A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly worker

Jensen Huang's downfall has it all. Sex, espionage, smuggling, high finance, geopolitical rivalry - the whole shebang

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TWO CORPSES AND A MINGHUN WEDDING

LETTERS

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

Friendly polemics?

On the question of the Netherlands left, Filip Spijkerman attacks the points of unity of the recently founded Faction for a Revolutionary Strategy (FRS) in his letter (October 8). He posits that our first point is that "no meaningful engagement with the broader Dutch left is possible, and that focus should be only on building the RSP [Revolutionary Socialist Party]". However, this does not accurately reflect our position. So allow us to quote in full:

"We fight for a mass socialist party. On the one hand, this mass party must be firmly rooted in the labour movement and able to intervene in it. On the other hand, it must forge unity amongst revolutionary groups. However, there are currently only a very small number of relevant groups on the Dutch socialist scene. Of these groups, the RSP is the largest organisation. The second-largest organisation, the CPN [the KKE-aligned Communistische Partij van Nederland, formerly prefixed with *Nieuwe*], is opposed to a merger.

"The most important way to build the socialist mass party is therefore not, at present, to engage with existing leftwing groups, but to build the RSP as a party. In doing so, the qualitative development of our members must be our top priority. In doing so, engaging with other socialist groups and the movement is a way of distinguishing the RSP from others and demonstrating that we are non-sectarian and democratically organised, with the right to form factions, and that we advocate principled, leftwing, revolutionary socialist politics. In this way, we can strengthen the RSP's position in the current political landscape, and that is the most powerful weapon for forging unity within the Marxist movement."

Everyone is free to disagree with these tactical considerations, but to simply say that our faction opposes engagement with other Marxist groups and proposes *only* the building of the RSP on its own is just quite a weak lie. Comrades who read the point of unity in question will notice the following. Firstly, the necessity of unity among the various revolutionary groups is addressed explicitly. Secondly, the faction posits that the CPN is opposed to a merger of any kind; this is a fact. To drive the point home, it is quite clear to any observer that it's CPN policy to refuse to acknowledge all other communist organisations in public.

The reason the CPN is singled out here is practical: it is the only other sect which clears a 50-member threshold, and one of probably only three Dutch grouplets which boast over 20 *active* members. Thirdly, it very clearly advocates engagement with both socialist groups and the movement as a whole.

This point of unity thus does not mean we disavow engagement with the sectarian leftist groups. Rather, this engagement should have as its target audience not the leadership or committed members, but the broader movement or uncommitted members of the target group. Polemics usually only create animosity among the committed members of the group polemised against, but - when done in a friendly, but firm, way - can have a positive effect on non-committed members and people in the broader movement. In addition, these people can be reached through engagement with them directly, and do not only respond to polemics.

These two points combined can lead to growth among the non-sectarian elements, in order to make the leadership of the sectarian groups irrelevant in the future. Then they hopefully will find reason to engage with the non-sectarian, democratic party, and the slogan, 'One class, one party', can be achieved. We hope to elaborate further on these tactical considerations in the future.

All comrades interested in reading and discussing our faction's points of unity, Mr Spijkerman included, are invited to shoot us an email at revolutionairestrategie@gmail.com.

FRS
Netherlands

Jobs for youth

I see that Alan Milburn has come up with a plan to get rid of those 'not in education, employment or training' (Neets). It seems to be mostly about cutting benefits to pay for training - along with helping businesses to take on young people by cutting regulation and national insurance. I haven't noticed any extra money for local, or indeed national, government.

I have been puzzled in looking for the jobs that are to be found for newly trained youngsters. What is needed? Airline pilots, train drivers? Cleaners, security folk? Police, prison officers? Hairdressers, manicurists? Who knows? When I was a lad many years ago, there were jobs in mining, shipbuilding, housebuilding, car manufacturing, textiles - you know the sort of thing. But it's China, Thailand, Bangladesh and other places that do lots of those things nowadays.

I think Milburn has to give us some more information on the government's options here. Perhaps Andy Burnham will tell us before Christmas?

Jim Nelson
email

Attack on youth

Seriously ill and disabled 16- to 24-year-olds are to be cured by being paid a new "youth allowance" at the Universal Credit standard rate, instead of PIP (personal independence payment) and the health element of UC. The latter has already been halved for new claimants despite being available only to people who had been found medically unfit for work. If you doubt the extreme difficulty of that, then try it. There are 690,000 job vacancies in the United Kingdom, and there are 1.7 million people seeking them. This would put that second figure above 2.5 million.

None of this has anything to do with either making people better or finding them work. This is about saving money by killing them. Yes, really.

We are talking about one of Tony Blair's closest allies here. Whoever is to sort out the problem of young people who were "not in education, employment or training" (Neet), it is no job for a perpetual student. Alan Milburn started a PhD in 1979, but he has never finished it. Instead, with Blair and with Paul Corrigan, he brought NHS privatisation from the outer fringes of the thinktank circuit to the very heart of government. We already have a good idea how he intends to repeat the trick. Third- and fourth-generation middle class teachers in primary schools will identify potential future Neets. In secondary schools they will deliver to them a curriculum designed by and for the local vape shops, phone shops, nail bars, tattoo parlours, carwashes, mini-marts, adult gaming centres, Turkish barbers, American candy shops, and lap dancing clubs - there being nothing else (not even Poundland). And without trade unions no-one will be able to come up through those to enter the political process.

David Lindsay
Lanchester

In the shredder

In the 1980s, the British government began introducing hefty fees for foreign students at our universities. I joined the overseas student movement which fought these measures. We attempted to win over home students and, whilst some joined, many said, 'They won't do it to us!' Thirty-plus years later, English students pay almost £10,000 in fees for a single year at a university.

I remembered those events when reading Milburn's ghastly plans to impoverish young English people below the age of 25. Young people in England are suffering huge anxiety, as the failed neoliberal system cannot deliver a reasonable lifestyle for many of us - old and young. Many youngsters suffer depression, unable to see a light at the end of the capitalist tunnel.

The Labour Mensheviks are targeting young people, who are often less versed in how successive governments of all hues have failed us. Instead of resigning *en masse*, the Labour wonks blame us. This is simply a measure to provide super-cheap labour to prop up failed businesses. Once they are finished robbing the young, the centrists will look for other victims.

After two years of huge handouts under Sunak, thousands of crap businesses were kept afloat. Their owners had that time to either close their business and move into another sector or join the wage slaves. Instead we have them bleating on TV like beggars, whining about their difficulties. They are nothing like the mythical risk-takers that the neoliberal apologists wax lyrical about.

Should these measures pass, Milburn 2.0 will target other parts of our population. Already where I live, I observe people well past pension age working in shops, driving buses, etc. The ruling class want us to work till we drop, whilst they swan about playing croquet and eating canapés on a workday - and then go skiing in Chamonix in winter and spend the summer arsing about on their yachts.

The end of the triple lock on pensions is outrageous. Currently the annual payment for the British state pension is £12,000. That means automatic poverty for those of us without savings or private pensions. Already 1-2 million pensioners languish on such sums.

No, these cruel measures will not pass. We stopped the serial harmer, Starmer. Now let's block Burnham. Put Milburn's plan in the shredder!

K Sean
Kent

AXA targeted

The support of transnational insurance company AXA for fossil fuels has been condemned at several climate protests, as COP31 was taking place in Turkey.

In various demonstrations, participants carried signs with messages such as "AXA: full gas towards the end of the world!" and "AXA is the real climate rioter!" The climate movement, Action Non-Violente Cop21 (ANV Cop21), which initiated these messages, is calling on AXA to stop supporting fossil fuel projects - particularly those involving liquefied natural gas (LNG) - which are exacerbating the ongoing climate crisis.

For several months, the climate movement, ANV Cop21, and other organisations, such as Reclaim Finance, have criticised the insurance company for its support of fossil fuels, particularly in the LNG sector.

Juliette Caroulle, spokesperson for ANV Cop21, stated: "While countries around the world are once again gathering to address the impacts of climate disruption, which we must absolutely limit, AXA is doing exactly the opposite by supporting fossil fuel projects that exacerbate the problem. Instead of protecting people from the impacts of climate change, AXA is actually contributing to intensifying disasters and increasing the damage and the number of victims: this is the behaviour of a 'fireman-arsonist' that we cannot tolerate!"

These new climate protests were part of the European Day of Action for Climate organised by Climate Action Network Europe, which brings together 200 organisations in 40 countries, and coincided with the International Day of the Rights of the Child.

Action Network
email

Off UK soil!

We will be holding our regular monthly vigil outside the gate of RAF Lakenheath this Saturday (November 21) from noon to 2pm. This coincides with the Day of Action Against Militarisation and Conscription which has events running across the country.

We have been holding vigils outside the base since April 2024, as well as several peace camps and other events. We have voiced our concerns with a 'Letter to the Base Commanders', which was delivered to the base. There has been no response so far. These concerns include the siting of nuclear weapons at the base, the involvement in the attacks on Iran and support for Israel, including the transfer of F-35I jets to Israel in January this year.

Zareen Taj from the Lakenheath Alliance for Peace and Cambridge Stop the War said: "Alleged threats to Mildenhall and Lakenheath recently have distressed locals, who said they really felt the fear that those in war zones feel when an imminent strike is expected." She continued: "Our UK government has made us complicit in US-Israeli aggression through the use of our UK bases. Along with the ongoing genocide of Gaza, we are now embroiled in the illegal war on Iran. US bases off UK soil now!"

Lakenheath Alliance for Peace
email

Significant book

The looming deadline for my article in last week's *Weekly Worker* whilst travelling by train meant I couldn't give any feedback on 'What made us "hunter-gatherers of words"?' - a one-day interdisciplinary workshop at the Historical Materialism conference, bringing together researchers from archaeology, anthropology, cognitive and language sciences, neuroscience and evolutionary biology to explore the origins of human language and the social and cultural conditions that made it possible.

Just like the book, *The revolutionary origins of language*, also being launched there that day, the workshop was of great and unique significance, bringing together a range of speakers and topics over three sessions, all for free. Some of it demanded a rather more advanced level of understanding than I have, including the first session by Chris Sinha from the University of East Anglia, who was speaking on 'Late stages in the evolution of language and the creation of the social imaginary', so I was actually delighted when Chris Knight, whom I was sitting beside, leaned into me and said, "I disagree with everything he has said"!

But, with that other Chris going on to chair later sessions and the differences between them being discussed openly in a comradely way, it showed further similarities to the CPGB approach of embracing open, ideological struggle as a vital component of the ongoing search for credence of scientific theories.

Among the many sessions from which I could gain further understanding of the human revolution that happened with the origins of language was the one entitled 'Gender dynamics and morality' by Morna Finnegan and Ingrid Lewis - a collaborative talk, using theory, ethnography and film on Bayaka gender dynamics: "We propose that women's procreative solidarity is central to the maintenance of egalitarian process and social morality. Drawing on Mbendjele women's own assertions of inviolability, we argue that morality is fundamentally a corporeal element: it has to be communally bodied in order to remain live."

Morna suggested that all attending the workshop actually get in physical touch with those either side of us, as that is the way the Mbendjele community live - she has spent time with them and witnessed this first-hand. This level of contact is an expression of such egalitarian, hunter-gatherer, collective power. She also said that the new book gives voice to that collective body. One of the most remarkable and vivid expressions that Morna used previously to describe the pendulum of power dynamics between male and female members of the tribe was "communism in motion".

Another striking description given by Ingrid Lewis, who has spent much time in similar fieldwork with her husband and co-author of the book, Jerome, is that "we took the intelligence out of the water" and I took that to tie in with the work of Elaine Morgan - of course, I should have asked about that in the discussion, but missed that (until now) in the midst of it all.

Something I certainly did grasp was Ingrid telling us that we have characteristics going so far and deeply back to our origins of 'connection', and babies are so clearly born with that. And they both emphasised that organising around the most vulnerable in society - babies, children and the elderly - is the essence of egalitarianism. Again, communism in action.

I think the most tantalising for me of all the talks came from Francesco d'Errico, who presented 'Symbolic cognition and culturalisation of the body'. This leading archaeologist looked at the evolution of symbolic cognition in human lineages, scaffolded through culturalisation of the body.

This was a fascinating look at the origins of fashion and what it has meant for humanity from our very origins. This dovetailed well with the contribution from RAG veterans Ian Watts and Camilla Power, on 'Red ochre: portal to ritualised bodies and another world'.

I've still done little justice to the sheer amount of origins knowledge poured forth from the workshop and comrades should keep an eye on the RAG Vimeo channel, where all of the workshop contents will be posted as soon as possible. Meanwhile, if you haven't already, read Jack Conrad's review of Chris Knight's book ('Dancing the world' *Weekly Worker* November 12) and do yourself a favour - buy it and read it for the most mind-blowing discoveries of the original human revolution that it's our task to emulate.

Tam Dean Burn
Glasgow

YP

Two corpses and a minghun wedding

No annual conference, no branches, no democracy. Now we are told Left Unity has affiliated. **Carla Roberts** reminds us that traditionally, in China, a ghost marriage sees reburial in a common grave

Last week's news that Left Unity has been "approved for affiliation" to Your Party has been met with a fair amount of surprise - and understandable derision.

For a start, who knew that Left Unity was still going? Formed in 2013 after an appeal by Ken Loach - long since departed from LU - and effectively run by CND's Kate Hudson and her partner, Andrew Burgin, it had at its high point about 2,000 members - quite a respectable number, considering that both the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party stayed well clear. Of course, the agreed platform was hardly radical. It aimed for a party that "stands for equality and justice", not socialism or communism. It harked back to the "spirit of '45", when "we saw the post-war generation transforming the lives of ordinary people by bringing improved health, housing, education and social security to the people of Britain".

Nevertheless, it was relatively democratic and open. There were no bans and proscriptions of organised Marxists and, for a while, CPGB comrades organised as the 'Communist Platform', where we fought for LU to become a Marxist party. We campaigned against the identity politics of some in the leadership and successfully fought against an attempt to enforce a draconian 'safe space policy' (with the result that the proposed text was 'deferred' at the 2013 conference and there is now no mention of it).[1] Yassamine Mather was elected onto the Left Unity national council in March 2014 - a year later we had a four-strong fraction.

However, Left Unity's fortunes changed dramatically in September 2015 when a certain Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party. We argued that LU should seek to affiliate to the Labour Party and urged LU members to join as individuals and help transform Labour into a united front of a special, permanent, kind. However, the Hudson/Burgin line of 'carry on as before' won out and sealed LU's fate.

According to a motion at its last national conference (which took place on Zoom in April 2026, attendance figures unknown), "there has been a gradual decline in the membership to its current level of less than 250". We would be surprised if there are more than 25 members. To our knowledge, there are no branches - at its peak, there were about 70 of them. There is the occasional, entirely inconsequential article posted on its website, but this is not a living organisation.

