

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly **worker**



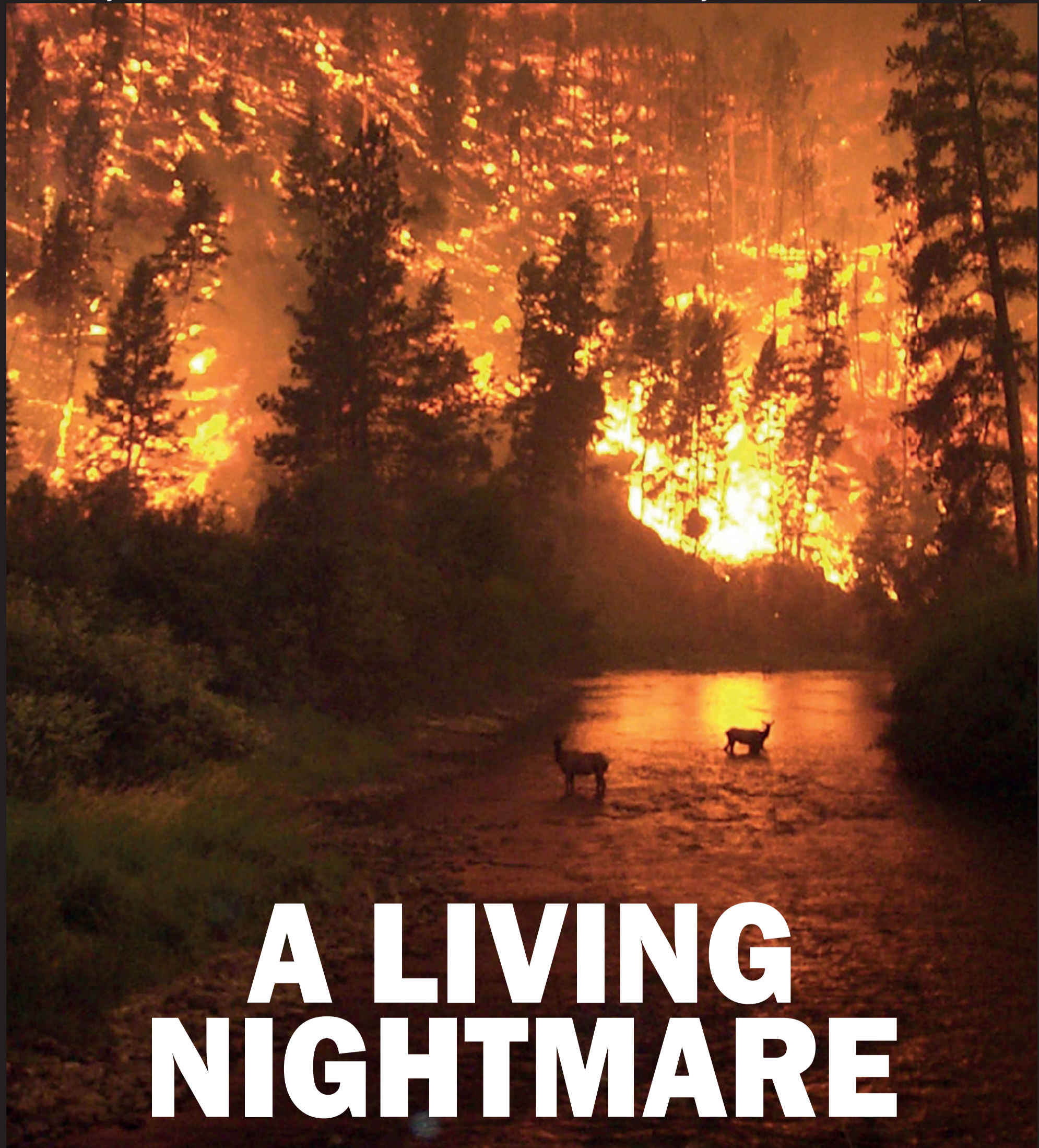
**Despite suffering something of a setback in Spain, the far right is on the march across Europe**

- Letters and debate
- By-elections assessed
- Possibilist left bankrupt
- Solar Radiation Management

No 1453 July 27 2023

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10



# A LIVING NIGHTMARE

## LETTERS



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

## Serious problem

In 'Fifty years of socialist theory', her report on *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, Yassamine Mather makes a statement that can't be allowed to stand. To wit:

"Here in Britain, in addition to the standard pro-Soviet and Maoist anti-USSR positions, as far as the Trotskyist left was concerned, two views of the Soviet Union dominated: Tony Cliff's position that the Soviet Union under Stalin and his successors had undergone a process of bureaucratic degeneration, where a ruling elite had usurped power from the working class and established a state-capitalist system; and the more standard, Trotskyist view that the USSR was a 'deformed workers' state', based on what Leon Trotsky had said in the late 1930s. This latter, softer analysis of the Soviet Union was often used (and is still used) to justify some of the most bizarre positions of the USSR at the time - and ironically it is used today to justify Putin and Russia (presented as legitimate successors of the Soviet Union)."

This is wrong from beginning to end. Trotsky did not call the Soviet Union a 'deformed workers' state'. He called it a 'degenerated workers' state', because it had devolved from a healthy workers' state to a terrifying dictatorship under the Stalinist faction. 'Deformed' rather was a term his followers reserved for post-war states like the People's Republic of China that were Stalinist from the start. Trotsky did not develop his analysis in the late 1930s, but in 1933, following the German Communist Party's capitulation to the Nazis.

As for his analysis being 'soft', it's hard to imagine how anyone could have been fiercer in his attacks on the Stalinist bureaucracy. Trotsky blasted it for sabotaging the Chinese revolution in 1927, for its disastrous collectivisation campaign, beginning in 1929, for undermining of the Spanish revolution, beginning in 1936, and, of course, for the nightmarish purges it launched in 1937-38 - purges that ended up claiming the lives of his son and daughter, thousands of his followers and, of course, Trotsky's own life in August 1940.

Regarding Mather's statement that Trotskyism was used to "justify some of the most bizarre positions of the USSR", this is inexplicable, since Trotsky repeatedly attacked Stalinist foreign policy on the grounds that it was undermining the revolutionary gains of 1917. The same goes for her statement that it is "used today to justify Putin and Russia (presented as legitimate successors of the Soviet Union)". How can a theory of Soviet development be used to justify a counterrevolutionary, post-Soviet regime of the sort that Trotsky repeatedly warned against?

Trotsky's theory of a degenerated workers' state is the only way to understand Soviet Russia - a country in which property relations remained nationalised despite the monopolisation of political power by a small, self-serving Kremlin clique. There was no bourgeoisie, no private investment and no private property to speak of beyond personal possessions.

The problem with the state-capitalist theories advanced by

Tony Cliff and others was not only their dogmatic insistence on seeing Soviet capitalism where there was none, but the fact that they completely did away with the need for anything resembling revolutionary defence. After all, why defend the USSR against capitalist onslaught if it's already capitalist itself? While workers the world over held their breath, as Red Army soldiers engaged in a desperate struggle for survival at Stalingrad, state-capitalist adherents called for a plague on both their houses. Could anything be more repellent?

Mather concludes her article by paying tribute to various people who have served on *Critique's* editorial board over the years - people like Suzi Weissman and Robert Brenner - and also by noting that the journal is now "well aware of the need to ... develop a clearer analysis of China and a better understanding of the United States as a hegemon power in decline". But Weissman and Brenner were among other followers of the late Ernest Mandel who signed a June 2022 statement declaring support for "the resistance of the Ukrainian people against the aggression of Russian imperialism and its attempt to rebuild the tsarist and then Soviet empire." (This statement, issued by the European Network in Solidarity with Ukraine, is available at [anticapitalistresistance.org/with-the-resistance-of-the-ukrainian-people-for-its-victory-against-the-aggression](http://anticapitalistresistance.org/with-the-resistance-of-the-ukrainian-people-for-its-victory-against-the-aggression)). While Marxists in no way support Putin's "special military operation", they do not characterise the current Russian regime as imperialist and they don't describe the ex-USSR as an empire either.

With people on board like this, any attempt to come to grips with US imperialism is crippled from the start. It seems that *Critique* has a serious problem on its hands.

**Daniel Lazare**  
New York

## Marx wrong

I thank comrade Andrew Northall for replying to my letter of July 13. However, I still think the comrade is saddled with the mistake of Auguste Blanqui and Karl Marx in referring to working-class, socialist rule as a 'dictatorship' (Letters, July 20).

The comrade also mistakenly suggested that I fail to recognise that society is divided into antagonistic classes and this has led me to confusion over the concept of 'dictatorship' and 'democracy'. Generally speaking, the bourgeoisie don't go around referring to their rule as a 'dictatorship', and there is even less reason for the representatives of the working class to use this in incorrect Marxist terminology, borrowed from Blanqui, for socialist rule.

The first thing to point out is that Blanqui and Marx misused the concept of 'dictatorship' when they applied it to socialism. This is at the heart of the difference between 19th century German Marxism and British democratic socialism. The term 'dictator' originated back in the times of the Roman republic, when the senate could give an individual emergency powers for a limited duration. After the emergency, the dictatorial powers had to be laid down, and the senate would resume its position of authority. During the emergency period the dictator was above the law. This is the essence of the meaning of the term - rule untrammelled by any law, as Lenin

clearly recognised in his debate with Kautsky. Dictatorship, in this sense, is closer to feudalism than modern bourgeois democracy - or worse, because even monarchs usually had to abide by certain traditions of rule.

As far as I know, Blanqui was the first to introduce the term 'dictatorship' into communism, which is nowhere to be found in Marx's *Communist manifesto* of 1848. We should not forget that Blanqui was a rival to Marx in the early communist movement and, when he started prating on about the need for a 'dictatorship of the proletariat', he was trying to win over Marx's supporters by projecting a more radical image. Marx responded by adopting Blanqui's position in a modified form, pointing out that, whereas for Blanqui dictatorship referred to a small group, for Marx dictatorship referred to a whole class. But the term simply means rule unrestricted by law.

I agree with Andrew that class rule is at the heart of the *Communist manifesto*, but like all Marxists the comrade equates all class rule with dictatorship. Dictatorship today is a police state to one degree or another. Why would you need a police state to defend socialism? This would only be necessary if you started a socialist revolution in a mostly backward country, where the working class formed a minority of the population: for instance, Russia in 1917. Lenin once wrote that the will of a whole class can be expressed through an individual. This is true, and shows the dialectical unity between the general and the particular, but this doesn't mean that such an individual has to be a dictator.

From the time of Blanqui onwards Marx unintentionally misled communists about the meaning of the term 'dictatorship' and its applicability to socialism as a form of rule. Calling it a proletarian dictatorship doesn't change the meaning of the term: lawless rule. Marx and his uncritical supporters confuse dictatorship with the need for state coercion, but there is a big difference between the two.

Comrade Northall seems to believe that I view Stalin as some sort of ultra-democrat for sponsoring the 1936 Soviet constitution, but this was not the point I was making in previous letters. The point I was making was to show the contradiction between the 1936 constitution and the internal and external reality faced by Stalin and the Soviet Union. Stalin was not responsible for starting a socialist revolution in a mostly backward country in 1917, and in fact was for unity of the left, before the arrival of Lenin and Trotsky, with their ultra-left stance of starting a socialist revolution prematurely. A dictatorship, by its very nature, is a police state. This is far from saying that the Soviet regime had no mass support: on the contrary there was a great deal of support for the regime - especially in the period of Stalin, without whom the Soviet Union would have probably gone down to defeat in 1941. Russia still celebrates the victory in the Great Patriotic War, and rightly so.

Comrade Northall says that I oppose Marxism, but I don't oppose Marx's support for a classless, communist society. What I oppose are the flaws within Marxism - a 19th century doctrine which contains three important, fundamental flaws: philosophical, economic and political.

At the philosophical level, the Marxist view that 'being' determines consciousness is obviously wrong - while 'being' influences consciousness, it doesn't determine it. At the economic level, Marxism is based on an almost complete lack of awareness of the fact that modern, industrial society arose from, and is based on, an abundance of cheap, fossil-fuel energy. Reading Marx's opus magnum, *Capital*, the impression is given that modern industrial society resulted from the circulation of money and capital accumulation. But money and the accumulation of wealth existed for thousands of years without leading to capitalism. What made the difference in more modern times was the energy revolution, which is almost completely ignored by Marxism.

Even today, most Marxists are not aware that the world is approaching a serious energy crisis resulting from the peaking of global oil production. Marxism views the circulation of money rather than energy as the foundation of capitalism. But this is all superficial stuff. For instance, you could be a billionaire who lives in a mansion, with a fleet of cars, a private jet and a yacht. But these things are of no use if you don't have the energy to run them. Energy comes first.

At the political level, Marxism confuses dictatorship with state coercion, while claiming that a 'dictatorship' is necessary under socialism. Blanqui's influence on Marxism is clear at the political level, so why does Andrew say I am putting forward a conspiracy theory. No conspiracy was involved. Marx simply took over Blanqui's argument and adapted it for his own use, and as a result ended up misleading the communists for several generations.

Andrew concludes by saying that I have not demonstrated any credible alternative to Marxism as a means of achieving socialism of any variety. It is as if the comrade has not learnt anything from the collapse of the Soviet Union after Gorbachev's inept attempts to bring about democratic socialism in the face of opposition from Leninism. The alternative to old-style Marxism is to win people over to the idea of democratic socialism. It is deluded to think Marxism-Leninism can come to power in advanced countries in the 21st century, having previously collapsed in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe. The collapse of Marxism-Leninism occurred when it did because of the increasing contradiction between these societies and their forms of political rule. This same contradiction is at work in China, and what the communists there need to do is lead society to democratic socialism. If they fail to do this, unfortunately, communists in China could lose power, as happened in the Soviet Union.

**Tony Clark**  
For Democratic Socialism

## Conscription

Ansell Eade argues against the militia demand as addressed to the police, by claiming, first, that the workers' movement has never tried it and, second, that, since conscription to military service is resisted, the effect would be that only volunteers actually served (Letters, July 20).

Conscription of beat police has, in fact, been used by *capitalist* countries in several periods - but within the framework of militarised

police structures, with the long-service professionals shaping the police culture.

Secondly, high-profile draft-dodging does not render conscription generally unworkable: under most conditions, the large majority comply with conscription. The USA and Nato countries abandoned armed forces conscription because in Vietnam the conscript soldiers proved politically unreliable in face of an obviously unjust war. England abandoned the conscription of parish and ward constables with the creation of Sir Robert Peel's Metropolitan Police and its provincial equivalents for the same reason: the relative political unreliability of the parish and ward constables, backed by their neighbours, in face of popular campaigns for the right to vote, strikes, etc, and the violent unpopularity of deploying the army, as at Peterloo.

**Mike Macnair**  
Oxford

## Left errors

Left economists make a big deal out of proving that wages are never the cause of inflation - or trying to play down its role as much as possible.

While there are sound logical reasons for doing this most of the time, I can't help but feel that the analysis is predicated on some methodological errors. Michael Roberts' 'Wages, profits and inflation' is a good example of how the analysis proceeds (July 20).

The primary error of this approach is over the category of wages. Wages are presented for the whole population and not broken down into subsets. A subset that would seem highly appropriate is one based on class, so we could analyse wages minus managers' wages; wages for the unskilled; wages minus professional classes' wages. Etc, etc.

