

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **Worker**



**Mikhail Bakunin: advocate
of revolutionary impatience
and strikes and streets**

- Letters and debate
- Reform UK conference
- Tory hate-mongering
- China's uncertain future

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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**NATURE not
LABOUR is the
PRIME source
of WEALTH**



Léon Frédéric 'Nature or abundance' c1895

LETTERS



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

Food for thought

A while ago I was working on some controversial issues of democracy and centralism within the history of the socialist movement. This research, and my work more generally, is informed by the important yet largely obscured historical fact that the organisational debates within the German-speaking sections of the socialist movement at the beginning of the 20th century fed directly into controversies within Russian socialism - not least when it comes to terms such as 'democratic centralism'.

Back then I did not have in my possession a book by Wilhelm Schroeder entitled *The history of Social Democratic Party organisation in Germany* (1912), which helpfully - albeit with a revisionist tint - outlines some of the key organisational debates within German socialism from 1863 to 1912. What is more, it reprints each and every party constitution agreed upon at the sovereign body of Social Democracy - the party congress - from that time.

Translating, contextualising and analysing a work of this scope is obviously a project in itself, but I want to highlight a not insignificant amendment to the first paragraph of the SPD's party rules between 1890 and 1900. While this might seem a rather esoteric academic exercise, the comparison is significant, because it to some extent pre-empts one aspect of the controversy between the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions at the 1903 Congress of Russian Social Democracy - namely over the precise definition of a party member in the very first paragraph of the party's rules.

Julius Martov's resolution read as follows: "A member of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party is one who, accepting its programme, works actively to accomplish its aims under the control and direction of the organs of the party."

Lenin proposed the following: "A party member is one who accepts the party's programme and supports the party both *financially* [my emphasis] and by personal participation in one of its organisations."

The issues of programme, participation and dues in particular are therefore at the crux of this matter. On this score, it is worth contrasting the first paragraph of the SPD statutes from both 1890 and 1900, which I have translated.

Agreed upon at the party congress in Halle on October 19 1890 was: "Anyone who proclaims the principles of the party programme and who supports the party to the best of their ability is a party member." Then at the congress in Mainz on September 21 1900 was this: "Anyone who proclaims the principles of the party programme and who continually supports the party *by paying funds* [my emphasis] is a party member."

This shift in the definition of membership was clearly of significance to the debates in 1903. The aforementioned account by Wilhelm Schroeder recalls an organisational commission - set up by the parliamentary fraction - that presented the Mainz congress

with a draft of changes to the party's statutes. Some, he notes, rejected this draft as not going far enough to create what he calls a "strictly centralist organisation".

When it came to the issue of party dues, Schroeder noted that it had now become necessary to include some kind of financial obligation in the party constitution. Previously this had not been legally possible, given the SPD's fragile constitutional status and even in 1900 individuals paying dues to the SPD would likely be blacklisted or face threats from the police. As such, many opposed the new definition of party membership, and it is noteworthy that the rightwinger, Ignaz Auer, a member of the organisational commission, spoke out against it in the following terms:

"An old acquaintance ... who has no money at all ... we are suddenly asking him to demonstrate his party membership through financial contributions. This objection is as old as organised social democracy in Germany itself. It was paraded against the 10-penny dues in the General German Workers Association and against the Eisenach organisation. The only strange thing is that this old and recurring demand ... always [came] from party comrades from places where - as far as one can speak of such a thing among workers at all - a certain prosperity prevails."

When time permits, I will return to these debates and elaborate more on the party-political context in which they occurred, because the discussion does not seem to boil down to the left demanding stricter, more centralist organisation and the right opposing it. Again, the context is decisive, as this was a time when the party was discussing whether to formalise its local structures or to stick with the system of elected "trusted representatives" that it had used in times of illegality and semi-illegality.

Writing in *Die Gleichheit*, for instance, Clara Zetkin defended a certain autonomy and freedom of party bodies: "In our view, the history of the Social Democratic movement proves that the loose form of organisation has not damaged the party's firm, internal unity or its effectiveness, nor has it impaired its material capacity. The old saying that 'the better is the enemy of the good' applies here too. We do not believe, however, that transferring party business to self-contained associations would result in a significant strengthening of the party organisation and greatly increase its material capacity, as some have predicted" (No19, 1900).

Some food for thought!

Ben Lewis

Marxism Translated

Inaccurate

Your article is accurate about Andrew Feinstein, but not about Organise Corbyn Inspired Socialist Alliance ('Unseating the Right Hon Sir Keir', February 22). The *Weekly Worker* could have contacted Ocisa through our website/Facebook groups/Twitter or widely circulated emails to get correct information.

Ocisa was formed just over a year ago to choose and support a candidate against Keir Starmer in Holborn St Pancras. Our campaign strategist wrote to 70

Holborn St Pancras community groups and we advertised throughout the last year to inform people that we were prepared to financially support a candidate. Andrew Feinstein agreed to put himself forward after many of our members suggested him.

Ocisa is run by a steering group of 10 people - far from being "tightly controlled by one Jim Breese". We do not have a set number of members. We are not a political party and no-one pays to join. The private Facebook group has 7,100 members at the time of writing, and we also have Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Threads and 20 regional messenger groups. 1,600 of our Facebook group signed up to our website to vote for the three candidates - 900 voted and Feinstein had 95% of the vote.

It is indeed true that Andrew also has wide support within community groups in Holborn St Pancras, including Female to Male, the local PCS union and many others. While I cannot speak about these other groups, what I can say is that Ocisa has worked on making good alliances with all of the other socialist parties and as a result of that they have all agreed not to stand an alternative left candidate in Holborn St Pancras.

While we expect criticism, particularly from the right wing, it is disappointing to see such a negative and inaccurate article from 'our' side. Please feel free to contact ocisacampaignshp@gmail.com if there is anything else that you would like to know.

Angie Ray

Ocisa steering group

Vote Galloway

Ian Birchall's letter on the Rochdale by-election calls for a vote for Mark Coleman, the Just Stop Oil activist standing as an independent (February 22).

Birchall takes exception to the call for a vote for George Galloway, claiming that, "as a former Galloway supporter", he has become "saddened to see his political degeneration". Galloway - once an "articulate and courageous spokesperson against imperialism and Labour betrayals" - has now apparently become "openly reactionary". Unfortunately, Birchall doesn't elaborate on this, so we can only guess that he's referring to his support for immigration controls, scepticism at the corporate green-washing agenda, or lack of support for the currently fashionable notion that biological sex is a social construct, which individuals can opt in and out of as they wish.

Actually, Galloway's politics have not significantly changed since the days when the Socialist Workers Party was virtually hailing him as the second coming - entering into an electoral alliance, in which Birchall and his comrades were apparently quite happy to largely keep schtum over their political differences with him, so long as they believed it was useful for their latest forlorn attempt to 'build the party' that never gets built.

Now Birchall suggests that a vote for Coleman would be "a warning shot to Starmer" and a spur to the building of a left alternative to Labour. This really is la-la land. The key political weakness for Starmer currently is clearly his unconditional support for Israel's assault upon

the Palestinians. Whatever his many faults, it is obviously Galloway who articulates this and is focusing the anger around it in this particular election. His is the only credible challenge to Starmer.

Birchall is clearly somewhat befuddled, contrasting Coleman's "moral principles" to what he calls "an atheist willing to back Starmer and Islamophobia". Who this is referring to is unclear, as Galloway is a Catholic who opposes both Starmer and Islamophobia.

What is clear is that the SWP's opportunism, which, having wallowed in it for so long, Birchall obviously finds difficult to shake off, is now embarrassing to witness. For their own sake as much as anyone else's, you just want them to stop.

Ben Rust
email

Unworthy victims

When doctors are telling of dead Gazan children having sniper head wounds, when mosques are being blown up, when Israeli Defence Forces soldiers are uploading war crime videos onto TikTok, it's time to realise that Israel is not just going

after Hamas: it's going after all Gazan Palestinians.

It must be noted that people suggesting that Israel has killed too many Palestinians should consider what they are actually saying. How many murders of Palestinians would be enough? If the tables were turned and Hamas were in their fifth month of a military incursion into Israel, would we be soberly claiming that too many Israelis had been killed and maybe it's time to stop the killing? Would Britain be dilly-dallying over organising a debate in parliament on the war in Israel and deliberating over the wording of a motion like a troop of contract lawyers? No, there would be a very different response. There are 'worthy and unworthy' victims, as Herman and Chomsky explained.

It's not about racism in my opinion: it's about functionality for the west. Israel functions as a Middle Eastern strong arm and does the west's bidding - it can bomb and attack neighbouring countries at will without sanction.

The security of the Palestinians is never the issue. Israel is always responding to aggression - it's never the reverse.

Louis Shawcross
County Down

Friday March 1 to Sunday March 3 Online Communist University Spring 2024



Their wars and ours

Friday 7pm
Marxism and revolutionary defeatism
Speaker: Marc Mulholland



Saturday 12 noon
Iran and its proxies
Speaker: Yassamine Mather



Saturday 6pm
Two-state, one-state delusions
Speaker: Moshé Machover



Sunday 12 noon
History of imperialism in the Middle East
Speaker: Mike Macnair



Sunday 5pm
Marxism and just wars
Speaker: Jack Conrad



Free to attend

Zoom links for each session can be obtained at www.facebook.com/events/1096511201682221

Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk

REFORM

Threat to Sunak from right

If polls and by-elections are to be trusted, the Tories face a big challenge from the far right - and before that the possible loss of former vice-chair Lee Anderson, writes Eddie Ford

Though it might not have made headline news, Reform UK held its party conference in Doncaster at the weekend. As most readers will know, it is the legal continuation of the Brexit Party, whose main shareholder is its former leader and now honorary president, Nigel Farage. Indeed, perhaps significantly, since November 2023 the organisation has stylised itself as 'Reform UK: the Brexit Party', presumably in anticipation of the forthcoming general election - giving itself a more recognisable name.

Of course, the conference, or more accurately a rally - there was no programme, agenda or timetable of events - was held on the back of its recent by-election results, which can only be classified as good for a non-mainstream party: 10% in Kingswood and then 13% in Wellingborough.

Worried

After Wellingborough, Reform candidate Ben Habib declared that "the world is our oyster" - a rather optimistic assessment, given that Reform is unlikely to break the two-party system under 'first past the post'. But the Tories are right to be worried by the rise of Reform, no doubt hoping that it turns out to be a mere flash in the pan, as some estimate that the party could split the Tory base and result in the loss of an additional 30 seats - making a resounding election defeat look even more probable.

In fact, many Tories want to emulate Reform UK and get some 'real Conservatism', thinking this might possibly hold out a dim chance of winning the upcoming general election.

Anyhow, Reform's property multi-millionaire leader and once a big donor to the Tories, Richard Tice, told his Doncaster conference that the party would "save" Britain from a "sinking Sunak" and "Starmageddon". He went on to say that when Reform was launched "they laughed at me", but "they're not laughing now".

Then Tice unveiled his pitch to traditional Tory voters, disillusioned by the state of the economy (especially with the tax burden at its highest level since the end of World War II). He claimed that a Reform UK government - if you can imagine such a thing - would almost double the basic income tax threshold and reduce corporation tax. According to him, this would mean an extra seven million people would pay no income tax at all, in a move that he claimed would reverse the current economic gloom that has "left everyone feeling poorer."

However, after all the rather boring economic stuff, the applause got a lot more enthusiastic when the Reform leader moved on the real 'red meat' stuff - like transgender rights, the BBC and vaccines. Tice announced that the party would "ban" transgender ideology in primary and secondary schools and sack teachers who keep it on the curriculum, earning him rapturous applause. Ditto with critical race theory, which would, supposedly, be quite easy to do: "The secretary of state for education writes to every headteacher and says this stops this weekend ... and, if it doesn't stop, you're fired". Simple as that!

Tice declared that the party would also abolish the existing BBC licensing fee, ensure the UK leaves the World Health Organisation, rip



Main shareholder

up the Equalities Act and - generating more raucous applause - launch an inquiry into "vaccines harms", which "the establishment doesn't want to talk about". For Tice, there was a "serious problem" with thousands more people dying than expected during the pandemic and the excess deaths could be attributed to the side-effects of the Covid jab (as inevitably a few will be).

We also discovered that Reform would freeze all "non-essential" immigration with a "one in, one out" quota system, on the basis that the British public never voted for mass immigration. In fact, Tice wanted government ministers to declare immigration a "security threat", as many of the people coming to the country illegally "do not have good intent". Telling you everything about the mood of the conference, Tice's promise not to "allow Sharia law in the United Kingdom", as well as Ann Widdecombe's speech for "the drawbridge" to be pulled up for non-skilled migrants, because "Rwanda ain't working", were both greeted with standing ovations. Indeed, in the absence of Farage - who was in the US with Liz Truss warning that the west's "Judeo-Christian culture" is under threat - Widdecombe was the darling of conference.

It almost goes without saying that Reform, like the Tory Party, is not remotely democratic. Its 115,000 paying registered supporters have absolutely no voting power or democratic outlet to influence party policy. The conference (or rally) was a fine example of stage-managed control-freakery, with no debates or differences of opinion allowed. By all accounts, Nigel Farage retains a high level of control over decision-making, including hand-picking candidates himself.

Journey

A certain annoyance was expressed at the conference by some Reform officials at Lee Anderson for "stealing our thunder" with his media-grabbing comments about the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, as it was supposed to be "our day, not his". This seemed a bit ungrateful, given how much publicity Anderson has generated for the party, and the intense level of media speculation about the possibility of him defecting to Reform. There is history between the two, needless to say, Reform having courted Anderson before - *The Sunday Times* reported in November last year that he had been offered "a lot of money" to join.

Anderson himself is a peculiar character. He is a former member of the National Union of Mineworkers who campaigned for Michael Foot in the 1983 general election and cites Arthur Scargill, Dennis Skinner and Tony Benn as "important influences" in his early political beliefs - before going over to the extreme right of the Tories. Only a short time ago he was actually a deputy chair!

Of course, Anderson - MP for

Ashfield in Nottinghamshire since 2019 - has now had the whip withdrawn for his inflammatory comments about Khan, saying that "Islamists" have "got control of Khan and they've got control of London and they've got control of Starmer as well".

Now, maybe Lee Anderson is a simple-minded fool who just says what comes out of his mouth, oblivious to the ramifications. Or he is calculating, cynical politician who did a Braverman and deliberately got himself suspended in order to put himself in a position where he can confront the Tory leadership - either select me as a Tory candidate in the forthcoming general election or I will stand instead for Reform.

