A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly worker

Dario Amodei can celebrate Anthropic's public launch - the biggest in history. But the bumpy ride for tech stocks continues

- Letters and debate
- Gulf deterrents
- Tony Greenstein
- Cop31 failure

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HUNGARY 1956: CHALLENGING FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

LETTERS

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

Trouble at t'SWP

The first two copies of Socialist Workers Party's *Pre-conference Bulletin* reveal an organisation with some trouble inside what is perhaps its most successful industrial fraction, the National Education Union.

The SWP holds around a fifth of the seats on the NEU national executive and has significant influence in the broad 'NEU Left' group, as well as running its own front, 'Educators Say'. It has a good number of well-respected militant reps, and several fraction leaders have not just won themselves positions, but led serious actions in important disputes, including some that have won real gains for members.

Prefigured by a grumpy *Socialist Worker* article, 'NEU education union leadership sinks pay strikes as prices rise' (September 29), when the NEU national executive voted to pause a formal national strike ballot earlier this term following the government's offer of a (still inadequate) fully funded, inflation-matching teacher pay award, the *PCB*s have seen the central committee openly attack the NEU fraction leadership. This was clear in *PCB* No1, if you 'read the runes' - strong stuff from the CC on the NEU leadership "retreating from the battlefield" was partially countered by a piece from "Jon and Jane" defending the fraction's position.

To contextualise the NEU leadership's position, members voted for action last term in an indicative ballot, when the government was proposing a teacher pay rise of less than 2%, funding for that pay rise which would have meant huge cuts to school budgets, and a wholesale assault on working conditions - the tearing up of the limit on in-school working hours. Despite significant effort, the turnout was 48.6%. The internal target is 60% - due to the legal 50% threshold and the roughly 10% drop-off common between internal online ballots and formal postal ballots.

Faced with an improved offer of a fully funded 3.5% pay rise and a complete withdrawal of the threat to working conditions, not a single member of the NEU executive proposed proceeding with the pencilled-in October formal ballot - not even the tiny number of SPEW members, whose risible adventurist positions in the NEU generally know few bounds due to their utter irrelevance ("Absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely", as Tony Cliff was fond of saying). But the SWP central committee is furious with their fraction leadership for not wrecking their own reputation in the union by calling for a ballot which every rep knows would have had little chance of success.

PCB No2 sees an escalation in hostilities. A snide note in the CC's main piece mentions the Cliffite view of the rank and file and bureaucracy, and adds: "… bureaucratic pressure can affect layers wider than the officialdom: for example, those elected to leadership bodies" (p16). Which rather begs the question in the NEU - why so many SWPers stand for national executive seats - and plan to do so again in the elections early in 2027.

The CC's next piece, 'Developing a perspective for workplaces and the unions', argues that ballot turnouts of as low as 29% can produce "magnificent" strikes (p29). Perhaps on occasion - but NEU activists, not just staff, would need some convincing of that, even if the legal 50% threshold was removed. Eliding that by asserting that union bureaucrats are fixated on "supermajorities" is a straw-man argument. Some may be; but it is in the interests of trade union militants that formal ballots are called, when there is a reasonable chance of passing thresholds and delivering well supported strikes; failing to beat thresholds or calling poorly supported strikes (as the UCU did for years under heavy SWP influence) only allows bureaucrats to smugly assert that members aren't prepared to fight. Incidentally, the assertion that the UCU is "firmly in the hands of the right" (p29), when it is the union leading the movement against huge public-sector cuts to fund defence spending, shows a level of syndicalist disorientation typical of the SWP in general and the current inexperienced leadership in particular.

The CC dismisses the arguments of 'Jon and Jane' as making excuses for the bureaucracy. It suggests they are wrong to see the wider left group in the union as the 'middle cog' in Cliff's schematic view of how action works, and that the SWP-front group should be the middle cog instead. This is highly ironic, as one central reason for the decline in influence of the NEU Left group is its widespread association with the SWP - if the CC think a shiny new group will solve that problem, they won't get far.

The latter part of the article calls for "very serious adjustments" in comrades' approach, based around a rank-and-file strategy rather than capturing positions in the union. Apparently, "executive members operate in close proximity to senior union officials, including elected general secretaries" (p35). Well, yes - and sometimes with positive results. Without the NEU and the historically SWP-friendly approach of its general secretary and other leaders, the half-million-strong Together march would never have happened. Yet in *PCB* No1 the CC argued for the "ruthless prioritisation" (p37 - a worryingly Maoist phrase) of Stand Up to Racism, with no mention of the wider Together movement at all. A sectarian turn away from wider anti-far-right activity would harm both the SWP and the whole movement.

Finally the CC suggests "A potential antidote to these pressures: subordination of party members occupying high-profile positions in unions to the discipline of the rank and file. AND [sic] subordination of party members occupying high-profile positions to the discipline of the revolutionary party - through their local SWP branch, party fractions dominated by rank-and-file concerns, and an elected party leadership attentive to these questions" (pp35-36).

This can only be read as a challenge thrown down to the leaders of the SWP NEU fraction. The CC may not get its own way here - later in the bulletin they enlist a rank-and-file NEU member to supplement their attack, but the author of the piece on p145, Suzanne J, is someone with no profile in the union and no chance of taking on the experienced and trusted fraction leaders. Pointedly, a seemingly harmless piece from three NEU members about why they joined the SWP contains high praise for the fraction leaders, including that "they understood the importance of bringing people with them" (Carly, p170), "patient organising" (p171) and their emphasis on "the importance of building from the base" (Jodie, p166).

Carly and Jodie are not new members of the kind who might usually be encouraged to pen a boilerplate 'why I joined' piece: they are experienced comrades with a high profile in the NEU, who hold important positions. The subtext is clear - the fraction leadership has the right approach, leave it be. But the Kremlinology involved in picking up this mild resistance to the CC's all-out assault shows it to be completely inadequate; if the fraction wants to maintain its influence in the NEU and not be forced into a destructive ultra-left deviation, surely *PCB* No3 must contain a direct defence of its position in the names of the fraction leadership itself.

The outlines of such a defence could be sketched out even by a non-member: there is no sense in the CC's analysis of a united front - the basis of the whole idea of the 'rank and file' approach. The way to outflank a left-bureaucratic leadership is to build enough strength to act independently of them. The CC's piece refers several times to Cliff and Gluckstein's *Marxism and trade union struggle*. This section from the end of chapter two is pertinent:

"The revolutionary attitude to all union officials should follow the line expressed by the Clyde Workers' Committee in November 1915: 'We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them'."

The questions the fraction should put to the CC are: (1) In what way have the NEU leadership misrepresented the workers, given the balance of forces, objective factors and the mood of reps and members? (2) What would 'acting independently' look like? What would the consequence of it be?

When SPEW denounced the executive's decision not to ballot support staff members (under threat of TUC sanctions) earlier this year, they accompanied their vitriolic denunciation of the leadership with saying they would "encourage" all areas to look at regional and local action (see 'NEU exec agrees to ballot teachers but not support staff' *The Socialist* September 16). The right line, if you believed such action was possible (clearly not so: with support staff members the NEU national density is below 7%!) but, of course, meaningless, because SPEW has no ability to call such member meetings, and indeed did not.

The SWP could make a bit more impact, but to what end? Rather than cohere a militant minority, rallying members to denounce the leadership wouldn't have got the union any closer to action and would have served only to make the SWP look totally out of touch. Reps in schools know that a ballot is better held back until the coming inflation spike shifts the mood on the ground. The militant minority is better off building the campaign on funding than shouting at the leadership.

Leftwing members in the NEU await *PCB* No3 with interest to see how the fraction leaders will respond, and on balance wish the comrades luck defending themselves. The NEU has only paused their national ballot; the callow SWP CC should also consider pausing its ill-advised assault on one of the few parts of its group with a fairly serious influence on the labour movement.

James Clifford
London

Thatcher again

When I look back at the icy winter of Margaret Thatcher's term of office, what made me detest her regime so much was the cruelty to claimants in general, and the young and chronically sick in particular. I despised the flagrantly exploitative nature of the Youth Training Scheme.

All of this was an adjunct to the ramping up of the cold war and, of course, her very own 'hot war' in the south Atlantic. That transformed her from the least popular prime minister since polling had begun, to having an unassailable majority in parliament. This was her redoubt to attack the working class, as Britain deindustrialised at the fastest rate since the great depression of 1929.

Andy Burnham's government seems determined to repeat much of this as farce. First Alan Milburn and now Stephen Timms are in a race to the bottom of who can cut benefits quickest - to the greatest number of people in general, and the disabled and young in particular. The drive to war with Russia is becoming hotter by the week and now extends to the coast of Libya. I cannot believe that it was possible for a Ukrainian drone to sink a relatively new Russian battleship off the coast of Benghazi without Nato intelligence and assistance.

Burnham's 'reindustrialisation' seems to consist of the expansion of North Sea oil production and data centres that will eventually displace labour at a rate that will make Thatcher's deindustrialisation look tame. This is to be supported by economic conscription into the worst-paid in the service sector. Military conscription of those not in education, employment or training (Neets) as a 'gap year' may seem implausible, but is being seriously discussed by the top brass and tested in the fume cabinet of the mainstream media.

In the UK, we tend to think of World War II as being from 1939-1945, ignoring the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the Arab uprising in Palestine, brutally suppressed by the British, as the war's 'prodrome'.

Neoliberal economics is failing to stop the decline of capitalism as certainly as Keynesianism did before. To fight against the attack on claimants is to fight against the attack on the standard of living of workers and both are to resist the march to war.

For the terminally gullible, Burnham's nano-shift to the left may seem to offer hope, as might the possibility of a Green-'progressive' future government. But, as we have seen with Zack Polanski's reaffirmation of Nato, all the bourgeois parties are united. We are going to war, and the working class will pay for it. First, they will come for the claimants, then they will come for those who resist - that will include the communists.

Ian Spencer
Durham

N20 fash bash

From the get-go, when we arrived at the youth demo on November 20, Trafalgar Square was littered with fascists, including Tony Martin, the leader of the National Front, who was filming people unopposed. After telling him to fuck off, we took up a security role and spread out among the demo.

Multiple scuffles occurred, as we outed fascists one at a time, but it soon dawned on us that not only did the youth *not* want to engage with the far right, but some began to have a go at our members/comrades for confronting the fascists.

At one point the organisers of the event even let a fascist walk up the steps onto the stage, and people who were trying to stop him were actively held back by stewards. Stop the War Coalition had 100 mostly old people standing around the demo, but they were not actually stopping fascists from passing and they were actively telling people not to engage with them. On top of that there were hundreds of students who seemed to be trained in the same manner - walking around, telling everyone not to engage with fascists - and so, every time someone or a group tried to repel a fascist, this army of liberal students would come in between them with their back turned to the fascists and push the students back, allowing the fascists to get even closer.

The whole thing was co-opted by middle-class, liberal students that wanted nothing more than to listen to the speeches and then go home. If they were honest with people in the first place, the Socialist Workers Party/Stop the War, who called the demo, wouldn't, in the run-up, have compared it and said it was inspired by events in France, because they did everything they could to make sure it *wasn't* like France.

All this isn't the fault of the powerhouse that is the working class youth, because they were not there.

Tech Com
email

Blood booster

For many people it may at first seem surprising that a latest so-called 'doping scandal' for world athletics has been thrown up by Kenya, of all places. Perhaps most shockingly of all, it involves Peres Jepchirchir, world and Olympic marathon champion, where she's just been handed a three-year ban for testing positive for a banned blood booster, an EPO.

According to *Al Jazeera*'s report, the Athletics Integrity Unit said Jepchirchir's sample was taken before her Sydney marathon victory in August, where she stormed to her fourth world marathon majors win after triumph in New York (2021), Boston (2022) and London (2024). She's also a former half-marathon world record holder.

How especially disappointing it is for communists that a systemically super-exploited African country's reputation as a powerhouse of long-distance running is being dismantled in this manner. Personally I'm not an avid follower of sports of any type, but surely one thing's been made ever more clear for us by these sad facts: how our global capitalist paradigm cannot ever provide substantial or impregnable alternative ideals to those available from within authentic socialist-communist ways to engage with life. It's flawed, it's polluting and it's corroding by its very nature.

Let me put it with a bit more depth: clearly demonstrated by these developments is how there's no such thing as either heroes or heroines, as gods and goddesses, and angels rather than demons, traitors and sinners. Under this current paradigm of ours there's only jugglers between competing forces and pressures between those contradictory values and measures for achievement and success, prestige and kudos, etc - an integral part of capitalism's typically financial/monetising 'temptations' at self-interest. All of which seems to offer pathways to socio-economic security from poverty, or at least powerfully structured disadvantage, for the vast majority of the population.

So what do you think, comrades? Useful, fecund or trite? Will you consider, discuss and dwell on this, or ignore it as convoluted drivel?

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

TECHNOLOGY

Funny, if only

Anthropic's initial public offering was the biggest in history. But the bumpy ride for tech stocks continues, as does political controversy over the AI industry. **Paul Demarty** investigates the bubble

Now that we are into the lame-duck period of Donald Trump's second presidency, we are perhaps running out of chances for him to proclaim something the biggest ever, the greatest ever, and so on.

But we did not need the trademark presidential waffle to tell us that the initial public offering (IPO) from the US AI company Anthropic - long anticipated and frequently delayed - was the biggest ever. The numbers are there in black and white. Shares went on sale at $83 on a valuation of around $1.3 trillion, briefly rocketed up to over $100 and, as of this writing, seem to have stabilised between $85 and $90. This raised a cool $81 billion for the company, which is just as well, since it is a bit of a money furnace. By several measures, this just about pips Elon Musk's SpaceX to the gold medal in the great sport of large numbers.