When you start to analyse the data based on the subsets, which is surely the correct way to proceed, the picture becomes more complicated and more is revealed. For example, gentrification comes into the picture - how low-income families are priced out of neighbourhoods and services, etc. The privatisation project, exemplified by Tony Blair's latest advocacy of neo-Thatcherite policies in relation to a barebones National Health Service, is explained; the failure of crackpot cooperative ideas, such as pooling workers pension funds, is because it is predicated on treating wages across the whole population. I could go on.

The 'catastrophist Marxists', such as pro-imperialist and neoliberal Arthur Bough predicting a huge fall in house prices, surely result from these categorical failures. This is another failure of the ahistorical, econometric school of economics, because dealing with subsets is just so much more difficult in econometric modelling, aside from all its other failures.

I think something deeper is going on though. These categorical errors are the result of Britain's place in the world market and this sort of analysis is a complement to imperialist apologetics: ie, an uncritical attitude to Britain's place in the world market and all that entails. Then there is the need of 'Marxists' to lump as many people as possible into the revolutionary class: ie, the politicisation of analysis leads to categorical errors.

**Steve Cousins**  
email

# POLITICS

## A tale of three by-elections

Kevin Bean of Labour Party Marxists looks at the state of bourgeois politics and the controversy over so-called green policies

Last week's by-elections show that sometimes in politics events do not always follow the widely predicted course.

On the basis of the opinion polls, the expectations were that the Tories would lose all three seats up for grabs on July 20, with Labour gaining Boris Johnson's old seat in Uxbridge and Ruislip, as well as overturning a large Tory majority in Selby and Ainsty, while the Liberal Democrats would regain their previously-held Somerton and Frome constituency. In the end it did not turn out like that: the Tories held Uxbridge (albeit with a tiny majority), allowing Rishi Sunak to claim that the long-foretold Tory defeat at the coming general election was not "a done deal" and reassuring his supporters that it was still 'all to play for'. The weekend press headlines and the lines coming from the political shows followed up on the surprising Uxbridge result and focused on why Labour had not made the expected breakthrough.

What quickly emerged as the widely-held explanation for the Tories holding on to Uxbridge was Ulez (Ultra Low Emissions Zone) - a scheme to reduce air pollution from older vehicles by imposing a charge, which is planned to be extended from central London to outlying suburbs. The Tories had made the charge the single issue in their Uxbridge campaign and essentially turned the by-election into a referendum on the policy. The Tories claimed to be standing up for the poorest sections of society, who own the oldest vehicles, along with those like taxi drivers, small businesses and others who need to drive for work in an area with poor public transport. On polling day, the anti-Ulez campaign and the focus on the London mayor, Labour's Sadiq Khan, paid dividends for the Tories and ensured that since the by-election Ulez and 'green policies' in general have been the centre of political interest.

For Sir Keir the focus on Uxbridge and Ulez seemed, at first sight, something of a setback, if not a PR disaster. While he was up in rural Yorkshire doing a photo-call with the successful candidate (a young, aspiring hack and Labour careerist, conveniently also named Keir) to celebrate overturning a huge Tory majority, all everyone back at Westminster wanted to talk about was Uxbridge. If the Tories and the media were more than keen to big up the success at Uxbridge, sections of the Labour bureaucracy and the Parliamentary Labour Party also tried to turn the situation to their advantage, shifting the blame for the reverse onto Sadiq Khan or the local conduct of the campaign. Starmer and his immediate circle also let it be known that that they were unhappy with Ulez and, in light of the Tory attacks, were considering scaling back even further on Labour's green policy commitments.

So far, all very Westminster bubble gossip and kite-flying in the op-ed sections of the sympathetic media, which is quite easy to dismiss as mere froth. However, both the by-election results (remember, there were two other seats apart from Uxbridge!) and the reactions of the Tory and Labour leaderships to the outcome do tell us a lot about how the general election campaign might develop and the sort of result that it could throw up.

The general trend in all three by-elections was a swing against the Conservatives, which reflected the



Sir Keir does not need the left

widespread anti-Tory mood that has been shown up in the opinion polls and local council elections in May this year. Following the conventional wisdom that governments lose elections rather than the opposition winning them, these results continue to point to a Labour government with probably a working majority.

With the Liberal Democrats posing a challenge in both the West Country and the formerly safe Tory seats in the so-called 'Blue Wall', and Labour regaining its 'traditional' seats in the north and the Midlands - along with possible gains in Scotland, combined with victories in marginal seats throughout Britain - the chances of the Tories staying in power appear slim. However, this anti-Tory feeling does not correspond to any great enthusiasm for Sir Keir and his Labour Party. By-election turnout remains low and the evidence suggests that the mathematical 'swing' was a largely notional one, with previous Tory voters staying at home rather than being sufficiently enthused by Starmer to go to the polls and actually vote Labour. On this showing the next election will be an unpopularity contest between parties and programmes for which the electorate shows no real passion or deep support.

Is Sir Keir concerned by this lack of electoral momentum? Will the failure to gain Uxbridge dictate a change of course? Not at all! It is all factored into his strategy and will actually confirm an important part of his approach towards the election, which has been to dampen down expectations and warn of the dangers of complacency. Far from Starmer's spinmeisters trying to hype up the opinion poll leads in recent months, they have been extremely cautious in their news management and, in this regard, Uxbridge suits them just fine. It keeps the troops in order and helps to silence even the mildest of criticism, on the grounds that electoral victory is not guaranteed and we all need to rally behind the leader.

Some critics from the official left - yes, a few still exist and can still be heard muttering off-stage, if you listen hard enough - say that Starmer's lack of radical policies on energy and transport renationalisation or his mean-spirited support for Tory benefit caps will cost Labour a few leftwing votes. That may be so - Starmer's aides, like his 'fixer', Morgan McSweeney, or polling and focus group guru Deborah Mattinson, would doubtless agree, but these are not the voters Starmer's Labour Party are after nowadays. In a world of focus groups and triangulation, team Sir Keir calculates exactly what will appeal to the 'target voters' in the 'centre ground' and he duly sticks to the script at all times.

Anyway, channelling their inner Peter Mandelson of the 1990s, his supporters argue, where else do these voters critical of the benefit policy or the other underwhelming positions have to go? Starmer is determined to win the election - but on his terms. That means adopting the most openly pro-capitalist programme in Labour's history and convincing his two audiences - the centre-ground electorate in Britain and the capitalist class in London and Washington - that he really is a safe pair of hands, who can be relied upon to steady the ship and not be diverted into 'dangerously radical' experiments.

Even by the historically low standards of Labour leaders, it is a pretty timid and uninspiring prospectus. Although Labour has been a bourgeois workers' party from its very beginning and its leaders have faithfully followed the dictates of capitalism at home and imperialism abroad, for the quite mundane purposes of electoral politics the party leadership had to inspire and mobilise its supporters and voters with some kind of radical vision - think of 'the New Jerusalem' of Clement Attlee in 1945 or the 'white heat of technology' summoned up by Harold Wilson in 1964. Playing the game of bourgeois politics required more than mere competence: Labour leaders had to at least pretend to offer some form of challenge or alternative to the status quo, however token this proved to be in reality.

Not so Sir Keir! His electoral strategy is one of responding to perceived shifts in 'public opinion' or the clamour of the media. Instead of trying to shape politics and alter how people see the world, even within the limited options offered by the framework of capitalism, Starmer simply fits in and presents himself as a diligent and conscientious custodian of bourgeois society and the constitutional order. His whole career in the law and the service of the state at the highest level makes him perfect for the role, and it is one that he will play to perfection, when he does finally enter No10. So this will shape his electoral strategy and allow him to take minor upsets like Uxbridge in his stride; indeed, he will even turn them to his advantage to consolidate his position - as we saw at Labour's National Policy Forum last weekend, where he saw off the rather puny criticisms of left trade union leaders. For Starmer the course is set fair for the next election and so he is determinedly continuing on his way, ignoring what remains of the disorganised and bankrupt official left in the PLP and their faint echoes in the Constituency Labour Parties ●

# ACTION

## 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).

**Oxford, Saturday July 29, 2.10pm:** Phoenix Picture House, 57 Walton Street, Oxford OX2. Tickets £10 (£5).

**Online, Sunday July 30, 10.30am:** Presented by Not The Andrew Marr Show. Followed by Q&A with the film makers. Register at [buytickets.at/ntams/969306](http://buytickets.at/ntams/969306).

**Mathry, Pembrokeshire, Saturday August 19, 7pm:** Trehale Farm, Mathry, Haverfordwest SA62. Organised by Pembrokeshire Peoples Assembly: [www.facebook.com/events/807548790834256](http://www.facebook.com/events/807548790834256).

## 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: [troublemakersat.work/conference-2023](http://troublemakersat.work/conference-2023).

## Care workers fight for better pay

**Saturday July 29, 11am:** Rally, Lady Godiva statue, Broadgate, Coventry CV1. Support care workers organising to fight low pay. Organised by GMB Midlands: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=795891875557989](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=795891875557989).

## 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 £15.

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).

## No to Nazis in Leeds

**Saturday August 5, 12.30pm:** Counter-protest outside the Britannia Hotel, Mill Green View, Seacroft, Leeds LS14. Far-right groups are gathering to intimidate refugees there. Organised by Leeds Stand Up To Racism: [www.facebook.com/events/215221088048313](http://www.facebook.com/events/215221088048313).

## 'Merchants of death' walking tour

**Saturday August 5, 2pm:** Central London walk, starting at St James Park Station, 55 Broadway, London SW1. Visiting the offices of some of the major arms companies exhibiting at the September London arms fair, including BAE Systems. Free registration. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: [caat.org.uk/events/london-caat-merchants-of-death-walking-tour-pre-dsei](http://caat.org.uk/events/london-caat-merchants-of-death-walking-tour-pre-dsei).

## Shut down Amazon - support the strikers

**Saturday August 5, 5.30pm:** Rally, BHX4 warehouse, Lyons Park, Sayer Drive, Coventry CV5. Join Amazon strikers on the anniversary of their first strike. Over 1,000 workers at the Coventry site have now joined the GMB, and strikes have spread to the Amazon site at Rugeley, Staffordshire. Organised by Rank and File Combine: [www.facebook.com/events/840542570974768](http://www.facebook.com/events/840542570974768).

## Weaponising anti-Semitism

**Friday August 11, 6.30pm:** Online and onsite book launch, IHRC, 202 Preston Road, Wembley HA9. Author Asa Winstanley discusses his new book - *Weaponising anti-Semitism: how the Israel lobby brought down Jeremy Corbyn*. Free entry, registration required. Organised by Islamic Human Rights Commission: [www.facebook.com/events/3476675772593840](http://www.facebook.com/events/3476675772593840).

## Peterloo guided tour and archive open day

**Wednesday August 16, 11am to 3pm:** Peterloo anniversary event, People's History Museum, Left Bank, Spinningfields, Manchester M3. Uncover the stories of a defining day for Britain's democracy. Bookings £10 (£6). Organised by People's History Museum: [phm.org.uk/whats-on/DAY/16-08-2023](http://phm.org.uk/whats-on/DAY/16-08-2023).

## DSEI: make the connection

**Wednesday August 30, 7pm:** Online briefing. In September the Defence and Security Equipment International arms fair returns to ExCel in London. Learn how DSEI connects to war, militarised borders and policing, the climate crisis and Palestine. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: [caat.org.uk/events/dsei-make-the-connection](http://caat.org.uk/events/dsei-make-the-connection).

## Wigan Diggers Festival

**Saturday September 9, 11.30am to 9.30pm:** Open-air free festival, The Wiend, Wigan WN1. Commemorating Gerrard Winstanley and the 17th century Diggers movement with music and political stalls. Organised by Wigan Diggers Festival: [www.facebook.com/WiganDiggersFestival](http://www.facebook.com/WiganDiggersFestival).

## Fight Tory anti-union laws - lobby the TUC

**Sunday September 10, 1pm:** Eve of TUC rally, Premier Meetings, Albert Dock, Liverpool L3. If workers take action together, the Tories and their anti-union attack can be beaten. Speakers include Sharon Graham (Unite) and Sarah Woolley (BFAWU). Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: [www.facebook.com/ShopStewardsNetwork](http://www.facebook.com/ShopStewardsNetwork).

## 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.

## LEFT ALTERNATIVES



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 'The blind leading the blind' (1568)

# Blind leading the blind

With Sir Keir in complete control of Labour, the left faces a crisis of perspectives - a crisis which finds full expression in three recent articles. Whatever the nuances and subtle differences, says **Mike Macnair**, they all remain trapped in possibilism

**O**n July 12 the *Morning Star* published a significant think-piece by Andrew Murray: 'Eyes left: even the right hopes for a better left'. July 22 provided a slightly longer offering of a different analysis by Kevin Ovenden: 'Back to the 90s with Starmer?' And on July 25 Vince Mills offered a 'Labour left' perspective on the same issues in 'Out of apathy - where next for Labour and the left?'

The common thread of these articles is the problem of perspectives for the left, which is faced with the complete domination of the Labour right after the Corbyn episode and the very ambiguous outcome of the recent strike movement. The perspectives they try to offer are different; but they are all characterised by a focus on what the authors think is *possible*, rather than considering to any significant extent what is *needed*. The focus on the 'possible' in fact - contrary to the authors' imagined realism - leads to ineffectiveness.

Andrew Murray's article starts with the July 2 article in *The Sunday Telegraph* by Nick Timothy, former chief of staff to Theresa May: 'Capitalism as we know it has failed. Not even the Tories can defend it'. Timothy's article, in turn, starts with the arguments of American 'democratic nationalist' Michael Lind<sup>1</sup> that globalisation has enriched 'elites' and impoverished the 'western' (and especially Anglo-American) working and middle classes, essentially by wage suppression. Timothy can hardly offer the obvious solution (abolish all the anti-union laws and criminalise any judicial attempt to reinvent them). He argues for some sort of limited regulatory interventions, and attempts to make these persuasive to *Telegraph* readers by concluding that

Conservatives should accept that to criticise capitalism is not to succumb to socialism, but turning a blind eye to the failures and excesses of capitalism - especially

the crony capitalism we have brought on ourselves - makes defeat to leftwing parties more likely.

Murray makes this his starting point. For the next general election "no leftwing party is standing, at least not one with any chance of forming a government". Starmer has made it clear that his leadership offers no substantive differences from the present government. In particular,

By ditching any idea of taxing the rich and big business they have foresworn the obvious means of addressing any temporary deficit ameliorative measures would entail. At this point, it is game, set and match to the moneyed Establishment...

So the next election will not offer a choice of programmes, only of executors...

The common response to this on the left is to say that the struggle must then move to the streets or the workplaces. That is absolutely true as far as it goes, which is somewhere - but not far enough.

Murray correctly points out that Enough is Enough (whatever it was) "secured the email contacts of around 700,000 people in the enthusiasm surrounding its launch", but that it "seems to have stalled for want of a discernible strategy beyond supporting disputes which will eventually come to a conclusion anyway".

This point is not merely a matter of Enough is Enough, which is a typical example of 'mass campaigns' designed round apparatus control, and therefore turned on and off by the apparatus as it is convenient, with demobilising effects. The focus on street and strikes as an alternative *necessarily* involves the Bakuninist general strike strategy: that is, of escalating and joining together the strikes till the point at which they merge in the creation of workers'

councils and a challenge for power. The conception is radically false and repeatedly disproved in practice.

Murray, however, does not get the point that the workers' movement needs a *political* alternative: as Marx put it, "a movement of the class, with the effect of enforcing its interests in a general form, in a form possessing general socially coercive force".<sup>2</sup> What Murray sees as missing is "the movement against austerity", and the anti-war movement; but both of these were campaigns of lobbying and demonstrations. And the anti-war movement precisely *recoiled* from enforcing the interests of the class in a general form, when it drew back from campaigning against individual pro-war MPs who had political allies within the movement, for fear of splitting the 'broad movement' on political lines.

