

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

My Body
My Choice



weekly **worker**



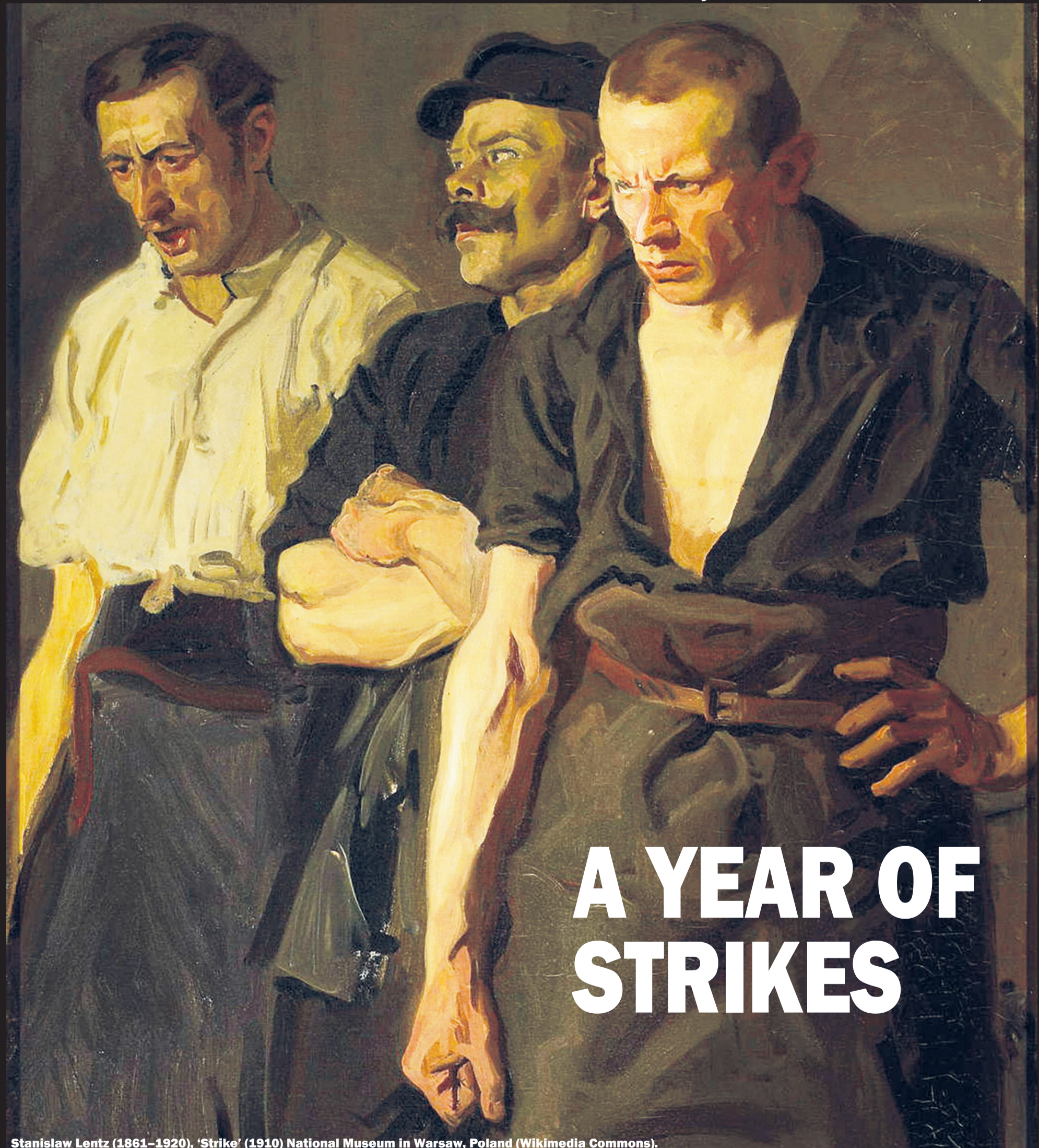
Carla Foster's 28-month abortion sentence is part of a wider culture-war offensive, warns Mike Macnair

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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A YEAR OF STRIKES

Stanislaw Lentz (1861–1920), 'Strike' (1910) National Museum in Warsaw, Poland (Wikimedia Commons).

LETTERS



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

Abortion rights

The abortion issue has again flared up, due to reports of one woman's desperate late termination. This time, however, anti-abortionists are concentrating not on arguments as to 'when life begins' or Catholic dogma, but on the question of 'rights' - namely, the rights of the foetus.

Now, however much we'd like to shift the emphasis onto social provision or equality of access for working class women (all still worth mentioning), the antis insist on making it about the rights of the person and the autonomy of the conceived. Over the decades, the abortion debate has come down to the question of whose rights should be paramount. Does a right to exist of the being inside the womb trump the mother's condition?

Various hypothetical instances have been used over the years to focus on the person and the question of personal viability and autonomy. One such 'thought experiment' was the supposition of a medical situation, where professional practitioners invent a technique whereby, in order to sustain a particular living patient, another adult must be hooked up to them by plastic tube for an indefinite period of time. It's the only way that the patient can be saved! Do you feel that someone can plead that this is too much of an infringement of one's life and personal autonomy? Or must someone accede to this essential connection of life-saving importance?

Of course, as socialists we may point out that we are all dependent on each other anyway and this involves exercising a duty of care regarding others. Is it not sheer indifference to let someone else die for our physical and mental convenience? Isn't it base individualism? However, this service is not like saving an infant abandoned by their parents or caring for a severely (but still aware) disabled person. The imaginary sustainer is having to give up their own free life in being yoked to a patient: they are in fact subject to another. They may choose to consent to this condition willingly, especially if the patient is a relative or friend, but can we condemn someone who refuses to have their autonomy and/or mental health so encroached upon in this manner?

Likewise, if a foetus is not surviving outside the womb, the woman is already attached in this absolute way, subject to such a connection. As with the mother in the recent desperate case - who already had three children, one of whom had special needs - to counter such an absolute subjection to another, the personhood (sentient, intelligent and future-conscious) of the adult must override the right of the being in her womb to exist and the threat of physical and mental distress.

If socialists ignore the equal rights of persons, then they will not deserve the trust of those who have only recently achieved some equality.

Mike Belbin
London

With Stalinism

Jack Conrad manages to keep a foot in both camps: favouring the planned economy, whilst repudiating the actual introduction of that planned economy in the USSR after 1928-29

('First plan backgrounds', June 15). Whilst favourably citing Stalinist hack Andrew Northall (Letters, June 8) against Trotsky and the Left Opposition, he actually then attacks both Stalin's USSR and Northall *from the right* on the question of planning the economy.

Yevgeny Preobrazhensky and the Left Opposition were entirely correct on the New Economic Policy: it was a measured retreat from war communism, forced on the party in March 1921 by the crisis highlighted by the Kronstadt revolt that same month. As Jack admits, Trotsky had proposed such measures a year earlier (Lenin rejected them then).

Trotsky's last struggle was against those who attacked Stalin - and with him the planned economy of the USSR - *from the right*, as elaborated in his *In defence of Marxism*. Their political descendants today are state capitalists, bureaucratic collectivists and third campists of all varieties who refused to defend the USSR against imperialism - particularly after Stalin invaded Finland in November 1939. These are Stalinophobes, who gravitate towards 'democratic' imperialism, as their main ideologue, Max Shachtman, did.

So we have no hesitation in forming a united front with Andrew Northall in defence of the planned economy of the USSR against Jack - unconditional, but critical defence here. There is a grain of truth in Northall's stance against imperialism and, distorted though it is, it is not the far more direct capitulation seen in saying that capitalism was restored with the introduction of that five-year plan after 1929. So in that alone I support Northall, even though very critically.

Had the Communist Party followed the political approach of the Left Opposition, the great tragedy of forced collectivisation in the great famine of 1930-33, that took the lives of between 5.7 to 8.7 million, would have been avoided. And, contrary to the far-right Ukraine 'Holodomor' narrative, it raged not only in Ukraine, but in all the agricultural lands of the USSR, the northern Caucasus, Volga and Kazakhstan. This was the blueprint for Mao's Great Leap Forward of 1958-61, which caused history's greatest famine ever - upwards of 30 million died in that mad, forced industrialisation/collectivisation drive.

Trotsky and the Left Opposition advocated collectivisation in proportion to when the tractors and combine harvesters, mills and all the other infrastructure became available and with pilot farms to demonstrate to the poor peasantry the benefits of this collectivisation. Nonetheless history records that, once these immediate and terrible events were over, collectivisation resulted in spectacular increases in life expectancy. Also literacy and per-capita gross domestic product grew spectacularly in the USSR after 1933 (and in China after 1962), demonstrating that the planned economy, despite its bureaucratic and undemocratic distortions, was far superior. It was partially production for human need and not for profit.

Jack's article is an implicit endorsement of socialism in a single country, in that it regards the struggle in the Communist Party of the USSR as national events of manoeuvre and counter-manoeuve irrespective of world events. The two great world events in regard to the rise of the Stalin-led counterrevolutionary

bureaucracy (after Hungary and Germany in 1918-19) were the defeat of the German revolution in October 1923 and the defeat of the Chinese revolution in April 1927. As for the right communist Nikolai Bukharin, he had lost faith in the world revolution before Stalin turned on him and Rykov in 1929.

But what are we to make of Preobrazhensky who capitulated after Trotsky refused to ally with Bukharin after 1928? Here we have a profound misunderstanding of the law of value. It was possible to partially suppress this law in production *only* - consumption had to be regulated by the bureaucracy (the "policeman of inequality", in Trotsky's famous phrase). But the law of value operates on a global scale and Preobrazhensky completely failed to understand this. Trotsky could not convince him of the ultimate impossibility of building socialism in a single country, while Europe, Japan and increasingly the USA dominated world markets and trade.

Stalinism, like social democracy/Labourism are counterrevolutionary currents, but they are part of the workers' movement internationally. As Trotsky observed in his 'Letter on India, 1939-40', "The general historic role of the Stalinist bureaucracy and their Comintern is counterrevolutionary. But through their military and other interests they can be forced to support progressive movements ... We must keep our eyes open to discern the progressive acts of the Stalinists, support them independently, foresee in time the danger, the betrayals, warn the masses and gain their confidence."

We have formed united fronts with the New Communist Party and many others like them internationally on the war in Ukraine on the basis that the US/Nato is the main enemy, and we are for its defeat. Not everyone opposes the withdrawal of Russian troops as we do, but if Russia is not imperialist (neither is China) then we cannot be for dual defeatism in this war (as Jack is) or in a coming war against China. We are for the defeat of US/Nato global imperialism, the main enemy of the global working class and all the oppressed internationally. The secondary enemies - Putin, president Xi, etc - will be more easily dealt with whenever the global power is defeated and driven back. Remember Vietnam!

We have nothing but contempt for those US/Nato defenders around Chris Ford's Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. And we are not for a 'multipolar world' of roughly equal imperialist power blocs. That remains the position of Socialist Fight and the Liaison Committee of the Fourth International, whom SF has rejoined (although we have not fused with Ian Donovan's Consistent Democrats; there are two affiliates in Britain).

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

For the purges

I appreciate Jack Conrad is just trying to 'stir the pot' in the notes to his fantastical and nonsensical article about the establishment of socialism in the USSR, but I can assure him I do not engage in "uncritical adulation of Stalin" - or any other Soviet leader for that matter ('First plan backgrounds', June 15). They were all products of their time and circumstances, and all of them had significant credits and debits to their record. Stalin's written and theoretical contribution to Marxism-Leninism was outstanding.

My own - balanced - view is that, yes, Stalin was a very significant Soviet leader, who carefully led and guided the Soviet Union from its extremely precarious and vulnerable state in the early 1920s, managed to coax and grow the industrial and agricultural economy under a form of socialist state control over the market over the next years to a certain critical mass, and was then able to launch a full programme of rapid socialist industrialisation and collectivisation, knowing full well the international situation was heading inexorably towards war, including against the Soviet Union. Without heavy industry and a heavy armaments sector, the USSR would surely have been crushed immediately by the imperialist powers.

Instead, it was the very strength and resilience of the Soviet economy and society - indeed of the Soviet people (products of that socialisation) - which played by far the major role in destroying four-fifths of Nazi Germany's armed forces. That very strength and resilience produced a very rapid recovery despite the devastation of the war, and the USSR quickly became a world socialist superpower.

Certainly, after the war, the suspiciousness, paranoia, conspiracy theories, faction-fighting, purges, executions, partly stemming from Stalin's aging personality, grew to extreme proportions, and it was only Stalin's death which brought that to an end.

I am strongly supportive of Khrushchev's actions in restoring full socialist legality and re-establishing the leading role of the Communist Party, which had been largely sidelined in favour of the military and security apparatus. I do think some of his economic and political reforms were a bit barmy and some actions on the international stage genuinely dangerous and frightening, but he deserves full credit for implementing deStalinisation in the 1950s and 60s.

Regarding the so-called Great Purge (1937-38), I'm afraid there are such things as hard, concrete facts and evidence. Historians such as Oleg Khlevniuk and J Arch Getty have now been able to scrutinise voluminous files of documents slowly released after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, including politburo minutes and papers, and a wealth of material from the security organs and from republican, provincial and local archives. Whilst there is no doubt as to their anti-Soviet and anti-Stalin credentials, they are capable of establishing the facts as to what happened and why.

The Soviet leadership in the late 1930s was certain war was coming and was genuinely *extremely* concerned about a potential 'fifth column' of enemies of Soviet power within the country. Among others, former kulaks and criminals who had been internally exiled as part of the mass collectivisation were now completing their sentences and expected to return to their former homes and communities, and were becoming the main source of criminal and anti-Soviet activities.

Operational order 00447 of the Soviet security apparatus (NKVD) "concerning the operation for repressing former kulaks, criminals and other anti-Soviet elements" was issued towards the end of July 1937. The order defined "the contingents to be subject to repression" ("repression" mainly meant sentenced to be imprisoned for fixed terms, but some were shot). In reality it included all those who

had struggled against Soviet power or who had been victims of previous repressions.

These included: kulaks, who had either been released or fled from exile; former members of disbanded parties (Socialist Revolutionaries, Georgian Mensheviks, Mussavats, Dashnaks, etc); former White Guards; surviving tsarist officials; those arrested for terrorist and spying offences; and oppositional factionalists, who had previously been expelled from the Communist Party.

All these groups either presented a clear and present danger to Soviet power or had the real potential to create it. I recognise repressing those with the 'potential' to threaten Soviet power will offend some modern-day liberals, but these are frequently the same 'liberals' and 'democrats' who would have hated the very existence of Soviet power and would have supported any effort to overthrow it. We know what happened to the communards after the Paris Commune was overthrown by reactionary forces.

Limitu (limits) were established in advance for the numbers to be repressed in each area - either to be imprisoned or shot. It is 'hilarious' that classic anti-Soviet historians (like Robert Conquest, Arch Getty and Khlevniuk) and modern-day Trotskyists insist on translating this word as meaning 'quotas' or minimum target numbers to be arrested and/or shot. As if the NKVD were scouring the streets looking for people to make up the numbers. No, the word means the precise opposite - *maximum* numbers. A simple example of how historians and modern anti-communists can completely turn facts and the truth into their opposite.

Were innocent people caught up and some killed in the Great Purge? Yes. Did these constitute unacceptable crimes? Yes. Local NKVD units *were* strongly encouraged to use their local initiatives. It was only when it became clear at a national level that repressions were starting to exceed the *limitu* or 'control figures' that the Great Purge started to be reined in during 1938. Significant numbers from then and into the 1940s *were* released from prison, rehabilitated and given back their rights. That, of course, implies innocent people *were* arrested and some *were* wrongly executed - and those responsible were then subsequently punished. The replacement of Nikolai Yezhov as head of the NKVD in 1938 has to be seen in this context.

