

# weekly **worker**



**Drugs war failures: give a critical welcome to Scottish government's proposals**

- Letters and debate
- Affirmative action USA
- Threads versus Twitter
- Moshé Machover: L-content

No 1451 July 13 2023

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

**Abolish the police, yes ...  
but then what?  
Why is the left silent  
about the republican  
alternative?**





## LETTERS



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

## Broad front now

Kevin Bean's review of the last year of labour unrest reaches gloomy conclusions about the current situation ('A year of strikes' June 22). His appraisal of the politics of various groups ends with the assertion that the choice exists of either building broad fronts or re-establishing a mass Communist Party.

Rather than seeing an opportunity to intervene now, in the midst of ongoing strikes and the consequent dissatisfaction with Labour's response to the cost-of-living crisis, the choice for the left is situated *after* a general election, which is expected to take place in over a year!

The comrade paints the Enough is Enough campaign as a move to curb radicalism by the labour lieutenants of capital. Yes, one motive for launching it will have been the sectional material interest of the trade union bureaucracy. But, since it is possible for workers from below to replace general secretaries and other elected officials above them, the bureaucracy can be pulled towards the collective interest of the membership and away from the total domination of employers or the capitalist state. At the start of the strike wave, there was little certainty that public opinion would come down in favour of any of the groups of workers taking action - and there was certainly no prospect of the rightwing Labour leadership making the case against real-terms pay cuts.

So Enough Is Enough was something of a public relations exercise to overcome defeatism and connect individual disputes with the cost-of-living crisis, giving a broader political context to the austere conditions. Thus it was also about proving to the rightwing Labour leadership that embarking on a wholesale purge of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs would be a high-risk move.

The number of supporters and the geographical spread of rallies all pointed to the potential for a new party to be formed to, at the very least, defend the SCG MPs - and potentially pose a long-term external political challenge to the Starmer project of making Labour safe for capital again.

The Starmerites know that the general secretaries won't break from the party while Labour is in opposition, but they cannot be certain of what trade unionists might do independently of their leaders. Anti-union laws strengthen the labour bureaucracy industrially, but not politically. There is nothing to prevent class-conscious workers from going rogue and taking a form of wildcat strike action *as voters* - presently the main beneficiary in England for such protest voting is likely to be the Greens.

This is why comrade Bean is wrong to say that Hannah Sell and her Socialist Party in England and Wales "cannot quite understand" the situation. Whatever criticisms we might have of the Socialist Party or the policy content of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's election campaigns, they have stuck with the principles of standing workers' candidates in elections and seeking a coalition of socialist groups to that end, consistently endorsing Socialist Workers Party and Communist Party of Britain members when they have stood as candidates. Of course, they have attempted to win the unions to their position, but they don't tail Labourism to the extent of giving up on independent challenges to the rightwing Labour leadership if union conferences don't swing behind Tusc.

If a new coalition of left groups promoting a 'workers' list' were to back the re-election of Labour left MPs (either as Labour candidates or as independents), but avoid making endorsements in marginal seats, then both the Labour left and left-of-Labour voting blocs could be given coherence as a coalition of anti-Tory, anti-Starmer tactical voters. In recommending that class-conscious workers hold their noses and vote for Labour in key marginals, credible charges of being 'Tory enablers' could not be laid against the left, and the foundations could be laid for the formation of a new mass workers' party in the course of the next parliament.

There is no certainty that this process will result in an electoral party in which Marxists would be free to advocate the adoption of a revolutionary programme. But we can be certain that the next smear campaign directed at the left will be that it is radicals and revolutionaries who stand in the way of strikes being settled and reforms being implemented.

The method of re-establishing a mass Communist Party through debates between small groups is necessary, but not sufficient. The choice now is in fact 'What kind of broad front will allow the left to establish a mass party?'

Ansell Eade  
Lincolnshire

## Bad medicine

Ian Spencer's excellent article covers the ground pretty well ('Road leading nowhere', July 6). As we know, the National Health Service is going down the pan - with conscious direction from the Tories and no little help from the last Labour government.

The NHS is a much loved institution, as politicians are well aware, and so the rundown has been a long-drawn-out affair - though one that is accelerating. One of the first signs led to the resignation of Harold Wilson and Nye Bevan from the Labour cabinet of 1951 - over charges for spectacles, dentures and prescriptions. I note now, when I collect my prescription medication (which is free because I'm old), that younger folk have to pay £9.50 per item. But even us old folk have to pay for dentures and spectacles and they are very expensive.

Comrade Spencer points out the failure of the NHS to look after dementia sufferers, since this is, allegedly, not a medical condition and so the sufferers can be treated in care. This means that they enter Margaret Thatcher's world of 'couldn't care less in the community'.

I discussed with an old friend of mine who has voted Conservative all his voting life (he's still a friend) about whether he would be prepared to pay a national insurance payment for dementia sufferers. Those with dementia would get the care they need and those without would just pay. He agreed that paying and not needing the care was the best option. This, I think, applies to the whole of healthcare.

Spencer points out the even worse (at the moment) situation in the US, when he says: "The USA spends more on healthcare than any other country in the world, but achieves worse health outcomes for the working class than many poorer countries." This reminds me of an article I read in *Jacobin* on US hospices.

The article is entitled 'Profit-obsessed private equity is now dominating the US hospice system' (May 25), which the writer, Lily Meyersohn, explores. She opens: "The US hospice system is supposed to provide compassionate end-of-life care. But private equity firms have swallowed up the industry: seven out of 10 hospice agencies are now for-profit, putting profit maximisation

over patient wellbeing."

She goes into the history of hospices in the US and points out: "As of 2020, over 72% of hospices are for-profit and approximately 24% are non-profit. Less than three percent are publicly owned." The march of finance capital goes everywhere even, in this case, into what may seem strange places.

She further tells us: "For now, the fixed payment system means that privately owned hospice providers are more inclined to take on both ineligible patients, who clearly have more than six months to live, and healthier patients, who require less expensive care. People with dementia, for instance, may have few acute medical needs and live for more than six months, giving providers more time to collect their daily reimbursement and allowing providers to goose their profit margins."

Money comes from Medicare and Medicaid (ie, the taxpayer), of course, and "By contrast, cancer patients or patients with heart conditions who are being released from the hospital typically have shorter life expectancies and require more skilled nursing care. Refused by privately owned providers, they frequently wind up in non-profit hospices. Those providers may struggle to provide for panels comprised of sicker patients, while privately owned companies thrive off relatively healthier, longer-living patients."

This looks a bit like the situation in the UK that Spencer describes - though, as might be expected, the US is a bit further ahead than the UK (for now). It is as clear a picture of finance capital parasitism as one could wish, and another reason for getting rid of it.

Jim Nelson  
email

## Pathetic

I note that, in his latest letter (July 6), Steve Cousins has abandoned any attempt to defend his previous arguments in relation to inflation, and settled for his usual method of simply hurling unsubstantiated, vague and mindless abuse at his opponents.

Cousins says there is lots of manufacturing taking place outside the "imperialist" core. True, but, if we take China, the modern "workshop of the world", 52% of its economy is in services, as against 40% in manufacturing. For India, the figures are 62% service industry and 23% manufacturing. If we take a more recently industrialising economy, Vietnam, the figures are 51% services as against 33% manufacturing. What Cousins fails to realise is that, even in the developed "imperialist core", there is also still lots of manufacturing going on, just as, when largely agricultural economies became industrial economies in the 19th century, that did not involve a reduction in agricultural output, but a rise in agricultural productivity! It's precisely what Marx describes in *The Grundrisse* as the "civilising mission of capital":

"On the other side, the production of relative surplus value - ie, production of surplus value based on the increase and development of the productive forces - requires the production of new consumption; requires that the consuming circle within circulation expands, as did the productive circle previously. Firstly, quantitative expansion of existing consumption; secondly: creation of new needs by propagating existing ones in a wide circle; thirdly: production of new needs and discovery and creation of new use values. In other words, so that the surplus labour gained does not remain a merely quantitative surplus, but rather constantly increases the circle of qualitative differences within labour (hence of surplus labour) makes it more diverse, more internally

differentiated. For example, if, through a doubling of productive force, a capital of 50 can now do what a capital of 100 did before, so that a capital of 50 and the necessary labour corresponding to it become free, then, for the capital and labour which have been set free, a new, qualitatively different branch of production must be created, which satisfies and brings forth a new need" (chapter 8).

And, in its development, Marx notes that this does not simply mean an expansion of manufactured products, but also of culture and services: "... production of this being as the most total and universal possible social product, for, in order to take gratification in a many-sided way, he must be capable of many pleasures [*genussfähig*], hence cultured to a high degree - is likewise a condition of production founded on capital" (*ibid*).

How this or anything I have said even remotely suggests it requires "privatisation" I don't know, but it's the kind of bogeyman that Stalinists, like Cousins, have always used as part of amalgams in place of facts or rational argument against opponents. Throw in vague comments about me supposedly distorting Marx's concept (*how*, of course, is not stated), for my own "servile ends" (*which* ends is again not stated other than being obviously "servile") and me also, painting a rosy picture of the gig economy, precarity, etc (where, when, how, of course, is not stated), as further boogies, and you have the total picture of Steve Cousins' Stalinist approach to analysis and debate.

As I said before, it's so pathetic, it's really not worthy of response.

Arthur Bough  
email

## Nasty ink blot

Robert Gildea's *Backbone of the nation: mining communities and the Great Strike of 1984-85*, which is about to be published, is a truly remarkable book - a unique insight into how the great mass of participants in the epic struggle of 1984-85 saw the strike at the time and how they now see it.

One would have thought that, coming up to the 40th anniversary, everything which could be said on the strike has now been said. Mostly, authoritative books (or those that claim to be), like the rash of TV documentaries recently, are deeply disappointing. They retell the tale according to well laid-down myths

and half truths wheeled out during the strike, and rarely seek to ask the folk involved or challenge the standard storyline.

This book represents the triumph of evidence - for the first time an oral history delivered straight from the mouths and memories of those who fought their corner so bravely. Here we have a roll call of the most extraordinary people from Scotland, Durham, Yorkshire, Nottingham, Leicester, Wales, London and the USA. It is this and the story of the miners' history, communities and perceptions - our ethnicity - which is almost as told from the inside out.

You would have difficulty finding fault with this book, because it tells how these people - 140 of them - in their own way saw the movement they were involved in. One could argue whether individuals among them should have felt the way they did or perceived what was happening the way they did, but not that this is how they did actually see it. In this sense I think it is a faithful cross-section of thoughts at the time and since.

Robert Gildea does, of course, offer the framework of, and some background to, situations and people. I'm proud to say he uses much of my evidence throughout his book. Most of it is gleaned from my histology, *Stardust and coaldust*, rather than direct answers to questions he set. I make that point because the summary of my indulgences are his and not boastful responses from me (you know how shy and retiring I am!).

But I think the section on my former wife, Maureen, is a little misleading. Probably due to her own modesty and failing memory these days, her key role in helping found the first Women Against Pit Closures group in 1983 at Hatfield, and at starting the women's flying pickets, gets understated.

The author depends upon the contributors to recall their own roles fully and accurately and I think overwhelmingly this is achieved. One of Maureen's outstanding achievements was in confronting mass assemblies of miners - many of them young, single lads - about their attitudes to the women in the community and movement. When first the wild and rebellious young lads of the pits burst loose from the mines and into the sunshine, boundaries were overrun. So it was that mass demonstrations of miners passing through big cities would cat-call *en*

## Fighting fund

## Where you come in

As we strive to reach what has recently been a somewhat elusive *Weekly Worker* monthly fighting fund target of £2,250, I can report that the running total for July now stands at £793. However, the amount raised over the last seven days has been just £365 - which means that now we really do need to step up the pace.

As usual, the highest proportion of what we received this week came in the shape of standing orders or bank transfers - thanks go to comrades PB (£60), BO (£35), HN (£30), GD and DV (£25 each), SM, LG and CC (£10 from all three).

On top of that, comrades RL and PM both came up with their regular £50 donations via PayPal - a means that was also used by NW (£25) and MH (£10). Finally we received one of those not infrequent cash contributions from both comrades LM (£20) and Hassan (£5).

True, we are approaching that part of the month when several substantial three-figure standing orders come our way, but that doesn't mean we should be happy with the below-par total that we've so far received in July. We really do need more of our readers to show their support in a way that counts!

As comrade LC recently wrote when renewing his subscription, "How could I *not* get the *Weekly Worker* each week? What other left paper encourages such free and open debate among comrades?" Yes, comrade, but don't forget that we have to raise the cash to continue to do so - and unfortunately the subscription alone doesn't cover all our costs.

That's where you all come in, dear readers! ●

Robbie Rix

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



masse any young lasses nearby - "Get ya tits out for the lads" being a favourite. Some of the chants were thoroughly sexist, such as "Maggie Thatcher's got one. Ian MacGregor is one". Maureen demanded on public platforms that they respect not only their own wives and daughters, but other peoples who they didn't know. It got some embarrassed giggles at first and some shamed faces, but, by god, it eventually stopped.

