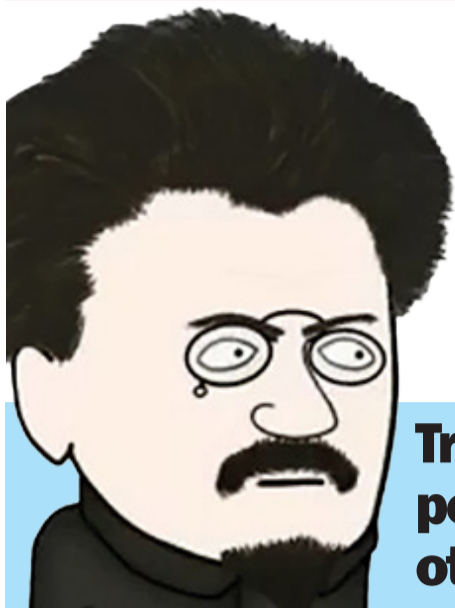


A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Trotsky: quick decision-making makes perfect sense during civil war. But otherwise we need time to debate

- Letters and debate
- Burnham's Manchesterism
- Scottish by-elections
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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MEET THE NEW BOSS SAME AS THE OLD BOSS



LETTERS



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

Just conjecture

Jon Benson's claims in last week's edition of the *Weekly Worker* bear little resemblance to reality (Letters, June 18). They are based more on conjecture and assumption than on any serious attempt to establish the facts. As such, a point-by-point response to refute these falsehoods is much needed.

As for the first claim - that my strategy for the Democratic Socialists to be the leading group in the eventual left slate for the CEC was predicated on the exclusion of others - this is not true, or at least not in the main. I make no apologies about having very little time for the opportunists in the Democratic Bloc, who were the primary proponents for the ban on dual membership within Your Party in the run-up to the founding conference. Comrade Benson seemingly ignores this despite the fact that, in doing so, they advocated his own exclusion from the membership rolls of Your Party.

As for Organising for Popular Power, I have no bones to pick with them. Their orientation - that of base-building - is arguably correct and one I have a lot of agreement with, but there is no denying that as a tendency they were (at least at the time) hostile to the expression of political substance, and had no strategy beyond base-building for the sake of building the base. It should also not be forgotten that they actively advocated a potential left slate to openly endorse rightwing candidates for the CEC - something which was at best naive and at worse an attempt to curry favour with those otherwise hostile to their own agenda. This was perplexing and did indicate an overall lack of seriousness on their part, but their departure from the slate at the 11th hour was genuinely disappointing and meant that the eventual left slate lacked a substantive pole of attraction that they sought to provide, much to our collective detriment.

As for Jon's accusation of myself and others gaining influence through internal disputes and personal attacks, the comrade appears to be staring into a mirror and accusing myself and others of the things that he and his own comrades are equally guilty of. Jon *et al* attended the first meeting of the left slate's negotiations so unprepared that they ended in disaster. A member of the executive committee had called me 10 minutes prior to the meeting for a briefing, as neither they nor those they were attending the meeting with had any clue as to what it was about and subsequently they were walked all over by the opportunists of the Democratic Bloc. They went into a meeting facing seasoned political operators acting like amateurs - and it showed. I did indeed accuse Jon *et al* of incompetence: their handling of the negotiations was amateurish and left them completely outmatched. The fact they weren't aware of what the meeting was about and yet arrogantly assumed they were the best to represent DemSocs at it says a lot. As for personal attacks, I only made one, and for that I

can only apologise.

Whatever way you look at it, Jon's response was undoubtedly worse. He and his co-signatories spent considerable time compiling a dossier of false allegations against me. They then afforded me just 15 minutes' notice via Discord of their intention to publish it, denying me any meaningful opportunity to respond, for which they were greatly admonished by other leading comrades of the organisation. Had I not had Discord open at the time, it would have been published without any prior warning. They presented these fallacies as fact, and went so far as publishing them not only on the Democratic Socialists' Discord channel, but the RS21 internal forum, at which point they promptly leaked and were used against the Grassroots Left in the CEC elections. If this lack of foresight as to how our opponents could weaponise our internal disagreements for their own gain proved anything, it was that the charges of incompetence towards Jon *et al* did in fact hold some weight.

Jon claims that the Grassroots Left arose out of a series of secretive meetings "featuring Shanly and a line-up of DSYP candidates close to him". This is yet another mistake on his part. I attended one privately held meeting the Monday after Your Party's founding conference - a meeting I was invited to, unaware of what the agenda was, and a meeting I immediately sought to report back on to the executive committee of DSYP - but was given just a quarter of an hour to inform them of the results of a day-long event. When the time eventually came to negotiate with others as to the composition of the slate, the Democratic Socialists struggled to find people willing to stand. I myself only stood because it was made very clear to me, as I relayed time after time, that support from certain quarters for our candidates in the eventual meeting to decide the slate's composition was reliant upon it. Personally, I'd have preferred not to run. I am not in the best of health and - something which the resulting campaign showed - not well enough to partake in such activities.

Jon claims that the organisation put forward "a line-up of candidates close" to myself, but again this is simply not true. The candidate I was close to was Chloe Braddock - herself then a member of the executive committee of DSYP. The rest were people who had put their names forward via a Google Form over the Christmas break, plus some who were hobbled together in a list in the hours preceding the meeting. As any member of the executive committee at the time should be able to attest, we were in a dire position the evening before the slate composition negotiations. So dire in fact that I had to stay up late into the night preceding the meeting in pre-negotiations with others to ensure support for the organisation's candidates.

Ultimately, we went from ensuring the Democratic Socialists had two candidates on the resulting slate of five. It should be noted that Chloe Braddock was not one of those two, so the implied claim on Jon's part that I sought to advance "candidates close" to me over the rest of the organisation is simply false. In fact, one of the candidates

whose inclusion I argued for was Ian Spencer. In making the case for him, I described him as indispensable to DSYP despite the fact that he had joined only a week earlier and that we had never previously interacted. Whatever faults I may have had, favouring personal allies over the organisation was not one of them.

As to the claim of me stacking the campaign team "almost entirely" with my supposed "close allies in DSYP", Jon seemingly forgets that those put forward were (all bar one) conveners or co-conveners of the various related working groups within DSYP. They were chosen for purely technocratic reasons on the basis of proven competency in fulfilling those roles, with the aim of mobilising (ultimately unsuccessfully) those working groups as the backbone of the campaign.

I won't go into detail as to the reasons behind my decision to leave my voluntary role as part of the campaign team, as they're largely irrelevant and personal, but the way Jon presents them are utterly false. There were serious political disagreements about the direction of the campaign, which, in combination with campaign management issues, made myself and others feel as if our position within the campaign was untenable. Hence our resignations.

On a final note, I never wanted to be on the executive committee of DSYP. In the end, I was forced to stand for it by claims of those allied with comrade Benson that a situation of "dual power" had arisen within the organisation in response to the circumstances that led to Jon's own departure from that body. Jon's allies argued that such a situation was untenable and that I should sit on the executive. Personally, I always thought this claim to be bullshit, but eventually reluctantly put myself forward. To be honest, I wish I hadn't. Jon is right that a culture of secrecy arose and power within the organisation became more centralised. What he forgets to mention is that it was his comrades who formed the majority of the executive committee at the time. I was in a minority of two and thus had no control over its decisions, so the comrade's attempt to pin the blame for this on me is sadly not born out by reality.

Jon says my record speaks volumes as to my "opportunistic attitude towards organising, leadership and group discipline". This is only true if you take the falsehoods he has conjured up in his mind as provable fact and not the conjecture they really are. I made mistakes, but the real record shows that I acted in a principled way, whilst navigating the reality of mass politics.

It's really sad the comrade still feels the need to attack me relentlessly on the basis of me calling him incompetent many months ago. Time after time the allegations Jon has made towards my person are just provable fantasy. It is genuinely regrettable that our disagreements have reached this point.

Even after Jon's document appeared, I attempted to reach out in the hope that we might reconcile our differences. Unfortunately, I do not think this exchange is proving constructive, and so this will be my final contribution to the matter. I wish everyone in

the Democratic Socialists all the best. We have a world to win.

Max Shanly
email

Fan fiction

Max Shanly has written a letter to the *Weekly Worker* (June 11) in response to Ian Spencer's own (Letters, June 4). In it he accurately corrects Ian, pointing out that he was opposed to the Democratic Socialists of Your Party liquidating and instead moved his own proposal. That's about where Max's accuracy ends.

First, Max argues that he put forward a proposal for a campaign for a Democratic Socialists of Great Britain. While the proposal did start off calling for a campaign, the aim of such a campaign was for it to organise an open split from Your Party, founding a new party via a conference in July. In contrast to Tina Becker's own campaign proposal, this one was much more unfeasible.

It's worth noting what this campaign would have asked from DSYP organisers - to reformulate its constitution and standing orders for a party of the size of the proposed split. It would have required a members handbook, rules and disciplinary process. Some tasks we at Democratic Socialists have also had to do, but with the added pressure of being professional enough for a new party. These include a more professional website, a professional membership management system, including a payment system, a forum for members, as well as setting up internal and external comms for the new party. This is all additional work, besides providing the logistics for an in-person conference within a few months (with what funds?).

For Max's proposal, to have

been in any way feasible, would've required DSYP mobilising the full weight of its influence to pull in all the various parts of the post-YP left, including the proto-branches, All-London Delegates Assembly, Connections (now a network), Members Charter (now its own organisation distinct from YP), the grassroots factions and the pre-existing socialist organisations still interested in organising with the YP left. For the DSGB to be viable as a party, all of these organisations would've had to have joined, despite some having very distinct politics from DSYP and others, encompassing a very broad spectrum of opinion.

Further, many of these organisations have had bad blood with each other and with DSYP, due to internal arguments and backroom politicking within Grassroots Left. This is unsurprising, given how Grassroots Left was cohered under a project of stitching together different leftwing groups in order to win a (mostly unwinnable) election, rather than a long-term project of building up a principled, democratic opposition to the Corbyn faction. Even if these groups could've coalesced around DSGB, how many people would such a split draw to it in the first place? Would a new party formed out of the fragmented ex-Your Party left have been greater or lesser than the sum of its parts? Could it have really drawn back the many organisers and independent socialists who'd already left Your Party?

Secondly, all of this organising would've had to be done by an organisation whose activists were already exhausted by the campaigning for the YP founding conference, the Grassroots Left CEC campaign, and by internal issues within DSYP. Added to

Online Communist Forum



Sunday June 28 5pm

Andy Burnham and the keys of No10
Political report from the CPGB's
Provisional Central Committee and
discussion

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all of that was the demoralisation DSYF organisers were feeling after losing the Grassroots Left central executive committee campaign and the behaviour of The Many's representatives on the CEC. Moreover, how would the CEC have responded to the call for an open split? How would this have looked, when now branches are just getting formed? How would those involved in pre-existing leftwing and socialist organisations respond to another organisation considering itself the socialist party of Britain?

It was in this context that I supported Jon Benson's proposal for DSYF to liquidate into Revolutionary Socialists in the 21st Century, this would have allowed us to have preserved DSYF's documents and funnelled organisers into an organisation with a healthy, democratic internal culture. That said, I also supported Tina's proposal, with its focus on political education and intervening in Your Party, the ex-YP left and beyond, which in contrast to Max's proposal was more feasible in scope, more respectful of DSYF organisers' time and more sustainable as a long-term project.

Next, I need to address the allegation that Marxist Unity Caucus members raided the DSYF meeting. Firstly, MUC has more members in total than the amount of people present at the meeting. The majority of MUC members didn't attend. Secondly, the meeting was open to all DSYF organisers, both local and national, and all MUCers who attended had already been onboarded to DSYF - most of them were national organisers in any case. Further, many of these members of MUC also spend a lot of time organising in RS21 - in workplace and tenant struggles, in anti-fascist coalitions, and in liberation movements.

Lastly, while I suggested that MUC attendees vote for liquidation, and then for Tina's proposal, MUC had no official position on what path DSYF should take and MUC members could vote how they wished.

As for his argument that MUC members voted for a proposal they had no intention of carrying out, MUC members have joined Democratic Socialists and three sit on its executive committee made up of seven members.

Max lost the vote in DSYF not because of any underhandedness, but because he could neither convince a majority nor muster up enough of his own supporters, who would've been needed to actually carry out his proposal. Rather than be a principled minority within DSYF and work towards winning over the organisation to his position, he then left Democratic Socialists and took an amended version of his proposal to Members Charter instead. While it was one among many to pass (I'm not entirely sure how that will work), he has publicly distanced himself from them since.

Democratic Socialists (formally DSYF) has just relaunched. Please check out our documents on our website (democraticsocialists.org.uk) to see our position on the kind of socialist party we need. Further, RS21 will be kicking off the programme drafting process soon and will be holding its 'Festival of the Oppressed' conference this weekend. I invite readers of the *Weekly Worker* to attend.

Bryce Bailey
RS21, Democratic Socialists and MUC

Pro-western

I spent a couple of days in Albania last week and witnessed first-hand the widely reported 'flamingo revolution' protests, which seemed to be taking place almost continuously. As is well known, the mobilisation is directed against plans to pave over a protected nature reserve in the Vjosa-Narta delta - one of the Adriatic's most crucial wetlands - for a luxury property development project aimed at wealthy tourists. The venture is backed by high-profile American capital - specifically via Ivanka Trump and Affinity Partners, the investment firm owned by

Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

Albania - once perhaps the world's most staunchly national-communist state under Enver Hoxha - has been transformed into one of the countries most subservient to the strategic and financial interests of the US and the EU. Prime minister Edi Rama - a towering figure who has dominated the country's politics for over a decade - embodies this trajectory like few others. A couple of weeks ago, he delivered an unbelievably deferential speech in the Knesset, fawning before Benjamin Netanyahu, Itamar 'Himmler' Ben-Gvir and the rest of the far-right coalition. Rama blamed Hamas entirely for the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and even suggested that Albanian ground troops might be dispatched to assist Israeli forces. As for the anti-corruption protests at home, he dismissed them as (what else?) "anti-Semitic".