In many ways, the Great Purge in sociological terms led to a major renewal of the leadership of the party and state at all levels - older, less educated, autocratic, more 'suspect' leaders were replaced by a younger, better educated, newer generation, who were brought up and moulded in the collective values of Soviet socialist power and untarnished with the bitter factional and personal disputes pre- and post- the 1917 Revolution.

And, of course, the 'fifth column', which Nazi Germany and Japan managed to cultivate *in every single country prior to invasion*, either did not exist in the USSR (despite there being large quantities of raw material for such an anti-Soviet basis) or it was indeed largely eliminated in this period.

We have to take a hard, sober, balanced, rounded and critical assessment of the facts and of history. Uncritical adulation of any individual cannot be part of that.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

LAW

Abortion should not be illegal

Carla Foster has been handed a 28-month sentence. Mike Macnair warns that this is part of a wider Tory culture-war offensive designed to rally the right

“Hard cases make bad law” is a proverb of modern Anglo-American law, invented somewhere in the late 18th to early 19th century.

The idea is about law-making through judicial precedents. In its original form the point is that law should not be made on the basis of *unusual* cases, which would tend to create rules which cause injustice to a much wider class of people: as the idea used to be formulated, “the law will rather suffer a particular mischief, than to open a gap to a general inconvenience”. Both ‘mischief’ and ‘inconvenience’ had changed their meaning so far that some reformulation was necessary. But the more modern version has tended towards the more general idea that judges should, when making precedents, not be swayed too much by the fact that the outcome seems ‘hard’ - that is, morally or emotionally unattractive.

In this context, it is perfectly possible for ‘hard cases’ to be *concocted* by Tory barristers and the advertising-funded media - precisely *in order* to create ‘bad law’, meaning law which is driven by Tory ideological fantasies and/or electoral scams. Thus in *Shaw v DPP* in 1961, a case about advertising prostitutes was used to reassert the 18th century claim that the courts are the guardians of public morality and can, as such, invent new crimes. The point was to undermine the recommendations of the 1957 Wolfenden report that homosexuality should be decriminalised; the purpose of using a case about advertising prostitutes was to make it politically more difficult to denounce *Shaw* as a usurpation of the legislative power. The underlying point was to assert that even if homosexuality was decriminalised in a limited way (as happened in 1967) it should remain *unlawful*.

Similarly, in *Pettitt v Pettitt* and *Gissing v Gissing* in 1969 and 1970, and again in *Lloyd’s Bank v Rosset* in 1990, cases were selected for appeal to the House of Lords on claims to shares in houses where the labour contribution on the basis of which the claim was made was minimal. The point was to reassert the ‘normal’ (patriarchal exploitation of family labour) position that the wife or female cohabitant’s contributions in labour to the marital household would not give her a share in the property. The selection of unusual, minimal-contribution cases to be appealed ‘dramatised’ the idea for the press that the “solid tug of money” should prevail in these cases (*Pettitt* added to this rhetorical role that the claim in that case was made by the husband to a share in the wife’s inherited property). All three are thus artificial hard cases which made bad law.

I have discussed this issue in order to establish the politico-legal background to what, I think, is happening in the severe sentence handed down to Carla Foster for her illegal acquisition and use of abortifacient drugs after the legal limit - and the wide publicity given to it, including the (unusual) web publication of the judge’s sentencing remarks. Indeed, the BBC’s report includes a comment from an official spokesperson: “Our laws as they stand balance a woman’s right to access safe and legal abortions with the rights of an unborn child” - the language of the ‘rights of the unborn’ preferred by the Christian anti-abortion lobby.

The point is not that Foster was charged or convicted, though it should be noted that prosecutions are sufficiently rare that there is no

‘sentencing guideline’ and Pepperall J relied for his views as to an appropriate sentence on a single Court of Appeal decision from 2013. Rather, it is the *prominence* which has been given to the case that seems to have politico-legal purposes: a ‘hard case’ selected by the Tory press with a view to making bad law.

The political trick here is to draw advocates of ‘a woman’s right to choose’ into defending a case which looks decidedly unattractive: because at 32-34 weeks, the foetus could very probably (95%+) have been born alive and survived; because Foster deceived the drug provider; and because Foster’s motivations are severely obscure - meaning that we do not have available any of the things which are, to moderate anti-abortionists, acceptable excuses for abortion (rape; illness, disability or mental illness of the mother; disability of the foetus; and so on). This *unusual* case is given deceptive prominence: a hard case with a view to making bad law. If advocates of ‘a woman’s right to choose’ are drawn into opposing the Foster prosecution and sentence, the Tories expect to win support among moderate anti-abortionists and among many women who would be uncomfortable with abortion this late in pregnancy.

The Tories then hope that this will enable them to run a successful culture-wars operation round abortion - as the Republicans have done in the US, and as the Tories themselves have recently been doing round ‘trans rights’. Christian anti-abortion groups were already preparing the ground for this operation in July 2022; the Foster case, they hope, will provide them with a launchpad for a new campaign *starting with* eliminating remote prescribing of abortion drugs (the supposed ‘culprit’ in the Foster case), and moving on to shorter time limits, and so on.

As with the ‘trans rights’ and ‘cancel culture’ culture wars operation, and those round ‘migrant criminality’ and ‘fake asylum-seekers’, it is unlikely that the top Tory leadership - or their hired-gun political operatives - have the slightest belief in the crap they utter and that their journos promote in these culture-war operations. Their underlying problem is that their government has, thanks to Brexit, to its Covid policies, and to the Ukraine war, made a lot of people seriously worse off. And the brief flirtation under Liz Truss with 1980s-style tax-cutting deregulation policies and competitive devaluation of the pound (and the immediately disastrous results of the mere *suggestion* of this policy) conveys an image of Tory economic incompetence that has not yet worn off. Infighting over Boris Johnson does not help. The polls continue to stand at around 45% Labour, 28% Conservative. Even if culture-war operations do not actually create a majority, it can be *hoped* that they will distract attention and hence save the Tories from the electoral disaster which seems to threaten them.

How to respond to this latest culture-wars initiative? In this case, it is possible that the right course of action is, as at least some pro-choice campaigners have done, to take the bait, bite the bullet and campaign for full decriminalisation of abortion.

Foster was originally charged with ‘child destruction’, contrary to the Infant Life Preservation Act 1929, which would be mandatory life imprisonment, like murder; but this was plea-bargained down to ‘procuring drugs to cause a miscarriage’ contrary to section 59

of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 (OAPA), which has *available* imprisonment for life, but not mandatory, like manslaughter. Campaigners have commented on this act as archaic, but, as Tories have responded, it is, in fact, merely the modernising ‘code’ statute for crimes of violence. The legislation ‘codified’ in sections 58-59 of the OAPA was not particularly ancient, having started with Lord Ellenborough’s Act 1803, whose purpose was to modernise older legislation, including to get rid of the presumption of murder in unexplained infant death cases under a statute of 1624, which had been “found in sundry cases difficult and inconvenient to be put in practice”. So the argument is weak. If anything, the 19th century saw an extension of anti-abortion law, because medical advances made the charge practically *provable*, which it had not been before except by use of the rather unpopular 1624 act.

On the other hand, the traditional pro-choice line of “defend the 1967 act” is unlikely to work against an attack of this kind - unlike the success of this line in the past against Catholic-sponsored private members bills. The reason is that the present attack works by using the structural design of the 1967 act. That is, like the anti-union laws, and like the act of the same year (1967) which decriminalised male homosexual conduct in limited circumstances, the 1967 act works by *leaving the underlying illegality intact*, but providing a limited ‘defence’, which you have to bring yourself within. Within this framework, it is much too easy to chip away at the limits - whether by endless private members’ bills promoted by the abuse of the charitable status of religious bodies, or by the sort of ‘politico-legal hard cases make bad law’ scheme being tried now.

The issue is too often presented, as it is by Rishi Sunak’s spokespersons on the BBC, as one of the balancing of competing rights of the mother and of the ‘unborn’. But this is a radical misconception. In the first place, to have a right is to be able to choose whether to waive it or to insist upon it - and neither the foetus nor indeed the newborn can possibly waive anything. If abortion is to be criminalised, it has to be on the basis that it is morally objectionable in some way *other than* as a violation of rights. Further, the moral claims involved have to be within the framework that *human biology enforces abortion* under conditions of starvation and severe stresses affecting the mother.

And ‘pro-life’ campaigners are remarkably reluctant to oppose the industrial-scale killing of civilians by ‘collateral damage’ in air-strikes and sanctions regimes. If abortion is murder (it is not), this stuff is *far more clearly* murder.

The ‘right to life’ campaigners are, in reality, campaigning for the return of the authority of the Catholic moral entrepreneurs who pioneered the criminalisation of abortion in the central middle ages. They are thus actually - though they would never admit it - campaigning for the return of the Christian Brothers orphanages and their legacy of abuse, and the more general power of Catholic priests to abuse. These phenomena are the *necessary other side* of the Catholic claims about male purity and female disorder, which are supposed to require the criminalisation of abortion ●

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ACTION

National Shop Stewards Network

Saturday June 24, 11am to 4.30pm: Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Bringing together active rank-and-file trade unionists from across the movement. All union members are welcome to attend and to participate in the discussion. Registration £6. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/events/1595519607615141.

Boycott Puma

Saturday June 24: Nationwide day of action. Demand Puma ends its complicity in Israeli apartheid.

Brighton 12 noon: Clock Tower, North Street, Brighton BN1.

Cardiff 11am: JD Sports, Queen Street, Cardiff CF10.

Coventry 11am: JD Sports, Broadgate Coventry CV1.

Durham 11am: Market Place, Durham DH1.

Edinburgh 11am: Princes Street/Castle Street, Edinburgh EH2.

Haslemere 11.30am: JK Coaching, 97 Wey Hill, Haslemere GU27.

Hull 11am: Outside St Stephens shopping centre, Hull HU2.

Kingston 12 noon: JD Sports, 20 Church Street, Kingston KT1.

London, 12 noon: Puma Store, 52 Carnaby Street, London W1.

Oxford 11am: Bonn Square, Oxford OX1.

Plymouth 11am: 82 New George Street, Plymouth PL1.

Reading 12 noon: 52 Broad Street, Reading RG1.

Stevenage 12.30pm: Sports Direct, The Forum, Stevenage SG1.

Wolverhampton 10.30am: Queen’s Square, Wolverhampton WV1.

Worthing 12 noon: JD Sports, Montague Street, Worthing BN11.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/events/420750110177209.

Free Assange - stand on the chair

Saturday June 24, 1pm: Protest, Parliament Square, London SW1.

Anything to Say? is a life-size bronze sculpture featuring Snowden, Assange and Manning - each standing on a chair - with an empty chair next to them, for us. Organised by Don’t Extradite Assange!:

dontextraditeassange.com/mc-events/anything-to-say-in-london.

Defend the right to protest

Saturday June 24, 6pm: Online meeting. People are being sent to prison just for using the terms, ‘climate change’ and ‘fuel poverty’, in court, and arrested for publicising the right of juries to decide, based on their conscience. Speakers include Tony Greenstein, who is currently facing prison and who was gagged during his trial.

Organised by Labour Left Alliance: www.facebook.com/events/281639277624058.

Chopped liver and unions

Thursday June 29, 8pm: New play, The Exchange, 75 London Road, Twickenham TW1. *Chopped liver and unions* tells the story of Sara Wesker, who organised many strikes by garment workers in the East End of London in the 1920s. Performed by Lottie Walker. Tickets £10. Part of Richmond Arts and Ideas Festival: exchangetwickenham.co.uk/event/chopped-liver-and-unions.

Marxism 2023

Thursday June 29 to Sunday July 2: SWP annual school, SOAS University of London, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Over 100 sessions, including debates, workshops, panels, live music and a culture tent. Tickets: day £22.38 (£11.55), full event £44.04 (£27.80). Organised by Socialist Workers Party: www.facebook.com/marxismfest.

Women Chainmakers festival

Saturday July 1, 11am to 6pm: Family festival, Mary McArthur Gardens, Cradley Heath B64. Celebrate the 1910 women chainmakers’ victorious 10-week strike against starvation wages. Entrance free. Organised by TUC Midlands: www.tuc.org.uk/events/2023-tuc-women-chainmakers-festival.

NHS 75

Wednesday July 5, 6.30pm: Online rally to mark the 75th birthday of the NHS. Sadly there are hundreds of preventable and avoidable deaths every week, over 132,000 staffing vacancies and over seven million on waiting lists. Staff are striking to protect pay and conditions and to stand up for the NHS itself. Organised by Keep Our NHS Public and NHS Workers Say No: www.facebook.com/events/962492601458279.

Peace talks now - end the war in Ukraine

Wednesday July 5, 7pm: Public meeting, Hamaara Centre, rear of 158 Castleton Road, Preston PR1. Oppose nuclear threats in Europe and the Pacific - increase wages, not weapons. Organised by Stop the War - Preston and South Ribble: www.facebook.com/events/786834226285520.

Durham Miners Gala

Saturday July 8, 8am to 4pm: Rally and labour movement festival, The Racecourse, Green Lane, Old Elvet, Durham DH1.

Organised by Durham Miners Association: www.facebook.com/events/1548202148922684.

Housing for need, not greed

Saturday July 8: Day of action with events nationwide. Challenge the madness and unfairness of the housing market. Stop the demolition of social housing, provide affordable housing now. Organised by Housing Rebellion: linktr.ee/housingrebellion.

Tolpuddle Martyrs festival

Friday July 14 to Sunday July 16: Annual commemoration festival, Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum, Dorchester Road, Tolpuddle DT2. Tickets £22.50 to £55. Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs: www.facebook.com/events/184599977675068.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party’s name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

PROSPECTS

A year of strikes

We must go beyond Labourism. Kevin Bean assesses the upsurge in trade union action and its limitations

June 21 marked one year since the first RMT strike, which ushered in the highest level of industrial action for more than three decades. With 3.7 million working days lost through strikes from June 2022 to April 2023, according to official statistics, this is the highest number for any 11-month period since July 1989 to May 1990, when 4.8 million days were lost.¹

With disputes and strikes involving workers in sectors ranging from the post office and the civil service through to the health service, schools, local government, universities and transport, it seemed to many commentators - whether in the left or the bourgeois media - that 'the militant working class was back'. Tory ministers reprised the Thatcherite playbook and declared that they would not give in to union leaders such as Mick Lynch 'holding the country to ransom', as they supposedly did in the 1970s. They even tried to use the Ukraine war, with Lynch and co being Putin agents. But nor did that work.

The year of strikes has drawn widely differing groups of workers into action, some for the first time, such as the Royal College of Nursing. Although the disputes have different proximate causes and demands, the common element is the defence of wage levels and working conditions.

We should also not discount the way that employers have attempted to use the historical weakness of the organised working class to further undermine conditions and benefits, such as pensions and permanent contracts. The long-running pensions dispute in the universities and the attempts by the railway employers to worsen the conditions of drivers and other workers are examples of disputes which are just as much about a wider defence of jobs and conditions as attempts to ensure that wages keep pace with inflation.

Back to 1970s?