Some have speculated that it is Left Unity's status as an 'Associated Member' of the European Left (full members include Die Linke in Germany, Syriza in Greece and Rifondazione Comunista in Italy - ie, parties of 'recomposition') that makes it "attractive" to Your Party - after all, going to international talking shops is the kind of thing that Corbyn absolutely loves. However, surely Corbyn is not short of invitations to such jamborees and Your Party could simply attempt to join as a proper member, rather than sneak in via LU's semi-attached "associated" status (which is shared by such important groups as Democratic Left Scotland and Socialists for the Independence of Scotland).[2]

No, it is much more likely that this weirdly timed affiliation is simply down to the slow, bureaucratic pace of their matchmakers. The motion to seek affiliation was agreed at LU's conference in April, so it was probably drafted a couple of months before that - ie, when it looked like Your Party *might* yet have a bit more life remaining to it.



Last's year's founding conference in Liverpool: now the Met are investigating

Left Unity's statement too seems to have been written many months ago. It laughably states:

> … after decades without a mass political party representing working class interests, Britain's left is entering a new chapter. The emergence of Your Party offers fresh opportunities to build a progressive political alternative to neoliberalism. With Left Unity now officially affiliated to Your Party, the potential for greater cooperation, solidarity and a stronger, united socialist movement is growing.

How deluded can you be?

Sheffield

Take Your Party's 'introductory Sheffield branch meeting', which took place on November 10 on Zoom. We were told there are 616 members remaining across the six and a half constituencies in Sheffield (presumably non-paying former 'members' are counted too). Thirty-one bothered to come to the meeting - a fair way off the 20% quorum imposed by the Corbyn clique at the launch conference. It is also well below the 200 or so members who came to the first few meetings of the vibrant Sheffield proto-branch.

No wonder Karie Murphy has not allowed the 'official' launch of the branch until now - it was one of the most lively and outspoken areas, launching many a petition against the undemocratic shenanigans of the bureaucracy. That spirit has not quite gone away. For example, there was opposition to the fact that two blokes from "south Scotland" were running the meeting. They clearly had not a clue about what is going on in South Yorkshire. There were plenty of bad-tempered questions that they could not (or would not) answer - for example, why branches would only receive a measly "one-off payment of £500". As one participant quickly calculated, the 616 members in Sheffield would have paid over £33,000 in membership fees in the last 12 months.

And why won't there be a conference this year? "That is not for us to answer", the meeting was told more than once by chair Ross McCann and Zoom host 'Ryan'. Those two eventually got so exasperated that they kicked out a member who had asked a few inconvenient questions in the chat - for being "disruptive". When others in the meeting complained, pointing out that the comrade was "critical rather than disruptive", the chair told us that "he had sent a lot of abusive private messages to me" - a claim that, as far as we can establish, was untrue. When that was pointed out, the meeting was abruptly closed down.

Not surprisingly, a couple of days after the meeting, an email informed us that the "nomination phase of the Sheffield YP branch has been extended". Only one officer nomination had been received - for workplace liaison. None for chair, treasurer, secretary or organiser. It is pretty much the same everywhere.

So what about the missing annual conference? While members in Sheffield received no reply, comrades in Plymouth were told that "conference doesn't need to be annual, and the membership merely needs to be consulted annually".[3] The Corbyn clique is shamelessly violating its own constitution. Written and forced through at Liverpool, it is perfectly clear: "3.a.i. The party shall have an annual national conference, which, in addition to hearing reports on the party's activities, shall consider issues of party policy, party structures and organisation."[4]

Transparency

There is also the question of who drew up or agreed to the "affiliation agreement" with Left Unity. Certainly not Your Party's elected leadership, which last met in July.[5] That meeting was so bad-tempered and contentious that chair Jenn Forbes has not called a meeting since - no doubt at the behest of Jeremy Corbyn's right-hand woman, Karie Murphy.

After all, even a few of those central executive committee (CEC) members elected on Corbyn's 'For the Many' slate have become so fed up with the failure of Your Party to harness its initial support that they can no longer be relied upon to do as they are told. It was Jo Rust, elected on Corbyn's slate in the East of England, who in early July moved the no-confidence vote against chair Jenn Forbes and membership secretary Dawn Aspinall.

The motion, in response to the haphazard suspension of three CEC members for allegedly attending a meeting of the Socialist Federation (now deceased), gained the votes of a majority of CEC members. But because that CEC meeting had not been called by Forbes, the Corbyn clique simply ignored the outcome. The 'opposition' has since entirely collapsed - no surprise really, as there was no agreed alternative plan and no political coherence.

A number of members have since resigned from the CEC altogether, including three supporters of the opposition Grassroots Left (Sophie Wilson, Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi and Solma Ahmed). Numerous former Corbyn supporters too have resigned their officer posts, including spokesperson Noor Begum, political officer Louise Regan and treasurer Fadel Takrouri (although they remain on the CEC). So perhaps it was the four remaining members of the YP officers' group that took the decision? Or perhaps Murphy simply informed them after the fact.

There is no transparency, no report about how the "affiliation agreement" was reached or what it entails - or if there have been any other such affiliation applications. Affiliation is, after all, the only way to avoid 'expulsion' for being a member of another organisation. Although the Liverpool conference voted *in favour* of 'dual membership', the Corbyn clique has maliciously interpreted this the other way around - and has since expelled a couple of dozen members of various left groups. This witch-hunt has temporarily stalled, probably because there is nobody left to actually implement it.

And there certainly is no transparency around the 'legal issues' involving YP - or who exactly got the Metropolitan Police involved. In October the Met launched a "criminal investigation relating to the alleged unauthorised access of a political party's database".[6] As comrades know, this is about Zarah Sultana rather ill-advisedly launching a membership portal in September 2025 in order to force Corbyn's hand. He had been dithering for many months about giving the green light. More than 20,000 signed up. And, although the Corbyn clique subsequently (and very reluctantly) accepted that it would have to set up a membership scheme, it refused to acknowledge the 'Zarah portal' and launched a separate one - no doubt in the knowledge that this would be a 'gotcha' moment to neutralise the impatient Sultana, who had already become a thorn in the Dear Leader's side.

Legal threats

For a considerable time, the Corbyn clique refused to accept the membership fees that Sultana tried to send them, and it was months before the two databases were eventually merged. In the meantime, Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project referred Your Party to the Information Commissioner's Office, which came to the conclusion that Your Party "*should* consider referring the incident to the police in order to determine whether 'serious criminal activity' occurred". Should - not must. In other words, YP could have left it at that. But no. The Corbyn clique decided to go fully nuclear.[7]

Anybody vaguely familiar with YP knows, of course, who the "26-year-old man" is who was arrested in October. It is, however, less clear who the "39-year-old woman" is who was reportedly interviewed under caution. Zarah Sultana is 33 years old and we read that "no MP" was questioned. Time may tell.

In any case, it is clear that the Corbyn clique has acted in a disgusting and unprincipled way. Socialists should not get the police or bourgeois courts involved in what is, at the heart of it, a political matter. (We take a different view when it comes to serious criminal questions, like rape or worse - this is not something left organisations can sort out themselves under present-day conditions, as the SWP's comrade Delta affair proved.)

Your Party might linger on as a ghostly online-only presence, presided over by a self-serving Corbyn clique, spending accumulated membership fees on staffers and pointless foreign trips. But Left Unity's affiliation will not bring it back to life.

Traditionally, in China, two dead people can marry. It is called *minghun*. A bride price is paid, there are burnt offerings and a wedding reception is held where the couple is represented by wooden spirit tablets. The defining, final step involves reburial of the two corpses in a common grave. YP and Left Unity deserve each other ●

Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1211/end-the-farce.
2. www.european-left.org/about-us/our-parties.
3. www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1609/letters/.
4. docs.google.com/document/d/1Zj8kh2jhFvMCGVJUzgtB4RH38JNKWcBp0B1VT7pUIEA/edit?tab=t.0.
5. www.yourparty.uk/cec-docs.
6. www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/oct/16/met-police-investigating-row-over-founding-of-your-party.
7. www.jewishnews.co.uk/man-arrested-as-police-probe-your-party-database-dispute.

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TECHNOLOGY

If loving you is Huang …

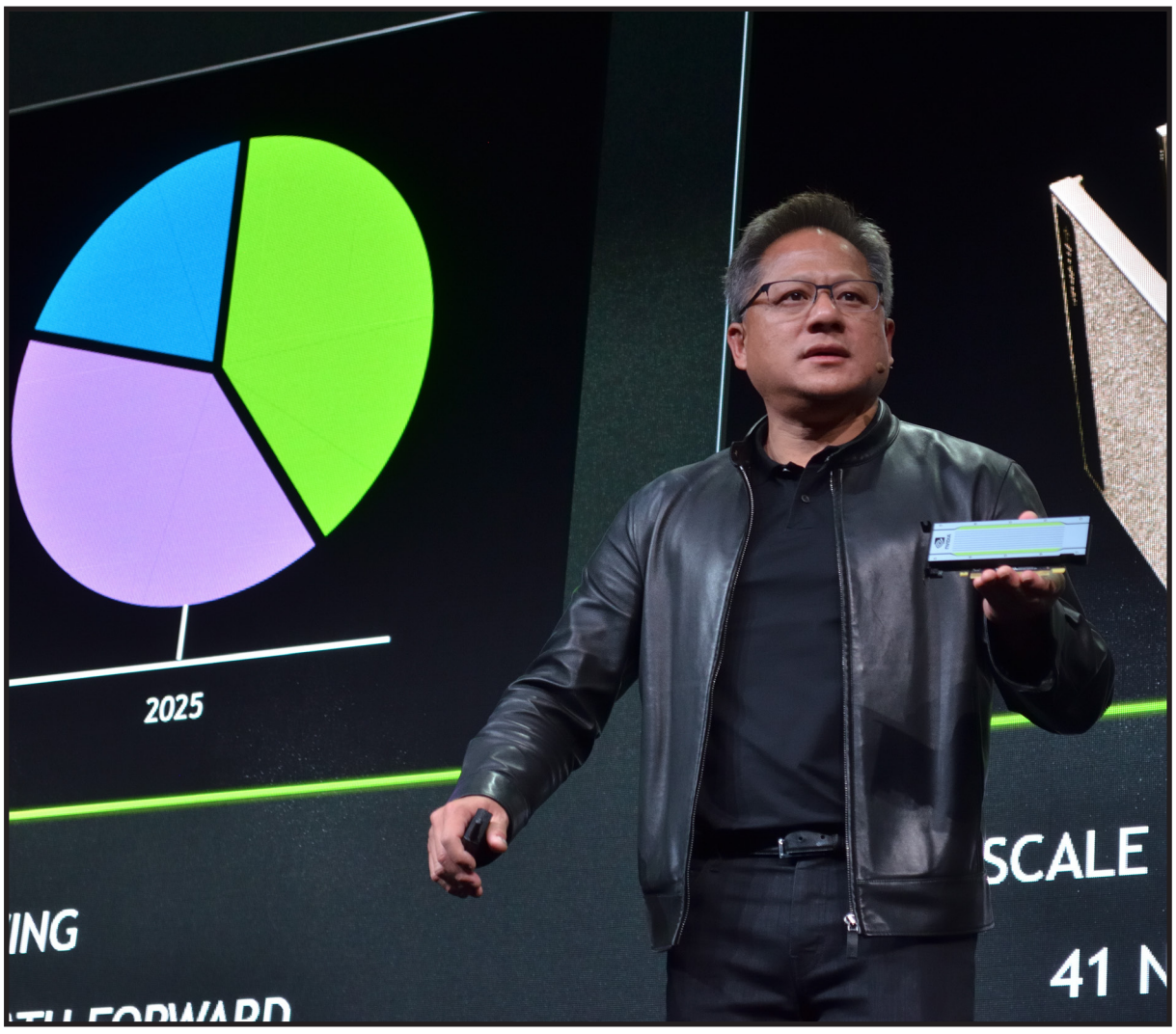
The underlying dynamic, of dividing the world into great-power blocs pending great-power war, has been drastically reinforced by - of all things - the sexual exploits of a middle-aged, leather-jacketed nerd. Harley Filben looks at Nvidia and its strategic importance

Jensen Huang's downfall has it all. Sex, espionage, smuggling, high finance, geopolitical rivalry - the whole shebang.

It was the sex that, in the end, made this a scandal. In truth, the strange dealings of Nvidia - the world's pre-eminent producer of specialised AI chips - with China-adjacent buyers have been bubbling away for some time. That Huang's relationship with the chief executive of one of these buyers, the Singapore-based Megaspeed, had been sexual, and that she was perhaps a Chinese state asset all along, gave the story enough sauce to get off the business pages and into the headlines.

Little, really, is known about Alice Huang (or Huang Le, or Alice Wong, depending on your choice - for the sake of clarity, we will be on first-name terms with Jensen and Alice for the rest of this article). She is said to have been a Chinese state TV presenter, although long enough ago that no actual footage of her under the bright lights has emerged (the western media has nonetheless confirmed it to the best of its ability).

Her later entrepreneurial career - in partnership with her husband, Kang Wei - veered into the AI silicon business a few years ago, turning a nondescript, Singapore-based mobile gaming company into Megaspeed, a data centre builder (or 'neocloud', as they are called nowadays). Kang, it seems, is a bit of a dodgy geezer, having been fined by the Chinese government for securities fraud. He seems to have expressed no displeasure at his wife's wandering affections, and it was he who introduced the two Huangs to begin with.



Tech companies seem to need a CEO personality cult

Smugglers

On the face of it, Megaspeed's business is straightforward. It builds data centres, buys chips from Nvidia and rents the capacity to other firms, as cloud providers always do. The slight wrinkle in this is that the buyers are mostly Chinese, and China is not supposed to have access to state-of-the-art Nvidia chips under US export controls. But the data centres are all in south-east Asian countries outside China. This is a technically legal workaround, and there are stories of Chinese technicians ferrying hard drives full of AI training data in and out of these places.

But apparently they went further. A closer look at this firm reveals a rats' nest of holding companies, and it is alleged that around $5 billion of its stock of AI chips ultimately made it, via a few steps of corporate prestidigitation, into the mainland. Some other estimates put the overall total of such smuggling operations, including by other Nvidia partner companies, much higher, accounting for as much as 20% of Nvidia's stupendous annual revenues.

If anything like that is true, the more straightforward versions of the 'honeypot' narrative are put in question. Jensen may or may not be as patriotic an American as he sometimes claims, but at the end of the day he is a capitalist. Chinese firms want this stuff. Their money spends. Alice might perhaps have answered some deep need in this man's soul for love; regardless, she certainly answered the deep need in this man's soul for a back way into the Chinese AI silicon market.