That said, it is not entirely a champagne cork-popping moment. It had previously been reported that Dario Amodei and his chums were targeting a $2 trillion valuation; but at some point in the autumn, reality clearly dawned on them and their bankers that this was not going to happen. Repeated delays to the process have worsened investor jitters about the overall state of the 'AI bet'; there are some indications that revenue growth is slowing considerably; and the problem of the unit economics of Anthropic's flagship, the Claude chatbot, has not yet gone away.

The IPO briefly lifted the price of various AI-related stocks, but this rally turned into a rout very quickly - both the Nasdaq and the S&P 500 index were down significantly by the end of last week. Then, on November 23, a revival - on the news that, after the direct intervention of Donald Trump, Nvidia had restored Jensen Huang to the CEO role. Nvidia immediately recovered $1 trillion in market capitalisation (poor old Colette Kress gets the boot after a week, worse than Liz Truss and the average Manchester United head coach these days …).

But, as I write these words, Nvidia is down again, in anticipation of political fallout. Huang's fate divides the Trump administration from the Democrats, and house speaker-elect Hakeem Jeffries promises investigations; but, of course, it also divides the administration itself internally, the restoration of Huang looking like a counter-coup by the tech-right against the state department China hawks. Anthropic's stock price is now below its offer price for the first time (since it is more aligned with the China hawks than the tech-right). By the time you *read* this, some other twist may send tech stocks soaring or plunging. Who knows?



What began with a big up, was followed by a big down

Fundamentals

In short, the value of these companies is whipsawing wildly, and that is because the fundamental stresses on the AI bubble - and there can be no serious doubt, at this point, that a bubble is what it has been all along - are still in place. Anthropic, having raised a bunch of cash, is now better placed to ride out whatever correction is coming than its troubled rival, OpenAI, whose pursuit of fresh capital at a respectable valuation continues to meet with difficulty. It is far better off than many of the 'neocloud' data centre builders, whose bonds are already in distressed territory and who may plausibly be treated as being on death watch. No doubt a small number of mostly men will have been made very rich last week (or *more* rich).

On a pessimistic read, however, this comes at a potentially grave cost. By going into the public markets, Anthropic sells equity and debt at far greater volumes to institutional investors like pension funds. Thus, if there is a *serious* correction, there will be serious problems for ordinary savers, and also greater risk of contagion (huge investments will be insured, and therefore insurance companies are exposed, and so on outward throughout the financial system, as we saw spectacularly in 2008 and after).

It remains to be seen how this all shakes out. Yet it seems devilishly unlikely that it will end up as promised in Anthropic's prospectus, which is basically a sequence of events like this: firstly, AI enormously increases productivity to the point that most white-collar workers are made redundant (and then, perhaps by means of robotics, blue-collar workers too); secondly, companies shift all their old 'human resources' spend into Claude; thirdly, incomprehensible profits accrue to Anthropic. There is a clear problem with this scenario: if everyone is unemployed, who is going to buy all the goods?

Without wishing to wander too far into the Marxist crisis theory bear-pit, this would surely amount to an enormous crisis of underconsumption. With real wages for most of the population already stagnant or worse for decades, the US economy has become ever more reliant on the spending of the affluent professional class - that is, the people who are to be lobbed in the general direction of the dole queue. Or in Britain, consider how much of the tax take is essentially income tax on financial services professionals. These are not minor questions.

True believers

That scenario, of course, holds as a constant that the structure of the economy will generally look the same after these breakthroughs as before - that is, we will still be part of a heavily consolidated and financialised, capitalist world economy, with limited redistribution for purposes of ensuring social peace. In reality, this is not the scenario envisioned by the brain trust at the core of Anthropic, who are in origin all true believers in the Bay Area 'rationalist' semi-cult.

For them, the coming event is machine super-intelligence that will 'immanentise the eschaton' for real (as religious conservatives used to believe was the danger posed by communism). The day after, there will be no defined-contribution pension funds or 401(k) retirement savings plans. There will be no obvious economic use for human beings at all. So the order of the day is to build a machine-god with a soft spot for us, such that it will not immediately exterminate us. We want to live in Iain M Banks's *Culture* novels, not James Cameron's *Terminator* movie franchise.

Separating this rhetoric into those statements that are mere attempts to hype the product and those which are sincere expressions of concern has always been difficult, but certainly some of it is sincere. What we are to make of it all, however, is not obvious. The panic of the AI 'doomers' - from rationalism founder-leader Eliezer Yudkowsky to Bernie Sanders - starts from the premise that the advances in the power of large language models put us on the threshold of recursive self-improvement (AI autonomously improving its own capabilities) and, from there, it will only be a matter of time until the promised singularity.

This premise is buttressed by reference to the opinion of 'AI experts', but the trouble is that those 'AI experts' were all true believers to begin with. Take Bernie Sanders on Twitter, who writes (in a long list of such statements) that "Nobel Prize winner Dr Geoffrey Hinton, the Godfather of AI, says that AI poses a 10% to 20% chance of wiping out humanity."[1] The trouble with this is that Hinton is attempting to calculate the probability of a one-off event that, by definition, nobody will know has happened.

This is, therefore, a fundamentally philosophically idiotic endeavour. Yudkowsky's beloved Bayesian methods offer no more help here, really, than the 'supreme mathematics' of the Five-Percent Nation - a movement so beloved of '90s rappers. All such estimates of 'p(doom)', to be blunt, are plucked out of the speaker's arse, though this sad fact is usually hidden from the speaker by his 'rationalist'-effective altruist ideological training. One may as well attempt to calculate the probability that Jesus Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead (and, indeed, periodically the latter question does appear on 'prediction market' betting websites).

The relevant expertise here, in short, is not (or not only) expertise in AI; in fact, exposure to the bizarre intellectual world that has built up in this industry is quite certainly an *obstacle* to talking sensibly about existential threats of this nature.

Real threats

Recent news gives us a bit more of a handle on the *real* nature of the AI threat, such as it is. The headlines throughout October were dominated by a series of cyber-attacks and critical software vulnerabilities, which must all be assumed now to be AI-powered (since basically all software development of any kind is predominantly AI-powered today). This led to the coinage, 'Black October' - but unsurprisingly, these stories have continued into the present month, and we may assume that they are to continue indefinitely. The potential for serious disruption of everything from transportation to food storage, to inadvertent military escalation, is quite obvious.

All this really ought to trigger our 'something must be done' reflexes. Yet this is not something that can be solved *by way of AI policy*. Making food refrigeration systems resistant to attacks of the sort we saw in Europe recently basically means de-computerising them to a considerable extent - which, of course, in turn has consequences for how much food can be stored and where, and ultimately for the whole rickety supply chain that ensures I can buy San Marzano tomatoes in the depths of a drizzly British winter.

It is, therefore, not exactly wrong to describe this as an 'AI problem'; but the *reason* we are vulnerable to such problems in fact goes to the most fundamental dynamics of the capitalist system: the replacement of living labour by dead labour, ruthless competition that ensures everything runs as lean as can be (as Jeff Bezos famously said, "your margin is my opportunity"), and so forth. A 'pause' on frontier model development, as demanded by Sanders and proposed with varying levels of enthusiasm by Amodei, is plainly useless, since the models are already good enough for this sort of mischief. No regulation you could pass will apply to criminals and military-intelligence saboteurs. In any case, the history of capitalism shows us that such measures are temporary by nature.

Solutions, I repeat, do exist to all these problems; but they are only possible in a transformed political situation that would allow us to plan directly in use-values, shorten and de-risk supply chains where possible, build extensive redundancy and hardware fail-safe mechanisms into all critical computer-controlled systems, and generally decommodify the economy, so that there will never again be the temptation to trade safety of this sort off against fine margins in competition. Software countermeasures against intrusion would have to be generally available, and therefore also excluded from the domain of the market.

By the same token, inter-state competition would have to be neutralised, so as to reduce the number of potential bad actors (the financial rewards of cybercrime would, of course, be dealt with by decommodification, but no doubt some other incentive for personal gain would replace it - it is impossible to imagine that hacking will go away entirely, hence the need for the belt-and-braces measures described above).

Without such a political transformation, we are doomed to watch, as these hyper-rich nerds slouch indifferently towards what they themselves believe is Armageddon. This would be funny if the risks were not so terrible ●

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Notes

1. x.com/BernieSanders/status/2124568144677159414.

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MIDDLE EAST

Deterrents real and imagined

The present stand-off in the Gulf could run and run. Or there could be a sudden escalation. It is impossible to say, argues **Yassamine Mather**. Meanwhile, the situation inside Iran grows ever more desperate for working people

Sections of the global media lazily dubbed the trilateral meeting in Shenzhen between Xi Jinping, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin as 'Yalta 2.0' (a reference to the World War II meeting between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin over February 4-11 1945). Flattered, Putin reportedly nodded approvingly when a Russian journalist suggested that the summit amounted to a "new Yalta".

The comparison, however, is unconvincing. Unlike the 1945 Yalta conference, where a new post-war order was negotiated, Shenzhen produced no historic settlement, dividing the world into clearly defined spheres of influence. Behind the carefully choreographed photo-op and the 90 minutes of great-power talks lie unresolved competing interests, ongoing conflicts and a good deal of ambiguity.

As far as Iran was concerned, the influential think-tank, the Atlantic Council, had already warned that the sight of Xi and Putin discussing Iran with Trump could provoke unease in Tehran, raising uncomfortable questions about the reliability of its supposed strategic partners in Moscow and Beijing. Perhaps that is why the Iranian state-aligned media worked hard to turn this potentially embarrassing episode into a narrative of American humiliation.

The summit's four-point 'Declaration towards peace' was remarkable chiefly for what was omitted. Beyond vague diplomatic platitudes, it offered no substantive commitments on the war involving Iran, the wider conflicts engulfing the Middle East or the continuing war in Ukraine. Its only concrete gesture was an agreement to open a dialogue on reducing nuclear risks and preventing proliferation.

In Tehran, Mohammad Mokhber, an adviser to supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei, claimed the summit was evidence of Washington's declining ability to mobilise international support against Iran. Trump, he insisted, had failed to secure his objectives. The *Tehran Times* echoed this triumphalist reading under the headline, 'Trump leaves Shenzhen empty-handed', arguing that neither Beijing nor Moscow had shown any appetite for joining Washington's campaign to pressurise Iran.

But this celebratory account obscures a more troubling reality for Tehran. The refusal of China and Russia to join an American campaign against Iran is not the same as a commitment to defend Iran against US aggression. Xi's reported reluctance to become deeply entangled in either Iran or Ukraine underlined the limits of Beijing's supposed solidarity. Moscow too has its own strategic calculations, in which, not surprisingly, Iranian interests remain subordinate to Russia's.

The real significance of the summit was therefore neither Trump's alleged humiliation nor the emergence of a united anti-American front. It was the unmistakable demonstration that the great powers are prepared to negotiate over conflicts affecting other countries without necessarily giving those countries even a voice. For Iran, the uncomfortable lesson is that being useful to Moscow and Beijing is not the same as being indispensable to them - and that diplomatic opposition to Washington should never be mistaken for unconditional political solidarity.

In the meantime, the battle for control of the Strait of Hormuz - one of the most strategically important maritime chokepoints in the world - continues. The three central questions are:

1. Whether Iran can prevent commercial shipping from passing through the strait using missiles, drones, mines and naval forces.
2. Whether the US can impose an effective naval blockade on Iran itself. This means stopping Iranian oil exports and restricting shipping to and from Iranian ports. This is not the same as closing the strait to all shipping.
3. Whether a maritime confrontation could develop into a wider war, involving yet more attacks on Iranian territory.



Big three: Winston Churchill, Franklin D Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin at Yalta

Rival action

So where do things stand in the last week of November 2026, and how many ships are passing through Hormuz?

The latest weekly baseline is the report by United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, published on November 20. It shows a steep fall in traffic: 263 ships crossed the strait in seven days: that is 15% fewer than the previous week and, by UKMTO's estimate, 65% below pre-war levels. Only 73 of those crossings were directly observed through AIS (Automatic Identification System) ship-tracking signals: the rest were US-reported facilitated transits that UKMTO could not verify. This is why live tracking websites tend to show much lower numbers.

Tanker traffic shows the same pattern. On November 21 the *Financial Times* reported that only 37 oil tankers had crossed in the latest week, down from 52 the week before. Provisional data suggest that oil volumes in the second week of November were close to half those of the first. (Daily figures since then come from sources that measure different things, so they should not be compared or added together.)

What can we conclude? Hormuz is not completely closed, but it is operating at a fraction of its pre-war capacity. The evidence points to severe disruption with intermittent passage, not a total blockade. We are seeing selective maritime coercion from Iran rather than an attempt to sink every vessel using the strait. By hitting some ships and letting others pass, Iran keeps shipowners uncertain as to which vessels are safe. Insurance costs, delays, damage and the fear of further attacks can then choke shipping without a continuous physical blockade.

Alongside this, the US is enforcing a naval blockade of Iranian ports and oil exports. The two campaigns are different: Iran is trying to control passage through Hormuz, while Washington is trying to cut Iran off from international maritime trade.

The blockade has moved beyond threats into active enforcement. On November 8, US forces disabled the commercial vessel, Huda, in the Gulf of Oman, accusing it of repeatedly trying to breach the blockade. US Central Command also says that 144 commercial vessels had been redirected by the end of October. Both figures come from the US military and have not been independently verified.

