

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Top scientists, including Bill McGuire, accuse far-right politicians of peddling a delusional North Sea fantasy

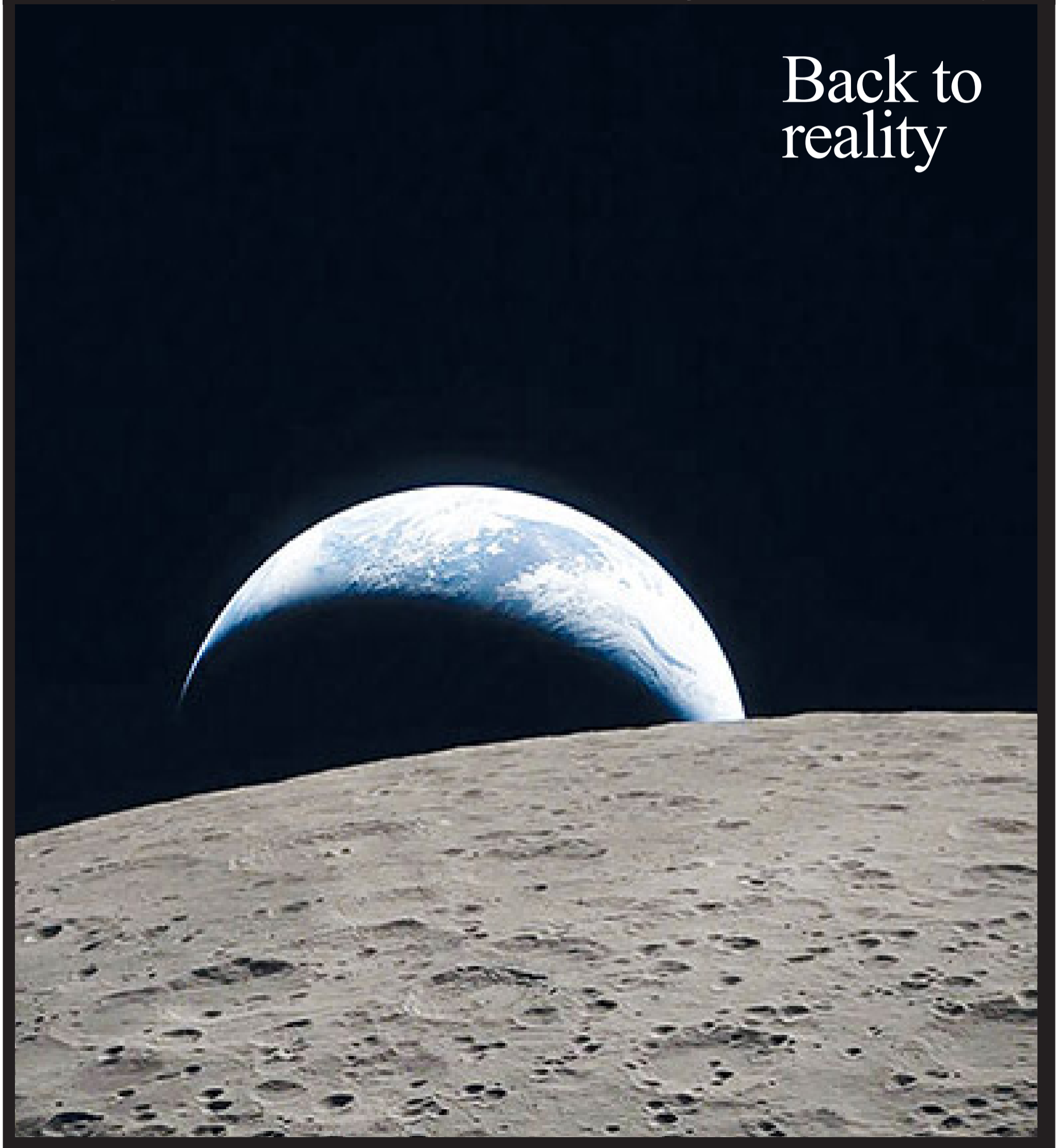
- Letters and debate
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Back to
reality



LETTERS



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

Those keys

The deadline, we are told - again - for negotiations with Iran has been moved. Not scrapped, not softened, but strategically repositioned - like one of Trump's golf balls, nudged ever so slightly out of the rough. This time, though, it's different. This time the president is 'serious'.

Throughout the ever-shifting deadlines, Trump has claimed that he is 'winning' in the negotiations, which the other side claims it has no idea they're taking part in. Initially demanding total victory, Trump has found "major points of agreement", while praising his own flexibility and deal-making genius.

The White House frames this as a masterstroke of negotiation. The 'art of the deal', we're reminded, is not about rigid timelines, but about leverage, optics and the occasional tactical U-turn (whether the other side has turned up to talks or not). Markets wobble? Put out a social media post adjusting the tone. Oil prices spike? Quietly ease a sanction or two. Iran defies a deadline they didn't agree to? Push is back.

Critics might call it reactive. Supporters call it genius. Either way, the pattern holds: maximal pressure until the markets get nervous - then a gentle recalibration to keep just enough tankers moving and enough sycophants thinking you're fully in control.

Iran, for its part, insists the delay in opening the Strait of Hormuz is purely administrative, reporting they have 'misplaced the keys'. Like a stubborn garden shed, it simply cannot be opened without them. There's talk of checking under sofa cushions, behind the fridge, perhaps even in that one drawer containing old mobile phone chargers, used batteries, foreign currency and takeaway menus that everyone has.

Still, at the time of writing, the message from Trump is clear and unshakable: the latest deadline stands; the resolve is firm; the seriousness is ... serious. Iran must find those keys - and soon!

But Iran seems unmoved by the latest deadline. Tensions will undoubtedly continue to rise, because, after all, the thing you're looking for is always in the last place you look.

Carl Collins
email

Didn't join

Because I'd bounced around Britain's far-left groups over the last decade, many of my close friends assumed I would be all-in with Jeremy Corbyn's and Zarah Sultana's new left party when it was launched last year.

As the title of this letter indicates, I didn't sign up to Your Party - I didn't even bother with its 800,000-strong mailing list. When it launched, a good friend and comrade asked me whether I'd be joining and I said no. I didn't give him a particularly clear reason as to why - I didn't want to sound like a 'doomer'. I still haven't given him a proper reason; I didn't want to sound like I was saying, 'I told you so'. But I feel that, now many good and genuine socialists are reconsidering their affiliation, it is worth voicing my thoughts.

When Your Party was launched, predictions were made all over about how it would look in a year's

time - no-one knew exactly how it would go, but, of course, many made predictions based on analyses of the characters or political and social forces involved. Gramsci's famous words of "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will" were in vogue.

My principal issue with Your Party at that point could be described as this: it is inconceivably unlikely that *career MPs*, Corbyn and Sultana both, would voluntarily sign up to the kind of party discipline that is necessary to maintain a genuinely communist or socialist-republican party. In order to prevent the bureaucratisation that killed the Second International, a party worth anything would have to have a democratic-centralist whip, party democracy would have to be sovereign, and its staff and representatives would be forced to take pay at the level of average or skilled workers' wages.

Without getting into each violation of party democracy and each betrayal from the Corbyn clique, I'm sure the readership of this paper will agree with me that the last year has proven that pretty mild prediction correct.

Jeremy Corbyn is a career MP and he is, politically speaking, a social-democratic liberal. He is, *de facto*, a monarchist who would like to see state welfare and the shape of British industry rearranged in a more benevolent manner - not a socialist republican and not a communist. Based on that understanding I thought then and I think now that he would not co-found a socialist-republican party or a communist party and he would not voluntarily submit to socialist-republican or communist discipline or wage levels.

It is a misuse of "optimism of the will" to invoke it with regards to the actions of careerist liberals like Jeremy Corbyn. It should be reserved for the creative and enduring spirit of the masses of the working class to resist exploitation and tyranny, over and over. Socialist republicans and communists must hold no hopes in the likes of Corbyn: instead we must unite among ourselves in order to bring about the kind of party the working class needs.

Thomas Donnelly
Liverpool

False premise

At our recent CPGB AGM I raised an objection to the catastrophist premise of the early sections of the perspectives document. The threat of impending catastrophe has generated bad politics which have haunted our movement long after events have proven the premise false.

I pointed to Trotsky's *Transitional programme* - or, as it was originally titled, *The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International*, written on the eve of World War II. But after six long years and massive destruction, we saw the long boom, which only petered out some 30 years later.

Lenin, I argued, stated there were no hopeless scenarios for capitalism. This, I concede, is a slight mangling of his 1920 speech during the first session of the second congress of the Communist International. However, my argument remains: even were capitalism to approach some putative planetary limit, without the intervention of the organised working class, it would seek to resolve the resulting crisis via its usual, historically established

mechanisms - the wholesale destruction of capital and people.

Where Lenin's speech is relevant is in the continuing ability of the bourgeoisie to "beguile this or that minority of the exploited". It is easy to foresee a situation where workers in the metropolises are convinced that those fleeing war, starvation and social collapse in Africa and Asia pose a threat to their living standards - no matter how meagre - and allow themselves to be mobilised around the protection of their 'own' national capitals.

I have previously argued that we could see a return to the more 'physical' imperialism seen during the rise of challengers to Britain in the latter half of the 1800s. Trump's aggressive overtures towards Greenland, Canada and the Panama canal are suggestive of a desire to secure access to resources free from the vagaries of the market and the unknowns of a politically unstable world.

China, as we know, has been buying up agricultural land in Africa (this and its scheme to plough a canal through Nicaragua as an alternative shipping route connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific). Legal title means very little, if the land is invaded by peasants forced to abandon their farms, because they are no longer productive. In the end, such matters are settled by force, including boots on the ground - whether your own or those of a proxy.

All of which could draw the accusation that I am peddling my own line in catastrophist politics. I do not, and have not, sought to downplay the very grave challenges we face. My concern is to highlight the political dangers contained within the concept of a final crisis. Like Trotsky's *Transitional programme* and the breakdown theories of the early 1900s, they have not served us well.

Andy Hannah
email

Marxist demands

I offer the following as a list of current demands which I hope can unify Marxists in the present:

- (1) Ceasefire now.
- (2) Shut down all military bases.
- (3) Lift all sanctions.
- (4) End all arms production.
- (5) Unite workers and students against nationalism, patriotism and war.
- (6) Strengthen resistance to perpetual war, exploitation and species extinction.
- (7) Overthrow all imperialist regimes and their reactionary proxies.
- (8) Build a global awareness of the necessity for a planned, classless, moneyless, stateless alternative to capitalism under workers' democratic control.

No doubt readers are capable of assessing whether or not these demands are transitional to socialism. Also whether they are already incorporated - one way or another - within the minimum/maximum programme of the CPGB,

Paul B Smith
Ormskirk

Formerly radical

The capitalist class really do have it sewn up. The 'reissue, repackage, repackage' ('paint a vulgar picture') vibe of late capitalism has formerly radical working class voices now reflecting their political outlook and commodifying our history.

A lively debate on the *Weekly Worker* Facebook page explored

how Morrissey, the former front man of The Smiths, in many ways prefigured the decline of partisan working class identity crafted from his 60/70s upbringing. Johnny Lydon, Mark E Smith and Noel Gallagher spring to mind, as do others who once championed a similar aesthetic, bound up with kitchen-sink drama, post-war working class subjectivities and the political left. Today the psychological terrain is crawling with reactionary Uncle Tom feels and these individuals reflect this

Mark E Smith is, of course, dead and was a contrarian more than anything else, but still fits the pattern (add a sprinkling of Russell Brand, perhaps?). Johnny Marr, the guitar hero of The Smiths, clearly still holds onto much of the 'pay no more than £3.99' indie subculture of the 1980s, seeking to maintain some defence against creeping corporate rockism.

As relating to an article on the *Creases Like Knives* progressive skinhead platform, Morrissey's pull towards skinhead culture was explored. Not being formally part of this subculture is relevant, as has been what he has drawn from this: namely the dressing up of racist, rightist bigotry with social democratic nostalgia. The messy consequence of working class alienation and subsequently indulged stardom led to a (probably unconscious) political collapse, mirroring that of the entire class with the defeat of the miners (this going into overdrive after the 1989/91 collapse of eastern-bloc bureaucratic socialism.) The inclusion of 'Asian rut' and 'Bengali in platforms' tracks from the first solo album spell this out, and the National Front disco featuring on the 1992 'Your arsenal' release took this yet further. The not so subtle subtext from *Mozza* is that proles are rightwing and 'we can't say what we want [bigotry] any more': ie, Life is hard enough when you belong here.

There's more to unpack of course, not least in terms of how we understand class, culture and solidarity. This is not the first time, however, that ex-working class 'stars' talk shite, as their conditions change and they cease meaningfully to be one of us. Morrissey's methadone class-consciousness is, of course, a headache for those of us who loved The Smiths and/or the more revolutionary/reggae-infused elements of skinhead culture.

Paul Cooper
email

Kanye ban

The decision to ban Kanye West from entering the UK and the subsequent cancellation of Wireless Festival, which he was due to headline, is, on the face of it, understandable. The rapper has been rightly criticised for making hideous anti-Semitic remarks. He

recently released a song called 'Heil Hitler' and advertised a swastika T-shirt for sale on his website.

Despite Kanye West apologising and attributing his actions to his bipolar disorder, there had been a media outcry to stop him performing at the festival. Sponsors had threatened to pull out and Jewish organisations added pressure on the government and festival organisers to act. Managing director Melvin Benn said the festival was "not giving him a platform to extol opinion of whatever nature - only to perform the songs that are currently played on the radio stations in our country and the streaming platforms in our country, and listened to and enjoyed by millions".

I cannot defend West's rhetoric or, personally, believe his excuses for making those remarks. If, however, we expand our view from this isolated case, we can see that the rise in anti-Semitism accompanies the crimes and genocide carried out by the Israeli state - which, after all, claims to be representative of the Jewish people worldwide. Similarly, if we widen our view from this case alone, we must also recognise this ban as an exercise of state power that extends beyond moral condemnation and into the regulation of culture itself. While West's statements are undeniably reactionary and harmful, silencing him raises deeper concerns about how the state can regulate ideological expression.

