

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Symbol of fatuity: beginning as a Scottish left nationalist, Alex Salmond ended up as a nothing

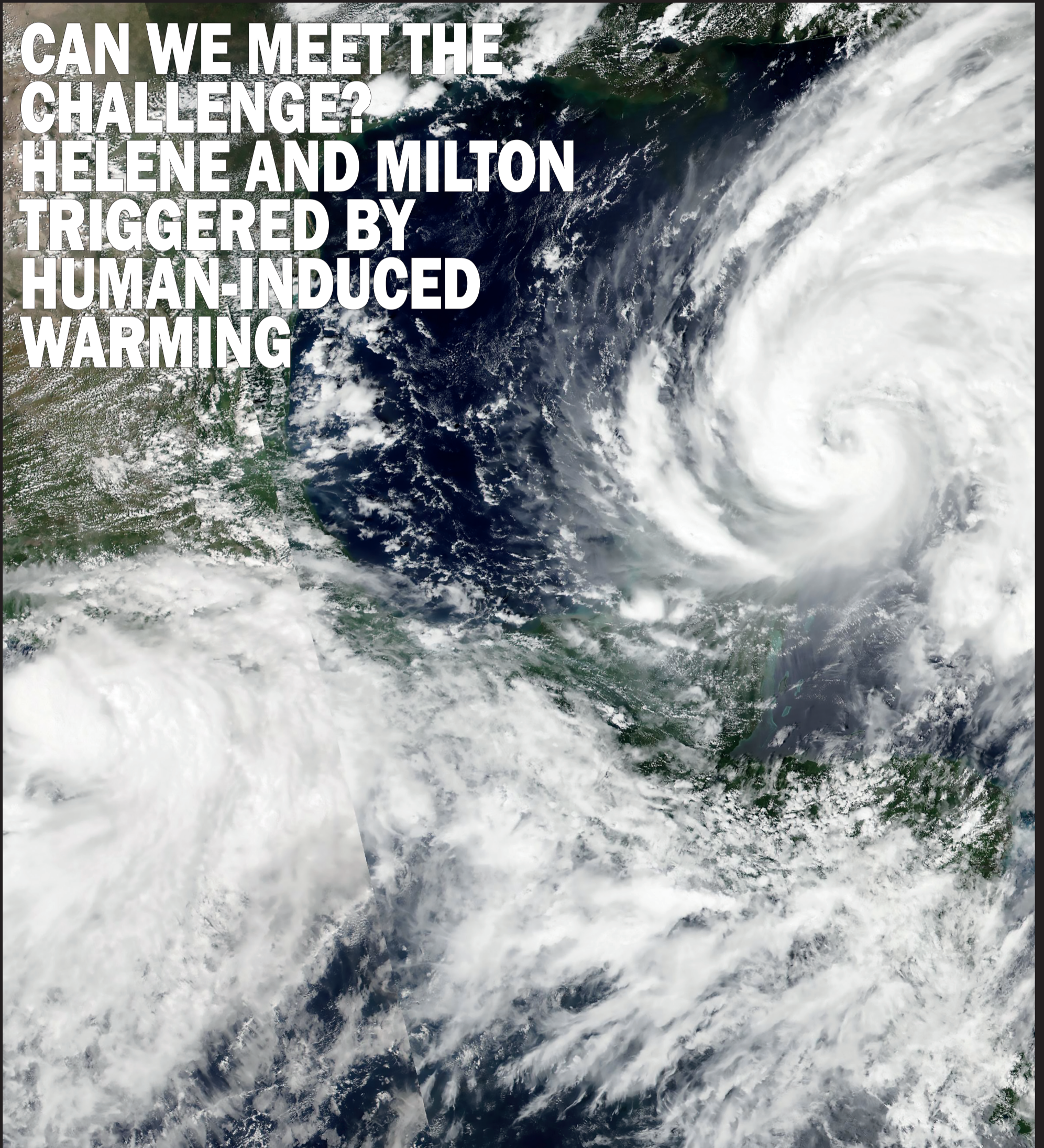
- Letters and debate
- Kurdish kaleidoscope
- Ukraine war polemic
- Marxist political economy

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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**CAN WE MEET THE
CHALLENGE?
HELENE AND MILTON
TRIGGERED BY
HUMAN-INDUCED
WARMING**



LETTERS



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

Nuclear fascism

Is the state of Israel fascist? The formal answer is 'no'. Is it becoming a fascist state? The answer should be 'yes'. Of course, it is important not to bandy around the term, 'fascist', and misuse it. But the case that Israel is becoming a fascist state is about direction of travel, not the final outcome. The importance of understanding this process is to arm the democratic forces and highlight the danger. It is a call for the working class to expose and resist Israeli fascism.

Of course, the Netanyahu government contains neo-fascists in the cabinet. This does not by itself make the state fascist. Yet it is an obvious warning of a state that can tolerate fascist politicians in government. Before the war the state adopted racially discriminatory laws within Israel and in the West Bank, where the rule of law was described as a form of apartheid. Since the insurrection in Gaza, the Zionist state has *de facto* annexed both Gaza and the West Bank. Is the state of Greater Israel 'from the river to the sea' a kind of fascism?

Today in Gaza there is no democracy, rule of law, civil liberties or rights. The Zionist state is carrying out genocide by terrorising the population with bombings, military occupation, assassination and torture. The state has made starvation and the spread of disease a weapon of war and a means of genocide. In the West Bank, fascist gangs armed by the state are carrying out pogroms with the support of the Israel Defence Forces. There are no rights, no democracy, no civil liberties, arbitrary arrests, imprisonment without trial, torture, etc. The treatment of Palestinians by the Zionist state is fascism in practice.

Before October 7 2023 Israel was a racist state with colonial ambitions, but not fascist. Free elections, rule of law, civil liberties and trade unions still existed. Netanyahu was seen by liberal Israelis as a corrupt, rightwing, populist politician, kept in power by neo-fascists. He was trying to change the constitution to remain in power and out of jail. A mass liberal, democratic opposition took to the streets, with strikes and mutinous soldiers. Many Israelis were aware of the danger of fascism.

Since October 7 2023 the Israeli state has been operating under a "special state of emergency" (Israeli Democracy Institute, October 16 2023). Ministers announced further 'state of emergency' measures for September 2024 in response to the situation in Lebanon. The IDF was given special powers to issue instructions to the Israeli public, to ban gatherings, limit studies and issue additional instructions. The expansion of state power into Gaza and in the West Bank brings the Palestinian population under conditions of barbaric fascism.

The contradiction exists between Israel as a 'liberal democracy' and a 'fascist state'. It is being resolved by a policy of war. The liberal opposition is calling for a ceasefire and the return of the hostages and calling on Netanyahu to account for his corruption and failures. The Palestinian resistance is not yet defeated, but suffering all the brutality of fascism. An imperialist war with Iran will propel the fascist forces. It should be concluded that the Israeli state is now semi-fascist and moving further down that road.