Whatever the case, he puts himself in a win-win situation - able to present himself as a consistent and 'principled' politician, as opposed to the woke crowd. He told GB News he would not apologise to Khan "while I have a breath in my body" and, when pressed over whether he would join Reform or not, Anderson did not directly reply - rather, said he had "been on a political journey", hinting that he was still 'travelling'.

There are rumours about him holding private talks with Richard Tice, who now goes on about how Anderson "speaks for millions of people who are appalled by what is happening to our country". Well, he certainly appears to speak for a large number of grassroots Tory members. A poll of 521 Conservative members by Opinium found that 58% say Islam poses "a threat" to this country - double the proportion of the overall population who believe the same.¹ It also found that 52% believe the increasingly prominent conspiracy theory that parts of European cities are under sharia law and are "no-go" areas for non-Muslims. Fertile ground for someone like Anderson,

We should certainly not discount the possibility of at least one Reform MP before the next parliament.

Consequences

Meanwhile, there are real-life consequences from the sort of rhetoric we hear from the likes of Lee Anderson and Suella Braverman. When the latter was home secretary, she agitated for the Met Police to ban the biggest demonstration of the 21st century in London - some 800,000 or more. Then, when it was not banned, the message from her and the media was that we have to defend the Cenotaph in Whitehall, the holy of holies for the establishment and its remembrance of imperialist wars - even though the idea that it was ever under threat was obviously absurd.

What Braverman actually mobilised, of course, was a rightwing mob who had been getting tanked up in various nearby pubs and ended up attacking the police around the Cenotaph, making a huge din amidst the silence that was meant to commemorate the millions of war dead.

Stirring things up about how "the Islamists" have "got control of London", or are setting up "no-go" areas for non-Muslims, will mean the fire-bombing of mosques, attacks on the streets - perpetrators finding justification in Anderson's off-beam chauvinist statements ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. theguardian.com/politics/2024/feb/28/more-than-half-of-tory-members-in-poll-say-islam-a-threat-to-british-way-of-life.

ACTION

Stop arming Israel - boycott Barclays Bank

Saturday March 2: Nationwide day of action. Demand the British government stops arming Israel. Demand Barclays stops bankrolling Israel's attacks on Palestinians. Join your local action.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Palestine, war and the Middle East

Sunday March 3, 2pm to 5pm: Anti-war assembly, Tyneside Irish Centre, Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Join activists to discuss the situation in Gaza and the Middle East, and how to build the Palestine solidarity and anti-war movements.

Organised by Newcastle Stop the War: www.facebook.com/events/1106470723815607.

Building the pro-Palestine/anti-war movement

Monday March 4, 7pm: AGM and public meeting, Quaker Meeting House, Upper Goat Lane, Norwich NR2. Help to build and organise the movement. Organised by Norwich Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/1071743907376586.

What it means to be human

Tuesday March 5, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online.

This meeting: 'Hunter-gatherers of words'. Speaker: Cedric Boeckx. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/889114996007884.

End cold weather deaths

Wednesday March 6, 12 noon: Budget day protest. Assemble College Green, Westminster, London SW1. Tory government policies have led to hundreds of thousands of avoidable deaths. Demand an end to deaths fuelled by poverty.

Organised by End Fuel Poverty Coalition: www.axethehousingact.org.uk

Stop the genocide in Gaza

Thursday March 7, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Sport Wales National Centre, Sophia Gardens, Cardiff CF11.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition and Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=122124291800190566.

Communist culture club

Thursday March 7, 7pm: Fortnightly online culture meeting. Includes Ben Lewis on Clara Zetkin and International Women's Day, Roger Silverman on Shakespeare from a Marxist perspective and Tam Dean Burn reviewing the comedy opera *Marx in London!* Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Solidarity with Palestinian women

Friday March 8: Workplace nationwide day of action. Organise actions in support of the women and children of Gaza, who have been forced to bear the brunt of Israel's genocidal war.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=782349290585316.

40th anniversary of the miners' strike

Saturday March 9, 11.30am: Assemble for entertainment at Broadway Hotel, Dunscroft, Doncaster DN7. March to Hatfield Main Colliery, then Hatfield Main Club, to hear Arthur Scargill.

Organised by Doncaster Coalfield Strike Anniversary: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1630377334373462.

Ceasefire now: stop the genocide in Gaza

Saturday March 9, 12 noon: National demonstration, central London - details to be announced.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Screen Cuba: films to change the world

Saturday March 9 to Friday March 22: Festival of Cuban cinema since 1959, The Garden Cinema, 39-41 Parker Street, London WC2. Inspiring shorts to ground-breaking features and documentaries, plus discussions with Cuban film specialists. Tickets £12 per film.

Organised by Cuba Solidarity Campaign: www.thegardencinema.co.uk/festival/screen-cuba.

Defend the right to protest

Tuesday March 12, 6pm: Public meeting, Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2. The police have placed restrictions on recent demonstrations and arrested marchers.

Speakers include Michael Mansfield KC. Tickets £5 (free). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Workers as the gravediggers of capitalism

Thursday March 14, 7pm: Online session in the fortnightly 'ABC of Marxism' course, presented by Ian Spencer.

Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Stop racism, stop the hate

National demonstrations for UN anti-racism day, organised by Stand Up to Racism and the TUC: standuptoracism.org.uk.

Glasgow, Saturday March 16, 11am: Assemble BBC Scotland, Pacific Way, Glasgow G51.

London, Saturday March 16, 12 noon: Assemble home office, Marsham Street, London SW1.

Cardiff, Sunday March 17, 11am: Assemble Welsh parliament, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff CF99.

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.

TORIES

Screaming blue murder

Lee Anderson, Liz Truss and Suella Braverman are trying to further their despicable careers in the only way they know how, writes **Paul Demarty**: by hate-mongering against Muslims



Stirring up hatred of Muslims has real-life consequences

It is now, somehow, 22 years since Theresa May made her first political intervention of any consequence.

It is sobering to think that people will vote in the next general election who were not even born when she denounced her own party in a conference speech for its petty cruelty, its total reliance on scaremongering about benefit cheats, asylum-seekers and what have you. "You know what people call us?" she told the crowd: "the 'Nasty Party'".

It was a pretty nasty outfit at the time; Iain Duncan-Smith had been elected leader as a standard-bearer of the right, and the rightwing press preferred to stick with Tony Blair for the time being. Blair's government could be nasty enough, anyway - and was gearing up to be extremely nasty to the people of Basra the following year, much to the braying satisfaction of *The Sun* and the *Mail*. Nastiness just did not pay the same dividends for Duncan Smith as it did for Margaret Thatcher. What were they to do? The lesson drawn at length was David Cameron - hug a hoodie, blather on about the environment, legalise gay marriage ...

Smash-cut to 2024, and nastiness is apparently the only trick left in the Tory box. The government itself has expended every penny of political capital it has to ram through mass deportations of asylum-seekers. Those slightly outside the circle of trust are on even worse behaviour. Suella Braverman - late of the home office, but forced to step down when those woke snowflakes at the Metropolitan Police refused to clamp down hard enough for her on pro-Palestine "hate marches" - is back in *The Daily Telegraph* to tell us that Britain has been taken over by Islamists. Lee Anderson

MP demurred from this judgment - apparently it was only *London* that had been coopted in this way, thanks to mayor Sadiq Khan.

Meanwhile, Liz Truss, the 'blink and you'll miss her' former prime minister, has hit the US far-right punditry circuit, and produced a book called *Ten years to save the west*. Slated for release in April, it will no doubt be fighting for space in the nation's remainder bins with Nadine Dorries' *The plot* by June. Judging by her deranged appearance at the notorious Conservative Political Action Conference in New York, Truss seems to have rewritten the Dorries account of how a shadowy 'they' got rid of Boris Johnson to be about ... herself.

Until last week, all three of the above were MPs in good standing: Anderson has since been stripped of the Tory whip, because, although his claim was rather less insane and inflammatory than Braverman's, he named Khan specifically, and the only thing 'protected' by parliamentary standards is the individual reputations of the great and the good, not the poor beleaguered masses of ordinary Muslims in Britain, who, particularly women, have been subject to a reported three-fold increase in hate crime since October 7.

Help them

There are narrower and wider explanations for this odd behaviour by Anderson, Braverman and Truss. The very narrowest is a matter of career prospects. Few expect the Conservatives to win the next election. (Anti-Muslim ravings *may* help them, but could just as well help Labour, whose usually strong attraction for the Muslim vote is somewhat complicated by Keir Starmer's thirst for Gazan blood; a

look at Anderson and Braverman may scare Muslim voters back to the devil they know.) Many MPs, even in hitherto safe seats, may be at risk of ejection from the Commons, so the question is: what's next?

There are several options. One is to prepare for the post-Sunak leadership contest. Another is to jump ship, perhaps to the Faragist Reform party. A third is to rotate out of front-line politics into the far-right punditocracy. At a guess, these seem to be the respective ambitions of Braverman, Anderson and Truss. Braverman clearly used her former cabinet position as an audition to run as the far-right candidate for Tory leader when the time came. Anderson's suicide-by-cop routine came after he was already identified as a defection risk. His ridiculous Alf Garnett shtick will sit nicely in the latest home of 'good old British common sense'. As for Truss, *surely* she cannot be looking for another go at the top job; her American jaunt is a reminder of where the action *really* is for shallow, hysterical culture-warmongering. A home will be found for her at GB News or some such place.

Whatever their particular goals, all three of these are quite prepared to spout nonsense along the way. Sadiq Khan, for example, might wonder how it is he is an Islamist today, when barely a week ago he was being denounced for naming the various London Overground lines in line with a corporate-feminist agenda. Is Khan rejected for being Osama bin Laden or Sheryl Sandberg? Who can tell?

That said, *why* is this a good idea? Why does it stick? It does so first of all because of the immediate situation: the British state is currently, in line with its subordination to the United

States, backing Israel, as it attempts to bomb and starve millions out of the Gaza Strip. This is, let us say, a harder sell than the Ukraine war, since Ukraine was at least actually invaded by a superior force and therefore commanded an instinctive sympathy for the underdog.

As it becomes increasingly clear that Israel intends to commit a wave of ethnic cleansing that dwarfs all the other horrors of this millennium, there is little left for its backers other than just doing their best to blanket the world in absurd lies about opponents of Israel. So the movement is caricatured as primarily Islamist, rather than a coalition of Islamists, ordinary Muslims, secular leftists, Jewish groups who demur from Zionism, and so on. By misrepresenting the movement in this way, it can be presented as an *external* threat, in true *Camp of the saints* style.

Right drift

But there is a wider canvas still, which is the steady drift of bourgeois political culture *to the right*. The collapse of the USSR entailed a drastic narrowing of the horizons of social democracy, with the Blair government obviously far to the right of Harold Wilson and James Callaghan (and similar points could be made about Gerhard Schröder, Lionel Jospin, Bill Clinton, and so forth). The well-nigh universal commitment of centre-left and centre-right parties all over Europe and North America to market reforms, privatisation and attacks on the social safety net - in most of those countries accompanied by extensive deindustrialisation - pauperised many, and broke the power of organisations like trade unions that could countervail this damage.

The respective parties nonetheless needed *something* to give to at least parts of their base. The social democrats largely plumped for identity politics, whether in the form of culturally progressive reforms in the sphere of sexuality, or the promotion of diversity measures of various sorts, to project an image of neoliberal market society as *truly* progressive relative to what it succeeded. This dovetailed nicely with the 'humanitarian' gloss increasingly put on imperialist misadventures around the globe. For the right, it was enough to declare war on precisely these liberal cultural policies and what have you. Since neither party in a given country can *actually* give anything to their base (Liz Truss illustrates the fate of those who try ...), the inevitable result is increasingly irrational forms of both reactionary and (supposedly) progressive cultural politics.

Cultural politics

This dynamic tends to favour the right, so long as there is not a serious left oriented to the working class. The displacement into cultural politics prevents the social democrats from holding on to their base, and builds resentment, which is exploited by the far right; the far right, in turn, displaces the centre-right (as in Italy) or is subsumed into it (as with the Brexit Tories or Trump Republicans). This authorises ever more irrational counterattacks - viz. the entirely unevincenced claims of Trump's collusion with the Putin regime - that produce very similar political pathologies (the characterisation of all dissidents, right and left alike, as foreign agents).

The stupidity of Truss, Anderson and co should not therefore be taken to indicate that there is no danger here. Every class politics has foolish and dishonest advocates, as well as intelligent and sincere ones. There are intelligent reactionaries at work today as well - you just do not see them on GB News, any more than you see intelligent liberals on MSNBC. Their stupidity works, as we said, because it is carried along on a real historical current.

By contrast, the working class, socialist left is not invested in the survival of the bourgeois political regime. It does not need to square pauperisation with the legitimacy of capital accumulation and therefore it needs neither cosmetic, tokenistic changes in the composition of elites according to race, sex, etc, nor an outgroup who can be scapegoated for all the ills befalling us. Indeed, so far as the concerns of liberal progressivism on race, sex and so forth go, we can do *better*, since for us the point is to make such struggles the occasion of universal solidarity, not the proof that such solidarity is impossible, as per identity politics of the modern sort.

We have not done a terribly good job of it recently. The left's bias for 'action on the streets' too easily leaves it open to being cornered by one or the other wings of bourgeois politics (usually the liberal wing). Yet the *necessarily* irresolvable contradiction of the bourgeois political cycle ensures that the way is never truly closed to us. That is why it is a matter of *socialism or barbarism*, rather than just barbarism ●

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HEALTH

Decay fast and furious

At great human cost NHS dentistry has been driven almost to the point of extinction. A similar outcome threatens health services in general, writes **Ian Spencer**

On February 5, St Paul's dental practice in Bristol opened its doors to new National Health Service patients. But the queues were so huge that police had to be called to control the crowds.

In England alone, there are 12 million adults and five million children who do not have access to an NHS dentist.¹ Last year more than 26,000 children were admitted to hospital to have dental extractions under general anaesthetic due to preventable decay.² Nearly 80,000 Scots are without an NHS dentist. Patients with acute dental pain have little recourse other than accident and emergency departments or DIY dentistry. In 2020-21, there were 83,000 attendances at A&E for dental issues.

Against this backdrop, on February 7 the government published its 'dentistry recovery plan' - no doubt with one eye on the forthcoming general election. So far, the Labour Party response has been to propose the introduction of "supervised tooth brushing" in primary schools - Aneurin Bevan would be so proud!