In terms of the size of the unions and the density of membership, the differences between the 1970s and today are so obvious as to hardly need stating. According to the latest government statistics, there are 6.5 million trade unionists in Britain - just over 22% of employees. This compares to the high point of union membership of 13.2 million - with a much smaller workforce - in 1979. The majority now are in the public sector (3.84 million) and tend to be older and more highly qualified or skilled than the 'average' worker.²

A combination of economic and social change since the 1970s, such as the decline in manufacturing and the rise of the service and public sectors, alongside a conscious (and successful) strategy of weakening the potential power of organised workers through anti-trade union legislation, has decisively changed both the terrain on which British trade unions operate and their organisational form. The power of the union bureaucracy has been greatly strengthened at the expense of the rank and file, especially the workplace representatives and shop stewards. These were important elements of rank-and-file power in the strikes of the post-war boom in the late 1940s-60s, which saw action to advance living standards, as well as during the more

defensive strikes against attacks on wages and conditions in the 1970s.

The legal restrictions put in place since the 1980s and the reduced industrial power of the movement have not only reinforced the power of the trade union bureaucracy, but strengthened tendencies towards compromise and class collaboration which have long been the hallmark of British trade union leaders. Hence the string of *below inflation* settlements negotiated by trade union leaders ranging from the FBU's Matt Wrack to the RCN's Pat Cullen.

The labour bureaucracy - a combination of trade union officialdom, Labour career politicians and apparatchiks - has, of course, its own niche and privileged position in capitalist society. Even when speaking the language of class war, its sectional interests cause this stratum to act as the labour lieutenants of capital in policing the working class.

This can be seen with initiatives such as Enough Is Enough, where trade union leaders such as Mick Lynch, Dave Ward and Eddie Dempsey worked hand-in-hand with aspiring Labour careerists and local hacks in order to contain and divert anger into pointless rallies and demonstrations. Naturally, the politics were kept to the usual banal platitudes of 'a real pay rise', 'decent housing for all', 'tax the rich', etc, and no accountable, democratic, structures were built. So, while Enough is Enough provided plenty of opportunities for inflating already inflated egos, the whole thing, inevitably, fizzled out ... along with other hopes of yesterday.

Momentum, the Socialist Campaign Group, Labour Representation Committee and Labour Left Alliance have likewise all withered on the vine in spite of, because of, the strike wave. Their politics have simply proven not fit for purpose.

Consciousness

If the trade union bureaucrats have been behaving true to form, what has been the impact of the year of strikes on the membership and wider working class? For both those taking part and the labour movement more generally, the strikes have both been a morale booster and raised class-consciousness, especially in disputes where the pay and conditions of the workers can be contrasted with the profits of the capitalists and the income of the senior managers.

Anyone who has taken part in a strike will tell you about the solidarity and sense of collective strength that is

engendered by taking part in pickets, strike meetings and protests. Workers in dispute identify their enemies and friends and start to draw wider lessons about the nature of capitalist society. Reports in the left and even the bourgeois media provide plenty of examples of how industrial disputes can shift workers' understanding of their place in the world.

This, however, does not proceed in a straight line and the hopes and expectations of some that the strike wave would produce a shift to the left and a rapid development of a revolutionary socialist consciousness have not borne fruit. Indeed, as shown in some trade union elections, the right has been strengthened. In Unison, for example, the Time for Real Change left group lost its NEC majority and the Socialist Party in England and Wales was reduced from four seats to just one (Hugo Pierre was elected from the Black Section).

The disputes themselves have been long drawn-out affairs, but the strikes have more been a day here and a day there. Also demands and struggles have been kept sectional, even when workers in a particular sector, such as the health service, are taking action over similar issues. The levels of coordination between unions at a national level have been minimal, although local groups of workers have attempted to build common action and demands in areas such as education, local government and the civil service. Most importantly, few of the disputes have truly resulted in victories, other than in some areas of

transport and food production, where all-out strikes hit the employers' profits and forced them to concede pay settlements *in line* with inflation. In other sectors, many of the settlements agreed by the union leaderships, even if trumpeted as victories, actually represent real *wage cuts* because they are quite a bit below the rate of inflation.

In response to these developments there is nothing wrong with calls from those on the left to build on the year of strikes and make attempts to overcome sectionalism by generalising the various struggles. But it is also important to undertake a sober assessment of where the movement might be heading and understand the limitations of strike action. After all, if a year of strikes has produced little in the way of tangible results, it is perfectly logical for trade union members, not just leaders, to look to the politics of moderation and the election of a Labour government headed by Sir Keir Starmer.

But some will never learn.

Alternatives

Take *Socialist Worker*; its whole *raison d'être* for decades has been the alchemy of spontaneity and turning the base metal of protests and strikes into socialist gold. At last, with big strikes happening, the picture was painted of Britain being on the cusp of a revolutionary situation rather than an altogether routine general election. Such economism entails either steering clear of high politics or, when there is high politics, there is tailism of the liberal bourgeoisie. But what is really important, in the meantime, is recruiting trade union militants to the confessional sect. Party Notes boasts of the SWP recruiting "well over 1,000 people since 2002" (June 19 2023). But, of course, few of them pay dues or attend meetings. Indeed it is a revolving door.

In a similar way *Socialist Appeal* - the British section of the International Marxist Tendency - also draws the wrong conclusions by overstating the impact of industrial disputes on class-consciousness. After the dreary years of auto-Labourism and pushing clause four socialism, albeit with a brief dalliance with Chavismo, the Scottish Socialist Party and other left nationalisms, they have suddenly discovered that they really are communists and that the crisis of capitalism internationally demands a new revolutionary leadership - now! The idea of entering into discussions with other groups with a view to forming an embryonic Communist Party, however, remains noticeably absent. Instead there is yet another attempt to build the confessional sect ... this time by appealing to revolutionary minded students (amongst whom communism is increasingly popular).

The aim is to get a thousand

members!

Socialist Appeal wants to, needs to, keep its recruits excited. Very excited. So what we have is the upturn in strikes painted, yet again, as a prelude to an acute social crisis and the outbreak of social revolution. The danger is, of course, that the false perspectives of today lead to burnout and demoralisation tomorrow.

All the while, their old comrades in the Socialist Party in England and Wales, now under Peter Taaffe's chosen heir and successor, Hannah Sell, doggedly push the totally stupid Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition project - trying to create a Labour Party mark 2. Clearly the elementary lessons of the real Labour Party founded in 1900, the Labour Party mark 1, have not been learnt. At best Labourism leads not to socialism, but governing capitalism in the interests of the working class ... and, when that all goes wrong, to a Tory government.

Comrade Sell and, following the Socialist Alternative split, her much reduced band of followers, cannot quite understand why trade union officialdom insists on sticking with the Labour Party and the *real* prospect of a Labour government headed by Sir Keir Starmer, rather than throwing in their lot with Tusc. True, members of Labour's front bench keep a studied distance from strikers and picket lines. They must appear responsible before the City, the capitalist media and Britain's US master. But, and this is crucial, a Labour government can *actually* deliver concessions to trade union officialdom and will almost certainly be less overtly hostile to trade unions than the Tories. Better, then, reasons the average trade union general secretary, to persuade, to pressurise, to plead with a Labour minister, than engage with the toytown Labourism of the Tusc project.

Clueless, Tusc carries on carrying on and in ever smaller circles. The SWP has gone, RMT has gone, even Chris Williamson has gone. Tusc's politics are, of course, thoroughly economicist; high politics are almost totally absent. Despite that, Tusc candidates get farcical votes ... one or two percent. That would not matter particularly ... at least to begin with, if the politics were principled - but they are not.

Then we have the fragments and sects of one who hanker after the big time by uniting in this or that broad front. There are plenty of them on offer: Left Unity, George Galloway's Workers Party, Socialist Labour Network, Peace and Justice and whatever Ken Loach comes up with next. All useless. All absurd.

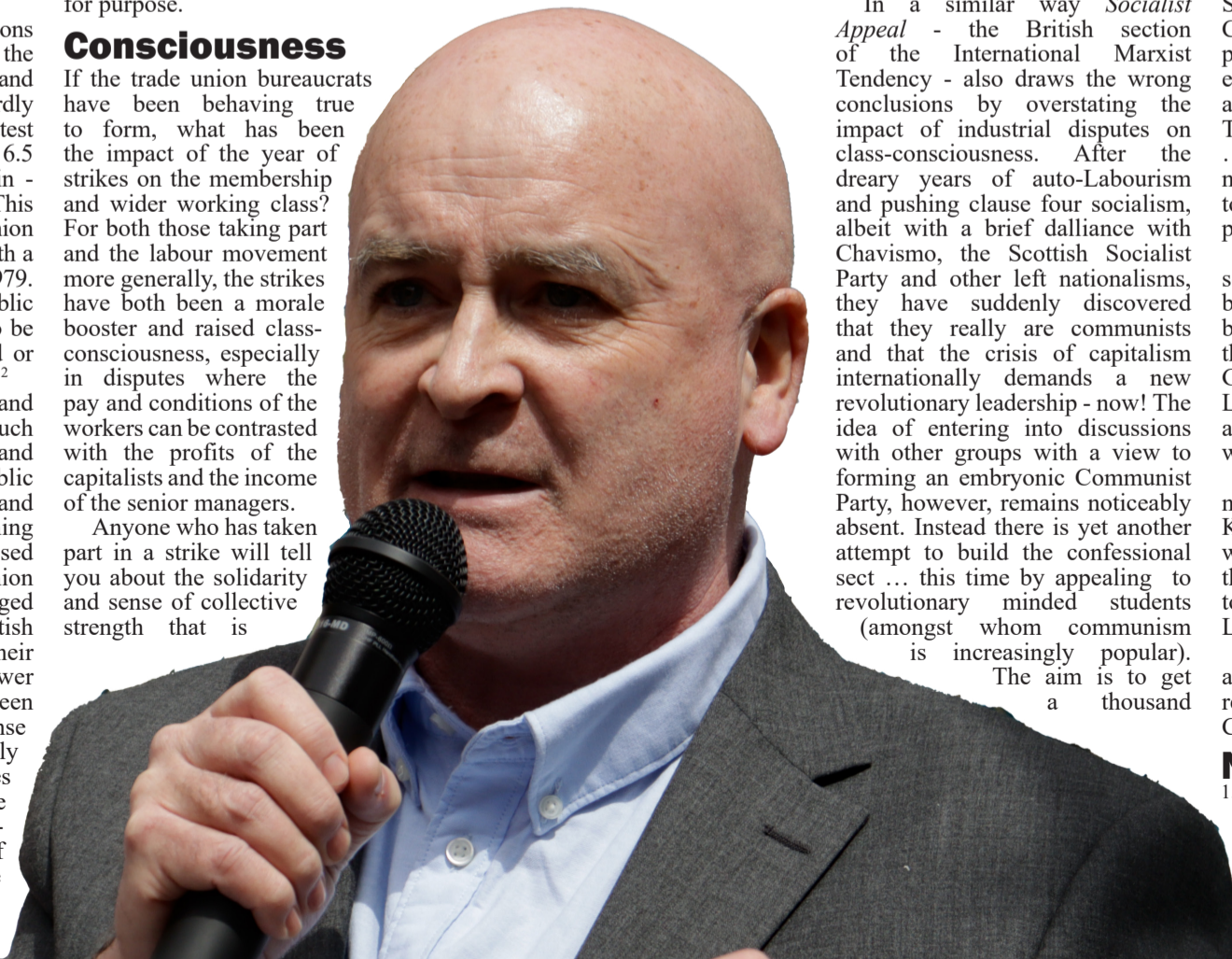
Probably, however, after the next general election and a Sir Keir Starmer government, things will change. The larger sections of the organised left will be looking towards an alternative to 'vote Labour ... but'.

The choice is clear: building yet another broad front, or something really serious: building a mass Communist Party ●

Notes

1. www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/workplacedisputesandworkingconditions.
2. assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1158789/Trade_Union_Membership_UK_1995-2022_Statistical_Bulletin.pdf.

Mick Lynch:
talks the talk of class war
but walks the walk
of officialdom



SECRETS

Death of a true believer

He exposed official lies, escaped the clutches of Richard Nixon's goons and fought hard for pacifism for the rest of his life. Paul Demarty remembers Daniel Ellsberg

It is strange, writing two articles in a row which are both obituaries; comparisons inevitably present themselves.

Both Ted Kaczynski and Daniel Ellsberg, who died last week of pancreatic cancer, were men of deep political conviction - conviction that guided their entire lives. They could perhaps both be credited with courage of some sort; and indeed the period of their 'activism', so to speak, was similar - roughly the 1970s onwards. Beyond that, the comparison breaks down. Kaczynski, as we noted last week ('Death and the cabin', June 15), was motivated by a jumble of alienated impulses, embraced a terrorism of despair, and campaigned in the end against an unkillable abstraction: the technological society (indeed the Promethean impulse *per se*). His failure was ordained, and his arrest a submission to the inevitable.

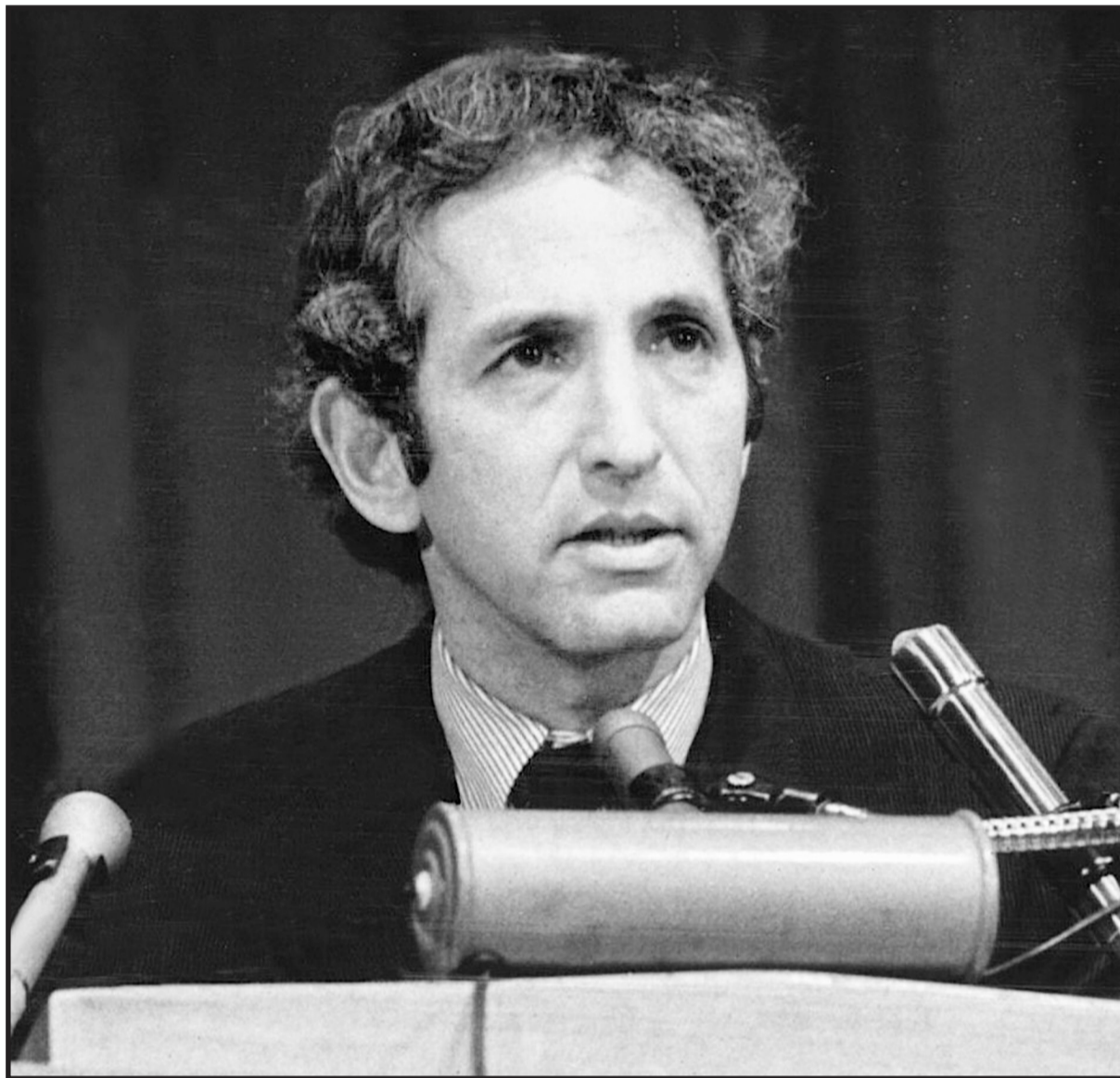
Ellsberg was, in stages, awakened to the horror in which he was an actor - of the perceived necessity to contemplate the near extinction of the human race to stop this or that ex-colony from falling into the Soviet camp. He overcame despair to betray the deepest workings of the American state. His activism, from then on, was always a public affair, and always in the service of a hard-won and deeply principled pacifism. His support of similar whistleblowers down the years is perhaps unsurprising, but disclosed an admirable consistency. I am not a pacifist, and the *Weekly Worker* is not a pacifist publication, but history will remember him as one of the good ones.