In summary, Israel is *becoming* a fascist state. Fascism is the policy in Gaza and the West Bank. Liberal

democracy is not abolished in Israel, but it is restricted by the war with no ending in sight. We may discuss how close it is to a fascist state. I have deliberately steered clear of using the term, 'Nazi', because of the historical experience of the Jewish people. The left is at ease with describing Israel as racist and settler-colonialist and, since October 7 2023, as genocidal.

We must now put our finger on the nuclear button by saying the unsayable: that Israel faces a real and present danger of becoming a fascist state.

Steve Freeman
London

Ultra-dogmatist

Steve Bloom suffers the wrath of Mike Macnair because of "the way in which comrade Bloom's (and that of the organised far left in general) fetishism of the revolutionary moment is an *alternative* to Marx's and Engels's strategic conception. In the far left (Bloom included) the wager is on 'mass action'. In Marx and Engels, in contrast, it is the organised movement of the working class (warts and all) that offers the possibility of hope of escape from the infernal machine of capitalism" ('Formulations, fetishes and failures', October 10). And what's wrong with "the mass action of the organised working class"?

This mechanical counterposition is so hostile to the Marxist dialectic as to be risible. Furthermore, the rest of the article sets out to prove that socialism in a single country is impossible (we know - Trotsky was the first and main opponent of this anti-internationalist Stalinist dogma), because revolution in a single country is wrong, as the international capitalists will crush it in a short time, and so it should not be attempted.

Steve has answered this by correctly asserting that revolutionary situations arise in single countries and waiting for a neighbouring regional uprising would lose the opportunity, given that revolutionary situations last for a few months at most. Lenin was fearful in September 1917 that waiting for the Petrograd soviet (in particular) to support the revolution would lose the opportunity, which Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin failed to recognise existed. The point is that the global working class radicalises globally, its class-consciousness advances on a world scale, within which individual countries have their own time scale of revolution. It is true that in some countries pre-revolutionary situations arise and do not develop because of the absence or weakness of revolutionary leadership, but none can doubt the fact that these periods have existed; eg, post-World War I and II, the early to mid-1930s, the mid-1960s to mid-1970s.

I think comrade Bloom bent over backwards to keep alive the prospect of Trotskyists participating in the CPGB's regroupment perspectives and I can't help feeling that the 16-page supplement by Lars T Lih was published to scupper his efforts. When I say 'bent over backwards', I refer to his agreement with Mike that 'extreme democracy' was the same as the dictatorship of the proletariat. The phrase, 'extreme democracy', always seemed to me to be simply an extension of bourgeois democracy, whereas the dictatorship of the proletariat was the rule of workers' councils/soviets, which not only does *not* give fascists the right to free speech (as the CPGB does), but denies to the capitalist class the right to organise, to publish their press and even the right to vote.

And he was also wrong to concede that Trotsky's 1938 transitional programme was mistaken because capitalism did not collapse post-World War II, as he predicted. The point

is that Trotsky was not a soothsayer predicting the future, but he was promoting a programme for revolution to enable revolutionaries to take advantage of the situations that arose at the end of the war and lead them to victory. The outcome was frustrated because the capitalists, Stalinists and the Nazis murdered those revolutionaries in the Warsaw uprising (Stalin and Hitler collaborated there), in Czechoslovakia, in northern Italy, in Greece and in Vietnam, and Stalinists in government in many European countries prevented pre-revolutionary situations developing to full situations by supporting de Gaulle in France, for instance, and dissolving the militias they led, which had played such a leading role in defeating the Nazis at the end of the war.

Lastly, I repudiate Mike's assertion during Communist University that Trotsky was wrong about Abyssinia in 1935 and Brazil in 1938. Abyssinia is the only African country that does not have a national holiday celebrating its independence from a colonising European power, because it was never colonised. Even if Haile Selassie did take refuge in London after the Italian invasion, that did not make Abyssinia a colony of Britain, or even a semi-colony. And in 1938 it was already clear that the US had eclipsed Britain as the global hegemonic power, even if that was not acknowledged everywhere until after the 1956 Suez Canal crisis. The putative invasion of Brazil would have been supported by the US; the Falklands/Malvinas invasion was supported by them in 1982.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Timing stinks

I have to admit I was a bit irritated to see a four-page spread on the origins of the Jewish religion and its alleged claims about the origins of the Jewish people, the Jewish nation and the likelihood or otherwise that an historical Israel ever existed (Jack Conrad, 'They worshipped many gods', October 3). This at a time when the present-day Israeli state is conducting a genocidal war against the Palestinian people in particular, but seems hell-bent (literally) on plunging the whole region into catastrophic war, in which millions of people would die, using quotations from the Jewish bible to try and justify this.

I don't know whether this is fully in line with the Marxist view of human nature, but leading Israeli leaders, such as Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, just seem to me to ooze pure evil in their smirking hatred of Palestinians and neighbouring Arab and other peoples - gloating over their pathological genocidal state terrorism in massacring hundreds and thousands on an almost continuous daily basis. If anyone has human-like coating over evil, hideous, slimy, alien creatures, it is these.

I am not sure that even Goebbels or Himmler would have had the nerves or chutzpah to stand before press cameras or the United Nations and smirk and gloss about the ongoing mass murder of thousands of those who they consider 'sub-human'.

I just cannot believe these people are genuinely motivated by religion of any description, that they believe any of the quotations they take from the bible are based on any form of reality or that they are somehow acting on behalf of any god.

However, I have to say I found Jack's article really interesting, informative and actually enjoyable - although I still think its timing stinks.

I found the "Ugaritic pantheon" or hierarch of gods absolutely fascinating, including that 'Yahweh' was just one of 70 "divine children", and that there

are still hints of other gods even in the Christian bible. Also fascinating, because this appears to mirror the ancient Egyptian pantheon of gods and goddesses, and no doubt others will be able to point to very similar things in other ancient religions, perhaps the Babylonian?

I don't subscribe to the 'ancient alien' theses - although I am open-minded - but the descriptions of all these various gods and goddesses, their stories, exploits and behaviours, do sound awfully like people, rather than genuinely divine beings. I would expect the latter to behave and conduct themselves a whole lot better!

I was struck by the 'life-death-return to life' cycle described for Baal. I had thought Baal was some form of god of evil and hadn't been aware of that specific life-death story. This is in fact extremely similar to that attributed to the ancient Egyptian god of the underworld and death, Osiris. And, of course, the semi-divine Jesus of the Christian religion also died and came back to life. Jack mentions a layer of semi-divine, half-god, half-human beings in the Ugaritic pantheon. Some see a similar caste of beings in the Old Testament being the Nephilim, also in Babylonian legends. The Egyptian god, Horus, was regarded as half-god, half-human, born of immaculate conception between husband and wife, (and brother and sister!), Osiris and Isis, and providing a semi-divine link between the gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt and the more earthly pharaohs. Jesus himself was regarded as half-divine, providing a link between God and human beings. Immaculate conceptions producing remarkable human beings are a common feature of other cultures, religions and legends.