From the inception of the NHS, dentists, like general practitioners, remained independent contractors - albeit paid for their services out of taxation rather than fees. But today the steady destruction of dentistry is a model for how the rest of the NHS will become a 'safety net' service, offering basic treatment for some, providing it is possible to find an NHS practitioner. If unchallenged, the NHS will go out with a whimper, rather than a bang, as underpaid professionals take more lucrative jobs in private practice or outside healthcare altogether.

The current dental contracts mean that few newly qualified dentists intend to work in the NHS. The British Dental Association - the nearest thing most dentists have to a union - has argued that the "government is failing to address the root cause of the crisis in NHS dentistry".³ The BDA points out that a record number of dentists are registered to practice with the General Dental Council (GDC), but that the number of dentists undertaking NHS work has fallen to historic lows.

Familiar mess

'Faster, simpler and fairer' is the government's plan to "recover and reform NHS dentistry", which is described by the BDA as "unworthy of the name". It serves up a familiar mess of pottage. Its foreword, by Victoria Atkins, secretary of state for health and social care, states that "dentistry is a priority for government", which leaves one wondering what the hell would happen to something which was not! The promised "significant expansion of access" appears to amount to the introduction of 'dental vans' that can bring a peripatetic service to areas which are already an NHS 'dentistry desert', such as rural Lincolnshire, where Ms Atkins' constituency is to be found.

The "significant incentive" to be offered to dentists is, apparently, £15 for each patient and £50 for those with higher needs. I do not think that will cut it, do you? Neither does the BDA, which argues that the current rates, even with the new incentives, effectively mean that dental practices will be making a loss. And this is not confined to dentistry, of course.

Similar complaints have been put forward by community pharmacists, who, the government hopes, will step in to supply services that GPs are already failing to adequately provide, in no small part because they are leaving the NHS in droves.

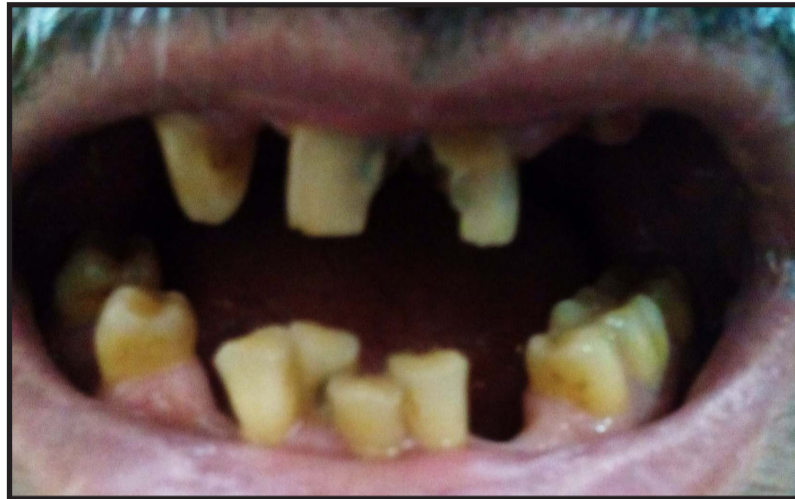
Other government measures proposed, include 'golden hellos' to attract dentists into "areas in need" (for this, read areas which are unprofitable). Dentistry, reduced to commodity production - and the dentists, reduced to petty-bourgeois hucksters - will go where the profits go. Surely that is among the things implied by Margaret Thatcher, when she sagely asserted that you "can't buck the markets".

'Faster, simpler, fairer' also includes something that is now standard, when it comes to dealing with the 'professions' - an increase in the number of "dental therapists and other dental care professionals", through a 40% increase in the number of training places for dental technicians, hygienists and dental nurses (assuming, of course, that these too will not be better off working privately. They certainly will not be able to afford the capital expenditure to set up as an alternative - or even to supplement registered dentists. Indeed, many will not even be able to afford dental care themselves!

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has suggested a minimum income standard - not just to survive, but to live with dignity. For a single person in 2022, this was £25,500 and for a single parent with two young children £38,400.⁴ By contrast a recent salary review by the Association for Dental Nurses reported that 73% of dental nurses earned under £20,000, which contrasts with £21,460 for a sales assistant in Lidl.⁵ The pay of dental nurses, like nurses in general, has historically been pitched at a level which assumes the worker to be female and the earner of a household's second income. Dental nurses and technicians have the additional disadvantage of working for a series of independent contractors, rather than the NHS itself and are therefore unable to exert much influence on the level of pay and conditions through trade unions (such as they are in dentistry).

Another stock response is to "make it easier for NHS practices to recruit overseas dentists who meet the UK's highest regulatory standards".⁶ This is notwithstanding the fact that 30% of all dentists (and 46% of recent recruits) trained overseas.⁷ Presumably, the plan is to recruit only overseas dentists who will accept a declining standard of living relative to those already based here. While the government's proposal tentatively suggests that there will be some sort of 'tie-in' agreement to ensure that new entrants spend at least some time working for the NHS, I doubt that indentured labour will be attractive to many for long.

The consequence of the loss of NHS dentistry is more than rotten teeth. It is a crucial public health issue. There is growing evidence of a close relationship between dementia, heart disease, strokes and tooth decay.⁸ Chronic periodontal disease is a well-established source of inflammatory load on the body - which, in turn, is related to Alzheimer's disease and Lewy body dementia. Vascular is the second most common form of dementia and is crucially related to arteriosclerotic



A horror story

disease.

Generally, good heart health is a factor ensuring good brain health. Coronary heart disease (CHD) and strokes have a well-known mutual association, with markers for inflammation shared with dental infection. Those with periodontal infections have significant elevations of plasma fibrinogen and white cell counts, which strongly suggests that periodontal infections increase the risk of CHD and stroke by inducing a "systemic proinflammatory and prothrombotic state".⁹

Good dentistry also increases the likelihood of the early detection of oropharyngeal cancer, which is crucial to improving survival rates. Currently, detection of such cancer in a premalignant state is the exception rather than the rule.¹⁰ That is likely to get worse with the collapse of NHS dentistry.

Class issue

Almost all disease shows a class gradient. The best way to live a long and healthy life is, first, to choose your parents well! The poorer you are, the less amount of control you have over your life in general and your working life in particular, and the more likely you are to suffer poor health and die younger.

This is nowhere better illustrated than in the consequences of capitalist, market-led dentistry. Particularly in the context of the current cost of living crisis, financial pressure may restrict access to basic products for dental hygiene. In a recent YouGov poll, 28% of people experiencing hygiene poverty said they had to go without toothbrushes and toothpaste.¹¹ Nutritional insecurity is usually related to a diet high in sugar and highly processed foods. Importantly, the working class is less likely to live in an area served by an NHS dentist - and less likely to be able to afford one, if an NHS dentist can be found.¹² For many, private dentistry is out of the question - and here we are not talking about whitening or orthodontics, but simple routine dental care. Good dietary intake is also a factor in resistance to periodontal disease. It is the poorest that have to use more expensive electricity metering, for example, which in turn affects the ability to prepare fresh home-cooked food. It is - and has always been - expensive being poor.

The government admits that tooth decay is the most common oral disease affecting children and young people. Those in the most deprived 20% of areas in the country are 2.5 times as likely to have experience of tooth decay. The cost to the NHS of hospital admissions for tooth

decay-related extractions in children was £50.9 million in 2021-22.¹³ As always, the 'solution' provided by the market is as cruel as it is inefficient.

Naturally, the Tory government's proposals take no responsibility for the situation, despite their length of time in office. Similarly, Labour's plan to "reform the dentists' contract" makes no mention of an increase in pay to maintain a universal, free dental service. Perhaps this is unsurprising, as the current contracts were put in place under the Labour government of the Blair-Brown years.¹⁴

The recent, unprecedented industrial action by nurses, junior doctors and even consultants has failed to succeed even in the narrow terms of reversing years of pay cuts. The next government, barring a major shift in public opinion, is likely to be a Labour one - even if only because the Tories are guaranteed to lose it, rather than Labour winning it with any significant policy initiative.

Meanwhile, a workers' movement without a political perspective and the strength to put forward a real alternative will become dissipated and have recourse to nothing but individual acts of resistance. In the case of dentists, that has taken the

form of voting with their feet to abandon free, universal healthcare in favour of petty bourgeois interest in the private sector. It is a dress rehearsal for what is likely to happen in medicine as a whole.

The demand for free universal healthcare, including dentistry, pharmacies and ophthalmology, is a central one - not just to communists, but to any civilised society. As we move into a world where war is likely to become a generalised feature, it will be paid for at the expense of the working class by not only the reduction of pay and conditions, but a greater extraction of a surplus from workers, as free provision is lost in favour of medicine as a commodity.

The quality of that commodity will be worse for those who can least afford it, while the smiles of the rich will be as white and as wide as those on the red carpet in Hollywood ●

Notes

1. *The Times* February 7 2024
2. *The Times* December 22 2023.
3. www.bda.org/news-and-opinion/news/provisional-registration-plans-ministers-try-to-fill-leaky-bucket.
4. www.jrf.org.uk/work/uk-poverty-2022-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk.
5. www.nature.com/articles/s41415-023-5685-0.
6. www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-recover-and-reform-nhs-dentistry/faster-simpler-and-fairer-our-plan-to-recover-and-reform-nhs-dentistry.
7. BDA *op cit*.
8. www.researchgate.net/profile/Pallavi-Tonsekar-2/publication/313462110_Periodontal_disease_tooth_loss_and_dementia_Is_there_a_link_A_systematic_review.
9. www.ahajournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1161/01.CIR.0000118643.41559.E2.
10. headandneckoncology.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1758-3284-3-33.
11. thehygienebank.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Hygiene-Bank_2022_Hygiene_Poverty_report_v9.0.pdf.
12. www.nature.com/articles/s41415-023-5685-0.
13. www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-recover-and-reform-nhs-dentistry/faster-simpler-and-fairer-our-plan-to-recover-and-reform-nhs-dentistry.
14. *The Times* June 6 2008.

Fighting fund

Brilliant

Some great news, comrades: with one day still to go for the February fighting fund, we have already shot past our £2,250 monthly target.

The main reason for this is the magnificent end-of-the-month donation received from comrade PP for no less that £365 - that's right, £1 for every day of the year! On top of that, there were two more three-figure contributions - thank you, comrades JC and MF, who chipped in with an excellent £100 each.

Then there was LM, whose monthly £80 standing order has just landed in our account, plus £50 from both BK and DB. Meanwhile, the donations from OG and GT were both for £35, with JT (£25), DG (£20) and TT (£6) also helping us out. Finally comrade Hassan handed his usual fiver to one of our team.

So all that takes the total received over the last seven days to no less than £831 - and for the month to £2,505, with, as I write, one day still to go. In other

words, we have already exceeded the February target for what we need to produce the *Weekly Worker* by a brilliant £255. And who knows how much extra we will get tomorrow?!

It just shows you how much the *Weekly Worker* is valued - what other paper campaigns so continuously and forcefully for what the working class really needs? I'm talking about a principled, democratic, revolutionary party, uniting all class-conscious workers in Britain.

To play your part, please go to the link below, where you'll see how to contribute via PayPal, bank transfer or cheque. Better still, why not take out a standing order? ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310 To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate

BASICS

The wealth of nature

Despite tailing the climate crisis movement, some on the left still think of labour as the source of all wealth. Jack Conrad spells out the ABCs for the SWP and the IST

For years, for decades, *Socialist Worker* carried this formulation in its 'What we stand for' column: "Workers create all the wealth under capitalism. A new society can only be constructed when they collectively seize control of that wealth and plan its production and distribution according to need" (Proposition one). And - no surprise - the Socialist Workers Party's dozen or two imitators and clones, organised into the International Socialist Tendency, loyally, crassly, present their own version of this bullshit.

Five examples:

1. In the United States the now liquidated International Socialist Organization: "Workers create society's wealth, but have no control over its production and distribution. A socialist society can only be built when workers collectively take control of that wealth and democratically plan its production and distribution, according to present and future human needs instead of profit."¹

2. Its diminutive IST rump, Marx 21, likewise declares: "We believe that workers create all the wealth under capitalism, which is a system run by a tiny, wealthy elite. A new society can only be constructed when we, the workers, collectively seize control of that wealth and plan production and distribution according to human need."²

3. Up north, in Canada, the International Socialists have: "Capitalist monopolies control the Earth's resources, but workers everywhere actually create the wealth."³

4. Down under, in Australia, there is Solidarity: "Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over production or distribution."⁴

5. Then, finally, in terms of our brief IST survey, we have Workers' Democracy in Poland (formerly Socialist Solidarity). In line with the others we are told: "While workers create social wealth, they have no control over the production and distribution of goods. In pursuit of increasing profits, global capitalism, cultivated by corporations backed by the power of the strongest and richest countries in the world, leads to a progressive stratification of income."⁵

Our polemics

When it comes to the SWP mothership, one can presume that our repeated polemics on this issue had an effect. A few years ago there was a *forced* tweak in *Socialist Worker*. Its 'What we fight for' column now reads: "Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used."

However, having just read the first in what is a series of unsigned 'What we stand for' articles in *Socialist Worker*, it is clear that, while there has been a change of words, there has been no change of heart.⁶ Nature is nowhere to be found, is missing, once again goes unseen.

Hence this question: "Where does wealth come from?" Answer: "Wealth under capitalism appears as a collection of stuff - commodities." Workers, of course, produce that "stuff" using the means of production owned by the capitalist class and are



Earth seen from Apollo 17 in December 1972: nature is the prime source of wealth

therefore "key 'wealth creators'".⁷

For those unacquainted with the ABCs of Marxism, all these SWP and IST formulations might appear perfectly acceptable. Yes, they are superficially anti-capitalist and apparently militantly pro-worker. But, as we have repeatedly argued, there is a problem. It lies not with the call for the working class to "collectively seize" control of the wealth they create and then "plan its production and distribution". No, the programmatic poverty, the economism, of the IST tradition announces itself in the very first sentence: "Workers create all the wealth under capitalism" ... or words to that effect.

The fault is twofold. Firstly, the IST statements are simply wrong. Workers do *not* create all wealth under capitalism. Secondly, it treats workers merely as wage-slaves, the producers of commodities - not feeling, thinking, emotional human beings - a mirror image of capitalist political economy, in other words.

