain* for June 1981, reporting the effects of the decision of the International Spartacist Tendency to pull its entry fractions and those they had won in the past months out of the USFI sections in Britain (International Marxist Group), France and Germany.<sup>3</sup> But it was fairly short-lived; many of those won from the WSL and IMG (as, also, others) rapidly came to identify the IST as a personal cult round James Robertson (1928-2019).<sup>4</sup>

It is not quite clear to me where this tendency to 'official optimism' among Trotskyist *caudillos* like Moreno, Lambert, Varga, Robertson - and James P Cannon; and Ted Grant and Alan Woods - came from. It is radically inconsistent with Trotsky's repeated

insistence that (for example) in 1932, "the proletarian revolution requires the truth, and only the truth", since "There is nothing so precarious as sympathies that are based on legends and fiction. There is no depending on people who require fabrications for their sympathies."<sup>5</sup> Or in 1937, against celebrating the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista - Workers Party of Marxist Unification), which had a stronger claim to be a "massive win for the communist movement" than any modern far-left regroupment (until you looked at the details):

Do not tell me that the workers of the POUM fight heroically, etc. I know it as well as others do. But it is precisely their battle and their sacrifice that forces us to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. Down with diplomacy, flirtation and equivocation. One must know how to tell the bitterest truth when the fate of a war and of a revolution depend on it.<sup>6</sup>

The 'official optimism' is already present in Cannon's 1946 *Theses on the American revolution*:

XIV ... Given an objectively revolutionary situation, a proletarian party - even a small one - equipped with a precisely worked out Marxist programme and firm cadres can expand its forces and come to the head of the revolutionary mass movement in a comparatively brief span of time. This too was proved conclusively - and positively - by the experiences of the Russian Revolution in 1917. There the Bolshevik Party, headed by Lenin and Trotsky, bounded forward from a tiny minority, just emerging from underground and isolation in February to the conquest of power in October - a period of nine months ...

XV ... The revolutionary vanguard party, destined to lead this tumultuous revolutionary movement in the US, does not have to be created. It already exists, and its name is the *Socialist Workers Party*. It is the sole legitimate heir and continuator of pioneer American communism and the

revolutionary movements of the American workers from which it sprang. Its nucleus has already taken shape in three decades of unremitting work and struggle against the stream. Its programme has been hammered out in ideological battles and successfully defended against every kind of revisionist assault upon it. The fundamental core of a professional leadership has been assembled and trained in the irreconcilable spirit of the combat party of the revolution ...<sup>7</sup>

At the time Cannon drafted and the SWP adopted these theses, the latter had about 1,500 members. The Communist Party USA had slightly over 55,500.<sup>8</sup>

At the outbreak of the revolution of 1917 the Bolsheviks had around 24,000 members under conditions of complete illegality, and where trade union militants were conscripted and sent to the front in the hope of preventing radicalisation in the factories. They had in 1912 won the workers' *curia* in the class-structured Duma elections; as if (for an analogy) a British communist party had won most of the urban working class constituencies.

Cannon was deceiving himself and his members about what was possible - a pattern followed by the rest of the Trotskyist *caudillos*.

The underlying problem, I think, is that Trotsky and the Trotskyists - along, in fact, with Comintern<sup>9</sup> - mistook the 1914-45 death agony of British world hegemony for the death agony of capitalism. For both, the mistake entailed forms of self-deception.

For 'official communism' the self-deception was the imagination that the USSR was marching ahead and outgrowing capitalism, and that nationalist leaderships which allied with the USSR to gain room for manoeuvre in relation to the USA were part of a growing 'socialist camp' and 'anti-imperialist camp' around it.

For Trotskyists, the self-deception was the expectation of imminent revolutionary crisis; this, in turn, entailed the need to self-deceive about the possibility of small groups

(themselves) 'leaping over' the mass parties and organisations to take the leadership of the working class masses. Here the falsification of the course of the Russian Revolution (as in Cannon's thesis XIV, quoted above) served as a 'proof'.

This, in turn, was linked to 'transitional programme' and 'transitional method' as a means by which it was and is imagined that it would be possible to leap from elementary economic struggles to the creation of soviets, without passing through the need for what Karl Marx called "political action": that is, working class struggles for public press, for electoral representation, for general laws and around constitutional and foreign policy issues.<sup>10</sup>

Back to the RCO and the SLA. These are two very small groups. Their unification can *potentially* become a pole of attraction for a wider regroupment. But it could, equally, be a disaster, like the 1970s-80s SL/B. Success or failure depends on a sober assessment of real possibilities - and potential pitfalls.

### Digging up

Two of these potential pitfalls are expressed in the notion that: "After years of talking about communist unity in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*, this merger is actually the first real achievement of this perspective. So we are puzzled as to why comrade Macnair wrote a letter (again) essentially bashing the Sparts by digging up examples from 50 years ago". The first is that comrade David seems to think that sharp polemic ("bashing the Sparts") is inconsistent with a perspective of communist unity. The second is the relevance of "examples from 50 years ago".

On the first issue, there is a curious contradiction in Spartacist comrades' responses to my criticisms. On the one hand, I have quoted the passage in which comrade David is "puzzled" by my sharp criticisms of the Spartacists in spite of their positive approach to communist unity. On the other hand, responding to my August 28 2025 letter<sup>11</sup> (to which comrade David also adverts), comrade Gabriel Perrault wrote on September 4: "We have no problem exchanging vigorous polemics"<sup>12</sup> (He, too, objected to my digging up the 1970s-80s.)

It is CPGB comrades' common view that *open polemics, as sharp as may be necessary*, are essential to any lasting unity. We have written about this repeatedly; the issue goes back to *The Leninist's* criticisms of the secretive culture of the old 'official' CPGB in the 1980s. Most recently, in our engagement in 2025 with *Talking about Socialism*<sup>13</sup> and the 'pro-talks wing' of the *Prometheus* online magazine,<sup>14</sup> the question of the CPGB's supposed "bad culture" of sharp polemics was a persistent issue, and I personally wrote about it more than once last year.<sup>15</sup>

I do not propose, therefore, to repeat the arguments in depth, but merely to summarise. In the first place, the culture of open and sharp polemics was that of the Second International left and of Bolshevism and Comintern down to the 1920s. It was the German SPD *right wing* who argued for speech controls and 'civility' - in 1891, in 1915 ... Secrecy of internal polemics seems to have emerged in the communist movement with the double police coup in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union against the left in late 1927 and against the right in early 1929. In the

Trotskyist movement it *seems* to have started with the split of 1940 over Soviet defencism.

The demand for civility and related formulae begins with Dimitrov's reformulation of the 'united front', together with the development of the 'people's front' at the 7th congress of Comintern in 1935 - and among the Trotskyists at the same period, but with the wing which opposed Trotsky and favoured more diplomatic approaches to the pro-people's front left (the Spanish POUM, the Molinier-Frank *La Commune* tendency in France, and so on).

Secondly, as the comrades from *The Leninist* already argued in the 1980s, the effect of speech controls and 'civility' and of secrecy of internal debates is to promote the dominance of the right wing of the movement and opportunism. The reason is simple enough: *capitalist rule* works under liberal constitutions through control of speech and publication, and through the support of the labour bureaucracy. Hence bureaucratic speech controls in the workers' movement will naturally promote capitalist ideologies.

Thirdly, speech controls and demands for 'civility' function in practice, and on a smaller scale, to promote splits. Insult is in the eye of the beholder: in my May 8 2025 article, 'They come with thorns', I gave several examples. In 1981 the pro-Spartacist minority were expelled from the IMG for insisting on calling it "centrist". Though I judge that the Spartacists were *looking for* a premature split, this sort of expulsion is typical bureaucratic centralism.

Finally, secrecy and diplomatic methods within the *party* deprive the broader workers' vanguard, and hence the mass of the working class, both of the educational effect of debates and of real choices in concrete politics. The effect of the dominance of the method in the last 50 years has been a remarkable dumbing-down of the organised left.