A strength of the book is in not trying to come to any definitive conclusion. Where two or more points of contention exist, they are all presented by the folk who hold them. So it seems the Welsh miners still believe they were let down by Yorkshire when they sent out pickets in 1983 and this resulted in them voting against action in 1984. This wasn't true, but the book sets out the facts, as seen by miners in both Yorkshire and Wales.

One thing which may put people off the book is the recommendation on the back cover by ... Paul Mason. Of all people to have recommended it! Mason stands just a few steps behind Keith Joseph. In a fit of pique following the overwhelming rejection of the European Union by the mining communities, he declared that industrial communities across Britain who voted overwhelmingly to leave the EU are full of racists and bigots. He called on Labour to embark on a 'Stop Brexit' tour of Britain by organising conventions of "progressive people". He went further in inventing the story that miners sat denouncing migrants as cockroaches - he will never be forgiven for it in coal communities. So perhaps this is the only nasty ink blot on an otherwise incredible book.

I have no doubt that this work will be referenced again and again as an authority on the true feelings in the communities and the rank and file in general. It is highly recommended.

David John Douglass  
South Shields

## First person!

In his concluding remarks to my letter of June 15, comrade Andrew Northall repeats the mistake that Karl Marx and the Marxist movement has made for well over 100 years (Letters, July 6). This 19th century German/French mistake has placed Marxism in opposition to British democratic socialism for over a century. So what is this mistake?

The mistake consists in misrepresenting the meaning of the word 'dictatorship' and confusing it with the idea of state coercion. The terms, 'dictatorship' and 'state

coercion' do not mean the same thing, as Marx and his supporters would have us believe. The result is that Marx has misled the communist movement for over 100 years. As far as I know, I may be the first person to point this out.

By misrepresenting the term 'dictatorship', Marx placed the communist movement and 'socialism' in the camp of a leftwing version of totalitarianism, even before the latter term arrived in the political lexicon. In other words, in the period after the *Communist manifesto*, the Marxist version of socialism, with its 19th century German/French roots, placed Marxism in opposition to democratic socialism. So it is odd when comrade Andrew says he supports democratic socialism, while defending dictatorship as principle rather than as a temporary emergency measure (in the sense of the Roman Republic before Caesar).

If Marxism was democratic socialism, individual communists like Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin would not have been shot on trumped-up charges for disagreeing with the leadership of the party in the Stalin period, or as rivals for political power. Nor would Trotsky have been murdered in Mexico. If Marxism was democratic socialism, Enver Hoxha would not have had a pregnant party member shot for opposing him. These were crimes against democratic socialism, which some crude and ignorant elements in the communist movement applaud.

Part of the reason why these crimes were made possible was due to Marx being influenced in a negative direction by Blanqui in the period after the *Communist manifesto* - the seminal work of 19th century communism - which nowhere mentions the term, 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. By abandoning the political standpoint of the *Communist manifesto*, and opportunistically adapting himself to Blanqui, in a modified form, Marx unintentionally did a lot of damage to the communist movement.

The result is that good and well-intentioned comrades like Andrew continue to defend Marx's mistake in confusing dictatorship with the need for state coercion. Plekhanov, Kautsky, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Mao made the mistake which Andrew is making. The truth is that, while all states are instruments of coercion, not all states are dictatorships. In his reply to me comrade Andrew implies that the working class need dictatorship to suppress counterrevolution. But, generally speaking, what the working class need to suppress the backward elements is state coercion when

necessary, based on democratic socialism.

Even at the highest level of Marxism after Marx, we not only see a confusion between dictatorship and the need for state coercion: we also see a confusion between the term 'dictatorship' and democracy - a confusion clearly expressed in Lenin's terminology about the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry". This absurdity assumes that a state or individual can be a democratic and a dictator at the same time. How is it possible for a state, or indeed an individual, to be democratic and a dictator at the same time? This is the political absurdity which Marx led communism into, when he abandoned the political standpoint of the *Communist manifesto* to adapt himself to Blanqui.

Comrade Andrew Northall's mistake is not a personal mistake, but rather reflects that of Marxism. Lenin understood the meaning of the term, 'dictatorship', but he still incorrectly used it to describe working class rule. Comrade Andrew's argument that "... dictatorship, or rule by the majority class, is of qualitatively different nature than previous rules by minority classes" begs the question: why do Marxists insist on calling working class rule a 'dictatorship'? One of the reasons why Mao launched the Cultural Revolution back in 1966 was that he believed the dictatorship of the proletariat had become the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Surprise, surprise!

Dictatorship, regardless of class content, is basically a return to feudal forms of rule. Marx was completely wrong to adopt Blanqui's terminology in referring to working class or socialist rule as a dictatorship - a term which refers to lawless government (in other words, gangster rule). So who should we blame for introducing gangster rule into communism? Trotskyists may want to blame Stalin, but they are missing the point. Ultimately, the blame lay with Blanqui and Marx.

Tony Clark  
For Democratic Socialism

## Not impressed

Labour has done a number of U-turns of late. Its plan to invest £28 billion a year to boost the green economy has been pushed back to 2027. Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves said Labour needed to avoid the "risk of being reckless".

Childcare reforms have also been watered down. Again it was said that Labour needs to be "fiscally responsible". It is claimed also that Labour will jettison a proposed £3 billion tech tax. This follows intensive lobbying by Silicon Valley firms.

This appears to have left voters less than impressed. Few people seem to know what Labour stands for - apart from political cowardice and fence-sitting. Plus, whilst the Tories are immensely unpopular, Labour's lead in the opinion polls is actually down three points and it now stands at 14 percentage points.

It is clearer, now more than ever, that, if Labour is to hold onto its lead and get into government, it needs to offer the electorate bold, radical policies.

Alan Stewart  
Wakefield

## Fred's friends

Can you help to find friends of Fred Carpenter, who died in May? We are planning a celebration of Fred's life in early September, but we do not have access to his address book.

If you would like to attend and have not yet told me your name and email address, please send both to gaby.a.rubin@gmail.com. If you know of others who were Fred's friends/comrades, please be so kind as to give them this information also.

Gaby Rubin  
email

# ACTION

## 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](http://www.facebook.com/events/184599977675068).

## Oh, Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie

Screenings of this feature-length documentary which explores a dark story of political deceit and outrageous anti-Semitism smears. Organised by Platform Films: [www.platformfilms.co.uk](http://www.platformfilms.co.uk).

Tottenham, Friday July 14, 7pm: North London Community House, 22 Moorefield Road, London N17. Entrance £10 (£5).

Hull, Friday July 14, 7pm: College for International Cooperation and Development, Winestead Hall, Patrington, Hull HU12.

Bury St Edmunds, Friday July 14, 7.30pm: Hunter Club, 6 St Andrews Street South, Bury St Edmunds IP33. Entrance free.

Plymouth, Friday July 14, 6.30pm: The Soapbox Theatre, Exmouth Road, Plymouth PL1. Admission by ticket, £2.

Tolpuddle, Saturday July 15, 2pm: Banned from the festival by the TUC, then cancelled by Tolpuddle Village Hall, this screening will go ahead! Details: [www.facebook.com/TolpuddleRadicalFilm](http://www.facebook.com/TolpuddleRadicalFilm).

Tunbridge Wells, Monday July 17, 7pm: The Forum, Fonthill, The Common, Tunbridge Wells TN4. Tickets: £4 (£2).

Middlesbrough, Thursday July 20, 6.30pm: St Alphonsus Church Hall, Westbourne Grove, North Ormesby, Middlesbrough TS3. Tickets free, but need to be booked.

Bournemouth, Saturday July 22, 5.30pm and Sunday July 23, 7pm: Poole Hill Brewery, Poole Hill, Bournemouth BH2. Entrance free.

## Say no to Yorkshire Patriots

Saturday July 15, 12.30pm: Counter-protest outside Brunswick shopping centre, Westborough, Scarborough YO11. Yorkshire Patriots is a fascist group that whips up hatred and intolerance, deflecting anger at the cost of living onto refugees and migrants.

Organised by Stand up to Racism Scarborough: [www.facebook.com/events/774490770814131](http://www.facebook.com/events/774490770814131).

## Building a mass workers' party

Tuesday July 18, 6.30pm: Online public meeting. The Labour Party has conducted a mass purge of socialists, and is committed to the same policies as the Tories. It is time for the trade unions to break with Labour and create an independent democratic mass socialist party to defend workers' interests. Speakers include Ian Hodson (BFAWU) and Audrey White (Liverpool left activist).

Organised by Campaign for a New Mass Workers Party: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10230526357038784](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10230526357038784).

## Ukraine - how do we get peace?

Wednesday July 19, 7pm: Public meeting, Central United Reformed Church, 60 Norfolk Street, Sheffield S1. Peace talks now; Russian troops out; no Nato expansion; welfare, not warfare.

Organised by Sheffield Stop the War Coalition: [www.facebook.com/STWSheffield](http://www.facebook.com/STWSheffield).

## Marx on India, Bonapartism and imperialism

Thursday July 20, 7pm: Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker Spencer A Leonard focuses on Marx's journalism for the *New York Tribune* in 1853, where he developed his emerging understanding of the British state as imperialist or Bonapartist. Tickets £5 (£3).

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/434](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/434).

## Build the strike wave, fight anti-union laws

Saturday July 22, 1pm: Public meeting, The Railway Club, rear of 3 Stuart Road, Plymouth PL3.

Organised by Plymouth National Shop Stewards Network: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=6169305756457592](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=6169305756457592).

## From picket line to parliament

Saturday July 22, 3pm: Public meeting, UVW, 140 Cambridge Heath Road, London E1. Rachel Keke shares her incredible story: in the space of a year moving from the picket line of a 22-month strike of chambermaids into the French parliament as an MP for NUPES, struggling against low pay and outsourcing. Followed by Q and A.

Organised by United Voices of the World: [www.facebook.com/uvwunion](http://www.facebook.com/uvwunion).

## Troublemakers at work

Saturday July 29, 9.30am to 5pm: Conference, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Bringing together workers who have won improvements at work, taken strike action and transformed weak unions into a strong voice for workers. Also those who want to win a pay rise, start a union or mobilise an existing union at work. Workshops and plenary sessions.

Registration £10 (£5). Organised by Troublemakers At Work: [troublemakersatwork.com/conference-2023](http://troublemakersatwork.com/conference-2023).

## Uncensored: the festival

Saturday July 29, 4pm to 10pm: Festival, Brookside Farm, Causeway, Nailsea (near Bristol) BS48. Music, poetry, stand-up comedy and speakers. At 8pm the film *Oh, Jeremy Corbyn: the big lie* will be shown on a giant screen. Tickets £11.55 (until July 17).

Organised by Not The Andrew Marr Show: [www.facebook.com/events/678576277641026](http://www.facebook.com/events/678576277641026).

## Chopped liver and unions

August 4 to 26 (not Sundays), times vary: The Space on the Mile, 80 High Street, Edinburgh EH1. *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. Tickets £10 (£8). Performed by Lottie Walker. Part of the Edinburgh fringe festival: [tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/chopped-liver-and-unions](http://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/chopped-liver-and-unions).

## 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.

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 16 5pm

## A week in politics - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Use this link to join meeting:  
[communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register](http://communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register)

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](http://communistparty.co.uk) and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at [Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](http://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)



**POLICE**

# Silence on the alternative

Crimes, prejudice and sheer incompetence give added weight to the traditional republican slogan of a people's militia, argues Mike Macnair. So why is the left so reluctant to make the call?

**P**olice misconduct is back in the news. On the other side of the Channel, the June 27 shooting of a 17-year-old who had stopped in his car, followed by the police tear-gassing of an initially peaceful protest, led to spectacular, large-scale riots, as it symbolised the normal abuse of power by the French police in the ethnic-minority *banlieues*. In this country, the affair of the 1993 racist killing of Stephen Lawrence and the fucked-up (to be polite) police 'investigation' into it resurfaced on June 26 with the claim that another participant in the killing, reported to the police at the time, was never pursued.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, on June 29 the first report of the Undercover Policing Inquiry chaired by retired judge Sir John Mitting reported that the *agent provocateur* tactics used were not justified; it is perhaps noteworthy that the Lawrence family and campaigners round the Lawrence killing were among those targeted by the 'spycops'.<sup>2</sup>

On July 5 the UK Supreme Court ruled that the test of 'self-defence' to be applied in police disciplinary proceedings arising out of killing was the *civil* liability test, under which the policeman's belief that his life was in danger had to be objectively reasonable - as opposed to the *criminal* liability test, under which it had merely to be an honest belief.<sup>3</sup>

On the same day, "home office sources" floated what *The Times* headlined as an "Overhaul to tackle the scourge of rogue police", and *The Guardian* as "2,000 police in England and Wales may face sack in vetting revamp". Details are not yet forthcoming, but the main proposal floated seems to be to replace external legally-qualified chairs of police disciplinary panels with chief constables. The vagueness of these proposals implies that the press were told of them on July 5 *in order* to distract attention from the UKSC's ruling on the killing of Jermaine Baker - which would all too easily bring to mind not only Baker's killing, but the Nahel M case, and other London police shootings of unarmed car users - Mark Duggan in 2011, Chris Kaba in 2022.<sup>4</sup> It did indeed do so.