Thus, as Matt Broomfield recently put it in a *Jacobin* article, the protestors are finding themselves "in an unexpected confrontation with a global constellation of Trump-aligned financial interests and Israeli-linked power brokers".

This may well be the case - though, speaking to a few of the protestors in Tirana, I didn't get the impression that their consciousness had quite arrived where the *Jacobin* piece locates them objectively. The protests were "not against the US" and "not against Trump", a young couple assured me - only against prime minister Edi Rama. His government had a long history of corruption, they explained, and the fact that he thought he could sell the natural reserve behind their backs was merely the last straw. They had lived through "50 years of communism", they said - though they were clearly too young to remember any of it - and finally wanted to become fully integrated with the west, beginning with the EU.

I suppose this helped explain the prominence of American flags waving alongside Albanian ones at the protests, as well as banners such as "Europe, can you hear us?" If anything, the protestors appeared to view Rama's corruption not as a symptom of his collusion with western elites, but as an obstacle standing in the way of Albania becoming a model western country.

Mind you, I spent only a few days there and spoke to a small sample of people. But the sentiments I heard expressed were reminiscent of those at the 2014 Euromaidan in Ukraine. The glaring difference is that Albania already has an intensely sycophantic, pro-western government. The protesters, however, completely decouple the local regime's actions from those of its western patrons. In their idealised image of the west, corruption, land grabs and affronts to democracy are local aberrations, entirely foreign to the Euro-Atlantic system itself.

This political blind spot is rooted in the specific trauma of Albania's modern history. The collapse of the Hoxhaist autarky in 1991 did not just usher in capitalism: it triggered a total ideological pivot. In the mid-1990s, the country fell victim to massive, state-sanctioned pyramid schemes that collapsed in 1997, plunging Albania into

a brief civil war and anarchy. Throughout these crises, and the subsequent mass emigration that has seen a vast portion of the population leave for Greece, Italy and the UK, the 'west' - and the EU in particular - has been cast not as a political choice, but as a form of secular salvation. Rama has skillfully exploited this, positioning Albania as a reliable Nato asset - hosting a tactical air base and agreeing to process Italian asylum-seekers on Albanian soil - in order to buy compliance from Washington and Brussels for his domestic consolidation of power.

Witnessing this, I was reminded of the critique of nationalism put forward by the German Marxist, Freerk Huisken. He notes that, because nationalism can never quite deliver on its promises of universal domestic prosperity, it continuously produces frustrated nationalists. Rather than questioning the ideology itself, they look for 'traitors' to depose, demanding an even more radical, purer nationalist leadership. The conclusion is always that policy was simply not nationalist enough.

In Albania, a parallel logic to 'westernism' applies. When a fiercely pro-western, neoliberal government fails to deliver happiness, stability and ecological preservation, the underlying ideology is never interrogated. The complicity of western capital - whether via Trumpian real-estate firms or EU diplomatic tolerance of Rama's autocracy - is filtered out. Instead, the collective conclusion is that the country's orientation is simply 'not western enough', and that salvation lies in a more perfect, more total submission to the very forces currently paving over the Vjosa-Narta delta!

Maciej Zurowski
Italy

Critical support?

To weigh in a little on the debate as to whether China is imperialist or not: are we taking into account the character of its exports? When we think of imperialist exports, we obviously think of capital exports: nation-states that frequently export capital - largely surplus capital, which they cannot invest profitably domestically - are considered to be imperialist, ever more dependent on monopolising industry on the world market. According to *China Briefing*, however, 64.6% of the country's foreign direct investment has been made by state-owned enterprises (SOEs) ('China strengthens oversight of state-owned assets overseas amid global tensions' *South China Morning Post* April 9).

That is not to say that China therefore cannot be considered imperialist, but it is a factor that needs to be included in the conversation. What can be said is that 65% is a rather large proportion. That is the cumulative total. It is down from 70%-80% in the period before 2015, but up from 51% in 2017.

I am not altogether sure what to make of this information, since a lot more detail and context is required, as is the case for the mix of China's economy in general. One could argue that China is largely 'exporting social capital' rather than exporting private capital. It could also be argued that the Chinese state is a capitalist state - since a fully

communist country technically would not have a state - and that its SOEs ultimately serve Chinese and global capital, just as Britain's post-war public assets ultimately served British capital and the British capitalist state (even if that level of public ownership endangered the British capitalist class by strengthening and emboldening Britain's workers).

The picture on China is complex and it is difficult to take a hard and fast position on the character of its system. But exporting social capital must surely be preferable to exporting private capital and should probably be considered as beneficial to the global working class. One thing I will say about China is that, just as we should oppose further privatisation here in the belly of the imperialist beast, we should defend China from attempts by western and Chinese capitalists to privatise the rest of China's SOEs - an outcome that would be absolutely devastating for the global working class. Doing so *might necessarily* mean giving critical support to the Communist Party of China, whatever its shortcomings.

Ted Reese
email

Dead trans

Trans people are less likely to hold stable employment due to their looks. We know sex workers are disproportionately transgender and, when trans people come out, they lose essential supports like their family, church and community, which cause disproportionate struggles. I was once homeless and I know a number of trans people in my small city alone who are too because they have *no-one* to help them.

They turn to drugs, etc and die, but that isn't always counted as suicide. When we march, we march in grief. Our most powerful chant is "No more dead friends!" because we all know trans people personally who have died too young.

Plus trans people are facing global displacement, including internal displacement within the US. I have an American friend who was fired because she is trans. She was told to "Leave Madeline at home" and fired in a red state. Lawyers said they cannot uphold gender expression if it's not cared about by the state or federally. She is one of many who have fled to Minnesota in the hope of actually migrating to Canada.

Jackson Unger
email

Missed me?

Since you agreed to publish my Hamas article and then changed your mind because of my "reputation", I would be grateful if you could let our *Weekly Worker* comrades see what they missed by letting them go to substack.com/@petegregson.

Pete Gregson
One Democratic Palestine

Editorial note

Just to note, the *Weekly Worker* never agreed to publish Pete Gregson's article on Hamas. We are, though, more than happy to feature letters from him, including the one above. We would only have published his article if we thought it was worthwhile carrying a rejoinder - we don't.

Peter Manson
London

Fighting fund

Vital necessities

As I write, there are just six days left in June for us to reach that much needed fundraising monthly target of £2,750. As things stand, we have £2,149 in the kitty, so another £601 will do the trick!

Amongst this week's contributions were two brilliant *three-figure* contributions from comrades SK and PM, plus more modest, yet still highly valued, donations from comrades OG (£26), GB (£25), RN and DR (£20 each), IS (£17) and IT (£10). All of those came in the shape of bank transfers or standing orders.

When it came to PayPal, there was only one donation - £50 from comrade KS. And, of course, I'm not going to forget that highly cherished comrade Hassan, who handed his usual fiver to one of the *Weekly Worker* team.

All that came to a very useful £729, making it more than possible that we'll raise the extra £601 we still need by Tuesday

June 30. So please play your part if you can. With such a short time still to go, please make a bank transfer or click on that PayPal button on our website to make sure we get it before the deadline.

Only the *Weekly Worker* can be described as a "paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity", as we do every week at the top of our front page. The whole Marxist project is epitomised by those two vital necessities and we do everything we can to stimulate such "polemic" with the aim of driving forward such "unity" on a principled basis.

Do you fancy helping us out? Please go to the website below for information on the various ways you can donate to this cause ●

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

BURNHAM

Two letters for Andy

Can he halt long-term British decline with his Manchesterism magic? Within the confines of the present political system, can anyone? Paul Demarty examines the prospects for the 'king of the north'

To be fair to Andy Burnham, he made it look easy in the June 18 by-election in Makerfield. In a seat where Reform had run rampant in the recent local elections, he achieved a triumphant majority; turnout somehow increased, compared to the general election - a rare thing with by-elections.

This was the first real test of his personal popularity on his return journey to Westminster. Before it, there was always the chance (not insignificant) that it would turn out to be mostly Westminster bubble hype. He benefited from the Reform/Restore split, but did not in the end need it; those new voters may have been attracted to him personally, or merely repelled sufficiently by the far-right threat to vote for him. In either case, he passed the test; at issue is the question of whether he can lead Labour to victory when the time comes, and presumably to victory over either Reform or some kind of unified Tory/Reform bloc. On that front, he made as strong a case as can be made in such a bizarre off-year election.

So now, with Sir Keir Starmer's exit, Burnham truly is the heir apparent to this flailing Labour government. The question is: what can he do with it? He is not in the worst possible position, of course. He inherits a large majority, courtesy of the freakish electoral arithmetic of 2024. Having been out in the provinces, he is more or less untainted by the government's various scandals, though frankly we do not expect that to last.

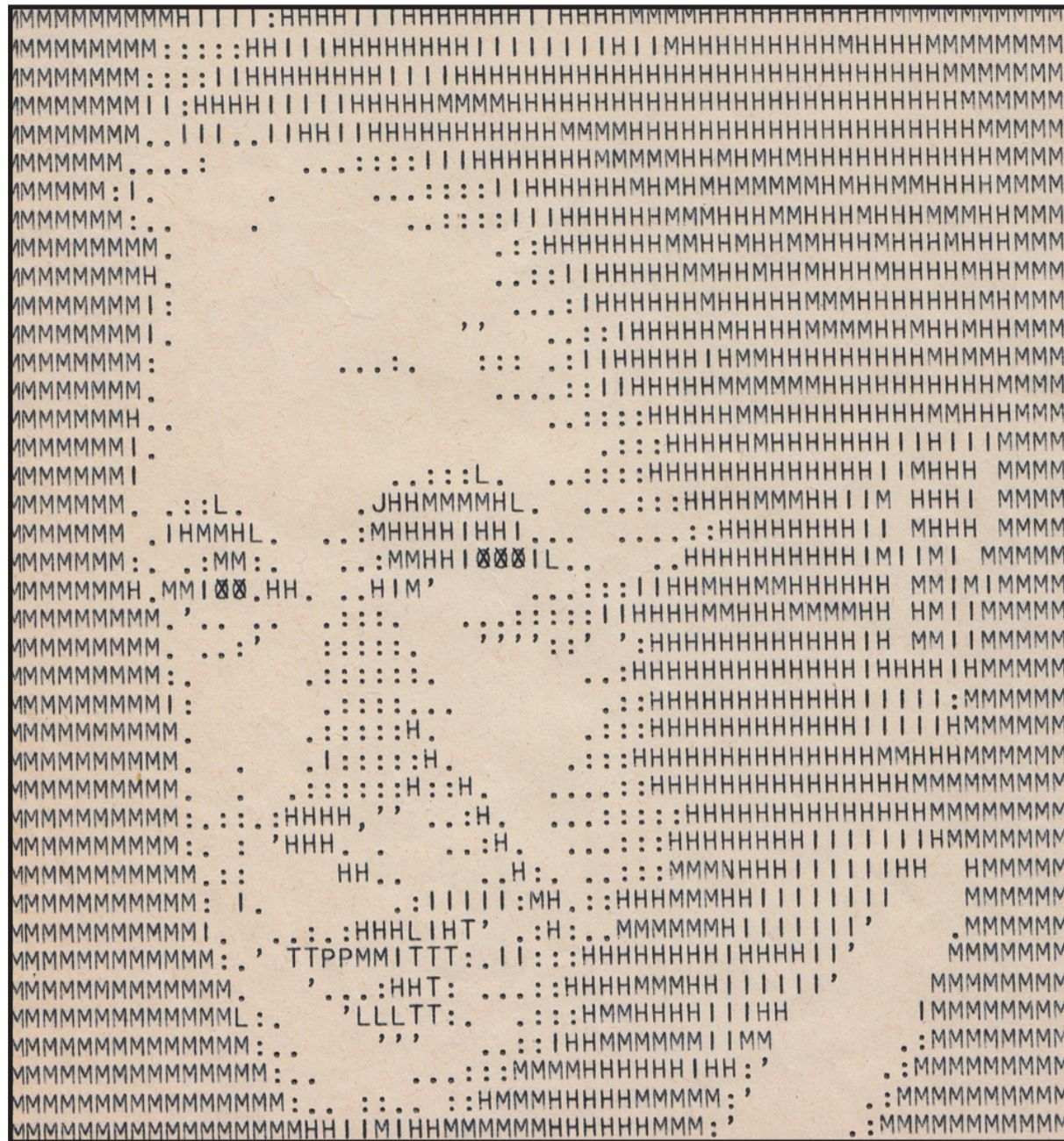
Nonetheless, even the narrow electoral measure of success is hardly a freebie. The British economy is stagnant. Nationalism is riding high in Scotland and Wales (and, for that matter, England, since that is one legitimate interpretation of Reform's success). Many municipalities are bankrupt or near-bankrupt. Successive prime ministers have promised to unleash new waves of development, to solve the housing crisis and other things - all have failed to deliver anything meaningful. The one serious state project of the last 10 years, the HS2 railway, is an ever-more absurd basket case.

We take it that this is not because Starmer or Rishi Sunak, or even Boris Johnson, were simply idiotic incompetents. Nor is it a matter of insincerity. Even if we take them only to be seeking glory, glory comes with big-ticket achievements. The truth is that each have found that they have no feasible levers to pull. Sooner or later, goodwill has to run out; and, when it does, scandals become ever harder to survive. That is how you get seven prime ministers in 10 years.

Headwinds

What are these headwinds? There are some immediate examples. The hardline 'remainers' are no doubt correct that Brexit has been a drag on growth, and they are correct to bemoan official dishonesty on this point, which serves only to patronise the people who voted for it. The end of the zero interest rate era has increased the cost of government borrowing, and thus reduced financial headroom for government investment.