It is thus in our view important to the success of unity projects - including the Australians' - to break with the methodology which says that unity requires some sort of toning down of polemics. Open polemics, as sharp as necessary, promote political education, create the conditions for continuing in unity in spite of sharp political differences, are the most effective means of fighting opportunist pressures, and tend to restore the *actual* culture of Bolshevism (as opposed to bureaucratic-centralist fantasies of it).

## Stuckism

As to the issue of history, comrade Gabriel Perrault in his September 4 2025 letter wrote:

We have no problem exchanging vigorous polemics, but for the exercise to be productive it needs to hold some relation to what we write and do. We do not ask that you forget our past, which we certainly do not, but we do ask that your critique of our politics be based on more than impressions from decades ago and lurid tales about our late comrade, Jim Robertson.

The point reappears in comrade Vincent David's objection to my "digging up examples from 50 years ago".

I might have some sympathy with this, if CPGB comrades generally did not concern ourselves with the problems of the far left in the 1970s-80s, but only did so in this case to "bash the Sparts". However, this is the opposite of the truth.

In the first place, leading CPGB writers have been extensively concerned with auto-critique of the political traditions from which we come. Jack Conrad's 1991 books, *Which road?* and *From October to*

*August*, are both concerned with an autocritique of the left 'official communist' politics in which he was active in the 1970s (leave aside very numerous articles). Comrade Yasmine Mather has written extensively against the political approach of the Iranian People's Fedai guerrillas, in which she participated in the same period.<sup>16</sup> I myself have written repeatedly against the political approach of Mandelism, the tendency in which I participated at the same period - both in its 'strategy of dual power' version from the early 1970s and in its more recent project of building 'broad parties'.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, why we do this reflects the *chronic* problems of the left, which Spartacist comrades misdescribe (in a way common on the left) as a "crisis of the left".<sup>18</sup> These problems reflect (like all historical phenomena) the combination of objective circumstances and subjective choices. The objective circumstances mean the period of reaction of a special type, which started in 1989-91, which has largely marginalised the *idea* of socialism-communism and the organised left. The subjective choices are the left clinging to false political and organisational conceptions, which the older cadre of the left learned in the 1960s-70s and have transmitted as dogmas to their successors. This is true not only of the organised left, but of the numerous 'independent' single-member sects.

I do not propose to list out all the issues involved. The *result* is endless repetition on a more rightwing basis and at decreasing levels of effectiveness of 1960s-80s nostrums - whether it is broad-front parties or attempts to recreate 'rank-and-file' in the trade unions and workplaces. The left, in short, is *stuck* in ideas mainly formed in the later cold war period. To overcome this problem we need to *critique* the ideas of the 1960s-80s left, and not merely to point towards what we think would be useful activities now. In George Santayana's tag, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

It is in this context that in my August 28 2025 letter I asked whether the Spartacists might be reviving their 1970s-80s use of Cannon's policy of "raiding unity" to destroy "centrist obstacles", to be rapidly followed by a split (also followed, as I pointed out February 5 this year, by the Matgamna group between the 1970s and the early 2000s). Comrade Perrault's response dodges the issue by calling my point "impressions from decades ago". In fact it is about *substantive arguments* made in the 1970s-80s, and the question I posed is whether the Spartacist comrades have broken with these substantive arguments. After all, the Spartacist comrades have in their 'reforging' in the 2020s explicitly broken with *other* substantive arguments of their tendency in the 1970s-90s.<sup>19</sup>

It is in this context that in my February 12 letter I pointed out that what the Spartacist comrades were proposing for Communist Unity in Australia was a repeat of the "industrial colonisation" nostrum of the far left of the 1970s-80s.

I do not propose to repeat what I said in my February 12 letter. I will add to it at this point merely that the policy of industrial colonisation was adopted by the US Maoist 'New Communist Movement' and by the 1970s US co-thinkers of the British International Socialists (later SWP) in the early 1970s, as well as by the Spartacists and some other Trotskyists. The British IMG had two iterations - one somewhat more limited in 1971-72, the other in 1978-82 that I discussed in my letter. The *most* successful result of these projects was to make a new generation of somewhat leftwing trade union militants: those 'colonists' who

stuck it out, in their majority 'went native' as trade unionists.

Comrade David says: "I fear Macnair's view is tainted by a form of political post-traumatic stress disorder." No such thing, I worked for a couple of years at British Leyland Cowley, starting because I needed a job and leaving because fortnights of day and night shifts were creating problems with my digestion; and a bit later for nine months at Metal Box Hackney (which was much less politically 'live' than Cowley). I formed the *political judgment* that the IMG's 1978 'Turn to industry' would not work. That judgment is only confirmed by the event and by the reported experience of the American groups which pursued 'industrial colonisation'.

## Proletarianising?

Is there anything in comrade David's substantive arguments in his letter that would lead to a conclusion that an 'industrial turn' in today's conditions would *not* merely repeat this failed 1970s-80s nostrum and produce demoralisation? First, comrade David argues that: "Every single communist party that went from a sect to a national force did so by organising workers and leading decisive sections of the proletariat in struggle. Work in the working class is thus absolutely key to rebuilding communist parties."

No evidence is offered in support of this argument and it is very doubtful that any can be. Just for a few examples of mass communist parties: Rosa Luxemburg's and Leo Jogiches' Polish Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania before World War I, which attempted to give *party* direction to the mass struggle, was a plain bureaucratic-centralist sect. The creation of the Polish Communist Party as a national force was made possible by unity with the Polish Socialist Party - Left. The German Communist Party became mass by unity with the majority of the Independent Socialist Party. The Communist Party of France was the majority of the old Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière. The Bulgarian Communist Party originated as the 'Narrow' Socialist Party, which grew radically through its anti-war position in 1914-18. The Communist Party of Italy remained largely marginal until it was able to play a central role in the anti-fascist resistance in 1941-45. And so on.

If anything, what allowed communist parties to become mass was successful *political action* in Marx's sense (above). Significant communist parties could, indeed, lead masses in struggle (though in *limited areas* small Trotskyist groups could too, like the Communist League of America in the Minneapolis Teamsters' strikes or the Socialist Labour League in Morris's Oxford Cowley Assembly - without this leading to becoming a 'national force'.)

Second, comrade David argues that:

Often, we hear that we must first focus on the left, or students, and later on go to the workers. But this is a false dichotomy. One of the biggest problems of the socialist movement today is that it is totally divorced from the working class. Most socialist groups today (at least in the west) are made up of students, petty bourgeois and retirees, and focus the bulk of their work on campuses.

This is a very slippery statement. In the first place, it is just not true that "the socialist movement today is ... totally divorced from the working class". Even on the narrowest interpretation, the major left groups have significant involvement in major trade unions. Following from this, an initial focus on *the left* is by no means the same

thing as focussing on *campuses*.

Thirdly, comrade David concedes that:

... "proletarianising" is not a talisman against degeneration. We have never argued this. In fact, having more workers brings new problems and pressures on the party - which highlights the key role of having good leadership of the party. But having next to no workers is even worse. It means the isolation of the party from the class it seeks to represent, and encourages sectarianism and dilettantism.

Going back to my letter, I made the point that *Cannon* (and Trotsky on the basis of the interpretation of 1939-40 in the SWP provided by Cannon) argued that "proletarianising" would be a talisman against degeneration; and that this was false. The argument that "proletarianising" is an answer to "sectarianism" is equally transparently false: witness the sectarianism of the US 'New Communist Movement' groups, of Gerry Healy's Workers' Revolutionary Party, and of Ted Grant's Militant Tendency - the first committed to industrial colonisation, the second and third more genuinely working class in composition than rival tendencies.

Sectarianism is a subjective choice that has a social basis. This social basis is not the petty bourgeoisie, but *trade union sectionalism* as a form of the 'bourgeois politics of the working class' and opposition to political action, since it is the objective need for political action that exposes the uselessness of small groups, far more than any strike movement.