Murray argues that "The strikes underline there is no lack of working-class combativity; the 2017 election showed that left policies can be popular, and the initial response to Enough is Enough demonstrated that masses of people want to fight for a different future." All of these are about the apparently possible; not about what is needed.

And the strikes remain protest actions, not actual effective coercion of the employer. So they show combativity, but of a limited kind, which at most is mitigating radical wage cuts inflicted through inflation.

The 2017 election showed that the *appearance* of a left alternative can be popular if the right is temporarily caught out (the actual *policies* were much less important than the *image* of Labour as an alternative). By 2019 the regime had regained its footing, and the aspiration of the Corbynistas to form a *government* and their consequent inability to break with the Labour right (and hence their inability to fight back against the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign or against Starmer's commitment to an illusory alliance with Tory 'remainers' in parliamentary manoeuvres to defeat

Brexit by undemocratic means) prepared the ground for Johnson's smashing election victory and hence Starmerism. Finally, 700,000 clicks is a big number, but Murray himself points out that the project "has stalled" - as did People's Assembly and all such bureaucratic initiatives.

What positive alternative? Murray, who spent years in Unite's bureaucratic apparatus, which included a seconded stint in the equivalent apparatus of the Corbyn leadership, roughly endorses Sharon Graham's line in defending the union's affiliation to Labour:

Unite leader Sharon Graham, successfully urging her union to remain within the Labour Party rule book, told its Rules Conference that "Labour must be Labour and the union must push them into that position ... We must make them take different choices."

There certainly isn't an obviously better strategy on offer, but, like any other plan, it needs to show results to remain credible. There will be the rub.

That, of course, is no more than a possible line for the full-time officials of the unions, who effectively control their organisations' funding of Labour and votes in its institutions. It is a line which is highly unlikely to be implemented in practice: since what the unions want from Labour is a *government* which will be less hostile than the Tories, even if it will not make life any *better*. It is not a line for the left at grassroots level. And here Murray has something to say, but still thinking in bureaucratic apparatus terms and very minimally: "A modest start in assembling the jigsaw of hope would be for the different campaigns, groups and organisations on the left to talk to each other with a view to reaching a workable unity behind a political alternative."

Yes, but *what sort of* political alternative? And how much use

would it be for the result to be just another People's Assembly or Enough is Enough?

### Misty optic

Murray's remote background is in the *Straight Left* faction of the old 'official' Communist Party, which was committed to a Labour Party strategy; he defended this line against 'Left Unity' in 2013<sup>3</sup> and appeared vindicated when Corbyn won the Labour leadership in 2015. The defeat of Corbynism is the defeat of Murray's whole long-term strategic perspective, since it is hard to imagine *better* conditions for a perspective of winning a 'left Labour government'. Hence without making a radical self-criticism, which he does not, all he can propose is to keep running on thin air like Wile E Coyote after running over a cliff-edge.

Kevin Ovenden's background is different: as a member of the Socialist Workers Party, he took the 'Galloway side' and was expelled from the SWP in the 2007 split in Respect. In 2015 he was an enthusiast for the Greek Syriza and wrote a book on the issue - finished (perhaps unfortunately) shortly before the Syriza government's political collapse into implementing EU-mandated 'austerity'. He has been a fairly regular contributor to the *Morning Star* for some years. But, as is apparent in his July 22 article, he remains a fan of 'broad front' left electoral initiatives to try to "break Labour's monopoly hold of electoral representation of the working class" (as Robin Blackburn put it in International Marxist Group internal documents in 1973-76).

The argument of his July 22 article begins with Starmer's July 18 panel with Blair and the comparisons which are inevitably being made between the present and the run-up to the 1997 general election. But Ovenden draws a sharp distinction: the Blairites offered a 'modernising' transformation of Britain (like Harold Wilson in 1964); Starmer

offers merely the repudiation of Corbynism. He argues:

It is for this reason that the process of starting to challenge Starmer-Labour from a left that is not restricted by party membership is under way. It is stronger than in 1995, when the launch of the Socialist Labour Party of Arthur Scargill suffered from bad timing.

It took three years into the Blair government for a major schism to occur electorally in the shape of Ken Livingstone's win against the official Labour candidate for mayor in London. An indication of Labour's faith-breach with voters in that election is that Frank Dobson came third with only 13%.

There is now the possibility of a left independent - Jamie Driscoll in the north-east of England - winning a major mayoralty before the general election and a probable Starmer-led government.

This analysis involves Ovenden being optimistic to the point of displaying a misty optic. He assumes that there is a good chance that Driscoll will win and assumes similarly that Jeremy Corbyn will stand as an independent and can win in Islington North. Both are possible, but relatively unlikely in an election which will probably display significant tactical voting to get the Tories out - seen in both Selby and Somerton in last week's by-elections. He even drags into the argument the *Tory* victory in Uxbridge:

But the Uxbridge result also showed how a significant number of people can use the instrument of a standalone election to send a powerful signal about a particular grievance or feeling of not being listened to.

Previous elections - from Blaenau Gwent to Tower Hamlets - have shown how local opposition to rule by remote party machine can act as a catalyst for an insurgent political campaign.

At one level this argument is true enough. At another, as Uxbridge shows, it is utterly useless for the left. While it is perfectly understandable that voters in outer London should oppose the Ulez expansion, decisions of this sort about how to deal with systemic pollution created by the transport system have to be taken at an all-London level. Indeed, all-UK or all-European or even global decisions on emissions controls would be better. To insist on a local veto is merely to give a veto to the *advertising-funded media* and the 'news management' of related 'political operatives'.

The objective dynamic, Ovenden argues, is for there to be "left ruptures" from Labour, albeit "on a highly localised basis" and in a "patchwork process". And:

Therein lies the coming rupture of Starmer-Labour with a real Labour sentiment that is much wider than the radical left.

Now is not the time for the radical left to flatten all these developments into 'It's all reformism' or to issue exposure demands and ultimatums. Now is the time for the left in and out of Labour to be an organic part of these developments ...

A more united, radical left can aim to help bring political clarity and to show why a systematic focus upon developing the movements of struggle is crucial to winning things now and to bettering the prospects of serious left electoral advances that can answer the cynical Starmer calculation that people have

nowhere else to go.

It was the retreat from that orientation that proved a major weakness of 'Corbynism' - despite, ironically, Jeremy's victorious campaign for Labour leader in 2015 coming directly out of the mass movements.

OK, so "be an organic part" of which competing initiative? The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition? The Workers' Party of Britain? The latest offer, Transform - a coalition of Left Unity, the Breakthrough Party, the People's Alliance of the Left and Liverpool Community Independents? Or any one of the various other initiatives which aim to organise the supposedly existing "real Labour sentiment that is much wider than the radical left"? And, for that matter, who are the "radical left" comrade Ovenden addresses his arguments to?

### Keep hold of nurse?

"Always keep a hold of nurse for fear of finding something worse" (Hilaire Belloc). This was, in substance, the line of the Labour left through the Blair years - 'nurse', of course, being the Labour Party. Both Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband offered slight illusions of leftward movement; then the 'morons' letting Jeremy Corbyn onto the shortlist for Labour leader in 2015 temporarily created a semblance of transformation. But at the core of the party, the Corbynites' continued managerialism and failure to promote real political democracy left the right in control. And now what remained of the left after Blairism is even weaker and more timid. But the message of "always keep a hold of nurse" is still with us, and reflected in Glasgow Labour leftist Vince Mills' July 25 article.

Mills begins: "It is a difficult time for the left in the Labour Party, in Scotland as everywhere else." After elaborating on this a bit, his nearly immediate next step is to attack all 'new party' ideas:

We can neither ignore it, nor adopt the approach of the ultra-left which seems to have come straight out of *Blackadder goes forth* - a mad assault on enemy positions over open ground in the certainty of mass slaughter.

Perhaps those advocating such an approach do so on the assumption that a new workers' party is about to bring salvation to abandoned socialists, so that expelled Campaign Group members could represent "a real socialist party" for a year before losing their seats in the 2024 election.

If so, then surely they recognise that the likelihood of that scenario has at the very least been postponed. The decision by Unite last month to reject disaffiliation from the Labour Party overwhelmingly is a good indication of where the organised working class in England, Scotland and Wales is ...

Add to that the local government elections last May. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (Tusc), put forward 254 candidates in 247 wards across 65 local authorities in England, plus two mayoral candidates.

Their results ranged from a high of 231 votes (10.5%) in the Newton Abbot ward to a low of 18 votes (5%) in the Mansfield ward.

What alternative, then? Mills argues that the "socialist left" needs to build alliances: within the Labour Party with the Fabians and Compass, and with the trade unions, around party democracy and around certain policy issues, like the two-child limit in

child tax credit. 'Beyond the party' the Scottish Labour left should be backing Mercedes Villalba's "campaign on land justice"; the Scottish TUC's 'Scotland demands better' campaign for higher taxes in Scotland (back to Andrew Murray on taxing the rich); and 'Scotland's not for sale' campaign against privatisation, together with left independence supporters. Like Murray's, this is merely a framework of single-issue lobbying campaigns. Nothing else is possible while hanging desperately onto 'nurse'!

### Possibilist

Possibilism was a trend in the late 19th century French socialist movement which rejected the focus of the Marxists on political power for the working class. Instead, the workers' movement should focus on the 'possible': this might be small improvements, or radical changes, depending on objective circumstances. Central Possibilist leader Paul Brousse had been an anarchist at the time of the split in the First International, and there was an element of Bakunin's critique of Marx in Brousse's criticisms of the Marxists and opposition to the 'minimum programme' (meaning the 1880 *programme of the Parti Ouvrier*) as tending to separate the party from the immediate aspirations of the workers.<sup>4</sup>

Brousse's transition from Bakuninism to reformism has been repeated more than once. Georg von Vollmar, a general-strikist in the 1880s, in his 1891 'Eldorado' speeches in Munich advocated a turn to gradualism and reforms.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Paul Mason, former activist in Workers Power and later author of *Why it's kicking off everywhere: the new global revolutions* (2012), is today an advocate of British rearmament within Nato.<sup>6</sup> There are many others in the times between ...

Our three authors are all, in very different ways, possibilists. They assume that socialism in some extremely general sense is desirable; but then frame their 'what is to be done' entirely by what looks practical in the very short term. But the result in all three cases is practical unrealism: none of these prescriptions are likely to produce anything other than 'more of the same' - meaning a labour movement dominated by the right and a left splintered into little pieces, each of which pursues its own 'possible' tactics.

To be possibilist means in practice to be dragged behind one side or another of capitalist politics: either the liberal defenders of anti-discrimination, the judicial power - and the free market and institutionalised corruption; or the nationalist defenders of collective provision - and also of protectionism and social conservatism.

Moreover, many approaches are in principle, or at least appear to be, possible. Hence one of the effects of the pursuit of the 'possible' is the practical inability of the left to unite. As a result, what the broad mass of voters - or, for that matter, of union members or of strikers - see, is the choice between, on the one hand, Starmerite Labour, which is in with a chance of forming a government, and, on the other hand, the People's Front of Judea competing with the Judean People's Front (*Monty Python's Life of Brian!*). The larger organisations, like the SWP, Socialist Party in England and Wales, and the *Morning Star's* own Communist Party of Britain, cannot escape from this framework.

### Needed

If, instead of starting with the possible, we start with what is objectively needed, and then

approach the possible - not in terms of the opportunities for mass influence, but in terms of how we may be able to insert what is needed in the political discourse - we have a chance of escaping from the gerbil-wheel: the phenomenon of the left doing the same thing over and over again, with ever decreasing success, which is what all our three authors offer us.

The starting point is that the workers' movement needs a *political voice* independent of the capitalists' political framework. It needs this because, as we saw in the Corbyn defeat, attempts at leftwing 'news management' through the state and the advertising-funded media just do not work. And, as we are seeing in the strike wave and the political responses to it, that same state and advertising-funded media work patiently and tirelessly to undermine strikes and solidarity, and to pretend that efforts to minimise wage cuts are unjustified demands for wage increases.

The evidence of our history is that the capitalists have made no general concessions to the working class merely on the basis of the carrot. There has always been a threat to the *constitutional order*, whether it was of late Chartism at the time of the Ten Hour Day Act, or of trade union involvement in the First International at that of the Second Reform Act and the legalisation of the trade unions - leave aside the obvious cases of concessions in 1918 and 1945.

As the defeat of the Corbyn movement also shows, for the working class to create an independent political voice, this voice has to be *disloyal* towards the existing nation-state. National loyalty implies 'British competitiveness'.

In this respect, Murray's and Mills' arguments for higher taxes are exemplary of why the trade unions and so on failed to defend Corbyn. Murray is right to point out that the Starmerites are scared by the fate of the Truss administration, rapidly crushed by "the markets". The problem is that they are *right* to be scared of this outcome. The UK imports around 46% of the food consumed in this country, so if these imports were cut off lots of people would starve. These imports are not paid for by the export of manufactured products: the UK's *quarterly* deficit in trade in goods to March 2023 is £55 billion. This deficit is compensated by a surplus in 'services' of £40 billion,<sup>7</sup> leaving an overall deficit of £15 billion, which is, in essence, borrowed. This is the

underlying reason why 'spooking the markets' was disastrous for Truss.

It is the same reason why Syriza capitulated to austerity and why the Hollande government in France in 2012-13 was forced to abandon very limited reform proposals. That Britain is much *bigger* than Greece does not make the country any less *vulnerable*.

The consequence is that the workers' movement needs, in order to have a voice which can be independent of capitalist control, *not* to aim immediately to construct a broad coalition for government, but to construct a fully-independent party, whose aims go all the way to the overthrow of the plutocratic constitutional order and the construction of working class power and socialism - and all the way to common action of the class on at least a European scale. That is needed in order to break out of the chains of the financial markets by creating the beginning of planned production on a European scale.

To start from this perspective requires us to aim to unite the 'radical left' - that is, the various forms of communists - *without* making the involvement of 'broader forces' a pre-condition for unity. This sort of unity *could* have a snowball effect, reaching broader forces and making a profound impact on what is thinkable in politics. On the other hand, pursuing the 'possible' 'broader forces' will lead nowhere ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

### Notes

1. In *Hell to pay: how the suppression of wages is destroying America* Brentford 2023. On Lind's political evolution see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael\\_Lind](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Lind).
2. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71\\_11\\_23.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71_11_23.htm).
3. See the discussion at [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/988/supplement-left-units-contradictory-aspirations](https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/988/supplement-left-units-contradictory-aspirations).
4. For a sympathetic account of Brousse and the Possibilists, see D Stafford *From anarchism to reformism: a study of the activities of Paul Brousse 1870-90* Toronto 1970. The 1880 draft programme in English at [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm); the French text actually adopted as of 1882 at [materialisme-dialectique.com/pdf/dossier-1/Le-Parti-Ouvrier-Francais.pdf](https://materialisme-dialectique.com/pdf/dossier-1/Le-Parti-Ouvrier-Francais.pdf).
5. For Ben Lewis's English translation go to [marxismtranslated.com/2022/10/georg-von-vollmar-eldorado-and-social-democracys-next-tasks-1891-part-i-and-marxismtranslated.com/2022/10/vollmars-eldorado-speeches-part-ii](https://marxismtranslated.com/2022/10/georg-von-vollmar-eldorado-and-social-democracys-next-tasks-1891-part-i-and-marxismtranslated.com/2022/10/vollmars-eldorado-speeches-part-ii).
6. [futuresofwork.co.uk/2022/02/10/for-a-new-political-economy-of-defence](https://futuresofwork.co.uk/2022/02/10/for-a-new-political-economy-of-defence).
7. [www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/bulletins/uktrade/march2023#monthly-trade-in-services](https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/bulletins/uktrade/march2023#monthly-trade-in-services).