**Culture**

The UKSC's judgment goes at length into the evolution of police disciplinary procedures since the Report of the Taylor Review in 2005 recommended replacing the then-existing 'court-martial model', based on military discipline, with an 'Acas model' based on 'good practice' in employers' disciplinary procedures (but in fact retaining a good many procedural rights for police officers). Since Taylor there has been considerable tinkering - not only with disciplinary procedures, but also with the definitions of the justified use of force, leading to (their lordships point out) considerable complexity and obscurity in the law and the guidance given to police. But the Taylor Review itself responded to perceived serious problems in police accountability ...

This is, in short, a *long-running* problem. The London Metropolitan Police ('the Met') has been recently characterised as "institutionally corrupt"; it is questionable whether anyone believed that the 1970s 'Operation Countryman' got near to the core of the problems.<sup>5</sup> The white-supremacist and male-supremacist 'police culture' certainly extends back to the 1970s and has been notoriously

**Public image**

undisputed by managerialist 'diversity' initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

The persistence of the 'police culture problem' tells us that it is not *merely* a matter of history. After all, the very different histories of Britain and France have produced very similar problems in 'police culture'. Similar phenomena can be seen in the police culture of the USSR starting in the 1920s, and in a more extreme form (because the police culture was given more general political authority) in the Stalin period.<sup>7</sup> At the end of the day, the persistence of police corruption, white-supremacism and male-supremacism can be explained by the nature of professional policing as a *job*.

A good deal has been written about this issue, but a recent pop-psychological treatment of related issues can be found in Brian Klaas's 'book of the podcast', *Corruptible: who get power and how it changes us*.<sup>8</sup> Klaas makes two relevant points. The first is that people who *seek* power over others are likely to apply for jobs which give them that power, policing being one of the salient examples. White-supremacism and male-supremacism are ideologies of petty power over others, and are therefore likely to be ideas shared by applicants for policing jobs. The second is that power actually does corrupt. This point links to a good deal of the 'police culture' research: *doing the policing job* requires regularly using 'suspect classifications' (not enough time to do otherwise). And it also requires prioritising aspects of policing which can produce 'results', and so on. It is the nature of the job.<sup>9</sup>

Hence the 'overhaul' of police discipline to bring more power in-house to the chief constables, floated on July 5, will have the *opposite* effect to that which government spin would have us believe. Instead of clearing out the 'bad apples', it will reinforce the internal solidarity of the police in the face of scandals. Klaas makes this point, too: corruption and misconduct can be reduced where *those in charge* are subject to external surveillance, rather than those below, he argues.

The traditional pre-1914 programme of the socialist movement - including Labour in 1900 - included the abolition of the standing army (and that included the standing professional police force) and its replacement with a people's militia. It should be clear from what I have said so far that there are two large drivers of police misconduct. The first is the use of the police for 'purity policing' initiatives by moral entrepreneurs aiming to hold the lower orders' noses to the grindstone: eg, the 'Societies for the Reformation of Manners' going back to the 1690s, long before the professional police; and today's 'War on Drugs'. The second and fundamental driver is the set-up of the police as a long-service career force. Replacing the police career regime with a short-service conscript<sup>10</sup> militia would fundamentally alter the incentives which drive police misconduct, and open up the decision processes to the light of day.

**Far left**

Mysteriously, however, this traditional plank of the programme of the workers' movement has disappeared from the arsenal of the larger part of the far left. That it should be absent from the ideas of the *Labour* left is unsurprising; their state loyalism makes them naturally support utopian ideas of a 'reformed' police force in spite of 50-plus years of failures. But the far left?

*Socialist Worker's* web page carried on July 4 an article by Matt Foot headlined "Met Police needs disbanding now". The story is mainly about the Stephen Lawrence case and 'spycops', but mentions also the rape/murder of Sarah Everard and the police attack on the vigil for her, the findings of institutional corruption in the 2021 report on the 1987 murder of Daniel Morgan and of institutional racism and sexism in the Casey review earlier this year, and the case of serial sex attacker David Carrick. The conclusion: "What else do the Met have to do before it is disbanded?"

OK, but what happens *after* the Met is disbanded? It is rumoured that

'Countryman' made this proposal: to actually expand the neighbouring police forces to cover London outside the City (whose police force cannot be abolished because of the constitutional right of the City to undisturbed self-government, settled as part of 1688-89). It should be obvious that this would be a merely cosmetic reform - all the more so since the reduction of democratic accountability over the last 60 years, with the separation of police authorities from local authorities under the 1964 Act and the 2012 creation of "police and crime commissioners".<sup>11</sup>

In the following issue of *Socialist Worker* Charlie Kimber, writing from Lyon, on the riots in France, had an article headlined "Stand with the rioters against the French state and police".<sup>12</sup> Kimber was mainly engaged in polemic against parties and leaders of the French left who have condemned, or failed to give clear support to, the riots. His conclusion is that:

... our criticism of riots is that they do not go far enough. They do not have the power to tear down the whole system of capitalism. Moving from riot to revolution does not mean becoming more 'respectable' or diluting the fury against the system.

It requires an insurrectionary fusion of the power of the workplace and the power of the street. But the first step is to stand with the rioters now.

This is, in fact, delusional. It is plainly Bakuninist, which makes it appropriate that Kimber should be writing from Lyon, where on September 17 1870 Mikhail Bakunin helped draft a proclamation which announced: "The state's administrative and governmental machine, having become powerless, is abolished." It did not take more than a couple of days for the "abolished" state to get rid of this 'Lyon Commune'.<sup>13</sup> The problem is not the "fusion of the power of the workplace and the power of the street", but *organisation* that can offer an alternative to the decision-

processes of capitalism and its state.

*Socialist Appeal* carried back on May 26 a story headlined "Police and Tories to blame! Overthrow their system!", on the riots in Ely, Cardiff, triggered by the killing of two teenagers in a crash after their electric bike was chased by a police van - and the police then lied about the circumstances. "Above all," says *Socialist Appeal*, "this episode has once again demonstrated that the police are not our protectors, but exist to protect the capitalist class and their rotten system. Both must be overthrown." But, of course, the connection between police car chases of teenagers and the protection of capitalist class interests, though real, is decidedly indirect (*via* young men as a target group and purity-policing as an indirect means of controlling the lower orders). And all that can be said by way of conclusion is that "It's time for workers and youth to sweep capitalism - and the vicious armed bodies of men that uphold it - into the dustbin of history, where they belong." Nothing *specifically* about the police?

The same is true of Rob Sewell's July 6 article on the riots in France: "Rising discontent and social explosions: riots or revolution?" He says nothing *specifically* about the police and policing, only:

Rioting offers no way forward for workers and youth. Instead, the fight must be for revolution: to overthrow this rotten dog-eat-dog system, and to transform society along socialist lines.

What is required is the forging of a revolutionary leadership; a Marxist leadership that is capable of matching up to the challenges facing us.

So tell us, Rob: what *alternative* can this 'revolutionary leadership' offer to capitalism's professional police force? Why not raise the traditional socialist demand for a militia? Like the SWP, *Socialist Appeal* is in the business of 'leading workers by the nose' to make revolution - and this means silence on the possible alternative to capitalist governance ●

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**Notes**

- www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-65989993. There will be a debate in Westminster Hall on July 12: commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2023-0160.
- www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-66020767.
- UKSC 24 (2023).
- irr.org.uk/article/reading-the-riots-from-mark-duggan-to-nahel-merzouk.
- blogs.sussex.ac.uk/centre-for-the-study-of-corruption/2023/03/28/is-the-metropolitan-police-institutionally-corrupt. On 'Countryman', there is a convenient reference at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\_Countryman.
- A recent discussion with the extensive literature cited is M Hasan, 'Racist bullying of BAME women within police services in England: race, gender and police culture' *International Journal of Police Science and Management* vol 23, pp182-95 (2021).
- DR Shearer *Policing Stalin's socialism* New Haven 2009; P Hagenloh *Stalin's police* Baltimore 2009.
- London 2022.
- CF also M Rowe *Disassembling police culture* Abingdon 2023 - especially chapters 7 and 8.
- Conscript*: a volunteer militia would be a different matter, dominated by the 'respectable' upper and middle classes - like the volunteer Yeomanry who attacked the Peterloo demonstrators in 1819.
- There is a summary account of the 1964 act at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police\_Act\_1964. Police and crime commissioners: lordslibrary.parliament.uk/police-and-crime-commissioners-powers-and-functions reports on the institution and a 2020 government review.
- Socialist Worker* July 11.
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyon\_Commune.



SCOTLAND

# Drugs war and its failures

Scott Evans gives a critical welcome to the change in policy proposed by the Scottish government

Scotland's government has proposed decriminalising personal drug possession - this in the context of the country having the highest rate of drug deaths in Europe. About 1,300 die every year, to which ought to be added the many ways drug addiction affects people and ruins their lives.

This situation is regularly described as a "drug-death epidemic". If drug use has some epidemiological dimension, drug use and associated death and disease cannot at this point be described as some new blazing ravage ripping through the population. This is an endemic problem, symptomatic of widespread social despair and historical-geographic particularities, which make the problem in Scotland uniquely shocking.

To nobody's surprise, this has been followed by uproar from the usual 'war on drugs' crowd, who act as though giving a single inch on drug policy to leniency or decriminalisation is tantamount to giving society a shove-push start down a slippery slope to moral depravity and degeneracy.

In origin, this militant opposition to drug use is at least in part a reaction by the ruling class against letting the lower orders engage in a little too much that might risk undermining their position as disciplined soldiers of capital, ideologically boosted and spread throughout as 'common sense' by decades of scare-mongering media and plain lies. It is an interesting example of where the discipline of the labouring classes is placed above crude economic logic, and where sections of the state operate through individual politicians to pursue a purity politics and disciplining agenda, as opposed to pure profit-seeking.

Obviously, if drugs were fully legalised and fully exploited by the market, even if it were to exclude particularly harmful drugs like heroin, it would be huge business for those who take it up, and the terrain would shift onto one in which our footing would have to change to be pushing for transparency and regulation. Even the cannabis available on the streets has, compared to the recent past, a greatly increased tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content - THC being the psychoactive component, with potential ill consequences for developing minds. In a legal and regulated environment THC strength would be declared when drugs are sold and age minimums applied for stronger varieties, as with alcohol.

But besides this general logic it is also historically contingent. The war on drugs was declared by Richard Nixon in 1971 and then came to the fore under Ronald Reagan, with Nancy Reagan playing a major role in the campaign. This war has been spread globally, and the UK is one loyal follower of the doctrine. "Just say no!" Nancy Reagan proclaimed, but the trouble is some of those kids may quite enjoy the experience on the whole, and come to reject everything they were told. They will be left with nothing to help them navigate the - yes, dangerous - world of black-market drugs.

But back to the topic in hand. In Scotland the story is mainly not about the issue of drugs for pleasure being clamped down on by the powers-that-be. The widespread use of opiates, particularly heroin, is due to pervasive social despair. From this comes a desire to escape, and in certain environments a turn to drugs can result in strong psychological and/or physiological addiction. This can result in over-consumption, both in one



Ecstasy: club drug

sitting and in general, and the seeking of stronger and stronger varieties - which, if widespread enough, will feed into general social listlessness and decay. So the conservative story is not without any truth, but it leaves out so much and contains so many lies. Its advocates do not really care for sufferers of drug abuse, as they pretend, so that any resemblance to truth in what they say is incidental. There is no room in this narrative for intervention other than the strong arm of the state: no harm reduction, no addressing the underlying social ills, including the inability of the current order to satisfy human needs.

It is, of course, no surprise that the Tory-lite Labour leadership has followed suit in condemning the Scottish Nationalist Party's proposals for decriminalisation. Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves has been quoted as saying: "I do not think this sounds like a good policy. I find it quite stunning that this would be a priority for the Scottish government."

"Quite stunning" for the government of a country with such astoundingly high rate of drug death and disease per capita? The only way Reeves can get away with such a ridiculous statement is because the war on drugs has been successful in ensuring that ideas like decriminalisation are regarded as propositions that only come from the 'loony left' and the libertarian right. Which is why a half-smirking, dismissive response like this is not itself dismissed for the insipid, callous disinterest it shows.

**Solutions?**

Of course, we should not take the 'hippy road' and declare that mind-expanding drug-use is the way forward for radical politics - it will feed into political artistic expression,

feelings of oneness ... and off to the races from there. But rejecting such wide-eyed optimism does not mean accepting any of the lies surrounding drug use generally.

The example of Portugal, which decriminalised personal drug possession in 2001, is routinely cited on this question: it resulted in lower-than-average drug-related deaths and a much reduced drug-related prison population. Any reduction in the prison population is a democratic victory as well, with prisoners often having much of their ability to participate in society substantially reduced or completely removed, including after release.

The truth is that decriminalisation must be supported, not least because it poses the necessity for the production and distribution of recreational drugs to be controlled in a way that ensures their quality, with negative effects minimised as a result. Of course, the Scottish government does not want to go anywhere near there, and explains why its proposals can only be critically supported. So two cheers, not three.