Comrade David argues that "It is much better for young revolutionaries to become plumbers, electricians, welders, nurses or even teachers and get a decent job, in which they can be on the front line of rebuilding the trade union movement." Better than what? Certainly better than staying on the dole - thus far I agree. But, as Dan Evans shows in *A nation of shopkeepers*,<sup>20</sup> today plumbers or electricians in the UK are as likely to be self-employed or move to and fro between employment and self-employment as to work consistently for wages. Even a significant group of nurses now work as locums. These people are unlikely to be the "front line of rebuilding the trade union movement".

Behind these arguments is a more fundamental issue. The proletariat is, for Marx, the *social class which, lacking property in the means of production, is forced to work for wages*. It is this condition that forces the working class into collective organisation: not just trade unions, but also cooperatives, tenants' organisations and collectivist political parties. For comrade David, on the other hand, "proletarianising" means involvement in trade union struggles - but not in the *real existent* trade union movement:

... when we say "serious work in the working class", we do not mean cozying up to the union bureaucracy, or voting paper motions in deserted branch meetings. This is too often what passes for 'trade union work' among the left. What we mean is to really rebuild the unions, which are today completely hollowed out, by pushing and organising struggles for what workers need. Crucially, this must be done in constant struggle against the union bureaucracy.

This is again 'back to the 1960s-70s' when the far left imagined that the union bureaucrats could be bypassed by organising struggles at the base outside the framework of the 'deserted' official structures. They rapidly found

that any degree of success in projects of this sort would attract the attention of the bureaucracy - as much in the form of left shifts as of suppression. The idea that small groups could leap over the mass unions (or the Labour Party, or even the larger 'official' communist party) to a direct relationship with the masses, was thus disproved by being tested to destruction.

It turns out, then, that the industrial colonisation or 'proletarianisation' policy contains within itself an implicit commitment to the mass-strike conception of workers' action, which is also - *sectarian* in a sense closely analogous to the 'red trade unions' policy of the Comintern's 'Third Period' in 1927-33 and having the same grounds: that is, that both in 1927-33 and in the 1960s-70s the trade unions were argued to be "completely hollowed out".

What is needed is not this dead-end policy, but pursuing relationships with the *actual workers' movement*: in immediate terms, the pursuit of the reconstruction of an actual communist party, as opposed to multiple grouplets; in strategic terms, for such a party to have a perspective for serious struggle in the trade unions and - in countries like the UK and Australia - policy towards the Labour/Labor parties ●

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## Notes

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7. www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1946/thesis.htm, thesis XIV and XV.
8. SWP membership from RJ Alexander *International Trotskyism* Durham NC 1991, p825, citing SWP sources. CPUSA membership from: depts.washington.edu/moves/CP\_map-members.shtml.
9. On the Soviet side, see RB Day *The crisis and the crash* London 1981 and *Cold war capitalism* Armonk NY 1995.
10. Eg. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/09/21.htm; and www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/09/politics-speech.htm. For Marx to Friedrich Bolte in New York (November 23 1871), see postscript, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71\_11\_23.htm.
11. 'Spart leopard' *Weekly Worker* Letters, August 25 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1550/letters.
12. 'Spart fusion' *Weekly Worker* Letters, September 1 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1551/letters.
13. talkingaboutsocialism.org has some of their side of the arguments. The site is not currently very active.
14. prometheusjournal.org. The site does not carry the debates. The very recent fusion of *Prometheus* with *Ebb* magazine (prometheusjournal.org/2026/02/21/ebb-and-prometheus) seems to show sharpening commitment to the 'intersectionalist' version of people's frontism.
15. 'Speech controls yet again' *Weekly Worker* February 20 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1526/speech-controls-yet-again); 'They come with thorns' May 8 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1537/they-come-with-thorns). Numerous older articles on the same theme are at weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/authors/mike-macnair. Comrade Jack Conrad's interventions go all the way back to 1981; but from 2025 see, for example, 'Programme 'n' chips' *Weekly Worker* May 8 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1537/programme-n-chips).
16. Eg. 'Legacy of failure' *Weekly Worker* February 23 2020 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1287/legacy-of-failure); 'From Glasgow to Baghche', November 21 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1516/from-glasgow-to-baghche).
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18. iclfi.org/spartacist/en/70/crisis-left.
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20. D Evans *A nation of shopkeepers* London 2023.

## CUBA

# Escape from paradise

Under a catastrophic US oil blockade, the country is suffering blackouts, shortages of basics and a draining exodus of young people. Yet there are still those on the left who imagine that small and medium-sized countries can be really independent and even build their very own socialist society, writes **Eddie Ford**

Cuba is now on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe - possibly the regime itself is facing a terminal crisis. Possibly, though, the US is banking on doing another Venezuela: there are reports of Raúl Guillermo Castro (grandson of former president, Raúl Castro) holding secret talks with Marco Rubio. The talks, described as being about the "future of Cuba", bypass official government channels.

Meanwhile the US blockade of Cuba's oil supply is not only crippling the island's economy: it is threatening "basic human safety", health minister José Ángel Miranda recently told *The Associated Press*.<sup>1</sup> For instance, five million people with chronic illnesses will see their medications or treatments affected, including 16,000 cancer patients requiring radiotherapy and another 12,400 undergoing chemotherapy. Ambulances are struggling to find fuel to respond to emergencies, deteriorating hospitals are persistently hit by outages, and the Cuban government is unable to refuel airplanes and therefore has to suspend vital supplies.

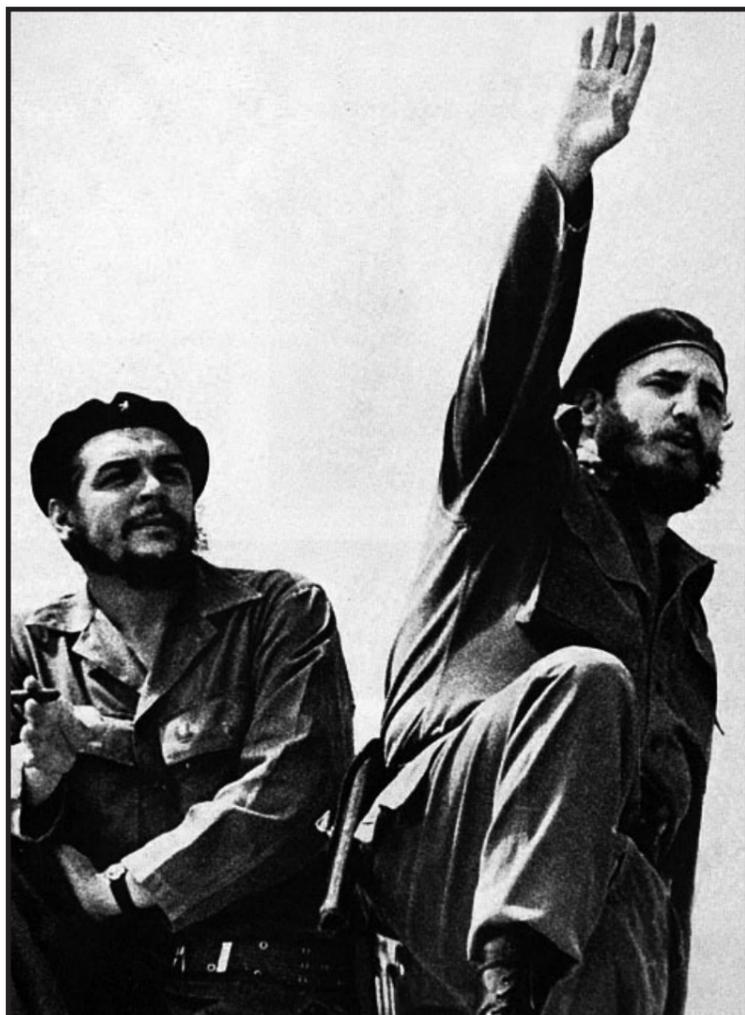
As we all know, the US has maintained an embargo on the island since 1960, preventing US businesses and citizens from conducting trade or commerce with Cuban interests.<sup>2</sup> That was significantly tightened two years later by the Kennedy administration in a Trumpian-style executive order that included all imports of products containing Cuban goods, even if the final products had been made or assembled outside Cuba. It prohibited aid to any country that provides assistance to Cuba - formally expanding the embargo a few months later to include all Cuban trade except for the non-subsidised sale of food and medicines.