Washington has also set up 'Task Force Iron Gate', announced on November 7, to extend economic interdiction to Iran's land trade routes and the Caspian Sea. Its initial staff were reported to number about 20 military and civilian personnel - an organisational unit, not a force preparing for invasion. This matters, because American pressure now extends beyond oil tankers to the wider trade links between Iran, China, Russia and central Asia.

On November 20, it was reported that Iranian oil tankers were gathering around Kharg Island and that Iran appeared to be preparing a convoy to test the American blockade. It also reported ship-to-ship transfers of oil at sea, some by vessels with their tracking systems switched off. On November 24 the maritime intelligence company, Windward, reported that satellite images showed 21 large tankers anchored off Kharg Island two days earlier - up from 17 on November 17. Tankers waiting at anchor do not prove that a convoy has set sail or confronted American forces, and what happens next remains unclear.

This could become a serious turning point. If the US blocks, attacks or boards Iranian tankers, Iran may retaliate against Gulf oil facilities or merchant shipping, which could drag in countries that have tried to stay out of the conflict. Two recent *Financial Times* articles are especially useful. The first, 'Oil shipped through Hormuz falls, as Iranian strikes increase' (November 21), reports falling oil shipments and rising Iranian attacks, and covers warnings that the United States may come under pressure to respond with military force. The second, 'Is Trump stuck with Iran forever?' (November 20), examines Washington's difficult position: it has not won a clear military victory, it is enforcing the blockade, and it may launch fresh attacks.

As the question of a US land invasion is raised once more by Israel and sections of Trump's supporters, we also need to consider what options such an operation might involve. A full-scale invasion of Iran would be a far larger undertaking than seizing a few strategically important islands.

Possible operation:

- Seize Kharg Island.
- Occupy Qeshm or Larak islands.
- Seize Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs.
- Conduct coastal raids.
- Launch a full mainland invasion.

Strategic objective:

- Disrupt Iran's principal oil export terminal and exert economic pressure.
- Weaken Iran's military control over the Strait of Hormuz: Remove Iranian military positions near strategic shipping routes.
- Destroy selected missile installations, radar systems and naval infrastructure.
- Defeat Iran's armed forces or impose regime change.

Principal difficulties:

- Holding the island against Iranian missile, drone and naval attacks.
- Exposure to attacks from the Iranian mainland and the problem of maintaining supply lines.
- Risk of regional escalation and confrontation involving Gulf states.
- Limited, temporary military gains without sustained occupation.
- Enormous requirements for troops, logistics, prolonged occupation and political support.

There is a fundamental strategic problem: even if American forces captured the islands, Iran could continue to threaten shipping from the mainland. At this stage, limited island seizures or renewed air strikes are more plausible than a full-scale ground invasion. However, the available reporting does not establish that any new landing operation has been ordered or is imminent.

What happens next? Three scenarios stand out:

- Prolonged maritime and economic confrontation. The US maintains its blockade, while Iran continues selective attacks on commercial vessels. Oil shipments remain depressed, and economic pressure on Iran and the Gulf exporters intensifies. This appears most consistent with the current US approach.
- Renewed US-Israeli military escalation. An attack on an Iranian tanker convoy, a major loss of life at sea or another strike on Gulf infrastructure could provoke renewed bombing and possibly limited territorial operations.
- Negotiated reopening. Iran relaxes restrictions on shipping in exchange for phased relief from the American blockade. However, the underlying dispute over which side should concede first remains unresolved, and the US is also demanding concessions on Iran's nuclear programme, which the Iranian regime is unlikely to accept.

Hormuz is an especially revealing example. Selective maritime attacks can push up insurance premiums and disrupt global energy flows without securing relief from the American blockade. Pressure on Gulf shipping also risks alienating neighbouring states, whose cooperation would be needed for any durable regional security arrangement. The military leverage that Tehran presents as protection may at the same time deepen Iran's isolation and add to the economic burdens borne by the general population.

The confrontation has become a struggle over economic endurance and regional power. Washington possesses overwhelming conventional military superiority, but that does not automatically translate into the ability to guarantee safe commercial passage through a narrow waterway which has seen ships repeatedly hit and even sunk. Iran, meanwhile, retains the capacity to impose costs on international trade, but is itself suffering from the American blockade of its seaborne exports.

The result is a contradictory situation: both sides can inflict serious economic damage, but neither has shown that it can impose a stable political settlement on the other. For Iran, the danger is that prolonged economic strangulation will deepen the crisis facing ordinary people, while the state uses the external threat to justify further repression and militarisation. For the US, the danger is that economic pressure fails to achieve its political objectives, generating demands for ever more extensive military intervention. For the Persian Gulf monarchies, the danger is that a confrontation between Washington and Tehran turns their oil infrastructure, ports and commercial shipping into targets.

So the immediate risk is not necessarily a full-scale American invasion, but an escalation from economic blockade and selective maritime attacks to a new round of direct military confrontation, potentially including the occupation of Iranian islands.

The key developments to watch are whether the Iranian tanker convoy actually sails, whether American forces attempt to intercept it, and whether Washington responds to further attacks on shipping with strikes on Iranian coastal or island positions. Such events would be far stronger evidence of imminent escalation than general speculation about invasion plans.

Deterrence

Deterrence means persuading an adversary not to take an unwanted action. Mehdi Noorbakhsh - an international relations professor at Harrisburg University, speaking to BBC Persian - offers the simplest definition: if you hit me, I can hit back. Thomas Schelling saw deterrence as the art of influencing an enemy's decisions - changing their calculations rather than destroying them. Glenn Snyder held that it works by threatening unacceptable costs, and succeeds only if the threat is credible.

Two types are usually distinguished. Punitive deterrence threatens retaliation severe enough to outweigh any gain, as in cold war nuclear theory. Deterrence by denial convinces the attacker that they will not achieve their goals, through air defences, dispersed infrastructure and protected sites. Combining the two improves the odds of success.

Effective deterrence is generally held to rest on capability, credibility, political will, strategic clarity and domestic resilience, and credibility is often considered more important than power itself. Today, economic strength, technology, cyber capacity, intelligence superiority, public opinion and social cohesion also count as components of 'national power'.

Every state builds deterrence to suit its circumstances. Before 1979 the shah's Iran relied on conventional military strength and the American alliance, playing the role of 'gendarme of the Gulf". After the Islamic revolution, the war with Iraq, arms sanctions and an ideological foreign policy pushed the Islamic Republic towards a different model: missiles, drones, asymmetric warfare, cyber capacity, domestic resilience and the 'Axis of Resistance' network of regional allies. Ali Khamenei was its chief architect for about four decades. He argued that resistance has a cost, but that the cost of surrender is hundreds of times higher.

Noorbakhsh argues that Iran gives more weight to offensive tools than defensive ones. In his view, Iran did create some deterrence, but it eroded over time and did not work against the US; what remains is a retaliatory capacity rather than true deterrence. He says the Strait of Hormuz has lost value as a strategic lever, partly because of opportunities that Iran failed to take - chiefly the 14-point Islamabad agreement. He sees the Islamic Republic's model and the shah's "gendarme" role as having ended in the same way: both eroded, and Arab states reacted negatively to both.

A BBC Persian article entitled 'From the "ghost of war" to "absolute deterrence"' examines the failure of Khamenei's repeated assurances that war could be avoided. What he once dismissed as the "ghost of war" materialised, and his prediction that "there will be no war" proved wrong. In under a year the Islamic Republic was engaged in two conflicts with the US and Israel: the 12-day war and the 40-day war. Under Mojtaba Khamenei, the policy his predecessor stressed appears to have hardened into 'absolute' and 'maximum' deterrence.

Ali Khamenei spoke variously of "deterrent power", "defensive deterrence" and "active deterrence". In August 2018, three months after Trump withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal, he declared, "There will be no war and we will not negotiate", dismissing the threat of war as a "ghost" intended to frighten the nation and arguing that America would not start a war, because it would suffer the greater blow. He cited the 1980 Tabas operation - the failed attempt to rescue 52 American hostages held at the US embassy in Tehran - as proof of American vulnerability, though it is unclear how far an episode so different in nature can serve as a measure of Iran's deterrence today. In May 2019 he called negotiating with the US a "double poison" and repeated that there would be no war.

In June 2019, Ali Khamenei called for deterrence in the economic, political and social spheres, saying that militarily the country had largely achieved it. In September 2022 he declared that Iran had reached the stage where there was no cause for concern over external threats - and that its enemies knew it.

In this contest, the two wars raised a fundamental question: if the Islamic Republic believed for years that it possessed deterrent power, why did it fail to prevent these conflicts or respond more forcefully after its political and military leaders were killed? And, did what its leaders called 'deterrence' meet the criteria of military and international relations theory?

Recent programmes on state television and platforms such as YouTube have debated the record. Hamzeh Rahim-Safavi, a political scientist at Tehran University and son of Yahya Rahim-Safavi, a senior adviser to the supreme leader, dates the collapse of deterrence to the 2007 killing of Hezbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh. Iran and Hezbollah promised revenge, but he says the response fell short of what was announced. Hadi Masoumi-Zare, an international relations analyst, places the start of the collapse in Iran's response to the killing of Qassem Soleimani: by settling for a missile strike on Ain al-Asad base, he argues, Iran exposed the gap between threat and action.

Tasnim, an Iranian news agency close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, rejects this assessment, claiming that Iran is far stronger today than during either war in military power, social cohesion and even economic resilience, despite inflation. But Ali Khamenei's outlook appears to have remained unchanged after the 12-day war, which he said had left America and Israel defeated and empty-handed. Rahim-Safavi, however, said on state television earlier this month that the intelligence and deterrence system had failed in that war, and that the security apparatus had done nothing to prevent the 40-day war.

The new supreme leader (or his AI projection) has continued and intensified his predecessor's approach. In his August 2026 decree appointing Ahmad Vahidi as IRGC commander, he called for "maximum deterrence" and readiness for "powerful offensive operations against the enemy". At a meeting with senior commanders in late October he reportedly said that every threat must meet an immediate and effective response "without geographic limits". In a message in early November he used the term "absolute deterrence", saying that the only path to it was to continue the 'stronger Iran' strategy of all-round progress, with social unity as its key element. His concept rests on four pillars: ever-growing military capability; readiness to respond rapidly to any threat; national power in economic, scientific, technological and political terms; and social cohesion.

Noorbakhsh calls absolute deterrence unrealistic: no country, not even the US, has it in every domain. Today's most effective deterrents are not necessarily military. China, for instance, avoided a direct arms race with America and instead raised the cost of conflict through mutual economic dependence. He also considers it a strategic mistake to draw Arab states into Iran's deterrence equation. If they feel used as leverage in Iran-US crises, they will lose trust in Iran; he argues that Iran should pursue shared security arrangements with its neighbours rather than act as a regional 'gendarme'.

The record is therefore mixed. Iran's missiles, drones, regional capabilities and ability to widen a conflict are factors its rivals must weigh. Studies suggest that its missiles were intended to offset a weak air force and strengthen its capacity to retaliate. But the wars and direct strikes on Iranian soil show that these capabilities did not prevent military operations against the country.

Here the distinction between deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial, outlined above, becomes crucial, because the maritime confrontation provides a practical test of both. The ability to punish shipping or energy infrastructure does not in itself prevent adversaries from striking Iran or stopping its exports. The credibility of a threat depends not only on the weapons available, but on whether an adversary expects the state to use them effectively and whether doing so would advance its political aims.

Applied to the current blockade, deterrence by punishment would mean convincing Washington that intercepting Iranian tankers or attacking coastal positions would have unacceptable consequences. Deterrence by denial would require Iran to frustrate the blockade or protect vital infrastructure and trade routes. The evidence presented here points to some capacity for punishment, but serious limitations in denial. It is this gap, rather than any lack of military firepower, that makes the claim of absolute deterrence unsustainable.

There is also a domestic dimension. Official invocations of national unity and resilience are hard to reconcile with the shortages, electricity rationing, workplace grievances and preventive security deployments described below. Social cohesion cannot simply be proclaimed by the leadership: it depends on material conditions and political legitimacy, and both military escalation and external economic coercion can erode those foundations.

Inside Iran

Iran is facing a renewed combination of social protest, fuel shortages, electricity rationing and intensified repression. These developments matter all the more because they coincide with the American maritime blockade and the aftermath of the US-Israeli war.

Iran's national electricity company, Tavanir, announced on November 21 that it would introduce scheduled power cuts for households and businesses. These began on November 22, initially with interruptions of up to two hours every two days. Tavanir's chief executive, Mohammad Allahdad, warned that the cuts could increase to two hours every day, as temperatures fall.

The immediate problem is a lack of fuel for power stations. According to Allahdad, wartime damage reduced Iran's gas production capacity by approximately 230 million cubic metres per day. Some capacity has been restored, but output remains below last year's level. The energy crisis has several causes: wartime damage to infrastructure, longstanding underinvestment, inefficient electricity generation and distribution, and difficulty securing enough gas for power stations.

Although Tehran is a major focus, the restrictions apply to the national grid as a whole, and exact schedules remain subject to local announcements. Outages have already disrupted schools, internet connections and municipal water pumps in cities such as Tehran and Mashhad. President Masoud Pezeshkian has acknowledged that attacks on gas infrastructure have aggravated the energy imbalance and that this will cause significant difficulties this winter, adding that industrial and productive sectors would be the last to be cut. Meanwhile, industrial estates already face steep electricity tariffs (up to 4.5 times the official rate) and gas restrictions affecting cement and petrochemical output, while one MP has warned that continuing power shortages threaten more than a million jobs.