While we must continue to emphasise the facts, however, simply citing working examples is not enough. The liberal idea of 'If only people knew and took this seriously' (so much of the liberal approach to climate change too) is not enough. It relies on a liberal-pluralist understanding of the state, ignoring the state's class character and how it is enmeshed in historical relationships: eg, between the UK and USA. In that light, it inevitably fails to grapple with how collective agents like the working class may mobilise both to put pressure on capitalist governments to change tack, and to organise to replace the entire system of capital.

The legal standing of decriminalisation in Scotland may be a difficult one, leading many to conclude that this is simply a way for the SNP to put the constitutional question back on the agenda again, and in a more favourable way than the clashes between the UK and Scottish governments over the right to hold a referendum, self-ID for trans people, and even bottle recycling.

But the Scottish government may have a better legal standing on this question than it did in regards to the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill and bottle recycling, where the former was blocked as not being a legitimate devolved matter and the latter as coming into conflict with the Internal Market Act (2020).

In theory, the treaty of union provides that there is no appeal out of Scotland in criminal law matters, so that you cannot appeal to the UK Supreme Court, and so things stop at the High Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh, the supreme criminal court in Scotland. Time will tell.

**Official madness**

From a political perspective, the issue is generally recognised as being downstream of the global war on drugs. The war on drugs - like the global health crisis (particularly acute in Scotland, though no less serious in many other countries) - is one of this generation's great democratic challenges. To properly be tackled, we need an international approach which links up with similar struggles for reform globally, especially in the heart of the beast, the USA.

It is so painfully obvious that official policy is like putting a finger in each ear with regard to the facts that the issue leads many

people, old and young, to question exactly what produces particular policy commitments, if it is not - at least as a baseline - simple and incontrovertible evidence. Unless one is born into an atmosphere of widespread pure cynicism bordering on fatalism, everyone must start somewhere in questioning the economic-political basis of the society, and the generalised madness of drug policy is an obvious place to start for many.

On the one hand, there are calls to treat drug use as a criminal matter. On the other, to treat it as a medical issue. In reality, it is treated (correctly!) as a leisure issue by most drug consumers. There is plenty to be said for alcohol as a social lubricant and, measured on scales of 'harm done to oneself' and 'harm done to others' caused by taking various drugs, alcohol comes out looking much worse. But, correctly, there is no support whatsoever for a return to the days of the US prohibition.

Harm reduction has to be the basis of a start to a sensible approach. One takes it as given that many people will take drugs, just as many others will drink alcohol, and they must be provided with information and resources to do so safely. Besides cannabis, a classic case of the UK's absurd drug policy can be seen in relation to psilocybin, the 'magic mushrooms', which is a class A drug. That means you can be sentenced for up to seven years in prison for possession, and up to life for its supply and production! Yet in Brazil magic mushrooms are completely legal. In reality psilocybin is as close to harmless as you can get in terms of both 'harm to self' and 'harm to others', and evidence seems to suggest that it can help in the treatment of various forms of mental illness. But in our enlightened UK psilocybin mushrooms are illegal to even pick when growing naturally in a field.

Cannabis, supposedly legalised for prescription in this country, has still only been prescribed a handful of times, thanks to the limit on application - not to mention the institutional inertia of a generation of doctors either not formally educated in 'illicit' drugs at all, or educated to see them as outwith the medical profession and whose benefits rest only on 'anecdotal evidence', not peer-reviewed double-blind experiments. Never mind that the law makes it so hard to even do legal, scholarly investigations into these drugs.

With the amount of people who die or suffer serious health issues every year in Scotland as high as it is, it is difficult to see the opposition to such a sensible drug policy as decriminalisation (combined with the institutionalisation of the conclusions of a harm-reduction approach) as anything less than appalling mistreatment through wilful neglect.

To continue to deny the good sense of changing policy on this is to openly admit to treating those suffering today from this crisis as a lesser class of human beings, who can be used as disposable pawns in the game of electoral advantage and global momentum on the topic, spearheaded by the USA. Let us never forget what this corrupt capitalist system and its representatives have done to the people who have suffered, and will continue to suffer, under this punitive policy regime ●



## TURKEY



Beefed-up F-16s are better than no F-35s

# King Brinkman in action

Erdoğan has run out of room for manoeuvre. Facing a major financial crisis, he had to accept Sweden's Nato membership and pivot away from Moscow. **Esen Uslu** thinks there will be consequences, however

**W**ith the July 11-12 Nato summit in Lithuania approaching, the pose adopted by president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of being an important influence on international affairs, had already worn thin. He and his cohorts in the media had tried to present him as the 'Brinkmanship king' - always getting what is best for Turkey by dragging his feet and resisting US pressure.

However, the economic and financial policies pursued over the last few years and the promise to spend non-existent funds in gay abandon - all this is now coming home to roost. Following Erdoğan's re-election as president and the victory of his Justice and Development Party (HDP) in May's general election, it has become apparent that Turkey is on the threshold of a major financial crisis.

Erdoğan's unorthodox 'High interest rates are the cause, and high inflation is the result' financial policies were quietly set aside, and more 'traditional' measures (that is, those accepted by the major capitalist powers) were introduced. Key personnel running the central bank and the finance ministry were replaced by those with more clout in the west. True, the minimum wage and pension increases promised before the elections were implemented grudgingly, but there were also massive tax rises. Erdoğan did his best to reassure the US in particular, but it has not yet been enough to resolve the crisis.

Ministers had been sent to various Gulf countries, where they begged for short-term support to help prop up the regime and support Turkey's Islamist government. However, as had been expected, the results of such a begging tour were

not fruitful. That despite the fact that potentially 'profitable' state-owned assets, such as ports and telecommunication networks, were offered as collateral.

So now support from the major western powers is back at the top of Erdoğan's agenda. To get them to open the taps and allow the flow of international finance capital once more, the brinkmanship of previous policies were to be set aside for the time being, and replaced by a return to a more docile relationship.

However, making such twists and turns in the international arena requires two things. First of all, for the sake of the domestic audience Erdoğan had to be presented not as a turncoat, who had discarded the Islamist-nationalist, crony-capitalist policies he had previously pursued. Instead, Erdoğan had to be presented as a realistic, cool and calculating politician, now bending as a reed before the floods in order to stand upright once again afterwards.

## International

Secondly, in the international arena Erdoğan could not please everybody. He had to make choices, and by doing so he would lose the support of one or other of the major players. The obvious choice was to please the US and Nato powers, so Erdoğan had to accept that this would not be to Vladimir Putin's liking and he would then have to try to limit the damage done.

Putin had supported Erdoğan and tried to play his part in relieving the financial pressure he had been under. The payment of the massive bill for the gas used during the winter months, after the Ukraine war pushed gas prices sky-high, was deferred to a suitable time after the elections. A

substantial amount of foreign currency was deposited in the central bank from Russian sources for the construction of a nuclear power plant. However, taking everything into account, all this was just peanuts compared to Turkey's actual economic needs.

And now, to win brownie points from the west, concessions had to be made in that direction. The first opportunity came with the visit of Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, to Turkey last week. He was sent home with two highly pleasing gifts: Erdoğan had stated that in his opinion Ukraine deserved to be accepted as a member of Nato very quickly; and, secondly, coinciding with Zelensky's return flight, the five commanders of the Azov brigade who had been interned in Turkey were allowed to depart. They were supposed to remain in Turkey until the end of the war as a condition of the prisoner exchange deal agreed between Ukraine and Russia, and facilitated by Turkey, last year.

Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, immediately condemned this move: "No-one informed us about this. According to the agreements, these ringleaders were to remain on the territory of Turkey until the end of the conflict." He added that, despite Erdoğan's statement that Putin was expected to visit Turkey in August, such a visit was merely a possibility, with "no exact dates set as of yet". That means, in practical terms, that the visit is now off the agenda.

Erdoğan and Turkey are also awaiting other consequences. An immediate Russian response came in the form of the blocking of the UN security council's proposal to maintain humanitarian aid to north-eastern Syria via Turkey's Bab al-Hawa border crossing. Expect the

same kind of stubborn refusal for the upcoming extension of the deal relating to Ukraine's grain exports through Turkish straits.

Erdoğan is bracing himself for more to come, and will surely attempt to placate Russia as much as possible in the near future. Despite the current hot summer, cold winter months are not far away - when gas procurement will once again become vital.

## Pleasing

Meanwhile, the opportunity to make up with the west has presented itself at the Nato summit. As expected, Erdoğan attended a meeting with Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg and Swedish prime minister Ulf Kristersson on July 10, and shook hands on the proposed deal for Sweden to join Nato despite what had been portrayed in Turkey as a recent provocative burning of the *Quran* by demonstrators in Stockholm.

One of the photos released was very symbolic, with its subliminal messages to the Islamic world: on one side of a long table sat Erdoğan and Stoltenberg, with Erdoğan's headscarved female Turkish interpreter between them; and on the other side Kristersson was sitting alone.

President Joe Biden also had a face-to-face with Erdoğan during the summit and said he was very pleased that Turkey has removed its veto on Sweden's Nato membership. Just how pleased will be known when the lip service ends on Turkey's purchase of advanced F16 jets from the USA, with export licences granted and credit lines approved.

There are still many hurdles for Turkey to jump before it gets at least a resemblance of parity with the purchase granted to Greece. The US congress could still block the sale

and, in view of Erdoğan's known weaknesses, there will probably be a long list of demands presented to him.

For the time being, Erdoğan's last-minute attempt to link Turkey's prolonged wait on the doorstep of the European Union with Sweden's application for Nato membership does not seem to have perturbed anybody in Europe. Despite Sweden's promise to support Turkey's EU membership, no movement is expected on that front in the short run.

The next hurdle for Erdoğan's charm offensive will be the coming meeting with the Greek prime minister. When the US beefed up its military capacity in the Balkans and eastern Europe by creating a logistics base at the Greek port of Alexandroupoli, the price paid was allowing Greece's massive purchase of military hardware despite its own severe financial problems.

The current proposed changes to the balance of power would reduce to a pipe dream Turkey's agreement with Libya on a 'Blue Homeland' - ie, a zone controlling the Mediterranean up to the coast of Libya, to the detriment of Greece and Egypt. So now is the time to make concessions to Greece and the west by accepting talks aimed at reducing tensions in the Aegean.

So, if things go Erdoğan's way, Ukraine will get verbal support for Nato membership, while continuing to receive military hardware for its war with Russia; Nato will be happy to have Sweden as a member, and the US will be pleased to continue operating in the Aegean Sea without further need to pressurise Turkey on the straits issue. That may be sufficient to let Erdoğan off the hook this time and help him avoid a financial crisis. On the other hand, it may not be enough - we must wait and see ●



USA

# Skin colour or social class?

Liberal anti-racism inevitably engenders racism. Affirmative action is collapsing under the weight of its own internal contradictions, argues **Daniel Lazare**

**D**id the US Supreme Court kill affirmative action? Or did half a century of phony anti-racism merely collapse under the weight of its own internal contradictions?

Two weeks after the court issued its epic ruling in 'Students for Fair Admissions v Harvard', it is looking more and more like the latter. Top Democrats issued the usual protests once the decision was released. Joe Biden slammed the court for not appreciating the importance of racial diversity, which, among other things, has made "the United States military the finest fighting force in the history of the world." Vice-president Kamala Harris expressed "deep disappointment", while Barack Obama tweeted a list of minority scholarship funds to contribute to, now that the court has decided that it is unconstitutional to give minorities a leg up in university admissions solely on the basis of race.

Michelle Obama - so popular among liberals that she is regularly touted as a presidential candidate in 2024 - was particularly passionate: "So often we just accept that money, power and privilege are perfectly justifiable forms of affirmative action," she said, "while kids growing up like I did are expected to compete when the ground is anything but level." But Obama's rage at the money power would have been more convincing if it did not turn out that she was on vacation at that moment on a luxury yacht.

Affirmative action indeed gave Michelle Obama's career a boost, while her husband's lucrative book contracts, movie deals and speaking fees have completed the process of propelling her to America's top ranks. But this is a society in which minorities are losing ground and the top one percent holds a dozen times more wealth than the bottom 50% combined.

Pro-forma as such protests might have been, they died away to near zero, once a poll reported that Americans approved of the Supreme Court decision by a stunning 20-point margin and that blacks supported it by 44% to 36%.<sup>1</sup> Even affirmative action's purported beneficiaries do not like it, which is why liberals, aware that affirmative action is political poison, now wish that everyone would forget about a policy that they spent decades promoting.

But Republicans will not let them, and socialists should not either. The problem with affirmative action is simple: it is an attempt to impose equality on elite institutions, whose *raison d'être* is to promote the opposite. Despite their ongoing racism, it gives them *carte blanche* to pit racial minorities against one another in ways that reinforce their position at the apex of class society.

In reality, black household wealth is lower relative to whites than it was in the 1960s, while black employment lags 22% behind the US rate as a whole. If the purpose of affirmative action is to provide a boost for those still suffering the after-effects of slavery, it plainly is not working.