## Socialist state

US imperialism expected Fidel Castro's revolutionary regime to collapse pretty damn quickly, faced as it was with extraordinary punitive measures, but collapse it did not. In April 1961 Fidel Castro declared Cuba a socialist state. Later that year, in December, he announced that he was a communist and would remain one till the end of his life. Indeed, Cuba went on to provide its population with especially good social services - including universal healthcare and education - giving it a life expectancy above that of the US. That stands as a condemnation of the privatised American health service, it goes without saying, where a sudden medical emergency can plunge you into economic ruin. But it also shows you what you can do, even in a poor Caribbean country, when the profit motive is not supreme and society is organised on a different basis.

Yet there is no mystery, of course, as to why Cuba survived the embargo, together with constant threats and intimidation from its imperialist neighbour. Yes, there was local effort, ingenuity, pride in the revolution and so on. But the straightforward explanation is called the USSR and cold war politics (followed later by Venezuela).

Perhaps stating the obvious, the Soviet Union was absolutely crucial for Cuba's economy, especially in buying its sugar. In return Cuba



**Che Guevara and Fidel Castro in 1962**

got oil, industrial goods, grain and arms. In 1972 it joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon). That provided Cuba with more trading partners, but the USSR was always paramount. Therefore the collapse of the Soviet Union, and with it Comecon, had an immediate and devastating effect on the island, as oil imports - for example - dropped from 13 million tons in 1989 to about three million in 1993 from the Russian Federation.

The isolation and grinding economic hardship that hit Cuba at this time, officially known as the 'Special Period', was most severe in the mid-1990s. Rations of food and other essentials were massively reduced. The government turned to tourism and market relations. Hotels and other tourist infrastructure accounted for 37.4% of investment in an attempt to save the system. Private homestays also played a big role.

But the situation improved somewhat with the emergence of Hugo Chávez's Venezuela and his Bolivarian revolution. Venezuela and Cuba formalised their alliance in October 2000, and started to integrate their respective economies through a Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement. This led to the development of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA), a regional trade organisation that was proposed by Chávez as an alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) being advocated by the US, which in the end actually never happened.<sup>3</sup> The ALBA was essentially aimed at the exchange of medical and educational services for oil.

Following the 2002 coup attempt against Chávez, he naturally drew closer to Cuba, as he could no

longer trust his own crew in the 'situation room' and instead brought in the Cuban G2 intelligence and significant numbers of military personnel. In return, Venezuela supplied about 96,000 barrels of oil per day from its state-owned oil company, PDVSA, at very favourable prices. Then in 2007 the two countries signed an agreement to develop a range of production projects, which involved nickel, electricity and rice, plus the construction of an underwater fibre optics cable to bypass a US embargo. Furthermore, from 2008 to 2011, Venezuela gave Cuba \$18 billion in loans, investments and grants, even if trade did begin to decline somewhat in later years.

But this all came to a dramatic end with Donald Trump's abduction of Nicolás Maduro and the resulting blockade of Venezuelan oil destined for Cuba. An executive order signed on January 29 2026, authorised the imposition of additional tariffs on imports into the United States from countries that directly or indirectly supply oil to Cuba. According to *The New York Times*, this is the "first effective blockade" since the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the results are predictable - the island is running out of fuel fast and we are seeing widespread suffering, with Trump calling on Cuba to "make a deal before it's too late".

So we have constant electricity outages and no tourist flights. Not because they are banning tourists, of course, but because there is no aviation fuel to fly them out. Meanwhile, Cuba has the highest exodus rate in the world except for Ukraine - from where vast numbers of women, children and old people fled to Europe to escape the Russian invasion.

According to official figures, the current population of 9,748,007, compared to the 2022 census of 11,089,511, means an incredible decline in such a short space of time. In December, the authorities confirmed that Cuba's population had declined again in 2025 and, according to current projections, by 2050 the country will have barely 7.7 million inhabitants. The result is a country that is no longer reproducing itself, that is rapidly losing its labour force, and whose population is ageing rapidly at a pace comparable only to nations that are in a state of war. More and more young people are leaving in search of a future - any future - abroad.<sup>4</sup>

Telling you a lot, unlike the Mariel boatlift in 1980, which saw the exodus of 125,000 Cubans to Miami,<sup>5</sup> there are no longer government-orchestrated insults at those fleeing, as being "lumpen", "worms" or "trash". If anything, the regime has encouraged them - for example, by facilitating entry into Nicaragua without a visa, ensuring that those who have the money can get out. That is simply because emigration is now a *pressure valve*, letting off some of the despair that exploded in mass protests in 2021, with repeated flare-ups every year since then. The blame for this lies squarely with US imperialism. Hence, we have no hesitation in raising that old slogan: 'Hands off Cuba!'

## Nationalism

Yet we still have people looking at Cuba as some sort of model. Yes, the health service was admirable and life expectancy is a great measure of a society. But you still have the idea on the left that the answer to capitalism is *national socialism* and making ourselves 'independent'. Well, Cuba was never independent - get real, comrades. It was dependent on the Soviet Union and then Venezuela. Now such support has been removed, and the country is being thrown into poverty.

Of course, seeing Cuba (or Venezuela) as a way forward was illusory, but we have an unthinking left still seeking to emulate the model. Interestingly, Che Guevara, one of the original leaders of the Cuban revolution alongside Fidel and Raul Castro, was an internationalist to his very core. He knew that the revolution had to spread if it was going to survive. Hence his "one, two, many Vietnams" slogan and his attempt to establish guerrilla foci first in the Congo and then Bolivia (where he met his death). Not that Guevara had a viable strategy. He didn't.

In reality the Cuban revolution was not just brought about by 82 seasick revolutionaries disembarking on the coast from that famous yacht, 'Granma'. The Batista regime was rotten to the core and what really swept it away was the general strike called by the historically rooted and widely supported Popular Socialist Party (an 'official' Communist Party). Castro's July 26th movement formed an alliance with the PSP and then merged with it, forming the Communist Party of Cuba in October 1965. Castro's system was modelled on the Soviet Union: ie, 'bureaucratic socialism with Cuban characteristics'.

The Cuban revolution of 1959 and its transition to what it called 'socialism' cannot be repeated ... and yet here we have the vote by Your Party Scotland by 63% to separate off from comrades in England and Wales and fight for an independent Scotland. This, apparently, is the "best route" to improve the lives of people in Scotland and achieve socialism.<sup>6</sup> We are further told that members have "fundamentally recognised" that a socialist programme and Scottish independence "go hand in hand".

Are you kidding, comrades? Imagine what Britain - or crucially the US - would do to a 'socialist' Scotland: they would reduce it to grinding poverty in next to no time. People would be exiting Scotland and going south in huge numbers.

What is the left thinking about? According to the Socialist Workers Party, a breakaway Scotland is about "weakening" the British state and therefore can only be good for the working class. That is like wishing for another pandemic. Then there is the even more bizarre Mandelita idea from Duncan Chapel that independence is "not a nationalist project: it is part of the democratic dissolution of the monarchical UK state".<sup>7</sup> An independent Scotland is as likely to lead to the "democratic dissolution of the monarchical UK state" as did the establishment of the Irish Free State in December 1922. The Scottish National Party is certainly committed to retaining the monarchy. As are comrade Chapel's England and Wales Mandelites. They do not want to "push" republicanism on broad left formations, and, therefore, one presumes, society at large (a very broad formation).<sup>8</sup> A strange case of monarchical socialism.

Nor should we forget how the Scottish Socialist Party imagined that Scotland could succeed where others have failed, because it has "long coastlines" and a "clean environment", is "fabulously wealthy" and has the "material foundations" for a "thriving" socialist democracy due to its "flourishing" culture with "legions" of internationally acclaimed musicians, writers, actors, film directors, etc.<sup>9</sup> Self-deluded left nationalism.