Yet that is too small a canvas in the end. As we argue constantly in this paper, modern Britain is a dependent of the United States - its dependency takes the form of acting as an offshore financial centre and secondarily in occasional military support in American adventures. What prosperity



Dag Hammarskjöld, printout from teleprinter (1961-62)

this nation has enjoyed, especially since the end of the cold war, has required not rocking the boat. So long as things were generally on the up and up, this was a good enough deal to bring to voters; statecraft disasters like the Iraq war were survivable - if not by every individual politician, at least by the political class as a whole.

The financial crash of 2008, however, entailed the rescue of the financial sector at the expense of layers of the popular classes. It increased the number of zero-sum conflicts between sections of the general population, giving fresh impetus to hopeless endeavours like Brexit, and exacerbating anti-immigration sentiment (when our low-wage economy depends on bringing migrants in). It pushed the world into a new phase of great-power conflict, carrying with it the demand from the American overlords to increase arms spending and producing the usual 'guns or butter' dilemmas.

So the question of Burnham's prospects is an instance of the general problem of the power of the individual at this point in history. It is, I think, possible to imagine some bourgeois government beginning a real shift in Britain's world role: let us say, pivoting to Europe, joining a stronger cartel of states at the core of the EU, building strategic military cooperation on that basis rather than hub-and-spokes through US-controlled initiatives like Nato; weathering sanctions and capital flight with trading relationships on the continent and with friendly states further

abroad; leaning on European partners for assistance with infrastructure, while state capacity is rebuilt; and so on. Central bank independence could be ditched and monetary policy put at the direct service of all this.

I am not saying that this would necessarily be good from a communist point of view. Doing so would still require massive remilitarisation and the cuts to service provision that would entail. It would also require ruthless and dictatorial action - imprisoning Nigel Farage, Tony Blair and most press owners as agents of a hostile foreign power, for a start (and purges of the secret state along the same lines). Union activity and far-left political activity would face the same kind of counter-subversive interference. In short, it would be a kind of total military mobilisation, albeit without an actual 'hot' war to fight (yet), and it would come with severe short-term economic costs.

I come up with this illustration to indicate the scale of changes required to accomplish a breakout from US dominance on a sheerly bourgeois basis. Yet we can already see problems - not least that it would require political co-thinkers on the continent to alter European politics, weaken the dictatorship of the judiciary within the EU, abolish the Germans' beloved debt brakes, and so forth. Even at this level, the required levers are not in Burnham's hands and - for all the occasional huffing and puffing from Emmanuel Macron, especially about European sovereignty - there seems little grasp there of the scale of the task

either. Wolfgang Streeck was surely right to dismiss Macron's "notorious inconsequential self-promotions" a few months ago.¹

Plans

What does Burnham plan to do? We have very little to go on. He has said no more about policy than he thought prudent on the Makerfield campaign trail. Mathew Lawrence of the public-ownership think-tank, Common Wealth, has published a longer version of his big idea - the 'productive state', under the banner of the Mainstream caucus in Labour. We discussed an earlier version, published in the *New Statesman*, recently, so will not rehash that here.² Yet this is hardly an official statement of Burnham's camp.

Burnham's 'Manchesterism' is less an ideology or a programme for government than a projection screen for various incompatible hopes. What else could it be? His job as mayor of Greater Manchester was a relatively cushy one. He received and disposed of specific central government grants; it was his job to give things out, and the council's job to take other things away. This is a job that can be mostly delegated, and the rest carried out strictly on a vibes basis. Does that work in No10? Just ask Boris Johnson.

It will not come as a great surprise to any readers that our answer to this bind is an international movement of communist parties, if such a thing can be built. That, a critic will say, is your answer to everything - while not quite true, it is true enough that we will take it on the chin.

The problem at hand, however - that some devious prankster seems to have snuck into No10 and replaced the toilet with an ejector seat! - highlights a particular aspect of our perennial solution. The communist movement, even in its rather straitened current form, is international. We are no great fans of tankie-ism, but it is at least a kind of international perspective. Now look at the dilemma of the poor souls doomed to become British prime minister: this is essentially a coordination problem. One either needs the consent of the US or a defensible bloc opposed to it to get out of the fiscal and geopolitical straitjacket that ultimately ensures that potholes go unfilled, houses go unbuilt and rivers get flooded with effluence.

Because the communist project exceeds the national frame of action, it has potentially far more traction on this problem than routine bourgeois governments. It does not need to engage in foolish and complacent delusions that things are so bad because of the last guy's 'incompetence'; it can face the real constraints head-on. And, by disciplining its public leaders, it can avoid absurd and demeaning spectacles like the slow-motion car crash of Starmer's premiership.

What goes for Starmer and Burnham, of course, goes equally for Zack Polanski, or 'left populists' like Podemos in Spain, and similar organisations. It is not enough to break with treasury-brain: one must see the rational kernel in it. To do so just is to dispense with the idea that 'I alone can fix this', or that some cocktail of targeted political messaging can build an impregnable electoral coalition among passive and atomised voters. (It is not so much a problem for Nigel Farage, since he is nothing more than a Renfield to the Dracula of the American right, and promises national independence only from America's perceived enemies.)

In the meantime, Burnham gets to take his turn at being the man of the moment. It all recalls a few lines from Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic*, spoken by a retiring 'war on drugs' official to his successor:

You know, when Khrushchev was forced out, he sat down; he wrote two letters and gave them to his successor. He said, "When you get yourself into a situation you can't get out of, open the first letter, and you'll be saved. And when you get yourself into another situation you can't get out of, open the second letter."

Well, soon enough, this guy found himself in a tight place, so he opened the first letter, which said, "Blame everything on me". So, he blamed the old man. It worked like a charm. He got himself into a second situation he couldn't get out of, and he opened the second letter. It said, "Sit down and write two letters".

Perhaps someone should make sure there's a DVD copy at 10 Downing Street. It could save a lot of time and heartache ●

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Notes

1. newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/american-violence.
2. See 'Burnham rolls the dice' Weekly Worker May 21: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1586/burnham-rolls-the-dice.

BY-ELECTION

Makerfield was historic

Andy Burnham gained a sweeping victory, but it would be foolish to project the results onto the national picture. People were not only voting against Reform, but to get rid of a widely despised prime minister, writes **Eddie Ford**

When it comes to assessing the Makerfield results, it seems appropriate to begin with the hoary old phrase from Harold Wilson about how ‘a week is a long time in politics’. Well, what a week then! It has involved near endless speculation based on the outcome, such as ‘Labour is bound to win the next general election’, the ‘Polanski wave has gone into reverse’, or the ‘Tories are finished’

Andy Burnham, of course, secured a landslide victory with almost 25,000 votes and a majority of over 9,200 - certainly exceeding the expectations from the opinion polls, which projected a far narrower win over Reform. The latter considerably underperformed compared with its showing in May’s local elections that saw it win more than half the vote, with Labour way behind on 23%. This must worry Nigel Farage because, of the 90 seats where Reform finished second to Labour at the 2024 general election, Makerfield was the seventh closest result - exactly the sort of place he needs to win if Reform is to stand a serious chance of winning the next general election. No wonder he posted a video clip saying the party’s second-place finish was “disappointing”, adding that Burnham had won the contest with a “vote share that nobody could quite see coming”.¹

With 54% of the vote, the former mayor of Greater Manchester finished 20 percentage points ahead of Reform, gaining comfortably more votes than Reform and Restore Britain combined - something of symbolic significance, because, even though Restore did split the far-right vote on the night, this did not make any material difference.² In fact, Burnham won more than *all* the other parties combined, because the performance of the ‘legacy’ parties was so abysmal - with the Tories, Greens and Liberal Democrats losing their deposits, as their votes barely registered statistically. You can contrast the 6.8% for Restore - a brand new formation founded only last year - to the hapless Lib Dems and Greens on 0.4% and 0.7% respectively, and the Tories not much better on 2.2%.

One particularly remarkable feature of Makerfield was the 58.8% turnout - a rise of 6.3 points from the 52.5% in the 2024 general election. That bucked the usual pattern which sees quite a dip in turnout for by-elections. Not since the Liberals won Torrington in 1958 has turnout risen by more, and indeed it is the third highest rise on a general election since 1945, while the actual turnout figure was the highest for a parliamentary by-election since Brecon and Radnorshire in 2019 (59.7%).³

Anyway, Andy Burnham was sworn in as MP on June 22 and, of course, the Makerfield result created a vacancy in the Greater Manchester mayoralty, with an election set for July 30.

Tactical

Nigel Farage and the polls aside, the extent of Burnham’s victory is not especially surprising, as there was clearly a personal factor in a by-election which was *historic* - a much over-used word that, for once, justifies the term. People were not just voting for an MP: they were also voting for a prime minister, which people were conscious of when they entered the polling booth. They clearly did not want more of Sir Keir.

It is worth adding that with by-elections like Makerfield - though we



Turnout high, margin of victory high too

are still guessing with this particular constituency, which sometimes can be a dangerous business - we saw significant *tactical voting*. All you need do is look at the first couple of polls for Makerfield. What you had to begin with was a narrow lead for Burnham of one to three points. But, as the weeks went by, there developed a more solid lead for Burnham - up to 10 points - and a draining of Tory, Green and Lib Dem votes. You can reasonably guess that a good slice of Tory votes would have gone to Reform (but, of course, there is room for doubt, as a section of the Tory vote might have possibly gone to Burnham on the basis that he was the only serious challenger to Reform). But that was almost certainly the case with the Green and Lib Dem votes, which defected *en masse* (or so it seems) to Andy Burnham.

Whether expected or not, not only did Restore Britain *consistently* come third in the polls throughout this campaign: its vote actually held up and it got what had been predicted. Hence, for example, an Opinion poll published on June 13 had Restore on 7%, as did a Survation poll earlier - which it got on the day.⁴ There was some speculation before the election that Restore voters who wanted to stop Labour might tactically vote for Reform, but that did not happen. Presumably they could not stomach supporting Nigel Farage - a figure despised by Rupert Lowe, founder of Restore Britain.

Of course, Restore is challenging Reform *from the right* - for instance, in its proposals around the death penalty and ‘rule by referendum’.⁵ But there is also its policy for mass deportations, which seems to be on the level of *millions* of people, in which case we should not be too surprised if they could not even envisage voting Reform - too soft by half! As we saw from the polls and then the election results, there were three parties in the running and one of them did not stand a chance. Therefore, in reality, there were only two - with King Andy reigning supreme on June 18.

Reportedly, the population of Makerfield got sick and tired of canvassers, pollsters and journalists constantly knocking on their doors - not to mention film crews coming into the pubs and local shops. Apparently, Burnham’s campaign team actually knocked on the door of residents *four times*, showing you the intensity of the election. Indeed journalists complained that they sometimes did not actually meet ordinary people - rather, fellow journalists who had come to Makerfield to cover the story! In that sense, it was a really freaky and interesting by-election.

It is also undoubtedly true that, irrespective of the result, Keir Starmer was the loser. If Burnham had lost it, you can confidently surmise that Labour MPs who fear for their jobs at the next general election would have blamed Starmer for his defeat - not Burnham himself. But, on the other

hand, Burnham’s actual victory was clearly not a victory for Keir Starmer. Rather, a victory for Burnham and his leadership ambitions, as we saw in the rolling coverage on June 22 of Starmer’s resignation and timetable for departure.

Strategy

We have already established the importance of tactical voting. Just as importantly, if not more so, Morgan McSweeney, the departed chief of staff at No10, was actually banking on this strategy for the next general election, talking up Reform and sidelining the Tories - corralling the so-called middle ground, maybe the left as well, into voting Labour in order to stop Reform before it becomes a juggernaut. Therefore, in a certain way, what happened in Makerfield represented a crowning success for the McSweeney strategy.

We saw a similar phenomenon last October in the Caerphilly by-election. Basically, Labour, Green and Lib Dem supporters lined up to vote Plaid Cymru in order to stop the Reform candidate, Llŷr Powell.⁶ This ensured that Lindsay Whittle won with 47% of the vote, ending Labour domination in Caerphilly, overcoming expectations of a closer race between Plaid and Reform - the latter getting 36.0%.

We also saw what you could call a *deflected* version of the ‘McSweeney strategy’ in the recent Gorton and Denton by-election. Initially the Labour Party was just ahead of the

Greens in the polls. Inevitably, a lot of the Labour left was arguing that, if you want to stop Reform, then logically - at least at the very early phase of the campaign - the thing to have done was to vote Labour. But, of course, the Greens subsequently opened up a lead and eventually romped home.

If you are a strategist for Reform, this is something that ought to trouble you - that there is a big potential anti-Reform vote in many constituencies, where a lot of people are now not voting positively for a party, but rather on a negative basis. Caerphilly, Gorton and Denton, and now Makerfield - ominous names for any Reform strategist.

The main lesson we can draw from Gorton and Denton, Caerphilly, Makerfield - not to mention Aberdeen and Arbroath - is that they threw up radically different results. There is *no* clear pattern, except that things continue to move to the right ●

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Notes

1. youtube.com/shorts/BJz2bErYjQI.
2. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Makerfield_by-election.
3. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Brecon_and_Radnorshire_by-election.
4. opinionium.com/resource-center/makerfield-by-election-poll.
5. See restorebritain.vote/policies/elections-democracy.
6. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Caerphilly_by-election.

DISCUSSION

Time is on our side

Quick decision-making is perfectly understandable during civil war conditions. But to create unity, prevent irresponsible splits and to educate the party and the working class, provision must be made for extensive debate.

Mike Macnair continues to explore procedural principles

In the first article in this series last week, I laid out what I planned to cover; and began with arguments for the importance of the issue, and why questions of procedures of decision-making should not be regarded as a diversion from 'real politics'.