That Yahweh emerged from the same caste of 70 'divine children' as Baal is also fascinating. Stephen Knight, writing about the cult origins of Freemasonry in the 1970s, claimed Masons worshipped an entity called 'Yah-Bul-On', being a composite of Yahweh, the god of the Christians and Jews (these are surely very different?), Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead, and Baal, who the Israelites identified with the devil. Knight claimed that, while Masons were not devil worshippers in the strict sense, they worshipped an entity which was in part diabolical.

However, it seems that if Baal and Yahweh were two of 70 'divine children', sent out to rule the world in 70 different regions, identifying one as 'good' and the other 'bad' seems crude and false. Both clearly had complex and contradictory characters and Yahweh at many times in the Jewish bible seems a diabolically evil genocidal bastard.

While Knight may have been onto something about the hidden nature of the 'divine being' or 'Great Architect of the Universe' that Freemasons really worship, his depiction of its composition as a mix of thirds of good and evil seems a bit mechanical rather than dialectical. It seems to me Freemasonry may have in fact simply traced back the history of various dominant gods and goddesses in ancient religions (including, apparently, the Jewish and Christian) right back to ancient Egypt, identifying their common sources as being the gods and goddesses in the ancient Egyptian pantheon. Perhaps deliberately including Yahweh, Baal and some others into that entity as a means of making those connections, and showing they all came from the same source.

There was one original 'divine pantheon', one original 'life-death-resurrection' cycle, one 'immaculate conception' producing a 'divine' half-god, half-human being, one flood/destruction of much of the world, etc.

The characters and stories were just replicated or duplicated for different religions in different settings. There is one ultimate source and one ultimate truth - according to Freemasonry.

So, in a classic masonic technique, re-integrating the personalities, characters, behaviours and values of all the various gods and goddesses in various pantheons across different religions and cultures - which all do look remarkably similar - back into one collective entity. They are all interconnected elements within one overall whole.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Viva coal!

If I might be allowed to reply to Eddie Ford's vision of the death of what he calls "fossil fuel capitalism" ('Nothing clean about it', October 10). This phrase has suddenly gained frequency among the lefty greens and, always wishing to be down with the kids, the Socialist Workers Party - and now it seems the CPGB-PCC have adopted it.

As I understand it, in order to attach the anti-capitalist sentiment and endeavours of the workers' movement to the thoroughly reactionary anti-industry, anti-progressive greens, they link capitalism with the current dominant fuel. Meaning that in order to defend oneself against the former and develop a working class alternative, one must also oppose oil, gas, coal, etc. Quite some trick, considering the workers extract all three, make a million and one by-products from it, process it and distribute it.

Apart from which, unless one envisages socialism - no matter how one defines it - as some back-to-nature trek back to some golden preindustrial past which never existed, we, the workers, will also need this fossil fuel to construct the basic needs of modern society. Some whizz-kid union functionary has hit on the plan of, instead of seeing oil, gas workers and miners pitted against the cry of the middle class greens to 'Just Stop Oil' or gas, having them join in a campaign *with* those workers. That cry being: 'No ban [on oil/gas] without a plan'.

So we see oil workers, steel workers and it would have been miners too, they hope, plus Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, on joint demonstrations demanding a 'just transition'. Well, on the face of it the slogan of no ban without an alternative plan isn't bad in itself. But there is no plan to save the communities which will be destroyed, as the mining communities were (I doubt very much that there will be before the oil and gas reserves are exhausted anyway).

Let's take it further and demand all reserves of oil and gas (and, I would add, coal) are developed, while they're thinking of what replaces those jobs (what replaces the substances is another matter that we shall leave for the moment). However, the tactic is a lie, and anyway isn't working. The joint demonstrations instead are dominated by the anti-industry, anti-fossil fuel lobby. These seek to present oil and gas rig workers as being against oil and gas extraction - about as likely as coal miners being against coal mining. It will surprise Eddie and his ilk, but rig workers, steel workers and miners believe in what they do - believe that their labour is valuable not just as labour, but for the progress and level of society we are able to achieve with it.

The carbon capture and storage (CCS) system they plan to roll out was first developed by Richard Budge at Hatfield Main Colliery (where I worked for 30 years). It was to build an entirely clean-coal power station: no CO₂ would enter the atmosphere, we would build an exhaust system

which would carry the captured carbon along to the Humber and pump it into disused oil and gas wells in the North Sea. Far from Eddie's dismissive heading about there being nothing clean about it, oh yes it was - and is - as the CO₂ is 'captured' and not let loose into the atmosphere. These wells are already empty, and it was estimated that, just using a small amount of them, we could store all the CO₂ emissions from all of western Europe for at least two centuries if we so wished.

Alarm bells began to ring in Whitehall, because even a blind man could see a forthcoming 'dash back to coal': new pits, new clean-coal power stations and the horror of the National Union of Mineworkers riding back from the jaws of hell with a regrowth of the industry. What happened? Need you ask? The plug was pulled, the government refused to pay their share, the scheme was dropped.

It's true to say the 'back to the Stone Age' advocates hated the idea of CCS - not because it doesn't work, but because it *does*: they don't want us to mine - gas, oil, coal - anything really. I won't even try and explain why such a prescription is a programme for starvation, regression and deprivation on a world scale. But this is a good thing: we get the fuel without the emissions. I'd prefer we owned and operated all mineral extraction for the good of the world's population, but that isn't the question we're being faced with.

Eddie gives the impression that CCS is just a big con. Sorry, Eddie, it simply isn't - as you state - used as a means of driving out small quantities of oil and gas which otherwise couldn't be extracted (though that is sometimes an added bonus). We more often than not target empty or virtually empty wells for the process. The concept is only now gaining momentum because of the clamour over emissions.

As for the strange sum we are given of the marginal oil driven out by CCS processes producing more CO₂ than is being stored, your calculator must have a logic mine doesn't (and like much of this fear-mongering was probably made up on the spot).

Likewise, he tells us the damn stuff leaks out - I really think he should take time to explain this. We are pumping the CO₂ at great depth, where it becomes solid, or at least not a gas. It isn't fluttering about like a flock of wild seagulls waiting to escape. Just where would it escape from? For millions and millions of years the oil or gas has been captive in its solid-rock tomb. If it could leak, it would have done so long before we got here. Supposing a small quantity could defy its nature and learn to fly despite its weight and density, so what? It would be a tiny part of the amount which would have been in the atmosphere otherwise.

We must take issue with another of Eddie's sleights of hand. CCS applied to the Tata Steel company would have meant it could continue producing primary steel. So-called 'green steel' is actually recycled scrap steel. This is useless for all heavy steel production, wind turbines, high-rise flats, bridges, etc. And emissions will still be made, but they'll be in someone else's country. So we're not net zero at all.