Communists, on the other hand, say unity is strength. We want working class unity against the British state. We want to unite with European comrades to coordinate across the continent. We want to be part of a Communist International. Capitalism is a global system and can only be overcome globally. Nationalism is antithetical to socialism, which is internationalist or it is nothing ●

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1. fortune.com/2026/02/21/us-blockade-cuba-oil-supply-economy-health-system-collapse.
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## VENEZUELA

# A strange endgame

Did Chávez and Maduro preside over a brave ‘socialist’ experiment? No, argues **Michael Roberts** - it was the absence of socialist policies, not least to end the sabotage of the economy, that brought the country to its knees

The kidnapping of Venezuela’s president, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife, Cilia Adela Flores, by US military forces; the subsequent takeover by the vice-president, Delcy Rodríguez; her agreement to allow the USA to control Venezuela’s oil export revenues and to bring in US energy multi-nationals to invest - all this signals the endgame of the ‘Chavista revolution’ that began over 25 years ago. So it is very opportune that a new book has been published on what happened in Venezuela to reach this point.

Called *Venezuela in crisis* and published by Haymarket, this book brings together “some of the most important Marxist, socialist and anti-capitalist thinkers in Venezuela, representing a range of left political traditions and organisations”. Some contributors served in Hugo Chávez’s cabinet and have now become critics of the Maduro government. Bringing such voices to an English-speaking audience “will allow readers to engage with the current debates and perspectives of the Venezuelan left”.

The book is edited by Anderson Bean of North Carolina State University, who has written before on Venezuela. He starts by pointing out that, through the 2000s, the Chavista-Bolivarian revolution was an inspiration for others in the so-called global south - perhaps even more so than the Cuban revolution of the 1960s. The election of Chávez in 1998, after decades of corrupt, pro-capitalist, pro-US governments, was a burst of fresh air. In the subsequent years, the Chávez presidency “improved Venezuelans’ material wellbeing, brought greater social equality and empowered sectors of society that were traditionally excluded from the political process”.

Bean argues that there were three key components of the Chávez presidency: first, the rewriting of the constitution to promote broad citizen participation and comprehensive human rights protections; second, the redistribution of oil profits through various social programmes, which reduced official poverty levels by 37.6% and “extreme poverty” by 57.8%. By 2008, Venezuela also had the highest minimum wage in Latin America, and inequality in the country dropped to one of the lowest in the Americas. By 2011, Venezuela was the second most equal country in the western hemisphere - only Canada had lower levels. And, third, which Bean reckons was the “most transformative”, was the transfer of power to the popular sectors through the creation of new forms of popular assemblies and experiments with workers’ controls and community councils.

But, from 2013 onwards, things began to go wrong, big time. From 2013 to 2021, Venezuela’s gross domestic product fell 75%, while inflation reached 130,000% in 2018, the highest in the world! The percentage of households classified as poor increased from 48.4% in 2014 to 81.5% in 2022. The collapse in real incomes and the sharp rise in poverty in the 2010s led to a migration crisis. Since 2016, millions of Venezuelans have fled the country, seeking work abroad in order to send money back home. Today, the number of Venezuelan refugees and



President Nicolás Maduro with a portrait of his mentor

migrants worldwide is estimated to be around 7.7 million, or 20% of all Venezuelans. Venezuela now has the highest number of displaced people in Latin America and the second highest in the world - just behind Syria.

### Collapse

What explains this collapse from inspiration to nightmare? Bean says there were two causes. The first was US sanctions imposed on Venezuela, coupled with several attempts by the US state, in collaboration with the domestic rightwing opposition, to undermine the Venezuelan economy in order to carry out regime change. US imperialism saw Venezuela as a threat, with Chávez’s renationalisation of the oil industry, his attempt to build trade relations with other Latin American countries outside the orbit of US-led trade agreements, while looking for support in trade and investment from the likes of China. The very early success of the Chavista presidency was anathema.

Indeed, in 2002, the US, in collaboration with the Venezuelan business class, attempted a coup to overthrow Chávez. He was removed from office for 47 hours, before being reinstated by mass mobilisations. From late 2002 to early 2003, the US supported an oil lockout to bring oil production to a halt, with the stated goal of forcing Chávez to resign. In 2014, the US backed the Venezuelan right again in violent street protests called the *guarimbas*, demanding *la salida* (the exit) of Maduro (Chávez died in 2013). The US, again in collaboration with the sections of the Venezuelan right wing, attempted yet another coup in January 2019, when Juan Guaidó unconstitutionally declared himself president of Venezuela. After the January coup failed to overthrow Maduro, Guaidó tried again in April 2019, but was thwarted once more.

These attempted coups failed, but a litany of economic sanctions were imposed. Under Trump, US institutions and citizens were prohibited from trading in Venezuelan debt. All government assets were frozen. Sanctions also closed off Venezuela from its most important oil market, the US, and properties held abroad were confiscated - such as the US-based Citgo, which the state depended on for sources of income. These measures led to a loss of \$6 billion in oil revenue in just 2018 alone. Sanctions froze \$17 billion of the country’s assets and cost it around \$11 billion in export losses in 2019, or

\$30 million a day.

The Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research published a 2019 report detailing the effects of US sanctions. Between 2017 and 2018 alone, they were responsible for the death of an estimated 40,000 Venezuelans and plunged many more into precarity. Over 300,000 people were put at risk because of the lack of medicine and healthcare.

But the writers in this book are at pains to argue that the collapse in Venezuela cannot be laid solely at the door of US imperialism and its sanctions. Despite the harm that the sanctions have wrought in Venezuela, the other major component was the economic mismanagement and neoliberal programme of the increasingly authoritarian Maduro government. Mainstream capitalist economists claim that the collapse of Venezuela was the result of ‘socialism’ (while many on the left claimed that the Maduro regime had to be defended as an example of such ‘socialism’). Both sides were wrong. Bean and the other writers do not accept that Chávez (and Maduro after him) had established a socialist economy, or even that Venezuela was on the ‘road to socialism’.

As I have argued in my own posts on Venezuela,<sup>1</sup> Chávez’s relative success in improving the lot of most Venezuelans was founded on the boom in commodity prices during the 2000s. With the price of oil and natural gas high, even a modest increase in royalties and taxes created a huge influx in government revenues. This extra revenue enabled Chávez to increase social spending, create various distribution programmes and improve the standard of living of the majority of Venezuelans.

But, as Bean points out, Chávez was able to do this without touching the Venezuelan capitalist sector: “There was no real meaningful transformation of social property relations, no transformation of the international division of labour, and no challenge to the prerogatives of transnational capital.”<sup>2</sup> Private capital still dominated in Venezuela throughout the presidencies of both Chávez and Maduro. The overwhelming majority of the means of production remained in the hands of the private sphere and the capitalist class. In fact, under Chávez, between 1999 and 2011 the private sector’s share of economic activity actually *increased* from 65% to 71%. The production and distribution of the majority of goods

and services, including key industries like major food import and processing operations, pharmaceuticals, and auto parts, are still controlled by the private sector.

Even in instances where the state did own the means of production - for example, the oil and natural gas company, Petroleum of Venezuela (PDVSA), and the concrete and asphalt industries - it is the state bureaucracy that controls and makes all decisions in these industries, rather than the workers. Indeed, as Chávez put it himself, “Who would think to say that Venezuela is a socialist country? No, that would be to deceive ourselves. We are in a country that still lives in capitalism - we have only initiated a path. We are taking steps against the world current, including towards a socialist project; but this is for the medium or long term.” Most important, as I also argued,<sup>2</sup> there was no break with the country’s dependence on the export of minerals and hydrocarbons. Venezuela’s dependence on oil exports increased during the Chávez and Maduro era, leaving the country as a ‘one-trick pony’ beholden to global financial and oil markets.