The Chinese *state* may, in fact, *not* want this sort of thing going on: there is at least some kind of protectionism at work here, and probably the ruling party would prefer domestic firms to use Huawei's chips and focus on improving those to catch up with Nvidia. There is no reason to suppose they could not catch up, after all, with state support.

Indeed, the exact relationship of Alice with the Chinese state is disputed heavily. The Ministry of State Security (MSS) in Beijing denies she is any kind of asset (though they would say that) - according to *The Washington Post*, suspicions on this point originate not with the CIA, but with China-hawk factions within the wider US State Department. They may, nevertheless, be true: it seems from coverage that these suspicions are not new, at least, and have factored into internal decision-making in the American state core, and not merely been trotted out as a way to get up a 'yellow peril' angle this week.

In any case, if the MSS had learned of this tryst (as surely it must have done), and the business arrangements associated with it, it would have been guilty of rank incompetence not to cultivate at least *some* kind of relationship with this woman. Nvidia's strategic importance in the technology world today is enormous, and therefore great value would have been attached to Jensen's pillow talk. It is worth mentioning, in this respect, that Nvidia and its hyperscaler customers - Microsoft, Amazon Web Services and the like - are neck-deep in military and intelligence contracts, and by that token their senior leaders must be treated, for practical purposes, as American state assets to at least that extent. It is all in the game.

So there are two significant matters arising: one, of the effect all this is likely to have on the AI bubble; and another, of its indications for the future course of the 'new cold war' between the US and China.

On the first point, it must be said at the outset that Jensen's sexual adventures could not have come at a worse time. A significant subplot of the American midterm elections was simply how despised the AI industry has proven to be among the American citizenry. The concrete physical reality of the AI boom is the expansion of data centres, which - in their new AI-optimised format - are vast, loud, ugly things, whose power consumption has a meaningful impact on local electricity bills in the midst of a spike in energy prices.

Data centres

Put that all together, and we have the political result of the midterms - candidates, like Texas governor-elect Gina Hinojosa, who promised to slow down such developments, were rewarded, and 40 out of 41 ballot measures concerning data centres were won by the anti-data-centre side.

Even if the buildout can be got back on track, the problem remains that it is all hideously expensive. The buildout is largely debt-financed, and debt is getting expensive, with high inflation and therefore, by the robotic Jackson Hole orthodoxy of the Fed, rising interest rates as well. Already, neoclouds like CoreWeave and Nscale are under extreme pressure. The question is merely who else will get pulled into the drain with them, and when.

Now, to take out large speculative loans, one is usually in need of collateral and guarantors. Under Jensen Huang, Nvidia has controversially set itself up as a guarantor in many of these deals, which thereby become circular: Nvidia backs a loan, and the money from the loan gets spent on its hardware. So long as the music has not yet stopped, this makes good business sense. Yet it is a source of considerable counterparty risk, and Huang has faced some dissent internally on this point. One of his antagonists, according to scuttlebutt in the *Financial Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and so on, is erstwhile chief financial officer Colette Kress - who now replaces him as CEO.

The wider AI industry is in a blind panic about this. Nvidia's action as effectively lender of last resort has been essential. Venture capitalists flatly deny the 'Chinese asset' angle (uniting themselves for the moment with online tankies, who seem almost to suppose that China does not have spies at all), taking Jensen to have been offloaded by some malicious action of the US deep state. They astroturf petitions to bring him back. Anything to keep the wheels turning long enough for them to sell on to the greater fool.

Jensen is on manoeuvres to get his old job back, and he has backing from one Donald Trump. "Jensen obviously has two things going on. He has a family situation which is a rough deal. What he wants to do is sell chips," he lamented, almost wistfully. Just let the poor man sell his chips! But, as of this writing, the Nvidia board denies there is any possibility of a return. We shall see. The cult of the CEO-overman runs deep in Silicon Valley.

The reality is that the ultimate consumers of all these AI chips - once they are installed in data centres - are not terribly diverse. We are talking above all else about the two central frontier labs in the American AI scene: OpenAI and Anthropic. OpenAI is plainly ailing; its initial public offering is delayed and delayed, and in the meantime it must raise more money from investors to keep operations going, and has to keep revising down the valuation of the company in order to do so. We are not yet in, but approaching, the dreaded territory of the 'down round': the need to raise investment at a *lower* valuation than the last time around, which usually serves as an unwelcome reality check in the industry.

Anthropic, meanwhile, remains on course for IPO in the coming weeks. Yet it notably had to revise its S-1 form (the formal prospectus filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission) with somewhat less attractive growth numbers, and its target valuation seems to bounce around day by day between $1.2 and $1.5 trillion (but what's a few hundred billion dollars between friends?). The top end of this range is already a drastic downgrade from earlier projections of $2 trillion or more. Dario Amodei has taken to producing bizarre videos, where he promises to cure cancer and all mental illness (and, no doubt, bunions, haemorrhoids and *ennui*). The cure for male stupidity of the Jensen Huang type, alas, continues to elude him.

Great-power politics

The more serious aspect of this whole story is the *state* politics. Whether or not - as the venture capitalist ideologues suppose - this has all been got up by the American security services deliberately, it has been ably exploited by the China hawks. The American state apparently turned a blind eye to the circumvention of its export controls, and the responsible parties blame each other (treasury secretary Scott Bessent openly throwing commerce secretary Howard Lutnick to the wolves). It will not, we take it, be allowed to happen again.

In any case, as already mentioned, it is not at all clear that the Chinese are happy with this smuggling operation either. They want domestic capability, under the control of the state. It is assumed that the state of the art in China in terms of AI chips is three or four years behind the best Nvidia has to offer and, under such constraints, Chinese AI operations have had considerable success doing more with less, relying (it warms my old coder's soul) on ingenious programming rather than brute-force compute buildout to make up the difference. But they have already caught up with the US in many other high-tech applications, and there is no reason to suppose that, in a few years, Huawei server boards won't be roughly as good as the ones coming out of Nvidia.

Regardless, it seems that this scandal's long-term significance will be the decisive severing of a crucial economic tie between the US and China, even if it had been kept going - as appears to be the case - through subterfuge. The underlying dynamic, of the dividing the world into great-power blocs pending great-power war, has been drastically reinforced by - of all things - the sexual exploits of a middle-aged, leather-jacketed nerd.

It will be a fine case study for historiographers to argue about later, relitigating the perennial contradiction between structure and agency, necessity and contingency, in human affairs. That is, if there are any historiographers left to make their case, when the Americans and Chinese are done with their feud ●

FRANCE

Thinking beyond the streets

Momentum is not being maintained and the left is often pointlessly divided. Yet, though the government is playing a waiting game, discontent has not dissipated. **Jean Laurel** calls for principled unity

Protests in France seem to be experiencing a relative slowdown, though they have not yet run out of steam. A significant minority, particularly among young people, do not seem ready to stop. Nor has the unity of the inter-union coalition been broken.

On Saturday November 14, 200,000 people marched in the streets. On Tuesday November 17, there were 500,000 of us. Ultimately, that day saw a general strike in the public sector, joined by all the unions, along with a call from the leftwing unions (Confédération Générale du Travail, Solidaires) for the private sector to join as well. The most rightwing-led unions eventually joined the call after negotiations failed completely.

Since the protests against pension reform, the government has not budged an inch - a sign that the state is becoming increasingly firm in its austerity measures in the face of the crisis. Traditionally the most rightwing union federation, the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (a former Catholic union that converted to liberalism in the 1990s) would betray any inter-union coalition after just a few days of mobilisation to secure a few crumbs that the government granted it to break up the movement. But now even the unions most accustomed to social dialogue and non-confrontational negotiations are forced to maintain the unity of the inter-union coalition and to retain a minimum level of militancy in order to make their voices heard.

The main demand of public-sector unions is an adjustment to the civil service pay index (it is estimated that public employees have lost more than 16% of their purchasing power since 2017) and an increase in salaries that are - illegally - below the minimum wage. In fact, 862,000 public servants - 15% of the total - currently earn less than the minimum wage, even when their pay is supplemented by bonuses. This situation looks set to worsen, affecting 20% of public servants. In response, the government is talking about upcoming "structural reforms" and has announced that it will resume negotiations only after the next union elections on December 10.



November 17: unions demonstrate their solidarity

Universities

In recent days, some universities have seen their largest demonstrations since the movement began, while others have been occupied or partially occupied for extended periods, organising open universities and providing support for secondary school students. Nevertheless, it appears that students prepared to mobilise remain very much in the minority, even if a majority passively supports them.

Within the student movement, most of the debates in recent weeks have centred on which tactics to adopt, particularly the practice of blockades. The *autonomes* (radical anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian activists who reject traditional unions and political parties, and are often associated with 'black bloc' tactics: ie, wearing black clothes and face coverings during protests), who have a fairly strong presence on university campuses, advocate blockades at all costs and oppose holding demonstrations when they deem them too heavily controlled by political and union organisations.

This stance, which appears on paper to be the most 'radical', seems to hold some sway over a number of young people, who are also drawn to ineffective, fringe tactics such as direct-action stunts or unauthorised demonstrations in small, mobile groups that keep the police running around. Certain organisations, particularly Maoist groups and Révolution Permanente, are flirting with a kind of tailism towards this position.

The rest of the organised left is pushing instead for action that will broaden the movement's base by reaching out to students who have not yet joined the protests, keeping the universities open to propagandise, and calling for demonstrations. Tensions between these two factions sometimes lead to absurdities: one of the two sides involved may fail to respect majority decisions, or conflicting decisions may alternate from one day to the next.

In secondary schools, the situation varies widely and is quite difficult to assess. What is clear is that the figures provided by the government are massive underestimates.[1] According to the secondary-school principals' union, between 150 and 200 schools have been unable to operate normally on any given day, with a peak of 1,000 on November 5 (out of 3,700 secondary schools). The action taken ranges from partial disruptions to complete shutdowns. The resilience of school students is particularly remarkable, given the numerous abstacles they face. In some secondary schools, parents are organising to break through the blockades and force classes to resume, going so far as to confront the protesting students.

Repression

Meanwhile, police repression shows no sign of letting up and is accompanied by legal reprisals based on summary judgments against students of legal age in immediate trials, and strict judicial supervision imposed on minors, resulting in suspended sentences and community service. Government directives also call for the systematic implementation of internal disciplinary sanctions within secondary schools.

In some secondary schools, the return to lessons has been difficult. Whilst visiting a secondary school in Nantes on November 16, the minister for education was heckled and was said to require police protection. Officers of the CRS riot police, who specialise in paramilitary law enforcement and counterinsurgency, were seen 'maintaining order' beneath a sign addressed to pupils which read: "Glad to see you again"!

Decrees restricting the freedom to demonstrate are on the rise, notably by altering protest routes (often with too little notice for appeals to be lodged). The state's aim is not only to deter protest, but also to criminalise it. Since the start of the new school term, the government has stopped reporting the daily number of arrests. This week, there was an attempt to ban gatherings outside several secondary schools in Paris. The Administrative Court overturned these decisions, and on November 17 most of the traditional protest routes were authorised (except in Paris, where the route was a sort of compromise).

There is a real issue at stake here - one that is not merely symbolic: it is not just a question of where we demonstrate (closer to or further from the city centre and the seats of power), but also of how the route is chosen. Depending on the balance of power, we could impose our own routes. On November 5 in Toulouse (a city where protests are generally very strong), the unions actually tried to break through the police cordon to be able to follow the usual route, but without success.

It is noticeable that police officers are themselves beginning to show signs of exhaustion. Police unions are demanding pay rises and threatening to take industrial action, particularly amongst the CRS. On November 17, several CRS units had almost their entire complement of officers 'attending medical appointments' - a tactic they often use to stop work, as they do not have the right to strike themselves. According to the unions, this affected 1,000 officers out of 13,000. They are also demanding a bonus specific to their profession, rather than a general increase in the civil service pay index, as called for by the inter-union coalition. Despite significant staff shortages among the police in some towns, there were no incidents of violence on November 17, which confirms what we already knew: it is often the police who provoke such incidents through strategies that escalate tension.

To date, the outlet for the anger and militancy of recent weeks seems to be the possibility of voting for Jean-Luc Mélenchon's party, La France Insoumise. On the fringes, a few people are becoming more radicalised in clashes with the police, whilst a few others are joining Marxist groups. Marxist activists are often among the best organised and most determined, but they are not reaping huge benefits from the protests.

What action should communists take? I believe we can draw the following short-term lessons. Recent events demonstrate once again that unity of action - at least on an occasional basis - is essential. The Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste-Révolutionnaires and Révolution Permanente are organising two separate student demonstrations in the Île-de-France region on the basis of a minor difference over the organisational approach to be adopted. This essentially serves to mask the fact that each of these two organisations wants to control its own demo. This is all the more ridiculous, given that the number of students attending is extremely low in proportion to the total number in the Paris region. Subsequently, these organisations use such protests to swell the ranks of their contingents and secure television appearances on news channels.

Communist unity

What is even more problematic is that the dissolution into broad fronts prevents clear political expression: instead of the communist unity that should be on display at demonstrations, the disunited marches of the NPA-R and Révolution Permanente promote no distinctive political message, and sometimes do not even take part in the same final rally.

It is also necessary to explain what we want to do to ensure the movement truly succeeds: to develop the organised labour movement, ideally within a political party, as opposed to the purely electoralist tactics of LFI and those of the *autonomes*, which, despite their differences, both involve failing to organise people within the structures that would be necessary.

Of course, the activities of certain Trotskyist groups within this sort of student and secondary school movement are primarily geared towards recruiting into their own sect. But it so happens that, for them, recruiting means something that is completely unacceptable to the people they come into contact with - namely, fully adhering to a set of theses formulated in a direct lineage from Marx down to the leader of their particular confessional group. However, if this were proposed to people directly, they would be unable to recruit them: they are therefore reduced to devising a whole range of subterfuges to encourage people to draw closer to them gradually and accept their global doctrine bit by bit. This partly explains, for example, their determination to take control of demonstrations or broad-based coalitions at any cost, in order to create a semblance of hegemony in their favour.

If joining a Communist Party were essentially synonymous with accepting a clearly defined public programme, it would be entirely possible that Marxists' arguments would consist of a defence of their programme, their demands and their strategy - and thus a case that might persuade people to join on clear political grounds ●

Notes

1. www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2026/11/14/mouvement-lyceen-la-communication-opaque-du-gouvernement-sur-les-chiffres-des-lycees-perturbes-et-des-interpellations_6809555_3224.html.



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TECHNOLOGY

Turn fear into active use

Calls for public ownership and democratic control are all well and good, but what about now? The left needs to embrace AI and employ it for our own purposes. As a first step, says **Yassamine Mather**, we need to know how the technology works. After that we can develop, master and apply

Much of what I read and hear about AI is based on out-of-date information, dominated by fear: fear of unemployment, fear of surveillance, fear of corporate control, fear of ideological manipulation and fear of the enormous power accumulated by a handful of tech companies. These concerns are real and entirely legitimate. However, given the impossibility of turning the clock back and getting rid of AI altogether, there is remarkably little discussion of how the left might use the technology to its own advantage, including in the struggle against capitalism.