The state is not a neutral arbiter, but an instrument that ultimately serves ruling class interests. In this context, the exclusion of a high-profile artist follows a precedent, whereby cultural figures are barred not simply for 'inciting public harm', but for expressing views deemed politically undesirable. It is inevitable that such censorship is used on leftwing or anti-capitalist artists, such as Irish rap group Kneecap, who have championed the Palestinian cause, and have been subjected to similar state repression, for example.

We must also keep in mind that the cancellation of a major cultural event like Wireless Festival disproportionately affects workers: there will be economic hardship experienced by lesser-known artists, dancers, performers, technicians, vendors, etc.

The wider view allows us to see the danger in selective enforcement, however we feel about this individual example. When the state arrogates to itself the power to decide which voices may be heard, it obviously gives itself the power of not only suppressing reactionary figures, but also those who seek to challenge the very system that grants the state its power.

Matthew Harper
email

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MOON MISSION

Back to reality

Artemis II and the new space race do not represent a great leap in human progress, argues Paul Demarty. Instead what we have is a criminal refusal to take responsibility for the dire conditions here on Earth

As I write, the Artemis II mission has entered lunar orbit, and is on course to reach the greatest distance from Earth ever achieved by a crewed space flight.

The news has been received with general good cheer. It is, after all, a welcome distraction from the worsening bloodshed of America's assault on Iran, and the looming economic dislocation attendant on the war. Presumably, something like that is part of the point - not *specifically* the current war, of course, but there is a clear attempt to recapture the optimism of the Apollo programme and its successes, above all the landing of Apollo 11 on the lunar surface in 1969.

As John F Kennedy famously put it in his speech at Rice University in Texas, in 1962,

We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organise and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.

Whatever else it was - and it was many other things, not all so salutary - the Apollo programme was an attempt at a grand nation-building project, using the cutting edge of rocketry, computer engineering and aeronautics to go, as the *Star Trek* slogan would later have it, where no man has gone before. In that respect, it was very American. The frontier had been closed at the beginning of the century, but here was a new frontier, glowing temptingly at us on clear nights. The moon landing, when it came, was a genuine mass cultural moment, registered in the fascination of generations of children with toy spacecraft, the resurgence of popular science fiction and science writing, and even the multiplication of new clichés ('It's not rocket science...').

The Artemis programme is the faltering attempt of several presidencies to recreate that great achievement - with, of course, the benefit of technology, the likes of which the Nasa of the 1960s could only dream about. (The Apollo 11 guidance computer, a justly legendary technical accomplishment, would be hard-pushed to power a modern television remote, never mind a smartphone.) Begun in 2005 by George W Bush, tinkered with by Barack Obama, relaunched in Donald Trump's first term, soft-pedalled by Joe Biden, and now just about tolerated by the cost-cutting Trump 2.0 regime, Artemis puts human beings - at great length - once more in the neighbourhood where Neil Armstrong set foot over 50 years ago.

Pointless

Despite the media hype, there is a certain pointlessness to the whole exercise, which is difficult to suppress entirely. The truth is that, from a strictly scientific point of view, the exercise is worthless. Earlier crewed space missions at least yielded data



Crew: Christina Koch, Victor Glover, Jeremy Hansen and Reid Wiseman

about the effects of zero gravity on the human body. How much is there left to learn, really, about that, after countless intervening missions and above all the various space stations? The four crew members of Artemis II will achieve nothing that could not have been done more efficiently, cheaply and safely with an unmanned craft, except social media posts about how stoked they are to be in space. A computer, after all, would not be troubled, as the Artemis crew were a few days ago, by a malfunctioning toilet.

Presumably the Nasa boffins are quite aware of this, and so we must look elsewhere for explanations. The first, as noted, is the idea of recreating a great historic achievement of the American state - of recent presidents, Trump has shown no small interest in all this. He is very keen to ensure the next moon landing takes place while he is still in office. Trump is a man who likes to put a shiny item on his CV, hence his resentment at being denied the Nobel Peace Prize. Crewed space missions, in the terms of evolutionary biology, are 'costly displays', like the ungainly tail of the peacock. We do these things, remember, because they are hard.

The second explanation is the vulgar matter of military competition. Indeed, the Apollo programme itself is hardly dissociable from the cold war, the endless angst over the supposed 'missile gap' and other Strangelovian obsessions. Now, of course, the great rival is further east. China has its own space programme, and its own plans to go to the moon; for Beijing, of course, it would be the first time - and

a grand coming-out party.

The outworking of this is presumably a new wave of *militarisation* of the Earth's near space. Much has already been done here - most notably the rival networks of spy and communications satellites. Military dominance of space has been an American objective since at least the 1980s, with Ronald Reagan's ill-fated Space Defence Initiative (better known as 'Star Wars'), and was then a major sticking point in nuclear negotiations with the Soviets. There is no kidding around now, and one expects the US and its new peer rival to play for keeps.

Finally, there is the question, once more, of 'opening the frontier'. The original remit of the Constellation programme in 2005 - which became, eventually, Artemis - included a crewed mission to Mars by 2030. As of now, plans still include a permanent moon base, to begin construction in 2028. In this respect, the US government seems to be on a similar wavelength to the science-fiction-poisoned billionaire, Elon Musk, whose SpaceX company is an important contractor for the programme.

One can put a positive, Promethean spin on the dream of - as Musk likes to put it - making humanity into a multi-planetary species. If it could be achieved, after all, this would be an enormous symbolic change in the dignity of species, next to which the exertions of Apollo and Sputnik would be mere child's play. It is a suitable goal for anyone whose ambitions are untroubled by realism.

There is, however, a less sunny

interpretation. The Pilgrim Fathers crossed the Atlantic, after all, because they found Britain inhospitable under the tyranny of the Stuart kings (who were happy, for their part, to remove these troublemakers to a place where they could be more easily managed). The colonisation of Mars, likewise, could serve as an escape route from the crowded, war-torn, environmentally-threatened 'Spaceship Earth'. In this aspect, Musk's grand plans look rather like the discreet efforts of fellow American billionaires to buy up land as far away as possible - New Zealand is popular - to build impregnable compounds and bunkers, for when the shit really hits the fan.

Bad conscience

Since the colonisation of Mars is a ludicrously unachievable goal, it is appropriate perhaps to refer to a work of science fiction to illustrate a more profound problem with this outlook. Kim Stanley Robinson's magnificent *Mars* trilogy is a hard-SF story of an international team of scientists set to work creating a Mars colony, in which endeavour they face innumerable technical obstacles, pitilessly described by Robinson. The biggest problem, however, is that they bring with them - precisely - humanity, Earth's problems, Earth's rancorous politics, and above all Earth's ruthless corporate interests, because of which things get rather sticky.

There is a basic philosophical misunderstanding here. It is a hard-won insight, from Giambattista Vico to Karl Marx and even Martin Heidegger, that all human life starts *in medias res* - in the foaming rapids

of natural and human history. This calls forth the hope that there is some way to wipe the slate clean, to start again from zero. But this hope is futile. Even to have the hope is to be marked irrevocably by history. Paradoxically, this hope's very futility causes its scope to expand: we need not only a new planet, but new bodies (as Musk has put it, referencing the initial procedures of a computer operating system as it starts, humanity is perhaps merely a "bootloader" for artificial intelligence).

This despairing Prometheism finds occasional echo on the left, in the form of transhumanism and momentary fads like 'luxury space communism'. Though leftist futurists no doubt do not share Musk's reprehensible opinions on gender, race and the justice of his own vast fortune, they undertake the same flight from reality.

Manifesto

There was a movement in hard-SF not long ago called 'mundane', complete with its own manifesto - the gist of which is that faster-than-light travel is impossible, and authors committed to the genre should refocus on the no-less-fascinating potential of the future of our own planet, or perhaps its immediate neighbourhood. In a similar way, I think it is correct for Marxism to be 'mundane'. The revolution will be made, if it is to be made, by the agency of our fellow humans, our friends and neighbours, our distant comrades, or people very much like them, on this blue planet of ours. We seek the liberation of humanity, not liberation from humanity.

Our destiny, then, lies not in the stars, or even on Mars, but on Earth. The problems before us here are severe, of course, but they cannot be solved by science fictional daydreams. They require, instead, global coordination of economic activity, the destruction of rival powers' vast apparatuses of death, and the healing of the metabolic rift between humanity and non-human nature. These are tasks for political transformation, not in the first instance for technological progress, important as that is: it is social relations that, in the end, determine the uses to which technology shall be put.

This should not entail a parochial attitude to the extra-terrestrial. Humankind's hunger for new discoveries about our solar system, galaxy and universe is quite salutary. Exploration of space should continue, with these aims in mind. And who knows? Perhaps, when every belly is reliably fed on our own planet and nuclear arsenals are no more than a anxious memory, we can put a few brave souls in a tin can and launch them towards the moon or Mars. It would be, for world communism, just what it is for capitalist society today - a flex, a 'because we can' move. Sometimes that is reason enough.

Under present conditions, however, one can only deplore the waste and the hubris. Artemis II is a flight from Earth, but also a flight from the capitalist world's bad conscience ●

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CLIMATE

No time to waste

Far-right politicians and media outlets are peddling a delusional and reckless North Sea fantasy. Britain pays global prices for both gas and oil. Meanwhile, the planet continues to heat up and targets are being routinely missed, writes **Eddie Ford**

Rarely has a political campaign, and slogan, been so vacuous as Kemi Badenoch's 'Get Britain drilling!' This, of course, is inspired by Donald Trump's "Drill, baby, drill" and general MAGA philosophy - fundamental to which is climate-change denialism.

Hence the Tory leader launched the campaign on March 30 on an oil rig off the North Sea near Aberdeen.¹ As part of her supposed three-point plan to 'max out' production, she proposed ending the moratorium on new oil and gas licences, scrapping the windfall tax on energy profits, and providing more financial support for the fossil fuel industry. In this way, we are invited to accept, households can be protected from rising energy bills - which saw drastic price rises across the globe with the US-Israeli war against Iran.

According to Badenoch, who initially called for UK forces to *actively* join the bombing campaign, Labour's ban on new oil and gas drilling licences was "stupid" and "completely crazy", as drilling for "our own" oil and gas is about energy and national security. After all, a "strong economy" relies on "cheap, abundant energy", which Labour is holding back due to its net-zero commitment. She even claimed that the "real reason" Labour is refusing new licences is that Ed Miliband "is now running the government" - so absurd a statement that it is impossible to imagine she believes it herself.

Naturally, Badenoch's sentiments are echoed by Nigel Farage, who called on Sir Keir to "open up the licences, and become self-sufficient in natural gas". Warming to that theme during PMQs, he urged the Labour leader to "follow Norway", on the basis that over the last year "our North Sea neighbours" have opened 49 drill sites for gas and oil.² Yet on "our side" of the North Sea, said the Reform leader, the number is none, thanks to Labour's net-zero push, which has left Britain "vulnerable".

In fact, Farage wants to make climate change a new populist dividing line in British politics - telling *The Sun* that "this could be the next Brexit", where parliament is "so hopelessly out of touch with the country". In this way he hopes to present net-zero as an obsession of the 'elites' rather than a matter of general human interest.³ Politics is moving so far to the right, both in the UK and globally - with the White House directly sponsoring the far right - that Farage could be latching onto something, unfortunately.

Vapid

Kemi Badenoch, Nigel Farage and the far right generally, are peddling a deluded fantasy, of course.⁴ Indeed, as described by Tessa Khan, executive director of the renewable energy campaign group, Uplift, it is a "vapid, political game playing at the expense of ordinary people". She points out that more drilling will do absolutely nothing to lower energy bills - a "fact" that Badenoch knows and "members of her [shadow] cabinet have admitted". She cites Tory MP Claire Coutinho, when serving as energy secretary in 2023, admitting that new licences "wouldn't necessarily bring energy bills down", but argued they would improve the "security" of supply - which is also nonsense, of



Offshore rig: welders

course. Coutinho now has the energy brief in Badenoch's shadow cabinet.

Yet in reality more North Sea drilling would obviously put the UK at *further* risk from volatile fossil fuel markets, not less. Just because Ed Miliband, secretary of state for energy security and net zero, says something does not necessarily mean it is untrue. He told a Parliamentary Labour Party meeting that "one overriding lesson of the crisis" is that Britain remains dependent on fossil fuel markets, when rather there needs to be "further and faster driving for clean power". Included in that 'clean' mix is, of course, building yet more nuclear plants - which given the inherent dangers, not least revealed by the Ukrainian and Iranian wars, we need like a hole in the head.

Acting as a corrective to Badenoch and Farage, research by Uplift and the energy consultancy, Voar, shows that the hundreds of new North Sea licences granted by the Conservatives between 2010 and 2024 have so far produced just *36 days of gas*.⁵ As the study further details, these licensing rounds will actually lead to just 20 new and re-licensed fields, and over their lifetime they will meet less than six months of UK gas demand and less than eight months of oil. Furthermore, they have produced to date just over two months of oil, but, of course, around 80% of UK oil is *exported*. Separately, official data shows that new drilling will have little impact on the UK's dependency on imported gas, due to the drastic decline of the North Sea. Therefore, after 50 years of drilling, we have already burned most of the gas and most of what is left is now oil - there is no 'abundant' energy from fossil fuels waiting for the UK.

In additional research to hammer

home the message, Uplift reveals that the Jackdaw field - one of the largest unexploited gasfields in the North Sea - would displace only 2% of current imports of gas, but would leave the UK still almost entirely dependent on supplies from Norway and a few other sources.⁶ Then you have the Rosebank field - also in Scottish waters, but mainly containing oil - which would displace only about 1% of the UK's gas imports. In other words, to quote Tessa Khan, both Jackdaw and Rosebank would do "vanishingly little" to boost UK gas production - Rosebank being a prime example of "oil for profit, not our security", given the fact that its reserves are predominantly oil for export and, if burned, would see the UK breach its climate targets. In fact, Britain is already well short when it comes to meeting its 2030 targets with emissions set to be 59% lower than 1990 levels, falling well short of the 68% reduction target, and is off track to achieve net zero emissions in 2050.⁷ Any uptick of homegrown fossil fuel usage through renewed drilling in the North Sea would blow another hole through these shaky ambitions.