### Crisis

The ‘compromise’ with Venezuelan capital finished with the end of the commodity boom in 2013. By 2015, commodity prices had hit a 12-year low. Maduro was faced with a dilemma. As Bean puts it, “Now in a situation of austere state revenues, who was going to pay for the crisis? Was it going to be labour and regular working people, the social bases that supported and voted Chávez into power?” Most important: “was there going to be a conflict with capital that had been delayed for years?”

The answer soon became clear. As one chapter by Venezuelan economist Luis Salas puts it,

There is not much difference between the economic programme of the [rightwing] opposition and that of the [Maduro] government ... The only difference with the opposition is that the government wants to reach agreements with the Russians, the Chinese or the Turks, and the opposition with the Americans and Europeans. They are capitalist alliances, but with different partners.

And, as Roberto López argues later in the book,

... the inauguration of Nicolás Maduro as president in 2013 meant the almost total abandonment of the anti-neoliberal programme, and the return of the same economic policies implemented in the last decade of the 20th century. Maduro maintained the same radical discourse as his predecessor and presented his government as a genuinely ‘workerist’ and ‘socialist’ one. However, in office, he has implemented a real change of economic course, opening the doors to neoliberal policies, in a framework of growing authoritarianism.

\This too was also my view at the time.<sup>3</sup>

In 2016, the Maduro administration opened the Orinoco Mining Arc for

mineral exploitation, and in 2021 he introduced ‘special economic zones’ for capitalist businesses, free of taxation and regulation. In 2018, the presidency abolished the right to strike. With the so-called Anti-Blockade Law in 2020, Maduro effectively suspended the constitution and granted authority to the executive branch for steering the economy. He dropped the living wage policy adopted under Chávez and introduced a ‘hate speech’ law that established prison sentences of up to 20 years for speeches against the government. The government also privatised major branches of industry, including oil, iron, aluminium, gold and diamonds: “Many of these privatisations targeted the very same industries that Chávez had previously nationalised, in effect carrying out a reverse appropriation that restored former state-owned assets to capitalist ownership.”

But perhaps worst of all is the cronyism. Under Maduro, the Venezuelan state has turned into a *piñata*, where a political-military caste distributes resources, privileges and financial benefits to secure loyalty and maintain its hold on power. The Maduro administration looked to compromise and reach agreements with the business sectors, including Fedecámaras - the big business organisation that had played a key role in the failed 2002 coup against Chávez. The voices of working class organisations were ignored.

It is the conclusion of this book’s writers from the Venezuelan left that among observers in the advanced countries of the global north, there has been a tendency

... to unwittingly lend credibility to a regime that uses the language of socialism to obscure its own oppressive and anti-worker practices. By failing to reckon with the realities of Venezuela’s crisis, such positions inadvertently sideline the struggles of the Venezuelan people, who are fighting both the consequences of the Maduro government and the suffocating sanctions imposed by the United States.

It is not socialism that failed in Venezuela, but the absence of socialist policies to end the sabotage of the capitalist sector in the country and unite the working class organisations in the struggle against US imperialism.

Now in February 2026, the Rodríguez administration is prostrate before US imperialism. The Trump administration has been clever and cautious; it has not yet replaced Maduro with the rightwing, free market, Nobel peace prize-winner (sic), Maria Machado, or even civil war. Instead, it is steadily forcing Rodríguez into acceding to all its demands in preparation for elections later that can then bring in a completely pro-US regime ●

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

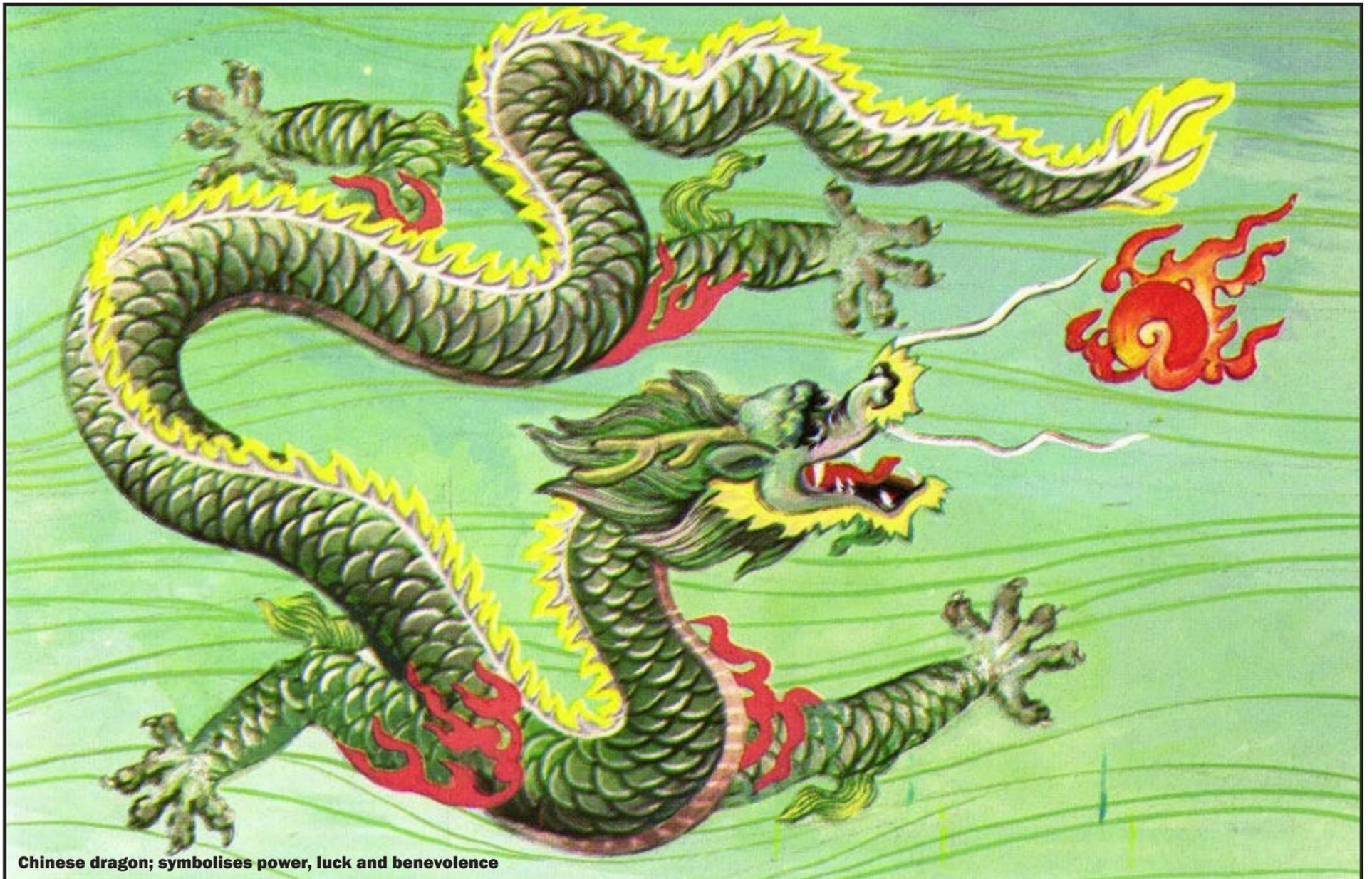
### Notes

1. See, for example, [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/05/31/venezuela-near-the-end](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/05/31/venezuela-near-the-end).
2. [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/08/03/the-tragedy-of-venezuela](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/08/03/the-tragedy-of-venezuela).
3. See [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/07/27/venezuela-the-end-game](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/07/27/venezuela-the-end-game).

## TECHNOLOGY

# Eagle vs dragon

Artificial intelligence has moved beyond fancy software and millions of chips. Today it is about geostrategic competition between the US and China. **Yassamine Mather** investigates how these two countries have adopted two different approaches



Chinese dragon; symbolises power, luck and benevolence

China's recent progress in artificial intelligence shows a clear change in direction. In the past, the main goal was to catch up with western countries. Now the goal is bigger: to compete worldwide, while building its own technology, so it does not depend on others. In early 2026, China's AI strategy can be described in two simple ideas: working more efficiently and becoming more independent.