Game theory

Ellsberg was born in Chicago - to bourgeois parents of Jewish background, but Protestant faith. He excelled academically, graduating from Harvard with a major in economics, before joining the marines as a commissioned officer. At the end of that process, he had exactly the combination of credentials to be ripe for entry into the military-industrial complex, and found himself working for the RAND Corporation, the think-tank that most epitomises that complex. Assembled out of various boffins who had been working for the state during World War II, it rapidly became extremely influential and specialised - especially after the USSR detonated a nuclear bomb - in planning for conflict between powers with unprecedented destructive weaponry at their disposal.

It was at RAND that, in 1950, mathematician and economist John Nash formulated the basic tenets of 'game theory' - essentially a framework for creating thought experiments about the behaviour of adversarial actors with imperfect information. As the cold war heightened, with the partition of Germany becoming effectively permanent and 'hot' war between the US and various Soviet allies breaking out in Korea, game theory became a major building block of US nuclear strategy, giving us the cheery doctrine of mutual assured destruction (MAD) in due course. (RAND's intellectual peregrinations are the target of the chilling satire of *Dr Strangelove*; Nash's later struggles with schizophrenia, on the other hand, were portrayed in the gloopy Hollywood biopic, *A beautiful mind*).

Nuclear planning was Ellsberg's



Daniel Ellsberg: New York press conference in 1972

speciality in his early days at RAND. He made his own contribution to the game theory field with the insight that people favour decisions where the risks are known rather than ambiguous, even when they are aware that alternative courses of action are likely to have better outcomes - an argument that has generated no end of literature since. Yet, to hear him tell it, he was already uneasy about the scenarios he was actually working out. MAD seemed to live up to its acronym.

From there, he was seconded to the defence department by Robert McNamara, who was overseeing the rapid expansion of the US's involvement in Vietnam and proposed to make a breakthrough by creating the ultimate brains' trust. Bright RAND staffers like Ellsberg were key members of 'the best and the brightest', and they duly placed American conduct in the war under close examination. The conclusion they came to, more and more, was that the war was unwinnable without a drastic increase in resources being ploughed into it. After 1967, by which time Ellsberg was back at RAND, these concerns were producing a significant documentary record; the government of Lyndon Johnson, however, repeatedly misled Congress about the progress being made.

Change of heart

Ellsberg's conscience tugged at him ever more. He started attending anti-war demonstrations. In 1969, he finally committed himself to the cause, and did the one thing he - and, within the movement, almost only he - could do. He duplicated all those documents, with the assistance of a colleague, making several copies.

After failing to interest several senators in exposing the material (they would be protected from prosecution), he finally succeeded, in 1971, in interesting *The New York Times* in the material, which they began publishing. Its right to do so was upheld in a landmark Supreme Court case.

The US government had, in the meantime, changed. In some respects, Richard Nixon was more amenable to the message of the Pentagon Papers - that Vietnam was a disaster, and the US needed a more or less dignified off-ramp. (That 'off-ramp' went through a genocidal bombing campaign in Cambodia, of course, but you can't have it all.) Yet this paranoid thug would not let such an insult pass. Thus there came to be the notorious 'White House plumbers', who sought to fix the various leaks in the state core by underhand methods. They illegally bugged Ellsberg, and even burgled his therapist's office, hoping to find something to discredit him. In the meantime, Ellsberg handed himself in to police, and awaited trial under the grotesque Espionage Act.

By the terms of the act, the presiding judge forbade the defence from addressing the jury to explain Ellsberg's motives (a proscription that was scandalous at the time, but has become routine in such cases). Yet the steady drip of revelations about the activity of the 'plumbers' made the prosecution untenable. Nixon's thuggery and crudity - and arguably the unpopularity of his policy of *detente* in sections of the deep state - allowed Ellsberg to get away with it. From then on, Ellsberg was committed to the peace movement: he could perhaps be compared to John Newton - the English slave

trader turned abolitionist.

That brings us to his consistent support of whistleblowers and journalists who expose state secrets - among them Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden and many more. It was possible, perhaps, in the mid-1970s to view Ellsberg's trial optimistically as a turning point - followed, as it was, by the Watergate fiasco and then the revelations of the Church committee: the secret state was a wounded beast and, if the rightwing theories about Nixon's enemies in the security apparatus have any merit, it was at least in part a self-inflicted injury. Squabbles between factions of the security state created the conditions for an idealist like Ellsberg, or a crusading senator like Frank Church, to give them a bloody nose.

Back in control

Bureaucratic turf wars and other maladies have hardly disappeared from the security state, of course. But the evidence of the treatment of Ellsberg's inheritors is surely that, in this respect at least, they are in quite as strong a position as they were at the beginning of the 1970s. Julian Assange languishes at Belmarsh - surely to be extradited to face charges under the same draconian Espionage Act hurled at Ellsberg. The same fate would surely have awaited Edward Snowden, had he not been shielded to some extent by the Russian state; and if the US *does* succeed in a regime decapitation in Moscow, his safety is hardly assured.

Assange and Snowden were at least politically motivated, by a common right-libertarianism in essence; the same could be said for the socialist and communist activists who were, in reality, the

target of the legislation in the first place. But, by targeting Jack Teixeira - who leaked the so-called 'Discord files' with apparently no more noble or maleficent motive in mind than impressing some idiot gamer children in a private Discord server - this grotesque law reaches its ultimate absurdity.

As for the pacifism - we could hardly call our age terribly pacifistic. The US did withdraw, eventually, from Vietnam, but wasted no time in going on the offensive against a decrepit Soviet enemy, manufacturing al-Qa'eda out of nothing in the process. Since then, we have seen the reduction of Somalia to a failed state, imperfectly frozen conflicts in the Balkans, the bloody catastrophes of Afghanistan and Iraq, state failure and near state failure in Syria and Libya, thanks to US action, and, finally, the conversion of relentless provocations on the borders of Russia into open, gruesomely attritional warfare.

Few indeed have been the moments, amidst all this bloodshed, when the mainstream media outlets that bought Ellsberg's photocopies showed anything other than complete compliance with the imperatives of state-department orthodoxy. Today, *The New York Times* and the like write oh-so-solemn open letters about the dangers posed to free speech by the Assange case - but only now that his prosecution is essentially inevitable have they bothered. When there was any hope of protecting him, such outlets had nothing to offer than relentless slander and laughable dishonesty about his case.

This rather bleak outlook must, in the end, enter into our assessment of Ellsberg's legacy. There is a certain idea, implicit in all his activity, that if people only 'knew', then the hideous crimes of the imperial state would become untenable. That turns out not to be the case; for knowledge in its political form is always doubled - there is the knowledge of the facts of the matter and the knowledge of what can, or must, be done about them. The latter inevitably frames the former. The instinct many people have of their *powerlessness* in the face of impenetrable state and corporate organisations is, alas, all too true to life. The idea of the honest, conscientious American citizenry putting a stop to crimes such as Ellsberg exposed is ultimately illusory. Some more concrete social agent is necessary - an agent with its own newspapers and other media, its own 'intelligence agencies' perhaps, reporting on the activities of the enemy; indeed a clear sense that there *is* an enemy, that contemporary society is inherently antagonistic, and pacifism is therefore false.

Nonetheless, the fact that a wholly institutionalised member of the intelligence apparatus could become a principled pacifist, and place himself repeatedly in danger of arrest and violence in the service of his programme, ought to give us some hope. The power of these agencies is not, in the end, complete - something that is good in humanity rebels against being so employed, to make plans for the use of genocidal weapons or military tactics, and to drown every insult to imperial pride in blood.

Daniel Ellsberg, above all, exemplified that spirit, and for that we must pay our respects ●

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MIGRATION

Cost of Fortress Europe

Those who horrifically drowned off the Greek coast were fleeing intolerable conditions. Eddie Ford argues for free movement, citizenship rights and effective trade unions

Last week a rusty 25-metre fishing boat carrying migrants capsized off the Greek coast. Passengers had paid thousands of dollars each for a place on the battered trawler. Their hope was of a better life.

We do not know how many died. It could be 500, it could be 700. Reports vary. Just 104 survived - none of them women or children. Pictures taken from the air show the boat jam-packed from bow to stern, apparently with people stuffed below deck like human sardines. That is where the women and children were.

Of course, that is yesterday's news. The world's mainstream media is now focused on the missing Titan submersible and the fate of five very rich thrill seekers who paid £195,000 each to gawp at the wreck of the Titanic. No expense is being spared in the attempt to find them.

What a contrast with the treatment faced by those fleeing war, climate catastrophe and economic collapse. There are conflicting and confusing accounts about the role of the Greek coastguards. They claim to have been in constant contact with the aged trawler by radio, sat-phone and helicopter, saying that the vessel was not in difficulty - rather, it was moving "at a steady course and speed" towards Italy after it set sail from Tobruk, while they kept a "discreet distance" from the boat. But tracking data supplied by the UK-based MariTrace service indicates that the ship had not moved for several hours before it capsized, while two Greek coastguard vessels stood by or circled round it for about four hours.

Indeed, some have accused the coastguards of flipping the boat over when they made a botched attempt to tow it - something denied by the Greek authorities. An official said they had used a rope to "stabilise" the boat, "to approach, to see if they wanted any help" - not tow it - but they refused the offer of help and continued on their way to Italy.

A Moroccan-Italian social worker and activist has testified the opposite, saying that the passengers were pleading for help a day before it sank - "asking to be saved by any authority". Another testimony says that the trawler's engine failed days before it sank, making it likely the crew would have sought help - though maybe they were afraid to contact the authorities, as it was an illegal 'people-smuggling' operation. Unsurprisingly, the United Nations and others have called for an investigation into Greece's handling of the disaster - why did the coastguards not intervene earlier, given that it was obviously dangerously overcrowded? Has there been a cover-up?

Details have also emerged of the conditions on the boat. Witness accounts suggest that women and children were effectively "locked up" in the hold, apparently to be "protected" from the men. Others say that Pakistani nationals were also kept below deck, only to be maltreated by crew members when they appeared in search of fresh water or tried to escape - other nationalities were allowed on the top deck, where they had a far greater chance of surviving a sinking. In fact, conditions on the boat were so appalling that even before it sank there had already been six deaths after it ran out of fresh water.

But we know that the coastguards in Italy and Greece, which both



Some 27,000 have died trying to cross the Mediterranean

have rightwing governments, turn a deaf ear to migrant ships in distress. Italy has imposed severe restrictions and even impounded humanitarian vessels, while Greece faces multiple allegations that it pushes people back to Turkey, illegally preventing them from claiming asylum. It is certainly true that, when a migrant boat is in trouble, there is a 'no-reply policy' in many countries - refugees are effectively left to drown.

The Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies has accused many European Union countries of "weaponising time" by delaying rescue as long as they possibly can - entering a "phase of strategic neglect and abandonment". In other words, they have deliberately built delays into European engagement at sea - essentially hiding from migrant boats, so that they are not drawn into rescue operations.

Yanis Varoufakis, the so-called "erratic" Marxist and former finance minister under the disastrous Syriza-led government of Alexis Tsipras, has expressed his abhorrence too over EU policy - which has created "a hecatomb at sea". The sea did not drown those refugees/migrants, he points out: they were drowned by the EU's policy of "being a fortress" that "treats people as objects of hatred".

As a consequence, since 2014 an estimated 27,000 have drowned in the Mediterranean - a journey that grows ever more perilous. More than 21,000 of those deaths have occurred on the so-called central Mediterranean route from Libya or Tunisia to Greece or Italy - a crossing that can take several days and is often made in unseaworthy and overloaded boats. Because the trek up to western or northern Europe from Greece also involves an often arduous crossing of the Balkans, many migrants now seek to bypass Greece. Instead, large numbers now head for Italy, which has recorded 55,160 "irregular" arrivals in Europe so far this year - more than double the number in 2022 - mostly from Ivory Coast, Egypt, Guinea, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's prime minister, has ordered an immediate crackdown on agents engaged in people smuggling, saying they would be severely punished. He also announced a national day of mourning for the victims, with the national flag flying at half-mast. Meanwhile, at the beginning of the

week, a court in southern Greece postponed a hearing of nine Egyptian men accused of organising and piloting the ill-fated fishing boat in order to hear more testimonies from survivors.

Citizenship rights

Yes, of course, we are in favour of people mixing freely with each other. But it is not a healthy situation when you get millions of people being forced by intolerable conditions to leave their homeland and their loved ones - leave behind the culture, the language, the friends and family they know. The intermingling of people is progressive, but mass migration of people, such as the Irish since the mid-19th century, is the result of a barbaric system.

Therefore, as Marxists, we call for a change to the appalling situation that pushes people to do almost anything to try to get into the advanced capitalist countries - the US, Britain, France, Germany, etc. We need to blame imperialism, structural adjustment programmes, neoliberalism, kleptocracies, and so on. Crucially, however, where we can really make a difference is here at home in Britain, with the right response from the labour movement. Our approach is not to say that every migrant is a refugee fleeing intolerable political persecution, therefore deserving of our sympathy - an essentially liberal approach. Of course, it goes without saying that some of them are political refugees or asylum-seekers - but that is almost an incidental point.

In reality, the majority of those who drowned - though this is not a fashionable term - were 'economic refugees' (cue howls of outrage from the rightwing media and embarrassed obfuscation from the liberal press). But, from a communist perspective, what on earth is wrong with trying to find a better life abroad for economic reasons? If you are young and dynamic, yet find yourself in a hell-hole, what is wrong with trying to get out to live a half-decent life? If you were in Ireland in the middle of the 19th century, with people around you starving to death, what was wrong with scraping together the money needed to get a boat to Liverpool or Boston?

So how exactly should the labour movement in Britain respond? People who come to this country

should have citizenship rights after a short period of time - say, six months - which will give them the right to vote and other legal rights, because the reality is that economic migrants will keep coming to the US, UK, Germany, etc. No matter how many walls, fences and patrols, they will keep trying to improve their lives. But communists go further, saying that workers should have the right to join a trade union - an *effective* one, that is, not the ineffective ones we currently have in Britain, thanks to wave and after wave of anti-trade union laws.

In this way, they can be fully integrated into British politics - which is the first step in limiting competition between workers. This is a fundamental principle of the political economy of the working class - a class that is born of capitalism, but pushes against capitalism and can go beyond capitalism. We stand for the free movement of people, but also organising labour in Britain and internationally. We are not out to

preserve the position of the working class in Britain or anywhere else by keeping workers out with so-called "non-racist" immigration controls, whatever they are. Our class is global and its interests are internationalist. In the view of communists, people should have the right to live anywhere they want on the planet in order to better their lives - hence our demand for open borders.