Eddie appears to think on behalf of the workers that we don't want oil, gas, steel or coal producers. I don't know when we had that debate or how we decided to live without them. He tells us that the resolution in support of the oil, gas and steel workers' jobs at this year's TUC only looks at workers in a narrow, trade union way, and not as actual human beings. What kind of human being do we become, when stripped of our work (and meaningful, important work, at that), and rendered unemployed in a bombed-out, once thriving community, rotten with anti-social crime?

Let me assure Eddie that killing fossil fuel like coal did not allow the miners time to meditate on 'How green is my valley?' and reach some profound understandings. Quite the contrary; they fell into a spiral of deprivation, generational poverty and neglect. To compare the size and depth of the mining industry and its loss with that of the charcoal-burning industry shows how much he understands of what is going on here - not very much, to say the least. What about quoting

the green spokesman for nuclear power, George Monbiot, that such schemes have failed time and again? Really? They are in fact in operation in various phases in many parts of the world. Of course, they've never been used on a commercial level in the UK - it's a new technology. But I thought we were looking for groundbreaking new systems to help manage climate change.

Eddie tasks us with "saving the planet". I wouldn't have put it in such catastrophic terms, at least when talking of climate change - we have a far more imminent danger of nuclear war and a World War III. The target of maintaining an abstract level of temperature was always based upon a global proscription of stopping third world development - that's the long and short of it, China, India, Indochina - to say nothing of Africa - must stop their development, while we in the west start the journey back.

For him the answer is blowing in the wind, but there are no renewables without coal - none. Turbines are made from steel produced by coke from coal (using a blast furnace, not an electric arc). They are constructed using cement and concrete produced by coal. They are serviced with thousands of litres of oil and rely on rare earth metals mined with heavy plant and steel tools made from coal. That's the reality. Sure, you can live without any of this, but the global population of eight billion people can't - not with our modern standards of life, including sanitation and medicine.

The final illusion - that the world is turning from fossil fuels and taking to renewables - is just patently not true. There is indeed expansion of renewables - mainly wind power, and that is mainly in China. But this is expanded capacity, not alternative capacity. The growth of world coal production and consumption is continuing to rise and is now at 8.7 billion tonnes, while oil is continuing to expand, with a growth of 2.4% on last year.

David Douglass
South Shields

Revolving door

It seems the newly launched Revolutionary Communist Party (formerly Socialist Appeal) is finding the going a bit tougher than it expected.

Back in May this year, when it was launched, it called its "next milestone" to be the recruitment of an additional 8,850 members to bring it up to 10,000. Now, it has set its sights on getting to 1,500 members by the end of this year - presumably mainly through student recruitment - and to 2,000 members by its next conference in May 2025.

Subsequent to this, a post on the RCP website entitled 'Autumn growth campaign: RCP reaches record membership' (October 2) declared: "In the past two weeks, the Revolutionary Communist Party's autumn growth campaign has taken party membership to record highs". However, the only recruitment figures specifically cited were those of seven in Cardiff.

Compared to earlier reports, no overall total membership figures were offered. We know from other similar organisations that members are like revolving doors - as some come in, some also leave.

None of this is said with any glee, for, unfortunately, it indicates that there is still a significant gap between the identification of subjectively arrived at 'opportunities' professed by the far left (and its newest 'kid on the block', the RCP), on the one hand, and the objective situation of leftward-moving dissatisfaction but, not yet discontent, with Labour and neoliberalism, on the other.

Gregor Gall
Glasgow

ACTION

Trade unions building solidarity with Palestine

Saturday October 19, 10am to 4.30pm: Conference for trade unionists, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Key Palestinian voices and union leaders discuss solidarity with Palestine, including divestment campaigns targeting institutions complicit with Israel's crimes. Tickets £20 (£15). Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

End service charge abuse

Tuesday October 22, 6.30pm: Online public meeting. Charges have rocketed, while services are not being delivered. Tenants are squeezed into debt by this legalised extortion. Organised by Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC): www.facebook.com/events/8775916142447948.

What made us human?

Tuesday October 22, 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: 'Students in revolt - Palestine solidarity organising on campus and the fight against empire'. Speaker: Haya. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/1434779577210249.

Hands off Lebanon - stop Israel's drive to war

Tuesday October 22, 6.30pm: Public meeting, SET Woolwich, Riverside House, Beresford Street, Woolwich, London SE18. Organised by Greenwich Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Communist culture club

Thursday October 24, 7pm: Online discussion: 'The ideological role of the expanding post-school education industry in the context of a declining capitalism', introduced by Peter Kennedy. Registration free. Organised by Why Marx?: www.facebook.com/whymarxism.

Walter Rodney: what they don't want you to know

Thursday October 24, 7pm: Film screening, Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford M5. Documentary about historian and Marxist Walter Rodney (assassinated in 1980 at the age of 38). The film covers cold war conspiracies, black power and Rodney's murder. Register for free ticket. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: wcmf.org.uk/event/Walter-Rodney-what-they-dont-want-you-to-know.

The duty to keep and bear arms

Thursday October 24, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: oxfordccs@aol.com.

The arms trade and Israel

Friday October 25, 6pm: Public meeting, Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Demand an arms embargo on Israel. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP and Lindsey German (Stop the War). Registration free. Organised by Camden Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Mixing pop and politics

Friday October 25, 7pm: Book event, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Author Toby Manning introduces *Mixing pop and politics: a Marxist history of popular music*, his radical history of political and social upheavals in the last 70 years, told through the period's most popular music. Entrance £3.50 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

Bargain books

Saturday October 26, 11am: Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Get your hands on Marxist classics and rare pamphlets. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/485.

Stop Tommy Robinson, stop the far right

Saturday October 26, 11.30am: National demonstration. Assemble Regent Street St James's, London SW1. Tommy Robinson is planning a march to spread racism and Islamophobia. Mobilise to prevent the far right from taking over the streets. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: standuptoracism.org.uk.

Resisting war, austerity and the far right

Sunday October 27, 12 noon to 5.30pm: Conference, SOAS, University of London, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Chart the left's next steps, as Israel takes the Middle East into a wider war, Starmer backs imperialism and austerity, and the far right make gains. Speakers include Lindsey German and Clare Daly. Tickets £15 (£5). Organised by Counterfire: www.facebook.com/events/1760965174648074.

Israel, war and the Labour government

Tuesday October 29, 7pm: Public meeting, Central United Reformed Church, 60 Norfolk Street, Sheffield S1. The UK is deeply implicated in another Middle East war. We need a powerful anti-war movement to halt Israel's genocide. Speaker: Chris Nineham. Organised by Sheffield Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/STWSheffield.

End the genocide in Gaza

Saturday November 2, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble central London, venue tbc. End Israel's genocide in Gaza, hands off Lebanon, don't attack Iran. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

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.

Fighting fund

Kevin and Tom

Let me start this week by reporting the death last week of two staunch CPGB comrades, Kevin Bean and Tom May.