One reason China's AI sector gained attention was the rise of a startup called DeepSeek. The company showed that it is possible to build very capable AI systems at much lower cost than similar western models. In early 2025, it released a model called DeepSeek-R1 that could solve complex problems at a level similar to leading American systems. By 2026, the company expanded this approach into new tools, including systems that can understand both text and images, while keeping costs relatively low.

Another major player in Chinese AI is Alibaba, with its Qwen AI models. Qwen has become the most widely used open-source AI system in the world, with more than 700 million downloads. It has become popular globally, because it offers different model sizes for different needs.

All this should be seen in the context of the US-China rivalry

regarding computer sovereignty. AI has moved beyond the domain of software innovation and entered the core of geopolitical competition. In this respect it should not be seen as just a clever new computer programme. It is part of a much bigger change. When we look at the rivalry between the US and China, it helps to see AI as part of a new economic system, built around computing power, energy and strong government involvement. It depends on large data centres, huge amounts of electricity, advanced computer chips and even military systems. So this competition is not only about who creates the smartest AI model: it is also about who controls the most important parts needed to build AI - especially advanced computer chips - and about how governments and large companies work together.

AI requires enormous computing power, and that means large data centres that consume huge amounts of electricity. It also has military uses, from intelligence analysis to weapons systems. So the real issue is how deeply AI is built into industry, energy systems and the military - especially at a time when the world is becoming more divided and politically tense.

A key issue is what experts call 'semiconductor chokepoints'. Semiconductors are the tiny chips inside computers and AI systems, cars, weapons and power grids - almost all modern technology depends on them.

A 'chokepoint' means a bottleneck: a place where only a few companies or countries have control. Today, only a small number of firms can produce the most advanced chips, and only a few countries make the highly specialised machines needed to manufacture them. If you control these bottlenecks, you can restrict others from getting the chips they need. That gives you economic and political power.

Another important difference between the US and China is how governments and businesses work together. In the US, private companies usually lead innovation. The government supports them by providing funding, buying their technology for the military and setting regulations. But companies remain largely independent. In China, the government plays a much more direct role. It sets national goals and instructs major companies to follow a broader national plan. Some companies are private, but the state has stronger influence over the overall direction of technology and industry.

In short, the US and China are not just competing over technology: they are using two different ways of organising their economies and their relationship between government and big business.

In the tech world, people talk about 'frontier models' - which is just a fancy way of saying the most powerful AI systems currently in existence.

However, 'winning' the tech race is not just about who has the smartest AI sitting in a lab. What actually matters is integration, or how well a country can plug that computer power into the real world. For example, can you use AI to make factories run faster? Can you use it to manage electricity grids or ship goods across the world? Essentially, a cool demo is useless if you cannot use it to run the 'real' parts of a country.

All of this is happening while the world is becoming more fragmented. Instead of 'free trade' we are seeing bitter rivalries (especially between the US and China), trade wars and sanctions, where countries try to

block each other from getting the best tech. There is also increased military tension. In other words there is high-stakes competition to see who can actually use the best technology to run their country, while the world is split into rival big powers and blocs.

## New foundations

People who study this question usually describe AI as a contest to build the 'ultimate' model. They measure success by the number of data points a system has, its test scores and its ability to handle text, images and video all at once. However, this way of thinking ignores what AI actually is. AI systems are not just 'floating brains' in the cloud: they

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are physically tied to the complex factories that manufacture chips, data centres, electricity generation, the web of shipping and trade that moves parts around the world, the rules and laws made by governments, the systems that control how military forces give orders and operate weapons.

What we need to consider is the fact that AI presents new foundations for the entire economy - much like how the invention of electricity or the use of shipping containers changed everything. It is not just one small part of the tech industry: it is a basic layer that everything else will be built on.

The maths behind AI is simple: if you want a smarter system, you have to feed it more data and use more computer chips. Because of this 'rule', building a top-tier AI now requires hundreds of millions of dollars spent on 'clusters' of specialized chips, massive amounts of electricity (enough to power thousands of homes), an advanced tech to keep the machines cool and move data quickly, as well as extremely skilled and expensive engineers.

From an economic view, this means that only the richest can participate. AI is becoming a system where it is almost impossible for new, smaller companies to start from scratch: a small number of players own all the 'thinking power', while everyone relies on a few rare pieces of hardware. Computer power is the new 'railroad' or 'oil refinery'. In the past, whoever owned the tracks or the oil controlled the world - today, that power comes from owning the computers.

In the US, AI is controlled by a few massive companies: eg, Microsoft, Google, Amazon and Meta. Their business model depends on: owning the 'cloud' (the giant computers everyone else rents), gathering as much data as possible, selling ads and business tools, investing in smaller, high-tech labs.

In China, however, things are different. They have big tech companies too (like Alibaba and Baidu), but the government tells them what to do. The state decides where the money goes and makes sure the companies' goals match those of the

state. This controls their speed of growth and what they choose to build.

### Military role

AI affects military power across four domains:

- Intelligence analysis (ISR automation).
- Autonomous weapons systems.
- Cyber warfare.
- Logistics and predictive maintenance.

As Lawrence Freedman argues in *The future of war: a history*, technological revolutions in warfare reshape not only weapons, but doctrine and tempo. AI compresses decision cycles and enhances battlefield data processing capacity. The US leads in advanced ISR integration, human-machine teaming systems and AI-enhanced command architectures, while China leads in mass drone production, industrial-scale manufacturing, and the rapid scaling of dual-use AI technologies. This contrast reflects differing industrial capacities: the US emphasises technological sophistication; China emphasises manufacturing throughput.

China's military-civil fusion doctrine integrates civilian AI firms into defence planning. This reduces transaction friction between state and industry. In the US, however, military AI procurement requires negotiation with private firms and may face internal resistance. The relationship between Silicon Valley and the Pentagon remains politically contested.

From a political economy perspective, the US model reflects a historically privatised defence-industrial complex, whereas China's model represents a more centralised state-capital alignment.

AI-enabled drone swarms reduce the relative cost of force projection. Expensive platforms become vulnerable to saturation attacks by autonomous systems. The key question becomes: does qualitative superiority outweigh quantitative scale? Historically, industrial wars have favoured scale. AI may reintroduce scale as decisive in high-tech warfare - especially if autonomy reduces marginal unit cost.

Because these drones are cheap, they make big, expensive things (like aircraft carriers, tanks and planes) vulnerable to attack. The big question is this: is it better to have one 'perfect' weapon or 10,000 'Okay' robots? In the past, the side that could build the most stuff usually won the big wars.

### Energy

To build and use AI, you need four physical things:

- Non-stop, high-voltage electricity: the machines can never be turned off.
- Advanced cooling: these computers get so hot, they would melt without massive industrial fans or liquid cooling systems.
- Super-fast memory: special hardware that allows data to move at lightning speeds.
- Last but not least, the industry depends on a strong power grid: the buildings must be plugged directly into the main 'spine' of a country's electricity system to stay stable.

Today's AI data centres look more like heavy-duty factories than quiet offices. They eat up as much power as an entire city. From an economic perspective, this shows a major shift in how wealth is created. Instead of just paying for workers or simple machines, companies are now pouring all their money into 'energy-hungry' digital equipment. You cannot grow your computer power unless you also grow your energy supply. In the AI world, owning the 'brains' (the code) is useless if you do not also own the 'lungs' (the electricity).

The US energy landscape includes abundant natural gas, advanced nuclear research and expanding renewables. Yet regulatory fragmentation and grid congestion constrain expansion. Big tech firms are increasingly negotiating private energy arrangements, effectively acting as quasi-utilities. AI intensifies the privatisation of energy planning, with corporations securing long-term power contracts to sustain their data centres.