Logically then, this also means that refugees - economic and political - should have the right to join a political party that is actually committed to transforming Europe into a socialist Europe, fighting for their long-term interests. That can make a real difference to conditions in Asia, Africa, Latin America, by spreading the flame of socialism to these countries - acting as a prelude towards the reconstruction of the world economy in the interests of all its inhabitants, no matter where they come from or where they live ●

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Fighting fund

Help us get there

As predicted last week, our June fighting fund got a big boost from the excellent payments that normally come our way this time of the month.

In fact the *Weekly Worker* received no fewer than four three-figure donations - brilliant stuff, comrades, and thanks very much to SK, KB, PM and GB! But there were other sizable contributions too, such as MM's £75, TR's £40, GS, DR and SB (£20 each), plus slightly more modest contributions from SS (£15), SA (£12) and JL (£10).

All the above were either standing orders or one-off bank transfers, while there were also cash donations from two regular donors - LM (£20) and comrade Hassan (£15). But, strangely, our fighting fund received not a single PayPal donation over the last seven days!

Despite that, the overall amount that came our way was a fantastic £872, taking the running

total up to £1,772 towards our £2,250 monthly target. In other words, we still need another £478 to reach it - and also, I hope, eat into the deficit that's been building up following the shortfalls of the last few months.

But now, with just over a week left to get what we need, don't be shy of helping us do that in whatever way you can. You'll find our PayPal link on the *Weekly Worker* website at weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate, and you can make a bank transfer to sort code 30-99-64, account number 00744310.

Nor is it too late to send us a cheque - whatever way you fancy to make sure we crash through that £2,250 barrier this month. Comrades, we need your support! ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

USA

Bussing and abusing

More and more Republican states are cynically treating migrants as political pawns. But what lies behind the surge in numbers coming over the border? **Daniel Lazare** blames wars, global warming, economic meltdown and the booming illegal drugs trade

Instead of solving problems, America's increasingly decrepit political system prefers moving them about - literally.

Undocumented migrants are the latest example. As the number flowing over the US-Mexican border has zoomed, politicians have responded by bussing them to different states, moving them to affluent suburbs, or even dumping them on the Canadian border - anything and everything, that is, as long as it stirs up resentment and avoids anything resembling a genuine solution.

The game began 14 months ago, when Texas governor Greg Abbott - an arch-reactionary who believes in banning abortion and legalising guns - rounded up 30 asylum-seekers from Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua and sent them on an 'all expenses paid' bus trip to Washington DC - some 1,700 miles away. "Texas should not have to bear the burden of the Biden administration's failure to secure our border," Abbott declared. So let the White House handle it instead. Over the next nine days, he sent nine busloads more.

Not to be outdone, Arizona governor Doug Ducey - a Republican who is every bit as conservative - began sending busloads of migrants from his state's border towns to Washington as well. Ron DeSantis - the Florida governor vying for next year's Republican presidential nomination - went one better in September by putting 48 undocumented migrants on a plane to Martha's Vineyard (a pricey vacation spot off the coast of Massachusetts, where Barack and Michelle Obama have an \$11.75 million summer home). The manoeuvre generated scads of publicity and established DeSantis as the up-and-coming bad boy of the ultra-right - even worse, maybe, than Trump himself.

Then the Dems started doing it too. Katie Hobbs announced that she would start bussing migrants out of Arizona as soon as she took over from Ducey as governor in January. After Texas sent migrants to Colorado, Democratic governor Jared Polis responded by sending them to New York.¹ New York mayor Eric Adams (also a Democrat) sent busloads to Canada and then began transferring them to the city's affluent northern suburbs, where local police vowed to block them at the border.

After pushing through a draconian state law banning illegals from entering the state in the first place, DeSantis finally began flying plane-loads across the continent to Sacramento, where California governor Gavin Newsom - yet another presidential hopeful, this time for the Democrats - seized on the gesture to launch a war of words against Sunbelt Republicans. As he put it in a recent fundraising appeal,

Eight of the 10 states with the highest murder rates are red [ie, Republican] and gun deaths are almost two times as high in red states. The Supreme Court has stripped women of their liberty and let red states replace it with mandated birth. They ban books, silence teachers and make it harder to vote ... The reason Republicans like Ron DeSantis are fanning the flames of culture



Venezuelans wanting to escape conditions in no small part triggered by US sanctions

wars is to distract from the fact that Florida has higher murder rates, worse education, and worse healthcare outcomes than states like California.

He is right. Sunbelt Republicans are caught up in a death cult that they are now trying to spread to the country as a whole. But the system is so broken that Newsom and politicians like him are helpless to resist. After hurling an insult or two, all they can do is put in place meaningless palliatives that make them look even more foolish than before.

Underlying causes

Not that the American liberals are alone in this respect. On the contrary, rising migration rates are a storm raging across the globe. Britain, France, Israel - there is no advanced capitalist state in which far-right forces are not making the most of the crisis to batter down democratic defences.

The reason is that, the more capitalism breaks down, the more it unleashes policies that are so punitive and destructive that millions of people are sent fleeing for their lives. Although the process has been growing for years, the period since the 2008 financial meltdown has seen a vast intensification, as a recent report by the UN Refugee Agency makes clear. In late 2012, for example, the number of displaced people around the globe stood at 42.7 million. By late 2022, it topped 100 million, better than one person in 80 worldwide and more than double the level of just 10 years earlier. For 23 countries with a combined population of 850 million facing high or medium-intensity conflicts, war was plainly a driving factor.²

But it's not just war *per se*, but war as a manifestation of capitalist crisis at its most concrete. The 2015 refugee crisis (the greatest since World War II), for instance, was a direct outgrowth of the military violence that the US unleashed in Libya, Syria, Yemen and other the Middle Eastern countries from 2011 on - violence that put millions of people to flight and which was ultimately about a struggle for control of the region's vast energy resources. Burkina Faso, which now has two million displaced people out of a population of 22 million, is similarly the victim of war in the form of a growing, lethal Islamist insurgency.³ But the insurgency did not arise out of thin air either. On the contrary, it is a direct by-product of Nato intervention in Libya in 2011, which,

by toppling strongman Muammar Gaddafi, reduced the country to anarchy and allowed rebels to grab and then distribute millions of small arms across the region from Nigeria to the Sudan. Burkina Faso is an innocent bystander caught up in a Nato-instigated coup.

Burkina Faso is also crippled by drought, but it is an innocent bystander in this respect as well. The climate crisis, which is causing temperatures in the central Sahel to rise 50% faster than the global average, is not Burkina Faso's fault, obviously, but the result of massive carbon emissions that advanced industrial nations are forever promising to curtail, yet which they never quite get around to doing.

Like the forces that tore apart the Middle East in the 2010s, those ripping Burkina Faso to shreds today are largely exogenous - imposed, that is, from without by an imperial system in its death throes. Although all advanced capitalist countries are implicated, the US is putting its own special stamp on the process by militarising local conflicts more and more, by instituting trade policies whose purposes are to improve its own economic standing, and by roping regional powers like Australia, Britain or the European Union into strategic 'partnerships', whose aim is to subordinate them to American interests.

Closer to home, there is yet another US policy that is wreaking havoc throughout the western hemisphere and driving up the crisis at America's southern border to greater and greater heights. This is the war on drugs. Within America, it has been an unqualified disaster ever since Richard Nixon formally declared it in 1971. As arrests have multiplied, the prison population has zoomed to the point where the United States accounts for 21% of the global population behind bars - even though it contains just 4.4% of the world's people.⁴ With black drug users three times likelier to be arrested than whites, the policy is not only brutal, but racist in the extreme.⁵

Still, it would not be quite so bad if it made drug problems better. But it does not - it makes them worse. The problem is that prohibition encourages a shift to intoxicants that are easier to conceal, harder to detect, and which also yield more profits. As drugs have grown more potent, fatal overdoses have multiplied to nearly 108,000 a year - more than gun and highway deaths combined.⁶ It is a nightmare that grows worse with each new drug-war escalation.

Yet the results outside the US are even more nightmarish. South of the border, the homicide rate has more than tripled since the US and Mexico jointly announced the Mérida Initiative in 2007 - an all-sided effort aimed at stamping out the drug trade once and for all, but which only ended up exciting it to new levels. The homicide rate in Honduras has tripled since that country emerged as a major transshipment point in the 1990s. Haiti, another major transshipment point, has been convulsed by gang violence over the same period, as have Guatemala and El Salvador.

Then there is Ecuador - a country of 17.3 million that saw a rightwing coup last month, when president Guillermo Lasso disbanded the opposition-led national assembly in order to avoid impeachment on charges of embezzlement. Previously a placid bystander, Ecuador saw violence explode when coca production began surging in neighbouring Colombia after decades of eradication efforts and *narcotraficantes* started looking for a new outlet to the sea. As local gangs warred over drug trade routes, the prison population quadrupled, while homicides nearly tripled between 2020 and 2021. But, with the above-ground economy still reeling from Covid-19, the only job opportunities are below, with the result that the drug trade can only expand. As it does, it is a sure bet that political instability will grow with it.

The results at the US-Mexican border are all too obvious. In 2012, 4,721 Ecuadorans were apprehended trying to cross. In 2021, the number hit 102,575, nearly a 22-fold increase. The number of Salvadorans trying to cross the border rose two and a half times over the same period, while the number of Mexicans rose 34 percent - from 520,000 to 696,000. All were fleeing conditions at home that the US is seemingly intent on exacerbating. In all, illegal immigration has more than doubled since 2012 - not despite the war on drugs, but because of it.⁷

Stupidity

All this is self-destruction at its purest - but not from the point of view of an ultra-right intent on using the crisis to bash liberals over the head. Sensing a winner, conservative Republicans are amping up anti-drug rhetoric to ever more absurd levels. Louisiana senator John Kennedy (no relation to the late president, by the way) recently called for a military invasion. Joe Biden, he said, should "call president López Obrador and

make him a deal he can't refuse to allow our military and our law enforcement officials to go into Mexico and work with his to stop the cartels",⁸ He also wants to designate Mexican drug cartels as terrorist organisations - as do Lindsey Graham, a Republican senator from South Carolina, Texas governor Greg Abbott, plus senior republicans in 20 other states.

And, of course, there is Donald Trump. "This is the time for Mexico, with the help of the United States, to wage war on the drug cartels and wipe them off the face of the earth," Trump tweeted back in 2019. According to Mark Esper, his former secretary of defence, Trump twice asked if the military could "shoot missiles into Mexico to destroy the drug labs", adding: "We could just shoot some Patriot missiles and take out the labs quietly. No-one would know it was us."⁹ More recently, Trump has reportedly asked advisors to draw up a "battle plan" to attack Mexico if he is elected in 2024.¹⁰

And, lest anyone think that Democrats are better, secretary of state Antony Blinken said in March that the Biden administration is thinking about hitting Mexican drug cartels with the terrorist label too.¹¹

The stupidity is mind-blowing, especially considering that opiate cultivation in Afghanistan surged as much as 41 times during 20 years of US military occupation.¹² Given such a track record, why would anyone think that a US military invasion would result in anything better in Mexico?

The answer is that they do not. Republicans are not thinking about how to end the drug war, for the simple reason that they want to see it continue, so they can use the resultant mayhem to bludgeon Democrats all the more effectively. The more ultra-potent drugs that are sold, the more users die, the more refugees pile up at the US-Mexican border - the more such horrors accumulate, the more they can blame liberal permissiveness for causing them in the first place. All Dems can do is echo such proposals or shift the problem onto someone else and hope that voters do not notice.

The upshot is a bipartisan *pas de deux* resulting in one outcome only: mutually assured destruction ●

Notes

1. www.axios.com/2023/01/03/colorado-migrant-governor-polis-bus-new-york.
2. See pp5-9: www.unhcr.org/media/40152.
3. www.nrc.no/news/2023/june/burkina-faso-is-the-worlds-most-neglected-crisis.
4. bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/correctional-populations-united-states-2015.
5. bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/rdsda.pdf.
6. blogs.cdc.gov/nchs/2023/05/18/7365.
7. For more, see table 34 at www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/2022_1114_pley_yearbook_immigration_statistics_fy2021_v2_1.pdf.
8. www.nola.com/gambit/news/the_latest/republican-sen-john-kennedy-unleashes-bomb-broadside-against-mexicans/article_c697695a-f11b-11ed-8b15-9b07ae423108.html.
9. www.vox.com/politics/2023/4/21/23686510/mexico-invade-bomb-trump-republicans-cartels.
10. newrepublic.com/post/171484/donald-trump-and-republican-party-wants-go-war-mexico.
11. www.cbsnews.com/news/mexican-drug-cartels-terrorist-organization-what-would-that-mean.
12. See Fig 1 at www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Opium_cultivation_Afghanistan_2022.pdf.

SCOTLAND

Arrested development

Scott Evans looks at the paradox of continued support for independence and the revival of the Scottish Labour Party

The two most recent stories consuming Scottish politics stand in symbolically for the two great questions hanging over everything in Scotland. On the one hand, we saw the arrest of the former leader of the Scottish National Party, Nicola Sturgeon, who was subsequently released without charge. Then there was the (failed) attempt of the Scottish Tories to pass a vote of no confidence in the Green Party's Lorna Slater - minister for green skills, circular economy and biodiversity in Scotland - for the decisions surrounding the so-far failing deposit return scheme (DRS).¹

These represent, respectively, the vacuum of decisive and competent leadership in the organisational forefront of the Scottish independence movement, the SNP, and the case-by-case attack of the Tories on both the SNP specifically and Scottish devolution generally.

The arrest of Sturgeon was not particularly surprising, being the last of those major names listed on the various important documents implicated in the finances scandal, alongside Peter Murrell and Colin Beattie. Besides the coverage - mainly in the Tory press - of the potential of the "cash in envelopes" development in the finances scandal,² there is not in my view a whole lot new to say about recent news relating to the investigation in general or Sturgeon in particular. Nevertheless, while Sturgeon's eventual arrest was about as equally expected as the eventual death of Silvio Berlusconi, like his death it reignited a flurry of debate on the major topics of the day relating to the figure of concern: Sturgeon's own career, the future of the SNP, the possibility of Scottish independence, the decision of current SNP leader and first minister Humza Yousaf to run as a "continuity candidate" (regretting that one perhaps?), and what exactly the obligations should be for a former leader accused of a crime in relation to her party.

If Sturgeon stays, she will be a 'distraction' from the SNP government agenda and the narrative they are trying to build around it. But, if she goes, she will be taking an action which in some ways announces a degree of non-innocence, and which sets a precedent which would allow 'just asking questions' police investigations to be used as political weapons in the future.

Split

Alex Salmond, speaking on the podcast *Holyrood Sources*,³ was, as one would expect, fairly scathing about the state of the SNP. He said that it brings him no joy to see the party in disrepair, at the same time bemoaning the party's transformation from a "volunteer party" with "inherent decency" and "very few careerists" to something approaching the opposite today. He also claimed that it has ceased to be a democratic party which can hold its leadership to account and where the rank and file can contribute to the direction of policy and strategy. While technically refusing to say whether he would support her suspension from the party, he did say that "Nicola Sturgeon would have suspended Nicola Sturgeon" - later claiming in an interview with Sky News that Sturgeon and her husband and ex-chief exec Peter Murrell "used to suspend people at the drop of a hat".



Nicola Sturgeon: should she go or should she stay?