## Fighting fund

# We can do it

Once again we have reached that tense, end-of-the-month situation. With just a few days left until the end of July, we still need a couple of hundred pounds to reach our £2,250 fighting fund target.

To be precise, we have received £2,026 so far, which means we are short by exactly £224. That is certainly within reach - especially if the examples of this week are anything to go by. For instance, three comrades donated three-figure sums - thank you, SK, PM and RG. Brilliant stuff!

Also contributing by bank transfer/standing order were GT (£35), AN (£30), DR and DG (£20 each), GD (£15), DD (£8) and TT (£6). Finally comrade LM handed over her usual £20 note to one of our comrades - all of which took this week's total to £570.

In other words, we are definitely within reach of this

month's target - yes, we have, as I write, five days left to raise the £224 we still need, but we really must make sure we get there this time, especially after so many shortfalls in recent months.

Please play your part in doing that - we need to receive your donations by Monday (July 31), so please help us by clicking on that PayPal button at [www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate), or by making a speedy bank transfer to 'Weekly Worker' (sort code 30-99-64, account number 00744310).

Yes, let's reverse the results of March, April, May and June. Together we can do it and help ensure the *Weekly Worker* can continue its vital work ●

Robbie Rix

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

## FAR RIGHT

# Venomous targeting of migrants

Despite suffering something of a setback in Spain, the far right is on the march across Europe. Prime responsibility for this, argues Paul Demarty, lies with the left

Contrary to some expectations, the July 23 Spanish elections did not deliver a clear majority for the right.

On the basis of opinion polls, it was expected - or at least feared - that the combined tallies of the Popular Party and Vox would result in Spain becoming the latest European country governed at least in part by parties of the radical right. Prime minister Pedro Sánchez would regret his gamble on calling a snap general election. What transpired, instead, was an impressive swing towards the parties of the 'centre right' - particularly the PP, which is now the largest group in parliament; but Vox lost 20 of its deputies, and together they fell seven seats short.

The Socialist Workers Party is the second largest party and had previously dominated the 'progressive coalition' with an assortment of left allies such as Unidas Podemos, the Communist Party and En Comú Podem. The PP is still in theory in the driving seat, when it comes to forming a new government, but may struggle in practice. Many of the remaining smaller parties are regionalist and/or separatist, and even the right-leaning examples of the species will be cautious even of confidence and supply arrangements, given the centralising chauvinist rhetoric of the PP over many years - never mind Vox, whose founders split from the PP on the issue of centralising Spain. It seems that the safeguards have held for now, even if *The Guardian's* spin that the Spanish had delivered a stirring verdict of '¡No pasarán!' rather puts the matter too strongly.

Indeed, though disappointment no doubt reigns for now at Vox HQ, its leaders and activists can celebrate a second election result in which they garnered more than 10% of the vote - a solid foothold, compared to the trivial returns of earlier elections. Though PP leader Alberto Núñez Feijóo is identified as a neoliberal moderate in theory, he attacked Sánchez for making deals with Basque separatists and on law-and-order grounds (the PSOE's reform of the law on sexual assault reduced the maximum sentence and therefore released 900 offenders early). Under his leadership, local government deals have been struck between the two parties. In short, the emergence of a serious far-right challenger had the predictable effect of dragging the PP onto its territory, in the hope of stealing back supporters.

It is arguable, then, that Spain has not decisively rejected the far right at all, but is merely lagging behind other European countries in a longer-term trend that has brought far-right, ultra-conservative parties to power in country after country. Some have their origins in the neo-fascist swamp, like Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy (FdiI); others in Christian democracy, like Viktor Orbán's Fidesz. The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), which is on course to come first in the next Austrian general election and has been in and out of government repeatedly in recent years, was a strange relic of liberal pan-Germanism and a member of the Liberal International until the 1990s, when it refocused entirely on anti-immigration hysteria.

To these names, we could add the ultra-nationalist and clericalist Law and Justice party of Poland (in government for eight years now) and the Finns, formerly the True Finns, who joined the governing coalition after this year's election. In the Franco-German European



Santiago Abascal: culture war campaign

core, National Rally and Alternative for Germany look very plausible contenders for government office before too long (only the comically Bonapartist structure of the French executive has kept Marine le Pen at bay so far).

### Theory and practice

What exactly is driving this? The far right itself has its own answers. In the Anglosphere, we are most familiar with this in the form of so-called 'national conservatism' or 'right populism', which would argue something like this: since the end of the cold war, the permanent institutions of power in western societies - the civil service, the university, the media, and so forth - have been captured by a distinct ruling, managerial class. This class is fundamentally progressive and cosmopolitan in outlook. It favours maximal personal autonomy, particularly in matters of sexual morality, and identifies far more strongly with fellow class members around the world than the toiling masses at home.

Under its leadership, society has become intolerable. Free trade and mass migration have decimated wages. Sexual liberalism has resulted in plummeting birth rates, and attempts to enforce such liberalism have marginalised religion - except Islam, of course, which has been allowed to thrive in the name of multiculturalism, and offers an existential internal threat to parties who decry all this, they are doing no more than using their demotic common sense to see through the uncommon nonsense of the elite. (This invocation of the wisdom of crowds is enough to authorise the employment of the wholly useless term, 'populism'.)

Some cousin of this explanation may be found in many countries on the continent who have elected far-right parties to government, or to substantial fractions in national parliaments. From Law and Justice you will get a more Catholic version, and from Giorgia Meloni you may get some barely intelligible Tolkien analogies. Yet the overall story is the same - the people versus the technocratic liberal elite, with a focus on cultural conservatism and migration panic.

There is a sense in which this critique - or family of critiques - is like Marxism viewed in a fairground mirror. Social classes play a major role here, clearly, although they are demarcated impressionistically: "all that is solid dissolves into air", indeed, but the solvent is not capital, as it was for Marx and Engels, but the cosmopolitan elite. (In some cases, this peculiar affinity is happily adopted for shock value, as with Steve Bannon's oft-declared admiration for Lenin.)

In this respect, it is truly the descendant at least of the far right of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. August Bebel described anti-Semitism as the socialism of fools - *Idiotensozialismus* - but the 'globalist elite' need not be identified with the Jews to play the same role in the overall ideological narrative (of course, there certainly are anti-Semites of the old school to be found in this mob). The classical fascists purloined the rhetoric of revolution, and so have many participants in the new 'populist' right.

The difference between the two (*pace* liberal 'horseshoe theory') is perhaps best highlighted by a cold-eyed look at the gap between the rhetoric and reality. The concern for the declining lot of the common man is revealed - by the actual practice of such parties in government - as a sham. Hungary and Poland effectively operate *maquiladoras* feeding German industry, and do so by maintaining low-wage, dangerous working conditions. The FPÖ has retained the (appropriately) Austrian economics of its older, 'liberal' incarnation. Meloni has repeatedly attacked the rights of workers and the unemployed.

As for economic 'populism', so, oddly, for nationalism. These parties have largely abandoned long-standing commitments to leaving the European Union, despite grumbling and kabuki fights over human rights with the Brussels authorities (especially in the case of Poland and Hungary). It is, specifically, immigration that remains as a toxic obsession, and such parties - not unreasonably - conclude that, instead of breaking away, it will be more prudent to band together to build another curtain wall around Fortress Europe. When it comes to the tutelage of the United States, the picture is almost the same. Only Hungary really stands out as a remotely rebellious member of Nato - Orbán quipped that he and the pope were the only heads of state on the continent to favour a peace settlement in Ukraine.

This narrowing of political horizons inevitably directs more energy to the remaining targets. Apart from demonstratively worsening the plight of migrants, the target *du jour* is transgender people: the ideal target for the far right, since there are so few of them, but they enjoy the ferocious support of most liberals and leftists, whose horror in the face of such attacks is in some ways the point. Petty cruelty in that direction is an impeccably phoney way to look like you mean business.

All of which is to say that, while one can construct a roughly coherent picture of the contemporary world on far-right, nationalist-conservative grounds, one cannot in the end so construct a *correct* picture, and therefore one cannot govern truly

in accordance with that picture. It is not the conspiracy of liberal elites that erodes freedom and dignity, but the grinding logic of capital; thus in the case of Orbán's 'illiberal democracy', the state core, media and other institutions have been purged and rebuilt, but nonetheless the picture is much the same of economic subordination, strategic impotence and even - despite various gimmicky, natalist policies - a low and declining birth rate. Liberal governments pretend that global capitalism is liberatory and good for everyone; conservative governments pretend that they have triumphed over that order. It's all gravy - just so long as Audi gets its cheap labour.

Marxism offers a real alternative, because it locates the real antagonism - between labour and capital - and does not project the mechanisms of capital's self-expansion onto reified images of an elite. In doing so, it exposes rightwing 'populism' - so far as it gains working class support - as a species of *sectionalism*, and thereby explains its failure to make any positive difference to those workers' exploitation. Sectionalism directly opposes the interests of the working class, because the working class is only as strong as its numbers; dividing sections against each other erodes discipline in direct struggle and lays the class open to piecemeal political cooptation.

### Ghosts

Having said all that, it is precious little comfort to have the solution to this riddle when the subjective factor is in so lamentable a condition. Far from offering an attractive alternative pole, Marxism is the ghost at the European feast. It would take more space - and patience - than we have by some distance to survey the state of the left in all the European countries we have mentioned, but Spain itself is representative enough. It gave us, after all, Podemos, which was ostensibly an attempt to turn the *indignados* square-occupation movement into hard electoral currency by way of the application of Ernesto Laclau's

galaxy-brained neo-Gramscianism.

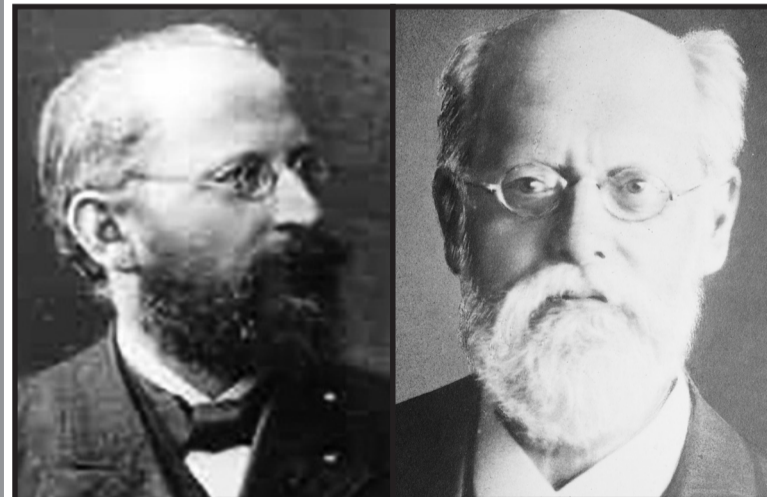
Over the last few years, Podemos has split again and again - and its old president for life, Pablo Iglesias, has retired from politics. What Spanish voters had in front of them was a coalition of dozens of organisations under the name, Sumar, and the leadership of Iglesias's successor, Yolanda Diaz. Looking a little more closely, the major components of the alliance appear mostly to be the various fragments of Podemos stitched back together on a more primitive political basis. Its showing was hardly dreadful, but less than the sum of its parts last time around - and why shouldn't it be, when it had been in coalition with the left wing of *la casta*, the elite caste it had always denounced (in deference to the recommendations of Laclau's 'On Populist Reason')? Why shouldn't Spanish voters dismiss them as just another bunch of grasping politicians, and look elsewhere?

The fascists of the early 20th century were a reaction to the strength of working class parties in Europe; their victory a product of the weaknesses within that apparent strength. Parties like Vox, Fidesz and so on respond instead to a situation in which the left, despite occasional and short-lived breakthroughs, is marginal and indeed self-marginalising by way of its opportunism. Liberals are denounced as Marxists or crypto-Marxists - at least partly because the available Marxists are just not up to snuff as an enemy within.

The advance of the far right, however, perpetuates this dynamic. With every victory, its sworn enemies become more frit. The duty of 'anti-fascism' dominates all other leftwing political concerns, with the result that the left cannot resist the temptation to ally with the centre; but, every time this happens, the left is revealed as a controlled opposition (or the centre is revealed as 'really' Marxist; in either case, the far right has an easy case to make to its base) ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 30 5pm  
**Bernstein versus Kautsky: some new materials and considerations**  
**Speaker: Ben Lewis**

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](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)

CLIMATE

# A living nightmare

Frequent, intense and deadly wildfires are the inevitable result of record temperatures. But this is not simply down to us humans: the climate crisis is driven by capitalism, writes **Eddie Ford**

**O**ur screens have recently been filled with apocalyptic imagery from wildfires burning in at least nine countries across both sides of the Mediterranean, from Croatia to Tunisia, with the situation on the island of Rhodes hitting the headlines in Britain. Thousands of firefighters in Europe and north Africa working in extreme heat have been trying to contain flames stoked by high temperatures, tinder-dry vegetation and strong winds.

More than 40 people have died so far - most of them in Algeria, with the country's National Meteorological Office saying that temperatures had soared to around 50°C in some regions. Witnesses have described fleeing walls of flames that raged "like a blowtorch", destroying homes and coastal resorts, and turning forest areas into blackened wastelands. Meanwhile, at the weekend, in the biggest evacuation from a blaze in Greece's history, 19,000 were forced to flee Rhodes - including many British tourists, who said they had been left in "a living nightmare" when the fires began. Greece is now preparing for more evacuation flights, as fires also rage on the islands of Corfu and Evia. Grimly, two firefighting pilots died when their plane - which had been dropping water - crashed on a hillside east of Athens.

As for Italy, fires spreading in Sicily forced the authorities to briefly close Palermo airport, while in Portugal, which is facing widespread drought affecting 90% of the country, hundreds of firefighters scrambled at the beginning of the week to put out fires near the popular holiday destination of Cascais - with especially strong winds complicating efforts. Overall, a total of 180 locations have experienced temperatures of 40°C and above. Apart from Algeria, the highest reading was 46.4°C at the seaside town of Gytheio in southern Greece.

Unfortunately, with each week that passes new records are set. For the last week, it has been Rhodes and Algeria - next week it could be somewhere else. Of course, apart from idiots who reject science, we all know the reason for the fires. Yes, the initial trigger could have been a lightning strike, or someone dropping a match. But the intensity and frequency of such fires is clearly part of a much bigger picture. True, the El Niño event on the Pacific has added about 0.2°C to the present temperature, but the overwhelming factor is human-induced warming that creates greenhouse gases, CO<sub>2</sub>, methane, etc. Or, to be more accurate, it is a *capitalist*-caused phenomenon.