Comrade May helped organise the *Weekly Worker* mailout for many years, but his health gradually deteriorated and he died aged 83 after a long illness. Comrade Bean was more well-known as a member of the CPGB Provisional Central Committee and writer for this paper, but unfortunately he died of cancer at a much younger age.

The *Weekly Worker* will be publishing obituaries of both comrades to coincide with their funerals, but in the meantime let me say how their demise has impacted on our fighting fund. First of all, Australian comrade MS has transferred £100 via PayPal as a personal commemoration for Tom, while we have just received the latest of Kevin's monthly standing order donations to the *Weekly Worker* for no less than £170.

While, obviously, here at the *Weekly Worker* we are thinking first and foremost of these two comrades, we must, of course, continue to raise the necessary finance for this paper and I am pleased to report that we've

received other more than useful contributions over the last seven days.

First of all, both RL and PM donated £50 by PayPal, while MZ in Italy contributed £10. Then there were those other standing orders/bank transfers. Thanks go to PB (£70), TR (£40), OG (£24), GS (£20), SS (£15), SA (£12) and finally PM and CC, who both donated £10.

All in all, then, we've received £581 over the last week, taking our running total for October up to £1,275 towards our £2,250 monthly target. That means we still need just under another thousand in the next 15 days if we're going to get there.

Please feel free, if you too want to pay tribute to Kevin and Tom by helping to fund the paper that both were so committed to. Do so by cheque, bank transfer or PayPal - see the link below for more details.

Comrades Kevin and Tom, you're in our hearts! ●

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

CLIMATE



Future of the American wheat belt?

Can we meet the challenge?

Milton and Sahara flooding are extreme weather events triggered by human-induced global warming, writes Eddie Ford. The danger is that they will become the norm

As everybody now knows, Hurricane Milton was a tropical cyclone that originated in the western Caribbean less than two weeks after Hurricane Helene devastated Florida. Milton was the second-most intense Atlantic hurricane ever recorded over the Gulf of Mexico (after Hurricane Rita in 2005, which itself was a record-breaking year in the Atlantic hurricane season). Adding to the destruction, Milton spawned dozens of tornadoes, due to the instability created by the extra heat and humidity in the atmosphere, and the sudden change in winds.

Category 5

At one point, Milton intensified to a category 5 hurricane, the highest level, with wind speeds at its peak up to 180mph and a pressure of 897 millibars, with terrifying implications for the possible death toll. Thankfully for the residents of Florida, though still devastating, increasing wind shear¹ caused the hurricane to weaken, as it turned north-east towards Florida - falling to category 3 before making landfall late on October 9. Afterwards, it quickly weakened over land and emerged over the Atlantic as a category 1 storm, transitioning to an extratropical low. The remnants gradually weakened near the island of Bermuda before dissipating on October 12.

The main reason why Hurricane Milton was expected to be so destructive was not simply because of the velocity of the wind and the rising sea level. Rather, it was the fact that people in Florida were still in the process of clearing up the wreckage left by Helene - the authorities fearing that the new hurricane would pick up the debris left behind by the previous, hitting cars, buildings, power lines, etc. As of October 14, it is reported that Milton had killed at least 27 people (24 in the United States and three in Mexico), and preliminary damage is estimated to be at least \$30 billion. The fact that relatively so few died is a testimony to an advanced society. If this had happened in Bangladesh or India, the consequences would

have been on a qualitatively different scale, there being no doubt that the death toll would have been in the thousands.

The authorities put 80,000 people into shelters and the advice was given out: 'If you live in this or that area, you should urgently consider evacuating' under imminent threat of death. Nonetheless, at the end of this dreadful storm, 1.6 million people were left without power. On October 12 Joe Biden issued a disaster declaration for the state and by the following day over 250,000 Floridians registered for help, which was the most for a single day in US history. Meanwhile, the governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, was forced to open up three fuel sites, where residents could get ten gallons of fuel for free - which at any other time would have been denounced as 'socialism'.

Incredibly, meteorologists tracking Milton got death threats from conspiracy theorists, saying that they were controlling the weather on behalf of the government, even using it as a weapon by controlled nuclear explosions - obviously unaware that a tropical hurricane can release as much energy as 10,000 nuclear bombs during its life cycle.² Naturally, it was left to Marjorie Taylor Greene, possibly the most unhinged person in Congress, to articulate the madness: "Yes they can control the weather - it's ridiculous for anyone to lie and say it can't be done." She was the person, of course, who in 2018 blamed a massive California wildfire on "space lasers" fired off by the Rothschilds.

Indeed, with the conspiracy theories spinning out of control, the Federal Emergency Management Agency actually had to set up a 'hurricane rumour response' page on its website.³ In near despair, a CBS News meteorologist wrote on X: "Murdering meteorologists won't stop hurricanes. I can't believe I just had to type that."

Essentially, there is no mystery about the root cause of this deadly storm and the appearance of one hurricane following another. Yes (sorry, Donald Trump), it is global warming, CO₂ emissions, the surface

temperature of the oceans, rising sea levels. The fact that the ice glaciers are melting and putting more and more water into the oceans contributes to the conditions leading to more severe and more frequent storms.

When it comes to understanding the complex science of hurricanes, the World Weather Attribution Centre has performed a great service for us all by providing precise modelling based on 1.3°C above pre-industrial levels.⁴ Using different temporal and geographical event definitions, as well as different observational datasets and climate models, they confidently conclude that without human-caused climate change Milton would have made landfall as a category 2 instead of a category 3 storm. They go on to say that such hurricanes have gone from a once in 100 years expectation to one in 10 years - a scary thought, especially if you live in Florida. Furthermore, in three out of the four analysed datasets they find that heavy one-day rainfall events such as the one associated with Milton are between 20% and 30% more intense than they would have been pre-1850, using that date as a general landmark. And the danger is that in the near future hurricanes like Milton will come back-to-back with other equally strong hurricanes.

Attribution

But what World Weather Attribution and very many others are also saying is that clearly we are not simply at the level of 1.3°C above pre-industrial levels. As shown by innumerable studies, since the early 2020s, temperatures are nudging up to, and sometimes even beyond, a global average of over 1.5°C above pre-industrial times. For instance, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service, this summer was the warmest on record globally.⁵ Additionally, August was also the 13th month out of 14 where the global average temperature exceeded that 1.5°C figure. Therefore, it is increasingly likely that 2024 will be the warmest year on record globally - bearing in mind that it was only last year (July 6) when global average temperatures reached a record high

of 17.08°C. Some estimates have us reaching 2.1°C or more above pre-industrial levels by 2100.