Then there are bread quotas and 'purchase management'. Last week, the interior ministry quietly activated a rationing mechanism through bakery payment terminals in several provinces, without any prior public announcement. Under the cap, each citizen is allotted roughly 8kg of flour a month at a subsidised rate; bread bought beyond that quota is charged at the free-market rate - more than five times as much.

Then we have eggs and poultry. According to domestic media reports on November 22, a tray of 30 eggs reached a record 800,000 tomans - up from 315,000 tomans in March 2026. Chicken prices have climbed similarly, to around 360,000 tomans per kilogram.

When it comes to dairy produce, retail milk prices jumped sharply in late November, following government approval of higher raw milk prices. In Tehran, the price of a 900-gram bottle rose by as much as 20,000 tomans in a single day - up to 180,000 tomans.

Yet it is not just price rises that lead to anger and protests: it is the grotesque levels of inequality. Last week a relative told me she had attended a celebration where the chef was flown in from Paris for the event and produced an unbelievable feast. She was so disgusted by all this that she left promptly. However, the underlying fact remains the same: while the poor struggle to pay for bread, war, sanctions and everything else have had little effect on the extravagance of the super-rich.

The monthly minimum wage is around 16.6 million tomans (roughly $61 at the open-market rate), government food vouchers cover only a fraction of basic food costs, and headline inflation could soon approach 90%-100%. The combined pressure of fuel costs, inflation and outages has triggered nationwide strikes by lorry drivers from around November 22, raising yet more concerns about further disruption to supply chains.

On November 17 hundreds of people protested in Abdanan, Ilam province, after a bus crash killed 13 oil-industry workers. Demonstrators initially demanded accountability for unsafe transport, but some later chanted against the government. There are, however, doubts about the anti-regime slogans reported by Persian-language foreign media, amid allegations that fake audio was added to social media videos of the demonstrations. Earlier this month, students at Tarbiat Modares University in Tehran demonstrated over rising canteen prices.

There are also problems in relation to the following:

- Bread: purchasing controls on subsidised bread now reportedly cover seven provinces, amid rising prices and supply problems.
- Petrol: long queues and shortages have been reported in Hormozgan, Urmia and Zabol.
- Electricity: rolling power cuts are underway, as winter demand rises.

These pressures reinforce one another. Power cuts can interrupt industrial production, reduce workers' earnings and raise business costs, while higher food and transport costs put further strain on households. Workers' protests over wages, transport safety and working conditions also point to mounting pressure on household incomes.

These are separate protests arising from different grievances, and there is no evidence that they amount to a coordinated nationwide uprising. However, they demonstrate the interaction between domestic and external pressures. If protests become more widespread, we can expect severe repression. Just in case anyone thought the regime has softened its attitude, remember that at least 51 protesters and political prisoners have been executed in Iran in the first 10 months of 2026.

And on November 23, singer Parastoo Ahmadi was given 74 lashes in Qom for a 2024 YouTube concert, where she sang without wearing a hijab. Four members of her team (three musicians and a producer) were flogged with her. All five were convicted of "offending public decency" and banned from performing and travelling abroad for two years.

Two competing political arguments should be considered. On the one hand, the government can blame shortages on foreign military attacks and economic pressure, potentially strengthening its national-security arguments. On the other, prolonged shortages may deepen public discontent with the authorities, particularly where people already associate poor services, inflation and job insecurity with their own government's mismanagement.

The critical question over the coming weeks is whether shortages and industrial disruption remain separate economic grievances or become the basis for wider, more politicised, collective protest ●



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ANNIVERSARY

Challenging false assumptions

According to the standard Trotskyist narrative, the 1956 events in Hungary were an aborted political revolution. A comforting story that led them to celebrate the restoration of capitalism in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union over 1989-91. **Mike Macnair** always had his doubts



Trajectory: towards capitalist restoration

Seventy years on, the Trotskyists of 2026 are repeating their old myths of Hungary 1956.

Thus the 'Atlanticists for Workers' Loyalism' (Alliance for Workers' Liberty) have a supplement in *Workers' Liberty* reprinting articles from Hal Draper and others from the US Shachtmanite Workers Party's *Labor Action* in 1956. Will Roberts, introducing them, says: "The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 lasted no longer than a few weeks, and was followed by a period of dark reaction, but it proved something that no moment before it had: that Stalinist dictatorship could not quell the workers' inherent urge to fight for freedom."[1]

Duncan Chapel has translated a speech by Ernest Mandel from 1976, making similar arguments,[2] while Anti-Capitalist Resistance has a shorter piece by John Lister from 1996.[3] For its part *Workers Power* reprints Dave Hughes from 1986, claiming that "The Hungarian uprising of 1956 contained the potential for the revolutionary destruction of Stalinism both within Hungary and beyond its borders. It opened the prospect of destroying the political rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy and replacing it with the direct political rule of the revolutionary proletariat."[4]

It therefore seems worth (perhaps as a provocation!) finally publishing what I wrote 30 years ago about Hungary 1956 and the Trotskyists. The text that follows is one which I wrote before I came to the view that 1989-92 disproved Trotskyism as well as 'official communism' and Maoism. I had in 1985-86 written at considerable length on the history of the International Marxist Group-Socialist League, of which I had been a member (with a gap) since 1974. (This document is available on the 'Red Mole Rising' site, and has been recently critically reviewed by Duncan Chapel. I agree with comrade Chapel that it overestimates the significance of philosophical issues in the history of the IMG-SL, and underestimates the significance of the international issues in the 1985-86 split.[5])

At the end of the 1985-86 IMG-SL history text I argued that the Fourth International itself was one of the sources of the persistent opportunism (in the sense of lack of stable strategic line and bandwagon-jumping, not of rightism) of the IMG-SL. I therefore embarked on writing a similar, long, critical document on the history of the Fourth International. This was mostly history from before I was involved (and quite a lot of it history from before I was born!). I went on working on this project after I left the ISG in 1993, but in the end I never carried it beyond 1967.

Part of the document was an argument about Hungary 1956 - an event which, I argued, was part of the process of disorientation of the Trotskyists (another important part of that process was the Cuban revolution).

It will be apparent from the text that it is significantly influenced by the arguments of Vince Copeland's 1956 document, *The class character of the Hungarian uprising*, which is available on the Marxists Internet Archive;[6] my view at the time of writing was that Copeland's *basic* arguments were largely corroborated by sources that were not committed either to the 'official communist' or Trotskyist views, or to the 1950s-60s west European media promotion of the idea of a social democratic 'third way' in the cold war period.

More fundamentally, I thought in the 1980s-90s, and still think, that we have to read the very short-lived crisis of October-November 1956 in Hungary in the light of the political dynamics of 1980-82 in Poland and 1985-91 in the Soviet Union: in both cases there was more opportunity for the political dynamics of the crisis to develop, and those dynamics were clearly predominantly *to the right*.

The framing of the extracts that follow is that in my view Trotsky and his co-thinkers in 1938 radically misunderstood the nature and shape of the then-coming war, mistaking the death agony of the British world hegemony for the death agony of capitalism. Besides the disabling effect of this assessment in the war, the effects continued after the war, as the large majority of Trotskyists failed to grasp that the overthrow of sterling and the destruction and devalorisation of capital assets during the war and in its immediate aftermath would allow a new long boom period.

By assuming the 'death agony of capitalism', they had flattened out the global situation, with the result that they had also *de facto* committed to a 'national roads to socialism' approach. Contrary to Marx's comment on the issue in the *Critique of the Gotha programme*,[7] the global and geopolitical contexts of national events were practically ignored.

My text attempted to analyse in outline how the global boom in the cold war period reshaped the national political dynamics of what the Fourth International in 1963 was to characterise as the 'three sectors of the world revolution': the imperialist countries and 'advanced' settler-colonies, the several different parts of the colonial world, and the bureaucratic regimes (in the text below I characterised these as 'workers' states'). This general discussion was the context for a slightly later discussion of Hungary 1956.

I have adapted the text to *Weekly Worker* style guidelines, added the first names of leaders, expanded some abbreviations, and put in a couple of footnotes - but the extracts from the text are otherwise 'warts and all', as I wrote it in the early 1990s.

Boom

In the workers' states too the boom of the world economy both stabilised and destabilised the bureaucratic regimes, producing episodic rather than endemic crisis. The nature of these crises, moreover, reflected primarily the pressure of the ascendant bourgeoisie rather than of the proletariat.

The war mobilisation in the USSR, and revolution in the other workers' states, lent an impetus to economic development and provided a basis of mass loyalty to the regime in a certain generation of the working class. (Outside the USSR the extent of this impetus and loyalty varied with the relative weights of the mass movement and the Soviet Red Army in the social overturns.) The boom and 'decolonisation' gave considerable scope for increased trade between the workers' states and the capitalist-dominated world, and in this way the world boom fed the economic development of the workers' states. In these conditions the bureaucracy was able to devote considerable resources to keeping the industrial proletariat sweet: if the working and living conditions of the proletarians of these states did not match those of the better-organised sections of the proletariat in the imperialist countries, they far outstripped both pre-war and colonial and neocolonial conditions. This fact provided a solid basis for the ultimate stability of the Stalinist regimes in the boom period.

However, from the early 1950s it was clear that the workers' states were still a long way behind the imperialist countries and that their economies were not growing as fast. Even the *partially* planned production that is possible by eliminating the national dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in a capitalist-dominated world can eliminate crises of overproduction. However, any growth in such a regime - and growth without the competition of private proprietors can only be politically motivated - is inevitably slower than the hectic accumulation of the upward phase of a capitalist cycle. This is both because it is partially planned, and because it is not based on screwing the last drop of surplus out of the productive workers. In addition to this 'slow growth', the Stalinist regimes faced the problems that:

(a) Before the revolutions, Russia and Czechoslovakia were sub-imperialist rather than true imperialist countries; eastern Germany was both smashed up in the war and plundered by the Soviet bureaucracy; and the remainder of the workers' states were all semi-colonies. They started several steps behind the imperialist centres in culture and technology, and this lag could only turn to a lead if there were to be a major regression of the imperialist countries (highly destructive inter-imperialist war, not involving the workers' states - a possibility actually excluded by the results of World War II).

(b) These reasons for a 'lagging economy' are exacerbated by the constant military pressure on the workers' states maintained by imperialism. Indeed, part of the purpose of this military pressure is precisely to cause economic problems with the result of producing internal political crisis. The results of Hitler's war clearly meant that the policy-making centres of US imperialism were not prepared to contemplate a frontal military assault on the USSR, especially after the USSR got the bomb. But these policy makers never abandoned the ultimate aim of the reconquest of the workers' states - as

has, in the event, ultimately happened. (c) The Stalinist bureaucratic regime also exacerbates these problems, dislocating production through secrecy, corruption and arbitrary decisions, and wasting the social surplus on 'prestige' projects that lack material or real political value. The bureaucratic regime and the privileges of the bureaucracy act as a material *dis*incentive to workers, exacerbating the problems of weakness of culture and technique. The concessions of the bureaucracy to bourgeois nationalism in the period of construction of new workers' states tended to 'Balkanise' the part of the world economy removed from direct capitalist management.

This 'growth gap' and continuous military pressure acted together like a ratchet to tighten the squeeze on the workers' states, while imperialist boom gave political attractiveness to the bourgeoisie, especially among the petty bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy itself and the youth. The political character of the bureaucracy made it inevitable that its response to these problems would be (1) to try, with little success, to force the workers to work harder, while (2) making concessions to the bourgeoisie, both economic ('liberalisation' and 'marketisation') and political-ideological (nationalism, cult of the family, accommodation to religion, 'thaw' for the intelligentsia).

These concessions had the effect of sharpening the antagonisms between the bureaucracies of the different workers' states, and producing a series of episodic crises in individual workers' states. Internationally, the Tito-Stalin split was followed by a series of show trials to reassert Kremlin control in eastern Europe. Then in 1959-61 came the biggest development: the Sino-Soviet split; and from that time on the assertion of a degree of autonomy by individual national Stalinist regimes became more and more common.

The national crises combined in varying degrees initiatives of sections of the bureaucracy towards 'liberalisation' and marketisation, and struggles of the proletariat against austerity and bureaucratic privilege. The Berlin uprising of 1953 and the Polish strikes of 1956 were clearly and unambiguously dominated by the proletariat; the Hungarian crisis of 1956 started from a 'liberalising' initiative by a section of the bureaucracy, but the leadership rapidly fell into the hands of a peasant-based bourgeois leadership; the Chinese 'Cultural Revolution' started with an intra-bureaucratic faction fight, which let loose a movement of workers and youth in the cities that had to be controlled by militarisation and mass deportations to the countryside; the Czech 'Prague Spring' began and ended as a liberalising movement of a wing of the bureaucracy, supported by the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, without a significant political intervention of the proletariat on either side. In contrast the persistent crises in Poland and Yugoslavia from the 1970s to some extent shared the *form* of these earlier events, but without the *context* (the world boom) that made bureaucratic restabilisation possible.



The Berlin uprising of 1953 belongs, in terms of the history of the class struggle, with the crises of the boom period, but in terms of the history of the Fourth International (FI) it belongs with the 1953 split. The Berlin workers, having at this early stage no desire for the restoration of capitalism, did not in their struggle against the bureaucracy raise the slogan of withdrawal of Soviet troops (in Germany more than anywhere else the true meaning of this slogan - ie, introduction of imperialist troops - was obvious). The International Secretariat (ISec) side of the split did not raise this slogan either, explaining its failure to do so with the tailist argument that since the workers were not raising the slogan, the FI should not do so. The rightwing/'International Committee' (IC) side of the split interpreted this as further confirmation of the ISec's evolution towards Stalinism.