Warning

This is something verified by more than 65 leading UK scientists in an open letter against new oil and gas drilling in the North Sea.⁸ Challenging both the environmental and economic case for further drilling, they write: "As climate scientists, we urge leaders to look to the cheaper solutions we have already, that we know work". Signatories include Bill McGuire, who has written numerous popular books on climate science and will shortly be publishing *The fate of the world: a history and future of the climate crisis*.⁹

In their letter, like Uplift, they argue that about 90% of North Sea reserves have already been extracted and additional production would have little effect on global prices, given the scale of *international* oil and gas markets. Instead, they go on, further drilling would only add to greenhouse gas emissions and undermine efforts to limit global warming. After all, the last three years have been the hottest on record and extreme weather events are becoming increasingly frequent.

As McGuire told the *FT*, more drilling "means adding carbon to the atmosphere that wouldn't otherwise be added" and "is the last thing we need".¹⁰ As for Ella Gilbert, who coordinated the letter, she makes the simple case that renewables *already* offer a cheaper alternative. Wind and solar energy were now the lowest-cost sources of electricity, while falling battery storage costs were making intermittency - when renewable sources are offline - easier to manage. This is a trend that will only accelerate, despite Donald Trump and his dystopian dreams.

Climate refuseniks say that the UK sources some 75% of its total energy from oil and gas and thus will continue to need fossil fuels for decades, even under the most optimistic timelines, and have also claimed that North Sea output has significantly lower emissions than imported gas. But this argument is not serious. The independent Climate Change Committee, for example, has found only a small emissions advantage when UK production is compared to the global average - and this, of course, would be offset by increased production adding to fossil fuel use and higher emissions. Fossil fuel enthusiasts also point to the latest

offshore wind subsidy auction as evidence that renewable energy is not uniformly cheap - developers were guaranteed £90.91 per megawatt hour, as opposed to the current spot prices of around £96, implying that wind and solar energy supplies would also need to be backed up with gas or battery storage, and extra electricity grid systems provided.

Knee-jerk

Gilbert and others reply that countries which had accelerated their transition away from fossil fuels have fared better: eg, Spain is enjoying lower power prices and greater resilience to energy shocks. James Alexander of the UK Sustainable Investment and Finance Association warns too that expanding drilling would be a "knee-jerk reaction" to a worsening long-term, systemic issue - policymakers would be better focusing on creating the conditions for green energy to attract more investment, rather than artificially prolonging reliance on fossil fuels.

But we have no time to waste, as we are approaching multiple tipping points, and may indeed be closer than previously thought to a *point of no return* - after which runaway global heating would be impossible to stop, at least according to recent studies.¹¹ As Bill McGuire further chronicles, this time in *The Guardian*, the first three months of the year have seen record-breaking heat across much of the US and floods have devastated Hawaii, northern Australia, as well as the Gulf states of Oman and the UAE.¹² Meanwhile, in England and Wales, February this year was the warmest on record, following on from record winter rainfall in many parts.

The "worst possible news", as McGuire writes, was to be found in a *Nature* paper, published just a week after the bombing of Iran started. This outlined that the rate of global heating has been *supercharged* since 2015, and is now almost double what it was in the 1970s. Meaning that at the current rate of near 0.35°C a decade, unless there is severe action on emissions, we will see the 2°C limit shattered as soon as the late 2030s with no end in sight - the 1.5°C 'ideal' target of the Paris Agreement having become an impossible dream •

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Notes

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SOLIDARITY

Basic rights are under attack

It is not only the government, the police and the judiciary. Too much of the left takes a 'free speech ... but' approach. Then there are the AWL scabs, says Carla Roberts

Chris Nineham of Stop the War and Ben Jamal of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign have been convicted for "breaching police conditions". This is simultaneously both surprising and unsurprising. It is surprising in so far as it is indeed "entirely grotesque", as Nineham put it outside Westminster magistrates court on April 1.

Those conditions were utterly bizarre: first, the police agreed that the demo (the 21st organised by the Palestine coalition since 2023) could assemble at the BBC and march to Whitehall - but then they suddenly withdrew that permission. They then suggested reversing the route - only to withdraw that too. Finally, the march was cancelled and reduced to a static protest in Whitehall.

"From there, we proposed a simple, symbolic act", as Jamal explains: "A delegation of 30 people carrying flowers, walking towards the BBC. That delegation included coalition leaders, MPs, actors, an 87-year-old holocaust survivor - and our own Kevin Courtney carrying a shoe belonging to his infant grandson - a simple, powerful symbol of peace and innocence." For announcing this intended "symbolic act" from the stage, Jamal was also convicted of two counts of inciting other protestors to breach police conditions.

A video produced by the defence at the trial clearly shows the police waving the delegation through. But later, more than 70 were arrested. Alex Kenny (Counterfire) and Sophie Bolt (secretary of the Campaign Against Nuclear Armament) will now also face trial on the same charges.

The Met Police said it placed those conditions "after factoring in the cumulative impact" on Jewish Londoners, adding that the march was in the vicinity of synagogues". Utter nonsense, of course - for a start, there are over 100 synagogues in London. Define "vicinity".

No, this is very much part and parcel of the Labour government's turn to the right - and specifically the attempt to outlaw, criminalise and silence all those critical of Israel (the key ally of US-led imperialism in the Middle East, of course). In that respect, neither the charge nor the conviction are surprising - this is down to political pressure and has to be seen in context. There is also the ongoing drumming up of false accusations of anti-Semitism; the banning of Palestine Action and the attack on the jury trials. The latter is being sold to the public as an important tool to deal with the 'backlog' in the courts.

Part of the reason there even exists such a growing backlog is, of course, the fact that there have been hundreds and hundreds of pointless charges against pensioners for holding up placards declaring 'I support Palestine Action'. And juries also have that pesky habit of finding protestors 'not guilty' - not always, but often enough to be an embarrassing thorn in the government's side.¹ Nineham and Jamal are appealing. We hope they will be successful - a victory for them will be a victory for all of us.

No-platforming

This story has a secondary, even more worrying aspect to it - because in this instance it is not the state attacking the Palestine movement, but parts of the left itself. Alex Kenny, former member of the executive of the National Education Union, was invited to speak about the charges against Nineham, Jamal, Bolt and himself at the March 31 NEU conference. But



Ben Jamal and coppers

a motion was moved from the floor to stop him - by members of the pro-Zionist and pro-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

They were quite sneaky about it too. On conference floor they argued that "it is undemocratic and wrong for conference committee to add a speaker to the agenda - taking time away from motions and amendments submitted and prioritised by districts - without conference itself having a chance to vote on whether it wants this to happen."²

That is deeply disingenuous: No doubt, hearing and voting on the complaint took a lot longer than the five minutes Kenny was down to speak. It is also not the real reason they tried to no-platform him. They were more open on various WhatsApp groups and online: "... we should have a vote on whether to hear the speaker, and if we do, Educators' Fightback [the AWL's front in NEU] will be voting against. The proposed speaker is Alex Kenny, and trans members and allies in particular have good reason to object to someone with a history of pushing anti-trans views to be given precious time at our union's conference."³

The AWL has form when it comes to witch-hunting, of course: During the anti-Semitism smear campaign against Jeremy Corbyn and the left in the Labour Party, it played the role of 'useful idiot' for the right and the pro-Zionist lobby. It justified the witch-hunt by repeatedly pointing fingers at alleged 'anti-Semites' like Ken Livingstone, Chris Williamson and Jackie Walker, while always just stopping short of calling for their expulsions.

As far as we know, they did not present any 'evidence' for Kenny's alleged transphobia - we suspect him being a member of Counterfire is enough these days. Counterfire has certainly developed a position that is very different from that of its former host organism, the Socialist Workers Party, which has thrown itself uncritically behind the identity politics

of many trans activists. Counterfire's Lindsey German, who usually covers these issues, holds a feminism-adjacent, relatively soft 'gender critical' view, which boils down to 'defend some women's single-sex spaces, while also defending trans rights'.³

Trans issues

We do not think this is the correct emphasis, considering the expanding campaign against trans people - but to call this "transphobic" is stretching the term beyond what is rational or useful. It is certainly not the first time we have seen Counterfire being dismissed as such. We have to say, we are much more concerned about its popular frontist politics, which makes it pivot right on many occasions - like Preston councillor Michael Lavalette arguing against MPs on a skilled workers' wage, because it could "put off MPs who would want to defect to Your Party".⁴

Incredibly, 300 NEU delegates supported the attempt to no-platform Kelly and he was deinvited - despite the fact that he was obviously not down to speak about Counterfire's stance on the trans question. Some of those delegates have since come out to state that they only did so because they believed the 'official' time-saving reason. But many more will have felt very nervous about being seen to defend somebody who has been tarnished with what is becoming the worst of all political labels.

Strangely, in his article in the *Morning Star*, Kenny does not mention that it was the AWL that conspired to no-platform him. All he says is: "Unfortunately, reactionary forces prevented me from speaking using a procedural amendment via standing orders."⁵ We have no objection to calling the AWL "reactionary", but Kenny's article gives the wrong impression that this was an attack by the hard right (though it could be argued that this too is a fitting description for the AWL!). Perhaps he was worried about being seen as

'sectarian' if he criticises another group. We disagree - it is incredibly important to be open and honest about such things. Otherwise, nobody will have learned anything from this sorry episode.

But Kenny also posted his article on Facebook - and the comments underneath leave no doubt about the AWL's role. "Shame and disgrace on those reactionary sectarians who Always Were Liars [sic!]," comments Alex Gordon, new general secretary of the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain - which comes in a lot heavier on the transphobia scales. Lindsey German 'liked' this comment: "I thought it was the AWL, an organisation that regards itself as part of the revolutionary left. Although it is a small organisation, its trans fanaticism is shamefully shared by a significant part of the left, including the Green Party and the Grassroots Left faction of the Your Party."

The fight over the future of Your Party had somewhat lulled the 'terf wars', with groups like Counterfire, the SWP and Trans Liberation Group all supporting the Grassroots Left. But now the left has lost, cancel culture is likely to come back with a vengeance - and Kenny's no-platforming is the first big scalp. All the more important that all genuine Marxists renew their emphasis to call for the left to adopt a democratic culture that embraces free speech and open debate and rejects banning 'bad thoughts'.

Free speech

We have a way to go, as a very strange article on the Counterfire website shows. Under the title, 'When denial of free speech fails the test of solidarity', Rob Horsfield argues that not letting Kenny speak was "a serious mistake" - because it "weakens the much-needed unity we need to fight against ruling class attacks". Apparently, "the main problem is one of positions as a substitute for politics - the idea of good politics as having the perfect positions on everything, rather than a political approach focused on pushing ahead."⁶

The comrades want free speech - for themselves. They clearly do not see it as an important political principle - and certainly not one that should go hand-in-hand with open criticism and public debate. Quite the opposite. Neither Rob Horsfield nor Alex Kenny for that matter give the impression that they think the 'trans question' should even be discussed. The far right is on the rise, so we should all get together, bury our differences, forget about having "perfect positions on everything" and just "push ahead".

Push ahead to do what, exactly? Support anybody but Reform, as the SWP's new front, 'Stop Reform UK', argues? This is certainly not the way to build the kind of democratic and transparent socialist party that could actually present a viable alternative to Reform. A real party of the working class would have to be able to contain different views on all sorts of questions - including the 'trans issue'. This is, after all, hotly contested throughout society. Of course there would be members of such a party with crass ideas on all sorts of issues. The best way to defeat wrong ideas is to take them on openly, debate them in front of the working class, so that everybody can learn from it. Brushing important differences under the carpet is the worst possible way to deal with them.

But for most of our comrades, calls for 'free speech' go very much hand in hand with calls for 'no-platforming' (often meaning the actual banning of certain groups). Usually, this is reserved for 'fascists', of course. We have argued plenty that this is entirely the wrong way to deal with political ideas - it is likely to achieve the opposite effect (if it achieves anything): it makes them into martyrs. Especially if the state and the mainstream press sing from the same hymn sheet, as they do when it comes to rightwing forces like National Action, The Base and System Resistance Network. The more they are vilified, the more attractive they become to those who feel entirely alienated by the establishment.

This fetishisation of no-platform tactics against fascists is 'patient zero' for cancel culture - the first context in which it became acceptable for members of the left to excuse themselves from their duty to engage in the battle of ideas with opponents and enemies. Physical defence is another matter entirely. To defend our communities, our marches, our meetings, our picket lines it is quite right to have a fighting agreement with all manner of different forces, not least with those who would otherwise be victims of fascist violence. Apart from defence it implies no wider political unity.

But, when it comes to the battle of ideas, we favour unrestricted freedom ... crucially the freedom to criticise ●

Notes

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ANNIVERSARY

A study in bureaucratic inertia

Marking a hundred years since the 1926 General Strike, **Jack Conrad** shows that, while the Tory government urgently, assiduously, ruthlessly prepared, the TUC was content to pass left-sounding resolutions and then urge strikers to tend to their gardens

Retreating before a TUC-threatened general strike in solidarity with the miners, Red Friday - July 31 1925 - saw the panicked Tories agree nine-month subsidy for the coal industry. Stanley Baldwin's cash-strapped government simultaneously established a commission headed by the Liberal grandee, Sir Herbert Samuel. Everyone knew it was a delaying tactic. Confrontation was inevitable - in the first place between the coal owners and the coal miners.