Let us discuss wealth. To do that we must flesh out some basic concepts. Every reader will know Marx's formula: M-C-M': M standing for money, C for commodity and the vital ' for the extra, the surplus - the profit made at the end of each circuit. In the embryonic form of mercantile capitalism, the secret of making something out of nothing is to be found in the existence of distinct 'world economies'. A 'world economy' being an economically

autonomous geographical zone, whose internal links give it "a certain organic unity" (Fernand Braudel).⁸

The merchant's ships, wagons and pack animals join and exploit each separate 'world economy'. Eg, Muslim Arab traders bought cheap in India and China, and sold dear to Christendom (Byzantium and the feudal kingdoms, principalities and city states of Europe). Merchants parasitically acted as intermediaries between such spaces. Mark-ups on spices, silks and ceramics were fabulous - way beyond the cost of transport. There were no socially determining capitalist relations of production. Unequal exchange was the key to the merchant's wealth and capital accumulation.

Under fully developed capitalism, however, surplus value derives from the surplus labour performed by workers during the process of production. Hence this (extended) formula for the circuit of money: M-C ... P ... C'-M'.

Through repeated enclosure acts, state terrorism and relentless market competition, the direct producers are separated from the means of production. Peasants and petty artisans fall into the ranks of the proletariat and have to present themselves daily, weekly, monthly for hire. It is that or destitution, hunger and eventual starvation.

Yet on average, we can assume, especially for the sake of the argument, that capital purchases labour-power at a 'fair' market price.

As sellers of that commodity - labour-power - workers receive back its full worth. Again on average; again for the sake of the argument. Wages then buy the means of subsistence necessary for the production and reproduction of themselves as a wage-slave. Only as human beings are they robbed.

However, capital, because it is only interested in self-expansion, would compel workers to work for 24 hours a day and seven days a week if such a feat were physically possible. Nor has capital, again as capital, any concern for the commodity created by the combination of labour-power, the instruments of labour and raw materials - albeit brought together under its auspices. The resulting commodity could be of the highest possible quality or complete rubbish. But, as long as it sells, and sells at a profit, that is what counts. Hence, *for capital*, wealth comes in the form of value, surplus-value and above all money. In other words, exchange-value.

Of course, for capitalists, *as individuals*, wealth also comes in the form of use-values. Despite the myths of Max Weber and the so-called Protestant work ethic, no-one should imagine them living an ascetic, self-denying existence. Especially given this - the second 'gilded age' - they have never had it so good.

The super-rich indulge themselves ... and often to extraordinary excess. Private islands, football clubs, famous

art works, superyachts, rocketing off into near space and flitting by from one palatial residence to another. Even philanthropy and charity-mongering is a form of extravagant consumption by which the elite feed their already grossly overinflated egos (and divert attention away from the grubby side of their businesses). Think of Bill Gates, George Soros and Warren Buffet.⁹

When it comes to more commonplace CEOs, they consider corporate jets, chauffeur-driven cars, English butlers, Filipino maids, Saville Row suits, vintage wines, trophy wives and the right to grope female employees as perks of the job (yes, most are male, sociopathic and aggressively self-entitled¹⁰). Meantime, nearly half the world's population live on less than \$5.50 a day¹¹ and a third have no access to safe drinking water.¹²

Either way, while for capital, wealth is self-expanding money or value, for the human being, wealth is use-value - what fulfils some desire, what gives pleasure, what is useful. Because use-value so obviously relies on subjective judgement, Marx quite correctly gave the widest possible definition. Whether needs arise from the "stomach or from fancy" makes no difference.¹³

Use-value is therefore not just about physical needs: it encompasses the imagination too. Indeed, a use-value may be purely imaginary. Its essence is to be found in the human being rather than the "stuff" itself. The consumer determines use-value (ie, utility). Obviously use-values are bought on the market for money and come in the form of commodities produced through the capitalist production process.

However, capital not only has an interest, a drive, to exploit labour and maximise surplus labour. In pursuit of profit, capital also seeks to maximise sales and therefore to expand consumption. Capitalists, in department I, sell raw materials and the instruments of labour to other capitalists: steel, electricity, machine tools, computer chips, etc. Capitalists in department II sell the means of consumption to other capitalists ... and to workers too (food, clothing, housing, drink, etc). While the individual capitalist, the particular capital, attempts to minimise the wages of the workers they employ, capital as many capitals, capital as a system, pushes and promotes all manner of novel wants and artificial needs.

Hence celebrity endorsements, influencers and the huge advertising sector, which works day and night to transform the "luxury goods of the aristocracy into the necessities of everyday life".¹⁴ That, and the class struggle conducted by workers themselves, combine to constantly overcome the barrier represented by the limited purchasing power of the working class. Part of what the working class produces is therefore sold back to the working class ... and historically on an ever-increasing scale.

That way, workers manage to partially develop themselves as human beings. Not that their needs are ever fully met. There is a steady stream of the latest must-haves. Capital, capital accumulation and the lifestyles of the rich always run far ahead. The lot of the working class therefore remains one of relative impoverishment and "chronic

dissatisfaction” (Thorstein Veblen).¹⁵

Workers and capitalists alike consume use-values that come in the form of commodities and from the sphere of capitalist relations of production and the exploitation of wage labour (there are, though we shall not explore it here, non-commodity use-values, such as domestic labour - cleaning, cooking, looking after the kids, maintaining the car, putting up shelves, decorating, etc).

Doubtless, once again workers and capitalists alike also consume some commodities that, directly or indirectly, come from peasant agriculture, the individual trader or the self-employed artisan. Such little businesses produce use-values and therefore, by definition, wealth too. With that in mind - and there are millions of them in Britain alone¹⁶ - it is surely badly mistaken then to baldly state that “workers create all the wealth under capitalism”.

First paragraph

In theoretical terms, forgetting, passing over, petty bourgeois commodity production is a mote, a mere speck of dust in the eye. There exists a beam, however.

In his *Critique of the Gotha programme* Marx is quite explicit: “Labour is not the source of all wealth.”¹⁷ There is nature too. Marx writes here against the first paragraph of the draft programme of the newly established German Social Democratic Party. It has a strangely familiar ring. A ghostly anticipation of the IST: “Labour is the source of all wealth and culture and, since useful labour is possible only in society and through society, the proceeds of labour belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society.”

Some necessary background. The Gotha unity congress in 1875 represented an unprincipled unification, joining together Lassallean state socialists and the Eisenachers - the followers of Marx, led by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht. Marx supported unity, yes, but not unity which involved weakening the programme. Note, the Lassalleans, not least because of their dictatorial internal regime, were in steep decline - their trade unions broke away and various splits joined the Eisenachers.

However, the Eisenachers did make unwarranted programmatic concessions: eg, “producer associations assisted by the state ...”. Not in itself a disaster, but the central role accorded to the state and state aid nostrums left the door ajar for a “Bonapartist state-socialist workers’ party” (Engels 1887-88).¹⁸

It should be added that Marx was probably eager, primed, itching to write his *Critique* due to Mikhail Bakunin. In his *Statism and anarchy* (1873), the founder of modern anarchism portrayed Marx as a German nationalist and an “authoritarian” worshipper of state power. Not only that: Marx was said to have been responsible for the programme and every step taken by the Eisenachers since day one. Eg, “The supreme objective of all his efforts, as is proclaimed to us by the fundamental statutes of his party in Germany, is the establishment of the great People’s State (*Volksstaat*)”.¹⁹

As a canny political infighter Marx chose to point the finger of blame at Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-64). Lassalle was the real German nationalist and worshipper of state power. He had secretly offered to do a deal with Otto von Bismarck. That way, the Bismarck state would have gotten its “own bodyguard proletariat to keep the political activity of the bourgeoisie in check”.²⁰

Marx, therefore, credited Lassalle

with being the spiritual father of the Gotha programme, including the above-quoted first paragraph. Unfair, perhaps - Lassalle was dead, killed in a silly duel. More to the point, Marx’s own pupils - ie, August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht - were quite capable of making elementary blunders, such as forgetting nature, all by themselves. No help, no prompting from Lassalle and his state socialists was needed. But, by blaming Lassalle, Marx was able to give his comrades an escape route - a route which, if taken, would simultaneously save their blushes and draw a clear line of demarcation against Lassallean state socialism.

None of the SWP’s leaders, past or present - eg, Tony Cliff, Duncan Hallas, Chris Harman, John Rees, Lindsey German, Martin Smith, Alex Callinicos, Charlie Kimber and Amy Leather - were cribbing from Lassalle ... or Bebel and Liebknecht for that matter. That much is obvious. No, we have a clear case of historical reflux, opportunism recurring, economism spontaneously regenerating - as it inevitably does, given the material conditions of capitalism and the oppressed position of the working class.

Incidentally, economism needs defining here - that is, if we are going to have an informed discussion. Economism is, in essence, a bourgeois-imposed outlook, which restricts, narrows down the horizons of the working class to mere trade unionism ... that or, more commonly, it simply denies or belittles the role of high politics and democracy in the struggle for socialism. And, regrettably, the IST and its SWP motherhood are hardly alone.

Economism is the dominant outlook of today’s left. Not, of course, that economism denies politics. The problem is that, when the economic left takes up politics, it is not the politics of the working class - ie, orthodox Marxism - no, instead it is the politics of other classes and other ideological trends which they promote: left social democracy, pacifism, greenism, feminism, black separatism, petty nationalism, etc.

Back to Marx

Anyway, back to Marx. In 1875, he savaged the “hollow phrases” in the Gotha programme about “useful labour” and all members of society having an “equal right” to society’s wealth. There is useless labour - labour that fails to produce the intended result. People are not equal, etc, etc.

More to the point, at least when it comes to our main concern here, there is nature. Marx wrote this: “Nature is just as much the source of wealth of use-values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour-power.” Marx goes on to explain that, “insofar as man from the outset behaves towards nature” - what he calls the “primary source of all instruments and objects of labour” - as an “owner, treats her as belonging to him, his labour becomes the source of use-values, therefore also of wealth”.

The same metaphor occurs elsewhere again and again in order to depict the two-sided source of wealth. Eg, in *Capital*, Marx approvingly quotes William Petty: “Labour is its father and the earth its mother.”²¹ Leave aside the gendered language - which I find totally unproblematic, especially given the primacy rightly given to the female sex and in turn nature - the thing that must be grasped here, is the two-sided source of wealth. Sunshine and water, air and soil, plants and animals are all ‘gifts from nature’.

Human beings too are part of

nature and, just like every other living thing, rely on nature in order to survive. However, humanity applies itself to nature, although in the process of production we often bank on the direct actions of nature. Eg, though a natural product, wheat is selected, sown and harvested by labour; yet it germinates in the soil and needs both rain and sunshine if it is to grow and duly ripen.

So the two forms of wealth conjoin. Yet, despite that, for the laws of capital, what gives the wheat *value* is not what is supplied by nature. That has *use-value*, but not *value*. Value derives from the application of labour-power alone.

There is another - a spiritual, or artistic - dimension to the use-value of nature that should never be underestimated:

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar:
I love not man the less, but Nature more.
(George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold’s pilgrimage* - 1812)

Leave aside enduring memories of long countryside walks in the Scottish highlands, the Lake District and places further still. Just looking out over London from my frontroom window each morning and seeing the sunrise, the bright blue sky, the gathering storm clouds, even the drab grey and mists inspires me. Walking on Hampstead Heath, picking blackberries, seeing the first signs of spring, glimpsing the occasional urban fox, following the nesting swans and the progress of their cygnets, the swirling, ever changing patterns of migrating starlings, the flashing lime green of the darting parakeets brings me joy. Turning from my computer, to admire the sunset, as I work in my office in the evening, humbles me too. In the big scheme of things I’m insignificant, I’m transient, I’m just a little part of nature.

Sorry are those who experience no such feelings. They are impoverished. So, surely, wealth cannot be limited to the products of human activity alone. As well as “stuff”, wealth must include every form of consumption which produces human beings in one respect or another.

Michael Lebowitz rightly considered this of particular significance: “Marx’s identification of nature as a source of wealth is critical in identifying a concept of wealth that goes beyond capital’s perspective”.²² Capital, as we have argued, has but one interest - self-expansion. Capital has no intrinsic concern either for the worker ... or nature. And, especially over the last 150 years, and increasingly so, capitalist exploitation of nature has resulted in destruction on a huge scale. Deforestation, erosion of topsoils, spreading deserts, CO₂, methane and other greenhouse gas emissions - all grow apace. Countless species of flora and fauna have already been driven to extinction. Instead of the cherishing of nature, there is greed, plunder and wanton disregard.

The working class presents the only viable alternative to the destructive reproduction of capital. First, as a countervailing force within capitalism - one which has its own logic, pulling against that of capital. The political economy of the working class brings with it not only higher wages and shorter hours. It is also responsible for health services, social security systems, pensions,

universal primary and secondary education ... and measures that democratise the environment: eg, the right to roam that came out of the 1932 mass trespass movement and Kinder Scout. Wealth, for the working class, is not merely about the accumulation and consumption of an ever greater range of commodities. Besides being of capitalism, the working class is uniquely opposed to capitalism.

The political economy of the working class more than challenges capital. It points beyond capital - to the total reorganisation of society and, with that, the ending of humanity’s strained, brutalised, crisis-ridden relationship with nature.

Socialism and communism do not raise the workers to the position where they own the planet. Mimicking the delusions associated with capitalism - as witnessed under bureaucratic socialism - brings constant disappointment, ecological degradation and nature’s certain revenge. Humanity can only be the custodian of nature.

Marx was amongst the first to theorise human dependence on nature and the fact that humanity and nature co-evolve. He warned, however, that the capitalist process of production is also a “process of destruction”, because it “tears asunder ... disturbs the circulation of matter between man and the soil ... therefore violates the conditions necessary for lasting fertility”.²³

John Bellamy Foster - basing himself solidly on Marx’s considerable writings on this question - coined the term, “metabolic rift”, to capture the break between nature and the human part of nature.²⁴ Capitalism crowds vast numbers into polluted, soulless, crime-ridden concrete jungles. Simultaneously, the ever bigger farms of capitalist agribusiness denude nature with mono-crops, the ripping up of hedgerows and, as highlighted by Rachel Carson back in the early 1960s, the chemical death meted out to “birds, mammals, fishes, and indeed practically every form of wildlife”.²⁵

The Marx-Engels team wanted to re-establish an intimate connection between town and country, agriculture and industry, and rationally redistribute the population. Mega-cities are profoundly alienating and inhuman. The growth of ever-sprawling conurbations has to be ended and new spaces made inside them for woods, parks, public gardens, allotments and small farms.