But Salmond offers no explanation as to why the party has gone this way. In the story he would have us believe, it is as if everything has gone downhill since he himself resigned as leader and later exited the party in 2018. Perhaps he is fatalistic with respect to party politics in general and believes that one has to regularly spawn new organisations, as the old organisations begin to bureaucratise, in a phoenix-like cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

The development of the SNP is at least in part a result of its 'professionalisation' while in government, meaning the development of an eminently corruptible, bureaucratic layer trained in the daily business of government administration, wheeling and dealing, schmoozing, and so on; and also its broad-frontist strategy for carrying the independence movement to power with (for now) a technocratic, 'civic nationalist' wing in the driving seat.

Being the leader of his new party, Alba, which split from the SNP in 2021, Salmond has a personal interest in advocating a multi-party approach to securing independence, culminating either in something akin to a 'de facto referendum' or a multi-party 'convention on independence'. Salmond has suggested that the SNP, Alba, the Scottish Greens and even the Scottish Socialist Party should be working together to secure independence, while maintaining organisational separation. The debate is reminiscent of those on the socialist/communist left around whether to organise into a single party or whether to organise as associations and networks of independent organisations working towards the same goal, with fundamentally different programmes and perhaps even mutually incompatible strategies for achieving that goal.

In terms of Salmond's continued influence or not, he claims that Alba is the third largest party in Scotland by membership at around 8,000, despite its current status as an electoral nonentity. But the Scottish Tories refuse to release membership figures and so it is hard to verify Salmond's claim; in any case, Alba is certainly bigger by membership than the Scottish Liberal Democrats and very similar in number to the Scottish Greens (though one can never really trust formal membership numbers on their own).

Ironically, the Tories' attacks

on devolution may well provide something of an out for the SNP in terms of the current political impasse. In the mid-to-long term there is Yousaf's push for 60% support for independence via a period of simple 'good government' (however unrealistic this is). In the short term there is the task of defending devolution, providing both an opportunity to look back on the history, as well as giving a disappointed, neglected and weary rank and file something 'positive' and immediate to fight for.⁴ As Yousaf has said, "we are facing a steady erosion of the powers of our parliament". Meanwhile, the SNP will point to independence as the only act which can truly secure what has already been 'gained' by devolution, and more besides.

DRS

That brings us to the recent vote of no confidence in Green Skills etc minister, Scottish Greens co-Leader Lorna Slater, brought forward by the Scottish Tories. Besides one rebel SNP MSP, Fergus Ewing, the vote of no confidence in Slater fell precisely along party lines, with 68 voting against her removal and 55 for. Given it had little chance of passing, Slater is probably correct to label it a "shameless political stunt", but to what end? Perhaps to add to the already present aura of chaos surrounding the Scottish parliament in recent months. Perhaps to try and drive at weaknesses in the two Green MSPs currently propping up the SNP government. Perhaps as a 'distraction' from Tory misrule in Westminster. Irrespective of why, it has triggered yet another round in the debates around devolution.

A deposit return scheme is not exactly the most exciting thing that has ever been covered in a communist newspaper, but a brief digression is necessary to explain the source of this vote. Essentially, a DRS adds an additional cost - in the Scottish case 20p (typical for these schemes in Europe generally, it seems) - on the price of single-use or low-reuse products which it covers. You can recover this cost by returning your plastic bottle, can or glass bottle either to a shop involved in the scheme or at any of the various local collection points. As someone who has attended music festivals implementing 10p schemes and witnessed some festival-goers carrying metres-tall stacks of plastic cups, I can say that it does work, at

least on that scale.⁵

The 'issue' posed by Scotland's scheme is the proposal to include glass. Though England is poised to introduce a similar scheme by 2025, it will not include glass, unlike proposals made also by Wales. This is said to risk raising *de facto* trade barriers between Scotland and Wales on the one side, and England on the other, making it fall foul of the Internal Markets Act (2020), so long as the Tories refuse to grant an exemption. Welsh first minister and Labour leader in Wales Mark Drakeford, when approached by the BBC for comment, said he would "dispute the use of the Internal Market Act for these purposes".⁶

Whatever truth there is in the various causes offered for the failed roll-out of this scheme, whether it is down to small and large industry lobbyists, the Scottish government's incompetence, the Tories' so-called '11th hour intervention' and general hostility, or all of the above, there can be no doubt that it has been yet another front on which the Tories have been hammering the SNP and devolution. We should expect to see more such cases, unless Keir Starmer's Labour takes the reins and pursues a fundamentally different approach, come the next UK general election.

Polls

By far the most notable aspect of opinion polling has been the continued detachment between approval levels shown for the SNP and for Scottish independence. Independence has barely shifted at all in terms of historical averages, while support for the SNP has shrunk dramatically. The recent by-election win for Scottish Labour in Bellshill, North Lanarkshire, cannot be used as anything like a bellwether for the SNP, as the incumbent, Jordan Linden, resigned due to sexual assault allegations, and the turnout was a mere 22.7%. Nevertheless, Scottish Labour has been predicted to take as many as 20 seats from the SNP at the next election.⁷ Starmer has claimed he wants a strong showing in Scotland for reasons of 'legitimacy', though one expects what he is really thinking is that he needs an actual majority in the House of Commons.

Polls are rarely used for much more than triggering talking points. More important is to look at relative polling, such as the detachment of support for independence and the SNP, and to try and explain - if the

polling reflects reality - what causes may be behind it. Through attempting to understand the *potential* cause, one can gather a much deeper understanding of the political situation and plan accordingly. But I have to throw my hands up and say I do not know what will happen come election time, except the obvious in terms of some Labour wins.

Some who only vote SNP as the representatives of a 'realistic vehicle' for independence despite not sharing all or much of their politics may be convinced to hold on and vote SNP again in the face of the devolution threat posed by the Tories. Some current SNP supporters who presently find little hope for independence may turn to the Scottish Greens, but this will only be a small minority. Others will simply not vote, refusing to hand their vote to Labour even temporarily, having never forgiven them for their role in the 'no' campaign in the 2014 referendum. Others - perhaps the most significant contingent (combined with non-voters) if polling is to be believed - will temporarily hand their vote to Labour. What the long-term outcome of this will be is anyone's guess, but I expect this will be more determined by broader tendencies in UK-wide politics if things are to change more permanently.

In the face of this desolate landscape, those on the Scottish left who continue to act like the only two options available are adopting left-Brexiteer arguments around 'national sovereignty', on the one hand, and socialistic versions of the technocratic transnationalism of institutions like the EU, on the other⁸ (ie, tailing trends on the left south of the border versus trailing the SNP), have forgotten one key alternative: working class internationalism aimed at a communist horizon of general emancipation. I am certain that those who ignore this option have not really forgotten. Rather, they see it as either a utopian demand of times past or as being premature in a time where 'revolutionary crisis' has not yet arrived.

If it seems ridiculous to them, it is because the left's political horizons have shrunk, not because of any real change in society and future possibilities, but because of the legacy of historical defeats and failures ●

Notes

1. I briefly noted the scheme and the UK government's intent to block it in 'A fruitless crown', *Weekly Worker* March 23 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1435/a-fruitless-crown).
2. Eg. www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/politics/snp-cash-envelopes-claims-being-30261361.
3. podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/exclusive-alex-salmond/id1673972192?i=1000616932159.
4. See: www.thenational.scot/politics/23600122.scotlands-future-eroding-witness-erosion-devolution and some Tweets from the official SNP account: twitter.com/theSNP/status/1668918492576268289 and twitter.com/theSNP/status/1669397828957765641.
5. Recycling International's numbers seem to support the claim that it works, and very well too, for what it is trying to achieve: recyclinginternational.com/technology/learning-from-the-worlds-best-deposit-return-systems/46477.
6. Brief interview here: twitter.com/GlennBBC/status/1664339467392393218, similar to Slater's intervention in the Scottish Parliament, a fragment of which can be viewed here: twitter.com/blairanderson35/status/1671160449583443973.
7. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-65262880.
8. www.conter.scot/2023/6/6/to-survive-scottish-independence-must-abandon-civic-nationalism.

USSR

First plan realities

Clearly the first five-year plan had nothing to do with the realisation of socialist planning. In the second of two articles, **Jack Conrad** investigates the counterrevolution within the revolution

In February 1931, Stalin talked of fulfilling the five-year plan in "the basic, decisive branches of industry" not in four years, but in "three years".¹ This was the speech where he issued his famous justification: "We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in 10 years. Either we do so, or we shall go under."² Alec Nove - obligingly, half apologetically - adds the obvious, but highly charged, fact that "1941 was 10 years away".³ Stalin doubtless expected war (not that that stopped him being caught completely unaware by the launch of Operation Barbarossa on June 22 1941).

Certainly, by demanding the maximisation of output in every branch, in every enterprise, productive capacity was violently shunted forward. But this could only be done in an unbalanced, chaotic manner. For instance, the target for oil production was supposedly reached in two and a half years. Naturally this was the cause of much official rejoicing. But it completely disrupted and overwhelmed auxiliary sectors. Storage, refining and transport facilities failed to achieve the pace needed to adequately handle the premature triumph. Such unevenness is, of course, the very antithesis of planning. Obviously, no coordination existed between what were closely related branches of the economy. And, while oil that could not be refined and transported had target-value, it had no use-value.

In the oil industry there was a discrepancy between output and the facilities needed to handle it, while in engineering the discrepancy was between output and the raw material and labour inputs. The plan was fulfilled in three years and output increased fourfold. Yet steel production fell short by some 40%. How machine tools, pumps, turbines, etc were built without the planned input of steel is probably explained by extravagant managerial lies, the very low base level in this sector and the ability of enterprises to circumvent the target system by unofficially obtaining scarce raw materials and labour - thus denying others. Hence, whereas spontaneity gives capitalism a certain coherence, in the Soviet Union spontaneity could only but drain what coherence might otherwise have existed.

So, yes, the first five-year plan was a mockery of planning - a salient fact recognised at the time by a number of observers. Amongst them the left Mensheviks, Aaron Yugov, Solomon Schwartz, O Domenevskaya, Fedor Dan and Yu Braginskaya, organised around the émigré journal *Sotsialistichesky Vestnik* (Socialist Herald). Braginskaya insisted that the projected growth of the Soviet economy in general, but especially in areas such as machinery and construction, could not be sustained by the iron and steel industry. The execution of the plan "has hardly been sinned against by being overly well thought out", she damningly wrote.⁴ Existing capacities and potential had been wilfully ignored. There was no organic interconnection between all branches of industry and all stages of production. Gosplan simply decreed maximum growth. But overfulfilment in one sector resulted in underfulfilment in another. The economy was therefore liable to fly



Yakov Guminer 'Arithmetic of a counterplan' (1931). Text reads: "The arithmetic of an industrial-financial counter-plan: 2 + 2 plus the enthusiasm of the workers = 5"

apart at any moment.

Christian Rakovsky, one of Trotsky's closest allies, issued the same sort of warning:

Today they increase the programme for coal and iron to make it possible to fulfil the programme for machine building; tomorrow it will be necessary to expand the programme for machine building to make it possible to fulfil the enlarged programme for coal and iron in order to guarantee the new programme for machine building. In the midst of this spiral it suddenly turns out that it is posing tasks for transport that transport will not be able to cope with, unless the latter receives an appropriate supply of iron and steel - and so the programme for coal and iron is boosted again and the circle begins anew. Hence the exaggerated tempos, the exaggerated figures,

the exaggerated plans, which collapse as soon as they come into touch with reality.⁵

Rakovsky - along with Nicolai Bukharin and the *Sotsialistichesky Vestnik* Mensheviks - thought that the attempt to overcome the underaccumulation of the means of production (ie, Russia's historic backwardness) in the shortest possible time by maximising the development of every sector, every branch, every unit, had to result in unevenness, bottlenecks and endless delays. The projected iron and steel complexes, chemical plants and engineering factories of the first five-year plan were, therefore, follies, destined to slowly fall into ruin like the pyramids of ancient Egypt. So reasoned Rakovsky, Bukharin and the *Sotsialistichesky Vestnik* Mensheviks. Obviously, a vastly overstated prediction. By the late

1930s these follies were churning out steel, artificial fertilisers, tractors and tanks. Nevertheless, the gigantic projects tied up enormous resources ... and, as everyone knows, delays and shortages became a permanent feature of the system.

Tajar Zavalani, who had first-hand experience of the first five-year plan, observed that the only way the authorities could cope with the chaos they had created "was to improvise, to waste precious materials and leave other things undone".⁶ The regime was compelled to cut across its own lines of command and impose its own priorities to make sure that what was absolutely vital got done. The armed forces, key enterprises, prestige projects had to be granted privileged status ... and in the process 'priority Peter' robbed 'non-priority Paul'.

Nonetheless, the results of the first five-year plan were in comparative

terms hugely impressive - the rest of the world had been sent reeling by the great crash. In the subsequent recession industrial production fell by 10%-50% in the capitalist countries, while in the Soviet Union it officially doubled. At the end of 1932 *Pravda* triumphantly announced that the five-year plan had been fulfilled in four and a quarter years. In 51 months, it was claimed, the gross output of Soviet industry leapt from 15.7 to 34.3 billion roubles - 93.7% of the planned target for the five-year period. The minor shortfall was explained as being due to foreign warmongering and the necessity of devoting more resources than expected to the armed forces (1932 witnessed the beginning of a series of border clashes with imperial Japan in Manchuria that only ended in 1939).

However, in the "main link" - ie, "heavy industry" - there was overfulfilment, boasted Stalin.⁷ He admitted that developing heavy industry involved enormous investment of raw material and labour-power. But, he claimed, the party (ie, himself) had "declared frankly that this would call for serious sacrifices, and that it was our duty to openly and consciously to make these sacrifices if we wanted to achieve our goal".⁸ Put another way, the promise to increase living standards by between 77.5% and 85% proved to be a cruel hoax.

Nowadays, there is no serious doubt that official claims about the first five-year plan were absurdly exaggerated. Recomputations by western experts, even in the 1940s, reveal much lower increases. Estimates for national income between 1928 and 1937 - ie, two five-year plans - vary between 33%, 64% and 74% (the discrepancy largely resulting from the use of US 1925-34 prices, US 1940 prices or real 1926-27 Soviet prices as statistical weights).⁹ Nonetheless, even allowing for rouble inflation and the probable inaccuracy of Soviet figures, the production of waste and the effective destruction of the statistically invisible, but economically significant, handicraft, small workshop and domestic sectors, to put it mildly, a "great deal was achieved".¹⁰

The engineering works of Moscow and Leningrad were comprehensively updated with the purchase and installation of foreign technology; the giant Dnieper hydroelectric dam started to generate electricity; the vast Magnitogorsk iron and steel complex arose, as if from nothing; and, all in all, 1,500 new factories and other industrial enterprises were put into operation. The Soviet Union was being modernised.

Collectivisation

As mentioned in part one of this article, the aim of "total" collectivisation was absent from the "definitive text" of the first five-year plan. Events forced Stalin's hand. The industrialisation drive, by its very chaotic nature, exacerbated the existing goods famine and, as its speed was relentlessly upped month by month, runaway inflation punctured the value of the rouble.

The price of grain could have been upped in compensation, as would be normal under a market economy - even a mixed economy, as under the

USSR

New Economic Policy. But that Stalin was unwilling to countenance and hence the state's options effectively closed. Higher *real* agricultural prices would divert (maybe halt) the industrialisation drive, and reassert the peasants' bargaining power with a vengeance. Extraordinary measures - ie, grain requisitions, already recommenced in late 1927 - inevitably resulted in a delivery strike, a sowing strike, a refusal to rent land, a turn to non-confiscatory crops and diminishing returns. There was less and less, even when it came to requisitioning. Market relations were therefore breaking down and once again threatening hunger. Stalin, following the line of least resistance, went for "total" collectivisation. So in no way was this a preconceived move.