## Absurd

The results are absurd in a way that only American political discourse can be - a fact that came through loud and clear in the flurry of opinions that have accompanied the Students for Fair Admissions decision. Take Clarence Thomas - the ultra-right Supreme Court justice who is at the top of every liberal's hate list. Born in 1948, he is an ex-radical who once hung a poster



**Ben Shahn 'The passion of Sacco and Vanzetti' (1932)**

of Malcolm X in his dorm room and who took part in the 1970 Harvard Square riots against the Vietnam war. But he started 'going right' after reading Thomas Sowell - a black Marxist-turned-conservative, who was emerging as a leading affirmative-action critic. A judicial opinion striking down race-based admission policies is clearly something Thomas has been aching to write for years.

The results are not bad. He is an excellent prose stylist whose opinion deftly dispatches one racial shibboleth after another. Noting that affirmative action is supposed to promote "diversity" - one of those elusive concepts that no-one can define, but everyone knows when they see it - he points out that white students from rural Appalachia and a wealthy San Francisco suburb "may well have more diverse outlooks ... than two students from Manhattan's Upper East Side ... one of whom is white and the other of whom is black". Yet affirmative action, with its concept of race *über alles*, recognises one kind of diversity and not another.

He points out that today's elaborate admissions process, which students spend years preparing for, only began in the 1920s, when Harvard discovered to its dismay that "too many Jews" were passing what at the time was a simple and straightforward entrance exam. So Harvard decided that comportment, leadership, civic activities, etc - areas in which Jews supposedly fell short - mattered no less than grades, causing the number of Jewish freshmen to plummet from 28% in 1925 to 12% in 1933. "According to then-president Abbott Lawrence Lowell", Thomas writes, "excluding Jews from Harvard would help maintain admissions opportunities for gentiles and perpetuate the purity of the Brahmin race - New England's white,

Protestant upper crust."

Quite right - although Thomas might have noted that the odious Lowell was not only a eugenicist who believed that America should exclude inferior races, but the leader of a blue-ribbon panel that in 1927 approved the death penalty for Sacco and Vanzetti - Italian-born anarchists who became a *cause célèbre* after a rightwing judge found them guilty of armed robbery and murder in a trial riddled with flaws. Ben Shahn's 1932 *Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, which shows a desiccated Lowell standing over the martyrs' bodies, is one of the most powerful images in radical art. Yet Lowell's spirit lives on in methodologies that now hold back hardworking Asians in the same way that they once held back hardworking Jews.

So far, so good. But then Thomas goes down a rabbit hole of his own by engaging in what he describes as "an originalist defence of the colour-blind constitution" - one whose purpose is "to clarify that all forms of discrimination based on race - including so-called affirmative action - are prohibited under the constitution". This is unavoidable from his point of view, since he cannot prove that Harvard's admissions policies are unconstitutional without assuming that the constitution is colour-blind as well.

But it is nonsense. Of the 55 delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention, 25 were slave-owners, who made their presence felt not only in various pro-slavery provisions - eg, the clause that boosted slave-owner representation in the House of Representatives and Electoral College; another requiring Congress to suppress slave insurrections; and one requiring free states to return runaways, etc - but in the constitution's fundamental architecture.

Bicameralism, for instance, was the brainchild of a Virginia slave-owner named Edmund Randolph. Slave-owners in North Carolina and Maryland played key roles in winning approval for an upper house based on equal state representation. James Madison and other Virginia planters were instrumental in creating a 'national judiciary'. The aim was to create an elaborate federal structure that would constrain democracy and minimise popular input, while at the same time maximising the power of states that were firmly under slave-owner control.

The results more than two centuries later are appalling. A Senate based on equal state representation means that the majority of the country that now lives in just 10 states will be outvoted four to one by the minority in the other 40. Since 81% of minorities also live in the highly-urbanised top 10, the Senate guarantees that they will be outvoted even more egregiously. Give an Electoral College that is also weighted in favour of rural white states, the Supreme Court ends up tainted, since it is up to the president (chosen by the Electoral College) to nominate members whom the upper chamber then confirms. Yet Thomas wants us to believe that the same doubly-stained judiciary will see to it that a slaveholders' constitution remains true to its 'colour-blind' origins.

Thomas goes so far as to cite the 1776 Virginia Bill of Rights, which declared "[t]hat all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights." It's yet more evidence, supposedly, in support of his colour-blind view. Yet this is the same state that a few years later would offer "one able-bodied healthy negro slave between the age of 10 and 40 years" to any patriot willing to sign up for the militia and fight for "freedom".<sup>2</sup>

## Even worse

Bad as this is, however, the arguments put forth by the other side are even worse. Sonia Sotomayor, a justice appointed by Obama in 2009, is realistic enough in her pro-affirmative-action dissent to acknowledge that the constitution "protected" slavery in various ways. She also admits that, despite years of race-based social policies, minorities are losing ground due to growing *de facto* segregation in housing and schools.

Which is worse - that admissions officers are allowed to engage in racial horse-trading or that Sotomayor seeks to justify it in the name of *anti-racism*? Anti-Asian prejudice has reached the point that private consultants advise Asian students not to enclose a photo in their applications or list "typical" Asian extra-curricular activities such as Chinese language school, piano, chess, or playing Indian classical instruments.<sup>3</sup> Yet Sotomayor's only advice is that Asian applicants "who would be less likely to be admitted without a comprehensive understanding of their background" should "explain the value of their unique background heritage and perspective", so as to allow colleges to "consider the vast differences within [their] community". As Jay Caspian Kang put it in the *New Yorker*:

It's hard not to read this as a premise for Asian American teenagers to essentially dance for acceptance, or to try to distinguish themselves from other Asian Americans by explaining to the good people at the Harvard admissions office why,

say, a Vietnamese applicant is more valuable to the Ivy League cultural texture than just another Chinese one.<sup>4</sup>

It is obvious where this is leading to, since Sotomayor quotes other students whose comments strike her as exemplary. These include a black graduate who testified that it was "really important" that the university sees who she is "holistically and how the colour of [her] skin and the texture of [her] hair impacted [her] upbringing"; a Mexican-American who says that her ethno-racial identity is a "core piece" of her identity that has affected her "every experience"; a Harvard grad who testified that being the child of Chinese immigrants was "really fundamental to explaining who" she is; and a black woman who said: "To try to not see [her] race is to try to not see [her] simply because there is no part of [her] experience, no part of [her] journey, no part of [her] life that has been untouched by [her] race."

A student who believes that skin colour is less important than class or political ideology clearly does not have the right stuff to make it in such a supercharged ideological atmosphere. He or she must either internalise the ruling class racial code or resign herself to attending a less prestigious university.

Even though Harvard claims to be private, 11% of its revenue comes from federal research grants, while another 45% comes from alumni donations that the government indirectly subsidises, since they are tax-deductible.<sup>5</sup> This is why 29% of each class consists of 'legacy' students whose parents also went to Harvard, athletes, and others who are also of "special interest", because their families are major donors. The goal is to build "a sense of community" among wealthy alumni who would not otherwise contribute if their children could not get in or if Harvard sports teams did not win.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, only 4.5% of students come from the bottom 20% of US families, while 15% come from those making \$630,000 or more per year.

Conceivably, as Kang points out, Harvard could have tried to even the score by expanding class sizes, relaxing admissions standards or cutting off its pipelines from exclusive private schools. But wealthy alumni would be unhappy, donations would shrink, and Harvard would no longer be Harvard - which is to say a bastion of the elite. So it finds it easier to play games with racial minorities, while liberals like Sotomayor cheer from the sidelines.

The Students for Fair Admissions decision will not make America any less racist, given how deeply inequities are baked into the US constitutional structure. Indeed, by putting wind in the sails of the pro-Trump forces, it will likely make it worse. But at least it removes a form of liberal racism, whose role has been particularly disorienting ●

## Notes

1. www.brookings.edu/articles/a-surprisingly-muted-reaction-to-the-supreme-courts-decision-on-affirmative-action.
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## MEDIA

# Elon Musk's Twitterdämmerung

The flashy launch of Threads demonstrates the web's tendency towards monopoly, argues Paul Demarty

A few weeks ago, in one of his many increasingly desperate publicity stunts, Elon Musk challenged Mark Zuckerberg to a fight - an actual, real, physical fight.

Indeed, Dana White - the top dog at Ultimate Fighting Championship, the world's largest mixed martial arts franchise - jumped in opportunistically to arrange the whole thing, and gave a bunch of interviews hyping up this clash of the century. We take it that Musk is not, in the end, serious about his challenge. (Both men know Brazilian ju-jitsu, but Zuckerberg is 13 years younger and - let's be honest - in rather better nick.) Yet the whole ridiculous episode, however it turns out, is a picture of Musk's whole reign at the top end of the social media business: a series of absurd stunts - each supposed to be funny, but none as funny as his tantrums. He can dish it out (sort of), but he cannot take it. Even the purchase of Twitter itself was imposed on him in the end.

It has come to look even more foolish, now that Zuckerberg's Instagram brand has launched its own Twitter clone, called Threads (we do not know if the name is a nod to the notoriously fiddly threading mechanisms on Twitter!). Five days after being opened to the public, it had garnered 100 million sign-ups, which is roughly half Twitter's monthly active user base. Those are two rather different statistics, of course, but it is a worrying sign (especially given that Threads is unavailable as yet in the European Union at all - a matter we will discuss later). Instagram itself, of course, already has following/follower mechanics, so the new product's social graph is easily seeded from the existing Instagram one. The network effect (the fact that a site is only useful if people you know are on it already) is the main 'moat' for the incumbent social networks; Meta and Instagram are well placed to pose an *existential* threat to Twitter, since they can easily solve this bootstrapping problem.

## Why now?

A few questions are posed by all this: above all, why *now*? The fact that the main incumbent microblogging platform is presently under the chaotic management of a prickly buffoon with the emotional age of 12 is, of course, part of the story; but it is a truth universally acknowledged that Twitter has been in decline for many years.

A chronic malady has become acute since the Musk takeover; its pre-existing set of intractable problems must now be solved with a fraction of the workforce, and now with a billion dollars of debt interest to pay out every year, on top of its already out-of-control costs. Its power users are notoriously contemptuous of this app that consumes so much of their lives (the 'hellsite', as it is known). Was there really no opportunity to eat Twitter's lunch before now?

Counterfactuals are a dangerous game, but surely this exceptionally vulnerable incumbent could have been disrupted. But it is a risky business, disruption: Facebook may have ground MySpace into dust in the space of a couple of years, but the attempts of big-tech companies to brute-force their way in have a high failure rate - remember Google+? Of course you don't! (You could also throw Zuckerberg's 'Metaverse' white elephant in here.)

For all the guff about innovation, the major tech companies are not especially innovative - a point made by the liberal anti-monopolist, Cory Doctorow, in relation to Google:

Google is a company that made



Choice ... but ever diminishing

one successful product. They made a search engine and it was really good. And then they just had no other ideas. Everything they tried in-house was a failure ... Their whole ad tech stack, their whole video stack, their whole server management stack, their whole mobile stack, docs, calendaring, maps, road navigation - these are all acquisitions. So Google is like, 'We are Willy Wonka's Idea Factory; we're geniuses who come up with ideas', but the ideas that they actually come up with - Google+, Sidewalk Labs, the floating Wi-Fi balloons, even their RSS reader - they've all failed.<sup>1</sup>

That is not to say that Google has failed. Its acquisitions have been enormously profitable. The same goes for Meta: it picked up Instagram early doors for basically no money, and used the vast resources generated by Facebook to create yet another social media behemoth. Instagram has been quick enough at cloning its rivals' features to avoid being eclipsed (Threads, we suppose, being the latest entry in that particular series - stealing from Twitter in the same way that 'stories' stole from Snapchat and 'reels' from TikTok).

Purchasing Twitter would - all things being equal - be preferable to re-implementing it. The official reasons given are weak-tea indeed - that they want to keep a sunnier, 'Instagrammied' vibe to the new

product, and leave behind Twitter's *Grand Guignol* malevolence. Threads is to be less focused on the news (above all, it is the failure of *journalists* to find a new home that has kept Twitter relevant during its decline). Its management hope thereby to avoid the absurd polarisation, circular firing squads, mob-handed polemical assaults and other cheerful entertainments that are so much a part of the Twitter experience.

The idea is not very plausible, for reasons we will get to. Threads will kill Twitter if it can accommodate the journos and politicians; if not, what the hell is the point of it? You can already screenshot some text for an Instagram post. (People are beastly to each other there too, if you know what to look for.)

The real reason is, primarily, that a purchase at anything close to its real market value will be impossible, since it will impose far too great a haircut on Musk and his fellow investors; and, secondly, that the vandalism of the Musk era poses real issues in technical due diligence; and, finally, that it could well trigger regulatory action on the part of a marginally more aggressive Federal Trade Commission than we have known for many a year. Evidently the calculation at Threads HQ is that Twitter is circling the drain and it is more important to be a real alternative when the *Twitterdämmerung* finally comes than to have the perfect product. (The other obvious rival - Twitter founder Jack

Dorsey's Bluesky - is still in an invite-only beta; Jack will have to get a move on if he wants a piece of the action.)