This week I turn to issues of *time*. These are posed both by arguments that democratic decision procedures are time-wasting *in general*, and by claims that the urgency of the situation, or the need to seize the moment and the initiative, require undemocratic decision procedures.

There will remain to be covered my third general point, which is that we are concerned with principles and guidelines for practice, not with absolute fixed rules like those to be found in Citrine or Roberts' rules; and the paramount principle - which will reassert itself at all levels of concrete details - that people who are prepared to participate in the decision process should be able to take real decisions.

Within the framework of this principle, it will then be possible to approach the *conduct of decision-making meetings*: they need chairs (not 'facilitators', which is a managerialist concept); how the chair should work (to draw out and promote clarifying disagreements); how to handle proposals for amendments; dealing with proposals that are counterposed to each other; and so on.

Decision-making on a larger scale involves specific considerations. The easiest example is national organisation, but the same issues would apply in a local or sectoral organisation that got big enough. *Sub-division* into local groups - cells, branches, and so on - is indispensable; and a large part of discussion can and must take place in these, before any larger conference. But even so, large numbers imply too many choices available, and it remains necessary to narrow the range of possible choices beyond the procedural forms discussed for meetings in general. Part of this role can be played by factional groups and caucussing at conferences; but arrangements such as commissions (as used in the early Comintern) and compositing negotiations (as used in the Labour Party before the recent past) are necessary.

The same issue - too many choices available - poses in a different way the question of leading committees. These are as much needed by large local organisations as by national ones. Here the choice between *collective* leading committees and the cults of *individual* leaders (and the direct election of individual officers) is a choice between democracy and Bonapartism.

Question time

On the question of time, I will begin with a quotation from Trotsky and his immediate co-thinkers, from 1933, from the document, 'The international left opposition, its tasks and methods':

The frequent practical objections, based on the 'loss of time' in abiding by democratic methods, amount to shortsighted opportunism. The education and consolidation of the organisation is a most important task. Neither time nor effort should be spared for its fulfilment. Moreover, party democracy, as the only conceivable guarantee against unprincipled conflicts and unmotivated splits,



Dmitrii Moor 'Be on guard!' (1920)

in the last analysis does not increase the overhead costs of development, but reduces them. Only through constant and conscientious adherence to the methods of democracy can the leadership undertake important steps on its own responsibility in truly emergency cases without provoking disorganisation or dissatisfaction.¹

A little earlier but less general (and making doubtful historical claims), but still posing the issue of the leadership allowing time to be 'lost' sending issues to the membership, is Trotsky on 'The crisis in the German left opposition':

We must not forget that even if we are *centralists*, we are *democratic* centralists who employ centralism only for the revolutionary cause and not in the name of the 'prestige' of the officials. Whoever is acquainted with the history of the Bolshevik Party knows what a broad autonomy the local organisations always enjoyed; they issued their own papers, in which they openly and sharply, whenever they found it necessary, criticised the actions of the central committee... Naturally, as soon as it became necessary, the Bolshevik central committee could give orders. But subordination to the committee was possible only because the absolute loyalty of the central committee toward every member of the party was well known, as well as the constant readiness of the leadership to hand over every serious dispute for consideration by the party...²

I do not quote these passages in order to assert that, because they are Trotsky, they must be true. I already made the point last week that Trotsky's arguments about the "party regime" are inconsistent; and if we push further back we can find a Trotsky advocating the militarisation of labour in 1919-20, a Trotsky for whom constitutional

issues are unimportant in 1915, a Trotsky who is a critic of Lenin's supposed 'bureaucratic centralism' in 1903-04...³

The point, rather, is that the argument that democratic methods involve 'loss of time' was already around in 1933; and that so were the counter-arguments (routinely rejected by modern Trotskyists) that democratic methods are both essential to party education, and vital to avoid "unprincipled conflicts and unmotivated splits".

Leftists of the 2020s should be all too easily able to recognise "unprincipled conflicts and unmotivated splits". On the other hand, the extent to which undemocratic methods are anti-educational, and thus have tended to *dumb down* the left, is parallel to hypoxia, preventing the person affected being aware that they are becoming hypoxic: being dumbed down by the anti-educational methods of undemocratic decision-making, the left can no longer recognise what they have lost.⁴

It is best, I think, to start on the 'time' issue with *social* decision-making, before moving to the specific arguments that *party* decision-making needs to avoid 'loss of time' in democratic procedures. It is worth flagging the point that the "democratic methods" Trotsky refers to are 'deliberative' - in the sense that they entail *discussion* before a decision is reached. (They are not 'deliberative' in the commonly used sense of substituting discussion/deliberation for any actual decision process; this approach entails an external decision process, and is thus *anti-democratic*.)⁵ It is the need for discussion *and* decision processes involving everyone who is willing to participate that is 'time-consuming'.

As I said in summarising the argument in the first article, there are some decisions for which democratic decision-making has to be recognised as inappropriate because of urgency. I gave the examples of decision-making in active military operations,

or in emergency management (fire, flood, etc). The point is that these contexts require that *some* decision should be made very rapidly. In such contexts failure to decide is worse than getting it wrong. Moreover, if the decision *does* turn out to be wrong, it will usually become obvious very quickly.

(It might be thought that under socialism we will not need military operations. But this is only true of *global* socialism. Reshaping the *party* for the needs of civil war in 1919-21 is at the core of the degeneration of the Russian Communist Party. And, on the other hand, we will certainly still need to have emergency management for fires, floods, earthquakes, epidemics, and so on.)

At the other extreme, there are some issues that are so non-urgent that - though we should discuss them in educational events - we should not take binding votes on them. An infamous example: it was legitimate for the USSR to spend *some* public money experimenting with Trofim Lysenko's arguments for inheritance of acquired characteristics in biology; to adopt these views as a state-imposed dogma was a disaster. The same is true of the UK Supreme Court's decision to overrule the Gender Recognition Act 2004 and give the force of law to Genesis 1:27: "male and female created he them".⁶

Turning to the level of the party, building the British Socialist Workers Party round the idea that Tony Cliff's version of the theory that the USSR was 'state capitalist' allowed the preservation of 'revolutionary politics' has proved to be as poisonous as Lysenkoism, albeit on a massively smaller scale. Equally, though less immediately poisonous, making Ted Grant's view on physics in the book *Reason in revolt* a party position is undesirable.⁷

At the same end of the spectrum (but this time as a negative) is the abuse of demands for additional discussion to prevent *any* decision: filibustering, demands for more and yet more 'consultation' before a decision is reached, 'Maxwellisation', scorched-earth litigation tactics, and so on. The common tag is that "justice delayed is justice denied";⁸ it is equally true that democratic decision-making delayed may be democratic decision-making denied. Capitalist constitutions are designed to facilitate blocking decisions by delay. The reason is that they suppose the default decision rule is that *owners* are entitled to decide; hence, there is a presumption against collective action,⁹ and democratic decision-making is to be blocked where owners (bribe-payers) want it blocked, including by delays.

The pattern is reproduced in the trade unions and the Labour Party, where the leadership organises to kick a decision into the long grass by endlessly deferring it or referring it from conference to the leadership itself, rather than openly debating its merits.

This is not a dialectic of democratic and non-democratic as interpenetrated, mutually necessary negations. It is a *spectrum* of the urgency of decision-making and of the extent to which the world, or the context, provides immediate testing of decisions. The problem is not, therefore, one to be *aufgehoben* by an imagined 'dialectical method'.

But, while the *actual* time needs of

decision-making for collective action is a spectrum, not a dialectic, the *ideologies* about this produced under capitalism are a dialectic. Capitalism is the contradictory unity of the market, with its freedom and equality, and the factory (starting with the sailing ship and the docks), with its sharply hierarchical authority; and this throws up liberal and patriarchal-nationalist political ideologies.

Specifically for our present concerns, the institutions of corruption in liberalism, producing the blocking of actions through delay, throw up as their negation the ideology of 'strongman' government: the decisive individual who, by cutting through the procedures, will "get things done". What we *actually* get from strongmen is visible in Boris Johnson's government and Donald Trump's administration (leave aside any number of dictators): overt corruption, cronyism and arbitrary and irrational decisions.

Strongman government then throws up as its negation the ideologies of 'separation of powers' and 'braking mechanisms' to *slow down* decision-making; which at the end of the day lead to blocking decisions, leaving decision-making power in the hands of private owners.

This capitalist political dialectic repeats itself in the left. The bureaucratic centralism of the old 'official communist' and Maoist parties and of the large majority of the Trotskyists throws up as its negation opponent ex-members and ex-minorities who promote a variety of 'separation of powers' schemes - and of the rejection of any real decision-making capability through 'networks' and so on.

The other side of the capitalist dialectic - delay as a form of minority rule, throwing up the cult of the strongman - can perhaps be seen in the *western* communist parties' adoption of bureaucratic centralism in the 1920s 'Bolshevisation' in the wake of the dilatory/blocking operations by the right wing of the French and Italian Socialist Parties, the German Independent Social Democratic Party, and so on, in 1919-21. It can also perhaps be seen in the 'Leninist party turn' of the British International Socialists - the SWP in the 1970s.

Wartime

I have just characterised the left as affected by a dialectic of political ideologies - liberalism and strongmanism - thrown up by *capitalism*. There are, however, specific left arguments for bureaucratic centralism based on the tasks of the party as such requiring urgent decision-making.

The more general argument that the party is as such a *military* organisation - an organisation all along designed for civil war. The idea is expressed in the formula, 'Leninist combat party' (which appears from quick googling to be an American phrase particularly associated with the US SWP and its splinters). It is, however, not dependent on this. The Russian Communist Party's eighth party congress in March 1919, ninth party conference in September 1920 and 10th party congress in March 1921 radically reshaped the party organisation in the direction of bureaucratic centralism, starting from the needs of civil war.¹⁰

It was in this reshaped form that the 1921 third congress of Comintern

addressed organisational norms of the western communist parties as an alternative to the pro-capitalist constitutionalism of the socialist 'centrists'.¹¹ Lenin remarked at the 1922 Fourth Congress that the Third Congress resolution was "too Russian" - though this was still framed within the *inevitability of short-term civil war*, since he went on to say that "The fascists in Italy may, for example, render us a great service by showing the Italians that they are not yet sufficiently enlightened and that their country is not yet ensured against the Black Hundreds."¹²

The specific arguments behind these decisions are long since lost to the left; as Lenin put it in the speech just quoted, the western communists were "hanging [the third congress resolution] in a corner like an icon and praying to it." A good example is Alex Callinicos's 2013 article, 'Is Leninism finished?', in which the organisational forms posed in the 1920s for *civil war* are said to be essential to mobilising street actions and 'united fronts'.¹³

It has to be said, in addition, that the "Russian experience" the western communists were to assimilate was that of *the civil war*. The Bolshevik leadership retrospectively reinterpreted their past - since the time of Lenin's 1902 polemic *What is to be done?* - in the light of the centralist decisions of 1919-21. Already by 1920 it was visible to the RCP that the combination of the pressures of war work, plus the 1919 military-centralist turn, was destroying the collective life of the local organisations (trade union fractions and related subject groupings were abolished in March 1919, but reconstituted in December).¹⁴ The reality was that, if Bolshevism had from 1902 been like the military-centralist organisational conception developed in 1919-21, it would never have won the mass working class support that allowed the Bolsheviks to take power in 1917.

Flood time

The second line of argument for the need for urgency in the decisions of a revolutionary party is the centrality of timing, of seizing the initiative in order to make a revolution. Steve Bloom, for example, has argued against my book on strategy that it fails to grasp the need for the party to seize the "tide in the affairs of men": that is, the state of mass mobilisation:

As Mike correctly notes, a general strike is not a permanent state of mobilisation. It is, by its very nature, fleeting. And yet it is at this fleeting moment of general strike when the majority sentiment that can produce revolutionary change is at its height, and when the active mobilisation of that majority sentiment, which is essential for smashing the old state (more on this in a moment), is also at its height. This is "the tide in the affairs of men" that we must take at the flood "or lose our ventures".

Taken at the flood, the mass sentiment for social change reflected in the general strike can succeed in smashing the old state, establishing extreme democracy and achieving all the rest. Allowed to ebb - because the potential of the mass strike movement was not taken at the flood - and the inevitable result is demoralisation (or at least demobilisation) that begins to set in, as the old order re-establishes itself to fill the vacuum of power. The majority sentiment demonstrated by the strike begins to be transformed into its opposite. Such a process of transformation can be completed in a relatively brief time.

This was the danger Lenin noted in 1917, when he objected to Trotsky's plan to wait until the Congress of Soviets to give the Bolsheviks a clear democratic

mandate for the insurrection. Lenin feared that even a delay of weeks might result in an ebb in the mass sentiment for revolution, making insurrection more difficult or even impossible. Lenin's fears turned out to be unfounded. But they were based on a proper understanding of how revolutionary situations unfold - in particular how they come upon us and then disappear in a matter of weeks or months, if we fail to take advantage, in a timely way, of the majority sentiment in favour of revolution that has developed, while some tangible form of mass mobilisation is ascendant.¹⁵

This is personalised as 'Lenin versus Trotsky'.¹⁶ It is actually Lenin versus the Bolshevik leadership majority (which sided with Trotsky on the issue). Here, the leadership majority were clearly correct. October could not have succeeded without the alliance between the Bolsheviks, probably representing a majority of the urban proletariat (which was, however, a small minority of the *country*) and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, probably representing a majority of the peasantry (which was the large majority class). That alliance was possible because the Petrograd Military-Revolutionary Committee, which overthrew the provisional government, acted in the name of the Congress of Soviets that was about to meet.

A 'Bolshevik-only' insurrectionary general strike without that political alliance and its constitutional legitimacy would have met the fate of the Berlin radicals' attempted forcible resistance of January 1919, or the 1921 'March Action': that is, decisive and demoralising defeat. It is the democratic political commitments of the Bolsheviks, and their commitment to the worker-peasant alliance, which allowed the Bolshevik leadership to reach the right decision here.