China's state-directed grid expansion and rapid nuclear construction enable the strategic siting of AI data centres, integration with hydro power and coal baseload, and coordinated infrastructure scaling (scaling refers to the rule that more data/chips equals smarter AI). DeepSeek's success suggests these laws can sometimes be 'hacked' or made more efficient, which subtly changes the 'only the richest can play' argument. Of course, China's political structure reduces delays and local opposition, thus facilitating rapid infrastructure rollout: energy sovereignty becomes computer sovereignty.

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### Divided world

The process of making computer chips is spread across the entire globe, with different countries owning different 'pieces' of the puzzle.

- Nvidia (USA): They draw the blueprints for the most powerful AI chips.
- TSMC (Taiwan): They own the world's most advanced factories that actually 'print' the chips onto silicon.
- ASML (Netherlands): They build the only machines in the world capable of printing the tiniest, most complex circuits.
- Korea and USA: They lead in making the specialised 'memory' these chips need to think fast.

Right now, demand for these chips is so high that, even if you have the millions of dollars needed to buy them, you often have to wait six to eight months for delivery. This delay creates a considerable bottleneck for any country or company trying to compete in the AI race.

In the last few years China's response has been to break away from this dependence and 'unplug' from US-led systems. They are spending huge amounts of government money to design their own chips, to find

clever ways to make 'slower' chips work more efficiently, and to build their own factories, so they do not have to rely on other countries.

Throughout modern history, the most powerful countries have usually been the ones that controlled the most important technology of their time. In the 19th century, that was steam power and industrial machinery. In the 20th century, it was oil, mass production and later computers. These technologies did not just improve business: they reshaped the world; they changed how goods were made, how wars were fought, how money moved, and how governments ruled.

Now artificial intelligence could well be the next turning point. AI is not just another industry. It does not produce just one product: it helps run entire systems. That makes it extremely powerful.

If one country controls the key parts of AI - advanced computer chips, massive data centres, software platforms and technical standards - it gains more than a commercial edge. Other countries may become dependent on its systems to manage their own economies. That creates influence. It creates leverage.

Military strength still matters when it comes to men and firepower. But today's military power depends heavily on technology and industrial capacity. Precision weapons, drones, cyber systems, satellite networks - all rely on advanced computing. Armies depend on production. And production depends on technology.

### Control

But the real issue is not 'smart robots': it is control.

AI connects directly to four foundations of modern power:

- First, the military. AI can improve surveillance, coordination, logistics and targeting. It can make force projection faster and more efficient.
- Second, energy. AI systems require enormous amounts of electricity. Data centres consume vast power. A country that controls energy production controls how far AI can expand.
- Third, factories. AI-driven automation allows companies to replace human workers with machines. This lowers labour costs and increases profits. It also changes the balance between capital and labour.
- Fourth, government. AI can analyse large amounts of data about populations. It can help manage services, but it can also expand monitoring and social control.

AI is not just a new gadget. It may reshape how the global economy works. All this is why the AI rivalry between the US and China matters. As competition intensifies, global trade is becoming more divided. Countries are trying to protect supply chains and secure resources. This weakens the global economic system they all rely on.

In this unstable environment, the real question is not who builds the most impressive AI model. The real question is which country can keep its economic system running during crisis - secure energy, control production, and preserve order at home. The 'winner' will not simply have the smartest code. It will be the one whose system is strong enough to survive the instability of the world it helped create ●

# 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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Sunday February 29 5pm

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# weekly worker

Italy, Greece,  
Spain, Morocco,  
France and  
Germany

## Strike against death machine

There has not being anything like the February 6 coordination in terms of scale so far. **Toby Abse** welcomes the overtly political strike action taken by dockers against Israel's continued assault on the Palestinians



February 6 saw the first International Dockers' Strike - against the "growing militarisation of transport infrastructure", but primarily in solidarity with Palestine. It was initially called by the Unione Sindacale di Base (USB) in Italy, Enedep in Greece, the Basque union, LAB, the Turkish Liman-İş, and the Moroccan ODT.

The call to action by these five unions was taken up elsewhere in Europe: for example, French dockers in Marseilles, and German dockers in Hamburg and Bremen also participated. Whilst there had been some previous internationally coordinated dockers' strikes in the past - most notably against the liberalisation associated with the EU's Bolkestein Directive in the early 2000s - there had never been anything on the scale of the February 6 strikes. Moreover, although the unions raised the question of both falling real wages and the threat to their jobs posed by increased automation, the action was in essence a political strike against wars and the international arms trade in general - primarily, but not exclusively, in relation to the continuing Israeli assault on the Palestinians.

The strike must be seen as the culmination of a series of disputes about arms transportation that started in Genoa in 2019, when the dockers blocked the port to demand that the government respect Italian law

185/1990, which prohibits the export of arms from Italy to any country engaged in war. On that occasion, the dockers' target was not Israel, but Saudi Arabia, which was bombarding Yemen. The conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine that have exploded since then have led to an increase in orders for Italian arms exports. Dockers' mobilisations increased in response to this, spreading from Genoa to Livorno, Naples and eventually other Italian ports.

All this reached its height in Italy during the September-October 2025 general strikes in solidarity with the 2025 Global Sumud Flotilla, which attempted to break the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, but was intercepted by the Zionists' naval forces. Solidarity with the flotilla also drew in a variety of workers in engineering factories and other workplaces. Although sympathy strikes for Palestine have largely faded out as a result of Trump's so-called 'Peace Initiative', the dockers have continued to raise the issue.

The February 6 strike not only affected the traditionally militant ports of Genoa and Livorno, but also brought out the dockers of Trieste, Ravenna, Ancona, Civitavecchia, Salerno, Bari, Crotona, Palermo and Cagliari. The unions' demands were crystal-clear, including "the immediate end of the

**Dock work is now highly automated ... but still relies on human labour-power**

**Giorgia Meloni: out to paint all strikes as political, to justify repressive state action**



genocide of the Palestinians carried out by Israel with the support of its US, EU and Nato allies".

EU regulation 1236/2005 prohibits the export of arms from the EU to countries at war, but not their transit via EU ports - something which has increased since the outbreak of war in Gaza in October 2023. José Nivoi, the national coordinator of the USB's dockers' section, and the spokesperson for the Genoese dockers' group, CALP, pointed out: "We do not want to be accomplices in a traffic that serves to kill innocent adults and children. The transit of arms is both a legal and an ethical problem."

The 24-hour strike had immediate practical effect in a number of Italian ports. The Israeli ship, 'Virginia', belonging to the ZIM company, was unable to dock in Livorno with its cargo of arms. A second ZIM ship, 'Australia', was prevented from landing in Venice, and a third, 'New Zealand', was kept away from the port of Genoa. A ship called 'Eagle 3', belonging to the Italo-Swiss company, MSC, which was on its way to Israel, did not even try to approach the Ravenna docks, and abruptly changed course in response to the strike.

The strike was also particularly effective in Greece, which has seen many ships loaded with arms pass through its ports - especially in the Athenian port of Piraeus. Markos

Bekris, the president of the Greek union, Enedep, addressing a rally in the Piraeus theatre, said: "They want us to be accomplices in wars that have nothing to do with the interests of workers. At the same time, they ask us to work 13 hours a day, and to accept greater flexibility, but with starvation wages, insecurity, repression and the theft of our pension funds."

Bekris also criticised the arms investment programme of the Greek government announced last year, which had allocated €27 billion for 'defence' over the coming 12 years, saying: "the Greek people are expected to pay for equipment which does not serve defence, but the imperialist rivalry of the US, Nato and the EU in relation to China and Russia."

These militant unions would, in the Italian case, best be characterised as 'syndicalist' and, in the Greek case, owe more to the 'official communist' tradition. However, the problem for the Palestine solidarity movement is that more mainstream unions, such as the Italian CGIL, are wary of calling their members into action over political rather than economic demands - particularly since Giorgia Meloni's Italian government is always eager to brand all strikes as purely political to justify state action against them.

Nevertheless, February 6 has shown how large numbers of workers can be *politically* mobilised. But the question is, under what leadership? ●