The same year - 1953 - saw the death of Stalin and the beginnings of a 'thaw' or 'deStalinisation' in the USSR, initiated by the 'collective leadership' in their struggle against Lavrenti Beria, the first deputy chairman of the council of ministers. This development similarly formed part of the ISec-IC debate, with the ISec arguing that it was an aspect of the inevitable internal breakup of the bureaucracy; the IC that it was a left manoeuvre to head off the pressure of the masses. If *any* external pressures were involved, what was in question was a right shift in response to the pressure of imperialist democracy, mediated by the managerial and intellectual classes. The dominant character of the turn, however, was a short-term internal manoeuvre against Beria's base in the secret police. After the fall of Beria, the 'thaw' slowed up sharply, but not before 'liberalising' and nationalistic leaderships round Władysław Gomułka and Imre Nagy had been installed in Poland and Hungary, only to be replaced (once Beria had been ousted and the 'thaw' had thus done its work) by resurgent 'hardline' groupings.

As the 'collective leadership' in the USSR began to break up in 1955-56, Nikita Khrushchev turned again to 'deStalinisation' as a political lever - this time against Georgy Malenkov - and at the 20th Party Congress of February 1956 he delivered the famous 'secret speech', acknowledging the 'terror' and blaming the personality cult of Stalin. The results of this political opening were that a wave of workers' struggles in Poland was met by the restoration of Gomułka; and the Hungarian crisis.

Hungary

In July 1956 the 'hardliner', Mátyás Rákosi, was, in a cosmetic move, replaced as Hungarian party secretary by his lieutenant, Ernő Gerő. This was taken as a sign of weakness, and both the liberal party faction round Nagy and the non-party intelligentsia, backed by students, began to put the pressure on for wider reforms. On October 21 the return of Gomułka to power in Poland signalled that major change could be achieved: rioting broke out in Budapest round the demand for the restoration of Nagy, and on October 24 he became prime minister.

From this point on the mass movement, which had been started by students, became broadened and more sharply directed against the presence of Soviet troops. By October 27 the centre of gravity of the movement had shifted to the countryside; it was at this time that the Red Army temporarily withdrew. Nagy now promised free elections and began to bring the old bourgeois parties into the government.

At this stage the workers in Budapest were *beginning* to organise workers' councils. The research of Gus Fagan (published in *Labour focus on Eastern Europe* in the 1980s) has clarified the nature of these councils. They were led by old social democratic and syndicalist militants. Their demands were primarily for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and free elections to a parliament. The power they sought for themselves was at most limited to workers' control on the shopfloor; they made no claim to run society as a whole, though they insisted the factories should remain state property. They excluded from membership members of organised political parties - a familiar device of social democracy to prevent political debate. The workers' councils therefore harnessed the struggles of the proletarian masses over their immediate conditions of life to the aims of the European social democracy and the defence of the Nagy administration.

On November 2 that administration - by now a government of bourgeois parties, including Cardinal Mindszenty as a representative of the church, with minority participation from a reorganised Communist Party - denounced the Warsaw Pact, announced Hungary's neutrality, and called for UN (ie, Nato) intervention. The Suez crisis made this politically impossible, while the military relation of forces in central Europe made it *militarily* impossible. On November 4 Soviet troops re-entered Budapest in much greater force. The military resistance was rapidly crushed, and the government arrested and replaced by a Communist Party one led by János Kádár. (It is noteworthy that Kádár was a member of the same liberal tendency as Nagy and had been a member of the October 24 Nagy government.) The workers' councils held out for a month. The Kádár regime tried to negotiate with them and only suppressed them on December 9.

It is worth emphasising the extreme rapidity of the Hungarian events: from the fall of Gerő on October 24 to the re-entry of Soviet troops on November 4 was a bare 11 days, and the subsequent resistance of the workers' councils hardly more than a month. The Trotskyists only really began to sit up and take note of events in Hungary *after* the re-entry of Soviet troops, by which time the workers' councils were the only remaining element of the opposition; and the Trotskyists concentrated on these, not on the Nagy governments, which were "merely symbolic".

Trotskyists

In consequence, for practical purposes all tendencies both in the FI and the IC identified the Hungarian mass movement as primarily a movement *of workers* (which it only became after November 4) and *therefore* as the model for political revolution.

The IC-FI differences remained unresolved: the FI saw the Nagy faction as a genuine left wing within the bureaucracy (though Mandel compared it unfavourably to the Gomułka faction in the Polish United Workers Party), while the Healy group in Britain and the Lambertistes in France saw it as manoeuvring towards the working class, with the aim of saving bureaucratic rule, and the US SWP said that the Nagy government's call for imperialist military aid showed a "lack of confidence in the working class". All the IC tendencies insisted that the rise of the workers' movement confirmed that fissures in the bureaucracy would be less important to political revolution than the independent movement of the working class, while the FI leadership argued that the origin of the crisis and the emergence of the Nagy faction showed the reverse, that the divisions in the bureaucracy were crucial.

In *political line*, however, the large majority both of the FI and of the IC adopted a common position: all power to the workers' councils; Soviet troops out.

Only in the US does there seem to have been an organised opposition to the majority line: the Marcy tendency, which had stayed with the US SWP in the 1953 split. Isaac Deutscher saw the Hungarian rising as counterrevolutionary, but his earlier evolution to reform communism meant his views could have little impact.

The Marcy tendency's development of a coherent alternative view on Hungary reflected, I think, three factors. The first was that the press in the US covered the evolution of the Nagy governments more fully than the press in Europe, and was more willing to depict the mass movement as anti-communist rather than just anti-Stalinist. This difference in coverage reflects the different geopolitical situation in the US, which was until 1969 out of range of Soviet nuclear attack, with a consequent difference in the attitudes of the foreign ministries and intelligence services and their spokespeople in the press - as well as the existence of mass social democracy and significant communist parties and fellow-travelling milieux in Europe. There were similar differences in the coverage of the Czech events, the Polish *Solidarność* and Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

The other two elements concerned the existing positions of the differing tendencies. *On the world situation* and the role of the workers' states, for the IC the Stalinist bureaucracy was "organically counterrevolutionary" or "counterrevolutionary through and through": *only* Stalinism held back the world revolution. Within this framework it was theoretically impossible that *any* opposition within the workers' states could be characterised as to the right of Stalinism, since anything that weakened Stalinism would tend to undam the revolutionary pressure of the masses.

For the FI leadership, rightwing opposition to Stalinism was theoretically possible, true, but in their assessment of the world situation the revolutionary mass movement was absolutely predominant and US imperialism had its back to the wall; in such supposed circumstances a mass anti-communist movement in a workers' state was hard to imagine.

For the Marcy tendency, on the other hand, the world situation was characterised by the intensification of contradictions, the penetration of the class struggle on a world scale into every country, and *both* the extreme centrality of the workers' states *and* the extreme political bankruptcy of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Sam Marcy's 1953 polemic against James P Cannon and Michel Pablo, 'The global class war and the destiny of American labor',[8] had warned vigorously against one-sided optimism and rose-tinted spectacles. So for the Marcyites (as for Trotsky in 1938-40) there would be right oppositions in the workers' states, against which Trotskyists would fight alongside the Stalinists (*Transitional programme*, section on the USSR, 9th and 10th paragraphs[9]). The Hungarian movement could be either political-revolutionary or counterrevolutionary, and had to be analysed to see which it was.

Thirdly, the Marcyites were unencumbered with the baggage of the *property criterion for characterising a state as a workers' state*. The majority of the FI and the IC performed a simple pair of syllogisms:

A
1. The state is a workers' state because of the nationalisations.
2. The Nagy tendency/mass movement do not propose to reverse the nationalisations.
3. Therefore the Nagy tendency/mass movement are not opposed to the workers' state: ie, are not counterrevolutionary.

B
1. In the present epoch all political tendencies are in the last analysis either bourgeois or proletarian.
2. The Nagy tendency/mass movement is not bourgeois (point A3).
3. Therefore the Nagy tendency/mass movement is objectively proletarian: ie, a political-revolutionary movement.

For the Marcyites, because proposition A1 was rejected, the whole of the rest of the argument fell to the ground. Since for them the question of the class nature of the state was the class character of the central political authority that controlled the armed forces, the political character of the Nagy tendency, the mass movement, etc, depended on their attitudes to this question.

The Marcyites' analysis of Hungary (as, also, their detailed analysis of China) was written by Vince Copeland. According to Copeland, the cardinal problem in Hungary was the lack of the working class's programmatic preparation to assume the leadership of the struggle against the bureaucracy - so that the workers did not understand that, however much they hated the Stalinists, the exclusion of the bourgeois parties from power and the alliance with the USSR were the essential bases of their social gains. The peasants and most of their leaders were not fascists, as the Stalinists falsely claimed; rather, they had the utopian belief that by getting rid of the Stalinists they could get US-style bourgeois democracy. US imperialism's failure to give military support to the uprising was not based on fear of its class character, but on tactical considerations of its prematurity and unwillingness to enter a general European war.

Copeland therefore characterised the Nagy regime, following the October 26 invitation to the bourgeois parties to enter the government, as a counterrevolutionary, restorationist regime; and argued that, while the Trotskyists should have (if they had noticed it!) opposed the use of Red Army troops against the liberalisation demonstrations in October, they should give critical support to the second entry of the Red Army and the overthrow of the Nagy regime.

Though it is taboo in the Trotskyist movement to take this view, it seems clear to me (as I have already indicated) that the bulk of the evidence supports Copeland's view. The disorientation of the Trotskyists in the face of the evolution of eastern Europe and the USSR in the 1980s reflects, at least in part, their determination to see the dawn of the political revolution in the Hungarian events ●

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Notes

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PALESTINE



Wholly Jewish in implementation?

It is not western Jewry that is to blame for the ongoing genocide in Gaza. To say otherwise is to mistake the symptoms for the disease, says **Tony Greenstein** in his open letter to Susan Abulhawa

Susan Abulhawa is a Palestinian-American writer, novelist, poet and activist, best known for her bestselling novel, *Mornings in Jenin*, and for founding the children's organisation, Playgrounds for Palestine.

On November 29 2024, Abulhawa was invited by the Oxford Union to debate the motion: This house believes 'Israel is an apartheid state responsible for genocide'.[1] She spoke in favour of the motion, which was carried with a majority of 278 to 59. The Oxford Union later deleted her original recording on YouTube and uploaded a censored version. The parts of Abulhawa's speech that were edited out by the Oxford Union included her mentions of the Israel Defence Forces' abuse of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians and the IDF's use of "booby-trapped toys".

Abulhawa recently posted an article on her substack expressing her outrage at the continued genocide in Gaza and Jewish support for the genocide.[2] It is an outrage we all feel.

The International Court of Justice has just found Myanmar (formerly Burma) guilty of perpetrating a genocide against the Rohingya people. It was an application that Britain supported when it intervened in the case, brought by Gambia - over 10,000 people were massacred.[3] Yet the same British government, first under the "Zionist without qualification" Keir Starmer, and now Andy Burnham, says that it cannot express an opinion on whether Israel is guilty of genocide, when it is a well-established fact that over 75,000 Palestinians (at the very minimum) have been murdered.

I decided to write the open letter below

Israel's army is an instrument of settler-colonialism. But Susan Abulhawa is wrong if she blames all Jews



to Susan Abulhawa, because, although understandable, her statement that "material Zionism" (ie, the genocide) is "wholly Jewish in its implementation" is, I believe, profoundly mistaken.

Open letter

Dear Susan,

I want to say a few things before I explain why your article on Substack is wrong - dangerously wrong.

Firstly, I have the greatest admiration for your passion and integrity, which we witnessed two years ago in the debate at Oxford Union. Your speech was a magnificent *tour de force*, with passion and articulacy going hand in hand.

Secondly, I admire your refusal to let the racist censors and hypocrites of the Oxford Union, who are happy to invite fascists like Tommy Robinson to speak in the name of 'freedom of speech', triumph. The Oxford Union was willing to excise from the record those parts of your speech which the Zionists and supporters of genocide objected to. Later the Oxford Union retreated and agreed a settlement on your terms.[4]

Thirdly, I understand the pain that you and all Palestinians feel about the fact that many Jews in the west have either supported the genocide or remained silent, whilst their 'leaders' supported the starvation, the rapes, the mass murder and all the other atrocities.

I share in your pain, not least because Jews above all should be the first to condemn Israel's genocide, given their own experiences. However, Zionism - the political and ideological heir to Hitler and the Nazis - has no such qualms.

Not only am I pained, but I'm also angry that those who claim

to represent the memory of the Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis use that memory in order to justify Israel's genocide and extermination. In so doing they defile the memory of those they claim to respect. As I said in my speech to Kingston Crown Court last August, "What I have always fought against was those who used the murder of six million Jews in order to justify the murder and genocide of others."

However, I can't agree with your comments about the debate about Zionism being irrelevant or your belief that the genocide is "wholly Jewish in its implementation". This is simply not true. What you are doing is letting off the hook those who are responsible for funding and arming Israel.

The United States does not supply billions of dollars of arms to Israel and Andy Burnham does not allow RAF flights overflying Gaza to collect intelligence for the IDF because they love Jews so much. German chancellor Friedrich Merz doesn't supply 30% of the weapons used in the genocide[5] because he is wracked by guilt over Germany's role in the holocaust of Jews.

Imperialism supports the Israeli state because it sees it as in its interests to have a stable settler-colonial state at the heart of a vital region, economically and strategically. It was Napoleon who first supported the idea of a 'Jewish' state in Palestine.[6] This was taken up by a raft of British imperialists, from Lord Palmerston to Arthur Balfour and Winston Churchill. They all saw the advantages of an armed settler state setting Arab against Arab and bolstering authoritarian Arab states.