We can, in fact, go further. Rosa Luxemburg argued in *The mass strike*:

To give the cue for, and the direction to, the fight; to so regulate the tactics of the political struggle in its every phase and at its every moment that the entire sum of the available power of the proletariat which is already released and active, will find expression in the battle array of the party; to see that the tactics of the social democrats are decided according to their resoluteness and acuteness and that they never fall below the level demanded by the actual relations of forces, but rather rise above it - that is the most important task of the directing body in a period of mass strikes. And this direction changes of itself, to a certain extent, into technical direction. A consistent, resolute, progressive tactic on the part of the social democrats produces in the masses a feeling of security, self-confidence and desire for struggle; a vacillating, weak tactic, based on an underestimation of the proletariat, has a crippling and confusing effect upon the masses.¹⁷

And in her 'The next step' (1910) we find:

For the expressions of the masses' will in the political struggle cannot be held at one and the same level artificially or for any length of time, nor can they be encapsulated in one and the same form. They must be intensified, concentrated and must take on new and more effective forms. Once unleashed, the mass action must go forward. And if at the acknowledged moment the leading party lacks the resolve to provide the masses with the necessary watchwords, then they are inevitably overcome by a certain disillusionment, their

courage vanishes and the action collapses of itself.¹⁸

A German left that had been trained up with arguments like these (and those of Anton Pannekoek - for example, in his 1912 'Marxist theory and revolutionary tactics', part of the same debate¹⁹) would inevitably be unable to hold radicalised local mass movements back from minority adventurism in order to allow the 'rearguard' to catch up, as the Bolsheviks did in the 'July Days' in 1917. And so it proved in 1919 (the 'Berlin uprising') and 1921 (the 'March action').

Initiative time

The significance of timing is not unique to conditions of revolutionary crisis. On the one hand, if George Galloway had walked out of the Labour Party and called for a new party on the day British troops went into Iraq on March 20 2003, as opposed to hanging on until the Labour Party expelled him on October 23, it is likely that the resulting movement would have been more powerful than Respect (founded January 2004). On the other hand, the role of the SWP in Respect was possible because of its role in Stop the War Coalition. And its role in the StWC was possible because the SWP seized the initiative in creating the coalition in 2001 to campaign against the war on Afghanistan.

This 'seizing the initiative' is precisely the problem. In the first place, each grouplet is determined to *have* the initiative, and hence creates its own front, which it hopes will be the one that 'takes off' (as the StWC 'took off'). Equally, groups walk out if they lose the majority (and thus initiative control) - thus the Socialist Party in England and Wales in the Socialist Alliance in 2001, and thus the SWP in Respect in 2007. Or they create competing initiatives to prevent their rivals' operations 'taking off' (as the three main French far-left groups have done against each other, repeatedly since the 1970s).

The problem is that if the fundamental task of the party is to catch the moment, to take the tide at the flood, to be "a political party that is capable of taking power, precisely at that moment when the mass strike poses this as a social necessity", the arguments quoted above for democratic methods must be wrong: the loss of time "wasted talking to ourselves", as advocates of bureaucratic centralism of various sorts put it, *is fatal* to the party.

Hence, in reality, the driver for the endless splittism of the far left: comrades are reluctant to "waste time talking to ourselves" and hence either minorities walk out of organisations in search of fresh fields and pastures new, or majorities invent factitious excuses of one sort or another to drive minorities out. The advocates of the mass-strike policy before 1914 were already driven towards bureaucratic-centralist sect-making in Luxemburg's and Leo Jogiches' Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, and in the US and British De Leonist Socialist Labour Parties. The reason being that the mass strike policy logically implied party control over the trade unions, and logically implied that internal dissent is time-wasting.

Back to Bolshevism and October. Their strategic orientation to political democracy, and the worker-peasant alliance, enabled the Bolsheviks to grow into a large-minority party with a mass-circulation paper in 1912; enabled the Bolsheviks to pursue a policy of patient explanation, with a view to winning the majority during 1917; and enabled them to make the practical alliance with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries that actually took power.

In reality, all this was the inheritance of August Bebel's and

Wilhelm Liebknecht's strategic conception, which was the foundation of the revolutionary social democracy of pre-1914. And this in turn was the legacy of Marx's and Engels' arguments against the Bakuninists, for a workers' party that attempted, not to lead the strike movement, but to create a *political voice for the class* in high politics.

Positive time

The fundamental positive conclusion is that militarised centralism and pre-emptive decision-making by governments, or by central committees (or politburos, or general secretaries) is to be restricted to the contexts where it is appropriate: that is, military and emergency decision-making.

Conversely, there is a right to actually take decisions, and mechanisms for preventing decisions being taken, like filibustering and other forms of 'talking out' agenda items have to be recognised and rejected.

Let me turn to *party* norms about the time problem, because we are not right now making decisions about a new constitution. First, *sufficient time* should be allowed for effective discussions *among the membership*. There are a series of consequences that follow. First, there do need to be regular annual conferences. Here the SWP, which actually holds annual conferences, does better than the Mandelites, who for all their (partial) acceptance of factions, tend to hold conferences with prolonged gaps between them to suit the convenience of the apparatus (as the Soviet regime and Comintern did).

Second, there needs to be sufficiently early publication of documents and draft motions, and sufficient time and space for a literary discussion to develop, counter-proposals and proposals for amendments to be drafted, and so on, before a conference. Here the SWP's three months would not be bad - were it not for the fact that the ban on 'permanent factions' and the limitation to three (internal) discussion bulletins effectively stifles initiative from outside the apparatus. The various broad-front left projects (Respect, Left Unity, Your Party ...) have been far worse, producing leadership proposals late and providing little or no space for effective discussion before voting. Even where it is not *openly* plebiscitary Bonapartism (as in Your Party), this stifles membership initiative and the educative effect of discussion.

Third, overcrowded agendas have the same effect of reducing what appears to be a conference to a combination of rally plus plebscite. There are two aspects to this. The first is that conferences need to meet for more than a single day (let alone, as is common on the left, a single day that starts late). It follows that even quite small organisations (say, of a couple of hundred members) need to have *delegate* conferences, so that those attending can so far as necessary book leave from work. The positive side of this coin is that the matters on the conference agenda need to be discussed in the pre-conference period in the local organisations (branches, cells) and sectoral ones (union, etc, fractions). This, of course, means that a democratic organisation has to *have* such organisations.

The second aspect of the 'crowded agendas' issue is that agendas need to be restricted: to try to cover everything is to cover nothing democratically. That means it is necessary to have decision mechanisms for what will go on the agenda, operating at an early stage, and themselves sufficiently politically transparent that there can be *argument* about the agenda before actually arriving at conference. The share of the agenda that is given to inspiring greetings from international co-thinkers or from militants in struggle needs to be reduced relative to recent British left practice: the

conference is a decision mechanism, and turning it into a rally is anti-democratic.

I have posed these issues in relation to *national* organisations. They are even more obviously posed to international organisations. But, as soon as a *local* organisation gets above a certain size, they are posed to it too. Thinking about the logic of *making time* for discussion and decisions is a fundamental question for the workers' movement and the left ●

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Notes

1. W Reisner (ed) *Documents of the Fourth International: the formative years (1933-40)* New York NY 1973, p29. For the date of the document, which is a bit more complicated, see p13.
2. G Breitman and S Lovell (eds) *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)* New York NY 1973, p155.
3. On the militarisation of labour, see, for example, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1920/military/ch02.htm; and, more generally, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1920/military/index.htm. The context and literature is conveniently assembled in S Louw, 'In the shadow of the pharaohs: the militarization of labour debate and classical Marxist theory' *Economy and Society* Vol 29 (2000), pp239-63, though Louw's actual argument is schematic anti-Enlightenment stuff. More of the *opposition to the militarisation* idea appears in M Brinton *The Bolsheviks and workers' control* chapter 5 (www.marxists.org/archive/brinton/1970/workers-control/05.htm). On 1915: 'revolution is first and foremost a problem of power - not of the political form (Constituent Assembly, republic, European federation), but of the social content of power' ('The struggle for power' *Nashe Slovo* October 17 1915 in 1905: see www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1907/1905/ch26.htm. And on 1903-04, *Report of the Siberian delegation* (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1903/xx/siberian.htm) and *Our political tasks* part IV (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1904/tasks/ch04.htm).
4. See, for example, www.boldmethod.com/learn-to-fly/aeromedical-factors/hypoxia: "One of the most dangerous things about hypoxia is the fact that it's impairing your judgement before you even know it's there." It is possible to make similar comments about intoxication; but the modern left's problem is not that they are ingesting poisons, but that they are depriving themselves of the necessary oxygen of discussion.
5. On 'deliberative democracy' there is now a large literature. Wikipedia gives a summary: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deliberative_democracy. Some useful critiques of 'shortcuts' (like lotocracy) appear in C Lafont *Democracy without shortcuts: a participatory conception of deliberative democracy* Oxford 2019.
6. See M Macnair, 'Case of judicial usurpation' *Weekly Worker* April 24 2025 for more detail on the UKSC's action (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1535/case-of-judicial-usurpation).
7. See M Macnair, 'Same old same old' *Weekly Worker* April 4 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1485/same-old-same-old).
8. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice_delayed_is_justice_denied provides various sources.
9. One line of argument is the liberal economists' 'collective action problem' concept, starting with M Olson *The logic of collective action* Cambridge MA 1965.
10. R Gregor (ed) *Resolutions and decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Vol 2: The early Soviet period 1917-1929* Toronto 1974, pp83-89, 90-98, 107-14, 119-24.
11. www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/3rd-congress/party-theses.htm (more detail at www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/3rd-congress/organisation/index.htm). There is a useful but uncritical Spartacist introduction at www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/3rd-congress/organisation/introduction.htm.
12. J Riddell (editor and translator) *Toward the united front: proceedings of the fourth congress of the Communist International, 1922* Leiden 2012, pp304-05.
13. socialistworker.co.uk/socialist-review-archive/leninism-finished. 'United fronts' in quote marks because the sort of single-issue protest campaigns the SWP promotes date in their origins to *before* there was a workers' independent political movement (let alone one split between socialists and communists) and are *not* united class fronts (contrary to the Comintern proposals of 1922 and after).
14. See above in note 10: pp107-10 (1920); p86 (abolition of fractions) and pp97-98 (their reconstitution).
15. 'In search of a synthesis' *Weekly Worker* August 1 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1502/in-search-of-a-synthesis).
16. Part of the cult-of-personality stuff developed from 1924; see LT Lih, '100 years is enough' *Weekly Worker* supplement, September 18 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1507/a-hundred-years-is-enough).
17. www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/ch04.htm.
18. www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1910/03/15.htm.
19. www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1912/tactics.htm.

LABOUR



Meet the new boss, same as the old boss

Sir Keir was not a total failure. He did a 'good job' in thoroughly marginalising the Labour left. But will Andy Burnham be any different? Unlikely, given the objective conditions, says **Carla Roberts**

In the end, it was all rather quick and relatively smooth. Having promised for weeks that he would not resign and would certainly not go without standing in a leadership contest, Keir Starmer effectively handed over the reins to Andy Burnham on June 22 - with "good grace", as he said, though he couldn't help deliver a small 'fuck you' in the process by denying Burnham's wishes to take over at Labour Party conference in September. Instead, Starmer's timetable means Burnham will have to take over in less than three weeks' time - prime minister number seven in 10 years.

Only the most foolish commentators (and there are a few) have argued that Starmer's resignation represents some kind of 'fall from grace' for the oh-so-popular prime minister - did he not win by a landslide in 2024? Well, yes, but this was very much an anti-Tory vote, not a pro-Labour one - and certainly not some kind of 'mandate' for the policies of Keir Starmer - what policies? It is very hard to remember anything in particular the man has achieved or even set out to achieve. He was very much an empty vessel - just what the ruling class needed after the disastrous misleadership of the Tories. A relatively safe pair of hands, leading the 'second eleven', but nothing more than that.

He could not even deliver on that, due in large part to the dire worldwide economic situation. Somebody with a bit of charm or personality *might* have been able to paper over the cracks a little while longer. Burnham certainly has that, as he showed when he was being sworn into parliament,

answering a loud Tory heckle, "He is not the messiah!", with a quick-witted "But I'm a very naughty boy" (in reference to the famous Monty Python sketch). It remains to be seen if there is more to him than that - his serial back-peddling on a number of political issues certainly makes that more than questionable (more on this below).

While Starmer was just about able to plead 'plausible deniability' over the appointment of Peter Mandelson as US ambassador despite failing the official vetting process, he could not talk himself out of the dismal Labour results in the May 7 local elections and the ongoing electoral threat from Reform, which has been leading in the polls for many months. Over 200 MPs were apparently prepared to publicly call on Starmer to go. The coup against him was not as sharp or as vicious as the attempts to get rid of Corbyn - but it had become clear that the Parliamentary Labour Party had turned against Starmer. No wonder: many of them feared losing their jobs at the next general election.

It is certainly a risk to get rid of the party leader. A reversal of fortunes is not guaranteed, as the merry-go-round at the top of the Tory Party has shown. But Andy Burnham's overwhelming victory in the Macclesfield by-election was the last push many of the MPs needed - and the final nail in Starmer's coffin. The media too was firmly behind the campaign to get rid of him.

The leadership contest, which starts on July 9, will be a mere formality. No other MP is likely to put themselves forward - if they do, they will get trounced.