## Monopoly

If it does 'win' - indeed, given the fact that victory is so obviously plausible - Threads is a renewed demonstration of the power of the tendencies towards monopoly in capitalism. It is, in a certain sense, a limit case: after all, the internet was supposed to be a new American-style frontier, but this time a truly limitless one, where the yeomanry need never be supplanted by the robber barons. Anyone with a rudimentary level of technical expertise might stake their modest claim. So, indeed, it began in the early days of the 'world wide web'. Then services like Geocities started to supplant the myriad personal websites, and then Myspace, Friendster and the rest of the first generation of social networks began to replace the millions of privately hosted forums and e-lists; and then Facebook swept all before it.

It was never really scarcity that drove monopolisation in the pre-digital economy, but the power of more sophisticated divisions of labour in creating greater returns on investment. So it turned out online as well. Indeed, the fact that the growth of the mass-popular internet coincided with a historic period of cheap money, exacerbated after the 2008 crash, sped up the process considerably by

funnelling vast scads of institutional investment money into tech companies of various kinds, including the social networks.

It was already clear a decade ago that Twitter's growth would never justify a valuation on the level of the 'hyperscalers' (Amazon, Google and Meta). From that time, its card was marked. According to Elon's rhetoric around the time of the purchase, Twitter was a financial basket case. But that was not true - it was not profitable, but was potentially so in a way that (say) Uber will never be. It had a stable, locked-in user base that generated revenue. In the strange, warped world of modern finance capital, that would never be enough. There would always be pressure towards consolidation - either by acquisition or by being eaten alive.

That is not to say that Meta and its various tentacles are in great shape either.

We mentioned earlier that Threads is not yet launching in the EU. The obstacle here is clearly the General Data Protection Regulation, which has already been enforced aggressively against Meta companies multiple times. (Though the UK Data Protection Act implements the GDPR, enforcement is so comically lax that plainly Meta is not bothered. Hooray for those sunlit uplands!) The underlying business model of all Meta's brands, for practical purposes, is selling targeted advertising, by means of creepy, intrusive tracking. It is a model that has come under adverse pressure in recent years, both regulatory and 'private'. The GDPR was one disaster, but another came when Apple imposed an opt-in system for data tracking on its devices (rather than some uncharacteristic act of altruism on Apple's part, this appears to be directed towards the launch of its own adtech business in due course).

Perhaps these obstacles can be negotiated: a deal struck with Apple, a few corrupt precedents set in the European courts. What is the consequence? Well, precisely, that all Meta's businesses remain what they are: psychopathically user-hostile. Tracking data is a volume business. You win by having more of it (hence Twitter's mediocre performance). That means having *more* people, *more* engaged, *more* of the time. Which means engineering dependency. Each social network seems to have its own characteristic pathology: Twitter encourages persecution mania, Instagram eating disorders ... but they all have (at least) one.

So the idea that Threads will somehow avoid the toxicity of Twitter by means of the cloying, coercive positivity of Instagram's culture should be presumed false: Instagram was already quite as toxic in its own way. I may be too poisoned by decades of polemical writing to see things clearly, but I think I *prefer* Twitter's war of 'all against all': it is a more truthful instance of the inevitable consequences of commodifying attention than its more successful rivals.

Slavoj Žižek used to argue that Ayn Rand's partisanship for free-market capitalism was so cartoonish and inhuman that her works are best understood, despite her intentions, as satire. Twitter, in the same spirit, is something like a satire of Facebook and Instagram.

We will miss our hellsite! ●

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## Notes

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# THEORY



Name of commodities

# L-content and price

Moshé Machover expands on his arguments in favour of applying statistical reasoning to the problems of analysing capitalism at its most basic level

**W**hat is the relationship between the amount of labour embodied in products and the price paid when these products are sold and bought as commodities? In other words, what is the relationship between the life activity of the workers and the alienated form of money? This is among the central topics discussed in a recent book co-authored by Emmanuel Farjoun, David Zachariah and myself.<sup>1</sup> Its title is a bit of a mouthful, so I will refer to it by its punchier subtitle, *A Labor theory of capitalism* (briefly, *LTC*). In writing our book we had in mind a reader who is a supporter of the interests of the working class, but is not necessarily familiar with Marxian political economy. However, the present article, summarising some ideas presented in *LTC*, is addressed specifically to Marxists, who presumably have some knowledge of Marx's economic theory. If you do have such knowledge, this article will seem somewhat familiar, but also

somehow offbeat, as our approach is unorthodox and bypasses a major controversial and unresolved issue in the Marxian theory of price.<sup>2</sup> I will try to make the exposition as simple as possible, and accessible to readers without technical expertise.

## Two levels

Under capitalism, economic activity (society's material metabolism) takes place at two levels: the ground level of production and consumption; and the superimposed level of circulation, the market. At the ground level, goods and services appear as *products*. A product may end up as a consumption item, or serve as input in the production of some other products. Thus, for example, electricity is a product that may be consumed for domestic lighting, or utilised for powering a machine operated in production.

The passage of most products, from the point of their production to the point of their use (as a consumption item or as input in production), is mediated by the

market. Here, at this level of the economy, goods and services appear as *commodities*, undergoing transactions of sale-and-purchase. Thus, electricity must be sold by the producer company and paid for by its user - except where that user happens to be the electricity company itself, consuming it in-house. The market existed, of course, in older economic systems, but has acquired an overarching role under capitalism.

Each of the two levels of the economy is associated with a measure that attaches a numerical value to goods and services.

First let us consider the market. Here, commodities have an obvious common measure: *price*. This measure is in most cases immediately observable: a commodity normally comes with a price tag attached to it (figuratively if not physically). But it is also mysterious: the price of a commodity does not belong to it as an inherent attribute, but is assigned to it behind the scenes by a process that needs to be uncovered.

Now consider the ground level of the economic metabolism. Here products have a socially natural common measure: their *labour content* (briefly, *L-content*). This requires some elaboration. Every product has *direct* inputs of (some or all of) the following three kinds: (a) labour, (b) previously produced products, (c) free gifts of nature (unprocessed natural resources). For example, production of wheat requires direct inputs of (a) farming labour, (b) previously produced inputs, such as seeds, fertilisers, fuel for powering farming machinery, etc, and (c) rain and sunshine. Now, inputs of kind (b) were themselves produced using inputs of the same three kinds, which are *indirect* inputs of the end-product (wheat, in our example).

In the following diagram the first line shows schematically the direct inputs of a given product. In the second line the direct inputs of kind *b* (the previously produced inputs) are in turn resolved in terms of *their* inputs. Pushing this analysis further

and further back, the *b* section dwindles away, and we end up at the limit with just two kinds of *ultimate* inputs: labour and gifts of nature.<sup>3</sup>

$$\begin{matrix} \{ a \} & \{ b \} & \{ c \} \\ \{ a \} & \{ [a][b][c] \} & \{ c \} \end{matrix}$$

The L-content of a product is the total amount of direct and indirect labour input required (under prevalent social and technical conditions) to produce it, measured in labour time, say *worker-hours*.

This is essentially what Marx - following Adam Smith and David Ricardo - defined as "the magnitude of the value of any article".<sup>4</sup> However, in *LTC* we avoid using the term, 'value', for this magnitude and stick to calling it 'L-content' - a practice that I shall follow here. Our main reason is that the term, 'value', is loaded with multiple connotations that we wish to sidestep. In particular, we would like to avoid confusion with 'value added' - a quantity of money on which value added tax is levied in many countries.



# THEORY

Our detailed definition of L-content in *LTC* differs in some technical details from Marx's definition of value. These differences, however, do not affect the present discussion. So you may assume that in what follows 'L-content' is just another term for Marx's 'measure of value'.

Unlike price - a superficial quantity, which is overtly attached to a commodity - a product's L-content inheres in it at birth, as it were, but is by no means easy to quantify exactly. It requires a highly complex calculation. The *direct* labour input that goes into a given product (using prevalent methods of production) is often fairly easy to quantify; but to this must be added the L-content it inherits from its previously produced inputs - of which there may be a large number, each with its own previously produced inputs. A precise calculation of a product's L-content is in most cases unfeasible, and an approximate estimate is the best we can expect. (By the way, very similar difficulties arise, for example, in quantifying the carbon footprint of a product.)

Note that products and commodities are not identical categories; they merely overlap. On the one hand, many kinds of product are not commodities. Examples of this are material objects and services provided free as public goods by the state or charities; and those produced privately for the producer's domestic use or given as gifts. On the other hand, there are many kinds of commodity that are not products: they have no labour input and hence have zero L-content. Example of this are virgin land or untapped mineral resources held as property; and a great variety of abstract commodities, such as patents, copyrights and other transferable legal rights. Present-day money is also a commodity - indeed a universal one - that is not a product. Of course, the overlap between the two categories is very large: in a modern capitalist economy a huge number of products are also commodities.

The relationship between the two measures, L-content and price, is of prime interest, for two reasons. For the classical economists, there was no doubt the purely scientific drive of trying to explain price in terms of L-content: science generally aims to explain surface phenomena by means of deeper-level ones. But Marx's main motive for investigating this relationship was promoting the interests of the working class. For workers, individually and collectively, L-content arises directly from their activity as direct producers; whereas price is an alienated quantity fixed by alien forces. Marx's great insight was that in order to analyse and expose the exploitation of labour by capital - the core antagonism between the two main classes of capitalist society - it is necessary to delve into the ground level of the economy and observe the division of the L-content created by workers into two parts: the share kept by them (in the surface form of money wages), and the 'surplus' share appropriated by capital (in the surface form of profits).

A central idea I pursue in the present article is the following. Since the numerical value of L-content of products is not directly observable, it is important to have a 'bridge' connecting price and L-content, allowing the conversion of monetary units into units of L-content: worker-hours.

The importance of such a bridge from a working class viewpoint cannot be overstressed. Suppose, for example, that a worker is paid at the rate of €30 per hour. She can relate immediately to this sum of money as a *consumer*: she knows what mix of consumer goods she can buy for it. But what does this sum of money

represent in terms of her life-activity as a *producer*? Now, suppose that scientific investigation reveals that the rate of conversion between the two measures is €60 per worker-hour. Then she realises that what she receives for one hour of labour is equivalent to one-half of what her class contributes to the social product! This knowledge is empowering in the class struggle.

As we show in *LTC*, there are other useful applications of such a bridge. One such application, which I will discuss later on, is a way of quantifying the rate of increase of the productivity of labour, which is an enduring long-term trend in the capitalist economy.

## Simplified model

In volumes 1 and 2 of *Capital*, as well as in *Value, price and profit*,<sup>5</sup> Marx assumes that the price of a commodity is proportional to its L-content.<sup>6</sup> For the sake of precision, he remarks a couple of times that this proportionality applies to what Adam Smith calls a commodity's "natural price", around which actual market price fluctuates and to which it gravitates when supply and demand are at equilibrium. But, apart from these remarks, and in all the numerical examples he presents in the first two volumes of *Capital*, he takes actual prices to be proportional to L-content. This means, for example, that if commodity A has three times the L-content of commodity B, then the price of A will be three times the price of B. Put another way: if we divide the price of A (as measured, say, in euros) by its L-content (as measured in worker-hours) and do the same for commodity B, we get the same result in both cases.

I would like to introduce here a bit of terminology. We call the ratio between the price at which a given commodity is sold-and-bought and its L-content the *price rate* of that commodity.<sup>7</sup> Thus the assumption that prices are proportional to L-content is equivalent to saying that all commodities sold-and-bought (in a given short period of time) have the same price rate.

There is no evidence or any other good reason to believe that such proportionality between price and L-content ever existed in reality, except *perhaps* in an extremely rough approximate sense.<sup>8</sup> Marx uses this model as a simplified didactic tool for exposition of his innovative theory of exploitation: capital exploits labour by paying workers for only part of the L-content created by them, and appropriates for itself the remaining 'surplus'. But in volume 3 of *Capital*, he abandons this simple proportionality fiction and puts forward a much more complex hypothesis regarding the relationship between the two measures.

I shall discuss this hypothesis in the next section. But right now I propose to suspend disbelief in the proportionality assumption and work out a simple instructive exercise that will come in handy later on. So bear with me and let us assume that price is strictly proportional to L-content. Using this assumption, we obtain a simple way of converting monetary units - say euros - into units of L-content: worker-hours. I illustrate this with the following example.

Consider a firm whose workers produce widgets, which the capitalist owners of the firm sell on the market as a commodity. Suppose the firm's workers perform a total of 4,000 worker-hours of labour during a given week. These 4,000 worker-hours are added to the L-content of the non-labour inputs used up during the week. Thus the L-content of the widgets produced in the given week is the sum of the L-content of those inputs plus the new 4,000 worker-hours directly added by the firm's workers.