Short-termism

Doubtless, while this programme has great relevance today, not least given the almost countless reports - eg, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and its code-red warning about the world approaching a tipping point - it is hard to imagine the capitalist class, with its short-termism and manic fixation on profits, willingly going along with the far-reaching measures that are needed to avert ecobarbarism. Under the conditions of socialism and communism that would surely be another matter entirely.

Our aim in the CPGB is not only to put a stop to destruction and preserve what remains. Of course, the great rain forests of Congo, Indonesia, Peru, Columbia and Brazil must be safeguarded. So too the much depleted life in the oceans and seas.

However, more can be done. The riches of nature should be restored and where possible enhanced. Grouse moors and upland sheep farming are obvious prime targets for rewilding in a Britain with its “very striking - and worrying” low levels of biodiversity (Natural History Museum report).²⁶ Wolves should sing again.

But we can think really big. Mesopotamia - now dry and dusty - can be remade into the lush habitat it was in pre-Sumerian times. The Sahara in Africa and Rajputana in India were once home to a wonderful variety of fauna and flora. The parched interior of Australia too. With sufficient resources and careful management they can bloom once more.

The aim of such projects would be restoration, not maximising production and churning out an endless flood of commodities - hardly the Marxist version of abundance. On the contrary, the communist social order has every reason to rationally economise and minimise all necessary inputs.

The “enormous waste” under capitalism outraged Marx. The by-products of industry, agriculture and human consumption are squandered and lead to pollution of the air and contamination of streams, rivers and lakes. *Capital* volume three contains a section entitled ‘Utilisation of the extractions of production’. Here Marx outlines his commitment to the scientific “reduction” and “reemployment” of waste.²⁷

In place of capitalism’s squandermania there comes with communism the human being, who is rich in human needs. However, these needs are satisfied not merely by the supply of stuff: they are first and foremost satisfied through the medley of human interconnections and a readjusted and sustainable relationship with nature ●

Notes

1. socialistworker.org/where-we-stand.
2. marx21.us.org/about.
3. www.socialist.ca/ourstand.
4. www.solidarity.net.au/about-us.
5. pracownicadzademokracja.org/?page_id=372.
6. It was, therefore, genuinely disappointing to read former SWP loyalist Colin Barker. Tasked with defending the ‘Where we stand’ column a couple of decades ago, he wrote a 19-part series in *Socialist Worker* over the period, December 6 2003-June 26 2004. Naturally he began with proposition one, but - guiltily - he steered clear of nature. He broke with the SWP in 2014 - not over the Respect popular front or even nature: no, it was the rape allegations against former national organiser Martin Smith. Not that Martin Empson’s pamphlet *Marxism and ecology: capitalism, socialism and the future of the planet* was any better (2009). As an SWP loyalist, Empson tried to do the impossible: square the old ‘Where we stand’ statement on wealth with the Marxism of the Marx-Engels team.
7. *Socialist Worker* February 21 2024. Nature, note, is totally absent, gets not a mention.
8. F Braudel *Civilization and capitalism* Vol 3, Berkeley CA 1992, p22.
9. See I Hay and JV Beaverstock *Handbook on wealth and the super-rich* Cheltenham 2016.
10. See P Babiak and RD Hare *Snakes in suits: when psychopaths go to work* New York 2007.
11. www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/10/17/nearly-half-the-world-lives-on-less-than-550-a-day.
12. www.who.int/news/item/18-06-2019-1-in-3-people-globally-do-not-have-access-to-safe-drinking-water-unicef-who.
13. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, Moscow 1970, p35.
14. See G Reith *Addictive consumption: capitalism, modernity and excess* London 2018.
15. See T Veblen *The theory of the leisure class* Mineola NY 1994, p20.
16. In 2021, 5.5 million in fact - see www.fsb.org.uk/uk-small-business-statistics.html.
17. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 24, London 1989, p81.
18. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 26, London 1990, p500.
19. dwardmac.pitzer.edu/bakunin/marxnfrec.html.
20. See www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/housing-question/ch02.htm; the official K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 24, London 1988, p364 leaves “bodyguard” out of its text.
21. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, Moscow 1970, p43.
22. M Lebowitz *Beyond Capital* Basingstoke 2003, pp130-31.
23. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, Moscow 1970, pp505-06.
24. JB Foster *Marx’s ecology: materialism and nature* New York 2000, piv.
25. R Carson *Silent spring* Harmondsworth 1991, p87.
26. *The Observer* October 10 2021.
27. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, Moscow 1971, p101.

STRATEGY

We need political action

What comes first? Politics or economics? Mike Macnair responds to the criticisms of Robert Schlosser and upholds the general approach of the Marx-Engels team and their strategy of revolutionary patience

This is the second part of my response to some recent criticisms of the book, *Revolutionary strategy* - the first part appeared last week ('Deal with the arguments' February 22).

This week we are concerned with the arguments of Robert Schlosser in 'Wider den Fetisch von Partei und politischer Macht' ('Against the fetish of the party and political power'), on the *Communist* blog (February 10).² I am working from a machine translation of comrade Schlosser's article, which comrade Scott Evans acquired, since I am too slow and imprecise at reading German to work directly from the original; but a limited cross-referencing of the German text in places that seem unclear suggests that the machine translation is adequate.

Towards the end of last week's article I quoted Mikhail Bakunin's 1869 critique of the Eisenach Programme of the German Social Democrats: "All the German socialists believe that the political revolution must precede the social revolution. This is a fatal error. For any revolution made before a social revolution will necessarily be a bourgeois revolution..."³

There is a distinct similarity to Bakunin's claim in the introduction to comrade Schlosser's article (I do not know whether he or an editor wrote it): "In particular, it is about the relationship of political and economic liberation: the overcoming of wage labour cannot be achieved by a political party, but only by the wage earners themselves, who must unite in the workplaces."

Now it may be that Bakunin and his co-thinkers were right and Marx and Engels were wrong. Or it may be that both were wrong. To begin to address the question seriously, though, it is important to recognise that this argument was not a new discovery of the mass-strike left in the Second International, or of the 1920s council communists, on the basis of new experiences, but an argument already central to the political struggle in the First International in 1868-72.

Debate

The background to comrade Schlosser's February 10 article is a debate on the *Communist* blog, parts of which have been translated on the *Angry Workers* website,⁴ triggered by an October 16 2021 article by Katja Wagner, Lukas Egger and Marco Hamann, 'What is to be done in times of weakness?' The latter article was influenced by the Marxist Unity Group's work, advocating a party formation based on a programme, and cited to Donald Parkinson, Parker McQueeney and myself for the case for a maximum and minimum programme.

The intervention of Wagner, Egger and Hamann was roundly denounced by Fredo Corvo (November 2 2021) as a "throwback to Bolshevism". An equally irritated response came from Felix Klopotek ('Inaccurate and dogmatic', November 20 2021); a more substantive argument was offered by Aaron Eckstein, Ruth Jackson and Stefan Torak in 'No mysticism in times of weakness' (December 10 2021). Comrade Schlosser's 'Notes on the organisation and strategy debate' (December 16 2021) was both more serious and more positive towards Wagner/Egger/Hamann.

There the debate seems to have stood until Egger and Hamann produced, in January 2024, a long reply to their critics, published in two parts by *Communist*: 'Forwards and (not) forgotten' (January 17) and 'Dilemma with no way out?' (January 31). These make heavier use of *Revolutionary strategy*, and the comrades have also been translating the book; this, then, seems to be the trigger of Schlosser's critique - that also marks a shift in his position towards a sharper anti-partyism than his December 2021 piece.

In one sense this is unsurprising. *Communist* self-identifies in their 'Ueber uns' page by saying: "This blog is written by various groups and individuals who identify as anti-authoritarian communists and are struggling together for a classless and stateless world society."⁵

CPGB comrades could agree with 95% of what the text that follows this sentence says. I emphasise the point. We have broadly common goals.

But 'anti-authoritarian' is usually code for acceptance of Bakunin's critique of Marx on parties and working class political action (where it is not code for liberalism, which it is in some 'Frankfurt school'-derived work, but clearly not in *Communist*). Hence it is unsurprising that Eckstein, Jackson and Torak should say:

An understanding of the pros and cons of the strategic proposal will not be easy for two reasons. Firstly, because of its provocative style. Slapping an anti-authoritarian band of Communists in the face with the thesis that proletarian self-liberation is 'inevitably linked to the form of the party' is - apart from the fact that the reasoning is not convincing - not very diplomatic.

There is a sense in which, if the *Communist* comrades do not want to engage with arguments from pro-party Marxists or regard these as "not very diplomatic", they should say something more explicit about anti-partyism (or even just anti-electoralism) in the 'Ueber uns' page than the mere codeword, "anti-authoritarian".

In fact, the responses to Wagner, Egger and Hamann make clear that their critics hold divergent views on the 'party question'. Fredo Corvo prefers the approach of the 1920s

Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (KAPD), which was for a party - just one of the 'advanced minority' that rejects a 'minimum programme'. Felix Klopotek, in contrast, asserts that all party forms are to be rejected. Eckstein, Jackson and Torak seem to take the same approach as Klopotek, though their argument is less clear. Schlosser in his December 2021 'Notes' argues that the creation of a party is not presently posed, because of the low level of the class struggle, but shares much of Wagner, Egger and Hamann's critique of spontaneism, criticising Klopotek on the point.

Objections

Schlosser begins with the objection that the model of the pre-1914 German Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) and of the Bolsheviks, albeit in different forms, "became a decisive obstacle to economic liberation". He argues that "this practice resulted from a theoretical understanding of the relationship between economic and political struggle that overemphasised the importance of political struggle, political party organisation and the conquest of power by this party".

He counters this with the argument that "materialist understanding" requires the idea

that the working class must first fight to improve the material life of wage labourers, and an independent movement of the class can only arise on that basis. This is, of course, the common understanding of the far left, including the 'official communists' and Maoists ("ML movement"), which Schlosser was engaged in in his youth), the Cliffites and Mandelites, and so on.

He goes on in the first section to criticise an interview with Alexander Gallus, which argued for unity on the basis of a maximum-minimum programme, on the ground that the theoretical differences among the left are too wide to allow for unity. The unity of the pre-1914 SPD, he argues, was actually not based on its programme, but on the theoretical hegemony of 'orthodox Marxism'; the 1914 split was "a necessary consequence of a reformism that became blatant nationalism during the war and counterrevolution after the war, in the revolution", and "All this happened on the basis of the much-vaunted Erfurt programme."

In contrast to today's left, he argues, the SPD expressed an actual movement of the class in combination with the then-fashionable theory of Marx's *Capital*. Today the left has no base in the class. He goes on to make standard Bernsteinian and Eurocommunist criticisms of the arguments of *Capital*.

The second section is titled 'Economic liberation as the purpose of a class-struggle labour movement and a programmatically fixed goal'. He begins with the provisions of the German Civil Code and 'Industrial Code' as to the authority of the employer. He argues that this issue - "the specific type of work in personal dependence that is bound by instructions and determined by others" - is not addressed in the Erfurt programme. Equally, Marx and Engels both wrote very positively about workers' cooperatives; not so Kautsky, who was silent on the topic in *The class struggle* (the 1892 introduction to the Erfurt programme) and in *The social revolution* (1902) argued that cooperatives could not play a revolutionary role.⁶ The implication is a workers-control orientation, of the sort that was common to the 'new left' and infected part of the far left in the 1960s.

Comrade Schlosser argues - rightly - that:

As history teaches us, economic liberation on the basis of cooperative production fails if it is not

generalised and the totality of cooperatives does not organise itself into a whole in order to regulate social production according to a common plan.

But he does not address the problem of transition and the continued presence - both today and in any transition in which capital loses power - of the petty-proprietor classes (small business operators, peasantry, petty proprietors of intellectual property in skills and information). And he argues, without offering any support other than the fate of the Bolshevik revolution, that "Nothing enables a political party or state organs to organise production in an alternative way, free from domination."⁷

The third section is directed to criticism of my arguments round the democratic republic in *Revolutionary strategy*. This is largely negative criticism denouncing the book for not proposing a strategic line centred on workers' control issues, because "What remains for the wage labourers is the right to vote, to vote out of office and, get this, the right to bear arms!" - and because "Voting at general assemblies in the various sites of social production, plebiscites at the social level, etc play no role in this 'democratic republic'."

As with several of the Trotskyist critics of the book in 2008, my explicit cross-references in the book to the CPGB's *Draft programme* are ignored, and thus *Draft programme* sections 3.9 (on the limits of trade unions, including the need to organise workplaces beyond the trade unions), 3.10 (on councils of action) and 4.3 (on economic measures under workers' rule) are also ignored.