Coal was by far the most important industry of the day, employing between 1.1 and 1.2 million workers. Coal-powered furnaces made gas, generated electricity, drove steam engines, kept homes, offices and schools warm during the long winter months, etc, etc. Coal was the prime energy source. Arthur Horner and Allen Hutt wrote of 'Coal capitalism'.¹ Needless to say, work underground was notoriously hard, dangerous and unhealthy. Occupational diseases such as pneumoconiosis were common occurrences, as were injuries and death. "Close the coalhouse door, lad. There's blood inside," runs the chilling opening line of Alex Glasgow's song.²

Profitability

The coal industry had long suffered from a crisis of profitability: 1,400 private companies and 2,500 pits, 613 of them producing 95% of the output.³ Most mines were primitive and hobbled by a woeful lack of capital investment. The industry was therefore grossly inefficient. Stiff competition from Germany and the US ate into established markets. There was additionally the growing use of oil (eg, the Royal Navy switched away from coal in 1910). One bright idea, already suggested by the Sankey commission in 1919, was to nationalise and close the least productive pits ... that actually happened in 1947 (though with Clement Attlee's Labour government paying generous compensation to the owners).

Meanwhile, the Mining Association of Great Britain - described by Tory cabinet minister Neville Chamberlain as the "stupidest and most narrow-minded employers I know" - was intent on breaking the national agreement, whereby all miners were paid at the same rate, and forcing down wages and extending hours on a colliery-to-colliery basis - that through imposing a national lock-out if necessary.⁴ Equally, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was intent on preserving pay, conditions and a national agreement which limited competition amongst its members (the *sine qua non* of trade unionism).

Understandably then, the CPGB warned that Red Friday was in no way anything but a temporary victory. The *Workers' Weekly* editorial explained why:

What has been achieved is the imposition on the capitalist class of an unstable truce, which cannot lead to industrial peace, but only to renewed class conflict. Behind this truce and in the industrial peace talk which will accompany it, the capitalist class will prepare for a crushing attack upon the workers. If the workers are doped by the peace talk and do not make effective counter-preparations, then they are doomed to shattering

defeat... The government, acting on behalf of the capitalist class, is certain to prepare for a new struggle with the working class under more favourable conditions than this time.⁵

Obviously what was at stake was far more than coal owners versus coal miners. The Tory government was determined that Britain, in the words of Winston Churchill - chancellor of the exchequer - had to be governed by parliament rather than "some other organisation not responsible by our elective processes".⁶ This, remember, from a Tory whose party gained its 200-seat "oppressively swollen majority" in the House of Commons through the forged 'Zinoviev letter' and by stampeding the middle classes into the camp of reaction.

The October 1924 general election was rigged. Ramsay MacDonald's minority Labour government was overthrown not by a mere vote of the combined 'bourgeois bloc' of Tories and Liberals in parliament: there was an anti-democratic conspiracy at the heart of the state that involved MI6/MI5, Conservative Party HQ, the *Daily Mail* and Buckingham Palace. Although Labour gained a million votes, the Liberal Party collapsed. William Gladstone's great party had been reduced to a pathetic 40 seats. In class terms, Britain was rapidly polarising. The middle ground virtually disappeared in parliamentary terms and the Tories were turning to the methods of civil war. The mailed fist was clearly visible. While Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald called for moderation and negotiations, Baldwin's government pressed ahead with energetic preparations for the impending struggle. Within five days of Red Friday it had - underway a complete overhaul of its machinery of repression. Once this was completed, the state machine would be ready to take on the organised labour movement.

The police, army and navy were given detailed contingency orders. Stockpiles of coal were readied. The country was divided into 10 areas, each under a minister as a commissioner. Civil service staff were appointed for each division. They were to handle transport, food, postal services and coal. Within each area local structures were created, with a chair selected by the government to convene and preside over a volunteer service committee. All officials were given plenary powers conferred on the government by the Emergency Powers Act. They could requisition, fix prices and order arrests. To put the whole thing in motion, all that was needed was a telegram from Whitehall containing the single word - 'Action'.

Baldwin's government also established the "strictly neutral" Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies. An overtly strikebreaking organisation. OMS pretended to support the "legitimate efforts of trade unions", only opposing "unconstitutional" activity.⁷ It recruited some 100,000 mainly middle class volunteers, who were secretly trained as drivers, telegraph operators and for "protecting the public services".

The ruling class had yet another line of defence - the British Fascists. In the words of home secretary Joynson-Hicks - recorded in cabinet minutes - this well-disciplined



Winston Churchill and Neville Chamberlain: class warriors

counterrevolutionary organisation was "at the disposal of the government".⁸ In fact the British Fascists split over the "strictly neutral" OMS: one wing, the Loyalists, under the leadership of Brigadier-General RBD Blakeney and Rear-Admiral AE Armstrong, promptly joined; the other (majority) wing lent the government support through the somewhat mysteriously named Q Division.

In fact, the British Fascists had made the fight against Bolshevism and "a general strike designed to paralyse the country" the core of their programme. To second the "efforts of the OMS" they drilled, attacked communist meetings - they even kidnapped the CPGB's Harry Pollitt (his assailants were caught, tried and acquitted⁹).

Left mask

By contrast, TUC and Labour Party preparations were noticeable by their absence. The key leaders of the labour movement put their faith in the constitution. Despite a few imperfections, such as the House of Lords and other so-called feudal relics, Britain was on the road to the socialist commonwealth. The monarchy could be left to play a purely ceremonial role. Meanwhile, though

the TUC was willing to threaten the government with a general strike in a *trades dispute*, it was not willing to step beyond the bounds of legality.

"Shout loud, but no wielding the big stick" accurately summed up the approach.¹⁰ At the Scarborough TUC, held in September 1925, extraordinarily militant-sounding resolutions were passed. Even CPGB initiatives won resounding majorities. Believing that the government would back down, as it had in 1920 over Russia and on Red Friday, and wanting to keep control over the left-moving rank and file, trade union general secretaries gave their bloc votes, 2,456,000 to 1,218,000, for a declaration, seconded by Pollitt, that "The union movement must organise to prepare the trade unions in conjunction with the Labour Party and the workers to struggle for the overthrow of capitalism."¹¹

Abandoned, the same officials went on to pledge support for the right of self-determination for the colonies. Arguing against the motion, JH Thomas - railworkers leader and former colonial secretary in MacDonald's government - desperately implored congress not to make itself appear "ridiculous". He was defeated by 3,082,000 to 79,000

votes - a margin that again reflected the almost universal desire of the right to pose left.

Needless to say, bureaucratic leftism was a mask of convenience. The trade union leaders showed their true face when it came to concrete questions. Asked to reaffiliate trades councils, they ruled the motion out of order. Asked to extend the powers of the TUC, they referred it back. Asked to organise workers' defence corps, they fearfully rejected the call. And, when it came to elections to the general council, right reformists - including, after an absence of two years, the very self-same JH Thomas - found themselves returned. The same bloc votes were used at the Liverpool conference of the Labour Party, which not only endorsed the miserable record of the short-lived MacDonald government, but - albeit with a thin majority - barred communists from individual Labour membership.

Our party

Immediately after Red Friday the CPGB launched a concerted campaign to alert the working class about the oncoming battle. The *Workers' Weekly* carried a front-page box in every issue, showing how long remained before "the termination

of the mining agreement and the opening of the greatest struggle in the history of the British working class ... we must prepare for the struggle.”¹²

Up and down the country the CPGB ceaselessly called for the class to be put on a war footing and for agitation in the army and the navy. While urging “the organisation of workers’ defence corps”, it attacked the OMS as “the most complete scheme of organised blacklegging and strikebreaking yet devised” and “the most advanced form of fascism yet reached in this country.”¹³

The government was so concerned about the communist danger that police raids were ordered on the party’s King Street HQ and the offices of its London District, the Young Communist League and the National Minority Movement. Large quantities of papers were seized, as well as busts of Lenin and Zinoviev and a mysterious metal sphere (the King Street lavatory ball cock).

Twelve prominent comrades were arrested and charged on three counts: “(1) Conspiring on certain dates to publish and utter seditious libels and words; (2) conspiring to incite persons to commit breaches of the Incitement to Mutiny Act, 1707 [actually 1797 - JC]; (3) conspiracy to endeavour to seduce from their duty persons serving His Majesty’s Forces to whom might come certain publications, pamphlets and books, and to incite them to mutiny.”¹⁴ The trial of the 12 communist leaders became a trial of communism. The prosecution was out to prove the illegality of the CPGB. Communism is financed from Russia, it seeks to establish “forms of government by force”, creates antagonisms between different classes and “involves the seducing from their allegiances of the armed forces of the crown”.

Despite widespread condemnation of the trial and clever defence arguments, the jury only took 20 minutes to return guilty verdicts. In his summing-up, judge Rigby Swift stated that it was no “crime to be a communist” or “hold communist opinions”, but “it was a crime to belong to *this* Communist Party”. Harry Pollitt, William Gallacher, Wal Hannington, William Rust and Albert Inkpin got one year. The remaining comrades - Ernie Cant, Tom Bell, Tom Wintringham, Arthur MacManus, JT Murphy and Robin Page Arnot - were sentenced to six months. Tom Bell does not overstate his case when he says: “No better testimony could be given to the influence of the Communist Party in this period.”¹⁵

However, it ought to be said that the CPGB’s leadership displayed a completely casual, irresponsible, attitude towards itself. Everyone with sense enough could see that a strategic confrontation was in the offing. As we have shown, the CPGB repeatedly said exactly that, and urged corresponding preparations. Why then did it not take measures to ensure the freedom of its most important comrades in the nine months leading up to the general strike?

Nonetheless, the imprisonment of the CPGB 12 did nothing to damage the party’s standing nor halt the growing response to its message. On the contrary. Membership, although still pitifully small, had more than doubled since 1922 to 5,000. A measure of the CPGB’s immediate constituency, however, was the National Minority Movement, discussed in the previous article.¹⁶ It had just under a million affiliated members at its 1926 peak.

The NMM was a united front, which meant unity in action with the ‘official’ lefts - but simultaneously criticism of them too. The idea being to split the mass of militant workers away from trade union (mis)leaders who were only prepared to talk left.

This could, however, be given

a pedagogic spin. In *Communist Review*, JR Campbell insisted that, when it came to the ‘official’ left, it is the “duty of the party and the Minority Movement to criticise its weakness relentlessly and endeavour to change the muddled and incomplete leftwing views of the more progressive leaders into a real revolutionary viewpoint”.¹⁷ Frankly, that could only really be done by winning ‘official’ lefts to join, or rejoin, the CPGB and operate in a truly disciplined fashion under the accepted norms of democratic centralism. I am thinking of the likes of Alf Purcell (FTAT), George Hicks (Bricklayers), AJ Cook (MFGB) and Alonzo Swales (AEU). Of course, that never happened.

Industrial unions

It should be stressed that the task set for the NMM was “not to organise independent revolutionary trade unions or to split revolutionary elements away from existing organisations affiliated to the TUC”, but to convert the “revolutionary minority within each industry into a revolutionary majority”. There was a definite mass feeling in Britain for radical change and very significant numbers thought of themselves as revolutionary socialists. For the moment though, they looked to leftwing Labour MPs and trade union officials as their legitimate leaders. In other words, there had to be an ideological struggle waged to defeat left reformists and centrists of every kind. Not by going round them, bypassing them: no, they had to be engaged with and gone through.

By marshalling the militant minority among the rank and file, the CPGB sought to overcome the petty sectionalist prejudices of trade unionism and thereby increase the fighting capacity of the class as a whole. Although having affiliations from official trade union bodies, the NMM was structured along industrial lines - there were, for example, miners’, metal workers’ and transport minority movements. Each in its own way was seen as a precursor to a powerful, single union in each industry. And, as the NMM grew, so would the CPGB. Or at least that was the calculation.

The March 20 1926 national conference of the NMM had a record 883 delegates, representing, as already noted, nearly one million organised workers (almost a fifth the number affiliated to the TUC). The conference called for every trades council to be reconstituted as a council of action “by mobilising all the forces of the working class movement in its locality”. It also demanded the TUC general council convene a National Council of Action.

Yet one has to admit that the *main* solution proffered by the CPGB was problematic. It advocated binding powers, even “all power”, for the TUC (yes, it sounded very Russian, but neither the affiliated trade unions nor the TUC were the equivalent of soviets, which were exceedingly democratic and capable of organising the masses in their entirety).¹⁸ Anyhow, moved by rank-and-file miners’ leader Arthur Homer, a resolution was adopted which stated, along these lines, that it was “imperative that all the forces of the working class movement should be mobilised under one central leadership to repel the attack and to secure the demands of every section of the workers”.¹⁹ Of course, that “one central leadership” was the TUC.

This hardly readied the working class for betrayal by the TUC - as inevitable as the betrayal of Andrea Egan, Sharon Graham, Daniel Kebede, Fran Heathcote, Matt Wrack, Eddie Dempsey and other ‘official’ lefts, if presented with similar conditions nowadays (let alone Paul Nowak, Garry Smith, Joanne Carns, etc).

Not surprisingly the Samuel commission agreed with the coal owners that in order to make the industry profitable there would have to be heavy wage cuts and an end to national agreements. That dashed TUC hopes, but confirmed CPGB expectations. Among ordinary workers there was seething anger - a gut recognition that, if the miners lost, the whole class would lose too. As a consequence there was a determination to stand together. Pushed on by mass pressure for action and effectively committed to unleash it on May 1 1926 - unless the government backed down on the miners - the TUC at last summoned union executives to a meeting in order to explain and affirm its plans. This was on April 29! The TUC had discussed its plans for the *first time* only 48 hours before!

On the surface the trade union bureaucracy was overwhelmingly for the general strike. A roll call of the union executives was taken. In bloc vote terms there were 3,653,527 for the strike, a mere 49,911 against (unions with a membership of 319,000 and over had to consult their governing bodies). Bevin announced that trades designated in the ‘first line’ would begin their strike at 11.59pm on May 3 1926.

Raising himself to what he doubtless imagined were the heights of stentorian rhetoric (which, as any psychologist could tell, unconsciously revealed his real financial fears and mindset), Bevin described the bureaucracy in heroic terms: “We look upon your ‘yes’ as meaning that you have placed your all upon the altar for this great movement and, having placed it there, even if every penny goes, if every asset goes, history will ultimately write up that it was a magnificent generation that was prepared to do it rather than see the miners driven down like slaves.”²⁰ Jumping to their feet, the leaders of Britain’s unions hurraed and sang the ‘Red flag’ before joining the biggest May Day demonstration London had seen for years.