A man for all seasons: from Tony Blair, to Gordon Brown, to Jeremy Corbyn

John McDonnell of the so-called Socialist Campaign Group: reduced to tears



It is also very unlikely that Burnham will call a snap general election. Rightwing papers like the *Daily Mail* may pretend that they care about the "democratic deficit" and that he has "no mandate" without an election, but this is very unlikely to happen. Yes, there is already something of a 'Burnham bounce', giving Labour a lead in *some* polls for the first time in many months.¹ But Burnham's honeymoon period is likely to be very brief and he knows it. Calling an election would be far too risky and could hand the premiership to Nigel Farage.

Labour left

Despite all of that, it would be wrong to describe Starmer's tenure as an outright failure - he 'succeeded' in one important aspect: he got rid of Jeremy Corbyn, successfully moved the Labour Party back to the centre and forced out hundreds of revolutionary socialists by proscribing a number of organisations, including Labour Party Marxists and Labour Against the Witchhunt (both involving CPGB members). John McDonnell MP is the perfect personification of the dire state of the so-called Labour left.

In an interview with the *Radio Times*, he gushes: "The way in which Andy has conducted himself is very traditional, he wants Labour to be a broad church again and to unite the party. If his cabinet becomes such a broad church, made up of people from the left, the right and the centre, allowing real debate, that would be so refreshing."²

The man has become an embarrassment - and his wish

may well come true. Would it not be super-"refreshing" if Burnham heeds Wes Streeting's "progressive capitalism" letter begging to be made chancellor? Ed Miliband seems to have no chance, as both "the markets" (ie, the ruling class) and "the unions" (ie, Unite's Sharon Graham) do not like his 'net zero' plans. And Burnham is keen not to spook either, being perhaps an almost perfect centrist. In other words, he is keen to be seen as a loyal servant of capitalism who will not rock the boat too much.

He wants to represent the "Labour mainstream", as his campaign of the same name puts it in rather waffly terms: "a vision of hope, a popular, principled and practical left politics for meaningful change. Radical realism is the belief that big change is possible." What "big change", exactly? Nobody knows. 'Mainstream Labour' describes itself as "soft left" and is financed by the centre-left groups, Compass and Open Labour.

But there is very little in terms of concrete policies left in Burnham's arsenal - he said he wants "the biggest programme of social house building since the second world war". On the other hand, *The Telegraph* reports that "Burnham has reassured MPs that he wants to give the ministry of defence (MoD) more than the £13.5 billion offered in the defence investment plan."³ Let us see what he goes for when the issue is put most bluntly: military or social housing. We can take a guess.

In any case, Burnham will not be able to do very much - even if he wanted to - thanks in large part to the dire world economy. He will struggle

just as much as Starmer and will want to avoid raising taxes too much or doing anything else that drives even more people into the arms of Reform.

He represents a change of façade, perhaps a slight move towards the 'soft left' - but most certainly not a change of political substance. Add to that the massive political pressure he now faces from the establishment media not to 'do a Corbyn' and you can see why he has been folding quicker than a house of cards.

As an aside, that is exactly why Corbyn has absolutely no chance of getting back into the Labour Party, as 'suggested' by McDonnell. Diane Abbott, perhaps - she is now a rather harmless 'grand dame'. But Corbyn will have to stay out and he knows it. He complains on social media that there is a "strange lack of policy" in the leadership debate and says Burnham "must offer real change". What, like Corbyn's Your Party? That is just as devoid of any policies, if not more so - and, come to think of it, it is also entirely devoid of democracy, transparency and, soon enough, a membership, thanks to Corbyn's misleadership. He does not want Your Party to turn into anything beyond a loose network, because he is, at heart, still a Labourite who believes in a national parliamentary road to socialism. He would rejoin the Labour Party at the drop of a hat, if he was invited. But he will not be.

On the other hand, by positioning himself even slightly to the left, Burnham will have probably delivered the final deathblow to Your Party. It might limp on for as long as Corbyn can keep it up, but it is finished as any kind of alternative project. As for Mainstream's waffle, it really does not sound too different from the empty slogans that YP puts out - or, for that matter, the Green Party.

Both Polanski and Burnham are made from the same populist cloth and are prepared to 'adjust' their views according to how the wind blows. Both certainly excel at talking a vaguely left talk and we suspect that the growth of the Greens will - at least - come to an abrupt halt, if not a marked reversal. While this is not yet massively reflected in the polls and we do not expect a mass influx into the Labour Party, there will no doubt be tens of thousands who will now switch their allegiance from 'our Zack' to 'our Andy', at least in the ballot box. After all, Labour has the advantage of being in office, so in theory Burnham could at least affect some minor changes, notwithstanding the obvious limitations imposed on that by a capitalism in decline.

Under Burnham, a Labour-Green anti-Reform coalition is starting to look like a real possibility - which Jeremy Corbyn MP would no doubt be all too happy to prop up, in the name of 'stopping fascism'. Such a coalition would certainly have the (implicit) support of the Socialist Workers Party, which demands that "anti-racists should celebrate" the election results in Makerfield - because stopping Reform beats everything else:

Makerfield shows Reform can be beaten. Nigel Farage poured huge resources into the by-election, but he was beaten back and defeated. Hundreds of Stand Up to Racism supporters helped make that happen - distributing over 30,000 leaflets, speaking to voters and challenging Farage's attempt to pose as the voice of working class people. This is a result anti-racists should celebrate.⁴

Yes, we might have voted Labour in Makerfield too, given the lack of an alternative. But the SWP is in effect celebrating because it helped to make Andy Burnham prime minister - despite the fact that he has promised to continue the 'hostile environment'

policies of Keir Starmer - which has, of course, helped to lead to the rise of Reform UK and Restore Britain in the first place. It is just that those two parties do it better and louder.

Once upon a time (ie, a few months back), Burnham did criticise the government's draconian changes to the immigration system, but he has since accepted them and also seems to back Shabana Mahmood's latest plans: that the changes to 'indefinite leave to remain' (from five to 10 years) should be applied retrospectively to all foreigners. And, while he previously called for migrants on visas to be able to access welfare payments, he has now backpedalled on that, too. The pressure from Reform to be even tougher on immigration will lead to more 'compromises', we predict.

The sorry state of the SWP and the rest of left inside and outside the Labour Party really underlines what is sorely missing today: a principled Communist Party worthy of the name, with democracy and transparency at the heart of it, with the right to form factions and where differences are not seen as a problem, but an opportunity to discuss and debate. Such a party could actually present a real political alternative to the rotten system and the misleaders in Reform, Labour and the Greens.

Adjustments

Burnham has famously 'adjusted' other key policies, too: he has rowed back on his speech at last year's Labour Party conference, where he said he hoped "Britain would rejoin the EU". He has also broken his promise to "stand by" Women Against State Pension Inequality and now says women who have suffered such inequality will not get any compensation. Having previously said that trans women should be able to use women's toilets, he now supports the Equality and Human Rights Commission's finding that 'woman' refers only to biological sex and he supports the implementation of all of the EHRC's recommendations.

He is and will no doubt remain a very loyal 'friend' of Israel: he joined Labour Friends of Israel in 2015, has said that the first place he would visit as Labour leader would be Israel and opposes the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement as "spiteful". No doubt he will continue Starmer's campaign to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, while keeping stumm about the ongoing genocide in Palestine (which he refers to as merely "disproportionate destruction").

It also remains to be seen which - if any - of the "10 radical constitutional changes" he will implement, which he outlined in his 2024 book, *Head north: a rallying cry for a more equal Britain*, co-written with Steve Rotheram (metro mayor of the Liverpool city region): "We need nothing less than a complete rewiring of Britain", Burnham wrote in his part, explaining why "constitutional changes are first-order issues".

The bulk of their "10-point-plan" focuses on a "written constitution and a basic law", "a federal UK through full devolution", and a "reform of the voting system" by doing away with "first past the post" and introducing a "form of proportional representation which could combine a regional list system for the election of MPs and a constituency link", similar to the system used in Scotland. It all sounds quite interesting at first glance - but, as always, the devil is in the detail.

He does not touch on the issue of the monarchy, but wants the House of Lords 'reformed'. His main issue with it is not that the Lords are not elected, but that:

55% of those in the Lords who were willing to state where they reside said they lived in London, the south east and the east of

England. How on earth can we build a sense of national unity and fairness for as long as that remains the case? We should be ashamed if we let the unelected Lords continue into the 2030s. There is simply no excuse for it.

He demands that the upper house is "replaced with a proportionally elected second chamber, based on a list system. Ideally it would be as simple as asking the public to cast two votes at the general election."

Needless to say, communists are against the idea of second chambers altogether. Those 'checks and balances' are there to circumvent the will of the representatives elected to the commons. In addition, Burnham's proposal makes no sense - why would you need to vote for two chambers, at the same time - especially if his plan for PR includes a regional aspect anyway. But it will certainly be interesting to see if he dares call for the replacement of the House of Lords, once he is Labour leader and prime minister.

Much of the book is written through the lens of Burnham and Rotheram as leaders of the so-called 'Northern powerhouse'. For example, Britain's

unwritten and murky constitutional arrangements have had the effect of hoarding power in a small number of hands. Because there are no written rules, everything is done through negotiation. But they are never equal negotiations. What chance does a local council have negotiating with the might of the Whitehall machine?

In Burnham's view, "power is concentrated" - but not in the hands of the billionaires or the capitalist markets. No, "power is concentrated in SW1 0AA. Ministers are able to do different deals with different regions based on the different relationships they might have."

The whole chapter on 'a federal UK through full devolution' focuses on "English devolution" - and concretely, "elected mayors everywhere". Communists are in favour of devolving power downwards, with as much local autonomy as possible. But Burnham wants to concentrate this power in the hands of little regional Bonapartes like he used to be. Mayors are the most undemocratic form of elected local governance.

He almost entirely ignores Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and makes no mention of the real democratic deficit that exists there (which is why we as communists call for a federal republic). Burnham, on the other hand, wants to

encourage Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to pass down more of the devolved powers they hold to their towns and cities. In Scotland in particular, power has been drawn out of its regions up into the national level. This can be seen, for instance, in the centralisation of the police and fire services. If we can imagine a world where Greater Manchester and the Liverpool City Region can collaborate with a Greater Glasgow with similar powers, it would make the UK a more practical, positive place.

Obviously, under socialism, people would run the services in their own communities and replace the police with a popular militia - but, needless to say, that is not what Burnham has in mind. He basically wants every city and/or region to be able to do their own thing - under capitalism - including running transport systems and railway infrastructure. And at least some of it, no doubt, with the help of private capitalist companies.

It does not take a genius to work out that for *some* things this level of localism makes absolutely no sense. When it comes to the railways, for example, centralised decision-making is absolutely crucial - what if city A introduces trains that do not travel on the tracks ordered by city B? What if their timetables are not coordinated? And what about the collective bargaining agreements of the unions? - they would presumably have been 'devolved' too.

Plus, he wants the mayors to be able to "raise additional local funds", which means that areas with more businesses and richer residents would be able to raise more money. This localistic kind of approach is likely to actually make matters worse for poorer areas. But they would make life rather easier for slightly better off areas like, say, oh, Greater Manchester.

Federal UK

Throughout the book, Burnham "looks for inspiration" at "modern Germany, [which] stands as a model of nation-building. Britain's ancient, ad hoc arrangements, by contrast, have taken us to a very divided, unequal place". His basic thesis is that after World War II the allies may have divided Germany into two different states "in a bid to prevent a future concentration of political power in Berlin" (true), but this division was the actual reason that Germany became the European powerhouse (false) - especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when the unequal living conditions between east and west were mitigated by a massive redistribution of funds from the west to the east. Rather embarrassingly, he writes: "When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 ... to ensure a perception of fairness, and build a sense of unity, Germany decided to add a Basic Law - or *Grundgesetz* - to its written constitution. The Basic Law stipulates that there must be 'equivalent living standards' between all of the German *Länder*."⁵

Err, no. The *Grundgesetz* is simply another word for the German constitution that was introduced in 1948. He means what was first called the *Solidarpakt* and is now entitled *Ausgleichsgesetz* (compensation law). It includes a 5.5% income tax called *Solidaritätszuschlag* - which everybody had to pay until 2020 (now it is only higher earners). Unsurprisingly, Burnham does not mention how deeply hated this extra tax remains to this day.

As an aside, it is sheer nonsense to claim that it was Germany's federal structure that helped to make it into Europe's leading economy - and not the massive investment by the US through the Marshall plan, to make West Germany into a strong bulwark against the neighbouring Soviet bloc. If anything, Germany would arguably have done *even better* economically had it been a centralised state (something that Marx and Engels argued for). There is no democratic deficit that explains why Germany has to remain divided into 16 states. Burnham also ignores that in recent years the German economy has tanked rather spectacularly, thanks in no small measure because of the Ukraine war.

He keeps on using the phrase, 'German basic law', in this entirely wrong sense of the word, throughout the whole book, to basically argue that London, and the south-east in particular, should be made to hand over more money to the less well-off regions. When he talks about "levelling up" and "rewiring Britain", that is what he means - regional redistribution of funds. It remains to be seen if the 'king of the north' keeps this up, once he is running the whole country - which, of course, relies on tax revenue from the City of London and the south-east in particular.

The 10-point plan also includes the call for "the removal of the whip" - because, you see, poor Andy was "traumatised" when he was an MP:

My worst experience in parliament was undoubtedly the vote in 2003. It was traumatising on every level. I voted for the [invasion of Iraq] - that is matter of public record. What people might not understand is just how trapped we felt as MPs in making a simplistic, binary choice about something as huge as taking military action in another country.

And yet, 139 of Burnham's fellow Labour MPs managed to make a different "binary choice" and put two fingers up to the three-line whip imposed by Tony Blair. We doubt Burnham would really do away with it, once he is prime minister.