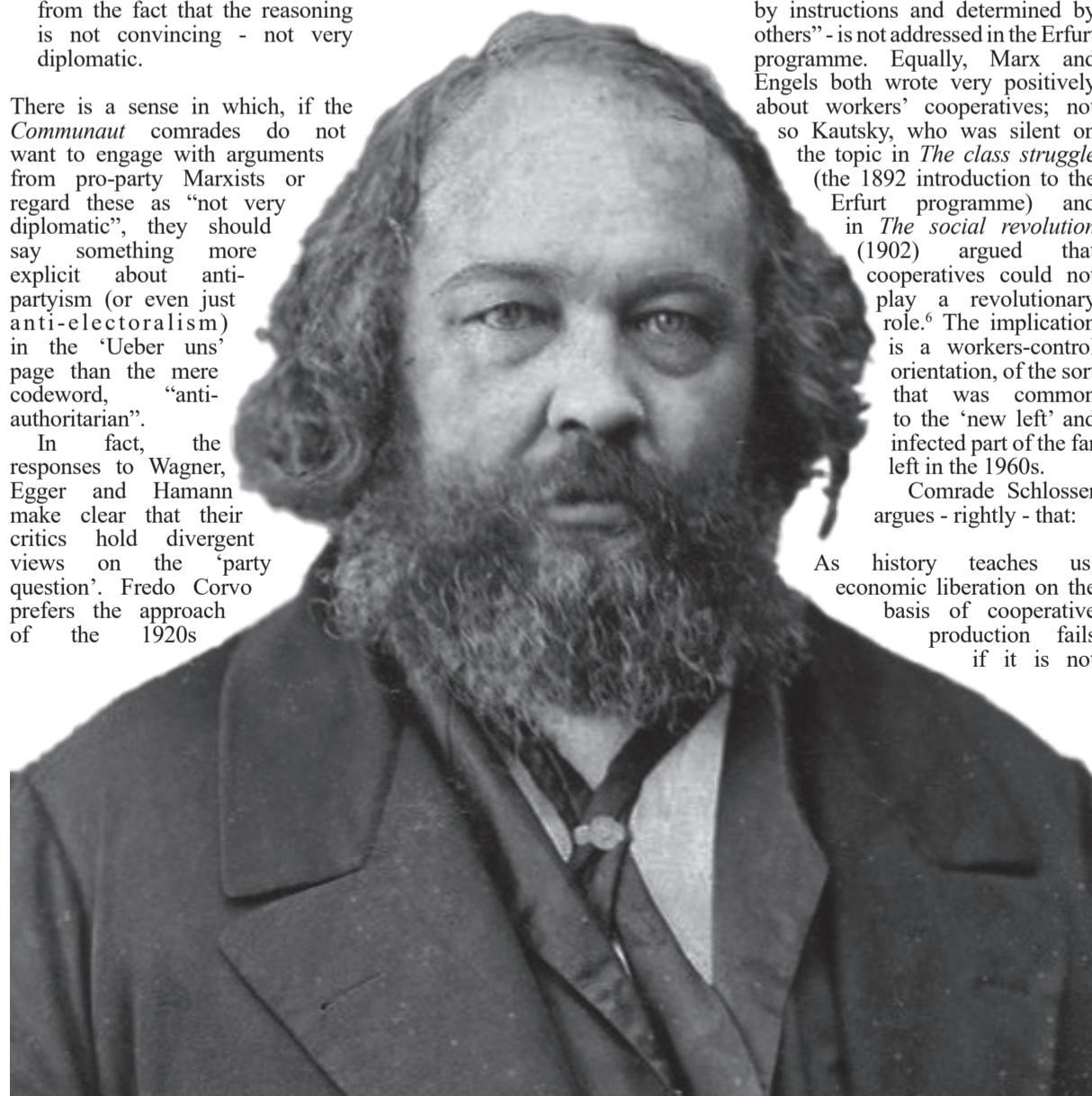
The second argument in this section is the standard Trotskyist objection that it is a "stages theory", disproved by the social character of the Russian and German revolutions - which I addressed last week in responding to the similar objection of Steve Bloom.

Finally, comrade Schlosser argues:

Today, the democratic republic is the dominant form of political rule by the propertied classes in developed capitalist societies. These are certainly not republics in which the democratic principles of the Paris Commune have been realised. However, democracy is organised in such a way that class struggles can unfold quite freely.

This claim can only be made on the basis of comrade Schlosser *internalising* the intense regulation of the class struggle by the capitalist state in the form of judicial strike controls, rules of registration of political parties and other anti-democratic devices, requirements of police permission for public assemblies, and so on, as 'normal business'. The class-struggle frog is being boiled slowly, but it is still being boiled. If the left will not oppose the constitutional regime, willingness to openly oppose the state-control regime then falls into the hands of the extreme right. That even the political descendants of the KAPD have internalised the regime of state control sufficiently to imagine that the plutocratic regime is 'democratic' and that "democracy is organised in such a way that class struggles can unfold quite freely" is utterly extraordinary.

**Mikhail Bakunin:
the 'anti-authoritarian'
authoritarian who opposed
the political parties
needed to win republican
democracy**



Comrade Schlosser quotes *Revolutionary strategy* for the proposition:

The left must ... break off the endless series of failed 'quick fixes' that characterised the 20th century. It needs a strategy of patience, similar to Kautsky's: but one that is internationalist and radically democratic, not one that accepts the existing order of nation-states (p138).

Draft programme

As above, his immediate objection is that demands for social/economic reform play no role in my argument; and again the short answer to this is my cross-references in *Revolutionary strategy* to the CPGB's *Draft programme*, which has plenty of material on this topic. He goes on to argue that Kautsky's political version of Hans Delbrück's *Ermattungsstrategie* ('strategy of attrition') failed, and in Germany and Russia the monarchies were overthrown in what Delbrück called a *Niederwerfung* or, as Schlosser puts it, a "schnellen Lösung" (a 'quick solution').

He continues:

It is astonishing that someone who sees himself as a revolutionary should build such a fetish out of patience that he wants to base an entire strategy on it. Without the impatience of wage earners, there would have been no labour movement at all.

I wondered at first reading whether there might be a translation issue here, as there was with Daniel Bensaïd's title *Une lente impatience* into *An impatient life* in English (the problem being that *impatience* has different senses in French and English).⁸ But German *Geduld* has the same range of overtones as English 'patience': that is, including persistence at a prolonged task; not just meaning putting up with things as they are.⁹ It is this sense of persistence at a prolonged task in spite of lack of *immediate* returns, which is what I mean by a "strategy of patience".¹⁰

So at first sight I thought that comrade Schlosser is just playing word games here. In reality, he is not. His argument is that "the patient path leads via elections, collective bargaining by trade unions, via the courts, etc, while the impatient path always leads via resistance actions that refuse social partnership, right up to mass strikes".

When my ex-partner was a trade union activist, in the 1970s-80s, she encountered the Cliffite Socialist Workers Party arguing, both in the civil service union and later in the teachers' union, *against* official trade union action, on the ground that it was essential that action taken should be unofficial if it was really to promote rank-and-file mobilisation. This is the gist of comrade Schlosser's argument here. This sort of line is *occasionally* useful - when people want to take action, but the officials are opposed - but, an awful lot of the time, merely demoralising and demobilising.

Authority

He segues into the question of the problem of authority. I argue that *some* decisions have to be taken at national (or, indeed, continental or global) level. I have argued explicitly against Paul Cockshott that the method of plebiscites (which comrade Schlosser supports - quotation above) is to be rejected. This is on the grounds that the current use of plebiscites is visibly anti-democratic (Louis Bonaparte; Hitler; Khomeini; Brexit, etc); and

that a version that was not anti-democratic would entail every individual drowning in the millions of plebiscites that would arrive every day.¹¹ Hence elected or sortition¹² bodies are essential to filtering the range of possible decisions. It is in this context that I argue that a government was necessary, but that the Soviet constitution *failed* to deliver effective supervision of the Council of People's Commissars because the supreme soviet was not a standing body.

Comrade Schlosser argues the contrary: Soviet power had no time to develop because

Their fate was sealed in bloody repression or the domination and takeover of government by a single political party, the Bolsheviks, who set out to establish state socialism in a country. The Kronstadt uprising as an attempt to defend the councils as an "alternative centre of authority" against the Bolshevik party was also bloodily crushed.

This is cold war theory (as the historical aspects of comrade Schlosser's argument more generally are): the failure of the revolution is blamed on the *bad faith* of the Bolsheviks. The story radically underestimates the difficulty of the situation faced by the revolutionaries (not just the Bolsheviks) in the former tsarist empire in 1918-22. By doing so, it erases the responsibilities of Hindenburg-Ludendorff for stabbing the German army in the back by refusing to make peace with the Soviet regime in late 1917-early 1918, and the responsibility of the Entente powers for making war on the Soviets from August 1917 on.

It also, *because* it has this character, erases the responsibility of the Bolsheviks and Comintern, not for the decisions they took in intolerably difficult circumstances, but for their decision to *theorise* these decisions as general principles - ones that were in the long term disastrous for the international workers' movement.¹³

Finally in this section, comrade Schlosser argues from the decline of mass parties in the late 20th to early 21st century (an argument, it should be said, that was also pushed by academic political scientists in the 1950s-60s) and poses Marx's *The civil war in France* as advocacy of the immediate abolition of the state, as opposed to its 'withering away', and the immediate abolition of class as such: "The councils were always organisations of a spontaneous revolutionary mass movement" (which ignores the role of the Mensheviks in promoting them, both in spring 1905 and in spring 1917); and:

The workplace and social authority of the councils was less an expression of the "rule of the working class" than an expression of the endeavour to eliminate all class rule. The workplace councils in particular aim at relations of production without command over and appropriation of other people's labour, without exploitation. If these relations of production are generalised, as commodity production and wage labour are today, then there is no longer a working class! It is then also nonsensical to speak of the leadership of "society as a whole" by the working class, as Macnair does in the context of his vision of a "democratic republic".

Again, in spite of the citations to *The civil war in France*, this is very straightforwardly Bakunin's critique of Marx. And it should be completely clear that it involves, as a logical

necessity, the rejection of any period of transition, in favour of forcible collectivisation of the holdings of the petty-proprietor classes. The results if such a policy obtained mass support would be those of the chaos of 'war communism' in 1918-21 or of 'Year Zero' in Cambodia.

In reality, there is no prospect of such a policy winning mass support or getting even close to it. Comrade Schlosser's arguments rest entirely on 'left' communist (anti-parliamentarist) or council communist judgments of the events of 1914-23. A century later, there have been endless attempts to make one or other of these policies work, and neither of them has achieved more than occasional 'spectaculars' like 'Occupy' and small circles. OK, I accept that *none* of the left's policies have actually 'won'. But some of them have got closer to achieving things than others.

Spontaneity

I argue in *Revolutionary strategy* (p9) that "Under capitalism there is an objective dynamic of the working class to create for itself permanent organisations to defend its immediate interest - trade unions and so on." Comrade Schlosser criticises this on the basis that

Insofar as wage workers can create permanent organisations to defend their immediate interests (trade unions and so on), this is already a subjective reaction to the "objective dynamic". And this subjective reaction depends not only on existing class-consciousness, but also on spontaneously growing indignation about working and living conditions.

It is probable that this difference is a philosophical one about what counts as "objective" and "subjective", and I do not want to pursue that here.¹⁴ There are, however, also very fundamental issues of history.

Comrade Schlosser argues that there is a radical decline of unionisation in Europe, which tells against the alleged objective dynamic. This is again a repetition of a Eurocommunist trope; and one which relates to decline relative to the period in the 1950s, in which the US government promoted social-democratic and Christian-democratic corporatism in the European 'front-line states', in order to make the 'west' appear more attractive than the Soviet regime. As to earlier times, the Trotskyists' 1938 *Transitional programme* stated, perfectly accurately:

Trade unions, even the most powerful, embrace no more than 20%-25% of the working class, and, at that, predominantly the more skilled and better paid layers. The more oppressed majority of the working class is drawn only episodically into the struggle, during a period of exceptional upsurges in the labour movement. During such moments it is necessary to create organisations *ad hoc*, embracing the whole fighting mass: strike committees, factory committees, and finally soviets.

Comrade Schlosser goes on to cite Engels' 1845 *Condition of the working class in England* for the frequency of strikes. He argues that "These spontaneous struggles were the basis for the emergence of trade unions and the Chartist movement in England."

Chartism, in fact, was a *political* movement: the six points of the 1838 Charter were universal manhood suffrage; the secret ballot; annual parliamentary elections;

constituencies of equal size; pay for MPs; and the abolition of the property qualification for MPs. This political movement inherited ideas from early 19th century Radicalism. It was the basis of the idea of the political demands of the 'Marx-Engels party', which were denounced by the Proudhonists and later by the Bakuninists. It began after the defeat of a wave of strike struggles, but, as it grew as a mass movement in the early 1840s, it also *stimulated* strike struggles and unionisation.

Trade unions were much older: they were already criminalised in England by the Confederacies of Masons Act 1425 for building workers, or at 'common law' by the prosecution of journeymen tailors of Cambridge in 1721 for 'conspiracy to raise wages'.

The actual existing mass permanent organisations of the working class have been captured by the capitalist class, primarily by complex carrot-and-stick state interventions. However regrettable that is, it does not alter the fact that the class movement involves an *interplay* between the permanent organisations, on the one hand, and spontaneous mass movements, on the other. The mass movements need hope as well as anger; and that hope is supplied by the belief that a better world is possible. That belief, in turn, depends on the ability to organise *beyond* the momentary strike struggle - if for nothing more, in order to produce counter-media to the bribe-taking (advertising-funded) capitalist media.

The final section of comrade Schlosser's argument asserts that he is not a "fundamental opponent of the political organisation of communists"; but that in the absence of spontaneous mass movements only theoretical work is possible. He does, in fact, proceed to summarise "a few key points of a communist programme today". These points would be of some interest for the conception of the transition to communism - *if the capitalist state power had first been destroyed*. Without that condition, comrade Schlosser's points would amount to no more than a repetition of the declaration of the 1870 Lyon commune that "the state's administrative and governmental machine, having become powerless, is abolished" (the French state proceeded within days to abolish the commune).

Fetish

Comrade Schlosser's piece is titled 'Against the fetish of the party and political power'. The boot is, in fact, on the other foot. The CPGB, and I as an individual, *support* spontaneous strike movements. We advocate self-organisation at the base and oppose bureaucratic-centralist control. In our *Draft programme*, we argue:

In any decisive clash of class against class, new forms of organisation which are higher, more general, more flexible than trade unions emerge. In Russia they have been called soviets, in Germany Räte, in Britain councils of action.

Embracing and co-coordinating all who are in struggle, such organisations have the potential to become institutions in the future, workers', state. Communists encourage any such development.

We do not fetishise either the party or political power. Rather, we recognise that partyism, as opposed to theoretical circles, and attention to questions of the constitutional order and high politics, is an element of the workers' movement - alongside trade unions, co-ops and so on - which is *missing* in the modern practice of the left and needs to be developed.

Comrade Schlosser, on the other hand, *does* fetishise: he fetishises the *non-intervention* of the communists in high politics and the purely economic aspect of the class struggle. This fetishism is evidenced in his inability to contemplate the possibility that there might be explanations *other than* the malign influence of partyism for the failure of the revolutions of 1917-20; or to offer any explanation of the persistent failure of 'anti-parliamentary left' politics - not only in the present times, but also in conditions of strong forward movement of the masses, like those of the late 1960s-70s. It is evidenced in the considerable artificiality of his arguments for the exclusive dominance of spontaneous movements, discussed above.

Cooperatives - if they are not to be simply forms of the 'formal subsumption of labour to capital', controlled by their materials suppliers and output purchasers - need *political backing* from a party that attacks the capitalist order as a whole and promotes the idea of the communist alternative. The same is true of strikes and factory occupations, which can be crushed by judicial action or isolated by media operations in the absence of a disloyalist - that is, communist - alternative media.