No doubt

However, despite the song (with its barbed reference to flinching cowards) and the obvious willingness to fight below, the TUC still hoped and prayed that “something will turn up” - ie, a negotiated settlement. On May 2 1926, instead of readying its army, TUC leaders were closeted with Baldwin, attempting to come to an accommodation based on *acceptance* of the Samuel commission’s recommendations.

The TUC’s determination to avert the general strike left Baldwin in no doubt. Certain that the general council did not believe in the strike, certain it would not take it through to a struggle for power, he reckoned he was on a sure-fire winner.

In fact, Baldwin took an “extremely simple but very stubborn line” throughout the general strike. Consisting of ‘good Englishmen’, the TUC had, he knew, no intention of risking a bloody civil war. But it was trying to intimidate the government with the threat of “political revolution - the destruction of the constitution”. Baldwin wanted to split the moderates from the militants. However, he was now in a position to demand that “the perpetrator must surrender before [any further] conversations were possible”. Churchill too was of the opinion that “We were at war” ... there was no room for compromise.²¹

Even in the midst of talks the coal owners fired the opening salvo. Their lockout began. OMS recruiting posters were put up throughout the country. In Buckingham Palace the king signed a state of emergency proclamation. Orders in council were issued in the form of emergency regulations. Local authorities were told to prepare themselves. So, against its wishes

and compromising instincts, the TUC general council found itself the general staff of a general strike. It was to prove incompetent, suffocating and, yes, treacherous.

The TUC’s first move was to claim the right to negotiate for the one million miners. Little did the MFGB imagine that meant selling them out. The TUC was also concerned that the strike would take place in carefully controlled, discrete stages. Workers would not be brought out *en masse*. They would be ordered to strike one wave after another - with the more moderate transport and general unions going first - and individual unions having responsibility for their members and ensuring the continued functioning of health, food and sanitary services.

By marching the workers into battle in two lines, a tight bureaucratic control was to be maintained. By organising in a fragmented way, it was calculated that self-activity could be limited or prevented altogether. An approach which owed more to fear of the rank and file than any determination to beat the enemy.

The general strike would thereby be a series of independent sectional strikes and for some time be only partial. And, while it was absolutely right to maintain essential supplies and services to the population at large, the TUC was quite willing to see existing management continue to manage. There was no call, or even thought, of imposing strict workers’ control over these vital areas of everyday life ... and making a great display of it (that would, if it had been done, transformed middle-ground, wavering, public opinion and could well have swung many millions more in favour of the strikers²²).

Either way, the strike began because of the government, not the TUC. The government was determined on confrontation and another, final, defeat of the working class. The TUC was supine and unsure. Courts and establishment figures lined up to denounce the strike as illegal. The TUC said all it wanted was to safeguard the miners. John Reith gave unlimited air time for Baldwin, but decided that neither MacDonald nor the archbishop of Canterbury nor even Lloyd George would be allowed to broadcast. So much for the much vaunted neutrality of the BBC. It was and remains an instrument of government.

The contrast between the two opposing camps could not be more stark. In its *British Worker*, the TUC called for football matches with the police and insisted that the whole thing was nothing but a non-political trades dispute. In parliament and in Churchill’s unbridled *British Gazette* the government claimed to be defending “freedom and the constitution” and rained down accusations that the TUC was opening the way for revolution. The TUC pleaded its innocence. The government deployed the army and navy and used OMS volunteers - shambolic on the rails, docks and trains, effective as brutal special constables. The TUC turned down Soviet workers’ aid and urged strikers to quietly sit out the strike at home, tending their gardens.²³

Broadly speaking, TUC instructions were faithfully obeyed by trade unionists. Even though the weakest sections were in the first line, there were only a tiny number of scabs. From every locality, from every union, TUC headquarters at Ecclestone Square received countless daily reports - all giving details of a strike that was solid beyond even the most optimistic expectations. Moreover, government plans began to show signs of fraying. Nevertheless for the moment the mass of workers remained under effective TUC control.

Despite provocation, the overwhelming majority of strikers bent over backwards to avoid the violence the TUC was so concerned to prevent. With only the minimum of trouble, the authorities were allowed to move food, unload goods at the docks and run a skeleton train, bus and tram service. Inevitably though, whatever the TUC’s intentions, a general strike remains a general strike ●

Notes

1. A Homer and A Hutt *Communism and coal* London 1928.
2. ‘Close the coalhouse door’ (1968).
3. J Schner *Nine days in May: the General Strike of 1926* Oxford 2026, p9.
4. Quoted in Q Outram ‘The stupidest men in England? The industrial relations strategy of the coal owners between the lockouts, 1923-1924’ *HSIR* September 1997, p66.
5. *Workers’ Weekly* August 7 1925.
6. Quoted in R Page Arnot *The miners: 1910-1930*, London 1953, p383.
7. Initial OMS communique quoted in R Page Arnot *The general strike* London 1926, pp50-52.
8. Quoted in J Foster ‘Imperialism and the labour aristocracy’ in J Skelley (ed) *The general strike: 1926* London 1976, p43.
9. They claimed that they only wanted to take Pollitt “away for a weekend in north Wales” (N Copsey *Anti-fascism in Britain* London 2017, p4).
10. We are “not going to begin wielding the big stick”, Ernest Bevin told Baldwin. “We did not start it.” Quoted in A Hutt *The post-war history of the British working class* London 1937, p128.
11. Quoted in A Hutt *The post-war history of the British working class* London 1937, p117.
12. *Workers’ Weekly* August 28 1925.
13. *Workers’ Weekly* October 2 1925.
14. Quoted by home secretary Jaynson-Hicks - hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1925-12-01/debates/3f477014-58a9-44e6-874b-abfab77244f4/CommunistProsecution.
15. T Bell *British Communist Party* London 1937, p109.
16. J Conrad ‘Fridays black and red’ *Weekly Worker* April 2 2026 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1579/fridays-black-and-red). See note 20.
17. Quoted in A Hutt *The post-war history of the British working class* London 1937, p125.
18. The party’s attitude towards the TUC general council was the subject of debate in 1922. Against the argument that the TUC could be transformed, Rajani Palme Dutt wrote: “The cry for the general council as the solution for the labour movement is as foolish as the cry for the League of Nations in the international field ... And the parallel is so exact because the error at bottom is essentially the same: the belief that a combination of the existing forces will achieve a solution, when it is the existing forces that are at fault ... Only the political struggle of the working class as a class can unite the workers; the only uniting force of the working class movement can be a political party of the working class. The trade unions are by their very nature separatist: only a political party can be the combining force ... Unless that party develops, the working class movement will continue to drift in sectionalism and confusion. Only when a political party of the working class can unite the workers around the common demands of the political struggle and so rally around those demands the manifold organisations of the working class, only then and by those means will the unity of the working class be achieved” (*Labour Monthly* October 1922). Palme Dutt was defeated. On the other hand, it is undoubtedly true that the Communist Party can not only win the leadership of trade union: it *must* do if there is going to be working class rule. Anyway we shall discuss the ‘All power to the TUC’ slogan in a later article in this series.
19. Quoted in A Hutt *The post-war history of the British working class* London 1937, p125.
20. *TUC The mining crisis and the national strike* London 1926, p34.
21. P Addison *Churchill on the home front* London 1993, p262.
22. In May 1926 composer Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote: “On the whole I am with the miners.” On the other hand, he also wrote: “I doubt the side of revolution has any better scheme for the better government of the country.” His conclusion? “I cannot deny the duty of the govt to see to it that people do not starve.” Hence, “If one accepts the benefits, one [must] support the organisation which provides them.” Logically at least - we cannot rerun history - if the TUC and the strikers had taken control over the supply of the basics of life then they would have had a good chance of winning over waverers such as RVW. See - vaughanwilliamsfoundation.org/letter/memorandum-on-the-general-strike-by-ralph-vaughan-williams.
23. After receiving news of the general strike, the All-Union Central Committee of the Soviet trade unions called upon its members to donate one-quarter of a day’s pay in support of the workers in Britain. On May 5 it remitted 250,000 roubles to the TUC and on May 7 it sent two million roubles. On May 9 the TUC informed the AUCCTU that it refused to accept the money or any other support from Soviet workers.

ITALY

An unexpected result

Following its referendum defeat, the far-right government is mired in corruption and clearly in trouble. However, writes **Toby Abse**, the 'centre-left' is a complete shambles and offers nothing substantially different

As readers will know, prime minister Giorgia Meloni suffered a very decisive defeat in the constitutional referendum of March 22-23 on judicial reform.

Although the opinion polls had shown that the initially huge gap between the 'yes' and 'no' voters had narrowed over the last month of the referendum campaign, no opinion pollster had predicted a clear victory for the 'no' camp. The pollsters had merely suggested that the government's initial overwhelming lead had evaporated, and the contest had become too close to call.

Meloni had imagined that the high turnout would work in her favour, that on this occasion opposition supporters were eager for a fight, but that her own supporters needed to be mobilised, as the apparently technical question on the ballot paper about various alterations to specific clauses in the Italian constitution of 1948 would not generate vast interest amongst her followers, even if they managed to follow the brief explanations offered by TV news programmes or the more serious newspapers.

Therefore she abandoned her original strategy of leaving the campaigning to others and made an increasing number of personal interventions on TV and social media - interventions which took on an ever more demagogic form, making constant references to alleged miscarriages of justice, and suggesting that reforming the structure of the judiciary would somehow guarantee that no mistakes would be made in individual cases ever again. One of her last interventions, at a public rally, even culminated in a claim that a 'no' victory would allow the magistrates to release "illegal immigrants, rapists and paedophiles" - in short, reverting to her default position of appealing to a combination of racism and widespread fear of crime.

In the event, voters did turn out in much greater numbers than most people had predicted - the percentage of habitual abstainers in recent general, European, municipal and regional elections had created an expectation of widespread apathy and lack of interest in both individual parties and wider political issues. However, the 58.9% turnout did not work in Meloni's favour. 53.7% voted 'no', against the 46.3% who voted 'yes' - a two-million majority for her opponents over her supporters. This defeat cannot be minimised - the 'yes' vote only gained a majority in three regions out of 20, in contrast to the 'patchwork quilt' effect that has occurred in most general elections.¹ While voters supporting Meloni's far-right Fratelli d'Italia ('Brothers of Italy') showed the greatest loyalty amongst the rightwing forces, with 88.8% voting 'yes', there is no way that the outcome can be seen as reinforcing the FdI.

Turnout

The highest turnouts were in the 'red regions' of Emilia Romagna (66.67%) and Tuscany (66.26%), where the Communist Party had originally been dominant. These regions predictably gave the 'no' side votes that exceeded the national average - 57.2% in Emilia-Romagna and 58.1% in Tuscany. But this



Giorgia Meloni: down but not out

opposition triumph in the 'red regions' was not counter-balanced by votes in the southern regions, which all had lower turnouts, and those people who bothered to go to the polling stations did not rally to Meloni.

Some commentators see the higher abstention rate as an indication of voters' disillusionment with the government. Meloni's endorsement of the desire to introduce 'differential autonomy' - a form of devolution that would favour the northern regions at the expense of the south - has not helped her.² Whilst the organised crime groups (the Sicilian Mafia, the Neapolitan Camorra and the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta) generally mobilise their support base in favour of rightwing parties in local, regional and general elections, they seem to have shown no such enthusiasm for involving themselves in a referendum against the magistrates.

Campania may have only had a 50.8% turnout, but it produced a 65.2% 'no' vote (higher than that of the 'red regions'), while Naples, Campania's regional capital, had a colossal 75.5% 'no' vote, albeit on a 49.55% turnout. Whilst the other two regions usually associated with organised crime - Calabria and Sicily - had even lower turnouts, they also had high 'no' votes - 57.3% in Calabria and 61% in Sicily. Clearly a section of civil society (which did not necessarily have any links with the organised left or trade unions) wanted to show 'solidarity' with the magistrates - out of hostility to the Camorra, Mafia and 'Ndrangheta.

The clear 'yes' majority amongst the older working population was counter-balanced by a 55% 'no' vote amongst those over 55 - pensioners were obviously aware that Meloni's government, far from reversing the pension 'reform' associated with Elsa Fornero and Mario Monti, had made their financial situation even worse, and her run-down of the SSN (Italy's national health service) had had a particular effect on this group.

The strong 'no' vote amongst the young shows that mobilisations over issues such as Gaza and the climate emergency have generated a greater degree of general political commitment, even if this is not,

understandably, accompanied by any great enthusiasm for the mainstream political parties. Interestingly, Meloni's security decrees of 2025 and 2026, which created new criminal offences and harsher penalties for existing ones, and were particularly aimed at protestors over Palestine and the environment, had not turned youth against the magistrates as such, even though young people had frequently been the main victims of judicial action against those involved in picketing, road blocks and 'eco-vandalism'. Some of these had been more eager to participate in politics earlier in their lives, but had lost interest, as the centre-left Partito Democratico (Democratic Party) had drifted further to the right under prime minister Matteo Renzi's virulently anti-trade union premiership (2014-16).

Spring-cleaning

The referendum result clearly rattled Meloni, who has rather desperately sought to purge her government of those whose conduct made her claims to be improving Italy's justice system look absurd. The first casualties of Meloni's 'spring-cleaning'³ were, predictably, figures inside the ministry of justice. FdI member Andrea Delmastro, the under-secretary of the justice ministry, had been completely discredited in the final days of the referendum campaign, as newspaper stories drew attention to his involvement in the ownership of a restaurant run by a company whose leading figure was the daughter of Mauro Carocchia, a man already convicted of money laundering on behalf of the notorious Senese clan, Camorristi, which is involved in large-scale drug trafficking.

Delmastro had tried to claim that he was completely unaware of who Miriam Carocchia's father was when the company was set up, and that he got rid of his shares as soon as he found out. The absurdity of all this became obvious with the publication of photographs of Delmastro in the restaurant alongside the man in question. Moreover, there was also photographic evidence of a large gathering of leading civil servants in charge of prison wardens - a section of the justice ministry for

which Delmastro had particular responsibility - at the same restaurant, while justice ministry chief of staff Giusi Bartolazzi was photographed there on another occasion.