Now suppose the value added of the firm in the given week - which the firm must report to the tax authorities - is €240,000. Please note that here the term, 'value', is used not in Marx's sense, but in the common official and everyday sense. By definition, 'value added' is the difference between the sale price of the output and the cost price of its non-labour inputs (so these costs exclude wages!). In our present example, the firm sold widgets for a total of €240,000 over and above what it paid for the non-labour inputs used up in their production. What does this new €240,000 pay for? Clearly, it is the price of the new L-content of 4,000 worker-hours created by the workers! Dividing the former quantity by the latter, we get €60 per worker-hour. This is the price rate of what the workers added to the non-labour inputs in the given week. Each worker-hour of labour performed during production of the widgets is worth €60 to the firm.<sup>9</sup> For the record, here is the general formula we have used to arrive at the price rate:

$$\text{price rate} = \text{value added} / \text{number of worker-hours employed}$$

Note that so far we have not made use of the proportionality assumption. What this assumption implies is that we should get the same bottom line, the same price rate, irrespective of which firm or which product we consider. The rate whereby units of money are converted to worker-hours according to our general formula should be the same, whether we consider widgets or any other product sold as a commodity; this ratio would apply *uniformly to the entire economy*.

I pointed out in the beginning that the L-content of a product is a hidden quantity, not amenable to precise calculation. But in this simplified model we would be able to calculate *indirectly* the L-content of any product sold as a commodity in the given week. In our example we found that the price rate was €60 per worker-hour. If this holds uniformly across the economy, it follows that in the given week each euro in the price of such a commodity represents one worker-minute of L-content.

For the formula we have just used for the price rate, we needed the following data: the value added and the total number of worker-hours employed by the given firm. There is an alternative formula for calculating the price rate, which uses instead of the latter data (total number of worker-hours), two other data: the *wage share*, defined as the share of the value added, which the firm pays as wages; and the *average wage rate* (ie, average pay for one hour of labour). This formula can be derived from the previous one by a simple algebraic manipulation:

$$\text{price rate} = \text{wage rate} / \text{wage share}$$

For example, suppose that the widget firm pays one-half of its €240,000 value added as wages (the other half is retained by the firm as profit). This means that the wage share is half, or 0.5. Thus €120,000 is paid out in wages for 4,000 worker-hours. It follows that the average wage rate is €30 per worker-hour. Using our new formula, we obtain:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{price rate} &= 30 / 0.5 \\ &= €60 \text{ per worker-hour} \end{aligned}$$

- which is the same result we got before.

Let me point out the great importance of the wage share as a parameter in the present simplified model. The proportionality assumption implies that the wage share in money terms is equal to the share of the wages in terms of L-content. Thus, in our illustrative example, since the wage share is half

of the value added, which is quantified in money terms, it follows that what the workers receive is also equal to half of the L-content they contribute to the product.<sup>10</sup>

## Transformation

In volume 3 of *Capital*, Marx abandons the simplified model and replaces it by a much more complex one.<sup>11</sup> His reason for discarding the simplified model was a good one. As a simple deduction shows, the proportionality assumption implies that a firm's rate of profit would depend inversely on the ratio between its fixed capital used in production and the amount of labour performed in production.<sup>12</sup> The higher this ratio, the lower the rate of profit. In other words, firms in which the amount of fixed capital per unit of labour is high would derive a lower rate of profit than firms which have a smaller amount of fixed capital invested per unit of labour. This is not quite the case in reality; so the simplified model appears to be refuted by empirical evidence.<sup>13</sup>

The transformation hypothesis (briefly, TH) is presented in part 3 of volume 3 of *Capital*, especially in chapter 10. I call it a 'hypothesis' because, in my opinion, this is what it is: I know of no evidence for its validity; its plausibility is a matter of judgment.

The basic conceptual assumption underlying the TH is that at equilibrium the unit prices of all types of commodities produced by the economy have determinate numerical values, which Marx calls *prices of production*; and the rates of profit accrued by capitals in all production firms are equal.

Of course, everyone knows that if you shop around you will find that the same type of commodity is sold at the same time by different sellers at a variety of unit prices; and rates of profit vary greatly both within industries and between them. So the equilibrium that the input-output model describes is an ideal one.

However, it is implied that the real economy is driven by market forces - the forces of competition - towards an ideal equilibrium of this sort, and is only prevented from actually reaching it by various disequilibrating forces, that act as 'noise'.

A crucial further assumption of the TH is that the uniform rate of profit at equilibrium is equal to the *average* rate of profit that would obtain if all commodities were sold at prices proportional to their L-content. This assumption connects the model posited by the TH with the simplified model of volume 1, and therefore justifies regarding the TH as a modification - albeit a far-reaching one - of the old model.

The TH has been challenged on at least two grounds, is widely regarded as problematic, and has given rise to a prolific controversy. I will outline this controversy very briefly, because the highly technical issues raised by it have nothing to do with my arguments for disregarding and bypassing the TH.

The first and oldest argument against the TH is that, when it is cast in rigorous mathematical form, it leads to a system of equations that is more than likely to be inconsistent, hence

unsolvable.<sup>14</sup> Some orthodox Marxist economists have argued for a different mathematical representation of the TH, which results in a consistent system of equations. Of course, consistency is only a necessary condition for the validity of the TH, but not a sufficient one. For that, some positive evidence would be required.

The second argument against the TH was mounted in 1983 by Emmanuel Farjoun and me in our book *Laws of chaos*<sup>15</sup> (briefly, *LOC*), which is a prequel to *LTC*. We argue that the uniformity assumption - namely the assumption that a competitive economy tends to a state of equilibrium at which rates of profit are equal across the economy - is fallacious. By the way, Marx inherited this assumption from David Ricardo, and in *LOC* we show that it has also been shared by several modern non-Marxist mathematical economists.

However, let me put these controversies aside, as my reason for avoiding the TH is that it is barren: it has no useful or even testable consequences. At best, it is an attempt to provide a highly theoretical explanation of how the equilibrium price of any given product is determined by L-content - not just *its own* L-content, but that of virtually all products in the economy. (This is because of the way the numerical value of the assumed uniform rate of profit is defined.) I do not believe that such a deterministic explanation is possible. But, even if it were, the TH does not provide us with a way of calculating the price of production of any product, so that it might be tested against real empirical data.

Worse still: the TH does not deliver a means of converting prices back into units of L-content. It breaks the bridge between the two measures, which was suggested by the simplified model, but does not construct an alternative route. This is a very serious problem, because Marx's own theory of exploitation, which is of great importance to the working class, and which we would like to uphold in essence, depends on reasoning in terms of L-content, not of prices.

We are faced with a dilemma: the bridge between the two measures supported by the simplified model is faulty, as it rests on the fallacious proportionality assumption. The TH does not provide us with any viable bridge at all. In fact, it leads nowhere.

I will now proceed to show how the faulty bridge can be repaired. Bypassing the TH, we shall take another route.

## Methodology

In *LOC* Farjoun and I proposed a methodology for dealing with macro-economic problems inspired by statistical mechanics, a branch of physics. Instead of seeking laws governing the behaviour of single objects - the price of a particular commodity, the rate of profit of an individual firm - we look for laws governing mass collections, ensembles, populations.

In this article, addressed to non-specialists, I will not provide formal definitions of technical terms, such as 'population', 'statistical variable' and 'distribution'. Instead, I will start with a simple illustration that is probably

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# What we fight for

familiar to most readers: a population pyramid. Look, for example, at the population pyramid of the United Kingdom shown in the Wikipedia article, 'Demography of the United Kingdom'.<sup>16</sup> What this pyramid shows is the distribution of a statistical variable across a population. The 'population' in this particular instance is literally a human population - that of the UK in a recent year. The 'statistical variable' here is age (measured in years). And the pyramid itself depicts the 'distribution' of this variable across the population: it shows the part of the population in each age range.

The data for such a distribution pyramid may be derived directly from a population census; but the laws of statistics (based on the mathematical theory of probability) provide a cheaper way of obtaining a very good approximation. If we take a large, random sample of the population, the shape of the pyramid of age distribution in the sample will be, with very high probability, very close to the pyramid of the population at large. (The larger the sample, the higher the probability and the closer the approximation.) In particular, important characteristic values of the at-large distribution will be closely approximated in the sample. For example, the average age of the sample will be very close to that of the entire population. And the same applies to the ratio of males to females.

This statistical law is used by compilers of price indexes. The index serves to estimate the rate of price inflation from month to month, but it would not be feasible to look at the price of each commodity (or each consumer commodity, in the case of the consumer price index) on the national market. So the compilers of the index look at a sample - a sufficiently large and diverse, representative 'basket' of commodities - and by comparing its change of total price from one month to the next, they calculate a very good approximation to the real value of the rate of inflation.

Now let us turn to the economy of a large capitalist domain, such as the US, the European Union or China (or the entire global capitalist economy). Let us look at the relationship between the two measures - price and L-content. While the assumption of strict proportionality between them is untenable, there is quite suggestive evidence for positive correlation. This evidence is necessarily imprecise, episodic and impressionistic, because the L-content of a product can normally only be estimated as a rough approximation. But it has nevertheless led many scholars, long before Adam Smith, to put forward versions of the thesis of proportionality.<sup>17</sup> Rejecting this assumption, what we advocate is addressing the relationship using the tools of statistics.

So, consider a 'population' comprising all the transactions of commodity sale-and-purchase in the economy during a given period - say one particular week. In this population, consider the price rate of the commodity sold-and-bought in a given transaction. Recall that this is equal to its price divided by its L-content. In the imaginary simplified model, price rate was a constant - the same for all transactions in the given week. But here, in the more realistic picture of the economy, price rate is a *statistical variable* - taking possibly different values for different transactions in the population.

The *average value* of price rate of our entire population will be of interest: it is, of course, equal to the *total price* of all commodities in the population divided by their *total L-content*. The same applies to each selected group, each 'basket' of the commodities in the population; it has its price rate, equal to its total price divided by its total L-content.

Now comes a crucial point:

according to the laws of statistics, the price rate of any large and diverse 'basket', or sample, of the population is with high probability very close to the price rate of the entire population. It follows that the price rates of *any two* such baskets are, with very high probability, approximately equal, to a high degree of approximation.

Thus the proportionality of price to L-content is retrieved *as a correct law*: not for *individual* products sold as commodities, but for representative baskets. Admittedly, this law is not deterministic, but probabilistic; not precise, but a good approximation. But such are lots of scientific laws governing the real world.

This law of proportionality allows us to reconstruct the bridge: to calculate the rate of conversion from monetary units to worker-hours - the overall price rate for the entire economy. To do this, we must consider not an arbitrarily chosen single firm, but a large representative sample of firms or, indeed, all firms engaged in production in the given economy. We use the same formulas as in the first part of this article. The rate is given by the ratio,

$$\text{value added/number of worker-hours employed}$$

or, equivalently, by the ratio,

$$\text{wage rate/wage share}$$

Of course, here the quantities in these formulas - value added, etc - are not those for a single firm, but for the entire ensemble of firms.

Note that the resulting rate is an average for the entire economy. So, for example, if the rate is €60 per worker-hour, it does not mean that every product sold for €60 - or indeed *any* particular product sold for this price - embodies one worker-hour of L-content. What it means is that €60 will buy a *representative basket*, a *mix* of commodities that embodies one worker-hour (to a high degree of approximation). Also, if a worker is paid at the rate of €30 per hour, it means that with this sum of €30 she can buy a representative mix of commodities that embodies 30 minutes of labour performed by the workforce of the given economy.

In *LTC* we use statistical reasoning to analyse several other aspects of the capitalist economy. I will end this article with a brief discussion of one of these.

## Labour productivity

Productivity of labour is of obvious interest to the working class. From the workers' viewpoint, the natural way to measure it is in terms of L-content, using what in *LTC* we call the *material* measure of labour productivity. First, let us consider an individual type of product - say widgets. The productivity of widget-producing labour is the arithmetical inverse (reciprocal) of the L-content of one unit of this type of product: a single widget. Thus, if the L-content of a single widget is 30 worker-minutes, the material productivity of widget-producing labour is 1/30 widgets per worker-minute, or two widgets per worker-hour.

Of particular interest is the rate at which productivity increases from one year to the next. In our example, if in the following year, due to increasing productivity, the L-content of one widget falls to 29.25 worker-minutes, this means that the productivity of widget-producing labour has increased to 1/29.25 widgets per worker-minute, which works out at approximately 2.05 widgets per worker-hour. This represents an annual increase of 2.5% in the productivity of widget-producing labour.

What about measuring the aggregate material productivity

of labour for an entire economy? This can be defined as follows: take a large representative basket of products produced in a given year; then the value of the measure is the arithmetical inverse of the basket's L-content. Of course, this numerical value depends on the size of the basket: a bigger basket will result in a smaller numerical value for material labour productivity. However, here I wish to focus not on the value of the measure as such, but on its rate of change from one year to the next. This rate is the same (to a very good approximation), irrespective of the choice of representative basket, provided we use the same standard basket from one year to the next.

This numerical quantity - the rate of change of the aggregate material productivity of labour - is obviously of very great interest to the working class. It relates directly to their creation of increasing wealth - wealth in real material terms rather than monetary terms. In particular, for wages to keep pace with the creation of this real wealth, they must keep pace not only with inflation, but on top of this also with the rate of increase of real labour productivity. Otherwise, the share of the workers in the new wealth they create will decline.

But there is a problem: direct data on material labour productivity are not available, nor can they be calculated directly, because they involve numerical values of L-content for an entire standard basket, which, as I pointed out at the start, can only be estimated roughly, but not calculated precisely, even for a single type of product.