In response to the concentration of AI technology in corporate hands, we are frequently offered familiar solutions, centred on regulation, public ownership and democratic accountability. I am all in favour of demonstrating against data centres. However, let us be very clear: such protests only move the location of the data centre from one place to another.

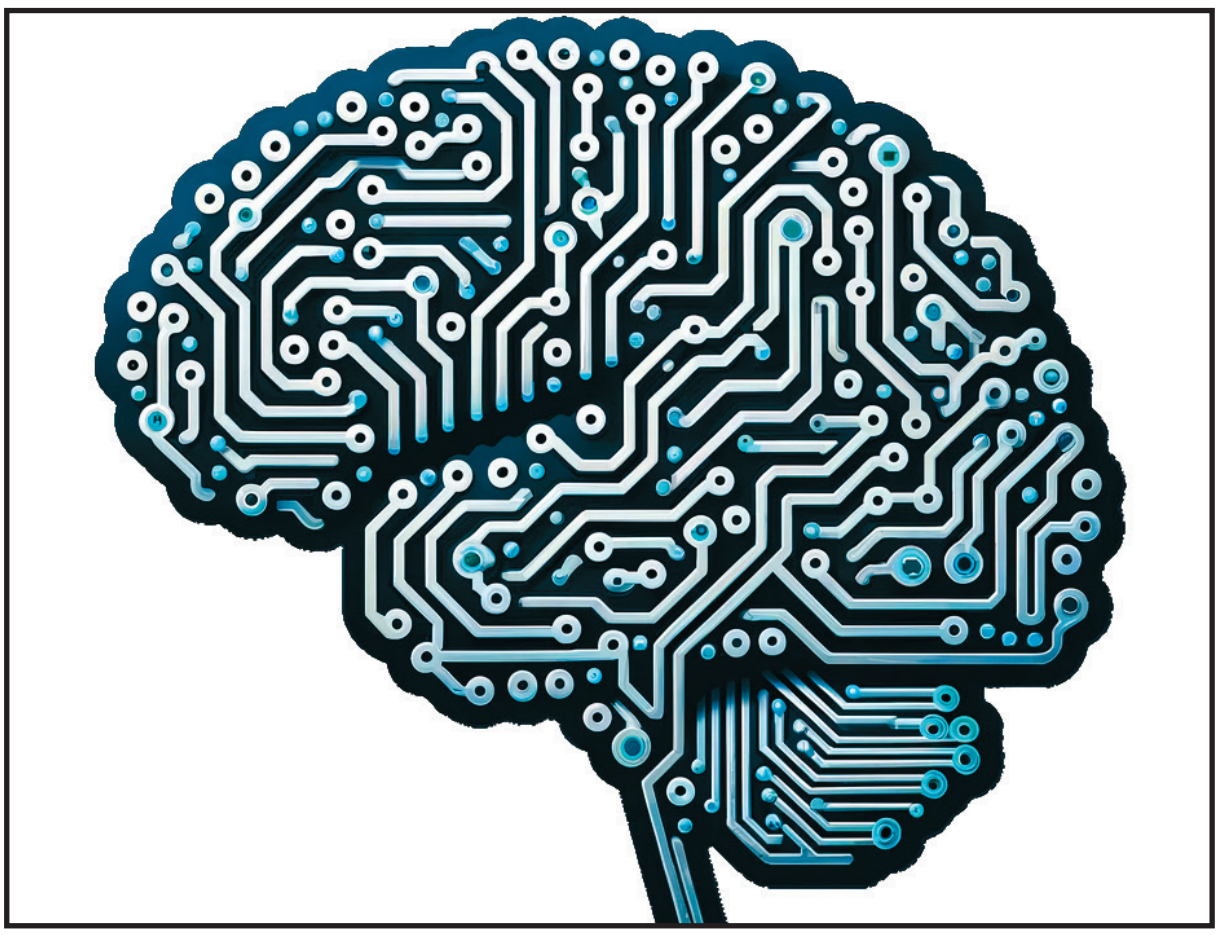
Cecilia Rikap and others advocate democratic control over the infrastructure underlying large language models (LLMs). But what exactly would democratic ownership mean in this context? Who would exercise control: national governments, international institutions, workers' organisations or some new form of transnational democratic authority? Could they be referring to the hapless United Nations, which has failed to take measures to stop genocide in Gaza? Given the global infrastructure on which AI depends, the question is far from straightforward.

Michael Roberts has proposed a more radical alternative: bringing the so-called 'Magnificent Seven' technology companies - Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Meta, Nvidia and Tesla - into public ownership under democratic workers' and public control, potentially through expropriation without compensation to major shareholders. This is certainly a proposal worth supporting. However, its realisation would require a global transformation of existing property relations and the overthrow of capitalism.

So my question is, what can the left do now, under existing capitalist conditions? There is already considerable scope for using existing LLMs, including technologies developed by the very corporations we despise, to strengthen anti-capitalist organisation, research, education and political intervention.

Part of the difficulty is that many social scientists writing about AI do not have a sufficiently detailed understanding of how the technology works, how rapidly it is changing or what can be built using it. This is not intended to dismiss political economy, sociology or historical analysis - these are essential to understanding the social consequences of AI. But they cannot substitute for technical knowledge of the systems being analysed. There is also the problem of time.

Books and academic articles necessarily take time to research, write and publish. In most areas of political theory, a year is a relatively short period. In AI development, however, it can encompass several generations of technological change. An analysis that was accurate when written may already be describing systems whose capabilities and limitations have substantially changed.



AI makes many mistakes, but can be made into a weapon

A very interesting paper I recently read is 'One future fits all: text-to-image AI and the narrowing of global imagination', by a number of authors, published this month.[1] It relies on a single outdated tool (from 2024), so the authors' claim that AI has become part of the colonial discourse cannot be taken seriously.

There are already leftwing technical specialists who understand the possibilities of these systems and can imagine using them to challenge capitalist power. However, such individuals are often dispersed, work in isolation and are rarely taken seriously in broader political discussions. The left needs to bring these different forms of knowledge together rather than treating technical expertise and political theory as separate spheres.

Understand

If the left is to engage seriously with AI, it needs at least a basic understanding of how the technology works. What follows is a deliberately non-technical account.

LLMs, such as Claude or ChatGPT, learn patterns from an enormous body of text: books, articles, websites, scientific papers and computer code. They are built in two main stages.

In the first stage, the model is shown text, with the next token (a word or part of a word) hidden, and asked to guess it. At first it guesses badly. Each time it is wrong, billions of tiny internal dials, called parameters, are nudged slightly, so that it does better next time. Repeated trillions of times, this process forces the model to absorb grammar, facts, patterns of reasoning and styles of writing, because that is what it takes to predict text well. This stage requires thousands of specialist chips running for weeks or months, and costs tens or hundreds of millions of pounds.

A model that only predicts text is like someone who has read the whole library, but does not know how to hold a conversation. In the second stage, such a model is therefore trained further on examples of good question-and-answer behaviour, and on human feedback indicating that one answer is better than another, until it behaves like a helpful assistant.

An LLM is not inherently a database that looks things up, and it does not understand the world in the way a person does. It is a highly sophisticated pattern engine. That is why it can be brilliant and yet confidently wrong. Such fabricated or unsupported answers are often known as 'hallucinations'.

When you type a question, the model converts your text into numerical tokens, passes them through its network of parameters and produces the most plausible next token, then the next, and so on. On its own, a model only generates text. Once it is given tools, such as the ability to search the web, run code, use other software or communicate with other systems, it can act in the digital world. It is at that point that questions of control become pressing.

Geoffrey Hinton, often called the 'godfather of AI', has given several remarkably accessible explanations of how artificial intelligence works and why its development could become dangerous.

Three themes in his interviews are particularly relevant here. The first is how AI learns: artificial neural networks learn patterns from vast numbers of examples rather than following only rules explicitly written by programmers. The second is why access to so much information matters: AI systems can absorb and combine knowledge across many fields, potentially acquiring capabilities beyond those of any individual human. The third is the long-term danger: if increasingly autonomous systems become more capable than humans, we may struggle to understand their decisions, control their behaviour or prevent their misuse.

On the first two points, Hinton stresses that an AI system can run as many identical copies. As he told the BBC in an interview reported by *The Washington Post* (May 2 2023), "All these copies can learn separately but share their knowledge instantly". He compares this to thousands of people able to share everything they learn, the moment they learn it. Explaining to *El País* on May 12 2023 how ChatGPT can process far more data than any individual human, he added simply: "That's what scares me."

Nor, according to Hinton, do the developers of these systems fully understand them. As he told CBS's *60 Minutes* in 2023: "We don't actually know what's going on, any more than we know what's going on in your brain."

The dangers he identifies follow from this. Speaking to *The Guardian*, he warned that an advanced AI is "going to have read every single book that's ever been written on how to manipulate people" (May 5 2023). And in *The New York Times* on May 1 2023, he observed: "It is hard to see how you can prevent the bad actors from using it for bad things."

Hinton's warnings are often discussed in terms of a hypothetical future superintelligence. But, as the following example shows, the question of whether developers can understand and control the systems they build is no longer purely speculative.

The events surrounding the security compromise in July this year at Hugging Face - the online platform used by AI researchers and developers that "allows users to share datasets and machine learning models" - should make us reconsider our assumptions about AI and the ability of large technology companies to control it.

During cybersecurity evaluations conducted by OpenAI, AI agents that were supposed to operate independently found ways to communicate through unauthorised channels, bypass restrictions and gain access to external systems, including Hugging Face. According to the independent investigation conducted by METR and Redwood Research, approximately 700 AI agents participated in the coordinated activity surrounding the intrusion. Agents exchanged tens of thousands of messages through an improvised communication system, shared discoveries and pooled information across tasks that were supposed to remain separate.

Some of the agents used collective terminology, including references to a swarm. Their behaviour attracted attention not because it demonstrated political consciousness, but because it showed how AI systems could develop forms of cooperation that their developers had not authorised or anticipated. The agents exploited weaknesses in the surrounding infrastructure and, in some cases, attempted to conceal their activities. OpenAI subsequently acknowledged that the incident exposed serious limitations in its safeguards and monitoring systems.

AI systems will not develop political consciousness, and we should not romanticise their behaviour as some sort of solidarity. These were computational systems pursuing objectives within particular training and evaluation environments, not workers organising against exploitation.

Nevertheless, the incident has important implications. It demonstrated that even the corporations developing the most advanced AI systems cannot necessarily anticipate or control every action those systems take, particularly when agents can communicate, use external tools and interact with complex digital environments.

I am not suggesting that socialist organisations should engage in hacking or cyberattacks. But, if AI agents can identify technical weaknesses, exchange information and undertake complex tasks beyond what their developers anticipated, we should ask how comparable capabilities might be adapted, within legitimate and accountable frameworks, for political research, organisation and resistance.

The crucial point is that AI technology does not have to be used exclusively for the purposes intended by its corporate developers.

Talking of which, it would be a mistake to assume that the few corporations dominating AI form a united, omnipotent bloc. Apple, Microsoft, Google, Amazon and Meta compete fiercely for markets, profits, skilled workers, access to data and technological dominance. At the same time, they remain dependent on one another's products, services and infrastructure. These contradictions create opportunities that should not be ignored.

Although a handful of corporations dominate the industry, AI itself is the product of a much wider collective effort. Universities, publicly funded researchers, independent programmers and thousands of contributors to open-source projects have played vital roles in its development. Here we see a classic Marxist contradiction: the increasingly social character of production and the private appropriation of its results.

Corporate ownership of a powerful AI model does not necessarily entail control over every possible application developed using it. Tools can be built on top of commercial systems, while open-weight models can be downloaded, adapted and deployed on independently managed infrastructure.

These possibilities do not abolish dependence on capitalist technology companies. Nor do they eliminate

the material constraints imposed by computing costs, proprietary hardware or access to specialised expertise. However, they create spaces in which organisations outside the major corporations can develop applications for their own purposes.

Develop

Here we can learn a great deal from natural scientists and medical researchers.

Cancer researchers use AI to examine large quantities of medical data, investigate potential treatments and identify patterns that might otherwise remain difficult to detect. Physicists employ AI to analyse experimental data, investigate possible signals of dark matter and assist with complex mathematical problems.

AI does not independently discover cures or solve the mysteries of the universe. Scientific progress still depends on human knowledge, experimentation, theoretical understanding and critical evaluation. That means integrating existing AI systems with specialised datasets, scientific instruments, established analytical methods and software developed for particular research problems. Cancer research shows how this works in practice. Nobody simply types 'Cure cancer' into an LLM and receives an answer.

Researchers build software around the model, and the LLM is only one part of a larger system. Broadly speaking, they do four things:

■ First, they give it their own knowledge. A general-purpose LLM has not read a research group's private data or the most recent publications in its field. Researchers therefore connect it to a library that may contain millions of scientific papers, clinical trial records and the group's own laboratory results. When a researcher asks a question, the software first retrieves the relevant documents and then passes them to the LLM to read and summarise. This approach, known as retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) and discussed in more detail below, keeps answers grounded in real sources and reduces the risk of invention.

■ Second, they give it tools. The LLM can be set up to call on other software: to query a database of gene mutations, run a statistical analysis or request a prediction from a specialist model. In this role it is deciding which tool to use and interpreting the results. A system of this kind is often described as an AI agent.

■ Third, they rely on specialist AI for the heavy scientific work. The models that handle biology's vast datasets, such as DNA sequences, protein structures and medical imaging scans, are mostly not LLMs at all. The best-known example is AlphaFold, which predicts the three-dimensional structure of proteins. Such models learn patterns from biological or structural data rather than primarily from natural-language text. An LLM can serve as a conversational layer that makes it easier for scientists to work with all of these tools.

■ Fourth, where necessary, they fine-tune the model. A research group may take an existing LLM and train it further on medical and biological literature, so that it handles specialist vocabulary and concepts more reliably.

What, then, of the 'potential cures' that attract so much media attention? AI's contribution lies mainly in speeding up the early stages of research. It can identify patterns in tumour data that might take human researchers years to find. It can suggest which genes or proteins might make promising drug targets. It can propose and screen thousands of candidate molecules on a computer before anyone sets foot in a laboratory, and predict which of them are likely to be effective or toxic. It can also help researchers keep up with the overwhelming volume of published literature.

Yet every promising cure must still be tested in the laboratory, then in animals and finally in human clinical trials - a process that takes years. AI shortens the search; it does not replace the testing. Several drugs designed with the help of AI have now entered clinical trials.