Bartolazzi had already made herself vulnerable by ranting in the closing days of the referendum campaign about the magistrates being "an execution squad" and about the need to get them out of the way. It is, of course, no coincidence that Bartolazzi, an ex-magistrate herself, was already under investigation for allegedly lying about her role in the 'Almasri affair' - when the Italian government not only freed Osama Almasri (a Libyan wanted by the International Criminal Court for torturing migrant prisoners and crimes against children), but put him on an Italian government plane, so that he could return to Libya in triumph.⁴ Meloni forced Bartolazzi to resign.

The other main victim of Meloni's attempt to clean up her government was the FdI's Daniela Santanchè, who until the referendum had managed to remain tourism minister, despite a string of judicial investigations into her business affairs over allegations of fraud. Unlike Delmastro and Bartolazzi, who resigned quite promptly, Santanchè - generally known as the 'Pythoness' - took nearly 24 hours to respond to Meloni's public request that she should resign, and drafted a particularly poisonous resignation letter with the help of her friend, Ignazio Benito La Russa - the FdI co-founder and president of the Senate.

In the wake of the referendum defeat, there has also been a purge of leading parliamentarians of the centre-right Forza Italia by an irate Marina Berlusconi (daughter of former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi), who seems to blame Forza Italia foreign minister Antonio Tajani and his close associates for the referendum defeat.

Amusing as the internal squabbles involving both FdI and Forza Italia members may be, the political parties associated with the 'no' victory have not behaved with much dignity either. No sooner had the results started to come in than Giuseppe Conte, the leader

of the green populist M5S (Five Star Movement) and former prime minister, felt it was necessary to raise the question of a primary contest to find out who should lead the 'centre left' at the next election.

The purpose of this is to undermine Elly Schlein, who, as leader of the Democratic Party for the last three years, is the natural prime ministerial candidate for her side. Whilst Conte, having ruthlessly toppled M5S co-founder Beppe Grillo and tightened up the internal organisation of M5S, is in no danger of being challenged within his organisation, Schlein has no such security. The PD's right wing - never reconciled to her victory in the February 2023 PD primary - are quite likely either to put up a rival candidate against Schlein themselves, or to back any 'independent' centrist willing to stand against her in a coalition primary.

PD right

As things stand, in any first-past-the-post primary involving three or four candidates, Conte would win, although in a hypothetical two-round contest Schlein might perhaps have more of a chance. The point here is that the PD right is more concerned with undermining Schlein than achieving a general election victory for either the PD or the 'centre-left' coalition as a whole. While we may regard Schlein as a relatively mild social democrat, for the PD right she represents the 'radical left'.⁵

As for the right, until her referendum defeat Meloni believed that her government would be the longest-lasting one in the history of the Italian Republic⁶ and that she would have no difficulty in being re-elected at the next general election, scheduled for 2027 (and stood a good chance of eventually becoming president of the republic). The referendum outcome and the growing unpopularity in Italy of her friend, Donald Trump, as well as the disastrous effect his current war against Iran is having on Italy's weak economy, place all this in doubt ●

Notes

1. The September 2022 general election, which brought Meloni into office, was an exception to this general rule, because the rightwing bloc - FdI, Lega and Forza Italia - were united, whilst their opponents were split three ways.
2. While the constitutional court ruled that the original proposal for 'differential autonomy' was unconstitutional, the Lega-run regions in the north have resorted to various subterfuges in a bid to give themselves greater power and a greater share of the national revenue.
3. Which the Italians call 'pulizia di Pasqua' (Easter cleaning).
4. Needless to say, justice minister Nordio, interior minister Piantedosi and Meloni's undersecretary have been shielded from any criminal investigation, although it is clear that Bartolazzi was not acting on her own initiative.
5. She opposed the PD right's endorsement of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism and, although she has tactfully avoided using the word 'genocide', she is an outspoken opponent of Netanyahu and the current Israeli government. Schlein is the daughter of an American Jew who spent a few years in Israel in his youth, but became disillusioned with Zionism and settled in Switzerland to pursue an academic career. It may also be noted that Schlein herself has experienced real anti-Semitism, including one particularly tasteless cartoon in *Il Fatto Quotidiano* soon after her election as leader. Doubtless there is worse material floating around the internet, and I suspect this is a factor in her relatively low scores in opinion polls about the relative merits of Italian Party leaders.
6. Only Berlusconi has the longest continuous record as prime minister, and before the referendum she looked set to surpass him in September 2026.

CANADA

Ambitions and institutional limits

Equipped with a long political pedigree and what counts nowadays as a radical social democratic platform, Avi Lewis has just been elected NDP leader. **Siamak Mehr** reports

Canada's New Democratic Party, the main social democratic party, has elected a new leader: Avi Lewis. He is among the most leftwing figures the party has seen in decades. The question now is whether this latest wave of left revivalism will follow the trajectory seen in Europe and the United States - or take a different path.

By 'revivalism', we are referring to the re-emergence of leftwing leaderships within historically moderate social democratic parties: figures such as Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and Bernie Sanders in the United States. These movements generated significant enthusiasm, particularly among younger activists, but ultimately failed to transform their parties or secure lasting political power. Whether Avi Lewis represents a repetition of this pattern - or a break from it - remains an open question.

He won the leadership with 56% of the vote in the March 29 election in Winnipeg. He ran a Bernie Sanders- or Zohran Mamdani-style left-populist campaign. Lewis is no stranger to the NDP or to Canadian politics more broadly: his father, Stephen Lewis, is a former Ontario NDP leader, and his grandfather, David Lewis, led the federal party.

Before entering formal politics, Lewis worked as a journalist and television host, interviewing a wide range of political figures. He was also a key figure behind the 'Leap manifesto', an initiative that sought to unite environmental, indigenous, labour and faith leaders - alongside artists and writers - around a transformative response to the climate crisis. He is also married to the author, Naomi Klein.

Low level

Lewis now emerges as the most leftwing figure in the NDP since Jack Layton, at a time when the party is experiencing its lowest level of support in decades. In the 2025 federal election, the NDP won just seven seats - its worst result in 40 years. One MP has since defected to the governing



Avi Lewis: Canada's Corbyn?

Liberal Party, reducing the caucus to six. The party is also burdened with approximately C\$13 million in debt.

Key elements of Lewis's platform include expanding public ownership to counter corporate influence and introducing a "public option" for essential services. This includes proposals for publicly owned grocery stores to address the cost-of-living crisis, as well as public telecommunications services in a country with some of the highest telecom prices in the G7.

He also advocates a rapid transition away from fossil fuels, including an end to oil and gas expansion, while promising that no workers will be left behind. His plan includes the creation of one million well-paid, unionised jobs and the construction of a modernised, 21st century

electrical grid. However, the concrete mechanisms for implementing these proposals remain unclear and are not fully detailed on the NDP's website.

This raises a broader issue: the tension between the scale of Lewis's ambitions and the institutional limits of a social democratic party operating within a capitalist framework. Proposals such as large-scale public ownership and major industrial transformation would likely encounter resistance not only from political opponents, but also from entrenched economic interests. Without a clear strategy for confronting that resistance, such policies risk remaining at the level of aspiration.

His platform also calls for large-scale, non-market public housing development, alongside strict rent controls to protect tenants. This comes at a time when major Canadian cities have experienced some of the sharpest increases in housing and rental costs over the past decade - so severe that the federal government has declared a national housing crisis.

In addition, Lewis aims to strengthen the labour movement by promoting card-check unionisation at the national level. He also seeks to rebuild the NDP's support in rural, remote and working-class communities through grassroots organising, community assemblies and local skills development.

To fund these proposals, Lewis has suggested a one-time "windfall profit tax", estimated to raise \$50 billion, alongside an ongoing 5% surtax on corporations earning over \$100 million in profits. While such measures would generate significant revenue, they also raise questions about capital flight, investment slowdown and the broader reaction of Canadian and international capital.

Foreign policy

Lewis's stance on Palestine has already generated controversy. He is Jewish and a supporter - though only recently a member - of Independent Jewish Voices, which has described Israel's recent actions in Palestine as genocide. This position has provoked concern among pro-Israel lobby groups in Canada. The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs stated the day after his victory: "Today, the New Democratic Party elected Avi Lewis

as its leader. We are left with a deep sense of sadness."

This reaction highlights the extent to which foreign policy - particularly on Israel-Palestine - remains a flashpoint within Canadian politics, capable of mobilising both external pressure and internal divisions within parties.

On immigration, an issue that has increasingly come to dominate Canadian politics - even in a country that prides itself on being welcoming to newcomers - Lewis has called for reversing some of the cuts introduced by Mark Carney's Liberal government. In an interview with a prominent online magazine, he argued that "the current immigration system is broken".

He proposes replacing the existing system with a single-tier model based on permanent residency and status on arrival, aimed at providing greater rights and stability. This would include prioritising family reunification, welcoming refugees fleeing war, and ending the division between different classes of workers by reforming the temporary foreign worker system.

At the same time, immigration remains a politically sensitive issue, particularly in Quebec and parts of western Canada, where economic pressures and cultural debates intersect. Lewis will need to balance a principled position with the electoral realities of these regions.

Lewis assumes leadership of a party without holding a seat in parliament, and his chances of securing one before the next election - expected in 2029 - appear slim. Whether he can lead the NDP to electoral success in the coming years, or merely stabilise a party currently polling at around 8% nationally, remains uncertain.

However, recent developments elsewhere suggest that unexpected outcomes are possible. The rise of figures such as Zohran Mamdani as mayor of New York, combined with the energy of younger activists involved in Lewis's campaign, indicate that a break from recent patterns cannot be ruled out.

At the same time, the experience of Corbynism offers a cautionary parallel. Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the British Labour Party mobilised hundreds of thousands of supporters and shifted the party's programme

significantly to the left. Yet it faced sustained opposition from within the parliamentary party, hostility from much of the media, and ultimately electoral defeat. These pressures - internal resistance, media campaigns and institutional constraints - are not unique to Britain and could well reappear in the Canadian context.

Within organised labour, there are signs of growing support. The Canadian Labour Congress and its largest affiliate, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, now appear to be backing Lewis at the leadership level. During the campaign itself, however, most formal endorsements went to his rival, Rob Ashton, who ultimately finished fourth.

Reactions to Lewis's leadership - both within and outside the NDP - suggest that he is already being taken seriously by political opponents. The rightwing *National Post* ran a column by Geoff Russ titled "Don't underestimate the appeal of Avi Lewis's third-worldish politics". Russ warned: "This is a time of revived leftwing radicalism in the English-speaking world. Do not dismiss Lewis ... If he plays his cards right, he will not be a punchline for long." Similarly, Toronto-based socialist and anti-poverty activist John Clarke compared Lewis's victory to that of Corbyn, noting that Lewis is already becoming a target both of rightwing attacks and of internal opposition from the party's right wing.

This comparison appears plausible. Lewis has already faced criticism from within the party. Saskatchewan NDP leader Carla Beck has described his positions as "ideological and unrealistic" and has refused to meet him unless he 'moderates' his proposals. In Alberta, NDP leader Naheed Nenshi has taken a somewhat softer stance, but has still clashed with Lewis over his opposition to oil and gas expansion, calling it "damaging for Alberta's economy". Nenshi, notably, is the former mayor of Calgary, the province's largest city.

Conclusion

The trajectory of the NDP under Lewis remains uncertain. It is possible that the party could experience a significant resurgence over the next few years, potentially even returning to electoral competitiveness. Equally, Lewis could face the same fate as figures such as Jeremy Corbyn, whose rise was ultimately contained by both internal and external opposition.

Much will depend on developments in Quebec, where the NDP must regain support if it hopes to become a serious electoral force. Lewis will need to demonstrate competence in French, articulate a convincing position on immigration, and navigate contentious issues such as Bill 21, which prohibits public employees from displaying religious symbols while on duty.

For the fragmented and currently weak revolutionary left in Canada, the strategic dilemma remains unresolved. There is no independent political vehicle capable of contesting for power in the near term, yet uncritical support for social democracy risks repeating familiar cycles of disappointment. The most viable approach may be a critical engagement: participating where possible, supporting progressive measures, but maintaining political independence and clarity.

Optimism is understandable, but it should not give way to illusions. The coming years will provide a clearer test of whether this moment represents a genuine shift - or another repetition of familiar patterns ●

Fighting fund

Week in, week out

Let me start this week by quoting comrade AN, who sent us this message, immediately following his £50 donation:

"I think the *WW* is a genuinely high-quality weekly Marxist/communist paper and I read everything in it. I don't agree with every single thing in it, of course, but week in, week out, it makes a strong case for the urgent need for socialism and communism, and for a mass Communist Party to help bring this about."

I'm glad you appreciate what we're doing, comrade. And you're not alone! In fact you were one of a dozen comrades who made a donation by bank transfer/standing order. Thanks also to comrades AC (£100!), FK (£41), MM (£31), CG and DV (£30 each), RG (£25), II (£20), RD and RP (£12), SM (£10) and KA (£8).

Then we had the usual batch of comrades who made their contributions via PayPal: DM (£50), MH (£10), not to mention comrades TM, TS, JN and NL, who each donated a fiver. Finally, another comrade who contributed

that same amount was comrade Hassan, who chipped in with his usual £5 note.

All that came to £454, taking our running total for April up to £743. But, of course, the target we set each month is no less than £2,750, which means that we have, as I write, three weeks plus one day remaining to raise another £2,007 if we're going to get there.

And I can't emphasise enough how much we *need* to get there. We rely on our readers to support us both politically and financially if the working class is going to get anywhere near that "mass Communist Party" that comrade AN talks about.

Do you fancy following his example? Go to the link below to find out more about the different ways you can help ●

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

OUR HISTORY

Not a clean, but a dirty split

The standard left narrative of the 1914-21 schism in the Second International is misleading and nowadays too easily leads to irresponsible splits. **Mike Macnair** argues for historical complication

On Monday March 30 I spoke together with Ian Spencer (of the Democratic Socialists of Your Party) and Tony Collins (author of *Raising the Red Flag*) at a meeting organised by the Bolshevik Caucus of Your Party on the topic of 'Considering cross-class coalitions: history and theory'.