I share your anger at the role of all too many Jews in supporting the genocide in the name of fighting 'anti-Semitism'. I detest war criminals like Chief Rabbi Mirvis,[7] who has played the role of genocide cheerleader.[8] Mirvis's place is in Nuremberg, not the House of Lords. He is no different from Father Tiso - the priest and president of the Nazi puppet state, Slovakia, who was hanged as a collaborator.

Those Jews who cheerlead the genocide, whilst denying it is happening, are no better than neo-Nazi holocaust deniers. It is no wonder that their best friends are people like Tommy Robinson and Nigel Farage. Zionism today has shed its social democratic pretensions. It is an openly far-right pastime.

But I would also caution against the assumption that most Jews outside Israel are supporters of the genocide. The United States is a very good example. True, all the major Jewish organisations are Zionist organisations and fully committed to an 'Israel right or wrong' stance. But, as you yourself admitted, half of the Jewish population in Michigan voted for Abdul el-Sayed for Senator. In fact it was between 57%[9] and 60%[10].

Even in Britain, which has a more conservative Jewish population, 24% describe themselves as anti-Zionist or non-Zionist. But among young Jews (20-29) 24% identify as anti-Zionist and 20% as non-Zionist.[11] In the United States just 37% of Jews identify as Zionists,[12] compared to 66% in Britain. 32% of young Jews (18-34) identify as anti-Zionist or non-Zionist. 39% of American Jews say Israel is committing genocide, compared to 51% who don't.[13] But, regardless, it is irrelevant how many Jews support or oppose the genocide. It is not Jews, either in this country or the United States who are responsible for western support for Israel, but the elites in both countries. Jews are the moral alibi for western imperialism.

As former US secretary of state Al Haig was reputed to have said, "Israel is the largest American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk ... and is located in a critical region for American national security." Or as Joe Biden once commented, if Israel did not exist, it would have had to be invented![14]

Jews occupy the same position in relation to US imperialism as groups like south Asians and Indians occupied in the British colonies in East Africa. These middlemen minorities often took the brunt of anger of the Africans, resulting in all the Ugandan Asians being expelled in August 1972.

Zionism

You say that "The raging debate on the origin of Zionism is academic" during a genocide and that "I don't care if Zionism was first a Christian idea." Well, you should. This debate is crucial to winning the argument that there is nothing uniquely Jewish about Zionism. That is why the books written by Molly Crabapple and Ben Moser are so important.

We have to change the terms of debate. Zionism and the imperialists use Jews, 'anti-Semitism' and Jewish 'safety' as a justification for the genocide - a moral comfort blanket. We have to make it clear that Zionism, far from being a Jewish phenomenon, was the product of Christian anti-Semitism. That Christian Zionism rested on the belief that Jews did not belong in non-Jewish society. Which is why, during the Nazi era, the Zionists were only too willing to work with the Nazis. These are not irrelevant questions.

So, when you say that the genocide and ethnic cleansing ('material Zionism') "is wholly Jewish in its implementation" you could not be more wrong. Without American and German weapons, British overflights of Gaza supplying intelligence, and economic and political support, Israel could not have carried out the genocide. Starmer, Biden, Merz and Trump are every bit as much war criminals as Netanyahu and Gallant.

You talk of how all the "holocaust museums" have either been silent on this first live-streamed genocide in human history, or they've closed ranks with other mainstream Jewish institutions - all of them running cover and giving support to Israel.

This is very true. It was why I wrote my book, *Zionism during the holocaust*, whose subtitle is the "weaponisation of memory in the service of state and nation". The holocaust has been used as a propaganda weapon to cloak western imperialism and its Israeli guard dog in the mantle of the holocaust dead.

Why do you think that the US Holocaust Museum exists in Washington, lavishly funded by the American taxpayer, yet there is no equivalent museum to slavery or the extermination of the Native Americans? The numbers of slaves and indigenous Americans who were slaughtered is far greater than six million, yet there is no inclination to remember them, because there are no strategic or political imperatives to do so.

The behaviour of all these institutions is shameful. For Zionists, 'never again' means 'never again' for Jews, not for everyone. When the Los Angeles Holocaust Museum posted a graphic on Instagram with the message, "'Never again' can't only mean 'Never again for Jews'", there was an immediate backlash from the Zionists.[15] Their complaint, that the statement might be interpreted as referring to Israel's genocide in Gaza, resulted in the post being deleted. The museum issued a new statement: "We recently posted an item on social media that was part of a pre-planned campaign intended to promote inclusivity and community that was easily open to misinterpretation by some to be a political statement reflecting the ongoing situation in the Middle East. That was not our intent."[16]

Karen Pollock of the Holocaust Education Trust went even further. She condemned the "shameful" comparisons between the holocaust in Gaza and the Nazi genocide.[17]

We should take on board what Primo Levi and his interviewer concluded in 1982 after the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Joan Acocella recalled how the famous Italian Jewish survivor of Auschwitz told a reporter, Filippo Gentiloni, from the Italian newspaper *Il Manifesto*, that "Everybody is somebody's Jew" ... At that point in the interview, printed on June 29 1982, Gentiloni closed the Levi quote and added a sentence of his own: "And today Palestinians are the Jews of the Israelis."[18]

You say that you want to talk about the dangers that Jewish supremacy poses to humanity, and to Palestinians in particular. This is dangerous talk. Not because it endangers Jews, but because it endangers Palestinians by poisoning and polluting their narrative.

If what you mean is the Jewish supremacism that we see in Israel, then that is simply a description of the racism that always accompanies settler colonialism. White supremacism was a feature of South African apartheid and the Jim Crow Deep South. Colonialism and in particular its settler-colonial variant is always, without exception, racially supremacist. Jewish supremacism is a function of *Zionism*, which you think we should not talk about.

But, if what you mean is Jewish supremacism *outside* Israel, then you are in danger of playing into the hands of the far-right conspiracy theorists. It is absurd to talk of Jewish supremacy in the United States, where Jews form less than 2.5% of the population. In Britain Jews account for around 0.5%. Jews are singled out by our rulers for 'protection' against anti-Semitism precisely because the mainly non-Jewish ruling class wants to associate Jews with British support for the Israeli state. Imperialism always wants a moral rationale for its actions.

Arab revolution

But I also want to take this opportunity to raise the real political problem of this genocide. It is a question that is rarely discussed. It is the family secret that is kept under lock and key. You say: "Besides the apathy of the Arab masses and complicity of Arab governments, nothing in this genocide has surprised me more than the widespread support Israel continues to enjoy among western Jews."

I have already made clear my own disgust at the support of western Jews for the genocide. After all, it was nine of these misfits who reported me to the police for my alleged 'support' for Hamas! But, even if the majority of western Jews had opposed the genocide from day one, then that would have made no difference to the *west*'s support for it. However, if the Arab masses had risen up against their own rulers, their collaboration and complicity with Israel, then I have no doubt that Israel would have been halted in its tracks.

We have seen how the Houthis and Iran, because of the wars forced upon them, have forced the United States to pull in its horns. It is the failure of the Arab revolution that allows Israel to get away with its genocide.

The interdiction by Ansarallah (Houthis) of Israeli ships and its closing of Eilat was the only contribution that the Arab world has made to the fight against Israel. Today the ruler of Syria, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, of Al Qaeda's franchise in Syria, HTS, is in league with Israel and the United States.[19]

The Palestinian leadership and the Palestine Liberation Organisation bear a great deal of responsibility for having agreed to the Oslo Accords, which disarmed the Palestinians and turned them into their own policemen.[20] The Palestinian Authority has become Israel's military sub-contractor.

The PLO, even before Oslo, had no ambition other than to form another repressive Arab regime. Whereas most liberation movements, at least until they achieve power, have a radical social programme which could appeal to others outside their ranks, the major Palestinian organisations had nothing to say about capitalism and imperialism - still less about the corrupt and repressive Arab regimes.

The PLO preferred Saudi and Gulf funding of their diplomatic offices throughout the world to support for revolutionary struggle in those countries (I except groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine). The mere fact that Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement) could rise to power in Gaza speaks volumes about the political bankruptcy of the main Palestinian resistance force, Fatah. It is this, not Jewish supremacy, which has been the major obstacle to Palestinian liberation. In making their bed with the Arab regimes, the PLO took the road to Oslo and eventually the Abraham Accords.[21]

If you single out Jewish supremacy and exempt western imperialism you mistake the symptoms for the disease ●

Notes

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Fighting fund

Just days to go!

Thanks to a few brilliant contributions, our fighting fund was boosted by an excellent £844 over the last week.

Top of the list of contributors were comrades SK, PM and JC, who each made a *three-figure* contribution. Then we had comrades AG (£50), DR (£20), IS (£17), CA and TT (£10 each), who also made their donations via bank transfer or standing order. Unusually there wasn't a single PayPal donor this week. Apart from those already mentioned, there was just comrade Hassan, who handed his usual £5 note to one of our team.

In other words, that tremendous weekly total came our way thanks to just nine comrades. Well, they did a fantastic job, but now we need a lot more of our readers and supporters to help us out before the end of the month. The running total currently stands at £2,101, with, as I write, just five days to go to raise the £649 we still need to reach our £2,750 target in November.

In other words, we need to receive your contribution by Monday November 30, so please make a transfer or click on our PayPal button. To do that, go to the web address below, where you'll hopefully find any other information you need to play your part before the deadline.

£649 is a lot to raise in just five days, so please make your donation as soon as you can after reading this. I can't stress enough how much the *Weekly Worker* relies on you, our readers, so now's your chance to prove that you can do what's needed!

I look forward to reporting on our success next week, but, to do that, you have to donate the cash we need. We can do it! ●

Robbie Rix

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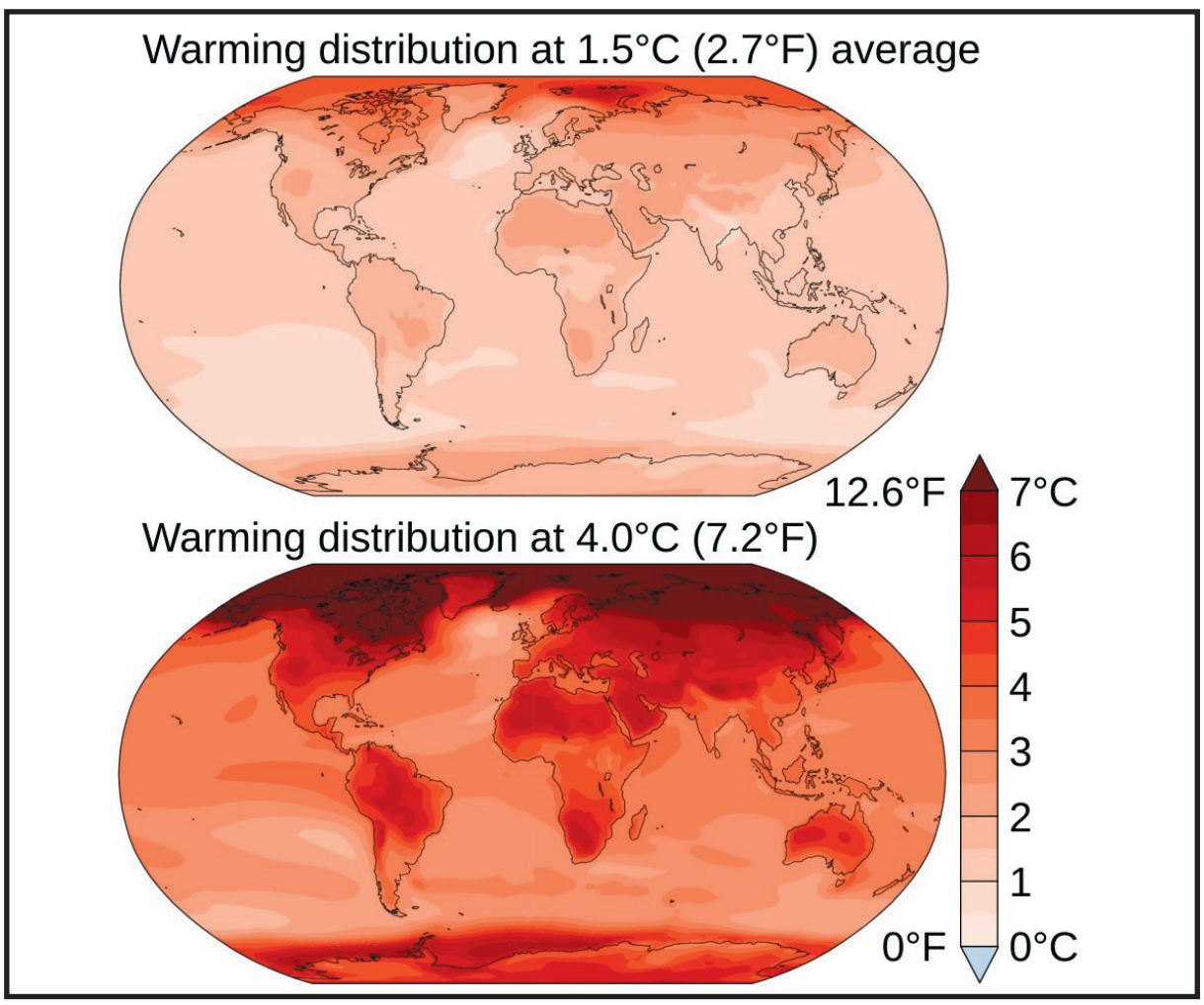
Time has run out

Antalya ended in complete failure. But the big victory scored by the oil producers and fossil fuel lobbyists underlines that the whole Cop merry-go-round has done nothing to halt the rise in global temperatures. **Michael Roberts** provides the damning facts and figures

Cop31, at Antalya's Expo Center, is the "worst Cop ever", climate activists said at a packed final press conference at the end of the November 9-22 summit. Hosted by Turkey under a joint presidency with Australia, there was no final agreement on the proposed Antalya Pact - despite it being the longest Cop ever … running 44 hours into overtime.