In the UK, June was the hottest month since records began, with the average monthly temperature of 15.8°C exceeding the previous highest by 0.9°C. In fact, records were broken in 72 of the 97 areas in the UK from which temperature data are collected. Worldwide, the record for the hottest day on Earth was broken three times this month in an extraordinary seven-day period - the hottest day ever happened on July 6, when the average temperature for the entire planet was no less than 17.23°C (obviously this is a worldwide mean, not the highest temperature in any one place). According to one climate expert at the Climate Reanalyzer unit based in the University of Maine,



**Death Valley: there will be more and more hell holes**

the chances are that July will be the warmest month *ever* ... since at least the Eemian about 130,000 years ago, though doubtlessly that will be a matter of debate.<sup>1</sup>

Showing the persistence of this trend, the eight warmest years on record have now all been set since 2014 - with the El Niño effect meaning 2016 is still the leader. But, as we have seen, there are fears that this year could be a warmer overall year and the warmest in recorded history - with July 6 an ill-omen of the future to come. Totally unequivocally, a new analysis by World Weather Attribution said that the deadly heatwaves that have struck Europe, the US, north Africa and China in recent weeks would have been "virtually impossible" without human-caused global heating - and there will be worse to come without very radical action. The brutal heatwaves we are witnessing are no longer rare, the report says. If the world heats by 2°C, they will happen every *two to five years*. Similarly, a series of heatwaves across the northern hemisphere in 2018 was also judged impossible without the human impact. More than 500 extreme weather events have now been analysed by scientists, who found 93% of heatwaves and 68% of droughts had been made more severe and/or more likely because of human-caused emissions. More than 61,000 people died in the European heatwaves of 2022, including more than 3,000 in the UK, with another study estimating that millions have died from heat across the world in the past three decades because of the climate crisis.

As for the hottest place on Earth, that appears to be Death Valley, which runs along part of central California's border with Nevada. On July 16 it reached a sizzling 53.3°C at the well-named Furnace Creek, which, according to the World Meteorological Organisation, currently holds the record for the

hottest temperature ever recorded on the planet with 56.7°C in 1913 (temperatures at or above 54.4°C have only been recorded a handful of times, mostly in Death Valley).

Clearly, in terms of the direction of travel globally, more and more places will become like Death Valley - which is a deeply worryingly thought. If the picture was not bad enough already, we also have record temperatures when it comes to the seas, which are getting warmer and warmer. For instance, in the north Atlantic off the Irish coast, temperatures have been 5°C higher than normal. As for the Antarctic, since 2010 - when analysing the average ice cover of the continent - an area *10 times larger than the UK* has disappeared, thanks to melting ice. Another fairly recent study by the University of Leeds found that West Antarctica had lost 3,331 billion tonnes of ice between 1996 and 2021, contributing over nine millimetres to global sea levels. The facts are speaking for themselves louder and louder.

## Momentum

A week ago, the BBC *Today* programme interviewed Bob Watson, one of the foremost climate scientists in the world - currently he is emeritus professor of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Research, having previously worked at the United Nations, Nasa, the UK's department of environment and the White House. The message of this former head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was stark and straightforward - the Paris 2015 agreement to limit global warming to 1.5°C above preindustrial levels will almost certainly be exceeded either this year or next, which spells very bad, but hardly unexpected, news.

Indeed, he was "very pessimistic" about achieving even 2°C, predicting that "if we allow the target to become looser and looser, higher and higher", then governments will do even less

in the future, not more - a disastrous situation. Climate Action Tracker has made a similar bleak forecast, bearing in mind that it has a very deterministic view of what is going to happen. That is, it does not take into account the possibility of quantitative change leading to *qualitative* change - tipping points that lead to runaway climate change and all manner of totally unpredictable, extreme-weather events. But, if for now we discount these tipping points, CAT's predictions are that, in order to keep to the 1.5°C target, basically you will have to more or less go into freefall, when it comes to emissions - literally go down a cliff if you think of it as a graph. That is because you have got a climate system that has inbuilt *momentum*: yet again using the metaphor of the oil tanker, you cannot simply just turn it round to safer waters. The warming of the air and oceans will continue, even if all human-produced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from power plants, road and air transport, industrial activity, winter heating, air conditioning, meat and dairy production, etc, were closed down immediately. Even then, once

you had somehow pulled off this magical trick to reorder the entire world, you would only just reach the 1.5°C target set in Paris.

In other words, this is not a realistic possibility, to put it mildly - there is no serious authority that thinks this is doable. If you had implemented a radical, real-time reduction back in 2015, then it might possibly have been. But, instead, what we actually have are emissions continuing to *increase*, and the chances are it will stay that way - just look at the nature of industry, power plants, urban planning, housing, and so on. Though the rate of increase looks likely to slow down, CAT believes that we are on target for something like 2.5°C-2.9°C by 2100. In other words, roughly speaking, in three-quarters of a century we could be touching something near 3°C above preindustrial levels.

Now, we all know that, in terms of our everyday experience at a particular time and place, that is neither here nor there. Rather, what we are dealing with are things like sea levels, reduction in ice cover, melting of the permafrost, etc. That brings with it the *potential* that at some point, or a whole series of points, we will go through a shift to another climate pattern altogether. It is quite feasible to imagine the Mediterranean going from its present climate situation to where it becomes scrub like the Savannah, or even something that tips over into desert conditions. This is conceivable too in the US, with the Wheat Belt turning into desert. Hence we are not talking about this or that statistic or event - rather the future of civilisation itself. None of this is to suggest for one moment that when 1.5°C or even 3.0°C becomes the 'new norm', humanity will suddenly face extinction - the planet will still be liveable in some shape or form.

But the real question is how concerned that change will be, how disruptive of present-day living conditions. Such a trauma could produce a whole series of undesirable outcomes like an increased tendency towards drought, famine, war and disease outbreaks, ever more deepening inequality and greater state oppression.

The climate crisis cries out for a working class solution ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eemian.

## Communist University

A week of provocative and stimulating debates.

Saturday August 12 to Saturday August 19 (inclusive)

International Student House, 229 Great Portland Street, London W1  
(nearest tube: Great Portland Street)

Confirmed speakers include:

Kevin Bean, David Broder, Jack Conrad, Chris Knight,  
Ben Lewis, Moshé Machover, Mike Macnair, Yassamine Mather,  
Anne McShane, Lawrence Parker, Joseph Perez, Michael Roberts,  
Colin Turner, Esen Uslu, Tina Werkmann, Ian Wright

Cost: Full week, including accommodation in en suite rooms:

£250 (£150 unwaged). Solidarity price: £300.

First/final weekend, including one night's accommodation: £60 (£30).

Full day: £10 (£5). Single session: £5 (£3).

Make payments to account 'Weekly Worker'. Account number: 00744310.

Sort code: 30-99-64. Please quote payment reference 'CU2023'

Email your booking, stating single or double room, to: office@cpgb.org.uk

**CLIMATE**

# Techno-fix delusions

Given the abject failure to deliver on the governmental pledges made in 2015 at Cop 21, there has been an increasing turn to bogus technological solutions, warns **Jack Conrad**

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy recently issued a report on the viability of developing and deploying SRM (solar radiation management): that is, technology which mimics the cooling effect volcanoes have on the climate (June 30 2023).<sup>1</sup> The latest in a string of similar such studies.

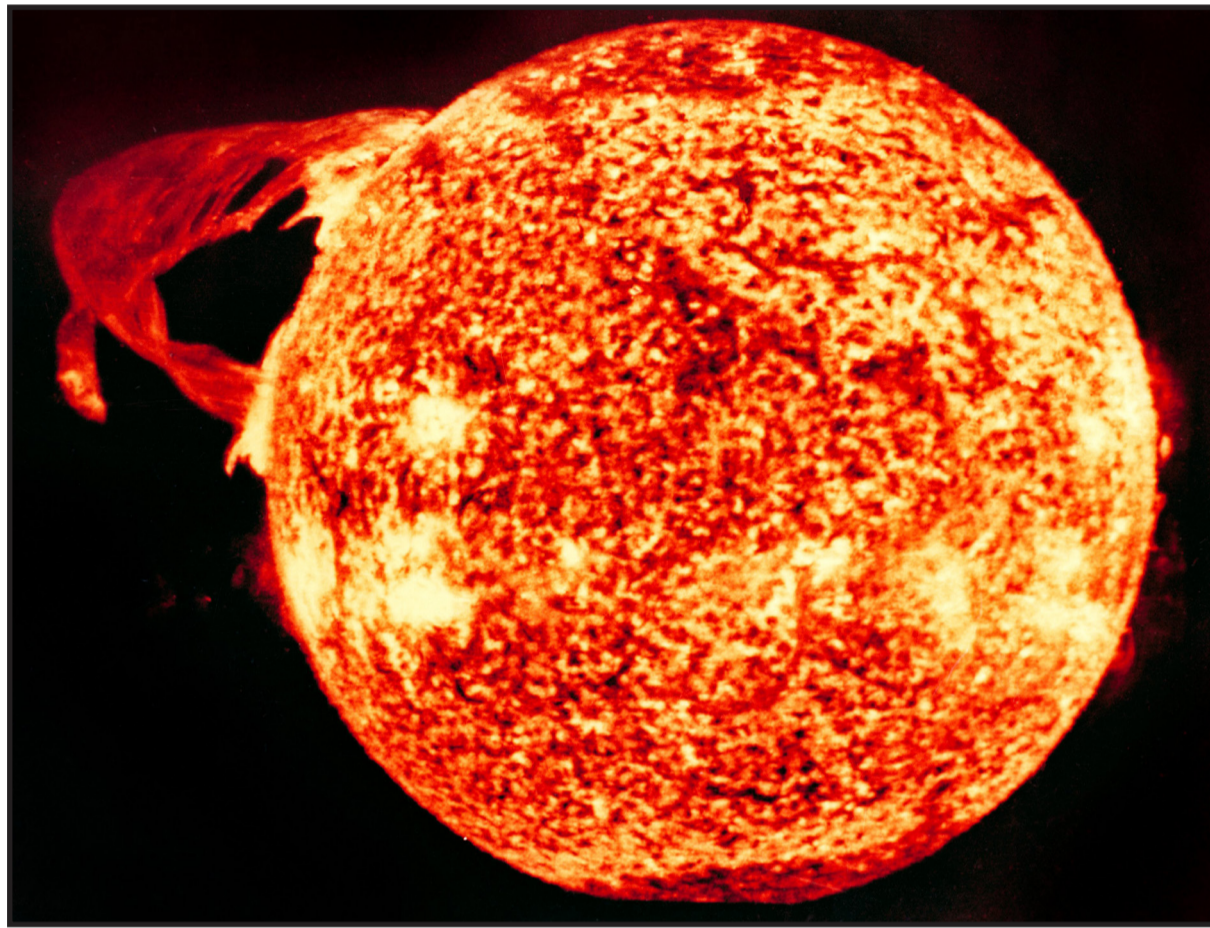
First mooted back in 2006 by Dutch Nobel prize winner Paul Crutzen, the idea is to shoot reflective particles into the stratosphere, or spray salt into coastal clouds to make them brighter and last longer.<sup>2</sup> That carries the promise of putting off or even halting climate change without capitalism suffering the beastly fuss, bother and costs of running down the fossil fuel industry, reorganising agriculture and moving away from the car economy.

While he deployed the term 'geoengineering', Crutzen never actually advocated such a course - well, except as a desperate last measure. Presumably he knew better. Despite that, his work spawned a whole slew of well-rewarded research papers, networks, conferences, computer simulations, feasibility studies and government consultations. Besides the latest OSTP report, other quick-fix solutions include seeding the oceans with iron filings and growing huge algae blooms, which would absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. On the grandest of grand scales there is another piece of SRM technology - the scheme to unfold a 2,000-kilometre-diameter eye patch in near-Earth orbit (estimated cost: around \$5 trillion).<sup>3</sup> A technological marvel which would reflect solar radiation back into outer space, reduce average terrestrial temperatures and thereby save the planet.

Geoengineering is certainly in vogue nowadays. Practically "everyone above a certain net worth" has a World-Saving Project (WSP). So writes the novelist, Hunter Murray, in the *FT*. As well as dreaming of getting his arse to Mars, Elon Musk (\$225 billion) has pledged \$100 million to the winners of his XPrize for carbon capture. George Soros (\$7.16 billion) wants to refreeze the Arctic. Jeff Bezos (\$153 billion) has announced \$10 billion for his grant-giving Bezos Earth Fund. And former Reddit chief Yishan Wong intends to plant a trillion trees. But by far the "most popular" idea amongst the "potential Greenfingers" is SRM.<sup>4</sup>

Could some billionaire Greenfinger start launching climate-change rockets from their James Bond-like private island or place a giant reflector dish in near space without state backing? Hardly. Anti-missile missile systems are now commonplace and even second-rate powers such as Britain, France and Germany could easily blow them out of the skies. No, what the billionaires do with their WSPs is shape research programmes, shift public opinion and steer government agendas. Undoubtedly, this salves the conscience of plutocrats, but breeds complacency. By holding out the prospect of a high tech solution to the threat of climate catastrophe, big business can happily carry on emitting greenhouse gases, as the overriding aim is pursued: M-C-M'. No wonder SRM is the poster child of the billionaire class.

However, there are numerous scientific studies warning of the unintended consequences: eg,



**Sun not the problem: social relations here on Earth are**

Climate Analytics and its 'Why geoengineering is not a solution to the climate crisis' (2018). Its authors, Fahad Saeed, Carl-Friedrich Schleussner and William Hare, write:

Solar radiation management does not address the drivers of human-induced climate change, nor does it address the full range of climate and other impacts of anthropogenic greenhouse gas and air pollutant emissions ... At best, SRM would mask warming temporarily ... would alter the global hydrological cycle, as well as fundamentally affect global circulation patterns such as monsoons.<sup>5</sup>

As long ago as 2011, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, then director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, branded both SRM and CCS (carbon capture and storage) as a "tale of two fairies" in a damning comment piece published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.<sup>6</sup>

CCS is Schellnhuber's "tolerably good" fairy, with its aim of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> levels by sucking it in from the atmosphere mechanically or capturing it before its release from fossil fuel-burning power stations, steel plants, cement kilns, etc - CO<sub>2</sub> being stored in geologically suitable underwater or land sites (which will not leak, of course).

However, there are definite downsides. The estimated cost of CCS is around \$50-\$100 per ton. Note, the IPCC reckons that to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5°C, between 100 billion and one trillion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> needs to be removed from the atmosphere. In other words, if CCS is going to do that job, it would cost between \$5 trillion and \$100 trillion (in 2021, global GDP was put at some \$93 trillion). But, once the complex infrastructure of pipes, pumps and storage needed for CCS are included, capturing a ton of CO<sub>2</sub> rises to around \$1,000 a ton and would therefore, if it were to impact on global warming, leave

governments effectively bankrupt.

Not only is CCS prohibitively expensive: it has "a long history of failing". Leave aside leakage. Carbon can be removed from the atmosphere - that much is easy. However, CCS is an "energy-intensive" technology.<sup>7</sup> Sadly, CCS sucks carbon from the atmosphere only to pump it back out again. Doubtless, if perfected, carbon capture and utilisation has the potential to clean up vital industries, such as cement and steel (CO<sub>2</sub> can be captured and put to use). But as a general solution to global warming CCS is a non-starter, yet another excuse for prolonging the life of fossil-fuel capitalism and delaying the measures necessary to reach net zero carbon and then below.

SRM is Schellnhuber's "rather wicked" fairy. SRM evokes for Schellnhuber the nightmare of the nuclear arms race - countries competing each with other in a scenario leading to mutually assured destruction. "If the climate can be influenced rather inexpensively by sending aerosol rockets to the stratosphere, then who decides when and where the buttons are pushed?" he wrote. Schellnhuber saw dreadful traits of MAD in SRM: that is, the cold war doctrine whereby neither great power bloc attacks the other ... but if they did, it would be the end of each side and maybe even the end of humanity itself.