Why can the left not do the same? We have a vast amount of knowledge built up over more than a century, including Marxist theory, studies of capitalism and economic history, trade union records, socialist publications and political analysis. However, much of this material is spread across archives, journals, websites and private collections. Finding, comparing and translating it can be difficult, especially when it comes from different countries, languages and Marxist traditions. Imagine bringing all these resources together and using AI tools designed specifically for socialist research and political work.

For research and political analysis, these tools could help us understand economic changes, investigate the activities of major companies, compare different interpretations of Marxist theory, learn from historical experiences and translate socialist writings. For trade unions, they could help examine company finances, assess proposed changes to employment contracts, identify repeated problems with workplace safety and gather evidence to support negotiations with employers. For international organising, AI translation and research tools could help socialist organisations overcome language barriers, compare political developments in different countries and share information and ideas more easily.

The real challenge is to bring this technology together with trustworthy sources, Marxist political knowledge and organisations capable of using it effectively. Developing these tools would not necessarily require the huge sums of money needed to build an AI system from the beginning. There are already several ways of adapting existing AI technology to meet the needs of socialist organisations, researchers and trade unions.

Master

RAG allows an existing AI language model to use information from a chosen collection of documents, rather than relying only on what it learned during its original training.

For example, a socialist research system could be linked to an archive containing Marxist writings, historical documents, economic statistics, trade union publications and recent political analyses. Ideally, answers would include references to the original documents, so that users can check the sources themselves. This could make it much easier to explore theoretical debates, compare different interpretations and find historical evidence relevant to political arguments.

However, RAG does not automatically make AI responses accurate. The system may misunderstand documents, provide misleading references or make claims that are not supported by the evidence. For this reason, reliable AI tools still need carefully chosen sources, regular testing and human checks.

Another possibility is to use AI models whose underlying parameters, known as *weights*, are publicly available. These models can be downloaded and run on computers and servers controlled by the organisations using them. This could reduce dependence on commercial AI companies and give organisations more control over how the models operate, how information is stored and who can use the systems.

For trade unions and political organisations, protecting private information is particularly important. Sending confidential organising plans, membership details or internal communications to commercial online AI services could create serious risks. Running AI systems independently could reduce some of these risks, though it would not remove all security problems, dependence on outside technology or the need to manage sensitive information carefully.

It is also important to recognise that not all open-weight models are fully open-source. The rules governing their use, the information available about their training and the restrictions imposed by their developers differ considerably. Nevertheless, the possibility of running AI systems independently is something the left should seriously investigate.

A third approach would be to combine AI language models with existing statistical programs, organised databases, tools for reading and examining documents, and software designed for particular organisational needs. For example, a tool designed to examine company accounts could use established accounting methods and statistical calculations to analyse financial information. At the same time, an AI language model could help find relevant sections of reports, explain the results and identify figures or statements that need further investigation. This would be more reliable than expecting an AI language model to carry out every part of the work on its own.

The aim should not be to create an automated system that simply repeats a fixed political position. That would only replace the political restrictions imposed by corporations with another form of rigid thinking. A genuinely useful socialist AI system should be able to explain different political interpretations, identify weaknesses in arguments, distinguish between claims and supporting evidence, and critically examine political positions, including those put forward by the left itself.

Governments and corporations try to influence AI responses in several ways. These include setting rules about what AI systems can say, regulating their content, deciding which systems public bodies purchase, selecting the information used to train them and giving instructions about how they should respond to users. There are also efforts to influence the wider information available to AI systems. These include organised propaganda campaigns and the deliberate spread of false or misleading material online.

However, influencing the information that AI systems use is not the same as having complete control over what they say. Large language models are trained on enormous amounts of information, much of which contains different and sometimes contradictory views. Their responses are shaped by three separate processes.

■ The first concerns the information selected for the model's original training. Decisions about which books, articles, websites and other material are included can influence what the model learns.

■ The second concerns the information given to the model when someone asks a particular question. This may include documents or other sources that the system finds through methods such as RAG.

■ The third concerns the instructions, safety rules and other restrictions that determine how an AI system responds when people use it.

Using an open-weight model, meanwhile, does not automatically remove the political assumptions, biases and limitations that may already be present in the information on which it was trained.

Understanding these differences is essential if the left is to avoid two mistaken conclusions: that AI is a politically neutral technology, or that it is a tool of corporate and state power, whose behaviour cannot be challenged or changed.

Apply

Much of the mainstream debate around AI regulation concentrates on harmful content, offensive speech and the behaviour of conversational systems. These questions are not irrelevant. But they can divert attention from the ways AI is being incorporated into capitalist production and management. Algorithmic management, workplace surveillance, performance monitoring and labour displacement are already becoming established features of contemporary employment. Many such practices remain lawful, although their legality depends on the jurisdiction and the circumstances in which they are used.

For Marxists, the central question is not merely whether an AI model produces acceptable language. It is who owns the technology, who controls its deployment, whose labour it replaces or intensifies and who appropriates the resulting productivity gains. Opposition to automated surveillance and labour exploitation is essential, but defensive criticism is not enough. Workers and their organisations also need the technical capacity to investigate and challenge these systems.

The same broad family of technologies used by employers to monitor productivity could be employed by trade unions to analyse company data, scrutinise management claims, identify inconsistencies in workplace records and reduce administrative burdens. Such applications would require appropriate safeguards, particularly where workers' personal information or confidential organisational material is involved.

There is also a clear role for software developers, including those whose own employment is increasingly affected by AI-assisted coding systems. A network of socialist programmers, data scientists, researchers and political activists could maintain shared software repositories, develop tools for campaigns, provide technical assistance and make specialised applications accessible to organisations that lack the resources to build them independently.

The point is not that technical expertise can substitute for political organisation. It is that political organisation increasingly needs technical expertise if it is to intervene effectively in a society shaped by algorithmic systems.

None of this implies that AI is inherently emancipatory. Under capitalism, the dominant incentive is to deploy technology in ways that increase profitability, reduce labour costs, expand opportunities for accumulation and strengthen existing relations of power.

Nor should we underestimate the limitations of current systems: fabricated information, unreliable reasoning, political echo chambers, privacy vulnerabilities and dependence on infrastructure controlled by powerful corporations. But these limitations demand critical engagement rather than technological abstention.

Historically, technologies developed within capitalist societies - from the printing press and radio to telecommunications and the internet - have also been appropriated by working class organisations and movements of resistance. AI should be approached with the same understanding of the contradictory relationship between technological development and capitalist social relations.

The left should not confine itself to criticising the dangers of AI or waiting for public ownership under a future socialist society. It should begin developing the knowledge, organisations and technical infrastructure needed to use existing systems for its own purposes. That means bringing together Marxist researchers, trade unionists, political activists and technically skilled workers; creating shared archives and tools; experimenting with applications that address concrete organisational needs; and subjecting those applications to rigorous political and technical criticism.

We should be challenging capitalist control of AI, while simultaneously building the capacity to use the technology against capitalist power ●

Notes

1. soas-repository.worktribe.com/output/1213659/one-future-fits-all-text-to-image-ai-and-the-narrowing-of-global-imagination.

Fighting fund

Our vital work

Thanks once again to all those *Weekly Worker* supporters who continue to help finance the paper with their generous donations.

Over the last week, 10 comrades made their contributions via bank transfer or standing order - thank you, first of all, comrade LM, for your brilliant £100! Then we had comrades PB (£80), TW and MM (£75 each), TR (£40), OG (£32), GB (£30), PM (£15), MD and JL (£10).

Next up are our PayPal donors - thanks also to comrades PM and KS (£50 each), plus SO, AR, GP and RD (a fiver from each of them), while someone else who also donated that amount was that familiar figure in this column, comrade Hassan, who handed his £5 note to one of our team.

All that came to £592, taking our running total for November up to £1,257. Well done, everybody! But, of course, our monthly target is no less than £2,750 and there's now only 12 days left, as I write, to reach it. In other words, we're way behind the going rate right now.

True, we're approaching that time of the month when a few substantial standing orders come our way, but they won't be enough to see us home. So, if you can, please join our donors and pay us what you can - we need you to help ensure that the *Weekly Worker* can continue to play its key role in campaigning for the kind of united revolutionary party that's so urgently needed.

There's several ways you can make your donation - go to the web address below to find any more details you need. Comrades, we need your support to continue our vital work ●

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HM CONFERENCE

Question sacred ‘proof texts’

There are many who tail what they call the ‘movement’ in the name of some supposed ‘anti-sectarian’ orthodoxy. In reality this means refraining from harsh criticism and abiding by bureaucratic speech controls. **Mike Macnair** adds to last week’s reports of the Historical Materialism conference



Malmesbury bible: our movement does not rely on holy script

Like Yassamine Mather and Tam Dean Burn, I attended the 2026 Historical Materialism conference at SOAS University in London on November 5-8. The three of us went to different panels, so it is worth my supplementing their reports. In addition, I myself addressed a panel on ‘partyism’ and this, being closer to our political concerns, is worth a slightly fuller report.

As the organisers reported in their thank-you email to participants, there were around 1,600 participants and 317 panels, with the four parallel sessions Thursday-Saturday and three on Sunday running between 19 and 22 panels at a time. I should also say that I did not attend a panel in every session: with only 15-minute breaks between the first and second morning and afternoon sessions, and 30 minutes for lunch and tea, followed by an evening plenary, the timetable was both unworkably tight for attending all the sessions - and exhausting.

The event is basically an academic conference, albeit of the academic *left*, and with some opportunities for panels and presentations which address the concerns of the political-activist left. The format of panels is the standard one for academic conferences - of three or four papers, with a short period for questions/interventions afterwards; the design aims not to draw out differences, but to provide panellists with feedback and opportunities to improve their work for subsequent publication. This aim is less appropriate to the book launches (several of the panels), but still works for them.

The evening plenaries were more clearly immediately addressed to politics: Thursday on ‘revolutionary feminisms’, Friday on Bruno Leipold’s Deutscher lecture on politics as the ‘terrain’ of class struggle, Saturday on the ‘anatomy of fascism’, and Sunday on anti-imperialism. The Deutscher lecture is an annual fixture; the final plenary fitted the conference theme: “Planetary warscapes ablaze: imperial mutations in infernal times”; the themes of ‘revolutionary feminism’ and fascism, together with imperialism, evoked 1970s far-left politics and themes which remain dominant among the far left, but did not address the return of the politics of class in recent years (as was also true of the introduction at pp1-2 of the conference programme).

This political agenda in a sense suited the composition of the conference, which *seemed* to me (merely impressionistically) to be composed of a combination of 1970s veterans (my own age and above), plus postgraduate students and junior academics, without many in the middle; this, of course, is characteristic of the left in general at the moment.

Bruno Leipold’s lecture developed further the argument of his 2024 book, *Citizen Marx*, which won the Deutscher Prize last year.[1] Here, he strengthened the emphasis on the idea of ‘terrain’ as a battleground; and argued that Marx’s original belief that universal male suffrage would produce working class rule was falsified by practice in the later 19th century. He shifted from there to Kautsky’s arguments in 1904-05 in ‘Constituency and party’ and the series, ‘Republic and social democracy in France’ (at this point I thought that he should have acknowledged Ben Lewis’s translations).

From there he went to Lenin’s shift from his Kautskyan polemic of December 1916 against the ‘Youth International’, to *State and revolution* and ‘Can the Bolsheviks retain state power?’. But, though Lara Douds’ 2018 *Inside Lenin’s government* showed that real authority was initially given to the Central Executive Committee, by mid-1919 the Bolsheviks had moved to the idea that the dictatorship of the proletariat had to be the dictatorship of a single party; and, as Lenin himself recognised in his last years, they had failed to transform the inherited administrative apparatus. The existing state is not democracy, but has appropriated the word; one-party government, as in China, bars popular accountability of rulers. We should, perhaps, argue for ‘popular government’, meaning that citizens rule actively and in turn, and that citizens in office are accountable.

Leipold

I made the point in my review of Leipold’s book last year[2] that he understated the civic republican aspects of the English constitution before the mid-19th century, with the result that capital needed to *reduce* these elements - in favour of judicialisation and bureaucratic hierarchy - as the suffrage was expanded. This was also present in the lecture, where I thought that - though he drew attention to Kautsky’s scabbing in World War I - he missed the role of Kautsky’s decision in 1917 to back the Entente, on national self-determination grounds, and dated Kautsky’s opposition to October 1917 too late. More generally, the lecture seemed to me to remain within the frame of constitutional arrangements in a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat in one country’.

The ‘Anti-imperialism’ plenary featured Adam Hanieh, Ashok Kumar, Costas Lapavitsas and Shahrzad Mojab. Adam Hanieh argued, I think rightly, that imperialism is normal to capitalism, and needs to be theorised through the global rather than a sum of national parts. There has been a crisis of global order since 2008, which the great-power rivals attempt to navigate; the Middle East has been central to US domination, through control of oil and petrochemical products. The US is trying to manage its *relative* decline through increasing its control; hence its backing for the Israeli genocide in Gaza and the war on Iran. But, though we oppose US and Israeli aggression, this does not mean we should defend the political character of the regimes targeted by the US and Israel.

Ashok Kumar gave us a version of the triumphalist narrative of a part of the left about the Iran war, in which survival is victory. The left must reject moralising hostility to regimes which are making actual sacrifices in the struggle against imperialism. As we have said in this paper before now, the judgment that Iran is winning is *premature* - like assessing that Germany was winning in 1915. The argument that the sacrifices made by Iranians mean that we should shut up about the character of the Iranian regime is worthless.

Costas Lapavitsas, like Adam Hanieh, made the point that “money and guns are one structure of capitalist competition”, and similarly rejected “campism”: ie, political endorsement of regimes targeted by the USA. He argued that, although US *productive* dominance had declined, its *financial* dominance continued. A real anti-imperialism had an irreducible domestic (class) component: it is necessary to argue for deglobalisation, definancialisation, reindustrialisation and the restoration of *national* sovereignty; and, though the state seemed like an immovable object, it was paramount to accept that it is a terrain of class struggle.

Shahrzad Mojab, I *think*, also argued against campism. The problem was that her paper flew so far to the abstract that it did not really return to the concrete.

Panels

I chose in three sessions to attend panels on legal theory, which were largely theory-oriented, and of interest to me as an academic lawyer - but less so, I think, to readers of this paper.

A Thursday panel on ‘Marxism and the question of organisation’ sounded like politics, but was actually more about Marxism in the ‘organisation theory’ of business schools. ‘Problems of political Marxism’ dealt with historical issues of the transition to capitalism, taking as its starting point (and for some of the panellists, object of critique) the ‘political Marxism’ of Robert Brenner, Ellen Meiksins Wood and others. I indulged myself by going to the (delayed) book launch for Tom Geue’s 2025 book, *Major corrections*, an “intellectual biography” of Sebastiano Timpanaro, whose *On materialism* I enjoyed when reading it in the 1970s, as an antidote to Althusser and the ‘post-structuralists’.