The point is not that the party is the *whole* of the movement. It is that we *need* a party, and currently do not have one. And that grouplets defined by *theoretical* agreement (as comrade Schlosser argues is necessary) cannot do the job ●

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Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1479/deal-with-the-arguments.
2. communaut.org/de/wider-den-fetisch-von-partei-und-politischer-macht.
3. libcom.org/article/critique-german-social-democratic-program-mikhail-bakunin.
4. www.angryworkers.org/2022/02/10/the-organisation-debate-communaut; www.angryworkers.org/2024/01/17/forwards-and-not-forgotten-continuation-of-the-organisational-debate; www.angryworkers.org/2024/01/31/dilemma-with-no-way-out. I say 'parts', because it is clear that there is more on the *Communaut* site (the debate at communaut.org/index.php/de/organisationsdebatte), and related is Schlosser's 'Legenden über die "revolutionäre" Sozialdemokratie', January 6 2024.
5. communaut.org/de/ueber-uns; their English version.
6. www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1902/socrev/pt1-3.htm. The context is probably an exaggerated opposition to the Lassalleans' arguments for *state-supported* cooperatives as the central strategy.
7. *Perhaps* "Nothing can give a political party or state organs the ability to ..."; the German text seems more emphatically negative than the translation.
8. See 'Daniel Bensaïd: repeated disappointments' *Weekly Worker* July 31 2014: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1021/daniel-bensaïd-repeated-disappointments.
9. en.langenscheidt.com/german-english/geduld. One example there is "Diese Aufgabe verlangt Zeit, Geduld, harte Arbeit und Glück" ('This task requires time, patience, hard work and luck').
10. I add that I should flag again, as I have done repeatedly after the publication of *Revolutionary strategy*, that the strategy itself is actually August Bebel's. Kautsky's analysis of it as an *Ermattungsstrategie* is part of the mass-strike debate of 1910-12, which involved a 'negative dialectic' where the left embarked on the road which led to the 1921 'March Action', while Kautsky moved towards the right.
11. 'Representation, not referendums' *Weekly Worker* June 30 2010: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/824/representation-not-referendums.
12. I argue in 'Representation, not referendums' against the *immediate* adoption of sortition on the ground that the *open* representation of the petty proprietor classes is necessary in order to avoid their *covert* representation through apparatus cliques (a significant part of what happened to the Soviet regime).
13. I have argued the point further in '1921 turning point' *Weekly Worker* March 11 2021: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1338/1921-turning-point.
14. See 'Against philosopher kings' *Weekly Worker* December 11 2008: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/749/against-philosopher-kings.

CHINA

Only solution: socialist democracy

Is the People's Republic heading for a crack-up or uninterrupted progress, asks Daniel Lazare. Perhaps we should ask Frederick Engels - or maybe not

The economic news out of China is grim. Despite last year's reported 5.2% growth rate, the country is in the grip of a real-estate meltdown of staggering dimensions that only goes from bad to worse. Consumer confidence has plunged, the CSI 300 stock index is 40% below its 2021 high, while manufacturing has declined for four months in a row.

Kyle Bass - a Texas hedge-fund owner who made a fortune out of the 2008 financial crisis by investing in credit-default swaps - says that the Chinese property collapse is so big that it looks like "the US financial crisis on steroids".¹ After HSBC reported a \$3-billion loss, CNN warned that China's financial woes are beginning to infect global banking as a whole.²

If so, the implications are dramatic. On the left, views are polarised between those who echo such alarmism and those who say the bourgeois press is blowing it all up in the hopes of weakening the Chinese state and forcing it to adopt more free-market measures.

On one side is the International Socialist Alternative - formerly the Committee for a Workers' International, founded by Ted Grant. It recently declared that the Chinese economy is in a state of "involution" due to "four Ds" - debt, deflation, decoupling from US investment and trade, and a demographic crisis caused by falling birth rates. The result is "a vicious circle, whereby collapsing property values, falling wages and unemployment translate into even weaker demand, forcing factories to lower prices and cut wages even more".³

On the other side is Michael Roberts, the popular Marxist blogger and regular *Weekly Worker* contributor, who has repeatedly argued that growth rates are still strong despite capitalist nay-saying and that the People's Republic of China has ample means to ensure stability. As he put it in July 2022,

The government can order the big four banks to exchange defaulted loans for equity stakes and forget them. It can tell the central bank, the People's Bank of China, to do whatever it takes. It can tell state-owned asset managers and pension funds to buy shares and bonds to prop up prices and to fund companies. It can tell the state bad banks to buy bad debt from commercial banks. It can get local governments to take up the property projects to completion. So a financial crisis is ruled out because the state controls the banking system.

One side says the crisis is intensifying, while another says the state is in a position to prevent matters from getting out of hand. So which is it - a state that is vulnerable to capitalist vicissitudes or one that is relatively immune?

In fact, both analyses have their shortcomings - which is where Engels comes in. In 1857, he wrote a 2,000-word article for Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* that ended with a prediction about the Chinese empire's impending collapse:

One thing is certain: that the death-hour of Old China is rapidly drawing nigh. Civil war has already divided the south from the north of the empire, and the rebel king seems to be



Mao Zedong proclaims the People's Republic of China

as secure from the imperialists (if not from the intrigues of his own followers) at Nanking, as the Heavenly Emperor from the rebels at Peking ...

The very fanaticism of the southern Chinese in their struggle against foreigners seems to mark a consciousness of the supreme danger in which Old China is placed; and before many years pass away we shall have to witness the death struggles of the oldest empire in the world, and the opening day of a new era for all Asia.⁴

But there was a problem. Rather than "rapidly drawing nigh", the demise of the Chinese empire was still more than half a century off. Problems continued piling up at astounding rates. The Taiping Rebellion, led by the rebel king, Hong Xiuquan, would claim perhaps 20 million deaths before ending in 1864. Foreign imperial powers would demand concession after concession, until an army composed of troops from Britain, France, Germany, the US and more than half a dozen other western powers finally blasted its way into the Forbidden City in 1900. Even then, the empire would still hold out until 1911.

Doom and gloom?

So Engels seriously underestimated the capacities of the Chinese state. This suggests a number of things. One is that he was as mortal as the rest of us; another is that he could be over-eager in predicting revolution, etc.

But a third is that, if someone with such formidable analytic powers got it wrong in the 1850s, then Marxists should be extra-careful not to make the same mistake in the 2020s. Bourgeois experts may predict doom and gloom, but the modern Chinese state's ability to carry on in the face of economic adversity should not be underestimated.

But Engels' error is suggestive in other ways too. One concerns the great riddle of the modern PRC, which is how a "deformed workers' state" could allow a vast capitalist sector to take shape in its midst, while maintaining the trappings of a communist state. Why did the PRC not go the way of the Soviet Union after 1991, by allowing the bourgeoisie to take outright political control? Groups like Socialist Alternative (SA) argue that this is in fact what happened via a process of self-bourgeoisification:

China under Deng would continue on the road to capitalism, especially with his historic 'Southern Tour' of 1992, but this would be under the control of the authoritarian [Chinese Communist Party] state to insure that the party elite and especially the 'princelings' - CCP royalty - could seize the juiciest pieces of the capitalist economy, while also maintaining iron political control to keep the working class down and nullify any resistance to brutal capitalist restoration.⁵

The upshot, supposedly, was a bourgeois state no different from the US or UK. But this sort of seamless self-transformation only makes sense if one assumes that a state must closely mirror the underlying class structure and that, if the economy is going capitalist, then it must immediately follow suit. But it is less compelling if one takes into account a 2,000-year bureaucratic tradition that has allowed the state to elevate itself above society and thereby maintain a high degree of independence. This is what enabled the Chinese empire to hold itself together despite deepening western inroads from the 1870s on. Perhaps it is what has enabled the PRC to hold itself together despite deepening capitalist inroads starting in 1992.

The remarkable durability of

the Chinese state is the subject of a new book, *The rise and fall of the east*, by Yasheng Huang, a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In it, Huang cannot resist comparing ancient China with another empire a few thousand miles to the west, in which completely different conditions prevailed:

Practorian guards roamed free in the Roman polity and seemed to assassinate at will any emperor standing in their way ... According to one account, between 27BCE and 395CE, 70% of Roman emperors died of unnatural causes. These include assassination (37%), battle wounds (12%), executions (11%), suicides (8%), and poisoning (3%). Roman emperors ruled for only 5.6 years on average ...

Their Chinese equivalents did the opposite. Huang provides the figures:

Dynasty	Years in power	Average reign (years)
Han	202BCE-220	24
Sui	581-618	17
Tang	618-907	19
Song	960-1279	28
Yuan	1280-1368	28
Ming	1368-1644	22
Qing	1644-1911	36

This is anywhere from three to six times the Roman record, which in turn seems like a model of stability, compared to the anarchy that followed the fall of the western empire in 476. Observes Huang:

Imperial China occasionally fell into disunity, but the disunity was *de facto*, never *de jure*, and in the 6th century China reconstituted itself as a unified country and it has never looked back. It then embarked on an expansion spree and scaled itself both spatially and temporally. Today China under the CCP is very much a continuation of its imperial former self - tyrannical, unified and durable against all odds.⁶

CCP 'guarantor'

If this seems overly ethno-determinist, it is worth keeping in mind that roughly the same process took place in the USSR, where Stalin styled himself a red tsar and argued that the Bolshevik goal was not to overthrow the old empire, but to consolidate it "as a single indivisible state ... for the benefit of the workers".⁷

If Stalin could dredge up various aspects of the tsarist past - the knout, the Okhrana, great Russian chauvinism, etc - then why could his co-thinkers not do the same? Instead of changing the communist structure into something new, Deng Xiaoping's decision was to preserve it as a guarantor of stability, even as a private economic sector was permitted to burst forth below.

Engels' 1857 article is suggestive for a third reason: while his timing was off, he ultimately proved correct. The imperial state's ability to defy reality was not infinite, and eventually it would succumb to larger forces. Indeed, the sheer length of the process ensured that change would

be all the more turbulent when it finally arrived. The implications for Xi Jinping are similar: that the PRC's ability to defy capitalist reality is also limited and that putting off change guarantees that it will be all the more thoroughgoing.

This is at least one aspect of Roberts' argument. Further economic liberalisation is no answer to the Chinese real-estate crisis, he contends, because market liberalisation is what caused it in the first place. Rather, the answer is a reinvigorated public sector. As he wrote in 2022,

China needs to reverse the expansion of the private sector and introduce more effective plans for state investment, but this time with the democratic participation of the Chinese people in the process ... Otherwise, the aims of the leadership for 'common prosperity' will be just talk.

Either the state reins in the private sector or the private sector reins in the state. Yet "democratic participation" is not something Xi can implement merely by pushing a button or flicking a switch, especially since the effect of lifting the lid on so much pent-up democracy will undoubtedly be to sweep the neo-Stalinist CCP from power. As Engels' 1857 article ended up underscoring in a round-about fashion, the process will be deep and turbulent. If it is not a 1917-style social revolution, it is because property is already nationalised, if only nominally. But, even if it is 'merely' political, it will still be a revolution regardless.

So, while SA appears to be correct about the depths of the economic crisis, it is incorrect about the nature of the political crisis, because it believes that state transformation is safely behind us. It fails to appreciate the degree to which the economic breakdown threatens the underpinnings of the PRC in the here and now.

But, if Roberts is correct about the risks for the PRC, he does not seem to fully appreciate the Hobson's choice it now faces. If it fails to intervene, the resultant crash will not only ruin a middle class that is a major source of support, but will bring about certain knock-on effects that could devastate local economies. If it does intervene by, say, saddling itself not with billions, but *trillions* of dollars in real-estate debt,⁸ then it winds up weakening itself. The fact that "the state controls the banking system" renders it more vulnerable rather than less.

Plainly, the CCP is incapable of a solution, since it caused the debacle. Only socialist democracy can wrestle with the consequences and come up with a response. But this is something that only a revolutionary working class can create - not on behalf of a fossilised and corrupt CCP, but *despite* and *against* it ●

Notes

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DISCUSSION

Consequences of deception

Oslo and the two-state 'solution' lay behind the events of October 7, argues Ghada Karmi. Suffice to say, we disagree with her well-meaning one-state 'solution'

One would have thought that the events of October 7 would have led politicians to try and draw some important lessons about the problems created for Palestine and Palestinians. But what it actually did was revive talk about the so-called two-state solution. It is really most remarkable that the lesson learned from October 7 was not, as one might have hoped, a re-evaluation of the whole story of Palestine that led us to that point. Why did this happen? How did we get here?

We are seeing that world leaders and western politicians are now reviving the talk about a 'solution' which has never happened and is never going to happen. But the international consensus on this remains.

There has never been a proposal on how to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians which has enjoyed as much support as the two-state solution. We have a line-up of very important world bodies, from the United Nations, which in 2012 voted to admit Palestine as an observer, non-member state, while a majority of the states represented at the UN general assembly have recognised the existing Palestinian state. Likewise, the European Union supports the two-state solution, as well as the United States, the Arab League and, last but not least, the Palestine Liberation Organisation itself.

But what is the 'two-state solution'? It proposes a division of historic Palestine - mandate Palestine, however you want to call it - into two very unequal portions: 78% was supposed to go to what is now the Israeli state. The other 22% of the territory of original Palestine are the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.

But, when we examine that a bit more closely, we realise that this solution is a nonsense. It has never got anywhere and never will - for very good reasons. Firstly, it is deeply unfair on the Palestinians to give such a large majority of the original territory where all of them used to live to the colonial settlers, and to reserve just a fifth of the original Palestine for them. You do not have to be a genius to realise that 22%, even if it happened, cannot possibly accommodate all the Palestinian refugees.

And the refugees are not incidental. Of course, western politicians do not want to talk about them and certainly Israel does not. The reality is, however, that they are the very core of the Palestinian story. Five to six million refugees are living in UN refugee camps, while many more millions, including myself, are living in exile. All these people need a solution and it cannot be met by pushing them all into 22% of the original Palestine. This is not acceptable, especially as people should have the right to return.

However, there is a second, extremely important reason why the two-state solution cannot happen, which is logistics. If you look at the map of Israel's settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, the problem immediately becomes clear. There is simply no territory on which to establish the Palestinian state. Without the Israelis being forced to remove their settlements, there is no way that what is left now of the original Palestine can form the territory of the Palestinian state.



Israel is a project pre-primed for ethnic cleansing and genocide

Thirdly - as if the two issues raised so far were not enough - Israel itself has rejected the two-state solution. No Israeli leader has ever accepted the creation of a Palestinian state.

PLO concessions

So why do western politicians continue to talk about the two-state solution as if it were a realistic peace plan? We need to go back a little bit to see how it came about.

In 1974, the Palestine National Council (PNC) - that is, the parliament in exile of the Palestinian people - dropped its goal of total liberation of the entire land and started talking about setting up an authority on whatever land was liberated. In 1977 the PNC first called this a "Palestinian governing authority" - the earliest time when this question was spoken about from the Arab perspective.