Now, it may be a bit premature to declare that these record temperatures can be categorised as the new norm, but obviously we are approaching that territory soon. The *New Scientist* journal recently featured an article arguing that, even if human beings stopped releasing CO₂ today, magically becoming carbon-neutral, it would probably still be too late.⁶

Cool down

As it sombrely notes, "we might not be able to cool the world down again after overshooting the 1.5°C warming limit - and, even if we can, a lot of irreversible damage will have been done". Like the proverbial oil tanker, it takes a very long time to turn things around - maybe never. As the polar ice caps keep melting sea levels will continue to rise and temperatures in the sea and the air will increase. That is an absolute certainty, with more and more tipping points being reached and crossed.

Increased extreme weather like Milton and Helene is potentially creating conditions whereby whole cities become uninhabitable. Jakarta is being abandoned by the Indonesian government, which is actually attempting to build a new capital. But whole countries are also in danger, like the very low-lying Bangladesh, not to mention US states like Florida, which are threatened with inundation - not hundreds of years down the line, but possibly within all our lifetimes. This is not just about unusual or extreme weather. It is a climate question, the definition of climate being 'big weather', taken over a period of more than a year.

For a possible glimpse of the future, look at the spooky pictures of flooding in the Sahara, where two days of rainfall in September exceeded yearly averages in several areas of south-east Morocco.⁷ Satellite imagery showed Lake Iriqui, which had been dried up for 50 years, overflowing with rain - there was bright yellow sand with palm trees sticking out above the water.

As a result of rising temperatures, we are in a situation of extreme unpredictability. The hydrological cycle - a biogeochemical phenomenon that involves the continuous movement of water on, above and below the surface of the Earth - has accelerated, leaving us either with too much or too little water. What happened in the Sahara could happen again in the relatively near future elsewhere.

This poses a danger to human civilisation. The traditional agriculture areas in the Central Belt of the United States, for example, can be turned to desert, while cities like Miami or St Louis get submerged under water - with the same possibly going for Amsterdam, Lagos, Bangkok, Alexandria, Shanghai, Dhaka ... And what about the refugees from these places? Clearly, the market will be unable to rise to the challenge. The capitalist state can, but will it?

We are no longer in the realm of speculation or apocalyptic films like *The day after tomorrow* - the question is how we actually deal with global warming, not let it sweep us away. From our communist angle, the only rational and civilised approach is collective decision-making by the people for the people and shifting from production for the sake of profit, accumulation for the sake of accumulation, to production for the sake of need.

Our very existence depends on the working class organising to achieve just such a transition ●

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Notes

1. Wind shear is a difference in wind speed and/or direction over a relatively short distance in the atmosphere.
2. [dw.com/en/hurricanes-release-energy-of-10000-nuclear-bombs/a-40627056](https://www.dw.com/en/hurricanes-release-energy-of-10000-nuclear-bombs/a-40627056).
3. [fema.gov/disaster/recover/rumor/hurricane-rumor-response](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/recover/rumor/hurricane-rumor-response).
4. [worldweatherattribution.org/another-hurricane-wetter-windier-and-more-destructive-because-of-climate-change](https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/another-hurricane-wetter-windier-and-more-destructive-because-of-climate-change).
5. [bbc.co.uk/weather/articles/c93p5kz9elro](https://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/articles/c93p5kz9elro).
6. [newscientist.com/article/2451285-once-we-pass-1-5c-of-global-warming-there-is-no-going-back](https://www.newscientist.com/article/2451285-once-we-pass-1-5c-of-global-warming-there-is-no-going-back).
7. [theguardian.com/environment/2024/oct/11/dramatic-images-show-the-first-floods-in-the-sahara-in-half-a-century](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/oct/11/dramatic-images-show-the-first-floods-in-the-sahara-in-half-a-century).

MIDDLE EAST

Slippery road ahead

Kurdish politics are hugely complex. Not only do they involve a dizzy range of parties, factions and interests: there are the regional power players too. **Esen Uslu** looks at the ever changing alliances and positions

Parliamentary elections in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region will be held on October 20. Around 3.5 million voters will go to the polls in the first parliamentary elections since 2018 (barring a last-minute postponement!). Originally scheduled to take place in 2022, the elections have been postponed several times due to the intense internal struggle between the currently ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party, led by Masoud Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, founded by former Iraqi president Jalal Talabani.

For years, the KDP's power base has been in the central part of the autonomous region, around Duhok and Erbil, while the PUK's power base is in the south, around Sulaymaniyah. This internal battle takes place in the context of the power struggles in the region between the US, Russia, Iran, Turkey and the Arab world, and has led to rapidly changing and reversing alliances and positions.

In addition to the KDP and PUK, the Kurdistan Islamic Union, the Kurdistan Justice Group, the Gorran Movement, the National Coalition, other smaller political organisations and independent candidates will be contesting the elections. According to previous agreements, there are some quotas for minorities in both the government and parliament. However, PUK recently challenged the previous agreements in the Supreme Court in Baghdad and succeeded in changing the quota system slightly by reducing the number of seats allocated to minorities. The PUK hopes that the changes will benefit its electoral prospects.

Bafel Talabani, son of Jalal and PUK's current head, will hold an election rally in Erbil in the coming days, as the Erbil region is key to swing votes. Meanwhile, the KDP's chummy relations with the Turkish regime appear to be quite toxic for it, and pundits expect KDP to lose a significant number of votes (but still come first). The expected distribution of seats is 28-30 for PUK and 30-35 for KDP, but everything could change at the last minute.

As this number of seats is not sufficient to form a majority government, both parties would be forced to come to an agreement to form a government. However, KDP would be obliged to make concessions and PUK would insist on reducing relations with the Turkish regime and force KDP to ask Turkey to leave the occupied Iraqi Kurdish areas. This demand seems to be in line with Iranian and US policies. Therefore, we can expect changes in the economic-political-military relations between Turkey and the KDP-dominated regime in the autonomous region.

As Turkey's influence in the region diminishes, Iranian influence would inevitably increase. This could have profound implications for US policy in the region. While the USA is pushing for more centralisation and consolidation of the position of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (Rojava) in Syria, Rojava could also continue its old policy of forming a centralised organisation by bringing together different militias. This would affect the positions of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and



Kurdish YPG fighters in Syria

the Kurdish freedom movement as a whole.

The Baghdad regime declared the PKK a "banned organisation" after the rapprochement with Turkey last spring. In August, it confirmed this position and took measures against organisations supporting the PKK, which have been banned and their assets confiscated. However, the PKK has made it clear that it will not take part in electoral politics in the autonomous region.

On paper

In return, Turkey entered into an agreement with the Iraqi government, at least on paper, to share one of Turkey's most important year-round occupied bases, which controls an important junction on the routes around the Kurdish mountains: the Bashiqa base established in 2015 in the traditional Barzani stronghold. It was agreed that a joint security coordination centre would be set up between Turkey and Iraq.

However, Turkey's unilateral actions continued and an armed UAV that flew over some sensitive areas of Iraq without due notice was shot down by the country's surface-to-air missile command.