He will want to play the 'sensible centrist card' for as long as possible. That centrism is reflected in the two 'economic advisers' that Burnham has apparently turned to. There is the incredibly annoying and very popular YouTuber, Gary Stevenson, who became a millionaire by working as a high-stakes interest rate trader for Citibank and whose sole "common sense message" consists of the call for a wealth tax. But *The Guardian* reports that because Burnham is "conscious of the need to reassure investors", the position of chief economic advisor is likely to go to Jim O'Neill, who served as a commercial secretary to the treasury under the Tory government of David Cameron and spent the majority of his career as the chief economist at Goldman Sachs, where he came up with the 'Brics' acronym. Maybe Burnham considers watching as those two tear chunks out of each other and then supporting whoever wins. Or maybe their positions aren't as far from each other as a first look suggests.

His appointment of James Purnell as chief of staff gives another indication of where things are going: Purnell used to run Labour Friends of Israel and was until recently chief executive of Flint Global, a lobbying firm that counts BP, Amazon, Jaguar Land Rover and Uber among its clients.

In other words, Burnham is positioning himself way to the right of where Starmer stood when he succeeded Jeremy Corbyn. Granted, Starmer was lying through his teeth when he promised he would "continue Corbyn's economic programme" - but nevertheless, many on the Labour left believed him - or pretended to.

One thing is for sure: all those proclaiming the Labour Party 'dead' have been way off the mark. It will, at least temporarily, recover, reflecting the at least residual working class attachment to the idea of a workers' party. Quite clearly, the Labour Party remains what Lenin described as a "bourgeois workers' party". That does not mean we have any illusions that Burnham (or Corbyn, for that matter) will 'deliver socialism'. But Labour is still an arena of the class struggle.

Although the pathetic tears of joy shed by John McDonnell over Burnham's victory in Makerfield show how weak it currently is, the Labour left may also regain ground under his leadership. It is important that socialists and communists seriously engage with the Labour Party and neither dismiss it nor uncritically prop it up ●

Notes

1. x.com/JLPartnersPolls/status/2069023070673621272.
2. www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1166680878974321.
3. *The Daily Telegraph* June 24.
4. Stand Up to Racism email, June 19.
5. A Burnham and S Rotheram *Head north: a rallying cry for a more equal Britain* London 2024.

SCOTLAND

North of the border

Labour trailed far behind in Scotland's two by-elections. The trade union movement commits to bone-headed sectionalism. As for the left nationalists, they merely serve petty bourgeois nationalism. **Tam Dean Burn** comments

With all the hubbub and hype surrounding the Makerfield by-election last week, the other ones happening in Scotland got a wee bit lost. But one at least has big potential significance for Scottish politics and beyond on the climate question.

The Tory landslide in Aberdeen South was described by the outgoing Scottish National Party MP for the constituency and former Westminster group leader, Stephen Flynn, as "a tough night ... that some will need to reflect on, quite heavily". Flynn had just secured, on May 6, a seat in the Scottish parliament in Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine (after having announced he was standing there without informing the sitting SNP MSP, Audrey Nicoll - another example of the petty SNP leadership arrogance we have just seen in all its pathetic glory with Peter Murrell's jailing for embezzlement of party funds).

Flynn clearly has an 'I'm alright, Jock' attitude, seeing himself as a potential first minister, following John Swinney, but was brought straight into the Scottish cabinet by him, as secretary for the economy, tourism and transport. The other MP-to-MSP - following the Arbroath and Broughty Ferry by-election, just down the east coast, which the SNP held with an increased majority - Stephen Gethins, has been made energy minister, reporting directly to Swinney.

Of course, this all involves careerist jockeying, but it also reflects the Scottish administration's difficulties over the oil and gas industry and its supposed 'just transition' to renewables. The draft of the SNP's energy strategy was announced in May 2023, but has still to be published three years later!

The anger and frustration at this is what gave the Tories their first Scottish by-election victory in over 50 years, with an election campaign led by UK Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch, who visited the constituency three times during the campaign, calling for an end to the energy windfall tax and a return to full-scale exploration of North Sea oil and gas fields, with licences granted. This could, of course, only add to Badenoch's surge in the polls (fostered by her boxing with a wet punchbag at prime minister's questions in Westminster for months recently).

There was a severe slump in votes cast in comparison with the 2024 general election - indicative of a disillusioned boycott by SNP voters more concerned about local jobs than Murrell's expensive pen stash. This went along with a clear switch from Reform (and, likely, from other parties too) to the Tories, as the sure way to give the SNP a beating.

This really hit hard on the Scottish Labour vote, which fell over 20% from second to fourth place behind Reform, almost losing their deposit. Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar's position clearly has not been strengthened by his being the first to call for Sir Keir Starmer's head - indeed Sarwar has since used the excuse that if Starmer had followed his



Aberdeen South: Tory victory based on oil and gas

advice before May 7 it would all be a different story today! More such ludicrous and hilarious storytelling is shown in the way Scottish Labourite journalists got their knickers in a twist over Sarwar's premature Starmer ejaculation in the nationalist blog *Bella Caledonia*'s article on it entitled 'Actually, this is brilliant'!¹

A major reason for the Labour collapse was the vehemence of the Scottish trade union movement in backing the oil and gas industry and the granting of licences - especially Unite's 'No ban without a plan' campaign and similar GMB demands, both backed by the Scottish TUC. They have even gone as far as to demand that the future Burnham cabinet must not see Ed Miliband given the role of chancellor, as this would be disastrous for the fossil fuel industry sector. (I would be willing to bet a bacon roll against that promotion happening, especially with Wes Streeting now calling for revenue from new licences to be used to cut energy bills: a chancellor in waiting, I would also wager.)

Unite's Sharon Graham has been

particularly vociferous about the Labour government's position on oil and gas, stating:

The Aberdeen South result is a direct result of failed Labour policies on oil and gas, which have been an abject failure. This tin-eared approach to the concerns of workers - letting go of one rope before we have hold of another - has been absolutely shameful. Unite will not accept a jobless transition. Until there is a credible plan for jobs the anti-North Sea policies must be consigned to the bin.

Another significant newcomer to the SNP government (one of the very few new women) is Hannah Mary Goodlad in Shetland, in the first election there not to be won by the Liberal Democrats and their Liberal Party forebears since 1950. She has been made public finance minister - particularly significant, considering all the public spending cuts that are still to come. Also highly notable by the fact that she worked for 15 years previously for Equinor, the Norwegian state fossil fuel company with huge influence

in the Scottish oil and gas sector, including an 80% stake in Rosebank and assets in Jackdaw. Equinor supplies approximately 27% of UK gas and more than 15% of its oil. It claims green credentials, but recently halved investments in renewables and is increasing oil and gas production by 10% from 2024 to 2027, whilst making billions in profit.

Goodlad has perhaps made more of a name for herself by proposing a tunnel from Shetland to the mainland (with echoes of Boris Johnson's daft bridge ideas for Scotland's western isles). Given the cuts she has presumably already started planning and her fossil fuel ties, this can be no more than an insidious distraction from her main government roles, in cahoots (mon!) with the likes of Flynn, Gethins and (still top of the decaying stump of a tree) Swinney.

An alternative strategy for this thorny (or should that be thistley?) issue is proposed in *The National* newspaper - the one pro-independence legacy press voice, which has a regular column from comrade Richie Venton of the Scottish Socialist Party. In his June 23 column, under the title, 'Beware of Andy Burnham fakery

and pretend radicalism'², he goes into the ramifications of the by-election and the North Sea, finishing with the statement: "There is no need to choose between good jobs, affordable energy and clean air; they are solved hand-in-hand in the Socialist Green New Deal we advocate."

Of course, the SSP deludes itself, and a few others, that this will all be possible in an independent socialist Scotland - and by not giving the SNP the second list vote in Holyrood elections, but instead voting for the handful of SSP candidates where one can. The SSP almost deigned to get involved in Your Party Scotland - but only as a nationalist front, determined to stand for election - and, as it turned out, were amongst the very few left candidates.

There remains a big question over why others of their ilk on the Scottish left still refuse to join them (except as similar opinion-dreamers on the national question, it seems ...) ●

Notes

1. bellacaledonia.org.uk/2026/02/11/actually-this-is-brilliant.
2. www.thenational.scot/politics/26218160.beware-andy-burnham-fakery-pretend-radicalism.

REVIEW

Existential eco threat

London's Raindance is the largest independent film festival in the UK. Launched in 1993, its 34th festival featured 197 films from around the world, including many by first-time film makers. **Jim Moody** looks at three which highlight the ecological impact of capitalism

Gaslit

Writer, director and producer: Katie Camosy - USA 2025; 111 minutes

Gaslit accompanies Jane Fonda as she travels across the oilfields of the Permian Basin of west Texas and along the Louisiana coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Not a pretty tale: by no means your usual travelogue. Fonda is a veteran activist - from opposition to the USA's war on Vietnam to climate protest, which saw her spend her 82nd birthday in jail.

Those impacted by oil and gas production relate decades-long tales of woe. With capitalism's fossil fuel production having boomed in the US, the lives of everyday people living near its operations have suffered immense harm. There has, too, been environmental degradation. Local activists - who have been beavering away for years, sometimes decades - are foregrounded in the film.

In the last 10 years, thousands of new wells have opened up in the Permian Basin, producing a 'Mad Max' landscape. And all this to transform the USA into the largest oil producer in the world. Fracking in particular is problematic, venting methane (CH₄) gas from its operations; but towers where it is supposed to be 'flared' (ie, burnt, producing carbon dioxide, CO₂) often just release methane into the atmosphere, where it accelerates climate change to greater effect than CO₂. The founder of Oilfield Witness, Sharon Wilson, and her self-styled 'methane hunters' have exposed the lies of fossil fuel extractors, with unassailable video evidence over lengthy periods of methane gas releases into the atmosphere. Regulators are notable by their absence. Texas has thus become the No1 polluter by greenhouse gases (viz, methane) in the world ("not China", notes Sharon).

Liquefied natural gas (LNG), plastics and petrochemical production infest local communities, especially where these industries' plants can take over areas cheaply. Often that means turfing out long-term residents or constructing slap-bang next to those unable to leave. Many of the areas along the Mississippi river have been occupied for 60 or more years by the majority black population, with traditionally little political heft. *Gaslit* illuminates such profitable casual racism and there are many emotional scenes, as a litany of depredations and deaths (especially by cancers) caused by emissions from nearby petrochemical plants is recited. The worst area is now called 'Cancer Alley'.

The USA is the world's largest exporter of LNG, much of which comes to Europe under threat of Trump's 'take it or be sanctioned' business gangster methodology. Local residents have journeyed to Germany, as we see, to expose the deceit of European governments in banning fracking on their soil, but importing its products, especially LNG, from the US to the detriment of those living right next to these polluters.

The issue with tissue: a boreal love story

Writer, producer and director: Michael Zelniker - Canada 2026; 107 minutes

Wryly grabbing the viewer's attention in a *faux* ad for toilet paper, this



documentary has a very serious message: 'Save Canada's boreal, thus saving the world and its population'. Canada's boreal is the climatic zone south of the Arctic - especially the cold, temperate region dominated by taiga and forests of birch, poplar and conifers; it is a northern biotic area running from the Pacific to the Atlantic, inhabited by indigenous first nations. In area it is equivalent to 13 Californias.

The main bone of contention is that this 'lung of the planet' of 'old-growth' trees and other vegetation is under threat from unfettered felling on an industrial scale that beggars belief. Clear cutting (complete removal, many square miles at a time) of virgin forest goes on apace. This boreal contains 80% of the diversity, 80% of the carbon store and 25% of the wetlands of the whole world. In terms of peoples, 600 indigenous communities live in the boreal. Its rate of sequestering carbon is more than all other areas of the world combined; hundreds of species make up its habitat.

Rapacious capitalism (is there any other kind?) has been encroaching. Currently, 80% of felling in Canada is in previously untouched forests at a rate of 95 trees every second (or three billion annually), mainly for packaging. Surveys show that 14% of felled areas fail to grow back decades later.

First-nation elders, boreal science specialists and activists alike are aghast at the enormity of what is befalling the ecosystem and what it means for them in Canada - and, indeed, the rest of the world - when such a resource is under threat. This is not just nibbling at the edges: the fauna and flora are being depleted, bordering unsustainability already. The fact that herds of up to 800,000 caribou have fallen in a few years to tens of thousands is a distinct marker toward extinction; all caribou herds are now officially considered 'threatened'. And it is down to logging. No provinces of Canada have countered the threat: they prefer oil exploitation; meanwhile, the federal government fails to act on the existential threat to habitat. In fact, Ontario has accelerated logging.

Canada's populist politicians spout about protecting jobs rather than developing schemes to protect caribou - deliberately failing to accept that the caribou are a marker species for severe degradation of this boreal environment. And this in the face of a 99% decrease in caribou in some areas - attesting real boreal distress.

Indigenous speakers condemn what they see as 200 years of settler colonialism, dumping their communities in reserves some refer to as 'concentration camps'. Colonial scum like Duncan Campbell Scott instituted measures to destroy indigenous culture and life, which he labelled "a final solution to our Indian problem". All done with intent by the

state. Children have been taken away from parents to 'educate' them out of their culture; rape and murder in their institutions was commonplace: at Kamloops, over 200 bodies of small children were found in the grounds of a residential school. 'Bitter' does not begin to describe the feelings now of those who have experienced the spoliation of people and place, some of whom speak on camera. As they say, it was all done to steal resources and land, or for a pipeline: "the forest subtle to big corporations". Currently, only 0.2% of land is available for indigenous communities.

The issue with tissue emphasises the necessity of the involvement of the indigenous people in protecting the Canadian boreal - which, while important, suggests it is mostly *their* fight. It is clear that such environmental issues, as examined in this film, do impact immediately and directly upon those physically closest to them, which is why what they have to say is rightly utilised to add power to the argument. However, another thread that runs through the film must be borne in mind and needs emphasising: this boreal is a lung of the world, for mammalian life, including human life, is pretty obviously unsustainable without enough photosynthesis.