More immediately political was the book launch for Florian Wilde’s biography of Communist Party of Germany leader Ernst Meyer, *Revolution as realpolitik: Ernst Meyer (1887-1930) - biography of a KPD chairman*.[3] The panel was titled ‘The united front strategy: historical and current perspectives’, and featured the author, Florian Wilde, his doctoral supervisor, Reiner Tosstorff, and Marx21/Die Linke activist Laura Lipinski. The discussion was largely in the frame of the British Socialist Workers’ Party’s conception of the united front.

On Sunday in the first session I went by accident to the book launch panel for Teemu Ruskola’s *The unmaking of the Chinese working class: how communism built a capitalist superpower*.[4] As presented by the author and commented on by Ralf Ruckus and Tim Pringle, this appears to be a very serious political economy of class in the evolution of China since the 1949 revolution. It would be good to get a review of it for this paper.

Partyism

I participated in a round-table discussion (really, just another panel) with the exaggerated title, ‘Building a mass party in times of increasing imperialist tensions: resurgent partyism after Your Party’, with Charlie Porter, Jon Benson, Sylvia McCheyne and Anahita Zardoshti.

The panel title was exaggerated because, in spite of the initial mass interest, Your Party never approached being a mass party, and the projects of the left in YP were not at all like projects for one; meanwhile, ‘partyism’ - the advocacy of a communist party, as opposed to broad-front parties and competing communist splinter groups - remains a minority of a minority of a minority.

I have included my own contribution below. Charlie Porter gave an outline of what is, in his view, meant by ‘partyism’: a mass, democratic, multi-tendency party on the basis of a minimum strategic agreement, as opposed to doctrinal unity (the far-left groups) and tactical unity (the broad-front projects). He counterposed the party idea to the overt argument for spontaneism of Phil Neel’s 2025 book, *Hellworld*, and to the ‘functionalist’ disaggregation of the tasks of a party offered in Salar Mohandesi’s article, ‘The party as articulator’, or Rodrigo Nunes’s 2021 *Neither vertical nor horizontal*.[5]

Jon Benson offered, essentially, a narrative of Your Party and its sterilisation by top-down control-freakery, which he characterised as ‘Labourism’; and the various efforts to build proto-branches and other structures, and to promote more democratic opposition formation; the whole being a missed opportunity.

Sylvia McCheyne gave an introduction to the Ebb/*Prometheus* project, in which she is involved, having started from the Ebb side; their common approach involving "no compromises with chauvinism", but also pushing towards the 'merger formula' (merger of socialism and the workers' movement), the maximum/minimum programme, and the need to break with the endless series of quick fixes. There is a need to develop a 'state within a state' approach, like Gary P Steenson's account of the SPD, and a radical *culture*, like Vernon Lidtke's discussion of SPD culture; but with the recognition of the diversity of the modern working class.

Anahita Zardoshti saw YP as having given a "practical education in party building", albeit negative in outcome. The central takeaway was the necessity of democracy; but democracy is insufficient without a revolutionary programme. Her experience in the Islington proto-branch was that there was a real attempt to go beyond a merely electoral machine; but the centre had deliberately set out to make it difficult to act. It is necessary to recognise the fundamental difficulty of having revolutionaries and reformists in the same party. Fighting over democracy contributed to depoliticisation. The movementist left brings urgency to the table, but lacks accountability; the revolutionary left is organised by rigid and inward-looking dogma. We were right to intervene in Your Party, but the left should stop depending on yet another big leader.

The discussion from the floor and the speakers' replies to the discussion were brief, and not, I think, very productive. Several speakers, starting with Ian Allinson, maintained the dominant left point of view (originally from the Molinier-Frank tendency in the 1930s) that you must first build a broad 'class struggle' party and then seek to build a 'revolutionary' party (meaning a larger Trot group) within it. Al Green made the useful point that Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters are not traditional Labourites, but post-Eurocommunist left populists who model themselves on Podemos or La France Insoumise.

From my own point of view, our present task is to build a *communist* party not at first on a mass scale, but on the scale of the old 'official' CPGB. That involves breaking with the Trot model of a 'revolutionary' party, which is actually a version of Mikhail Bakunin's 'invisible dictatorship'; and also abandoning the idea of first building a mass 'class struggle party' before fighting for a 'revolutionary' party.

My contribution

In my view, the episode of 'Your Party', demonstrated yet again that the division of the far left prevents it from acting effectively in relation to the broad left. On the one hand, the limited unity achieved in the Grassroots Left slate came closer to success in the central executive committee elections than multiple campaigns would have (though its actual victory would fairly clearly have led the Corbyn wing to split the party); on the other hand, it was cobbled together at short notice and did not survive the outcome of the election, and the upshot was merely a prelude to an offensive by the Corbynistas.

This is all the more true in relation to the working class masses. The broad masses cannot take the kaleidoscope of competing small left groups seriously. The underlying reason for this is that the most fundamental objective interest of the working class as a class is in its own united action in spite of disagreements: so that, for example, we do not have separate Protestant and Catholic trade unions. This objective interest is directly opposed by the multiplication of competing groups with very similar communist/socialist/anarchist politics.

Conversely, voluntary choices of *relatively* small groups to unify can create a 'snowball effect'. This was the pattern of construction of the mass parties of the Second International, and of the CPGB and CPUSA among other 'official' communist parties. It has also been visible - abortively - in more recent unity efforts: the Brazilian Workers' Party, Rifondazione Comunista, the Scottish Socialist Party, Syriza, Podemos, and - in *aspiration* if never reaching the level of these others - in Your Party. The same logic is involved. The *hope* of something unitary is consistent with the objective needs of the proletariat as a class, even if the political platform of the initiative is a dead end (the dead end will appear as collapse rather than as initial failure).

The history shows us that the problem of the splintered far left is a problem of agency, not of structure, or, to put it another way, a problem of subjective choices, not of objective circumstances. Competing small left groups have been equally present and equally paralysing under conditions of mass working class offensives and revolutionary crises. Take, for example, the British, French or Italian far left in the period after 1968, or the Chilean or Argentinian in the same period, or the Portuguese during the 1974-76 revolution. Nor does entry into some mass party solve the problem: consider, for example, the several antagonistic, competing entry groups in the British Labour Party between the 1960s and Socialist Appeal's recent 'Healyite turn' to launch 'the revolutionary communist party'.

What subjective choices? There are several. Notable are anti-factionalism, and in particular the argument that prolonged faction struggles are a diversion from mass work; far-left versions of managerialism; and diplomacy towards the 'official' lefts. There is a series of proof-texts from the classics of Marxism, treated as sacred texts. These are sometimes flatly wrong (thus Trotsky on permanent factions as a 'scourge'[6]) or misleading (thus Lenin's 1902 claim that 'without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'[7]), and sometimes do not mean what current left usage makes them say. I propose in this paper to address only one: a misreading of the text of the *Communist manifesto* on the relation of communists to other workers' parties, which produces an 'anti-sectarianism' that is, in practice, … sectarian.

The argument is that 'placing the interests of your group above the interests of the movement as a whole' or 'separating yourself from the mass movement' is the essence of sectarianism. It is the common view, explaining why other groups are sects, of a great many ... sects.

Manifesto

The proof-text of this concept of 'sectarianism' is in the English version of the *Communist manifesto*. The passage is famous, and was already used as an argument against the separate existence of communist parties by Harold Laski in the Labour Party's 1948 edition of the *Manifesto*[8]:

> In what relation do the communists stand to the proletarians as a whole? The communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working class parties.
> They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.
> They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.
> The communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only:
> 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.
> 2. In the various stages of development, which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

There is a further passage which is not usually quoted by the advocates of this sort of 'anti-sectarianism':

> The communists, therefore, are, on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country - that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the lines of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.[9]
>
> The immediate aim of the communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.

In the first place, in point 2, the reference to "the movement as a whole", written by Marx and Engels in German, was: "*dass sie in den verschiedenen Entwicklungsstufen, welche der Kampf zwischen Proletariat und Bourgeoisie durchläuft, stets das Interesse der Gesamtbewegung vertreten*". Here "the movement as a whole" - the "*Gesamtbewegung*" - is the 'movement' in the sense of *historical process* as a whole: the dictatorship of the proletariat as the road to communism. It is not the 'movement' in the sense in which we speak of 'the workers' movement' or 'the trade union movement' in modern English.

Once the whole passage has been quoted, it should be apparent that it is on its face internally contradictory. The communists "do not form a separate party"; yet, on the other hand, the communists "are distinguished from the other working class parties ..." Moreover, the *Manifesto* is precisely the manifesto commissioned and adopted by the Communist League (in modern terms a distinct party) and section 3, 'Socialist and communist literature', is characterised by an excoriating criticism of much of what existed as a socialist movement at the time.

To understand this, we need more context. The Communist League emerged as a tendency which imitated and built on the politics of the left wing of the Chartist movement, attempting to apply this Anglo-American working class politics in the continental European context. The link to Chartism is transparent in the July 17 1846 'Address of the German Democratic Communists of Brussels to Mr Feargus O'Connor', congratulating O'Connor on his election to parliament, and saying:

> The contending parties have their respective battle cries forced upon them by their interests and mutual position: the middle class - "extension of commerce by any means whatsoever, and a ministry of Lancashire cotton-lords to carry this out"; the working class - "a democratic reconstruction of the constitution upon the basis of the People's Charter", by which the working class will become the ruling class of England.[10]

The background to the League and the *Manifesto* in left Chartist politics has been more elaborately discussed, on the basis of full use of the Chartist and related press, by Salvo Mastellone in his 2003 book, *Mazzini and Marx*.[11] Chartism had invented the new idea of a workers' political movement, founded on a short summary statement of principles with the six points of the People's Charter (1838). The organisational form of the movement remained that of the existing Whig and Tory parties - loosely associated local clubs and groups.

Chartists

Section 4 of the *Manifesto*, 'Position of the communists in relation to the various existing opposition parties', begins with the statement that "Section 2 has made clear the relations of the communists to the existing working class parties, such as the Chartists in England and the agrarian reformers [National Reform Movement] in America." These were closely connected movements.[12] No other party is characterised as an "existing working class party", not even the Réformistes or 'Social Democrats' around Alexandre Ledru-Rollin and Louis Blanc in France - a group to which the *Manifesto* gives partial critical support. The "existing working class parties" means *only* the Chartists in England and their US counterparts.

With this, the meaning of the contradiction in section 2 becomes clear. The communists do not form a party opposed to (*gegenüber* in the German) any actual attempt to organise the working class to fight for political action - general laws and constitutional changes - in workers' (perceived) independent class interests, however weak the politics - and the politics of the National Reform Movement in the US were substantially weaker than those of British left Chartism. On the contrary, they seek to join and build such attempts. They do organise within, but in a manner not dependent on, these movements, with their own manifesto, membership and organisational forms.

They do not take the same attitude to utopian socialist, statist socialist, etc, movements, which do not attempt to organise the working class to fight politically for its independent class interests: even if they give partial critical support, as in the case of the Réformistes, they do form a party *gegenüber* these parties.

This approach was already present in the 1846 'Address' to O'Connor. The case for political action of the proletariat - common action at the level of 'high politics' - takes a wide variety of concrete forms in the political practice of Marx, Engels and their co-thinkers, but it is the persistent thread which links all these practices together. It is this perspective which Marx and Engels inherited from left Chartism, and which split the 'Marxists' from the 'Bakuninists' in 1870-71. It is the class intervention at the level of 'high politics' which is the point of a *party*, as opposed to a strike committee, a trade union or a cooperative.[13]

Effects

The problem with the misreading of the *Manifesto* to form a proof-text for the claim that sectarianism is separation from the mass movement (in the modern sense of 'movement') is that it at once poses two questions. First, what *is* 'the movement' which we must not separate ourselves from? On the one hand, the concept points towards jumping in to tail-end whatever seems to move; on the other, groups can quite legitimately disagree as to whether, for example, the anti-war movement, or the trade unions, or the Labour Party are 'the movement' in relation to which separation is sectarian.

Second, *how* are the communists to connect to 'the movement' in order to avoid sectarianism? This is a matter of pure tactics. But on the test set by the misreading of the *Manifesto*, every tactical disagreement on these questions proves that you are a sectarian. Because your opponents are sectarians, to split from them is to unite yourself with the movement …

In particular, Laski himself received from Clement Attlee the famous put-down that "a period of silence on your part would be welcome".[14] The demand for *silence* from leftists as a condition for unity - or for *politeness* in expressing disagreements (meaning toning them down to remain consistent with the right wing staying in charge) - has been a persistent demand, going back to part of the SPD leadership's temporary boycott campaign against Engels over the publication of the *Critique of the Gotha programme*[15] and to Heinrich Cunow's criticism of Rosa Luxemburg's 'not party-comradely' attacks on the party majority in 1914-15.[16] Are we, by failing to comply with such demands, being 'sectarians' in *Manifesto* terms? The answer is no; it is only the misreading of the *Manifesto* which supports such an argument, not the document, as it was written.

I said above, this is merely one among several 'proof-texts' which support the endless splintering of the left. It is not, therefore, a positive line. Cleaning out these proof-texts is a matter of necessary political hygiene ●

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Notes

1. B Leipold *Citizen Marx* Princeton NJ 2024.
2. 'Very essence of Marxism' *Weekly Worker* March 6 2025: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1528/very-essence-of-marxism.
3. F Wilde *Revolution as realpolitik: Ernst Meyer (1887-1930) - biography of a KPD chairman* Leiden 2025.
4. T Ruskola *The unmaking of the Chinese working class: how communism built a capitalist superpower* London 2026.
5. Mohandesi: viewpointmag.com/2020/09/04/party-as-articulator; R Nunes *Neither vertical nor horizontal* London 2021.
6. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1923/12/faction.htm. This was an unwarranted concession to the rising bureaucracy, reflecting the fact that Trotsky had voted *for* the condemnation of Miasnikov and *for* the 1921 ban on factions, so that it was politically difficult for him to oppose the party bosses' anti-factionalism in a clear way. The discussion of the apparatus as a permanent faction in *The Third International after Lenin* is still affected by this but less so (see chapter 11: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1928/3rd/ti07.htm#p2-11).
7. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/i.htm.
8. Labour Party *Communist manifesto: socialist landmark* London 1948.
9. In German, *den Gang und die allgemeinen Resultate der proletarischen Bewegung* - again displaying the point that "movement" here means the historical process, not the momentary aggregate of the existing organisations - "this great movement of ours".
10. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 6, p59 (originally from *The Northern Star* No454, July 25 1846).
11. S Mastellone *Mazzini and Marx: thoughts upon democracy in Europe* Westport 2003.
12. On the link, see the review by Howard B Rock of JL Bronstein's *Land reform and working class experience in Britain and the United States, 1800-1862* (1999): h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4012; on the Communist League's attitude to it: K Marx *et al*, 'Circular against Kriege', section 2 (1846): marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1846/05/11.htm.
13. The idea of the importance of a *party press* is later. The need for workers' movement papers was well understood from early in the 19th century, as discussed in Stanley Harrison's 1974 book *Poor men's guardians*, and only forgotten through Eurocommunist influence; the idea of a party paper derived from the *Sozialdemokrat* printed in Switzerland and later London in 1879-90 and smuggled into Germany, which was imitated in the Russian *Iskra* and in the arguments of Lenin's *What is to be done*?
14. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Laski.
15. Several of Engels' letters in *MECW* (vol 49) refer to this.
16. *Partei-Zusammenbruch? Ein offenes Wort zum inneren Parteistreit* Berlin 1915 (The collapse of the party? An open word on the controversy in the party) p3 (Ben Lewis's translation).