It should be pointed out, moreover, that some of the geoengineering ideas, including SRM, originated in the military-scientific circles organised around John von Neumann and Edward Teller in the 1950s. These Dr Strangeloves openly advocated climatological warfare as a way to beat the Soviet Union. Droughts could be created, harvests ruined.<sup>8</sup> Given the unpredictability of the atmosphere, that meant developing sophisticated computer models and channelling in huge resources. And, of course, from the theory there came, inevitably, the practice. Between 1966 and 1973, US forces in Vietnam implemented the now declassified Project Popeye.

This saw 2,300 cloud-seeding missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the vain attempt to stop north-south arms and munitions supply lines by artificially extending the monsoon rains and its mud, floods and landslides.<sup>9</sup>

However, given rising concerns about global warming, military-scientific institutions involved in climatological warfare easily segued into geoengineering research. Not that this amounts to beating swords into ploughshares.

Doubtless, certain countries, take Russia, might actually welcome some warming of their territories - it would make the north-eastern passage navigable year-round by way of conventional shipping, open-up vast oil, gas and mining opportunities, and considerably enhance agricultural potential. Indeed, beginning in the 1960s, there were studies conducted in the Soviet Union investigating the possibility of building a giant Bering Sea dam and pumping waters from the cold Arctic Ocean into the warm Pacific, and thereby shrink the Arctic ice cap - fortunately this mad-cap notion was eventually abandoned.<sup>10</sup>

Russia might well shoot down, say, US or Indian geoengineering missiles launched with the stated intention of stabilising the Asian monsoon pattern or other tipping elements in the climate system. One step further up the escalation ladder, the supposed beneficiaries of climate change might turn to counter-geoengineering measures: ie, deliberately increasing greenhouse gas emissions to compensate for SRM measures.

There is, though, the crucial point: SRM would most probably wreak havoc with the climate system.

## Normalisation

While the OSTP report emphasises a precautionary approach, the fact that it comes from the highest levels of the US administration could be a step down a slippery slope towards attempting geoengineering interventions into the climate

before all the risks are anywhere near fully understood. Raymond Pierrehumbert, a physicist and climate researcher at Oxford, says that there is an "unfortunate edging towards normalisation, that geoengineering is just going to be another part of our response to climate change, when the case for whether it will ever be usable is still extremely weak."<sup>11</sup>

Pierrehumbert is one of those spearheading the proposed Non-Use Agreement on Solar Geoengineering, he worries that "a lot of mainstream scientists" with little background studying SRM have recently been signing petitions or letters promoted by a vocal "pro-geoengineering camp". Even to research into this technology is to eventually invite usage by who knows who.

A recent policy statement on geoengineering by the American Geophysical Union certainly ought to be read as giving support to an active research programme into climate intervention, potentially including large-scale atmospheric experiments.<sup>12</sup> The AGU statement is vaguely worded - presumably deliberately so - it does not even state how to decide upon what kind of experimentation ought to be allowed.

But this is clearly part and parcel of building a constituency with a series of reports from governments, scientific institutes and philanthropic foundations, which help make the idea of geoengineering acceptable. Pierrehumbert fears that, if scientists get the go-ahead to do small-scale experimentation and then they admit that, "Well, this didn't answer our questions", they will say they need something bigger: "you can see how there's a slippery slope leading towards deployment".<sup>13</sup>

It is vital to understand that small-scale experiments do not show anything about the effect of geoengineering on climate change. For that, an experiment would need to be carried out over a long time and on such a large scale that it "could not be called an experiment"; rather, it would be a "large-scale deployment of geoengineering", with all its potential impacts and irreversibility. "Geoengineering can't really have an experimental phase" (Silvia Ribeiro).<sup>14</sup>

Naturally enough, the pro-geoengineering lobby says that such is the danger of runaway global warming that it fully justifies more SRM research - with the implication that application must follow PDQ. A February 27 2023 open letter "organised by members of the physical and biological science community" was signed by a rather unimpressive list of 110 PhDs and student PhDs and calls for accelerated studies of technologies that could tackle the climate risk.<sup>15</sup>

The letter says that spiralling climate impacts will increase the pressure to reduce the warming by any means necessary, including solar geoengineering. A fuller understanding of the risks could enable scientists to issue even more clear warnings about using technological climate fixes, and could also help show what might result from a unilateral, unregulated deployment of aerosols to the stratosphere, or saline compounds to ocean clouds.

In fact, many countries in the so-called global south express concern that the rich G7 and G20 nations could use climate interventions to



try and protect their own territories, while leaving them to fry. The Geoengineering Monitor website, for example, complains about geoengineering activities conducted on the African continent with little or no involvement by local researchers.<sup>16</sup> In a word: climate imperialism.

Naturally enough, the February 27 letter calls for “rigorous, rapid scientific assessment of the feasibility and impacts of SRM approaches, specifically because such knowledge is a critical component of making effective and ethical decisions about SRM”. But it is hard not to miss the stench of self-serving hypocrisy.

The OSTP report was followed by a flurry of email pitches to journalists from geoengineering consulting and research companies, making the case for governments boosting solar geoengineering funding. One firm called for a \$13 billion increase in research over the next five years “to ensure a safe climate”.<sup>17</sup>

## Challenge

The OSTP’s report dealt specifically with stratospheric aerosol injection and marine cloud brightening. It follows, though, the much wider 2021 study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine that helped mainstream geoengineering discussions.<sup>18</sup> Many US agencies contributed to its ‘Reflecting sunlight’ final report, which focused on atmospheric approaches, because they could be implemented sooner than other geoengineering methods, but present a greater challenge to governments, since their effects would be felt across borders and therefore, potentially, involve a clash of rival state interests if any one country were to go ahead and launch a sun-dimming project unilaterally - warned against by Jennie Stephens, Prakash Kashwan, Duncan McLaren and Kevin Surprise amongst many others.<sup>19</sup> Hence the almost ritualistic incantations about “international collaboration” on research and SRM governance.<sup>20</sup>

In that same conventional spirit we read that “full consideration” will be given to the “implications for society” in order to reduce the “risk that research is perceived as a step towards inevitable deployment”. Societal concerns include the usual buzz words: environmental justice, geopolitical stability, mitigation, adaptation, public perception and acceptance, etc.

Notwithstanding the fact that the report could be seen as a form of course correction, there is still no perspective in the US administration of establishing a UN or some other such formal international body to oversee, monitor and direct research and development.<sup>21</sup> Understandably something supported by many in the climate science field. Indeed various IPCC reports say the lack of robust international governance of SRM is a risk in itself. However, if such a thing were to happen - and we should expect such a development some time in the near future - the danger is all too apparent: geoengineering, including SRM, is being normalised.

Meanwhile, governments routinely fail to meet the already grossly inadequate Cop emission targets and global temperatures hurtle towards 1.5°C, 2°C and beyond - if emissions continue to increase at their present rate the world will hit 8°C above pre-industrial levels in 2300 - the hottest it has been in 40 million years.<sup>22</sup>

## Logic

Elizabeth Kolbert, a Pulitzer prize-winning author, pinpoints the faulty logic of the would-be geoengineers: “If control is the problem, then, by the logic of the Anthropocene, still more control must be the solution.”<sup>23</sup>

In effect, the geoengineers want to treat greenhouse gas emissions in the same way as Victorian engineers, such as Joseph Bazalgette, dealt with London’s sewage crisis following the famous 1858 ‘great stink’. But the climate system is vastly more complex: everything is connected to everything else. Physics, biology, chemistry and human society form an interconnected and interacting whole.

So, in all probability, if one of the SRM pseudo-solutions was to be implemented, it would let loose a Pandora’s box of demons. For example, triggering armed conflicts, regional climate extremes, disruption of precipitation patterns, limiting the growth of crops and thinning stratospheric ozone. Then there is the “potentially dangerous” consequence of a temperature bounce when the programme is finally terminated, which would be “two to four times larger” than would otherwise have had been the case.<sup>24</sup> The impact on ecosystems and biodiversity, though largely unexplored, would, to put it mildly, probably be decidedly negative.

Surveying the sorry results of past efforts to ‘solve nature’s problems’, Michael and Joyce Huesmann argue, not unreasonably, that humans cannot “substantially modify natural world systems without creating unanticipated and undesirable consequences”.<sup>25</sup> With that in mind, there are far too many on the left who advocate techno-fixes.

The blind worship of technology can be seen in recent times with ‘left’ accelerationists such as Nick Land, Mark Fisher, Paul Mason, Nick Smicek and Aaron Bastani. Technology is held out as the means of overcoming climate change, third-world poverty, etc, etc. Technology is even credited with a fabulous ability to deliver “fully automated luxury communism”. Instead of organising the working class into a party - so *passé* - we have the relentless forward march of technology. Technology, not the working class, undermines capitalism and duly holds out the promise of human freedom. Through supercomputers, through embracing automation, through space rockets, through mining asteroids, through following the “leading-edge” political vanguard of Alexis Tsipras and Pablo Iglesias, we are promised a 10-hour working week, more equality and all manner of tawdry luxury commodities - yes, taken from an article that is over five years old.<sup>26</sup> The whole, almost instantly dated, utterly banal, ‘left’ accelerationist programme clearly owes rather more to Eduard Bernstein, HG Wells and Isaac Asimov than Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

Not that orthodox(ish) Marxism can be entirely excused. Here is what Leon Trotsky, still near the pinnacle of political power in 1924, wrote about refashioning nature:

The present distribution of mountains and rivers, of fields, of meadows, of steppes, of forests and of seashores cannot be considered final. Man has already made changes in the map of nature that are not few nor insignificant. But they are mere pupils’ practice in comparison with what is coming. Faith merely promises to move mountains; but technology, which takes nothing ‘on faith’, is actually able to cut down mountains and move them.

Up to now this was done for industrial purposes (mines) or for railways (tunnels); in the future this will be done on an immeasurably larger scale, according to a general industrial and artistic plan. Man will occupy himself with re-registering mountains and rivers, and will

earnestly and repeatedly make improvements in nature. In the end, he will have rebuilt the Earth - if not in his own image, at least according to his own taste. We have not the slightest fear that this taste will be bad.<sup>27</sup>

And the approach to nature Trotsky preached, Joseph Stalin and his successors put into practice - not in order to realise some global artistic grand design: rather, more prosaically, to provide the state (and in due course, its citizens) with more and more use-values.

Leave aside the radioactive waste littered over Kazakhstan, the open-cast mining, the oil spills and the ruinous industrial practices which caused choking air pollution, poisoned rivers and killed lakes. Let us focus on agriculture. We will see why Marx argued that what is needed for rational agriculture is either the “small farmer living by his own labour or the control of associated producers”.<sup>28</sup>

Expropriating the peasants through forced collectivisation in the late 1920s and early 1930s caused agricultural production to crash. The cities went hungry. The countryside starved. Millions died. However, joining together the country’s peasant farms even without the necessary tractors and combines meant that the regime would never again be held to ransom by richer peasants, the *kulaks*.

## Stalin

Throughout the 1920s they had held back grain when prices were considered too low. The state had to respond, either by increasing prices (and thereby denying industry, the army, etc) or by sending out special armed detachments to seize grain supplies.

But collectivisation merely collectivised primitiveness. The peasants were, to all intents and purposes, re-enslaved. They were state helots. When tractors and combines eventually came on stream, productivity remained notoriously low. Collective farm members had to be allocated individual plots to grow fruit and vegetables for their own consumption and for sale in special, private, markets established in the towns and cities. Despite lacking machinery, productivity on the individual plot was far higher than on the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz*.

As one of many techno-fixes, in the second half of the 1940s Stalin proposed his Great Plan for the Transformation of Nature - a superambitious response to the 1946 drought, which in 1947 left an estimated half to one million dead. Huge bands of land were to be forested in the southern steppe to provide a network of shelterbelts.

Rivers feeding into the Aral Sea were to be diverted - once the world’s fourth largest lake, it has now virtually disappeared. Irrigation canals, reservoirs and countless ponds were going to upgrade the thin soils. Trofim Lysenko’s “elite strains of seed”, so went the presumption, would ensure fabulously high yields.

Lysenko, of course, contemptuously dismissed the Mendelian theory of gene inheritance as an example of “metaphysics and idealism”.<sup>29</sup> Instead he upheld a neo-Lamarckian doctrine of crops passing on environmentally acquired characteristics, such as cold resistance and drought resistance. This was vigorously opposed in Britain by the CPGB’s scientific superstar, JBS Haldane (much to the chagrin of the official leadership faction).<sup>30</sup> Haldane was famously one of the originators of the Darwinian-Mendelian synthesis<sup>31</sup> and eventually resigned from the CPGB in 1950. A great loss.

Lysenkoism had been elevated into official doctrine in the Soviet Union. Those who disagreed were viciously denounced, dismissed from academic posts and often ended up in the gulag. That or they were simply shot. The message was clear: politics, not scientific facts - certainly not nature - was in command.

In 1948, Lysenko made his notorious speech to the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences. He rhetorically asked: “What is the attitude of the central committee of the party to my report?” He answers: “the central committee has examined my report and approves of it (Stormy applause. Ovation. All rise).” The “most chilling passage in all the literature of the 20th century science”, writes Stephen Jay Gould.<sup>32</sup>

The Great Plan ended in complete failure. The trees were of the wrong kind, went untended and died. The crops were of the wrong kind too, and froze or wilted. Topsoils were quickly exhausted and were washed away by rain or blown away on the winds (they contained, of course, the highest concentrates of organic matter and microorganisms). All negative and unintended consequences.

Nikita Khrushchev attempted his own techno-fix. In 1953 the virgin lands campaign was launched. Within two years the first secretary sought to put 13 million hectares of hitherto uncultivated land under the plough, in “Kazakhstan, western Siberia, the lower Volga and (to a limited extent) in the northern Caucasus”.<sup>33</sup> ‘Fallow land is lost land; erosion is a fiction’ ran a Khrushchevite slogan, featured widely in the Soviet press during the mid-1950s. An obvious stupidity.

The eventual target for 1962 was adding a staggering 42 million hectares. Never before in history had there been such a vast projected extension of cultivation in such a short period of time. Masses of urban volunteers were mobilised - especially young enthusiasts. However, neither instruments of labour (tractors, combines, etc) nor the extra labour-power itself proved up to the job. Crucially, though, topsoils were thin and weather conditions notoriously dry. Repeatedly ploughing, sowing and harvesting the fragile virgin lands of the northern Caucasus, western Siberia and north Kazakhstan saw productivity steadily decline. Soils were quickly exhausted and deserts expanded.

Khrushchev had one more gigantic techno-fix up his sleeve: irrigating the arid south, specifically in order to expand cotton production. He gave the go-ahead to divert 12 rivers ‘uselessly’ flowing into the Arctic Ocean. Reversing the flow of the Pechora was not only going to boost cotton production: the shrinking Aral and Caspian seas would be replenished.

Obviously part of the project relied on digging new water channels. However, instead of using traditional methods - mechanical diggers, dumper trucks and the requisite labour-power - the proposal was to detonate 250 nuclear devices. In fact, the Soviet bureaucracy envisaged the almost boundless application of nuclear technology to construction, industry, agriculture and medicine: “atomic-powered communism”.<sup>34</sup> Sounds familiar, doesn’t it?

The wonders of computers, automation, robots and, yes, nuclear power held out the prospect of catching up with the US by 1970 and the beginnings of ‘communist abundance’ by 1980. Three 15-kiloton devices were actually detonated - inevitably causing some fallout. The whole crazy river-diversion idea was finally abandoned in 1986. Who knows what the consequences would have been if it had gone to completion.

With warm river waters no longer flowing into the cold Arctic Ocean from the south, maybe a new, Eurasian, ice age is triggered. Glaciers, permafrost and sea ice slowly spread. Leningrad is eventually permanently frozen in. The city becomes uninhabitable and has to be evacuated. Nowadays climate modellers might well be able to give us a highly accurate prediction - impossible in the 1960s and 70s, though.