Our titles were given to us by the organisers: comrade Spencer's was 'Millerand: socialists in capitalist governments' on Alexandre Millerand and the debate sparked by his becoming a minister in the 1899 coalition 'government of republican defence'. Comrade Collins' was 'Separating Labour from the Liberals', on the origins of the Labour Party and the relations of British leftists to it in 1900-1918. Mine was 'Separating communism from social democracy', on the split in the Second International. Each of us spoke for 15 minutes, followed by brief discussion of three-minute contributions and a four-minute reply. This was not, in fact, a good way of getting into depth on any of the subjects, though in the event few people wanted to speak from the floor.

This article is primarily an expanded write-up of my talk. But it is worth beginning with a point about the titles. 'Separating Labour from the Liberals' and 'Separating communism from social democracy' both contain the implication that the primary task is an *organisational* split, *organisational* separation. But in fact comrade Collins' presentation made clear that the formal organisational separation created by the Labour Representation Committee and the creation of the Parliamentary Labour Party did not in any sense entail the *political* independence of the Labour party from the Liberal Party.

The converse point is much less obvious, because standard far-left narrative tells us that Bolshevism and Menshevism were separate *parties* from 1903, or from 1912. The reality is that they were politically independent *factions* (with their own publications, organisational forms, etc) within a common *party* identification - the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Siberian Social Democrats continued common action down to October 1917 (if they had not done so, Petrograd would have been starved out in the immediate aftermath of the October revolution).¹ The existence of *public organised factions* of the RSDLP allowed *political independence* from pro-capitalist politics without full organisational separation.

Political dependence

We should be conscious of this in relation to the modern left. The *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and the Socialist Workers Party are both *organisationally separate* from the Labour Party. But their political projects have the effect that they are *politically dependent* on the Labour and trade union 'official' lefts. The Socialist Party in England and Wales seeks explicitly to *recreate* a new Labour Party based on the trade unions. However much such a party *sought to be* more leftwing, its dependence on trade union affiliations would inevitably give it the same political character as the existing Labour Party: an instrument for bargaining with the state to slow down capitalist attacks, on the basis of offering loyalist support for the British state, its constitution and its foreign policy.

There is a standard far-left

narrative of the split in the Second International. This narrative is that the Second International aimed to build 'parties of the whole class'. As a result, these parties included both 'revolutionaries' like Lenin and his co-thinkers, Rosa Luxemburg and hers, and 'reformists' like Georg von Vollmar, Eduard Bernstein, and their co-thinkers. The 'centre' defined by Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel, Karl Kautsky and others sought to maintain this unity and as a result to evade the necessary choice between 'reform' and 'revolution'. This produced a politics of 'attentism' - waiting for a revolutionary crisis that would be generated by capitalism itself. The result was the capture of the party by the 'reformists' - shown by the failure to escalate the Prussian suffrage campaign of 1910 to the general strike.

This, in turn, led to the collapse of the International in August 1914, as the national parties (mainly) fell in behind their own bourgeoisie. Lenin and the Bolsheviks "raised the flag of the new International" in 1914 (to quote comrade Collins' version of the standard story in an intervention from the floor in my part of the discussion). A very small opposition appeared at the Zimmerwald (September 1915) and Kienthal (April 1916) conferences of anti-war socialists, but with the later part of the war and the Russian Revolution these marginal groups leapt to mass leadership, creating the conditions for the creation of the Communist International in March 1919. The 1984 Pathfinder Press collection of documents edited by John Riddell, *Lenin's struggle for a revolutionary international*, emphasises in its title (and to some extent in the choice of documents) the *personal* role of Lenin in the struggle for the split: a feature of the standard narrative more generally.

What my talk set out to do and this article aims to do is not to *abolish* the standard narrative: in contrast to Eurocommunist Fernando Claudin's *The Communist movement: from Comintern to Cominform*, which argued that the split was a sectarian error.² It seems to me perfectly clear from the course of events since Claudin wrote that the split between, on the one hand, communists and, on the other hand, constitutional and national loyalists (who appropriated the name 'social democrats') was, in fact, necessary.

First, because the 'social democrats' would never accept communists winning a majority (as in France in 1920), or, indeed, communists having freedom to speak and organise within 'broad united parties' (as in the British Labour Party from 1920 on).

Second, silence of the communists for the sake of unity achieves nothing. This is, first, because the constitutional- and national-loyalist policy of the 'social democrats' involved socialists accepting political responsibility for barbarism - in the form of both colonialism and inter-imperialist wars. And, second, in domestic politics it set radical limits to socialisation, and left the fundamental levers of political power in the hands of the bribe-paying classes. Since the end of the cold war, this has meant that the loyalist socialist parties at best *merely delaying* the capitalists' class war on the working class, without ever actually *turning back* this class war.

So the split in the Second International was justified and cannot now be reversed. But I aim to *complicate* the standard narrative, in three ways. The first is that that



Copenhagen 1910: Alexandra Kollontai and Clara Zetkin (centre right). Who else do you recognise?

the Second International was never engaged in building 'parties of the whole class', and the argument that this policy drove the International's failure in 1914 is false. The second is that this 1914 failure is a story more complicated than the simple victory of the 'reformists'. The third is that the split was, and had to be, a 'dirty split', not a clean one.

1889

The Second International was founded in 1889 - *in a split*, with two rival international congresses taking place simultaneously. The 'Possibilist' congress was backed by the French 'Possibilist' socialists, who argued against the French 'Marxists' that the adoption of a minimum programme (the 1880 *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*) tended to separate the socialist movement from the real mass class movement. It was also backed by the British Trade Union Congress general council. The decisive immediate split decision was that the 'Possibilists' demanded legal verification of membership numbers, which was impossible for the illegal German socialists (the 1890 legalisation of the German socialists as the Social Democratic Party of Germany made it clear that the insinuation that the Germans were overstating their numbers was false).³

Modern far-left advocates of 'broad front' parties would no doubt have preferred the 'Possibilist' congress over the 'Marxist' one. All the more advocates of a 'party of the whole class' would have preferred that option.

At Zurich in 1893 the International, on the motion of August Bebel and Karl Kautsky (Germany), Victor Adler (Austria) and Otto Lang (Switzerland), voted that future participation should require 'recognition of political action' - explained as "the workers' parties should make full use of political and legal rights in an attempt to capture the legislative machine and use it for the interests of the working class and for the capture of political

power": this was to exclude 'anti-electoralist' political groups. The issue was brought back to the London congress of 1896, where the TUC GC was hosting the congress, and anarchists still received invites; Keir Hardie (Independent Labour Party) and Tom Mann (delegated from the Amalgamated Society of Engineers) argued for broad unity without political pre-conditions.⁴ The congress nonetheless voted, on Wilhelm Liebknecht's motion on behalf of the Standing Orders Committee:

The Standing Orders Committee of the Congress is entrusted with the duty of drawing up the invitation for the next congress by appealing exclusively to:

1. The representatives of those organisations that seek to substitute socialist property and production for capitalist property and production, and which consider legislative and parliamentary action as one of the necessary means of attaining that end.
2. Purely trade [union] organisations, which, though taking no militant part in politics, declare that they recognise the necessity of legislative and parliamentary action; consequently anarchists are excluded ...⁵

Far from being a 'party of the whole class', this was an international formed on the basis of a definite political project; and one which most of the modern far left would consider to be ultra-left: seeking the replacement of capitalism with socialism. The TUC's enthusiasm for 'breadth' to include the anarchists was, in reality, an instrumental device to support the TUC's intimate relations with the Liberal Party.

Materials from the congresses of the Second International are available in Mike Taber's 2021 *Under the socialist banner and his Reform, revolution and opportunism: debates in the Second International, 1900-1910*⁶ - both available in paperback

at very reasonable prices. For those who cannot afford these, but have web access, a good deal of the above is on Marxists Internet Archive.⁷ It does not take long looking at these to be clear that, in spite of the presence of a substantial right wing, the International's debates and decisions were predominantly those of an organisation seriously seeking the overthrow of capitalism.

1914

In the standard narrative, the story of August 1914 is simple. The reformists, because they were reformists, displayed loyalty to their nation-states. The left opposed the war; but the 'centrists' clung to unity with the right; Lenin fought, almost alone, for a clean split with the right.

This story needs to be complicated in several ways. In the first place, some traditional leaders of the non- or anti-Marxist right wing of the workers' movement opposed the war. For example, in France, Jean Jaurès, who had backed Millerand's entry into government, was assassinated on July 31 1914 for agitating for a general strike to stop the war.⁸ In Germany, the prominent revisionist leader Eduard Bernstein became an opponent of the war.⁹ In Britain Ramsay Macdonald opposed the war and was, as a result, forced out as leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party (he continued to oppose the war, was witch-hunted and lost his parliamentary seat in 1918).¹⁰

Conversely, significant leaders of the pre-war left wing of the movement actually adopted pro-war positions. For example, again, Italian revolutionary syndicalist leaders Benito Mussolini and Arturo Labriola became advocates of Italian entry into the war on the Entente side (and after the war they became fascists!).¹¹ In Germany, a group of former radical leftists and anti-imperialist writers became advocates of German victory as the most progressive outcome. They were led by Parvus (who had worked with Trotsky on the theory

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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of permanent revolution in 1904-05), who was himself drawn to supporting German victory through the idea that this would allow Turkey to escape from Anglo-French control, also arguing that it would promote Ukrainian independence from Russia.¹² Karl Kautsky initially argued for the SPD to make the vote for war credits conditional on defensive-only war aims.¹³ In 1917, however, he went over to open defence of the Entente justification of the war: the right to self-determination of Serbia and of Belgium.¹⁴ It was this Entente 'victoryism' that led him to oppose the October revolution. After the war, he became a publicist for German 'war guilt'.¹⁵

If we ask why the story has to be complicated in this way, the answer is that the 'war guilt' problem is not as simple as it seems. The standard left narrative is that World War I was a war between predatory, monopolistic (oligopolistic) imperialist states for the redivision of the world. This character subordinated the questions of the self-determination of Serbia and of Belgium (which left supporters of the Entente used to justify their line) and of national self-defence (which left supporters of the Central Powers used to justify theirs).

It is nonetheless true that Austria-Hungary *did* invade Serbia, using a justification that would now be called 'harbouring terrorists' and 'pre-emptive self-defence' (when the USA or Israel use such arguments). And it is nonetheless true that Russia and France *did* invade Germany in August 1914: we merely forget the fact due to the radical military failure of these invasions. And in 1916 Lenin argued, against Luxemburg and the so-called 'imperialist economists', that national self-determination was *not* wholly subordinated to the inter-imperialist war - in the case of the Dublin Easter Rising.

On the other hand, the *Die Glocke* group argued that the underlying cause of the war was Britain's attempt to hold on to global supremacy in spite of the (relative) decline of its productive industry. This is a partial truth which should become more visible today in the light of the

very similar policy of aggressive encirclement the USA is pursuing towards China, as Britain pursued towards Germany in 1900-14.¹⁶

My point is not that the characterisation of the war as an inter-imperialist war for the redivision of the world, and Lenin's accompanying argument for 'the main enemy is at home' on both sides, was *false*. It is that this was *not obvious*. The victory of the 'social-chauvinist' right wing of the international movement reflected partly state intervention: in Germany, for example, chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg offered the trade unions major concessions after the war in return for the war credits vote; this carrot was matched by the stick of repression of anti-war voices. But it also reflected the break-up of the *left* of the international, precisely because the nature of the war was not obvious.

1917-21

The appeal for the Communist International was issued on January 24 1919, for a meeting to start on March 2 - 14 months after the October revolution, just over a year after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by the Soviet government and just under a month after the founding of the Communist Party of Germany (Spartacists). Rosa Luxemburg had been hesitant about founding the KPD(S), wanting to pursue the struggle in the anti-war Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) further; she was also doubtful about founding the Communist International, arguing that it was first necessary to have mass communist parties.¹⁷

Lenin and Zinoviev had been arguing for a split with the social-chauvinists as a necessity to reunite the international as a *revolutionary* organisation since 1915. Lenin proposed the call for a new international alongside that of changing the Bolsheviks' name from 'RSDLP (Majorityite)' to 'Communist' on several occasions during the Russian Revolution. The renaming proposal was not accepted until the 8th special party congress

on March 8 1918. Through February-October 1917 Lenin continued to grumble about the unwillingness of the party majority to break directly with the Zimmerwald 'anti-war socialists';¹⁸ but it was not until December 1918, after the outbreak of the German revolution, that concrete steps were taken towards a new international, as distinct from informal collaboration.

March 1919 also did not represent the end-point of the split. The KPD only acquired a mass character as the Unified Communist Party of Germany (VKPD) through fusion with the majority of the USPD in 1920.¹⁹ The Communist Party of France was created when the majority of the SFIO voted in December 1920 to join Comintern.²⁰ The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was founded in May 1921, fusing several organisations round the core of a majority of the Czech Social Democratic Party, which had split that party (by holding a congress in defiance of the leadership) in September 1920.²¹ The Communist Party of Italy emerged in January 1921 when the majority of the Socialist Party, which had participated in Comintern in 1919-20, refused to expel its right wing under the *21 Conditions*.²²

Maybe someone who reads Russian could find out *why* the Bolshevik majority in 1917 refused, against Lenin, the open organisational split expressed in changing the organisation's name to 'Communist Party', and persisted with attempts to work with the 'Zimmerwald process' (I do not have the necessary skills). But I think what we should learn from this is that the creation of new parties and new internationals needs not only the betrayal or collapse of the old, but also a sense of the existence of a real alternative.

In 1889 two models were on offer: the French 'Possibilists' or the British TUC's broad-frontism; or the German SPD's partyism. As of the 1890s, the SPD model was strong enough to create an international. As of 1915-17, the betrayal and collapse of the Second International was obvious enough. But what alternative? It was the October revolution, followed by the German, Austrian and Hungarian revolutions (and much more widespread revolutionary movements), which made the idea of a new international grip the minds of a sufficient section of the broad workers' vanguard (that is, the movement's activist layer that pays some degree of attention to politics) to become a material force.²³ That is, *unlike* the many 'oil-slick internationals' created by Trotskyists, Left Communists and Maoists ...