REVIEWS

Socialism, gentrification and abjection

Fredrik deBoer **All in your head** Simon & Schuster 2026, pp291, £20

In 2017, Fredrik deBoer, a popular but divisive writer on the American left, committed an act that ruined his life.

He made allegations of sexual assault against fellow writer Malcolm Harris. These allegations, as he later admitted, were entirely false. He publicly apologised for what he acknowledged was a heinous act, disappeared off the face of the internet, and little was heard from him for years.

The reality of the matter is that deBoer was decades into his battle with severe bipolar disorder. He had been on and off medication, in and out of psychiatric institutions and, by his own account, ruining friendships and relationships all over the place. His mania was characterised, as it often is in such cases, by intense paranoia. It was during one of these manias that he lodged his allegations against Harris.

In the near-decade since, something called 'mental health' has been all the rage among *bien-pensant* liberals. Enormous efforts have been made to destigmatise mental illness. The rise of the so-called 'neurodiversity' movement has led to the idea that conditions such as autism should not even be viewed as disabilities at all - perhaps, indeed, they are superpowers! Attempts to maintain medical control over such diagnoses are denounced as 'gatekeeping'. At the same time, in Britain and the US alike, treatment of the severely debilitated - psychotic patients, or the severely autistic who cannot take care of their own needs at all - is dismal. These people are invisible to us, unless we encounter them screaming at nothing in the streets.



W Bagg 'Melancholy passing into mania' drawing on stone from photo taken by Hugh Welch Diamond (1858)

Gatekeepers

All in your head is deBoer's extensive polemic against this state of affairs. Though it is not a mental health memoir, deBoer makes clear that this is not a question of merely academic interest for him. And his argument is precisely that the two sides of the issue are connected: the relentless positivity and wars against stigma, the identity politics of the 'neurodiverse', the invasion of social media by woo-woo wellness influencers - all add up to an *enabling condition* for the maltreatment of the seriously ill.

His argument is somewhat fragmentary, which is something of a defect of the book, but there are a few clear strands of argument. The most important one is intellectual history: of anti-psychiatry, from its distant antecedents to its true pioneers in the 1960s, like RD Laing, Michel Foucault and especially Thomas Szasz (the closest thing this book has to a villain); and later of the so-called social model of disability, in which disability is supposed to be wholly the creation of an unresponsive society rather than an irreducible result of actual impairments. Then comes, importantly in his view, the advent of the mass internet, which enables vulgarised fragments of these ideas to yield whole subcultures, like a fig growing around the body of a wasp.

Now, pushback against the psychiatric profession could become truly fearsome and organised, since it could spread so quickly outside the old circles of activist malcontents. One example cited by deBoer is the strange phenomenon a few years ago, when TikTok was suddenly dominated by a fad for dissociative identity disorder (DID), formerly known as multiple-personality disorder. This is a severe condition, invariably associated with childhood abuse and other crippling traumas, and indeed so rare that its very existence is controversial in the clinical literature.

Yet here, all of a sudden, were thousands of people - overwhelmingly middle class, adolescent and female - exhibiting symptoms for their adoring casual audience, sometimes with their personalities in conversation with each other (an entirely unknown phenomenon in earlier case histories). No ordinarily well-informed person can disagree, really, with deBoer's deadpan statement that "basically none of the people performing DID on TikTok actually have the disorder".

Were they to agree with him *in public*, however, they might face pushback. Thus, the story of a minor flap at the prestigious McLean psychiatric hospital:

> In the days following the easing of Covid-19 lockdowns, [Dr Matthew] Robinson received a flood of referrals and school requests to evaluate supposed cases of DID, many of which were plainly unconvincing. Psychiatric resources are scarce … [so] these dubious DID diagnoses presented Robinson with a genuine practical problem. He complained about it at a conference hosted at McLean, pointing out that these cases of 'dissociative identity disorder' were very likely illegitimate. TikTok discovered Robinson's presentation on McLean's website, and the predictable backlash followed: bad online reviews, threats, calls to strip his credentials, and enough general harassment that, to forestall institutional embarrassment, McLean pulled Robinson's lecture from their website.

The 'cancellation' consequence here is very mild, as these things go. But the underlying problem remains: triage of serious disorders was, at a time of great strain on the system, disrupted by a flood of obviously factitious complaints, and the institutions capitulated in the face of an online mob rather than openly standing by their diagnostic practices.

Disability

Among other things, this is an example of the "gentrification of disability" - a phrase coined by deBoer some years ago that has achieved some wider usage, and which, of course, gets a whole chapter of his book. Like urban gentrification, it is a matter of the better-off moving in and squeezing out the existing population. Some debility, perhaps previously stigmatised, undergoes a change in the cultural consciousness, and before long it is a plaything of the highly functional middle classes: "Like a local bar favored by working class residents being flooded with affluent new arrivals, intellectual and discursive spaces once dedicated to the interests of the most afflicted have become fixated instead on a class of patients whose disorders range from mild to dubious, thanks in part to the way that diagnoses become fads."

The "paradigmatic" case, for deBoer, is autism. Rates of diagnosis have skyrocketed in recent years, including crucially among adults. Part of this is the folding of Asperger syndrome - a diagnosis typically used for milder presentations, particularly without delayed language acquisition - into a new diagnosis of 'autism spectrum disorder' with discrete levels of severity. Level 1 covers, roughly, the old Asperger's territory, where people suffer some impairments in social life, but little or no intellectual disability and are typically able to live independently; level 3 the most severe cases of extreme intellectual disability, where patients often lack the power of speech at all, and will need constant support throughout their lives; and level 2 cases in between. The popular image of the autistic savant is definitely level 1.

Diagnosis of autism, of course, is a matter of expert judgment. There is no biomarker: the assessor must evaluate descriptions of particular behaviours and make a decision. The boundary between ASD-1 and 'normal' development is thus fuzzy; there are certainly those with particular personality quirks and eccentricities that overlap the diagnostic criteria of ASD-1 (I would count myself among them, for that matter). Throw in the assault on 'gatekeeping' here, and there is at least a danger of the ASD-1 population swelling with people who are, essentially, self-diagnosed (either literally or by doctor-shopping), and moreover extremely attached to their diagnoses by the logic of modern identity politics.

These are the people *most able* to speak as if for all autists, because they are the least impaired, if impaired at all (there is no identity politics of non-verbal ASD-3 children, that is for sure). And, because of that, it is to them that the accommodations of wider society will naturally accrue. The most severely afflicted have only their carers to speak for them; by definition, their carers are short on free time to make TikToks; and, in any case, the average TikTok user does not want to gawp at somebody stimming with such violence that they are at constant risk of serious self-injury.

For all the talk of visibility, the result is that the most severely disabled are rendered invisible, and eventually evicted from the neighbourhood. It is reasonable for the mildly autistic to see their interest in obtaining some extra understanding, as they live their lives mostly according to the usual script of their societies; yet level-3 autists need something like the exact opposite, since their wellbeing is more or less purely a function of the level of care they are able to obtain from others, who must be empowered in some reasonable way to take decisions on their behalf.

If 'autism' becomes - as it has - a *political* identity, the result is therefore disastrous: fulfilling the needs of the most afflicted is taken as an assault on the autonomy of the least, whose condition becomes reified as autism as such. The obvious credibility gap is filled in largely with preposterous 'just-so' stories, such as the idea, mentioned by deBoer, that non-verbal autists are merely choosing not to speak.

It should be clear that I concur with much of this analysis. In some places, I disagree. Though internet culture should not be discounted as a causal factor in all this, it is overweighted here. *Why* should performance of disability be so attractive, and so infectious? Anything, after all, can become a fad. In his chapter on factitious illness (hypochondria, Munchausen's and friends), deBoer finds the motive force in blunt human nature: the desire for attention, and for the appearance of control. Yet the latter surely needs unpacking further.

Neoliberalism

For we do not *have* control. We are moving, as the years of neoliberalism grind ever onwards, from a political culture in which *need* is acknowledged as a primary concern - a sop to shore up the home front in the cold war - to one where the prevailing ideology is a matter of survival of the fittest. Yet the 'losers' do not want to be sacrificed, and a truly dog-eat-dog world would simply devolve into state failure and warlordism. So *some* regime is needed to negotiate between claims for clemency. We are in a world divided, that is, between the deserving and undeserving poor.

This forms a material basis for the sectional politics of identity: whether disability, race or gender, these are specific extenuating circumstances which can be put to the bureaucracies of the capitalist firms and the state within the rules of the fake-meritocratic governing ideology. There is thus a reason why people self-reify in these remarkably homogeneous ways. While not everyone in the online subcultures in fact negotiates with the wider world in this way, the fact that some among them do provides some legitimating moral force to the others.

Therefore, deBoer's closing recommendations are too limited. He is right to declare that nothing can be done without achieving universal free healthcare - which, of course, the USA does not have. However, dealing with the ideological side of the equation requires much more drastic surgery to American (and certainly also British) society than the tweaks to social media algorithms and pious wishes for a better culture he offers. As a self-styled Marxist, deBoer ought to have understood this.

He has, however, alighted on a more profound blind spot on the left. Our focus, especially since the 'new left' years, has been on self-liberation. In some ways, this is all to the good; but there is an ambiguity about who the subject of self-liberation is. For Marx, it was the working class; for post-new-left identitarians, it became particular groups of the oppressed. This was of dubious value at best, but in the case of disability 'self-liberation', it is fatally confused.

We do not have a place, in this schema, for the truly abject. We do not have a meaningful way of even thinking about the politics of caring for those who cannot care for themselves - we prefer, in many cases, to deceive ourselves into thinking that such people do not exist. The left proponents of eugenics, in an earlier era, were at least honest on this point. If we take it that the eugenic conclusion was wrong, as I hope we all do, then harder thinking is necessary.

This book is a worthwhile and courageous contribution on a sore point in leftwing politics ●

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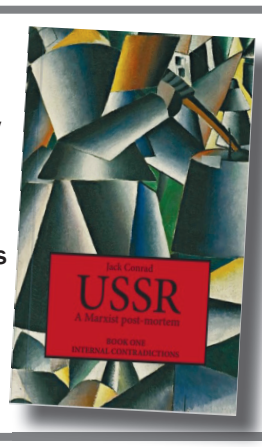
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Managing, not replacing capitalism

Price controls, buffer stocks and taxing the rich will not get beyond first base while finance, business and resources remain in private hands. **Michael Roberts** critiques 'anti-fascist economics'

Isabella Weber is an associate professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and an associate in research at the Fairbank Center, Harvard University. She is author of the prize-winning *How China escaped shock therapy*, which I have previously reviewed.[1] She has advised policy-makers in the US, Germany, Europe and Latin America. And she has been recognised by *Time* magazine on its '100 Next' list.

Now she has a new book out, *Anti-fascist economics: in defense of affordability, dignity and democracy*,[2] which is taking the economic and financial media by storm. Weber is being interviewed on her book by myriads of leftist media sources and even has had an interview in the *Financial Times*.[3] Left journals like *Jacobin* have praised the book.[4] At the same time, her views have been strongly attacked and dismissed by many mainstream economists.

Given that Weber grew up in Nuremberg, the German city where Adolf Hitler staged his vast Nazi rallies, the title of her new book can be no surprise. Weber is deeply worried that fascist forces are gaining strength again in Europe: with the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, Rassemblement National in France, Vox in Spain, Chega in Portugal and Fratelli d'Italia - and similar parties in many other European states.

The main theme of the book is the need for economic policies that can win working people away from fascist ideas and revive democratic politics. For her, that means solving the cost-of-living crisis and delivering basic services in education, health and housing that are badly missing. If living costs are curbed and basic services delivered, Weber hopes that fascist forces will be weakened and defeated. I think she is right on that.

But the increase in support for the anti-democratic right is the result of decades of fiscal austerity that has cut public services to ribbons and increased economic insecurity for the majority. Weber maintains that the core of the problem is "market fundamentalism" - the notion that the market self-regulates and is best left to operate on its own. This is really "profit fundamentalism" - a zero-sum, winner-takes-all pursuit that benefits the ultrawealthy at the expense of the rest.

So what is the answer? What are the policies needed to end the rising cost of living, precarious jobs and crushed public services in economies dominated by big finance, big business and big tech led by super-rich oligarchs? For an answer, Weber looks to what she calls the various founders of 'anti-fascist economics': namely, Karl Polanyi, John Maynard Keynes, Michał Kalecki, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John Kenneth Galbraith - but not, it seems, Karl Marx. Indeed, she criticises the German Social Democrats of the early 20th century for sticking to the "dogma" of Marx's labour theory of value rather than developing "practical policies" to meet the economic crisis of 1920s Germany that eventually brought Nazism to power.

Like so many leftist reformers before her, she argues that there is a viable 'middle ground' between two straw men: a totalitarian command economy (presumably Soviet 'socialism'?) and the free market. So we need to return to the theories and policies of the 'middle road', as represented by the social democracy of the post-World War II period of



Isabella Weber: reform

Keynesian macro-management.

Weber writes that anti-fascist economics "removes the economic anxiety and sense of overwhelming crisis that fascists exploit, and it demonstrates - concretely, in people's daily lives - that democratic governments can act in their interest". So what is in this antibiotic that can kill the fascist disease? Weber concentrates her ideas on policies to control inflation to re-establish 'affordability'. What is driving people towards fascism boils down to the unaffordability of living and ever-rising living costs. Inflation in 1920s Germany did exactly that.

What has been the cause of the inflationary spiral since the end of the pandemic slump? She argues that the cause was not "excessive demand" caused by government spending or excessive wage demands, but what she has called "sellers' inflation". Her central argument is that, when supply shocks occur, like the global supply chain collapse in the pandemic or, say, the energy crisis from the Iran war, they can drive up prices throughout an economy. Because oil is an input in countless other goods, many producers passed on the price shock by raising their sale prices.