The mechanism by which humanity pulls together on this question of the spoliation and destruction of our shared habitat is, of course, wholly and deeply political. No solution is likely to 'emerge' magically, or even if a majority is simply like-minded. No, political organisation through unity based on the working class majority and, of course, a communist party worthy of the name is our way out of this horror story of late capitalism. 'Socialism or barbarism' never sounded better.

In the path of giants

Directors/producers: Kirsty Wells and Fayed Khan; production companies: Black Leaf Films, Channel News Asia, Singapore, Bangladesh 2026; 89 minutes

If anything suggests the strong link between human actions and environmental degradation, conflicts between states and peoples is up there amongst the prime causes. This documentary presents the facts, as its makers have seen them on the ground in and around the world's largest refugee camp, Kutupalong, in Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh. As of 2017, pogroms against the Muslim Rohingya over the nearby border in Burma/Myanmar became ethnic cleansing, resulting in a mass exodus of Rohingya to Bangladesh. Around 950,000 now live in Kutupalong and satellite camps, with around 8,000 acres of forested area having been mown down as a consequence.

The indigenous group of Buddhist Chakma people are longstanding local forest dwellers, who initially sympathised with the refugees, but are now in dire straits themselves due to the environmental impact of one particular animal: the Asian elephant, whose habitat this forest is. Crucially, the elephants' ages-old migration pattern has been thwarted, since Kutupalong sits astride the animals' migration trail into Burma. The elephants cannot find enough food and its young are not thriving, leading to night-time forays onto Chakma farmland.

Kencharam, a Chakma rice farmer in nearby Horikhola, joins other

village men in patrolling to scare off marauding elephants with torches and loud noises. Villagers live in constant fear, because elephants not only eat and trample on crops, but also sometimes attack humans and damage houses and outbuildings.

Rohingya in Kutupalong also suffer from the elephant problem, with 14 people killed by elephants since 2017. A UN-associated NGO, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), trains Rohingya as conservators on how to expel elephants safely.

But there is no Bangladeshi government help or compensation to be had by the Chakma, whose crops have been destroyed by rampaging elephants, although there is a vague suggestion from a campaigning lawyers' group here that something positive *might* happen. However, also on screen, some government officials squash these ideas and have no trouble in labelling the Chakma as 'land-grabbers' who have no right to live on Forest Department land anyway. This illustrates the accuracy of Kencharam's statement that "Chakmas do not get rights like Bengalis", despite both being officially Bangladesh citizens. Distraught and abandoned, some Chakma are caught on Forest Department cameras harrying elephants at night, only to be condemned outright without trial, not to mention having the department's goon squads invade and tear down their homes.

Social breakdown in the Rohingya camps is leading to criminal gangs rising, and some refugees are being forced back to Burma to fight the regime there - seemingly as cannon fodder.

Meanwhile, the elephants' problems have worsened, because the Bangladesh government has erected impenetrable fences to prevent any more Rohingya coming from Burma overland. Talk by some NGO officials of creating an elephants' artificial migratory route near the old one has been stymied. Bangladesh's bourgeois bureaucracy has completely failed the indigenous local Chakma people, the dumped Rohingya people and, of course, the environment, not least the elephant population of the forest. No-one and no environment look likely to be protected by the state. And in the last 10 years, the rate of elephant killings in Bangladesh has doubled.

Problems of human-environment interaction only look likely to get worse. At the film's end a stark estimate is given: "In 2025, as a result of conflict and climate change, the number of forcibly displaced people in the world reached 122 million. This is forecast to rise to 1.2 billion people by 2050."

Assuming, of course, that capital's domination of the world continues ●

Jim Moody blogs at redryde.wordpress.com

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

**Bolting on
Lebanon makes
things hellishly
difficult**

Negotiations proceed in Geneva

There is little enthusiasm for the interim agreement. In Iran, hardliners wanted to keep on fighting and have, as a result, suffered from a government crackdown. But, in Israel, there is fear that Trump is putting his personal political interests first. **Yassamine Mather** looks at the new rhetoric coming from Washington

Despite a brief interruption on June 20 - when Iran announced it was closing the Strait of Hormuz, citing Israeli military provocations in Lebanon - the broader diplomatic process has not derailed. The White House and vice-president JD Vance claim they are "highly committed" to keeping the Memorandum of Understanding on track. Ships have indeed started moving in and out of the Strait of Hormuz. Hopefully the nightmare of the 11,000 trapped sailors will soon be over.

This week, Vance and Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf officially sat down in Switzerland. Specialised working groups are now tackling the twin pillars of the framework: lifting sanctions and limits of nuclear enrichment.

There is an underlying assumption that, even if Israel attempts to launch further strikes on southern Lebanon to disrupt the process, the bilateral talks will continue. This is not just a matter of the MoU text, but a paradigm shift in Washington's rhetoric and the immediate economic needs of both sides.

The Trump administration has brokered a kind of ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah. While the Israeli Defence Forces have drawn down some of their forces and eased northern border civil defence measures, there are reports that the US has heavily restricted Israeli offensive operations.

Following the deaths of six Israeli soldiers, US restrictions mandate that IDF troops in southern Lebanon may only fire in cases of a direct threat. This resulted in the Israeli leadership halting some military operations, such as the planned demolition of a major underground Hezbollah drone factory in Majdal Zoun.

Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and defence minister Israel Katz are accused of misleading the Israeli public. Publicly they insist Israel will not withdraw from the southern security zone (where, for instance, Beaufort Castle is situated) and claim the IDF has unrestricted freedom of action. But US restrictions are already actively curbing Israeli military operations. This political game of smoke and mirrors draws parallels to past Israeli government rhetoric: for example, inflating the strategic importance of Gaza's Philadelphi route during the 2024 hostage negotiations.

Following US-Iran memorandum negotiations mediated by Qatar and Pakistan in Switzerland, a new "deconfliction cell" is being established to oversee the Lebanon ceasefire. Israel is excluded from this mechanism, effectively stripping it of its ability to independently manage events in Lebanon.

Of course, Donald Trump's primary motivation in all this is securing a stable arrangement in the Persian Gulf to allow a swift winding down of US forces. Zionist critics argue that he is prioritising his own immediate personal political interests ahead of



Mojtaba Khamenei: hidden away

the US midterm elections - aiming to curb war-driven inflation and high petrol prices - at the expense of Israel.

According to the same sources, a passive military presence in southern Lebanon exposes IDF soldiers to recurring logistical risks and specialised threats, such as fibre-optic-operated drones. While Iran's economy and military have been severely damaged by US and Israeli strikes, the soft terms of the emerging US-brokered arrangements are bolstering Tehran's confidence and providing the space needed for Iran and Hezbollah to rebuild their military capabilities.

Policy departures

Donald Trump has recently made highly unusual concessions on key regional 'security' issues in the Middle East, directly contradicting long-standing US and Israeli policy positions:

- **Missile programme:** Trump remarked that because other regional powers possess advanced missile technology, it is fundamentally unfair to demand that Iran unilaterally dismantle its own programme - a stance that undercuts one of Israel's main strategic complaints.¹

- **Nuclear enrichment:** Rather than treating enrichment as an absolute red line, Trump now suggests that, because Iran may require enrichment for civil and domestic purposes, the focus should be on regulating the *level* of enrichment rather than forcing a total halt.²

- **Sanctions and assets:** Trump argued that withholding frozen Iranian assets could damage confidence in the dollar, saying that, if the money were not returned, "nobody would ever invest in the dollar again".³

Concurrently, Vance issued unprecedented critiques regarding Israel's behaviour. During a White House press conference on June 18, he openly signalled that certain elements within Israel had deliberately escalated actions in southern Lebanon in the attempt to sabotage the deal: "We are not going to let this happen again". Furthermore, both he and Trump have broken with traditional rhetoric

regarding Hezbollah, suggesting that the presence of militants inside a civilian structure does not justify the total destruction of an entire building. Of course, no-one should be fooled: this shift is primarily due to economic worries. Trump has candidly admitted that western strategic fuel reserves are dwindling to a matter of weeks, making energy stability and lowering oil prices Washington's overriding priority.

No doubt all of this could change next month or even next week. However, for the time being, both Iran and the US have no option but to try and defend the MoU.

While the administration pushes forward, the American public remains deeply sceptical. A CBS News/YouGov poll, conducted following the MoU's electronic signing, reveals a stark disconnect between the public's desire to end the war and the government's view of the actual terms: ■ **Ending the war:** 78% of Americans prefer to end the war now, while just 22% want to hold out for further Iranian concessions. Though Trump advisors have celebrated this as an endorsement of the administration, the rest of the poll indicates otherwise.

- **Evaluating the MoU:** only 22% of Americans believe the interim agreement is better for the United States, whereas 37% believe it favours Iran (with 41% viewing it as equal).

- **Partisan scepticism:** only 39% of Republicans believe the Trump administration negotiated a win, meaning only about four in 10 members of Trump's own party back the accord.

Factional warfare

Meanwhile, within Tehran's political circles, a complex game of accountability and ideological survival is playing out. Supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei reportedly hesitated significantly before endorsing the framework. In a statement read on his behalf he says he was ultimately persuaded by president Masoud Pezeshkian. Iranian politicians were terrified of taking personal responsibility for the concessions - a tension exacerbated by persistent, unverified rumours regarding the supreme leader's health status.

As a result, a number of ideological rifts have emerged within the regime. On the one hand, there are pragmatic conservatives and 'reformists' in the government and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) camp, including:

- president Masoud Pezeshkian;
- foreign minister Abbas Araghchi;
- parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf;
- elements of the Supreme National Security Council and the IRGC.

These are the groups that back the deal. They view sanctions relief and de-escalation as absolute necessities after the war. Pezeshkian argues that Iran must decisively end its 'no war, no peace' paralysis. Ghalibaf and pragmatists in the IRGC recognise

that, despite radical claims of military victory, the underlying domestic economy is in a critical condition. We can add Quds Force commander Esmail Qaani, who is giving conditional support to the deal.

Many of the above insist that Iran's regional allies, particularly Hezbollah, must be fully protected within any final settlement. Demonstrating this nuanced line, Qaani publicly backed the negotiators after they came under fire from hardliners, signalling that the internal dispute is over terms, red lines and regional leverage rather than the validity of diplomacy itself.

Compromise

On the other hand, there are the hardliners (the 'ideological opposition'), who reject the deal and argue that any compromise risks complete 'capitulation', and oppose major concessions on the nuclear issue. They demand Iran retain aggressive leverage over the Strait of Hormuz and maintain maximalist pressure to force the US entirely out of the region!

To secure the agreement, the regime has initiated a swift internal crackdown on rightwing hardliner dissent. For example, Saeed Jalili was quietly removed from his recent post. A rightwing media commentator who publicly attacked the MoU on state television, he was forced to resign - followed closely by the resignation of the television channel's director.

Following the announcement of the MoU, the Iranian rial rose by roughly 10% compared to foreign currencies. While organisations like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank predict inflation could drop to between 30% and 35% due to sanctions relief, these figures remain very high for ordinary citizens, who are facing systemic poverty.

For the moment, the domestic street is quiet. The regime successfully continues to organise large-scale public celebrations of the signing, demonstrating loyalty to the regime. At the same time, intense economic fatigue has fostered a sense of resignation rather than active protest. Even on social and cultural fronts, the IRGC has shifted its tone, broadcasting propaganda tracks explicitly welcoming women, whether they wear the full hijab, a partial headscarf, or no headscarf at all - signalling a managed, tactical retreat from the enforcement flashpoints that previously sparked the Woman, Life, Freedom movement.

Obstacles

The framework of this interim agreement remains very ambitious, promising the lifting of all unilateral US sanctions alongside the rollback of UN Security Council resolutions. Legally, a US president cannot unilaterally dissolve UN sanctions; however, we all know that the US imposed its will regarding the imposition of current UN sanctions and the Trump administration clearly admits that it can introduce a motion

reversing sanctions - one that Russia and China will naturally support. Simultaneously, European allies are pushing back. France has explicitly stated that a bilateral US-Iran agreement does not alter French or EU sanctions. Vance reportedly dismissed these concerns, implying European compliance with past sanctions was merely a byproduct of American enforcement rather than independent foreign policy.

For Arab leaders in the Persian Gulf, the geopolitical calculus is exceptionally complicated. On the one hand, their own population is deeply sympathetic to Iran's regional posturing, making overt opposition to the MoU risky for regimes. On the other hand, there is a deep-seated distrust of Iran after infrastructure attacks, paired with an acute fear that Israel could bomb Gulf states out of existence.

To mitigate these threats, Gulf states are utilising a proposed \$300 billion regional reconstruction fund as a vital insurance policy. By using their capital to purchase or develop physical infrastructure inside Iran, they are attempting to establish mutual economic dependencies. The logic is simple: if the Gulf states own a stake in Iran's domestic economic infrastructure, Tehran will have a direct financial incentive to avoid targeted military conflicts with its neighbours. However, this is a double-edged sword; inside Iran, hardliners are already criticising the deal, complaining that the government is selling off sovereign assets to the Persian Gulf principalities.

From the point of view of the Iranian working class, the central flaw of this peace process mirrors the systemic failures of previous sanctions-relief eras. Unless there is a fundamental reversal of privatisation and a structural war against state-level corruption, the influx of unfrozen assets and foreign investment will simply enrich the same oligarchic networks.

The corrupt state officials and senior IRGC commanders who enriched themselves by smuggling and manipulating the sanctions economy are the exact same individuals positioned to act as the primary corporate partners for incoming capital. If the state receives a massive financial windfall, it will likely distribute a highly calculated, minimal amount to the poorest sectors of society, purely to suppress the immediate threat of bread riots and labour strikes.

The vast majority of the incoming billions will simply be absorbed by entrenched bureaucratic corruption, leaving the underlying structural misery of the Iranian working class completely unchanged ●

Notes

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