The main sop to the Iraqi government was the signing of an agreement to build a modern rail and road link between the new deep-sea port, which is being built on the al-Faw peninsula in the Basra region, and Turkey via a new route bypassing the Kurdish autonomous region. The first phase of the Faw Grand Port is due to be completed in 2028, and the so-called 'Iraq-Turkey Development Road' could be an important channel for global trade if all parties agree on the route and manage to finance its \$17 billion construction.

With the other Gulf states concerned about the future of their ports - especially if the new link ends up competing with the congested Suez Canal and the potential Road and Belt Initiative being developed by China - there may be many pitfalls along the way. As this route could exclude the oil-rich Kurdish regions from reaching global markets, any improvement in the autonomous region's relations with Turkey and Iraq would require a delicate balancing act.

With the Kurdish Regional Government no longer able to export oil through the pipeline via Turkey (after the international arbitration court imposed a heavy fine on Turkey and ordered compensation to be paid to the Iraqi central government), the Kurdish oil exports were routed via Iran. The new Iranian president, Masoud Pezeshkian, recently visited Erbil and Sulaymaniyah and met with Barzani and Talabani. He was trying to improve relations between the Iraqi Shia militias and the KDP.

These improved economic relations with Iran led the KDP to make a bold move to win the appointment of the regional governor for Kirkuk and outmanoeuvre the PUK and the Arab minority in the region at an electoral conference held in Baghdad, with the support of Iran and the Iraqi central government. Turkish and Turkoman protests, as well as the PUK's protests against foul play, failed to produce any results.

When a security agreement was signed between Iran and the KDP last year, the price paid was the cessation of activities by Iranian Kurdish opposition forces operating in Iraqi Kurdistan and the closure of their camps along the border. Tehran continues to press for the complete disarmament of Iranian Kurdish organisations and their expulsion to third countries. The KDP regime deported a leader of the Iranian KDP living in Sulaymaniyah to Iran and there is a list of 180 Iranian Kurdish leaders now awaiting deportation.

Despite all these humiliations, the KDP is unable or unwilling to completely compromise its relations with the USA and Turkey. So dithering and instability are the order of the day. The price the KDP will have to pay will be made clear by the October 20 elections.

The attitude of the hawks in the Turkish regime was recently made clear by a former head of military intelligence, on TV. Speaking about the security agreement between Iraq and Turkey, he said: "The agreement reached with Iraq is very important. We should do the same in Syria. If Bafel Talabani continues his attempts to sabotage it, he should be neutralised, I mean, if necessary, an assassination could be arranged."

The studio presenter intervened to apologetically proclaim that Turkey would do no such thing, but he continued unabashed: "If you can't do it, get someone else to do it for you."

This is not just a reckless statement, but the reality of the Turkish regime's blatant attitude towards the Kurdish movements in Iraq and Syria. Turkey is still funding and equipping the so-called Syrian National Army as well as the various associated militias that gathered in Idlib, northern Syria. As Israeli air attacks in Lebanon - including on the Syrian-Lebanese border as well as in the suburbs of Damascus - intensify, there is a clear danger of unleashing these forces again in northern Syria and opening up Rojava, as well as the Aleppo, Latakia and Hama provinces, to attack.

Using this option as a threat, Turkey is forcing the Syrian regime to come to an agreement and normalise relations. So far, this ploy has been unsuccessful, with president Bashar al-Assad insisting that Turkey leave Syrian territory before any bilateral talks. Russia, note, supports Assad's line.

Weakened Erdoğan

Meanwhile, president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government is losing its popular appeal and public support. The main driver of this decline is the dismal economic performance, but the corruption, mismanagement and arbitrary rule akin to a dictatorship, created by the Turkish-style presidential system, have also played their part.

Now, desperate for public support, Erdoğan has called a snap election to extend his rule beyond the constitutional limit, since he cannot run again in a normal presidential election. He is trying to manoeuvre the opposition into supporting his ploy by exploiting a loophole in the electoral law that does not prevent him from standing in an early election.

He has the unerring support of the nationalist-fascist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), but it is not enough. He has desperately appealed to Kurdish voters in a bid to secure a mandate to stay in power. The price is a humiliating retreat. But

he has to do this so neatly that he disarms the opposition and presents himself as a peacemaker - the only person capable of pulling this off to start a new 'peace process'. He has already made his first moves - even persuading the MHP leaders to shake hands with the MPs belonging to the pro-Kurdish People's Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) and making an emolument speech at the opening of parliament.

One obstacle is the incommunicado detention of KDP founder Abdullah Öcalan. He has been serving a life sentence since 1999. Under normal rules, a life prisoner who has served 25 years would be eligible for conditional release. The Kurdish freedom movement and the DEM deputies are organising demonstrations whenever they can to demand his release. However, the security establishment is determined to drag him down. There is talk of bringing a new charge against Öcalan to keep him in jail indefinitely, arguing that he is continuing to run a banned organisation from prison, because he acted as a mediator between Kurdish guerrillas and the political establishment in the previous peace process.

On October 15, the police in Diyarbakir arrested 269 people out of the 1,500 or so who took part in a demonstration two days earlier, which demanded ending Öcalan's solitary confinement and his release. Therefore, if Erdoğan wants to pull off his trick, he has to reach an agreement with those parts of the security apparatus that are willing to try a new strategy and show them that he could disarm the opposition by reducing some of the old repressive measures. He has to prove to them that he can present this new course as a relaxation - an end to the policy of repression, an initiative to return to the rule of law and democracy.

On October 15, Erdoğan-supporting newspapers published the speech he made the day before: "They tried to pit our people against each other by saying 'secular-religious', 'progressive-reactionary'. Millions of our citizens were marginalised, because they only spoke their mother tongue. Unfortunately, they were subjected to injustice and lawlessness."

These carefully chosen words obscure the issue. Who did this? "They", who remain unspecified. And, by using the past tense, the speech tried to hide the ongoing repression of the Kurdish language. These are just the opening salvos of a new line of attack.

Kurdish opposition figures are cautiously welcoming his latest comments. For example, the deputy of the National Assembly, Sirri Süreyya Önder, who was at the forefront of the previous peace initiative (and suffered the consequences in prison), said from the podium that he welcomed the moves and words of Erdoğan and the MHP leaders. Another important figure of the previous peace process, Cengiz Çandar, gave a long interview, in which he supported the line. He also added that the imprisoned former leader of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party, Selahattin Demirtaş, supported the move.

So - interesting times, but a slippery road ahead ●

POLEMIC

Wrong and right war politics

Escalation, Storm Shadows and the danger of nuclear war between Russia and Nato should not be dismissed as a diversion, as unnecessary and dull. Jack Conrad replies to critics and welcomes a recent development

Last week we carried a letter from Carla Roberts.¹ She is not quite alone in her views; there is, in our ranks, at least one other critic of the statement issued by our Provisional Central Committee on the latest developments and dangers of escalation in the Russo-Ukraine war.² However, because comrade Roberts has taken the lead and gone public, the following remarks will mainly concentrate on what she has to say.