Either way, the message is clear: leave behind the dangerous nonsense about humanity being the master of nature. No, we should aspire to being nothing more than good custodians ●

## Notes

1. www.whitehouse.gov/ostp/news-updates/2023/06/30/congressionally-mandated-report-on-solar-radiation-modification.
2. PJ Crutzen, ‘Albedo enhancement by stratospheric sulphur injections: a contribution to resolve a policy dilemma’ *Climatic Change* No77, July 25 2006, pp211-19.
3. www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-hidden-dangers-of-geoengineering.
4. *Financial Times* June 30 2023.
5. climateanalytics.org/publications/2018/why-geoengineering-is-not-a-solution-to-the-climate-problem.
6. www.pnas.org/doi/pdf/10.1073/pnas.1115966108.
7. www.politico.com/newsletters/power-switch/2022/07/12/this-climate-techno-fix-is-back-in-vogue-00045297.
8. See KC Harper *Make it rain: state control of the atmosphere in twentieth-century America* Chicago IL 2017.
9. See history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v28/d274.
10. history.aip.org/climate/RainMake.htm.
11. www.solargeoeng.org/non-use-agreement-open-letter.
12. www.agu.org/Share-and-Advocate/Share/Policy-makers/Position-Statements/Climate-Intervention-Requirements.
13. Quoted in insideclimatenews.org/news/21072023/new-federal-report-on-research-into-sun-dimming-technologies-delivers-more-questions-than-answers.
14. www.geoengineeringmonitor.org/2018/11/against-geoengineering.
15. climate-intervention-research-letter.org.
16. www.geoengineeringmonitor.org/2021/01/geoengineering-activities-on-the-african-continent.
17. Quoted in insideclimatenews.org/news/21072023/new-federal-report-on-research-into-sun-dimming-technologies-delivers-more-questions-than-answers.
18. nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/25762/reflecting-sunlight-recommendations-for-solar-geoengineering-research-and-research-governance.
19. JC Stephens, P Kashwan, D McLaren and K Surprise, ‘Toward dangerous US unilateralism on solar geoengineering’ *Environmental Politics* Vol 32, No1 2023.
20. nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/25762/reflecting-sunlight-recommendations-for-solar-geoengineering-research-and-research-governance.
21. As urged by Janos Pasztor, Cynthia Scharf and Kai-Uwe Barani Schmidt of the Carnegie Climate Governance Initiative - see ‘Solar geoengineering is coming. It’s time to regulate it.’ *Foreign Affairs* May 23 2023.
22. JC Zachos *et al.*, ‘An astronomically dated record of Earth’s climate and its predictability over the last 66 million years’ *Science* September 11 2020.
23. E Kolbert *Under a white sky: the nature of the future* London 2021.
24. CH Trisos *et al.*, ‘Potentially dangerous consequences for biodiversity of solar geoengineering implementation and termination’ *Nature Ecology and Evolution* March 2018.
25. M Huesmann and J Huesmann *Techno-fix: why technology won’t save us or the environment* Gabriola Island BC 2011, pxxv.
26. www.vice.com/en/article/ppxpdm/luxury-communism-933.
27. L Trotsky *Literature and art* - see: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lit\_rev/ch08.htm.
28. K Marx *Capital* Vol III, Moscow 1971, p121.
29. TD Lysenko *The situation in biological science* Moscow 1951, p24.
30. See www.marxists.org/archive/haldane/works/1940s/lysenko.htm. For Haldane’s M15-bugged exchanges with CPGB tops, see blogs.ucl.ac.uk/sts-observatory/2017/07/26/science-and-the-cold-war-at-ucl-1-surveillance.
31. JBS Haldane *The causes of evolution* London 1932. The title deliberately included the plural. See: jbsaldane.org/books/1932-Causes-of-Evolution/haldane-1932-causes-of-evolution-flat.pdf.
32. SJ Gould *Hen’s teeth and horse’s toes* New York 1983, p135.
33. R Sakwa *The rise and fall of the Soviet Union 1917-1991* London 1999, p304.
34. PR Johnson, ‘Atomic-powered communism: nuclear culture in the post-war USSR’ *Slavic Review* summer 1996, pp297-324.

## USA

# Year of four trials

Legal case follows legal case. Expect a crack-up even bigger than January 2021, says **Daniel Lazare**

**W**ith its tripartite system of government in Washington and each of the 50 states, the US political system is a complicated world all its own. But, the more it breaks down, the more complexity it creates - which leads to further complications, and then still more.

2023 is shaping up as the year of duelling investigations, as Republicans use their control of the House of Representatives to probe Joe Biden's wayward son, Hunter, while Democrats use their control of the executive branch to throw everything they have at Donald Trump. But 2024 could result in even greater tumult, as a presidential election plays out against a backdrop of as many as four separate criminal trials in which Trump is a defendant, and Republicans retaliate by impeaching Biden for bribery and other offences.

No-one has a clue as to how it will all work out. Will Trump rail away at the Deep State one day and then sit meekly in court the next, as prosecutors charge him with subverting the constitution? Or will he use the proceedings to accuse Democrats of 'weaponising' the criminal-justice system? Will judges charge him with contempt in response? If so, what will it say about the US electoral system, if a top candidate ends up in jail?

Will Republicans impeach Biden as well? So far, party members are only mentioning the I-word in connection with Merrick Garland, Biden's attorney general, who is accused of reining in an investigation into Hunter's taxes. But, since they are still fuming that Democrats impeached Trump twice, they will no doubt feel honour-bound to do it to Biden at least once.

The constitutional implications are extraordinary. In effect, voters are being asked to pass judgment not only on the political issues of the day - inflation, war, climate, etc - but on whether the Biden administration is justified in prosecuting Trump for mishandling documents and urging on an attempted coup, and whether Trump is justified in vowing vengeance in return.

"I am your warrior, I am your justice, and, for those who have been wronged and betrayed, I am your retribution," he told followers in March.<sup>1</sup> Or, as he added a few weeks ago, "Every time the radical-left Democrats, Marxists, communists and fascists indict me, I consider it a badge - a great, great, beautiful badge of honour and courage - because I'm being indicted for you." Last week, Trump recorded a nine-second video on his Truth Social platform, warning over ominous background music: "If you fuck around with us, if you do something bad to us, we are going to do things to you that have never been done before."<sup>2</sup>

Never have politics more been war by other means.

The implications of a Trump victory are clear. The January 6 coup will be vindicated, hundreds of 'J6ers' will be pardoned and Trump will see to it that his legal troubles end. Democracy will receive a fatal blow, since it is clear that Republicans will use their control of the election machinery to see to it that a Democrat never enters the White House again. Instead of putting a stop to political prosecutions, Trump will use vendettas that Democrats launched during Russiagate as justification for many more of his own.



**Trump can appeal to all classes**

ABC News has already compiled a list of 27 people, from Hillary Clinton to Barack Obama, whom he has said should be indicted or jailed over the years.<sup>3</sup> But, this time around, Trump will be in a position to not just talk, but act. If Biden wins, he will be in a position to see to it that Trump ends up behind bars instead - even while maintaining a pose of independence and insisting that he wants nothing more than to allow the criminal-justice system to run its course.

'Lock 'em up' is thus the battle cry on both sides. The contrast with Britain and the European Union could not be more striking. Despite a growing list of woes, other advanced capitalist states are still able to make it through elections with a semblance of normality. Parties do not dispatch squads of prosecutors, threaten opponents with prison or send out rioters if they lose. But America does all that and more, as its decrepit 18th century constitution breaks down ever more thoroughly.

## Trump

The charges against Trump are well known. In Manhattan, he is scheduled to go to trial on March 25 on charges of fraudulently misrepresenting hush-money payments to porn star Stormy Daniels. That will follow primary elections in eight states, including California, Texas, Ohio and Illinois. Then after eight more state primaries, he is scheduled to go to trial on May 20 on charges of violating the Espionage Act of 1917 by storing 31 sensitive, defence-related documents at his residence at Mar-a-Lago.

Although the Manhattan indictment is widely derided as a featherweight concoction, cooked up by a Democratic district attorney elected on a promise to nail Trump to the wall, the documents case is serious business and could conceivably put the 77-year-old real-estate magnate away for life.

A third case is pending in Atlanta, where a Democratic county prosecutor named Fani T Willis may soon hand down indictments in connection with a phone call that Trump made shortly after election day, in which he told Georgia's top election official, "I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than

we have, because we won the state." Having lost the state by 11,799 votes, in other words, he wanted Georgia secretary of state Brad Raffensperger to rustle up that many more to see him over the top. The Republican faithful have pilloried Raffensperger for refusing to play along. But, if Willis does indict, the latter will be a star witness in a case that could also start in 2024.

Finally, special prosecutor Jack Smith - the same federal prosecutor in charge of the documents case - has formally notified Trump's lawyers that their client is the target of a second investigation into whether his efforts to overturn the 2020 election amounted to political fraud. Among other things, Smith is said to be looking into a wild Oval Office meeting on December 18 2020, in which Mike Flynn, Trump's former national security advisor, reportedly urged the president to seize voting machines, declare martial law and then hold a new election under military auspices. The session supposedly ended in a shouting match, in which White House legal counsel Pat Cipollone succeeded in scotching any idea of a military coup. But the fact that such discussions took place at all is sensational enough.

That could mean a fourth 2024 trial if Smith hands down an indictment in that case too. Trump wants to put the trials off until after the election, so he can run against the justice system without suffering the indignity of submitting to a court. Worried that they may not be able to beat Trump in a head-on political contest, Democrats want to hold them during the campaign in the hope that they will undermine Trump in voters' eyes before they go to the polls.

Considering that Trump's approval ratings have bounced around in the same 40%-42% range despite his legal woes, it is unclear if the Democratic strategy will work. Given his ability to command the stage, in fact, it may even backfire. After all, putting a young ultrarightist on trial in Munich following the 1923 beer-haul putsch did not do much to undermine his career!

Although the charges against Biden have gotten less attention, they are no less serious. For Republicans,

Hunter's missing laptop is the gift that keeps on giving. When news of the abandoned computer surfaced three weeks prior to the 2020 election, 51 former senior intelligence officials signed an open letter, charging that the disclosure had "all the classic earmarks of a Russian information operation".

## Biden

It was a clumsy attempt by neoconservative hawks to use Russophobia to engineer a Democratic victory - one that left Republicans gasping with fury. Since then, investigators mining its contents have found inexhaustible riches: business communications; photos of the zonked-out owner chilling in a bathtub; X-rated stills from a sex tape that rightwing firebrand Marjorie Taylor Greene insisted on displaying at a recent congressional hearing; and more.

Of particular importance are communications from Vadim Pozharsky, an executive with a Ukrainian energy firm called Burisma Holdings, which, beginning in April 2014, paid Hunter as much as \$50,000 a month to serve on its executive board in the hope that he would then use his family connections to curry favour in Washington.

A month later, Pozharsky sent Hunter an email saying, "We urgently need your advice on how you could use your influence to convey a message/signal, etc to stop what we consider to be politically motivated actions" against the firm in Ukraine. In November 2015, he sent another email asking him, in awkward English, to arrange for top US officials to visit Ukraine in order to "bring positive signal/message and support on Nikolay's issue to the Ukrainian top officials above with the ultimate purpose to close down for any cases/pursuits against Nikolay in Ukraine".

Nikolay is the Russian name of Burisma founder Mykola Zlochevsky. A month after that, the elder Biden flew to Kiev and told top Ukrainian officials that if they did not fire a prosecutor named Viktor Shokin, who was conducting an official investigation into Burisma, \$1 billion in US loan guarantees would not be forthcoming. As Biden

later recalled, "I looked at them and said I'm leaving in six hours. If the prosecutor is not fired, you're not getting the money. Well, son of a bitch, he got fired."<sup>4</sup>

Although US officials said they wanted Shokin out because he was soft on Burisma, Pozharsky's email complains that "the representatives of new authorities in power [since the 2014 Euromaidan coup] tend to quite aggressively approach NZ [Nikolay Zlochevsky]" - which suggests the opposite.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Republican senator Chuck Grassley last week released an FBI document summing up interviews with a "confidential human source" - apparently a Russian or Ukrainian-American businessperson, who met with Burisma officials and quoted a conversation in which Pozharsky said he had hired Hunter "to protect us, through his dad, from all kinds of problems". According to the FBI source, Zlochevsky made the same point at a later meeting in Vienna: "Don't worry. Hunter will take care of all of those issues through his dad." The source added that Zlochevsky had "many text messages" and 17 recordings showing that he was coerced into making \$5 million payments to both father and son. Two of the records are supposedly of Hunter and Joe, and 15 are of Hunter alone.<sup>6</sup>

This does not amount to proof, because the source is anonymous and no texts or recordings have as yet turned up. But it is far more than the FBI had when in July 2016 it launched 'Crossfire Hurricane' - the investigation into Russian interference that turned Washington upside down and nearly drove Trump out of office. Yet FBI officials sat on the document for years until Grassley forced them to cough it up.

Plainly, Biden junior was a man in acute emotional crisis who was desperate for money and eager to cash in on his father's position. Biden senior encouraged him by taking him along on diplomatic missions, introducing him to foreign officials and taking part in phone calls with Hunter's business contacts. Whether or not Biden took a payoff, we know that one email speaks of "10 held by H for the big guy" - evidently 10% of a proposed deal with a Chinese energy firm that Hunter was setting aside for the ex-vice president.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, Biden now finds himself at the mercy of Republicans out for blood, at the same time that Trump finds himself at the mercy of Democratic prosecutors.

Just when it seemed that the wars on Capitol Hill could not get any worse, they are heating up faster than the semi-tropical weather outside. There is no doubt whatsoever what 2024 has in store: a crack-up even bigger than in January 2021 ●

## Notes

1. See my article, 'Creeping civil war' (*Weekly Worker* March 30: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1436/creeping-civil-war](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1436/creeping-civil-war)).
2. [truthsocial.com/@AmericanAF/posts/110735839615873166](https://truthsocial.com/@AmericanAF/posts/110735839615873166).
3. [abcnews.go.com/US/trump-faces-criminal-charges-27-people-previously-indicted/story?id=100413013](https://abcnews.go.com/US/trump-faces-criminal-charges-27-people-previously-indicted/story?id=100413013).
4. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=S31bbq\\_LG-4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S31bbq_LG-4).
5. [nypost.com/2020/10/14/email-reveals-how-hunter-biden-introduced-ukrainian-biz-man-to-dad](https://nypost.com/2020/10/14/email-reveals-how-hunter-biden-introduced-ukrainian-biz-man-to-dad).
6. [www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/1023\\_obtained\\_by\\_senator\\_grassley\\_-\\_biden.pdf](https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/1023_obtained_by_senator_grassley_-_biden.pdf).
7. [nypost.com/2020/10/15/emails-reveal-how-hunter-biden-tried-to-cash-in-big-with-chinese-firm](https://nypost.com/2020/10/15/emails-reveal-how-hunter-biden-tried-to-cash-in-big-with-chinese-firm).

## TURKEY

# Meanwhile the economic war

Ending the Black Sea grain corridor has put Erdoğan's government under intense diplomatic pressure, writes Esen Uslu



Wheat: blockaded

Ukraine's much-hyped spring offensive seems to have stalled. On the other side, Russian forces, unable to launch a new offensive, have opted to stand their ground in territories occupied during the last year. Unless something unexpected happens, the forces of both sides will remain bogged down, and a long war of attrition is on the horizon.