Saudi Arabia picked it up in 1982 and produced what was called the Fez Plan, which spoke about two states. And from that moment on the idea became familiar. This led to the so-called Declaration of Independence, which was agreed at the 1988 Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers, and spelled out that there would be a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders - 22% of the original Palestine - and this was coupled with recognition of Israel.

Those are the steps that led to the idea of something called the Palestinian state on the 1967 territories, and that, of course, formed the basis of the Oslo agreement, which was drawn up in 1993 between Israel and the PLO. So, in other words, the two parties to this Oslo accord were a state, on the one hand, and an organisation on the other.

In this agreement Israel recognised the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, while the PLO agreed to recognise Israel within "secure, safe borders". The PLO also agreed to give up "terrorism" - which really meant resistance to Israeli occupation. And it promised to amend the *PLO international charter* published in the 1960s by removing all clauses which were potentially 'offensive' to Israel.

Why did the Palestinians enter into an agreement that was so unequal and so unfair? Well, one has to remember the background. Following on from the first Gulf War, in which the PLO supported Saddam Hussein, the organisation's funding dried up. Nobody wanted to acknowledge or accept the PLO any more - it had become almost irrelevant. That had followed on from the 1982 war in Lebanon, when, thanks to Israeli pressure, the PLO was expelled from Beirut, with its fighters ending up in places like Tunis and Yemen - in other

words, they were really very far from where the actual action was. And so by 1992-93 the PLO had become increasingly irrelevant and bankrupt.

In addition to that, during the first intifada in 1987, an alternative leadership looked as if it was coming to the fore - a leadership from *inside* the Palestinian territories, making the PLO itself even more irrelevant.

So Yasser Arafat decided that the only way forward was to negotiate *directly* with Israel, not have the involvement of any third parties. There were secret negotiations in Norway, which led to the formal drawing up of the Oslo accords.

What did either side get out of that? As far as the PLO was concerned, it was back on the scene - relevant once more and able to steer the Palestinian political process from then on. At the same time, it was, of course, in Israel's interest. The Oslo accords created the conditions in which Israel could offload the Palestinians in the occupied territories, who had become what was called a "demographic threat" to the Zionists - they did not want all these non-Jews. So here was a wonderful way of separating from them: all the Palestinian population centres occupied by Israel were given a certain autonomy. They now had the Palestinian Authority, which ran civil affairs - but, of course, not *political* affairs.

That was great for Israel. It was separate from the officially recognised Palestine, while at the same time retaining control of all the borders of this so-called autonomous area. Sea, land and air all remained under Israel's control. It was a very cheap way for the Israelis to offload both the Palestinian areas and the Palestinian population.

That begs the question: did Arafat and the PLO not know that this would happen and that this was exactly what the Israelis wanted? Well, in my opinion they did know. But they got to a point where Arafat believed that if the PLO could get a foothold in the occupied areas it could advance Palestinian aims in a piecemeal way.

This is a bit like the salesman who pushes his foot in the door, so you cannot shut it. He talks to you and you end up saying, 'All right, you can come into the hallway', and then after a bit he gets into other parts of the house. This might sound flippant, but I believe that it was actually the sort of thinking that Arafat employed. To him, this approach seemed like it was the only way to get the Palestinians back into Palestine.

The results of the Oslo agreement were not good for the Palestinians at all. Under it Israel never kept to any of its deadlines or undertakings. The area that it conceded had no

sovereignty of any kind and, as I pointed out before, all borders were controlled by Israel. And, of course, the extending of settlements continued.

By October 7 2023, we had a Palestinian territory full of Israeli settlements, in which no possibility of a Palestinian state could be envisaged. Palestinian rights had been downgraded by recurrent, so-called peace-process negotiations, which only benefited Israel and not the Palestinians at all.

At this point, I would like to quote a short abstract from my new book, *One state*:

The Palestinian strategy in Oslo was a despairing strategy. To salvage *something* from which to regenerate the remnants of Palestine, even though the price was high. Without this sacrifice, it seemed to Arafat and his successors that Israel would finish what it had started in 1948: the destruction of the Palestinian people, the loss of the land that remained to them and possibly their total expulsion. That matters should have come to this point, where people were forced to delegitimise their own national cause, renounce their legal rights and recognise the theft of their land by others as legally and morally acceptable, as implied in Palestine's recognition of Zionism, is the stuff of tragedy.

'Peace' process

Needless to say, the whole 'peace' process suffers from one major flaw: the parties are hugely asymmetrical. The power is clearly on one side and not on the other. Palestinian rights, as I pointed out, had to be downgraded to make a negotiation about any kind of settlement possible.

In terms of a solution, I believe, as my book indicates, that there is only one way to solve the issue. And that is by the creation of a democratic state, with equal rights of citizenship and equal rights in every other way. I am not in any sense implying that the Israelis would accept this or that either the government or the population would be happy with it. And the Palestinians would find it quite difficult as well, to live with their former oppressors and the people who occupied their land, etc. So it is not based on some idea of utopian friendship and everybody suddenly loving everybody. Of course not.

It is about recognising that there really is no other end point - unless Israel gets away with expelling all the Palestinians, which it currently appears to be wanting to do. While there is a Palestinian population in historic Palestine, the only way forward is for those two communities to learn to live together in a democracy where they have equal rights. They do not have to love each other, but in time, of course, people get used to a new situation ●

This is an edited version of Ghada Karmi's talk to 'Why Marx?' on February 15 2024. The ongoing discussion and education series takes place every Thursday at 7pm. See www.whymarx.com.

Ghada Karmi's book, *One state*, is available at www.plutobooks.com/9780745348315/one-state

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Short memory syndrome

SWP members are being told they cannot possibly 'call for a vote' for George Galloway, but, as Carla Roberts reminds us, it was a very different story when they operated together in Respect

By the time you read this article, you will know if George Galloway has won the Rochdale by-election or not. We hope he has. We have many political disagreements with the man, but there is no doubt that, especially in the midst of Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza, which is supported by all mainstream parties, he would set the Commons and wider politics alight.

We can easily imagine how he will eloquently savage Sunak and Starmer, denouncing arms sales to Israel, while exposing the open and covert support for the racist Zionist government of Benjamin Netanyahu. No doubt he would also call out the treacherous cowardice of the so-called Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, which continues to display its utter uselessness. Most of these Corbynites stay well clear of the mass protests over Gaza - if they do attend and speak from the platform, they make sure to say nothing that goes beyond platitudes, so that their precious careers are protected.

Galloway, on the other hand, would use parliament not to curry favour with this or that lobby group - making sneaky deals in murky backrooms or sucking up to the Zionists - but as a political platform to call out mass murder committed with the help of British weapons and diplomatic backing.

He would use parliament in the manner of Karl Liebknecht, for example, who in 1914 stood up as the only member of the Social Democratic Party and the German Reichstag to vote against war credits. Independent Irish MEPs Clare Daly and Mick Wallace are doing similarly excellent work in the European parliament, not to make this or that rotten compromise, but to speak out against all sorts of injustices - be it the onslaught against the Palestinians or the efforts by US and UK to prolong the war in Ukraine.

The Sunday Times - in a bit of wishful writing - explained a short while ago that "the Rochdale by-election will be won on bread and butter, not Gaza". That is the result of some very important focus groups, you see, extensively quoted in the long article - only at the end of which it informs the reader that these oh-so-neutral groups have actually been put together by one Luke Tryl, "a former Tory advisor who conducted the focus groups for the campaign group, More in Common". Top-notch journalism.

The Observer also tried to put people off from voting for Galloway, but at least reports slightly more honestly that he is "the bookies' favourite", calling the vote "the most radioactive by-election in living memory". Yes, while the entire establishment cries crocodile tears over the pending assault on Rafah, George Galloway - for all his sins - has been a principled, long-standing and outspoken supporter of the Palestinians for many decades.



Nose tap: those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it

On this issue, he certainly reflects the mood of the population better than any of the mainstream politicians: 66% want a ceasefire - and no, not of the "sustainable" variety, as proposed by that clever man Sir Keir (which really is the call for the nonsensical two-state 'solution'). They mean that Israel should "stop military action" - not in the future, but now. Only 24% find that Israel's continued assault is "justified" (down from 29% in November); 45% know that it is not.¹

Hypocrisy

Not surprising then that almost the entire left supports Galloway. Almost. We can safely ignore the pro-Zionist Alliance for Workers' Liberty. More interesting is the Socialist Workers Party, which, for reasons which have much more to do with personal animosity than political principle, laments that "Galloway is not the answer for Rochdale" and that "we need a better expression of Palestinian liberation than George Galloway's party", which is why "we can't call for a vote" for him.²

The article in *Socialist Worker* criticises, quite rightly, the "rotten politics of the Workers Party of Britain", which are anti-trans and anti-refugees, "spurning many battles that are part of the working class fight, such as oppression and environmental collapse". True. But they could and should have added Galloway's opposition to a woman's right to choose an abortion and the Workers Party's miserable nationalist outlook. Plus, despite the departure from the WPB of the ultra-Stalinist CPGB-ML (run by the Brar family), the organisation's website still sets out to "defend the positive historical legacy of the Soviet Union" and the "achievements of the USSR, China, Cuba, etc".³

That is not an oversight: George Galloway's left Labourite, nationalist

politics always went hand-in-hand with a profound admiration of the Soviet Union, Cuba, etc. In his autobiography, *I'm not the only one* (2004), he describes the end of the Soviet Union as the "worst day of my life".

Former SWP top, Ian Birchall, writing in last week's *Weekly Worker* "as a former Galloway supporter", claims to be "saddened to see his political degeneration" (Letters, February 22).⁴ That is an interesting point of view - and one difficult to substantiate. As far as we can see, George Galloway has been peddling the same sort of politics for decades. In reality, it seems that it is our comrades in and around the SWP who are trying to rewrite history and in particular their own troubled relationship with the fiery Glaswegian.

The SWP was a lot less moralistic only a few short years ago. In fact, in Respect, a short-lived popular frontist party, the SWP, the Muslim Association of Britain and Galloway were fused together ... and as such the SWP and its foot soldiers loyally voted down the political principles they now pretend to hold so dear.

Abortion rights were deliberately omitted from Respect's 2005 general election manifesto after George Galloway insisted to the SWP's then leader, John Rees, that it would cost Muslim votes. Ditto gay rights. When the CPGB and a few others in Respect (precious few, we should say) protested loudly and repeatedly, Lindsey German made what must be her most infamous speech ever: supporting gay rights should not be treated as a "shibboleth".⁵

SWP members also voted down a CPGB motion on republicanism, because it would "put off royalists";⁶ they voted against open borders⁷ and at the 2004 Respect conference voted down a naive motion calling

for the nationalisation of "British-based multinationals" and a CPGB motion defining socialism as the rule of the working class.⁸

And then, rather predictably, Galloway and his one-time lieutenant (and Respect national secretary), John Rees, fell out in a rather spectacular and entertaining fashion. Suddenly, all the "lies" of the *Weekly Worker* - the only paper reporting openly about the shenanigans behind the scenes - turned out to be true after all ...

Principles?

Whoever has met George Galloway knows, of course, that the man is accountable only to ... George Galloway. He basically did what he wanted, siding with the businessman's wing of Respect in Tower Hamlets and Birmingham and always had his eye on appealing to the Muslim and Bengali population in order to get (re)elected to parliament. He ignored clauses in Respect's tame programme not to his liking and set his own priorities - disregarding, for example, Lindsey German's hopeless efforts to get elected to the Greater London Assembly, while siding with local Asian candidates against those from the SWP standing for this or that position.

To top it all off, he famously moved into the *Big brother* house - for a load of cash, but without discussing it with Rees or the SWP. The memory of Galloway pretending to be a cat, seductively drinking imaginary milk out of Rula Lenska's hands, still sends shivers down my spine (and not the good sort!).

Galloway and his allies (which included Nick Wrack, Ken Loach and Salma Yaqoob), on the other hand, accused the SWP of trying to assert "bureaucratic control" - which is, of course, true as well. When Rees orchestrated a split in Respect

in November 2007, Galloway and his supporters founded Respect Renewal.⁹ Both 'organisations' died very undignified and entirely deserved deaths soon afterwards.

Even though John Rees and Lindsey German were hived off from the SWP a couple of years later for their role in Respect¹⁰ (and went on to form the SWP-lite group, Counterfire), Galloway clearly still hates the SWP with a passion.

Not that you read any of this in *Socialist Worker* - oh no! The stupid working class would not understand anyway, so the SWP just pretends that it has suddenly developed really strong political principles, which can never be broken (until, of course they dump them in the next 'united front' they jump into, where they have to ditch those precious principles in order to attract this or that passing movement).

Perhaps the SWP head honchos hope that the organisation's revolving door means many of their current membership do not even know about this sorry chapter of sucking up to Galloway and 'the Muslim vote'. Most of the older loyalists have probably been through enough political U-turns to simply accept this latest piece of sectarian nonsense like sheep.

In any case, our attitude to electoral politics are based on tactical considerations. After all, surely it depends on the political questions of the day; the local electorate; the state of the organised working class; the candidates on the ballot paper, etc.

In the current situation, where the desperate situation in Gaza is on every TV screen and in every newspaper, surely calling for a vote for Galloway, who has all his publicity done in the colours of the Palestine flag, is a no-brainer. He probably will not be re-elected at the next general election, but in the next few months, he could certainly upend 'politics as normal' and send a huge message of solidarity to the Palestinian people ●

Notes

1. yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/48675-british-attitudes-to-the-israel-gaza-conflict-february-2024-update.
2. socialistworker.co.uk/what-we-think/galloway-is-not-the-answer-for-rochdale.
3. 'Thou shalt not criticise Israel' *Weekly Worker* February 15: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1478/thou-shalt-not-criticise-israel.
4. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1479/letters.
5. See 'Rees lays it on the line' *Weekly Worker* July 9 2003: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/488/marxism-2003-rees-lays-it-on-the-line.
6. 'Take inspiration from Cromwell' *Weekly Worker* May 4 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1441/take-inspiration-from-cromwell.
7. 'No respect for principles' *Weekly Worker* February 19 2004: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/516/no-respect-for-principles.
8. 'The modern Janus' *Weekly Worker* November 17 2005: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/601/the-modern-janus.
9. 'Renewal of populism' *Weekly Worker* November 22 2007: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/698/renewal-of-populism.
10. 'Left Platform throws in the towel' *Weekly Worker* February 18 2010: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/805/left-platform-throws-in-the-towel.