Delegates were locked in division over the wording of the pact. All mention of getting rid of fossil fuels had been removed from the draft communique. And it also failed to show how developing countries will receive financial help to deal with the climate crisis. "It has all the hallmarks of a deal to let carbon capture through in exchange for an electrification target that does not even require renewables-based electricity nor ensure access for the people who need it most. None of this is defensible."[1]

There is an 'adaptation fund' that supposedly finances projects and programmes to help vulnerable communities in developing countries adapt to climate change. It has operated since 2010 and is financed largely by government and private donors. But at this Cop31 just $50 million has been pledged, compared to the $135 million in Belém, Brazil, last year. Moreover, most of these pledged funds are not in the form of grants, but *loans*. So poor countries trying to deal with global warming and to reduce emissions are supposed to pay back the bulk of the rich countries' handouts. Calculations from Oxfam suggest the true level of climate-specific grants is about one-fifth of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development "climate finance" figures, once loans are taken out.



We are already over 1.5 °C and going on towards 4.0 °C

António Guterres

At the beginning of Cop31, outgoing UN chief António Guterres had called on countries to push forward a phase-out of fossil fuels, rather than merely hinting at it: "The case for fossil fuels is collapsing," he said. "Fossil fuels must go the way of the dinosaurs. And that won't happen on its own. The dinosaurs did not have a lobby. Fossil fuels do. It's time to kick the habit - and end the fossil-fuel addiction. It's make-or-break time." But the outcome of Cop31 shows that Guterres has been ignored by the organisers and the governments of the major economies.

Meanwhile the world continues to get hotter and greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. Global average yearly temperatures are at record highs, heading above the 1.5°C increase over pre-industrial levels - the target limit set 10 years ago at the Paris Cop.

CO_2 emissions are projected to hit a record high of 38.1 billion tons - rising roughly 0.8% to 1.1%, compared to the previous year, according to data tracked by the Global Carbon Budget. Under current policies, the planet will heat up by 2.7°C on average by the end of the century, compared with pre-industrial times, a report by Climate Action Tracker (CAT) concluded - up again from a prediction of 2.6°C last year.[2] Even in the most optimistic scenario - where all current pledges, targets and other long-term promises made by states and international organisations were fulfilled - the world would still heat up by 1.9°C by the end of the century.

The latest UN Emissions Gap Report looked at a "lowest possible" 1.5°C overshoot scenario, in which peak warming by around the middle of the century is limited to 1.7-1.8°C and global temperature returns to 1.5°C or below by 2100.[3] To achieve that, global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions would have to be reduced by 18% by 2030, 45% by 2035 and 69% by 2040 - all relative to 2025 levels. Increasing levels of carbon dioxide removal (CDR) through the century would also be needed for a return to 1.5°C. Current promises by nations would only reduce emissions by 5-8% by 2030 and 11-15% by 2035, relative to 2025 levels - leaving the world on track to only limit warming this century to 2.6°C - in other words, making hardly a dent on the expected rise in global warming.

Even before Cop31, the USA under Trump had dumped all its climate commitments. And fewer than half of G20 members are on track to close their implementation gaps for 2030. Yet the latest analyses suggest that countries need to invest somewhere around 1%-2% of global GDP in renewables and other technologies, over something like 30 to 50 years, to reach a global zero carbon economy.[4] If that were done, global GDP per capita would be no lower and potentially a little higher than if we continued to rely on fossil fuels for 80% of our energy.

If nothing is done to remove fossil fuel energy production, and the average global temperature increase rises to near +3°C by 2100, the world will face additional cumulative losses equivalent to 11% to 24% of GDP between now and then - all of which could have been avoided, if governments had invested 1% to 2% of global GDP to keep global warming below 2°C. So the costs of inaction are massively higher than the cost of mitigation.

Fossil fuel

However, the fossil fuel industry and its lobbyists at Cop31 argue that rising global demands for energy make a significant move away from fossil fuels impossible. Microsoft mogul Bill Gates reckons that "the best we can do" - even with rapid technological advances - is a limit of very slightly below 3°C. But don't worry, says Gates - such a temperature increase would not be catastrophic, and humanity and the planet can adapt!

On the contrary, only a fast elimination of the production and consumption of fossil-fuel energy can save humanity and the planet from a worsening climate catastrophe. Moreover, with clean electricity we could replace fossil fuels in end applications, and in doing so achieve a revolution in energy efficiency.

Fossil-fuel energy is highly wasteful. The losses from fuel-refining and combustion-based electricity generation reduce the potential energy produced by two-thirds. If electricity production reached 60%-70% of final energy demand over the next 30 years, it would be possible to reduce the consumption of primary energy by 36% and final energy by 24%, while increasing the consumption of useful energy by 64% and global GDP by over 100%.

But any credible strategy for limiting global warming to well below 2°C cannot rely on clean electrification alone. It must also include actions to reduce or offset emissions, where electrification cannot provide the answer. For example, the global capitalist food system has a huge detrimental impact on the environment. The 50 million square kilometres devoted to food production, of which 80% is for meat and dairy, is 100 times the land required for solar and wind power generation, 500 times the land currently allocated to mining activities, and 5,000 times the additional land allocation required to mine all the mineral resource we will need in the energy transition. Water use in agriculture is 500 times that required in all mining activity. And over 90% of annual deforestation results from agriculture, with most of that driven by cattle pasture or by the arable production of feed for various categories of animal protein production.

The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that an average of 1,000 gigawatts of renewable power capacity needs to be built globally every year until 2030.[5] But the world's clean energy plans (and they are only plans) still fall almost one-third short of that figure. And to reach the necessary level of investment, climate finance will need to increase to about $9 trillion a year globally by 2030 (up from just under $2 trillion in 2024), according to the Climate Policy Initiative.[6]

Why are none of these climate targets being met? Why have the majority at Cop31 removed reference to fossil fuels and have not met promises to help global-south economies cope with the impact of global warming that affects them most? Why is the necessary finance not forthcoming?

Profit problem

It is not the cost price of renewables - those prices have fallen sharply. The problem is that governments are insisting that private investment should lead the drive to renewable power. But private investment only takes place if it is profitable to invest. And lower prices for renewables drag down the profitability of such investments. Solar panel manufacturing is suffering a severe profit squeeze, along with operators of solar farms.

This reveals the fundamental contradiction in capitalist investment between reducing costs through higher productivity and slowing investment because of falling profitability. On the other hand, investing in oil production remains highly profitable, as figures for the oil transnationals show.

At Cop31, a record 700 lobbyists argued that we should forget about ending fossil-fuel production and instead go for technologies that could reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. CDR is the answer, not stopping fossil-fuel production. It is true that, as the UN recently estimated,[7] an enormous 320 billion tons of CO_2 will have to be removed this century in order to get back under 1.5°C. But, as Rachel Kennerley - a carbon capture campaigner at the Center for International Environmental Law - retorted, "The focus should always be on cutting emissions now. It's very dangerous to assume that we can put more emissions into the atmosphere and then assume we will have technology in the future to just remove them again."[8]

Technology alone will not do the trick. Only government intervention, investment and planning on a global scale can give humanity and nature a chance to succeed before degradation is made permanent. And time is running out - indeed, it has run out ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com.

Notes

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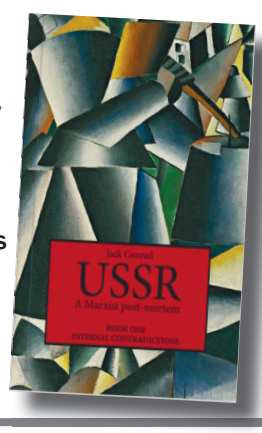
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REVIEWS

Two takes on a genocidal nightmare

Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor (directors) ***NAZA***. Daniele Rugo and Kyle Oakeson (directors) ***Life support***. Both on general release

NAZA is the acronym used by the Israeli military for 'collateral damage'. It is code for the systematic massacre of the Gazan population.

In the film of the same name we hear the testimony of 24 Israeli soldiers, who give their accounts anonymously - hidden in darkness on the rooftop of a Tel Aviv apartment block. As they speak, through the windows of opposite buildings we see Israelis coming home at the end of the day. Families eating dinner, watching TV, reading, chatting, and then turning off the lights to sleep. Everything feels very calm, very ordinary.

Gaza City is 70 kilometres from Tel Aviv. One Israel Defence Forces operative tells us that the Rimal neighbourhood of the city reminded him of Tel Aviv, with its glass-fronted buildings and sandy beaches. It was one of its most prosperous districts, modern and beautiful. Now it lies in ruins, with its inhabitants displaced or dead, some still rotting under rubble or eaten by dogs. Operation Lavender is the AI-based programme which murdered the Gazan population as they slept. It tracked up to 70,000 phones of 'Hamas' targets and spied on their families. The policy was to wait until targets returned home at the end of the day, and then that night to hit their building, killing their entire family, along with all others in the building. There were times when the target did not come home, but the attack went ahead anyway. Also "sometimes the technology did not work", according to another IDF soldier, and the wrong people were killed. But this was not something to be concerned about for the individual operative - "quantity, not quality, was what was important".

Those on the hit list included members and ex-members of Hamas, and at least 15% of those targeted had never been members. Benjamin Netanyahu's claim that they were targeting homes because Hamas was using women and children as human shields was dismissed by one soldier as complete nonsense - "We bomb them in houses because that's how we find them … They just come home to sleep. That's where we catch them." People tend to have their phones by their beds, making it easy to locate them. The intention was to kill the largest number of people - with the standard number of those approved for death being 20, and the largest 500. The method is arbitrary, designed for systematic elimination.

The majority of people in Gaza City lived in apartment blocks, as they do in Tel Aviv. Operatives were provided with maps with numbered targets: eg, buildings with four floors and two apartments on each floor, with an average of 32 people living there. Using IT, they could see into the building. If any victims were left alive, they would be targeted again until they were ticked off as dead.

In situations where the IDF orders evacuations, those unable to move because of illness or age are fair game - it's a question of 'good luck to them'. If people run back for other family members or possessions they too are shot - "If they do not leave it's their own problem". One operative saw a boy run back to his home and shot him without a thought. Yes, it was "their own problem". The IDF is not responsible for avoiding civilian casualties and will not assist with evacuations. It just waits to kill.

Once residents are killed, the army on the ground sets about burning down their ruined homes. The soldiers boasted that they have "become expert in burning houses", using gas, olive oil, furniture and clothes to set them alight. They are ordered to make sure that there is nothing left, in case families try to return. This is the long-used strategy of ethnic cleansing devised in 1948, aimed at ensuring the erasure of the Palestinian people, culture and history. Towns, cities and national parks in Israel today are built on the demolished remains of Palestinian life.



Rachel and Yuval at Venice film festival

One of the most disturbing aspects of the film is the way the IDF men talk about killing in such a mundane manner. This is particularly true when they discuss the massacres during the 2025 famine. From May to October of that year, more than 2,600 men and boys were killed, and many thousands were seriously injured, when queuing to get food at the deadly Gaza Humanitarian Foundation depots, set up by the US and Israel. People, weak and desperate to eat after months of deliberate famine, were lured to their death. IDF operatives spoke of the "great fun" of being snipers. It was like playing a video game, where they "picked off" the men and boys running to get food. If they "stepped out of line" or ran in the wrong direction, they were shot and "fell flat on their faces", with "bodies piling up on top of each other", and left for the rats and the dogs - "We saw it all from the cameras".

One operative spoke of how their "hormones would be going crazy" with "the excitement of killing" being stirred up by "escalations". They would feel very satisfied afterwards by "the completion of successful missions". Another said that he and his colleagues refused therapeutic support, stating simply that "there was no need for psychologists - we were not traumatised". Yet another said that he had previously wondered "how Germans could live with themselves" after World War II, but "now I know how a man can kill and still go home to a normal life".

The overall strategy is to get the job done as quickly as possible; to exterminate Palestinians before Israel lost international support. Meanwhile life in Israel must remain calm and unaffected.

I can understand why Palestinians are so outraged at this film. It is unbearable to listen to men who have been granted anonymity to speak about their mission to deliberately erase your people. Palestinians know that the problem has never been Hamas and that Netanyahu's claim that the war is one of national defence is an utter lie - a lie which continues to be retold by western governments and their compliant media. *NAZA* gives us a partial glimpse of the nature and operation of the Israeli project. But there is far more to be said.

Determined

Life support, sponsored by Medical Aid for Palestinians, shows the immense battle of Palestinian healthcare workers to prevent the slaughter of their people, and reveals in stark terms how they are constantly thwarted by a state which cuts off every source of life.

The group of doctors who came together to make the film are surgeons, intensive care, maternity and paediatric specialists from outside Gaza. They are all very familiar with the Strip, having gone there to work and train Palestinian doctors for many years. Before October 2023, Gaza had 35 hospitals serving the population of over two million. Despite the numerous problems resulting from Israeli attacks and the 16-year siege, its healthcare system worked relatively well, with a very dedicated workforce. Israel's actions in the aftermath of October 7 were aimed at destroying all that had been achieved and ensuring that Palestinians maimed in its attacks would have nowhere to turn.