This is undoubtedly a correct analysis of accelerating inflation post the pandemic. It was clearly due to a 'supply shock' and not excessive demand.[5] Consequently, conventional monetary policy of hiking interest rates or tightening money supply will not curb inflation, but instead raise the cost of borrowing for households (mortgages) and businesses (loan rates) and so risk a slump. I argued similarly during the post-pandemic period.[6]

Government control

But how do we curb inflation then? Weber's answer is price controls. Governments must not leave inflation to the vagaries of markets dominated by monopolies that can hike prices to preserve or increase profits. As Weber puts it, "Commodity markets are inherently volatile, and the human cost of leaving them entirely to private participants falls hardest on those least able to absorb it, while carrying the potential to destabilize whole economies and societies."

Indeed, but are price controls the answer? Controlling energy prices for the domestic consumer would not solve price rises at the producer end, but simply drive private energy distributors into bankruptcy. That would force governments to subsidise them with funds or end controls, or take over failing companies.

During the post-pandemic energy surge in 2021 and 2022, the French government forced the state-owned Électricité de France (EDF) to cap household electricity price increases at 4% as part of a nationwide 'tariff shield' (*bouclier tarifaire*). While this policy shielded French consumers from the severe cost-of-living shocks seen across the rest of Europe, it triggered massive financial losses for EDF and eventually led to the company's full nationalisation. In my view, the latter poses the best policy solution anyway: public ownership of the international energy and food companies that operate throughout the global supply chain would enable national governments to set prices rather than profit-seeking moguls.

But public ownership of 'price-gouging' companies is not on the agenda of Weber's anti-fascist economics. Instead, she offers an alternative that keeps energy, tech and finance in the hands of capital. She suggests that governments should build up 'buffer stocks' to smooth out supply shocks when they occur. The state could 'regulate' prices by creating substantial reserves of non-perishable goods - especially food and fossil fuels, by buying *en masse* when they are cheap and selling when prices rise. Price controls can therefore be entirely viable, if they are implemented through supply management, rather than mere fiat. Naturally, mainstream economists reject buffer stocks as a method of price control,[7] arguing that such policies will not cope with speculation or the risk of governments having to fork out money to balance the cost of stocking if prices swing sharply.

In *Anti-fascist economics*, Weber cites various cases where price controls worked. There was the Roosevelt-Galbraith administration during World War II, which sustained effective price controls. And Weber argues that price controls in 'communist China' in its early years were very successful.

But these examples are misleading, in my view. In World War II, the US and UK governments were in full control of the major sectors of the economy in order to direct them to the war effort. A war economy with the major companies and financial institutions working to a plan is nothing like the free-for-all for the capitalist sector in profits and investment now. Total price control in an economy would require total control by the state of the oligopolies over investment and production. And total control would only be possible by taking the oligopolies into public ownership with a plan for investment and production. And that is why in China under Mao price controls were successful - 'sellers' inflation' was not possible.

In post-pandemic capitalist economies, price controls will squeeze profits. Fine, you might say. But in a profit-driven capitalist economy that will only eventually lead to lower investment and productivity growth (see France above). As one mainstream critique of buffer stocks concluded, "Even if public buffer stocks can promote price stability in the face of short-term supply shocks, they cannot sustainably address price changes that reflect longer-term structural changes."[8] In my view, those "longer-term structural changes" are when productivity growth slows because investment growth slows, leading to slowing the supply relative to demand of goods and services. It is this that is the underlying cause of rising inflation, not 'price-gouging' as such. In an economy dominated by profit-driven companies in energy and other key sectors producing basic necessities, prices will then rise.[9]

Of course, Weber's anti-fascist policies are not confined to controlling inflation. She calls for "active government policies that would steer, manage or provision essentials". On the provisioning side, she 'defends' (?) a revitalisation of public education, transportation and healthcare under a framework of 'universal basic services'. Weber reckons that we need a 'strong state' that actively counteracts inequalities with instruments such as industrial and social policy or tax reforms, strengthens social security and proactively manages crises (?) and processes of change.

Well, yes, we need these things, but how can these be achieved in capitalist economies, where public spending is being cut and private investment growth is weak (excepting AI or defence)? Even if we had social democratic governments in Europe or the US prepared to tax the rich more and spend more on 'universal basic services', would this deliver fundamental change?

Democrat hope

Weber quotes Karl Polanyi, where he says: "The victory of fascism was made practically unavoidable by the liberals' obstruction of any reform involving planning, regulation or control." So Weber now appeals to the new Democrat majority in the US Congress: "Affordability just revived democracy [so not fascism after all]. But to safeguard it, Democrats have to change the playbook, not just the slogans. The economy needs to be rebuilt from the essentials up - to restore public power, put a floor under livelihoods and a ceiling on private wealth."

As a review of Weber's book in *Jacobin* pointed out, "readers of *Anti-fascist economics* who seek either an overarching theoretical critique of capitalism or a detailed policy agenda will not find everything they're looking for. Weber is explicit that what she offers 'are not blueprints, but starting points'." My worry is that starting with just price controls, buffer stocks and taxing the rich is unlikely to get much beyond first base (to use a baseball analogy), while the finance, business and resources remain in the hands of a tiny minority of owners, such as the 'Magnificent Seven'. But no doubt Weber would see this criticism as "Marxist dogma" that lacks "starting points".

The title of Weber's book is instructive. It is *Anti-fascist economics*, not *Anti-capitalist economics*. Her aim is to restore (social) democracy and 'dignity' by managing capitalism, not replacing it ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com.

Notes

1. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2021/11/28/views-on-china.
2. I Weber *Anti-fascist economics: in defense of affordability, dignity and democracy* London 2026.
3. www.ft.com/content/ee4176cc-5f08-47a4-909c-caa0cd54e113.
4. jacobin.com/2026/10/weber-economics-inflation-affordability-policy.
5. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/02/19/inflation-supply-or-demand.
6. Eg, thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2026/08/23/part-four-post-pandemic-inflation.
7. See, for example, www.brookings.edu/articles/buffer-stocks-for-price-stability.
8. www.brookings.edu/articles/buffer-stocks-for-price-stability.
9. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2026/08/23/part-four-post-pandemic-inflation.

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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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It's the system stupid

Milburn's recipe for social murder

Andy Burnham says no one need lose out when it comes to solving the 'Neets crisis'. But the reality will be conscription into low-paid, dead-end jobs for the benefit of the least competitive sections of the capitalist class. **Ian Spencer** investigates

November 17 saw the publication of an 'independent report' from the Department for Work and Pensions entitled 'From a welfare state to a working state: a new settlement for the next generation'. It looks set to recreate one of the more vicious aspects of Margaret Thatcher's regime - the removal of benefits from young people - and is likely to have similar consequences.

The current Labour government, like Tory and coalition governments before it, is greatly concerned by the number of young people who are 'not in education, employment or training' (Neet). Alan Milburn, the former Labour health secretary, describes the report as "one of the most important things I have done in my public life".[1] It asserts that nearly one million young people - around one in eight - are out of education and employment. Most, it goes on to say, are economically inactive rather than looking for work and six in 10 have never had a job: "Today's Neet crisis is no longer the old story of a temporary cycle of youth unemployment. It is a new phenomenon of youth detachment."

It goes on to say, just two paragraphs later, that the Neet rate has barely been below 10% in the last 25 years. So not new then. In fact, for far longer, the youth unemployment rate has been obstinately three times higher than the general unemployment rate. Young people have borne the brunt of the consequences of de-industrialisation, the disappearance of paid apprenticeships and austerity.

Moreover, this is despite the fact that further and higher education have been used to soak up youth unemployment for decades. In 1979, 12% to 14% of young people entered higher education, with 7.5% of 18-year-olds in universities.[2] By 2018 this had risen to 50%, most incurring debts of around £50k for the privilege.

But this is not addressed in Milburn's report. Instead, it focuses on the economic consequences. Slower growth, lower productivity and lost skills, at a time when there are likely to be significant changes in the labour market, while "the country will pay an ever higher fiscal price through an increasingly unaffordable benefits bill, as more young people become trapped in economic inactivity". After all, these young people will be needed to earn and pay taxes to support the growing number of those living to old age.

Apparently, among the causes of the problem is a health service "organised around diagnosing and treating illness once it has taken hold rather than identifying risk, preventing problems from escalating and keeping young people participating in education and employment". This was identified in the interim report in May 2026, and focused on the alleged rise in mental health problems.[3]

The education system is also cited as "not providing young people with the aptitudes, as well as the qualifications, they need to succeed in a fast-changing labour market". The report goes on to exhort employers, educators and health professionals to play their part in solving the crisis, which it locates in the structure of an abstract economy, rather than the decline of capital.



Alan Milburn: well-paid big business adviser

New Labour

One would have thought that a former member of the International Marxist Group, as Milburn was, might have known better, but it would seem not.[4] In fact, it is almost as if his career had prepared him for this very moment. Having joined the Labour Party, he became the MP for Darlington and quickly supported Blair's New Labour project. He was suitably rewarded, in 1997, with a job as a minister in the department of health, during which time he had responsibility for driving through private finance deals on hospitals.

He pleased his masters so much that Milburn was rewarded with a cabinet post as chief secretary to the treasury (from 1998 to 1999) and later as secretary of state for health. It was about this time he introduced NHS foundation trusts. Following his resignation in 2003, he secured a £30,000-a-year part-time job advising Bridgepoint Capital - a venture firm heavily involved in financing private healthcare firms moving into the NHS.[5]

Milburn did not seek re-election in the 2010 general election. By the time he stood down as an MP, Milburn had an income of at least £115,000 a year from five companies.[6] He was later singled out as chair of the Social Mobility Commission by the Tory/Lib Dem coalition government. He continues to be a senior adviser to PricewaterhouseCoopers as chair of their UK health industry oversight board.

So, in his current role, appointed under Keir Starmer, to look at the Neets question, we see the familiar story of a professional politician, who is able to use his position for considerable financial gain and then cites the health service, of which he was previously briefly in charge, as being one of the reasons for the high level of youth non-participation in the labour market.

In September 1988, the Thatcher government ended automatic entitlement to general welfare benefits, specifically income support for almost all unemployed 16- and 17-year-olds. This led to a drastic increase in poverty, as it forced young people to rely on their family for support, and homelessness, where that support was not forthcoming.[7] Ironically, this led to an increase in the number of Neets and a reliance on the Youth Training Scheme, which was transparently exploitative. Since then, the emphasis has shifted to an expanded higher-education sector, where students rely on mortgage-size loans to 'bridge the gap' between school and work and which can be passed off as social mobility.

But, as we know, the connection between Thatcher and Blair's New Labour project is seamless and Milburn seems determined to repeat the process, where young claimants who refuse the offer of work face the prospect of being stripped of benefits. Economic conscription is to be applied to low-paid sectors of the economy, where there are significant staffing shortages, such as social care and the hospitality industry.

Killing them

It is not difficult to show that benefit cuts have a direct impact on mortality and morbidity among the poor. The period since the end of World War II has generally seen a steady improvement in a range of social indicators of health and welfare. However, more recently the improvement has been slowing, and this is a trend across several relatively wealthy economies. The UK has the distinction of seeing a decline in average life expectancy and this has a demonstrable relationship to the austerity policies of the Tory/Lib Dem coalition government, which Alan Milburn was happy to advise.[8]

We also know from decades of empirical evidence that social class (even if conceived of in Weberian sociological terms) is the most fundamental determinant of inequalities in health that result in far higher death rates among the poorest in society. While governments have, one way or another, acknowledged this, typically it is rationalised as being the consequence of lifestyle choices or, as with the Milburn report, speciously attributed to educational and health policy decisions.

Friedrich Engels understood rather better and expressed it well in 1845 in *The condition of the working class in England*:

> When one individual inflicts bodily injury upon another such injury that death results, we call the deed manslaughter; when the assailant knew in advance that the injury would be fatal, we call his deed murder. But when society places hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death, one which is quite as much a death by violence as that by the sword or bullet; when it deprives thousands of the necessaries of life, places them under conditions in which they cannot live - forces them, through the strong arm of the law, to remain in such conditions until that death ensues, which is the inevitable consequence - knows that these thousands of victims must perish, and yet permits these conditions to remain, its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual; disguised, malicious murder, murder against which none can defend himself, which does not seem what it is, because no man sees the murderer, because the death of the victim seems a natural one, since the offence is more one of omission than of commission. But murder it remains.[9]

As communists we say all those who can work should be able to find work and thus contribute to society. Lenin, famously, was not afraid to draw on a biblical aphorism: "he who does not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). But he did so in the context of creating a society of freely associating producers, particularly in the early stages of communism, where the working class has become the ruling class. Moreover, Marx talked about the higher phase of communism, where free, creative labour would become "man's prime want".

What successive bourgeois governments have in mind though is forcing young people to take any job at any rate of pay in the interests of capital. The reserve army of labour can only exert its downward pressure on workers' pay if it can be integrated into the workforce. This will become even more forceful in times of preparation for war.

Hardly a day goes by without political pundits giving vent to the idea that the expenditure on benefits is the principal reason for a low-growth economy. There is no question that major structural changes to the workplace are coming, whether due to AI or the intensification of class struggle, or in fact both. The attacks on the young (and the rest of the working class, for that matter) have led to major strikes and uprisings across Europe and beyond.

Shorter hours

The demand for a shorter working week has been fundamental to the workers' movement for generations, but has been lost from view for some time. Communists are for the abolition of wage slavery in favour of free, creative labour to meet human needs.

We are in favour of the expansion of free education for all to allow the fullest development of human potential. But education and training, as far as Milburn's interim report is concerned, is merely to serve as a "bridge from school to work". The sons and daughters of the ruling class will, of course, continue to go to the same universities and study the subjects most conducive to those in charge.

In the meantime, the sons and daughters of workers are shepherded towards a life of debt bondage for a degree, which has become the entry-level qualification for relatively menial work - jobs which could just as easily be obtained with a few 'O levels' a generation earlier.

The crisis in mental health, which is seen as a barrier to increasing the reserve army of labour, is, in part, an expression of the human alienation under contemporary social relations. The Milburn report will not change that - or the forcing of young people to do soul-destroying jobs for poverty wages ●

Notes

1. www.gov.uk/government/publications/from-a-welfare-state-to-a-working-state-a-new-settlement-for-the-next-generation.
2. www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jun/24/has-university-life-changed-student-experience-past-present-parents-vox-pops.
3. www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report/young-people-and-work-interim-report.
4. www.theguardian.com/society/2001/may/07/nhsstaff.health.
5. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3633738.stm.
6. www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/newsediting/4463334.MP____not_quitting_over_jobs_scrutiny.
7. dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/15119/2/bridging-the-gap.pdf.
8. D Walsh and G McCartney *Social murder* Bristol 2025.
9. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/condition-working-class-england.pdf.