However, in *LTC* we show that the rate of change of material productivity can be derived *indirectly* from widely available data. Let me outline how we do it.<sup>18</sup>

I will denote by 'P' one of the ratios we used to determine the rate of conversion between price and L-content:

$$P = \text{value added/number of worker-hours employed.}$$

Here this quantity refers not to a single firm over one week, but to an entire economy over a given year. I would like to look at the change of P over time, from one year to the next. In order to make a meaningful comparison between values of P at different times, we must neutralise the effect of inflation on the numerator - value added - which is measured in price terms. The way to do it is to use *inflation-adjusted* prices (also known as *real* or *constant* prices). These are prices that are tweaked, so as to keep constant the total price of the basket of commodities that statisticians use for calculating the price index. In what follows I shall assume that the formula for P uses prices adjusted in this way, so we can ignore price inflation.

Over time, the numerical value of P tends to increase, due to increased productivity of labour - a very powerful long-term tendency in capitalist economies. Indeed, P is used by mainstream (bourgeois) economists to measure the aggregate productivity of labour in the entire economy. We call this the *monetary* measure of labour productivity in the given economy. The data of this measure for many countries are published and are freely available. In fact, the numerator in this formula - the value added in the economy over the given year - is used as one of the standard ways for quantifying the gross domestic product of the economy in the given year. Hence P is in fact the GDP per worker-hour.

The most interesting thing about P is its rate of change from one year to the next. The data for the rate are also published and are freely available. We

can exploit this for our purpose: using statistical reasoning, we show that the rates of change of the two measures of labour productivity - the material measure and the monetary measure P - are very nearly equal, to a high level of approximation.

This near-equality between the rate of growth of GDP per worker-hour and that of aggregate material productivity of labour can also be used for a deduction in the reverse direction: from L-content to prices. It implies that this aggregate rate together with the growth of the workforce constrain the GDP growth of a capitalist economy as well as the average rate of profit. It is one of the ways in which labour powers the global economy.

This has massive implications for the future of capitalist expansion ●

**This article is an edited and expanded version of my talk at the Online Communist Forum on September 4 2022.<sup>19</sup> I am deeply indebted to Emmanuel Farjoun and David Zachariah for extremely helpful comments**

## Notes

1. E Farjoun, M Machover and D Zachariah *How labor powers the global economy: a labor theory of capitalism* Berlin 2022. The pdf version is freely downloadable at [libgen.is/book/index.php?md5=72B31D10079180F07FCF7541E2AC326F](http://libgen.is/book/index.php?md5=72B31D10079180F07FCF7541E2AC326F).
2. A useful brief discussion is in Ian Wright's review of *LTC*: 'Understanding capitalist dynamics' *Weekly Worker* May 12 2022: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1395/understanding-capitalist-dynamics](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1395/understanding-capitalist-dynamics).
3. An observation to this effect is made by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha programme*.
4. K Marx *Capital* vol 1, chapter 1. See also Marx's *Value, price and profit* (1865), chapter 6.
5. *Op cit*.
6. To be quite precise, this makes sense only for commodity-products. A commodity that is not a product has a positive price, but zero L-content. I shall avoid the cumbersome term, 'commodity-product', and rely on the context to make it clear where the present qualification is meant.
7. Another term for this ratio is *specific price*.
8. This is not to deny that there is a *positive statistical correlation* between the two measures! I shall return to this point below.
9. Another way of putting it is that every €1,000 contributed by the workers to the value added of the firm took  $1000/60 \approx 16.7$  worker-hours to create.
10. In Marx's terminology: the rate of surplus value is 1, or 100%.
11. Volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital* were heavily edited by Engels, from notes left by Marx. In what follows I will not try to disentangle Engels' editorial contribution to the published text.
12. This ratio is essentially what Marx calls "organic composition" of the firm's capital. Note that the *fixed* capital of the firm is used, but not necessarily used up, in the course of production. The part that is used up is what Marx calls *constant* capital.
13. Ironically, this seemingly perverse consequence of the proportionality assumption is not as far from reality as all that. There is some evidence that this inverse relationship does indeed hold - not for individual firms, but statistically across firms aggregated into sectors. We discuss this in chapter 3 of *LTC*.
14. The earliest charge of inconsistency is from Ladislaus von Bortkiewicz in *Wertrechnung und Preisrechnung im Marxschen System: eine 'Übersicht' über die Marx-Kritik* (Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft, 1906). The English translation is entitled *Value and price in the Marxian system* (1952 - downloadable from [jphdupre.chez-alice.fr/livre/pdf/bortkiewicz.pdf](http://jphdupre.chez-alice.fr/livre/pdf/bortkiewicz.pdf)). See also I Steedman *Marx after Sraffa* London 1977. For a modern mathematical presentation of the consistency problem, see M Machover, 'The stochastic concept of economic equilibrium: a radical alternative' (2011), which is downloadable from [eprints.lse.ac.uk/36428](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/36428).
15. E Farjoun and M Machover *Laws of chaos - a probabilistic approach to political economy* London 1983 (second edition 2020).
16. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography_of_the_United_Kingdom).
17. Wikipedia lists the following thinkers as having advocated, or having been understood as advocating, this thesis: Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Ibn Khaldun, William Petty, John Locke, Benjamin Franklin, Adam Smith, David Ricardo and, of course, Karl Marx. See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labor\\_theory\\_of\\_value#Origins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labor_theory_of_value#Origins).
18. For details see *LTC* section 5.4.
19. video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ix1KHLTzSOY&list=PLQb1NcwJsXdf775X4vgDO0tMu11SrU&index=12&t=61s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ix1KHLTzSOY&list=PLQb1NcwJsXdf775X4vgDO0tMu11SrU&index=12&t=61s).

■ 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.



# weekly worker

**Anti-Zionism  
does not equal  
anti-Semitism**

## Sir Keir's abstention disgrace

Labour's official left either meekly followed orders or stayed away - there were less than a dozen rebels. David Porter of Labour Party Marxists reports

Last week's second reading of the Economic Activities of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill tells us a great deal about the dire state of politics in Britain - whether in the form of the first eleven of capitalism, the Tories, or the second eleven, Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party.

The bill is designed to stop public bodies like local councils and universities boycotting Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. In other words it is an attempt to kill off the campaign for boycott, disinvestment and sanctions, which so infuriates the Israeli government and all those who support the Zionist settler-colonial project. Naturally enough the charge is that BDS is anti-Semitic, anti-Zionism being routinely equated with anti-Semitism nowadays. This was all quite evident during the parliamentary debate, when Michael Gove, the minister responsible for the proposed legislation, repeatedly smeared opponents of the Israeli state, including the left. He even claimed that anti-Semitic "events" increase after the activities of the BDS movement, "including", apparently, "supermarkets removing kosher products from their shelves following specific protests."

Doubtless true, if those kosher products were made in the occupied West Bank. But nothing whatsoever to do with anti-Semitism. In the same way supermarkets might well have removed South African products from their shelves after anti-apartheid protests. Does that mean, however, that the anti-apartheid movement was anti-white? No, no, no, the suggestion is as stupid as it is outrageous.

Although the bill's provisions are all of a piece with recent Tory attempts to limit democratic rights and narrow the room for political protest, it is done, of course, in the name of combating racism and promoting community cohesion. Compared with Winston Churchill, Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher, a sort of progress. The Tories are all for combating racism and for community cohesion now - well, apart from blaming migrants for the NHS crisis, the housing shortage, the lack of school places and wanting to send them to Rwanda or lock them up on giant prison barges.

But there is an even bigger hypocrisy: it is Israel.

Here is what UN rapporteurs have repeatedly called an apartheid state. Zionism being a colonialist ideology and therefore a form of racism in its own right, because the original inhabitants of the land have to be oppressed, driven out and replaced. Even within Israel proper the Arab population is subject to second class status and faces systemic, racist, discrimination. Israel, is after all, a Jewish state for Jewish people - not for all its citizens. But what does Gove care about that? He and the Tory government are out to legitimise a greater Israel and delegitimise any opposition to what is a Zionist one-state solution.

There was a possible parliamentary bonus too: wrong-footing Labour. By



An appeal to stand with the oppressed

voting for the proposed legislation, Labour agrees that BDS really is anti-Semitic; by voting against, the party shows that it remains as 'anti-Semitic' as it was alleged to be under Jeremy Corbyn. In the end the Labour leadership got off that hook rather easily. Lisa Nandy claimed the bill "drove a coach and horses" through the necessity of distinguishing between Israel proper and the occupied territories and therefore ran counter to the so-called two-state solution. Labour tabled a killer amendment and, when that predictably failed, abstained on the second-reading.

But, both in the days preceding the debate and during the debate itself, the official leadership line was to repeat their objections to BDS and to generally support the government's position: identifying opposition to Israel with anti-Semitism. Given that Starmer had promised to 'cleanse' Labour of the non-existent 'widespread anti-Semitism', and the Labour right more generally had utilised arguments similar to those of Gove against the Labour left, how could it be otherwise?

Amidst these parliamentary games, however, the main reason for the Labour leadership's position became clear. The debate showed that the big lie that anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism is more than just an effective

weapon with which to beat the left: Starmer's explicit pro-Zionism, combined with the usual cant about the entirely bogus two-state solution, is both a practical and symbolic demonstration of Labour's renewed commitment both to the foreign policy of British capitalism and to the global hegemon, the United States.

Support for Palestinian rights was an important issue during the Corbyn period: passing critical conference motions against the occupation and delegates waving the Palestinian flag were an all too visible sign that Labour was unfit for government as far as the establishment was concerned. So, falling into line behind Israel is the absolute *sine qua non* to show that the 'dangerous leftism' of the Corbyn period is now a thing of the past and that normal service in British politics has been well and truly resumed.

### Second eleven

At exactly the same time as last week's parliamentary debate, Israeli forces were carrying out an air and ground onslaught against the Palestinian population of Jenin, with the aim of crushing any resistance to the occupation. This resulted in at least 12 Palestinian deaths, hundreds of injuries, and widespread damage. Far from condemning these attacks and expressing political solidarity with the

Palestinian people, rightwing Labour MPs, as expected, lined up with the Tory apologists for the Israeli state in making false accusations against the BDS campaign and its supporters.

Also, as expected, the official parliamentary Labour left proved incoherent and ineffective. In the last few weeks, after a long period of largely keeping heads down, a few voices, such as John McDonnell, have become a little louder in complaining about the intolerance and the internal lack of accountability under the Starmer leadership. Some have speculated that the previous silence had been a cunning plan to lay low in the hope that, in the event that Labour has only a small majority after the election (say 20 or 30 MPs), this will give left MPs a much greater influence over the direction of government policy.

Leaving aside the ifs and buts, and the likelihood of a general election being at least a year off, this brilliant plan is clearly an example of wishful thinking. After all, Sir Keir and his apparatchiks are ready, waiting and wanting to suspend and disbar any left MPs for no matter how trivial an offence. Hence, while there are some 30 MPs in the Socialist Campaign Group today, after the next general election there will be far, far, fewer of them. Meanwhile, though, the

cunning plan provides a much needed excuse for being good boys and girls and doing nothing too naughty.

The official left's response to the anti-BDS bill, its role in the parliamentary debate and division, show just how ineffective it has become. A few left MPs spoke - not least Jeremy Corbyn, who, though still a Labour member, sits as an independent. He denounced this "truly appalling piece of legislation" and made the telling point that "the bill would have made it impossible to campaign against apartheid in South Africa, and would also ban any effort by public bodies to impose sanctions against Saudi Arabia over the war in Yemen" (echoing the legal advice from Richard Hermer KC, given to, but ignored by, Starmer.).

However, the SCG as a whole played no organised role, and, when it came to the vote, the bulk of those going through the 'no' lobby were SNPers, dissident Tories and other odds and sods: most of the SCG either abstained, in line with the official whip instructions, or absented themselves.<sup>2</sup> Only 10 of the 70 came from Labour Party MPs. Where were Diane Abbott, Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Zarah Sultana, Rebecca Long-Bailey, Richard Burgon and Bell Ribeiro-Addy?

Some justifications for the poor showing of the official left have been made following the vote, such as: pressing business elsewhere; and the argument that this was only a second reading, with the main division coming on the third reading. Pathetic apologetics. Given the political and symbolic importance of this bill, especially in the week of the Israeli attack on Jenin, you would have thought that even a moderately engaged left MP would have been stirred into enough life to turn up to vote. So much for the principled fighters for Palestinian rights and so much for an effective left opposition to the pro-imperialist politics of Keir Starmer! If genuine supporters of the Palestinian people and real partisans of militant politics are looking for a lead, they will obviously not find it in the SCG ●

### Notes

1. [www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-israel-jenin-assault-criticised-opposition-grows-anti-bds-bill](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-israel-jenin-assault-criticised-opposition-grows-anti-bds-bill).
2. [hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-07-03/division/2B8BF1D4-5FC0-4D70-919F-65CEED69D671/details?outputType=Names](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-07-03/division/2B8BF1D4-5FC0-4D70-919F-65CEED69D671/details?outputType=Names).

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