Dr Nick Maynard, a surgeon, entered Gaza in December 2023 and was overwhelmed at the obliteration of life, the thick smoke and the smell of war hanging in the air. The sound of bombing and artillery fire from Israel was "terrifying", he said. Hospitals were under sustained attack, with the World Health Organization then reporting 427 attacks (as of October 2026, that number is 2,137). Netanyahu insisted that the strikes on hospitals were essential to eliminate Hamas militants sheltering within. Dr Maynard made it his business to check out this claim: to walk every corridor and inspect all parts of the hospitals he worked in. He found no Hamas members and no weaponry. On his return to Britain he spoke out to expose the propaganda, which has been endlessly repeated by governments and the media.

The part played by visiting healthcare workers has been vital. As well as providing physical and moral support to their colleagues, they have used every opportunity to protest against the mass murder of the civilian population, which they have seen with their own eyes. Dr Victoria Rose, a plastic surgeon, arrived in Gaza in March 2024. She brought 23 large suitcases of medical equipment with her, as all normal supplies had been blocked. As she crossed the border, she saw hundreds of aid trucks lined up, unable to enter Gaza. At the European Hospital in Khan Younis she saw what she describes as "a concentration camp". Hundreds of displaced families were sheltering in its corridors and its wards.

Local medics work relentlessly to save lives - fainting with hunger and exhaustion, and not stopping to deal with the grief of losing their own families. They do long shifts with little equipment to help. Yet they fight on, operating on the wounded non-stop, amputating limbs and removing bullets and shrapnel.

Dr Rose was able to bring supplies in early 2024. Now Israel forbids any assistance - doctors entering Gaza are only allowed one suitcase and none of the contents can be medical equipment. Staff have no gauze, no antibiotics, no clean surgical instruments, no general anaesthetics. The lack of antibiotics and other aftercare supplies means that even those who survive operations often die of infections. Cancer patients die in terrible pain.

The attack and forced evacuation of Al Nasr children's hospital in November 2023 left premature babies to die in incubators. The following February, Nasser Hospital was put under siege and then attacked. The hospital had no fuel and corridors were flooded with sewage. There was no electricity, food or oxygen. Patients who tried to leave came under constant gunfire. Medical staff were taken away by the IDF, which reported that it had arrested 100 "suspects".

Dr Maynard reports on the nature of the injuries inflicted during the 2025 attacks on Gaza Humanitarian Foundation depots. He found a pattern of shotgun wounds to the neck, head and abdomen, and a large number of young boys who had been shot in the testicles. He believed that the IDF was conducting target practice on these young people. This was the systematic killing or maiming of Palestinian boys, so they could never have children - a repulsive act that could not be more genocidal.

Today Gaza has the largest number of child amputees in the world, while the UN published a long list of physical disabilities and illnesses caused by malnutrition and trauma. Vegetables and fruit are scarce, if not impossible to obtain, and up to 80% of children are malnourished. Pregnant women are hungry and there is little possibility for safe births.

Healthcare is at the centre of the struggle to survive. More than 1,700 doctors and other medical staff have been killed since October 2023. Many more are missing. Those talented, hardworking professionals who care for the population are being murdered because Israel fears even their limited success. Their courage and humanity are powerful - they are giants, compared to the dehumanised IDF operatives ●

Anne McShane

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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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Fewer and fewer parents are getting their children immunised

Health under attack

What lies behind the surge of measles cases in the USA? It is not just Donald Trump and his health secretary. **James Linney** blames the general environment of disinformation and distrust in science

America is currently experiencing its worst outbreak of measles since 1991 and has officially lost its 'measles elimination' status after 26 years. As of November 19, there have been 5,838 confirmed measles infections reported in the US in 2026,[1] occurring in 47 different jurisdictions. Pennsylvania is the worst-hit state, where there have been 1,600 cases so far. At least 11 deaths have been recorded (some children), but sadly this figure will inevitably keep climbing - a result of the increasing number of parents choosing not to have their children vaccinated.

Measles is a highly contagious but entirely preventable disease. Its return is a stark warning about what happens when public health becomes entangled with conspiracy theories and the systematic undermining of scientific evidence. Donald Trump's political alliance with the American far right, including the likes of QAnon, has helped create an environment in which distrust of established scientific and medical facts has become widespread.

The Covid-19 pandemic provided fertile ground. Fear and uncertainty were exploited by those promoting everything from vaccine microchips to elaborate government plots to control the population. Who can forget that Trump himself used an early Covid-19 press conference to suggest that the virus could be treated by injecting disinfectant: whether this was the wilful spreading of misinformation or simple stupidity, who knows? Social media platforms helped these claims spread; their algorithms are designed to convert outrage and sensationalism into commercially useful data and advertising revenue.

Sharp focus

The appointment of Robert F Kennedy Jr as secretary of health and human services in Trump's administration has brought this problem into sharp focus. Kennedy is certainly not the sole cause of America's declining vaccination rates, nor did the anti-vax movement begin with Trump (it has been around as long as vaccines have). But Kennedy's elevation to one of the most important public health positions in the country has given legitimacy to ideas that were previously confined largely to the fringes of the unhinged right.

A member of one of America's most prominent political dynasties, RFK Jr has had a varied political career, changing his spots whenever that was needed to advance it. A former environmental lawyer and campaigner, he was previously associated with the Democrats before running as an independent candidate in the 2024 presidential election, but subsequently withdrew his candidacy and endorsed Trump.

Throughout his career, one recurring feature has been promoting anti-science ideas: chemtrail conspiracy theories, HIV/Aids denialism and one of his favourites: vaccination misinformation. Unbelievably, in his 2021 book, *The real Anthony Fauci*, Kennedy even revealed that he does not believe in germ theory, instead diseases stem from imbalances in the body's inner 'terrain'. Meaning his grasp of basic biology is centuries out of date. No more inappropriate a candidate could have been chosen to head America's public health system.

Kennedy founded and led Children's Health Defense - an organisation that has campaigned against vaccine mandates and challenged vaccine safety. Among the most persistent claims associated with the anti-vax movement is the allegation that the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (MMR) causes autism. This particular myth has a history which begins not in America, but in Britain.

Andrew Wakefield

In 1998, the medical journal, *The Lancet*, published a now infamous paper authored by British doctor Andrew Wakefield which suggested a possible association between the MMR vaccine and autism in children.[2] Although the paper involved only 12 children and did not establish a causal relationship, Wakefield used it to promote the idea that the combined vaccine was responsible for a rise in autism diagnoses.

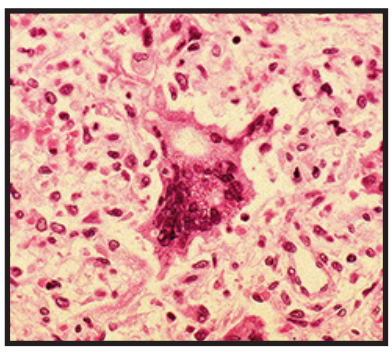
The media championed and echoed Wakefield's claims and as a consequence public confidence in the MMR vaccine fell, as did vaccination rates, and measles outbreaks followed.

The paper was eventually exposed as deeply flawed. Investigations established that Wakefield had acted dishonestly, breached ethical standards and misrepresented aspects of his research. He had also failed to disclose financial conflicts of interest. The General Medical Council found him guilty of serious professional misconduct, and he was struck off the medical register in 2010. *The Lancet* retracted the paper that same year. Subsequent research involving hundreds of thousands of children has repeatedly found no association between the MMR vaccine and autism.

Yet Wakefield has never abandoned his claims. Instead, he has continued to promote anti-vaccination arguments and found a receptive audience among conspiracy theorists as well as in sections of the political right in the USA. In a particularly revealing illustration of how these movements have become interconnected, RFK Jr recently spoke alongside Wakefield at an anti-vax event.

The damage caused by the Wakefield paper has therefore extended far beyond UK borders and has helped establish a template for modern medical misinformation: the manufacture of doubt, the presentation of discredited claims as suppressed truths, and the portrayal of scientific institutions as part of a conspiracy.

To understand what is at stake, it is worth remembering what measles is and why vaccination matters - something which needs doing only because of the success of the vaccination in the first place. Measles is a very nasty infection caused by a single-stranded RNA *morbillivirus* from the paramyxovirus family. It is one of the most contagious infectious diseases in the world. Measles is the archetypal childhood infection, although most cases are self-limiting, presenting themselves as a cough, runny nose, fever, sore throat and rash; in about 10%-20% of cases the infection can cause serious complications, such as pneumonia, severe diarrhoea, and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) which can result in permanent neurological damage. It can also cause a condition known as 'immune amnesia', damaging immune memory cells and leaving people more vulnerable to other infections for years afterwards.



Measles: under the microscope

In unvaccinated children, the measles case fatality rate is typically estimated at one to three deaths per 1,000 cases (0.1% to 0.3%), but in poorer countries it can be as high as 6% - and it remains a considerable cause of childhood mortality worldwide, with estimates of more than 100,000 fatalities each year.

Up until the last few years the US, other than a handful of annual cases and isolated small outbreaks, has been free of measles for decades. It was declared eliminated in 2000, thanks to a highly effective vaccination programme.

Vaccines are among the greatest achievements of modern medicine. Their history goes back to 1796, when the English physician, Edward Jenner, demonstrated that inoculation with cowpox could protect against smallpox.

The mode of action of vaccines is simple and well understood. Basically, a vaccine uses harmless chemical signals, or a small amount of an attenuated (weakened) form of a virus, to trick a person's own immune system into thinking it has been infected by a certain pathogen. The immune system can then identify the infection and kill cells that remain in the blood. That means that, if the person is ever infected by the actual pathogen, their immune system has an army of cells ready to prevent the infection becoming established.

The results speak for themselves. A major study published in *The Lancet* in 2024 estimated that vaccination programmes had prevented 154 million deaths worldwide since 1974, including 146 million among children under five[3] - an extraordinary contribution to human health. Infections such as diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough (pertussis) and polio, which were once a death-sentence for children or resulted in lifelong disability, have been completely eradicated or made vanishingly rare by vaccines.

The measles vaccine is usually delivered as part of a combined vaccine, protecting against measles, mumps and rubella (MMR). In England, children are now offered the combined MMRV vaccine, which also protects against chickenpox, at the age of 12 months and again at 18 months. The two doses provide around 99% protection against measles.

However, vaccination is not simply about protecting individuals: it is also about protecting the population. Because measles is so infectious, around 95% vaccination coverage with two doses is needed to prevent sustained transmission. This is known as population or herd immunity and it protects those who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons, including some immunocompromised people and newborn babies.

When vaccination rates fall below this threshold, the virus finds opportunities to spread. The consequences are not confined to the families who choose to reject vaccination: they affect everyone.

It is only the massive successes of vaccine programmes that allow the likes of RFK Jr to question their safety and spread misinformation about them. Whole populations seem to have forgotten how terrible these infections are.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with questioning safety or effectiveness. Quite the opposite: large, inclusive population studies, designed to scrutinise, test and challenge, are fundamental to scientific progress.

Profit

The pharmaceutical industry has a long history of putting profits before patients - we need look no further for evidence than the opioid crisis in the US. Purdue Pharma aggressively marketed OxyContin while downplaying its addiction risks, helping to fuel an epidemic of opioid dependence and hundreds of thousands of overdose deaths. The conduct of pharmaceutical companies, their relationship with regulators and their influence over medical practice justifies distrust. As does the blurred line between drug companies, insurance companies and health services in America.

But none of this requires us to abandon science. The explanation for pharmaceutical misconduct is not some elaborate secret plot: it is rooted in the familiar workings of capitalism - the drive to maximise profits, expand markets and protect commercial interests, even at the expense of public health.

Of course, the likes of Kennedy and Trump are not really searching for safer vaccines or interested in better medical studies or stronger evidence: spreading misinformation and questioning established public health evidence is the whole point. It suits their political agenda to spread division, confusion and fear, and allows them to paint themselves in some strange way as being anti-establishment, whilst at the same time *heading* the establishment. It also allows them to implement their attacks on public health provision.

Aid cuts

This becomes clear when looking at Kennedy's actions since taking office. He has implemented vast cuts to American health infrastructure: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has lost a third of its staff, the National Institutes of Health has had its grants cancelled, US aid to developing countries has been slashed. Kennedy dismissed all 17 members of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), the expert body responsible for advising on vaccine recommendations. He replaced them with people more ideologically aligned with himself. The CDC was forced to alter advice relating to vaccine safety on its website, replacing its previous unequivocal statement that vaccines do not cause autism with wording suggesting that the claim was not evidence-based and that studies supporting a link had been ignored.[4] Kennedy has also pulled funding for research into the mRNA vaccine - particularly worrying, as this research is essential in preventing future Covid-19-like pandemics.

In the last week there have been calls for Kennedy to be impeached[5] - perhaps a reason why he came out with a damage limitation statement on X, saying: "I continue to recommend MMR vaccination as the most effective way to prevent measles." But this is beyond 'too little, too late'.

It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that responsibility for the present crisis rests exclusively with RFK Jr and his 'Make America Healthy Again' movement, or Trump himself - as we have seen, anti-vaccination sentiments predate the current administration. Nor is America alone. In November 2026, it was confirmed that Mexico and Bolivia had also lost their national measles elimination status, following the earlier loss of that status by Canada in 2025. The UK also does not have measles elimination status and has had multiple serious measles outbreaks in recent years; this is partly a legacy of the Wakefield MMR scandal, but also as part of a general trend towards science scepticism.

Yet the scientific evidence is clear: vaccines save lives ●

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