Tentatively, let me say that the origin of the simplified 'standard narrative' seems to be in the cult of the personality of Lenin. This was developed in Lenin's last years because the lack of a broader body to which the Soviet government was *effectively* accountable meant that debates in the apparatus were forced to produce Lenin as a kind of monarch who took last-instance decisions.²⁴ When Lenin was disabled, this produced a succession struggle and, especially after his death, expansion of the cult of the personality of Lenin - presenting him as the uniquely correct leader of Bolshevism rather than as one among a group of leaders - was developed as an instrument against the possible Bonapartism of Trotsky. After all, Trotsky the conciliator had been late in willingness to split, relative to Lenin and Zinoviev ...

The price of this 'standard narrative' is, however, an undue willingness to split with small forces and without considering whether your split is one that can be clearly explained to the broad workers' vanguard. On the contrary, the modern far left has tended to go for organisational separation and then attempt to speak directly to the masses *in competition*

with the existing broad workers' vanguard. This tendency has the effect of producing multiple organisations pursuing very similar goals, none of which will actually be taken seriously by the working class ●

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Notes

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3. J Brauntal *The history of the International, 1864-1914* (translated by H Collins and K Mitchell) London 1966, p198.
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5. M Taber (ed) *Under the socialist banner: resolutions of the Second International 1889-1912* Chicago IL 2021, p62.
6. Chicago IL 2023.
7. www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/index.htm.
8. A convenient summary of his career is at Wikipedia: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Jaur%C3%AAs. Jaurès might well have, like Jules Guesde, responded to the German SPD vote for war credits by turning to supporting the French government; but this is a mere counter-factual.
9. Eg. 'Revisionism and nationalism' (1915) www.marxists.org/reference/archive/berstein/works/1915/09/berstein-ww1.htm; there are other pieces from 1915-16 in M Steger *Selected writings of Eduard Bernstein 1900-1921* Highlands NJ 1996, chapters 13 and 14.
10. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramsay_MacDonald.
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15. *Wie der Weltkrieg entstand* Berlin 1919, translated (anonymously) as *The guilt of William Hohenzollern* London 1919 (reprint, Forgotten Books 2012).
16. See note 12.
17. J Riddell (ed) *The German revolution and the debate on soviet power* New York 1986, pp157-58 (KPD), pp454-56 (Comintern); Hugo Eberlein reporting a conversation three days before her murder.
18. Seventh party congress: R Gregor (ed) *Resolutions and decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Vol 2, The early soviet period 1917-1929* Toronto 1974, p49; Lenin's grumbles on the international question: *Collected Works* Vols 24-26 at various points (it is a peculiarity of the US SWP's Communist International in Lenin's time series that volume 1 of *Lenin's struggle for a revolutionary international* (New York 1984) ends in December 1916, while volume 2, *The German revolution and the debate on soviet power* (New York 1986) begins in November 1918).
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20. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tours_Congress.
21. CIA report, *The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia* (1960), www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R001200140002-1.pdf, pp3-5.
22. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Communist_Party. The section, 'History', begins with a convenient summary. R Drake *Apostles and agitators* (see note 11 above), chapters 6 (Bordiga) and 7 (Gramsci) has more detail. D Broder, 'Theatre of revolution' *Weekly Worker* May 20 2021 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1348/theatre-of-revolution), among other issues criticises those modern liberal authors who blame the split for the victory of fascism.
23. "... theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses": K Marx, 'Abstract from the introduction to contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right' (1844): www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/df-jahrbucher/law-abs.htm.
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Does it include Lebanon?

Politics of civilisational threat

The most revealing feature of the fragile US-Israeli two-week ceasefire with Iran is its vagueness. Yassamine Mather assesses the internal and regional effects of the war

Washington speaks in the language of total dominance, which Donald Trump pushed to its most extreme form, when, on April 7, he warned that “a whole civilisation will die tonight” if Iran did not meet his demands over the Strait of Hormuz.

A day later, a tentative two-week ceasefire begun, with Trump describing Iranian proposals as a “workable” basis for negotiation. Reporting has linked that pause to an Iranian 10-point plan, though it is better understood as a contested framework for further talks than as a settled peace on Tehran’s terms.

Precisely for that reason, both sides can present the pause as a victory. The US and Israel claims the ceasefire is proof that overwhelming pressure forced Iran onto the back foot, Trump even talking about there being a “new regime” in Tehran (obvious nonsense). Meanwhile, Israel continues to bombard Lebanon as a prelude to re-establishing a buffer zone all the way up to the Litani River. As for Iran it presents its survival, its continued leverage over Hormuz and the fact of negotiations on terms it helped shape as evidence that it has triumphed.

But the social meaning of the war remained visible even at the moment of de-escalation: Associated Press, reporting on April 7, said strikes destroyed half of Tehran’s Khorasaniha Synagogue and nearby residential buildings, while the BBC showed Iranians forming human chains at bridges and power plants after Tehran urged people to gather outside potential US and Israeli targets. In other words, the threat to destroy civil infrastructure did not remain at the level of rhetoric: it entered directly into the field of mass fear, symbolic defence, collective exposure and the widening destruction of social life itself.

To understand why this war between two unequal sides has lasted so long, it is necessary to distinguish between air supremacy and air superiority. Air supremacy means an enemy has effectively no functioning airforce, no viable radar network and no surviving missile architecture. It is the ‘empty room’ scenario: the dominant force flies where it wants, when it wants, at little cost. Air superiority is weaker than that: one side remains dominant, but still faces some resistance. Air denial is different again. It does not require control of the skies: it only requires making the skies sufficiently dangerous that the stronger power cannot operate as if risk has disappeared.

That is the contradiction now confronting Washington. No doubt the United States retains overwhelming military superiority, but it has not transformed the conflict into a risk-free exercise. The repeated need for escalation, the resort to threats against civilian infrastructure and the political theatre of emergency operations - all point in the same direction: the sky is not ‘owned’. It is contested. Even where the US remains the more powerful military force, Iran’s strategy has been to preserve enough retaliatory and defensive capacity to make every

step more costly, slower and politically dirtier than the White House wants to admit.

That is why the credibility gap matters. Imperial power rests not only on bombs, carriers and aircraft, but on the perception of superiority. If the world believes you are unstoppable, much resistance collapses before the battle begins. Trump’s political narrative has depended on exactly this image: that US force is overwhelming, clean and final. But, the more the war produces scenes of damaged cities, disrupted infrastructure, emergency rescues and improvised retaliation, the harder it becomes to sustain the fantasy of frictionless dominance. The real lesson is not that the United States is weak: it is that even overwhelming force cannot eliminate the enemy’s capacity to resist and impose costs - and therefore punctures the myth of total control.

Widening targets

This dynamic is obvious in the widening targets set. The bombing of universities marks a major escalation, because it shows the war moving beyond immediate battlefield objectives and into the sphere of social reproduction. Iranian officials have said that more than 30 universities have been damaged since the war began in late February.

These are not marginal sites. Universities such as Sharif and Shahid Beheshti are important, when it comes to research and education, as well engineering training and the broader intellectual infrastructure of the country. To bomb them is not merely to destroy buildings: it is to attack future capacity - the continuity of research, the material basis of laboratories and the social institutions through which skilled labour is reproduced.

The same is true of the attacks on petrochemical and energy infrastructure in the south. Reports this week confirmed strikes on facilities in Asaluyeh, Bushehr province, as well as attacks on petrochemical facilities in Mahshahr. Associated Press reported on April 6 that Israel said it struck what it described as Iran’s largest petrochemical facility in Asaluyeh, claiming that the country’s petrochemical sector had suffered a severe blow and that facilities linked to a very large share of exports were knocked out of service.

The political meaning is obvious. Petrochemical infrastructure is not just an export machine. It is a concentration of working class life, technical labour, logistics, maintenance, contract work and regional dependency. In Bushehr province and the wider South Pars corridor, the destruction of a single industrial node can ripple outward through transport firms, subcontractors, repair crews, local markets and dependent households. These strikes threaten tens of thousands of direct jobs and a much wider layer of indirect employment, while also undermining state revenue, industrial capacity and regional social stability.

For the Iranian working class, the war appears less as abstract geopolitics than as a collapse in the ordinary



US fleet in the Persian Gulf

conditions of survival. Wages do not rise at the speed of crisis, but prices do. For families living on fixed incomes, public-sector salaries, casual labour or daily wages, the first effect of war is a collapse in real income. Bread, transport, electricity, rent and basic staples absorb a larger share of household budgets, just as work becomes more precarious. The result is familiar and brutal: meals are skipped, diets deteriorate, small debts become permanent and electricity or heating are treated as luxuries rather than necessities.

War also disrupts the mechanics of production. Factories slow under supply problems and power disruptions. Construction work stalls. Informal and temporary labour is hit first and hardest. Those without secure contracts have no cushion: when the work stops, the income stops immediately. Fuel shortages intensify the crisis. For delivery workers, taxi drivers and commuters, fuel is not a consumer good, but a condition of labour itself. When shortages hit or prices spike, the working class suffers a double blow: life becomes more expensive, and access to work becomes harder. The pincer closes from both sides.

Displacement sharpens this class divide further. Middle class households may have savings, vehicles or second properties to fall back on, but working class families often have none of these. To be displaced under bombardment is therefore not only to flee danger, but to lose both shelter and income at once. On April 7 reports from Tehran describe civilian panic, preparation for infrastructure collapse and large-scale movement out of the capital, even if exact numbers remain hard to verify. The point is not the precise displacement figure on any given day, but the social fact of fragmentation: workers do not simply relocate; they become stranded, cut off from employment, networks and the means to restart life elsewhere.

Steel matters

The widening target now appears to have included another decisive layer of Iran’s material reproduction: the steel industry. If the bombing of universities signalled an attack on scientific and technical labour, and the strikes on petrochemical infrastructure targeted export revenue and industrial energy capacity, then the attacks on major steel complexes pointed toward something equally strategic: the disabling of one of the central pillars of Iran’s industrial economy.

Reports on strikes against Mobarakeh Steel in Isfahan and Khuzestan Steel suggested a qualitative escalation. These are not marginal factories. They sit at the core of Iran’s steel production, feed raw materials into a wide range of downstream sectors and contribute significantly to non-oil exports and foreign currency earnings. Their disruption therefore carries consequences far beyond the immediate site of attack. It affects manufacturing supply chains, state revenues, employment and the country’s ability to sustain industrial activity under wartime conditions.

Whatever the precise military rationale, the economic meaning is clearer. The *Times of Israel* explicitly framed at least part of the logic in terms of the attack’s “economic effect” on Iran. There have also been claims that part of these companies’ output is linked to supply chains serving the defence sector. But, even where military justifications are invoked, the broader reality remains that the destruction of steel capacity is not a narrow strike on a single node: it is a blow against a strategic industrial base, whose effects radiate quickly through the wider economy.

This matters because steel is not simply another commodity: it underpins construction, cars, household appliances, infrastructure, pipelines, machinery, shipbuilding and parts of the oil, gas and petrochemical chain. To strike steel production is therefore to strike industrial life itself. The immediate effect is disruption of output and exports. The wider effect is rising costs, bottlenecks across dependent sectors, pressure on employment and a deepening of wartime economic fragility. In the short term, it may also increase Iran’s dependence on imported steel, above all from China - further tightening the relationship between military vulnerability and external economic dependence.

The employment effects are equally serious. Beyond the tens of thousands directly employed at the two complexes, far larger numbers in subcontracting, transport, maintenance, fabrication and dependent firms are exposed to prolonged disruption. Once again, the burden falls hardest on workers with the least protection: contract labour, temporary workers and those in small and medium-sized downstream industries with little capacity to absorb prolonged shortages or shutdowns.

The Gulf monarchies built their recent prosperity on an image of stability, investability and secure

connectivity. Their airports became global hubs, their cities financial and tourism centres, and their energy infrastructure the anchor of global supply. But the war has exposed the fragility beneath that image. Iranian strikes and threats against regional infrastructure have forced governments back toward emergency calculations, even where they seek to restore normalcy quickly. The central problem is geographic and strategic: these states are close enough to the battlefield to remain vulnerable, yet not powerful enough to insulate themselves fully from its consequences.

Asymmetry

That vulnerability has economic consequences. Even massive defence spending cannot erase the asymmetry between highly expensive infrastructure and relatively cheap drones or missiles. Insurance costs rise. Logistics become more difficult. International firms reassess risk. Gulf rulers may decide to move closer to Washington for immediate security reasons, and in practice closer to Israel as well, but this is driven by expediency, not trust. The deeper fear is entrapment: being dragged into a war not of their choosing, becoming priority targets and sacrificing autonomy in exchange for incomplete protection. Some might decide they need better relations with China.

At the global level, the energy shock is already visible. Market reporting on April 7 showed oil prices jumping sharply with Trump’s ultimatum. That volatility matters everywhere, but especially in countries heavily exposed to imported hydrocarbons. China is a crucial case. It remains deeply dependent on oil imports, including from the Gulf and Russia, yet it is also better insulated than many advanced economies because of its energy mix, coal base, large strategic reserves and its long-term shift into renewables and electric transport. Even so, a conflict that disrupts shipping, damages infrastructure and pushes prices upward imposes costs across petrochemicals, transport and manufacturing, and leads to expectations of inflation.

The larger lesson is that this war reveals the limits of modern imperial power. The United States can destroy an enormous range of targets; Israel can widen the geography of destruction. But neither can turn war into a clean, one-sided, managerial process. The more they try to do so, the more openly they threaten bridges, power plants, universities and industrial complexes, and the more clearly the real content of the war emerges.

Trump’s threat that “a whole civilisation will die tonight” is therefore not an incidental outburst. It is the expression of the need for escalation, even though in this case it was actually part of negotiations for a ceasefire. When a state begins to speak in those terms, it is no longer claiming merely the right to defend itself or disable an adversary’s weapons. It is claiming the right to hold an entire society hostage. ●