For a short while the idea was that industrialisation would go hand-in-hand with collectivisation. Industry was to supply 100,000 tractors and so Machine Tractor Stations were established. However, with the tractor factories still under construction, orders were issued, in late December 1929, to encourage every peasant to join one of the *kolkhozy* (collective farms). In reality force decided. The NEP and market relations were thereby abandoned in favour of coercion and a system of targets. Peasants were transformed into *kolkhozniks* and effectively re-enslaved. They could not, for example, move away from the collective farm without the express permission of the *kolkhoz* chair. Internal passports were soon reintroduced - a classic feature of tsarist oppression.

True, collectivisation was dressed up as a spontaneous mass movement of the peasants themselves (well, the middle and poor peasants). But this was piffle. Behind the facade of voluntary union lay the full might of the state. Meetings were convened where peasants were effectively compelled to vote in favour of collectivisation. Those who voted the wrong way were denounced as *kulaks* or semi-*kulaks*. There was not only bullying, but beating, confiscation and, within no time, mass killing. The real history of collectivisation is, therefore, written not by Stalin's propagandists, but harassed regional and local officials. Their bland reports bear truthful, though unintended, witness to the human suffering.¹¹

In the 13th century Genghis Khan had laid waste to old Rus, and Stalin did the same to new Russia. He unleashed a 'silent' civil war on the countryside. Orders were issued demanding the liquidation of the *kulaks* as a class. It should be understood that the *kulaks* were an altogether vague category: eg, a hard-working, former Red Army hero could easily find himself branded as a blood-sucking *kulak*.

The *kulaks* were divided into three neat categories: the first set might be admitted into the *kolkhoz* as probationary members; the second were to be arrested, imprisoned, shot and their families exiled; the third merely exiled. Perhaps 1.5 million people in all were affected, among them so-called 'ideological' *kulaks*, ie, those middle or poor peasants who opposed collectivisation. Family obligations, friendship ties, hatred of local communist officials, loyalty to the Orthodox Church, etc, meant that there were many such potential *kulaks*.

Suffice to say, numerous protest demonstrations and revolts occurred - led not only by *kulaks*, but serving militia lieutenants and former Red Army officers too. The danger was of a full-scale *jacquerie* and Stalin was forced into changing course. His famous 'Dizzy with success' article appeared in *Pravda* (March 2 1930), in which cadres were

blamed for being carried away by the collectivisation drive and using excessive force. A tactical withdrawal was ordered. Individual holdings were to be allowed. Low-quality and marginal land was once again divided up. There was the promise, though, to return to the offensive when the time was ripe. Agriculture would be totally collectivised and kulak resistance finally broken. By 1932 that promise had been delivered.

When it came to reporting agriculture, Stalin deviously tried to shift the focus. Instead of output, instead of surplus product, instead of improved productivity, he boasted that the first five-year plan had been fulfilled "three times over". Now there were 200,000 collective and 5,000 state farms. Far above the original five-year-plan target ... and this went hand-in-hand with the "routing of the *kulaks* as a class".¹² This was akin to a transplant surgeon fulfilling their target three times over by killing off hospital visitors and harvesting their organs.

Collectivisation had nothing to do with boosting production, let alone civilising agriculture. Robert Conquest is quite right when he says that the "idea of smoothly planned progress was quite inapplicable".¹³ Collectivisation was carried through barbarically and resulted in agriculture being hurled backwards - not least by the peasants' gluttonous attempt to retain what was theirs. Mikhail Sholokhov's 'socialist-realist' novel *Virgin soil upturned* (1932 and 1960) vividly conveys the bacchanalia of eating that attended the onset of collectivisation:

Not only those who had joined the collective farm, but individual farmers also slaughtered. They killed oxen, sheep, pigs, even cows; they slaughtered animals kept for breeding. In two nights the horned cattle of Gremyachy were reduced to half their number. The dogs began to drag entrails and guts about the village, the cellars and granaries were filled with meat. In two days the cooperative shop sold some 200 poods of salt, which had been lying in the warehouse for 18 months. "Kill, it's not ours now!" "Kill, they'll take it for the meat collection tax if you don't." "Kill, for you won't taste meat in the collective farm." The insidious rumours crept around. And they killed. They ate until they were unable to move. Everybody, from the youngest to the oldest, suffered with stomach-ache. At dinner-time the tables groaned under the weight of boiled and roasted meat. At dinner-time everybody had a greasy mouth, everybody belched as though they had been at a funeral repast in memory of the dead. And all were owlsh with the intoxication of eating.¹⁴

Even when the butchery finally stopped, the *kolkhozy* lacked the expertise necessary for handling what little livestock remained. Neither the peasants - nor the 25,000 frontline workers mobilised from the towns - had been prepared or resourced. Tending two or three cows was within the grasp of any half-competent peasant. Milking, feeding, sheltering and maintaining herds of 200 or 300 was an entirely different matter. Not surprisingly, many animals "died from neglect".¹⁵

The net result was that between 1928 and 1932 the number of cattle fell from 70.5 to 38.4 million, pigs from 26 to 11.6 million and sheep and goats from 146.7 to 52.1 million. Shortages of draft horses, due to slaughter and lack of fodder, the absence of tractors to replace

them and lack of basic knowledge also disastrously reduced the grain harvest to below 70 million tons between 1931 and 1935.

Starvation

True, that grain possessed the same colour, the same shape and the same size as before. However, a new social spirit had taken hold. Once the grain had been cultivated on a mass of small family farms and had belonged to the individual peasant. Now farms had thousands of members, covered thousands of hectares and the grain belonged to the state. And, despite the string of poor harvests, because of urban expansion and the need to fulfil export contracts, more and more of that grain went to the state till the countryside starved.

Targets demanded a 40% increase in the value of exports, including grain, in order to pay for imports of foreign machinery needed for industrialisation. However, there was a little problem. The world capitalist economic crisis resulted in a precipitous fall in basic commodity prices. Hence, to keep its imports up to what was required, exports would have had to increase by 57%. That proved impossible - imports could only be increased by 35%.

The foreign correspondent of the *New York Evening Post*, Hubert Knickerbocker, reported that "many factories in the Soviet Union failed to receive important orders because imports had lacked coming up to plan by 5%" and that the export drive meant that "there was still less for the population to eat, wear and use".¹⁶ Perceptively this US bourgeois journalist stressed that under Stalin's plan "it is the state that is to become at once more powerful, not the population that is to become better fed, clothed, more comfortable and happy ... Power for the state has become an end in itself under the five-year plan."¹⁷

Transforming necessary product into an addition to accumulation, yes, went hand-in-hand with less and less of everything - crucially food though. Shelves emptied. Queues grew longer and longer. People went hungry. To ensure the survival of the urban population rationing had to be reintroduced. John Scott - an American working in the newly established giant Magnitogorsk iron and steel complex - stoically testifies to the impoverished diet:

Foodstuffs, indirectly very important for the construction job, were as hard to get as industrial materials and supplies. Every industrial organisation was responsible for feeding its workers. It gave out food cards and then tried to supply the items indicated thereon. This, however, it often failed to do. In 1932 a rigger's food card entitled him to (per month):

Bread 30 kilograms
Meat 3 kilograms
Sugar 1 kilogram
Milk 15 litres
Butter 1 kilogram
Cereal grain 2 kilograms

Potatoes In proportion to supply
During the entire winter of 1932-33, however, the riggers got no meat, no butter, and almost no sugar or milk. They received only bread with a little cereal grain.¹⁸

And, when food deliveries did finally arrive, they were frequently near inedible. Stale bread, rotting potatoes and what passed for meat often being little more than bones, gristle and scraps.

One brilliant solution to the meat shortage, "proposed" by none other than Stalin himself, was the attempt to persuade workers to breed rabbits.¹⁹ Exhortations were repeatedly issued in the press, along with many and

varied feeding tips and cooking recipes. But the "campaign failed to capture the public imagination" and ended in hysterical recriminations.²⁰ The only effective short-term answer to the food crisis, other than rationing, was the "massive expansion" of workplace canteens.²¹ Numbers catered for grew rapidly - from 730,000 in 1929 to 15,400,000 at the end of 1932. Canteens were habitually overcrowded and filthy. And, as might already be expected, the quality was appalling. That way, though, the cities were saved from starvation.

While urban workers ate much less meat, those in the countryside ate much less of everything - to the point where the years 1932-33 witnessed horrendous mass starvation. Donald Filtzer estimates that "as many as four million" died.²² Michael Ellman gives a five million figure.²³ Robert Conquest quotes Soviet sources from 1988 who claim that the "deaths in the terror-famine cannot have been lower than six to seven million"²⁴ - The human cost of Stalin's *spontaneous* collectivisation movement.

Nikita Khrushchev's memoirs are worth mentioning on this score. A member of Stalin's inner circle and his effective successor, Khrushchev claimed he had "no idea" how bad "things were" during collectivisation.²⁵ Unbelievable. The surely less well informed Hubert Knickerbocker could pun at the time that: "The plan is a method for Russia to 'starve itself great'."²⁶ And, while there was an eventual recovery from the collectrophe, there can be no doubt that, when it came to agriculture, the Soviet Union remained hopelessly inefficient right through till the 1991 fall. That notwithstanding, peasants would never again engage in economic blackmail. They were robbed of their market strength. Because of collectivisation, selling strikes, sowing strikes, etc were now impossible - and surely that, for Stalin, is what counted.

The peasantry had been reduced to an inert, sullen mass, incapable of acting in its own interests. The *kolkhoz* chair could treat general meetings of the collective farm as a rubber stamp and act to all intents and purposes in a manner little different from the old *pomeshchiki* (landlords). In public, peasants held the *kolkhoz* chair in the greatest respect, if not awe. They would approach him humbly with much bowing and scraping.²⁷

Of course, the *kolkhoz* chair had no property rights. An agent of the state, they could be replaced at any moment, for any reason. On the other hand, unlike the post-1906 capitalist farmers of tsarist Russia, the *kolkhoz* chair had no incentive to cut costs, experiment with new crops, introduce innovative machinery or new forms of labour organisation. Apart from a modicum of competence, the main quality that recommended the *kolkhoz* chair was a willingness to fall into line with orders issued from above.

Primary accumulation

Controversy has raged over whether or not, or to what degree, agriculture provided the surplus product necessary for primary accumulation. Agriculture, according to Alec Nove, "made a decisive contribution to the financing of the plan".²⁸ Standard Soviet historiography also claimed that a "substantial contribution to industrialisation was made by the Soviet countryside".²⁹

Tony Cliff, on this subject at least, had a much better handle on things:

Collectivisation has resulted in the freeing of agricultural products for the needs of industrial development, the 'freeing' of the peasantry from the means of production, the transformation of a section of them into reserves of labour-power for industry, and the transformation of the rest into part-workers, part-peasants, part serfs.³⁰

Because of collectivisation and the dramatic fall in the numbers of cattle, pigs and horses, there was more grain, cabbage and potatoes available to deliver to the towns (there were fewer animals to feed and the peasants were allowed to go hungry). Yet whether or not this represented a *net* transfer of surplus from agriculture to industry for purposes of primary accumulation is open to serious question.

There are those, such as Michael Ellman, who calculate that the "agricultural industrial surplus was negative throughout the first five-year plan (except 1931, when it was slightly positive)".³¹ James R Millar, concludes that agriculture may well have become a drain on industry³² - an assessment echoed by Robert Conquest.³³ Quite possibly, therefore, agriculture received "tribute" from industry in the early 1930s. Not the other way round, as advocated by

Online Communist Forum



Sunday June 25 5pm

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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.

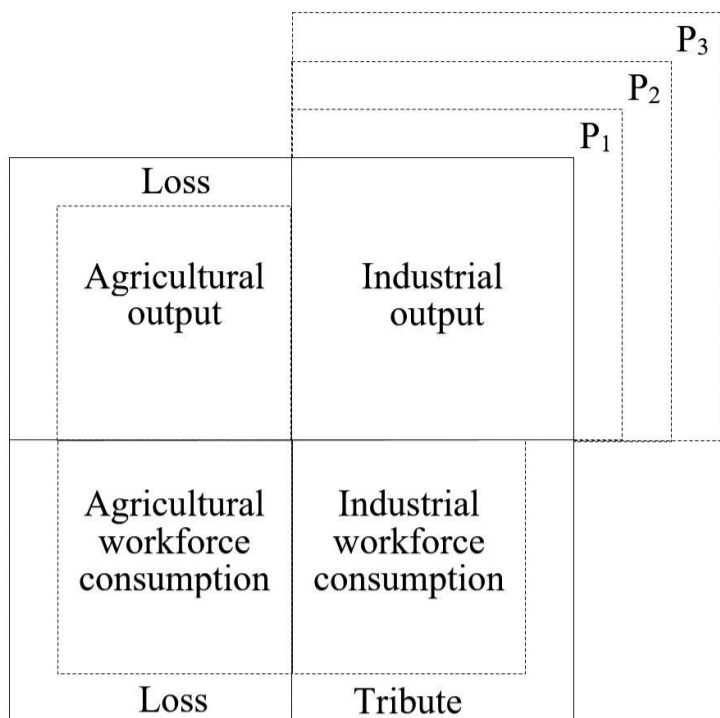
■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ 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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The tribute model in practice



Trotsky, Preobrazhensky and Stalin. In other words, the 'normal' poles of unequal exchange were reversed.

Admittedly, there is a calculation problem: different results come from using 1913 or 1928 prices, certainly post-1928 prices: ie, the rouble names of products were arbitrary, inconsistent and on occasion totally bizarre. What is beyond doubt, though, is that, despite producing less, peasants were, for a few terrible years, subject to a regime of *lethal* exploitation. So much for maintaining the famed worker-peasant alliance.

Extensive wheat, barley and rye monoculture requires tractors, combine harvesters and artificial fertilisers delivered from industry. Because of the unplanned, politically motivated rush to total collectivisation, such means of production were largely absent during the first five-year plan. They were, though, with the second five-year plan, supplied, and on a substantial scale. Hence, in due course, the state presided over a slow but steady rise in agricultural production. However, the results were, in productivity terms, always disappointing. Therefore, it is quite conceivable that unequal exchange, which benefited agriculture, continued after the first-five year plan.

When it comes to primary accumulation, Ellman emphasises two main factors: firstly, the "fall in urban real wages" and, secondly, the role of coercion.³⁴ We, of course, would say this about so-called wages: certainly from the first five-year plan onwards, roubles were not money (ie, the general equivalent). Estimates of the drop in urban living standards vary considerably, but it could have been as much as 50%. Whatever the exact figure, there can be no quibbling about the role of coercion. Force atomised the industrial workforce, force dragooned peasants into the *kolkhozy*, force expropriated the *kulaks*, force supplied the gulag prison system with its human inputs, and force made them work. Nor should we forget that the whole population - not least the apparatus itself - lived under the shadow of coercion. During the purges the apparatus was decimated, hundreds of thousands were executed or died due to the appalling treatment meted out in the gulag. Fear ensured, in public at least, a robotic uniformity.

Certainly, during the course of the first five-year plan the number of registered workers shot up from 11.3 to 22.8 million. The urban population reached nearly 40 million (compared with the projected 32.5 million). Here, in the simultaneous fall in *average* living standards and the absolute increase in the number of workers made available through collectivisation, we surely find the main source of primary accumulation. Hence we read: industry "developed chiefly on the basis of its own resources".³⁵ Stalin's plagiarised version of Preobrazhensky, together with his programme of unequal exchange between agriculture and industry, resolves itself via increased exploitation within industry. Note, the *proportion* of national income devoted to accumulation rose from "19.4% in 1928 to 30.3% in 1932".³⁶ A gouging increase.

So we arrive at a more *realistic* picture of the sort of accumulation that actually happened in the first five-year-plan (see diagram). It is, note, different in key respects from the tribute model first presented by Preobrazhensky and later taken up by Stalin.