Apart from long-range artillery, drone and missile attacks, the war is more vigorously pursued in the economic sphere. Grain exports, one of the main earners for Ukraine, is once more blockaded. The Russians declined to extend the so-called Black Sea grain corridor agreement beyond July 17, when the last ship loaded with Ukrainian grain passed through the Bosphorus. Afterwards Russian staff assigned to the joint control centre in Istanbul were withdrawn.

Russia declared that any ship docking in a Ukrainian port would be considered an enemy craft. Just to add strength to the words, a few seamines 'accidentally floated' towards the entrance of the Bosphorus, but were intercepted in time and safely detonated.

As the grain shipments stopped, the accusations and charm offensives began in the international arena. Russia is about to hold the second Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum, July 27-28, and Putin issued a statement, which claimed:

In almost a year, a total of 32.8 million tonnes of supplies were exported from Ukraine under the 'deal', with over 70% of the exports ending up in high- and upper-middle-income countries, including in the European Union, whereas such countries as Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia, as well as Yemen and Afghanistan, received less than three percent of the supplies parties once more.<sup>1</sup>

The 'international opposition' rebutted this claim. The UK says that about 61% has gone to low- and middle-income countries - and 65% of wheat alone. The World Food Programme resulted in 750,000 tonnes of Ukrainian grain that was shipped immediately to places such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, was the counter-claim.

However, there is one part of the agreement that is not mentioned much. Russian grain and fertilisers are allowed to be shipped from Novorossiysk on the Black Sea, but, because of the economic sanctions imposed on Russia, shipping

companies are unable to obtain insurance and therefore unable to pass through Turkish waters. Which means that, yes, Russia is exporting grains, but only on its own ships and at a much-reduced rate. Turkey has been a key importer of Russian grain - its ports on the southern shore of the Black Sea provide the main access points.

The war of words was soon followed by a new wave of aerial attacks on Ukraine's major port facilities, as well as grain storage facilities. Odessa and other ports in its vicinity, such as Chornomorsk and Yuzhny, were targeted and became unusable... and Ukraine was forced to look elsewhere. There are three ports on the border between Ukraine and Romania, and one of them, Reni, was targeted by Russia, which launched a drone attack, which happens to be just a few metres away from Nato member Romania, on the other side of the Danube.

While they are not deepwater ports, they are capable of handling 50% of Odessa's capacity. The route may provide an alternative, close-to-shore passage for the shipping off the Danube delta - as may be remembered, Snake Island was occupied by Russian forces and then after a fierce bombardment campaign abandoned last summer. So it seems Russia is determined to block Ukraine's grain export via Black Sea ports. Meanwhile, Poland and Hungary have also blocked further imports from their 'ally', Ukraine, because the price drop has been devastating for their own grain producers, while rail transport to Romanian ports is expensive and difficult due to the different track gauges. In other words, the export of grain has become very difficult. The plan to utilise northern European ports for this purpose seems impracticable, as the existing rail capacity is quite insufficient.

Which brings Turkey - an 'ally' of all sides - once more into the diplomatic fray. While president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was on a begging tour to the Gulf, his foreign minister said, "We need to bring Russia back to the negotiating table" in order to achieve a positive outcome. This was not liked by many, but he later added that Turkey does not believe that a shipping route through Romanian and Bulgarian territorial waters is a viable option.

Turkey's position is more difficult than it might seem at first glance. This year is the centenary of the Lausanne Treaty, and one of the points of contention was how the Turkish straits were to be administered. An international commission headed

by Britain was established and the Sèvres Treaty was signed between the last Ottoman government and its allies in 1920. With the Lausanne Treaty, the commission remained in control, but, following Sèvres, Turkey had a more prominent role.

The restrictions imposed over Turkish control of the straits were changed just before World War II via the Montreux Convention in 1936, which allowed Turkey some control, but restricted the passage of warships from Black Sea countries and the navies of all other nations.

Recent developments have put pressure on Turkey to alter its stance regarding the Montreux Convention - before the shooting war started between Ukraine and Russia, a Nato naval patrol used to show its flag in the Black Sea. However, as the Lausanne Treaty and Montreux Convention are accepted as the

basic documents of Turkey's formation, Erdoğan is not willing to compromise. And Nato and the US have taken this into account by trying to build a land corridor from the Greek port of Alexandroupolis through Bulgaria and Rumania.

Now pressure is mounting on Turkey to allow new patrols, since Nato reconnaissance patrols are regularly challenged by Russian jets. At the same time, there are increasing incidents of Russian planes doing the same thing in Syrian airspace.

Turkey knew full well the price it would have to pay when it changed its stance on the issue of Nato expansion in Scandinavia, completing the encirclement of Russia in the Baltic Sea. However, the world is full of surprises. For example, the military machinery of Ukraine still depends on Russian oil. Last December Europe banned the import of sea-borne oil from Russia, but the oil coming via pipelines to landlocked countries were exempted. Oil continued to flow via the Druzhba pipeline through Ukraine to refineries in the Czech Republic, Slovakia - and, of course, Hungary, where another type of Erdoğan, Viktor Orbán, maintains a special relationship with Vladimir Putin.

Sanctions prevent these three countries from exporting the fuel they make from Russian crude oil to others - with one ironic exception: they can send it to Ukraine. So the proverb, 'Make hay while the sun shines', is still alive and well in eastern Europe! ●

### Notes

1. See [static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/zv5JSBtjX9EsGqehQEBPksj2wJy1LQk.pdf](https://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/zv5JSBtjX9EsGqehQEBPksj2wJy1LQk.pdf).

## Summer Offensive

### Steady flow

My report last week outlined why the CPGB's Summer Offensive - our annual fundraising drive - is so important. It is not just a long-established tradition or simply a regular summer routine, it is an important way that our members and supporters can make a vital contribution that allows our political work to continue and develop.

Producing the *Weekly Worker*, organising events such as Communist University and carrying out the full range of political work throughout the year to build support for the ideas of Marxism - all this obviously requires finance and resources. That's why the SO is so important and why we ask our members, and our much wider circles of supporters, to raise money.

As I reported last week, this year's SO has a particular focus on supporting a new project - Communist TV - which we hope to launch in the autumn. We will be writing more about our plans and the thinking behind them in articles and features in forthcoming editions of the *Weekly Worker*. The project will involve new developments in our social media and online presence, as well linking our audience and supporters to a wide range of archive and theoretical resources in a new and attractive format.

To do this in a sound and effective way will require more expenditure on the production and the editorial aspects, as well as in operating on new channels and in new formats. That is why contributing to the Summer Offensive and encouraging all supporters and regular readers to do the same is so important.

There's been a steady flow of donations since we began the Summer Offensive. As ever, these range in size, but, whether big or small, they all represent hard work and sacrifices by our comrades and they all contribute to the overall success of the campaign. So thanks to everyone who chipped in this week to bring us closer to our £20,000 target.

We had some large donations that boosted the figures - thanks to MM, BD, AK, BB and KB - as well as a steady stream of smaller regular contributions from Andy G, RMW and Jim M, which are just as welcome in bringing us closer to our target. Overall, we raised an excellent £3,787 this week, bringing our total so far to £7,597.99. We're on our way, but we still need to up the tempo of donations if we are going to reach the £20,000 target by the end of August.

Can you play your part and help us get there? ●

James Harvey

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The *Weekly Worker* is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode). ISSN 1351-0150.

# weekly worker

There is  
widespread  
defiance

## Double standards on show

While the morality police are back on patrol, top figures in the regime are renowned for preaching one thing and doing another, writes Yassamine Mather

Over the last couple of weeks, news agencies have reported the resumption of patrols by Iran's notorious Gasht-e-irshad ('morality police'). According to official sources this will ensure compliance with the regime's 'forced hijab' policy and deal with those who "ignore the consequences of not wearing the proper hijab and insist on disobeying the norms".

No doubt the Islamic Republic's government is keen to clamp down on 'no hijab and poor hijab' in the two months leading up to the anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini - the event that sparked off a wave of nationwide protests.

As always, it is difficult to predict what will happen in the next few months. However, the women I have spoken to who live in Iran seem determined to continue refusing to wear the hijab or - in the case of women who wear the hijab, but do not agree with the legal obligation to do so - to support the opposition to the 'morality police'.

I should add that both inside and outside the country it is very difficult to assess what percentage of women have removed their head cover over the last few months. My relatives tell me that 80% of women have not covered their hair for the last 10 months. This is not quite true: they are referring to their own experience in more affluent suburbs of north Tehran, where even before September 2022 most women only nominally observed the forced hijab, by covering a very small part of their hair with a thin, see-through scarf.

### Class

Others who live in provincial towns or in more traditional, less middle-class neighbourhoods tell me the number of women refusing to wear any head cover is between 10% and 20%. Of course, given the size of the country, there is a huge diversity between the major cities and the rural areas, but, more importantly, there is also the class divide.

Last week a relative was telling me that she has not worn any form of head-cover since September 2022, explaining that in her daily routine she goes to work, shops in supermarkets, collects her children, travels within the country and abroad ... and yet she kept reminding me that, by doing so, she is not intending to confront the 'authorities', and no-one has actually tried to force her to cover her hair during that time.

Over the last few weeks she has faced shop or bank 'security' staff, who have asked her to cover her hair as she entered. But she assures me that, like hundreds of other women, she has ignored such polite requests and simply walked straight in.

Another relative in her 70s told me that since last September not only has she refused to wear any form of head cover: she also refuses to carry an 'emergency scarf' in her bag or around her neck, in case she is stopped by the morality police. A number of women I have contacted



Hijabs: for dummies

inside Iran tell me removing the scarf is the least we can do to show solidarity with the young generation who have confronted the police and the security forces with such courage.

A social science academic inside Iran has been telling me that, when she attends international seminars, conferences, etc, people ask her what will happen next and she responds that "something has already happened": Iranians have already changed, in that they are less scared of state repression and there is a tangible expectation of further change, with much more optimism about the future. She added that women feel empowered through collective action and solidarity; and nothing and no-one, except through very severe repression "can take that away". Of course, we should not underestimate what the regime is capable of doing. Hardliners are suggesting that the public hanging of a few women who refuse to wear the hijab will 'solve the problem'.

While, as I have stated, such views are not necessarily mirrored nationally and across the class divide, aspects of this optimism, this fearlessness, can be witnessed in all neighbourhoods, rich and poor, and in most regions in both urban and rural areas. The problem for the Islamic Republic is that after 10 months of more relaxed attitudes towards head cover, it will be much more difficult to re-impose restrictions. In many ways the horse has bolted and it is

too late to close the stable door.

All this explains a comment by Iran's first 'reformist' president, Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), who in reference to the redeployment of 'morality police' accused sections of the regime of asking for *khod barandazi* ('self-overthrow'). "Wrong methods will make the society more tense than before," he added.

### Hypocrisy

It is difficult to assess how many Iranians are actual religious believers, and how many pretend to follow Shia practices in order to keep their job, their connections, etc. However, no-one can be in any doubt that amongst the most 'loyal' members of the religious state and even the 'morality guidance' forces there is enormous hypocrisy.

Last week, a film was released on social media that apparently showed the "sexual relationship" of two men, one of whom was, according to reports, Reza Saghati, the Director General of Islamic Guidance of Gilan province. After a few days of silence the office of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Gilan issued a statement calling it a "suspicious mistake ... This case has been referred to the judicial system for a thorough investigation." The government was quick to say that the release of this film should not cause a "weakening of the cultural front" and it could be used as "an attack on the Islamic Revolution" by "evildoers

and opponents".

According to the government statement, published on July 21, a special representative went to Gilan, where "all aspects of this issue were carefully investigated with the presence of security and judicial authorities". The statement did not mention the results of this "investigation", but added: "To create a suitable environment for further research and to carry out continuous cultural and artistic activities, a new supervisor has been appointed for the General Directorate of Gilan Islamic Guidance".

On July 24 the issue was raised in the Iranian parliament, and the speaker, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, added that the incident was also discussed in the meeting of the Supreme National Security Council.

This is a country where homosexuality is illegal and gay men have been executed. Only a week earlier president Ebrahim Raisi, while visiting Uganda, accused western states of promoting homosexuality:

Having the culture of establishing and forming a family and at the same time the culture of 'genuineness' is another common point between Iran and Uganda. We pay great attention to the issue of establishing families and we believe that it is a fundamental principle. The west is today trying to promote the idea of homosexuality and, of course, by homosexuality they are trying to end the generation of human beings; and at the same time they are acting against the inheritance and the nature of human beings. I believe that this issue and these strong attacks by the west against the establishment of families and against the culture of the nations is another area of cooperation for Iran and Uganda.<sup>1</sup>

As always, the rhetoric of the regime does not match reality. For example, since the day it came to power the Islamic regime has banned the consumption of alcohol, but, as any visitor to Iran will tell you, drinking alcohol is very common: in fact alcoholism is a problem - the country has some of the largest Alcoholic Anonymous groups in the region. Alcohol is in fact sold in major cities and, according to medical officials, over the last few months there has

been a rise in the number of deaths caused by 'alcohol poisoning'.

Researcher and therapist Mohammad Ghadirzadeh told the daily paper, *Etemad*, that alcohol use has increased over the past five years, as has excessive drinking. He said that Iran has very few alcohol rehabilitation centres and many who suffer from alcoholism are too afraid to seek help: "The main problem is that many alcohol [abusers] ... refuse to go to hospitals or medical centres because they are afraid that [doing so] would result in a legal case against them."

Elements within the regime are guilty in another way: the sale of black-market alcohol is very much part of the 'enterprising' financial work of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Command (IRGC) - it started small-scale in the early 1980s and it has now become multi-million-dollar business. I was once on a bus in Turkey travelling to the east of that country and many of the other passengers were Iranians returning home. Before leaving Turkey they had bought bottles of whisky, vodka, wine ... and I asked them how they would get these past the border guard. They replied that they buy double quantity of each item: "one for us and one for the revolutionary guard on the border".

The IRGC became well known for its confiscation of drinks - and for then selling them. Nowadays, thanks to severe sanctions and the collapse of the Iranian currency, only those in power with access to the black market can import alcohol at official exchange rates. In other words, it is only state officials, and senior figures in the security and other government authorities, who are capable of organising the importation of alcohol on such a large scale. As a result, in Tehran you can phone through your alcohol order and it is delivered within hours!

So, once again, the religious state says one thing, but does the exact opposite - no wonder no-one believes anything the Islamic Republic authorities say. As in most religious states, the prevailing hypocrisy is evident: the 'devout' leaders engage in clandestine behaviour that totally contradicts the 'moral righteousness' they preach ●

### Notes

1. [www.africanews.com/2023/07/13/iranian-president-accuses-west-of-promoting-homosexuality](http://www.africanews.com/2023/07/13/iranian-president-accuses-west-of-promoting-homosexuality).

Subscribe			Name: _____	
	6m	1yr	Inst.	
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220	Address: _____
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264	_____
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528	_____
<b>New UK subscribers offer: 3 months for £10</b>				Tel: _____
<b>UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £12 a year. Minimum £12 every 3 months... but please pay more if you can.</b>				Email: _____
Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' at: Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX				Sub: £/€ _____
				Donation: £/€ _____
<b>Standing order</b>				
To _____			Bank plc _____	
Branch address _____				
Post code _____		Account name _____		
Sort code _____		Account No _____		
Please pay to Weekly Worker, Lloyds A/C No 00744310 sort code 30-99-64, the sum of _____ every month*/3 months*				
until further notice, commencing on _____ This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)				
Date _____				
Signed _____		Name (PRINT) _____		
Address _____				