The solid outer line can be taken as representing simple reproduction and the broken lines mark the changed brought about during period one (P1). However, instead of agricultural output going unaltered, it suffers a

contraction, and it was the same with the consumption of the agricultural workforce - they went hungry, many to the point of starvation. Now, though, it is not the reduced (expected) consumption levels of the agricultural workforce that supplies tribute to expanding production in the industrial sector: it is the industrial workforce itself. This, in turn, allows for greater industrial output and not just in period one (P1), but period two (P2), period three (P3), etc. At some point - say, period four (P4) - industry is in a position where it can begin to supply the agricultural sector with the means of production, combines, tractors, artificial fertilisers, etc, which allows for the restoration and then - say, in period five (P5) - the boosting of agricultural output.

Undoubtedly, expectations of immediately boosting productivity in the industrial sector failed to materialise. That despite the initial enthusiasm for the first five-year plan amongst Komsomol members, the shock brigades, production communes and socialist competition. Nonetheless, when the new plants and machinery eventually came on stream, productivity did significantly rise.

The first five-year plan was an historic turning point. Members of the elite came to expect luxuries, they were supplied with servants, their apartments were spacious and well appointed. Meanwhile, the living standards of ordinary industrial workers and collective farmers were driven downwards ... often below the level of subsistence.

Note that from 1930 candid references to the embarrassing phenomenon of falling real wages (yes, so-called) were "no longer permitted" in official publications.³⁷ However, instead of blaming their own system for this and many other failings, those at the top hunted down "wreckers, spies, diversionists and assassins" (Stalin's term for victimised workers, peasants, managers ... and suspect apparatchiks).³⁸ The secret police arrested according to a "quota principle".³⁹ A horror that stands out even amidst the horrors of the 20th century.

True, workers fought back in their own particular ways: nod-and-wink go-slows, sabotaging machines, intimidation of snitches, norm busters and uncooperative foremen ... and simply by quitting. That way they won more roubles, increased food rations, better accommodation and all-in-all established a greater and greater degree of negative workers' control.

The apparat, of course, responded by introducing round after round of draconian legislation. Workers were

thereby, yes, re-enslaved. The position of women, national minorities and young people underwent a pronounced retrogression too.

Perhaps Stalin really did believe that the first five-year plan, and an ever expanding state machine, would really take the Soviet Union in the direction of communism.* But objectively his 'second revolution' was a counterrevolution within the revolution.

New laws

The market-and-state combination of the NEP proved unsustainable and was finally abandoned with the launch of the first five-year plan and a target and delivery system. Soviet society had entered the "kingdom of freedom", hurrahed Stanislav Strumilin - a sick joke nowadays. Ostensibly the new system knew no limits - "other than technical and natural norms and laws".⁴⁰ Moshe Lewin comments, with not a little irony, that nothing was supposed to remain as an "obstacle to a non-monetary, rationally and 'directly' planned economy and hence the advent of the purest socialism".⁴¹

Hence, surely confounding the ideologues of the Soviet Union being a form of state capitalism - not in the Lenin-Zinoviev sense of the nominally working class state ruling over nationalised capitalist relations of production - this counterrevolution against the masses went hand-in-hand with the uprooting of capitalism. Not the transformation of the bureaucracy into a "ruling class" that sought to "accumulate capital" as speedily as possible (Tony Cliff).⁴²

A new set of social laws arose. At the most basic level the domination of use-value by organisation (target-value). Exchange took place not via the market, but via Gosplan's

* It is worth quoting Stalin on the second revolution, here writing in 1950: "In a period of eight to ten years we effected a transition in the agriculture of our country from the bourgeois, individual-peasant system to the socialist, collective-farm system. This was a revolution which eliminated the old bourgeois economic system in the countryside and created a new, socialist system. But that revolution did not take place by means of an explosion - that is, by the overthrow of the existing government power and the creation of a new power - but by a gradual transition from the old bourgeois system in the countryside to a new system. And it was possible to do that because it was a *revolution from above*, because the revolution was accomplished on the initiative of the existing power with the support of the bulk of the peasantry" (JV Stalin *Marxism and the problems of linguistics* Moscow 1952, pp38-39, my emphasis). The stuff about gradualism is obvious bullshit, as is the notion of collectivisation having the "support" of the mass of the peasantry. However, that the second revolution was carried out from above is indisputable.

allocations and targets (and, on the side, through barter arrangements). The market remained, but as a mere vestige. In the early 1930s, its main human representatives - the Nepmen and *kulaks* - were, of course, liquidated as a class.

However, Stalin had already coined his 'Marxist' justification for inflicting still further violence on society: the "intensification of the class struggle" under socialism. Because these "capitalist elements" - that is, the *kulaks* and Nepmen - were in *decline*, they supposedly increased their "resistance".⁴³ Here was the ideological justification for the great terror that was to come ●

Notes

1. JV Stalin *SW* Vol 13, Moscow 1953, p32.
2. *Ibid* p41.
3. A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p189.
4. Quoted in D Filtzer *Soviet workers and Stalinist industrialization* London 1986, p40.
5. K Rakovsky, 'The five year-plan in crisis' *Critique* No13, 1981, pp48-49.
6. T Zavalani *How strong is Russia?* London 1951, p15.
7. JV Stalin *SW* Vol 13, Moscow 1953, p177.
8. *Ibid* p178.
9. See N Jasny *The Soviet 1956 statistical handbook* Michigan 1957, p32.
10. A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p194.
11. In July 1941 the invading German army captured the Smolensk oblast (area) Communist Party archives. Consisting of 536 files and totalling about 200,000 pages of documents, they were eventually seized by the US army. The archives covered the period 1917-38 and included reports from local party committee meetings, Central Committee directives, letters of complaint from ordinary Soviet citizens, party purges, the financing of state farms, Komsomol activities and the collectivisation drive (see M Fainsod *Smolensk under Soviet rule* New York 1958). Besides this material, there are the surprisingly frank accounts carried in the regional Soviet press. And then, of course, there is the work of post-1991 historians, who have been given access to the Moscow archives (see *The Russian Review* Vol 61, No1, January 2002).
12. JV Stalin *SW* Vol 13, Moscow 1953, pp193-94.
13. R Conquest *The great terror - a reassessment* London 1990, p20.
14. M Sholokhov *Virgin soil upturned* Harmondsworth 1977, pp127-28.
15. A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p174.
16. HR Knickerbocker *The Soviet five-year plan and its effect on world trade* London 1931, p192.
17. *Ibid* p236.
18. J Scott *Behind the Urals* Bloomington IN 1989, p78.
19. N Khrushchev *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev* Vol 1, Providence RI 2004, p55.
20. D Filtzer *Soviet workers and Stalinist industrialisation* London 1986, p94.
21. *Ibid* p94.
22. *Ibid* p94.
23. See M Ellman *Socialist planning* Cambridge 1989, p106n.
24. R Conquest *The great terror - a reassessment* London 1988, p20.
25. S Talbot (ed) *Khrushchev remembers* London 1971, p58.
26. HR Knickerbocker *The Soviet five-year plan and its effect on world trade* London 1931, p240.
27. See G Guroff and FV Carstensen (eds) *Entrepreneurship in imperial Russia and the Soviet Union* Princeton NJ 1981, p267.
28. A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p212.
29. *Istoriya sotsialisticheskoi ekonomiki SSSR* Vol 3, Moscow 1977 - quoted in *Socialism: theory and practice* April 1979.
30. T Cliff *State capitalism in Russia* London 1974, p54.
31. See M Ellman, "Did the agricultural surplus provide the resources for the increase in investment in the USSR during the first five-year plan?" *Economic Journal* December 1975, p853.
32. See JR Miller *Soviet Studies* July 1970 and *Slavic Review* December 1974.
33. R Conquest *The harvest of sorrow* London 1986, pp170-71.
34. M Ellman *Socialist planning* Cambridge 1989, p107.
35. *Ibid* p107.
36. A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p196.
37. D Filtzer *Soviet workers and Stalinist industrialisation* London 1986, p91.
38. JV Stalin *Works* Vol 14, London 1978, p248.
39. N Werth, 'The mechanism of a mass crime' in R Gellately and B Kiernan (eds) *The spectre of genocide* Cambridge 2003, p225.
40. Quoted in M Lewin *Political undercurrents in Soviet economic debates* London 1975, p99.
41. *Ibid* p97.
42. T Cliff *State capitalism in Russia* London 1974, pp153-54.
43. JV Stalin *SW* Vol 12, Moscow 1953, p37.

weekly worker

Israel is
holding back
... for the
moment

An unofficial deal?

Iran and the United States seem to be talking about the nuclear issues again. Yassamine Mather reports on the latest round of diplomatic negotiations and manoeuvres

Over the last week or so rumours have emerged about the possibility of an informal understanding between Iran and the United States aimed at reducing "nuclear tensions". There are reports too of Israel's tacit agreement. So far it is only Iran that has confirmed indirect negotiations with the US, mediated by Oman. Western media are speculating about a deal being weeks away.

According to these reports, Iran would agree not to increase uranium enrichment above 60% and its allies in the region (in Syria and Iraq) will not attack American interests there. Iran also would agree a freeze on the country's ballistic missile programme, stop the sale of drones to Russia and release three American hostages in exchange for a reduction in sanctions. The US would agree to the unfreezing of \$20 billion of Iranian assets held in foreign banks, as well as allowing unhindered passage of Iranian fuel tankers in international waters.

The Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, was initially quoted as saying that this was nothing like the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal and Israel's assessment was that the United States and Iran have agreed on a formula of "less for less" (less US pressure/sanctions on Iran, in exchange for limited Iranian concessions) or "freeze for freeze" (freezing US sanctions in exchange of Iran freezing some of its nuclear, ballistic activities). There were also reports that the deal might not be a formal, written document, but the proposals would be implemented as 'goodwill gestures' - this way avoiding a Congress vote that could be costly for Joe Biden.

Last week the *Al-Monitor* website quoted a source close to the Israeli prime minister claiming that Netanyahu may be willing to turn a blind eye to the Washington-Tehran deal in return for Biden's determined push to achieve Saudi normalisation with Israel:

The Americans are more than likely toying with Netanyahu on the Saudi issue, creating expectations and illusions in order to appease him on the Iranian issue. After the agreement with Iran is reached, it will be too late to regret it. It is not certain that the administration will be able to deliver the goods in the Saudi arena ... For an Israeli prime minister to order a military attack on a country that has signed an agreement with the United States is an inconceivable scenario. On the other hand, if the understandings are not signed and anchored in an official agreement, Israel will feel much freer.¹

On June 16 the Israeli paper *Ha'aretz* published a report confirming that the United States has given details of the negotiations to Israeli officials,



Joe Biden will be keen to avoid Congress and Republican wrath

while at the same indicating that Israel has the freedom of action to deal with Iran's nuclear programme.

By June 19, according to reports of the previous day's Israeli cabinet meeting, Netanyahu was telling ministers that his government opposes any possible understanding between the Islamic Republic and the United States and that he is against any temporary agreement between Tehran and Washington. He added that the mission of his government is "to curb Iran's nuclear programme ... We have also said that even small and limited agreements do not help our goals and we are against them."

So either earlier reports were false or something happened over the weekend for Netanyahu to change his mind.

Of course, we should also note US denials of any progress. Last week Reuters quoted a Washington official, who spoke on condition of anonymity: "There are no talks about an interim deal," he said. These comments were in line with other official denials earlier in the month, which called a report that the two nations were nearing an interim deal "false and misleading".²

Having said that, there are signs of other discussions between Iran and western leaders. News agencies reported a 90-minute call between French president Emmanuel Macron and his Iranian counterpart, Ebrahim Raisi, on June 10 and it is assumed

that the discussions were related to the Iran nuclear negotiations. Then, nine days later, on June 19, France banned an upcoming rally of the Iranian group, Mojahedin e-Khalq (Iran's equivalent of the 'Moonies'), which has been held in the French capital every year since 2008, citing the risk of an attack. Paris police confirmed the decision to ban the rally, as it could "generate disturbances to public order due to the geopolitical context".

Watering hole

When it comes to US-Iran talks, it is very difficult to decide who is telling the truth and what is going on. In the meantime, we can say with a level of certainty that the cold war between Iran and Israel is continuing. According to the Israeli cyber security firm, ClearSky, in the last few weeks a number of shipping and logistics websites in Israel have been hacked by a method known as the 'watering hole' attack, said to be used by Iranians. This method involves injecting harmful code, often in the form of JavaScripts, into websites used by government officials, with the code being activated every time users visit the site and gather information about them (Israeli cyber security firms are blaming the Iranian state hacker group, Tortoiseshell - also called TA456 or 'Imperial Kitten' - for this).

This aspect of the cold war heated

up last week, when Israeli national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir used a fake news campaign, allegedly generated by Iranian hackers, to attack anti-government Israeli protestors. In this latest campaign, apparently Iranian hackers used a number of fake posts on Instagram accounts, claiming they emanated from genuine anti-government protestors, which revealed personal details of Israeli police officers. An Israeli internet watchdog, as well as the Shin Bet security agency, characterised this as a scam, but this did not stop Ben-Gvir claiming the posts were authentic and accusing protestors of endangering the lives of members of the police.

For Iran the only ray of hope regarding an end to economic isolation comes via Riyadh. Iran-Saudi relations are flourishing, with two Saudi ministerial visits to Tehran in one week. Investment minister Khalid al-Fatih arrived first, saying he was "optimistic" about the economic potential of the détente brokered by China, and adding that "Saudi enterprises could also help the Iranian market 'catch up' from the periods of closure and sanctions ... it is to our advantage on all fronts". According to Iranian media, the country hopes to reach \$1 billion in annual bilateral trade with Saudi Arabia in the short term and \$2 billion in the medium term. However, all this is very doubtful, given the

current state of US sanctions and the fact that it is not clear if the Saudis share these ambitions.

On June 17, Saudi foreign minister prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud visited Iran to open the kingdom's embassy. He met Iranian foreign secretary Hossein Amir-Abdollahian as well as president Raisi, whom he apparently invited to Riyadh on a state visit - presumably to meet the Saudi king, Salman bin Abdulaziz and his infamous son, Mohammed bin Salman.

In Tehran Faisal said:

... mutual respect, non-interference in the two countries' internal affairs and commitment to the United Nations Charter will be at the centre of bilateral relations going forward, with an eye on securing the interests of both nations ... I would also like to highlight the two countries' discussions on cooperation on ensuring maritime security and reducing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.³

However, the joint press conference with both foreign ministers created its own controversy, when the Saudi prince realised he was standing in front of a picture of general Qasem Soleimani. As the leader of the Iran Revolutionary Command, Soleimani was the man credited with leading the fight against Islamic State - one of many Salafist/jihadi groups linked to Saudi Arabia. Soleimani was assassinated in an air strike in January 2020, while visiting Iraq in an attack ordered by former US president Donald Trump. Prince Faisal asked for the photo opportunity and the press conference to be moved to the other side of the foreign ministry's ceremony room and the Iranians complied.

If Iran continues to entertain Saudi ministers, however, decisions over portraits of general Soleimani will be relatively minor matters, compared to the overall relationship between the major powers! ●

Notes

1. www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/06/israel-acknowledges-inability-thwart-us-iran-mini-agreement.
2. www.reuters.com/world/white-house-denies-report-us-iran-nearing-interim-nuclear-deal-2023-06-08.
3. www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/17/saudi-foreign-minister-arrives-in-tehran-amid-warming-ties.

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On June 16 the Israeli paper *Ha'aretz* published a report confirming that the United States has given details of the negotiations to Israeli officials,