For a start, the comrade complains about the statement not being a statement. It is apparently a long or "overlong article". Statements, you see, "should be short and sharp, and concentrate on the political principles". Prescriptive, to say the least.

In standard English the word, 'statement', in fact carries no special meaning whatsoever, when it comes to length. A 'statement' is meant to be a "definite or clear expression of something in speech or writing". Put another way, something like a 'declaration', an 'expression of views or facts', an 'affirmation', a 'proclamation', an 'explanation', a 'presentation', or a 'report'. You can also have an artistic statement, a fashion statement and a bank statement ... the latter being of any length depending on the number of financial transactions.

Our 'Establishing a principled left' statement is therefore, er, a statement. Besides political principles it contains explanations, views, facts and warnings. What about length? Coming in at just a tad over 1,900 words it is, certainly in *Weekly Worker* terms neither long nor "overlong". It took up a page and was accompanied by a three column picture of a Ukrainian tank. But frankly, if 19,000 words were necessary to convey our collective message, that would in itself be no problem.

No property rights

Comrade Roberts says that she was "the person who at the last aggregate of the CPGB proposed drafting a statement on the war in Ukraine in order to seek closer cooperation with others on the left". She definitely proposed issuing a statement and this suggestion was readily accepted by myself. When comrade Tam Dean Burn asked why we would want to issue a statement at this precise moment in time, I did not, however, reply that we wanted to "seek closer cooperation with others on the left". Instead I referred to my aggregate opening.

Here I stressed the danger of escalation, the symbolic importance of British Storm Shadows, the danger of a wider (including a nuclear) war, the strategic aims of US imperialism to reduce Russia to a neo-colony, or a series of neo-colonies, with a view to strangling China. I also dealt, in the opening, with the necessity of genuine socialists and communists "cementing principled unity" and towards that end drawing clear lines of demarcation against social-imperialists, against social-pacifists and against centrists. Finally, I noted the criminal silence over Ukraine, when it came to certain sections of the left.

Either way, it needs to be understood that, whatever is in the head of a particular proposer, those authorised to action any such proposition can do with it as they see fit - as long as they are ultimately accountable. Proposers, especially when it comes to a passing verbal



After February 1917 the Bolsheviks dropped 'revolutionary defeatism'

suggestion, do not exercise property rights.

Clearly, comrade Roberts looked at our statement and did not find what she wanted. With hindsight she would have had us "delete, as a minimum" formulations 1-10 and formulation 19. Leaving aside formulation 19 for the moment, this would "mean", according to her, that "the reader would not have to wade through all sorts of paragraphs about this or that weapons system". Yes, I am sure that there are some strange folk who find the idea that there "is a real danger of escalation in Ukraine and the possibility of war between Russia and Nato" a total bore (formulation 1). Though, I must admit, that the people who I come across in everyday life are really concerned - terrified even - by the prospect.

Obviously, the same blasé judgement is made, when it comes to our highlighting the "strong position" agreed by Joe Biden and Sir Keir Starmer, "which everybody takes as reference to British Storm Shadows - and other Nato-supplied missiles that Volodymyr Zelensky wants to use to strike into the territory of the Russian Federation" (formulation 2). And how "Putin has warned that, if this happens", it would mean that "Nato would be at war with Russia" (formulation 3).

All comrade Roberts sees is a lot of tiresome stuff and nonsense that ought to be hacked away like so much dead wood. But formulations 1-10 matter. It is why the PCC issued the statement. There is after all ominous Kremlin talk of "reducing Kyiv to a 'giant melted spot' ... and, as we said, "this is sabre-rattling, perhaps - till the moment when it is not". So we take the danger of escalation seriously, Storm Shadow being a 'red line' symbol of this phasing into World War III (formulations 7-10). The same goes for weaponising the

nuclear facilities in Ukraine and Russia, and potentially covering the entire region in deadly radioactive fallout (formulations 5 and 6).

Additions

Having complained about the statement being "overlong", comrade Roberts wants to introduce some additional text. There are what she sees as puzzling "omissions". Ever since she "joined the CPGB some 25 years ago", she writes, "the organisation has distinguished itself by stressing the need for a politically independent, working class position in a war between two reactionary sides". Actually, we would insist upon a "politically independent, working class position" in any war, such as a national liberation war, which we support.

That aside, comrade Roberts accuses the PCC of omitting - that is, abandoning - the "concept of revolutionary defeatism" and the slogan, "The main enemy is at home". We have replied, as is clear from her letter, that we should not fetishise particular phrases, slogans or formulations. In an earlier exchange she complained that the words, "revolutionary defeatism" and "the main enemy", had been dropped or betrayed by the PCC. Now we only have the "concept" ... progress, but only of a sort.

Well in all my years writing on the question of war in the *Weekly Worker*, and before that in *The Leninist*, I must admit that I have never felt under any obligation to use these exact words in each and every article (or speech or resolution). I am not going to the bother of checking. I simply know that this is the case. So readers can rest assured that the PCC has not gone over to social-pacifism on the quiet with our 'Establishing a principled left' statement. Frankly, though, the suggestion is risible.

While our statement did

not include this or that exact combination of words wanted by comrade Roberts, it does close with this resounding declaration:

Clear lines of demarcation must be drawn. This is the necessary condition for developing the political consciousness of the advanced section of the working class and then taking the struggle of the broad masses from the narrow routine of trade unionism and economics to the level of high politics and thereby the perspective of *turning what is a war between reactionary capitalist powers into a civil war - a revolution - for democracy, socialism and communism* (emphasis added).

For anyone reasonably well versed in the ABCs of political language, this is simply another way of presenting the "concept" of revolutionary defeatism and the slogan, "The main enemy is at home". You can agree, or disagree, with what is being said, but there can be no mistaking *what* is being said.

It is worth noting too that I have written, on a whole number of occasions, about how in Russia, following the February Revolution, the Bolsheviks, first under the leadership of Lev Kamenev and Joseph Stalin, then under Lenin, dropped revolutionary defeatism. All of this is, of course, *very* well known. Hal Draper wrote a thorough-going study on the question back in the mid-1950s.³

Moreover, we recently published an excellent eight-page supplement penned by Lars T Lih, where he made the exact same point. As soon as Lenin "arrived back in Russia, he understood that any reluctance to disavow the hostile image of the Bolsheviks as defeatist semi-saboteurs would be political suicide". Yes, Kamenev and Stalin had

already argued that 'Down with the war!' should be discarded as a campaign slogan. Did this argument offend or infuriate Lenin, asks Lars? No, in fact, Lenin went out of his way to endorse it:

The slogan, 'Down with the war!', is correct, of course, but it does not take into account the specific nature of the task of the present moment and the necessity of *approaching* the broad masses of the people *in a different way*. It reminds me of the slogan, 'Down with the tsar!' with which the inexperienced agitator of the 'good old days' went simply and directly to the countryside - and got a beating for his pains.⁴

So there was no chasm between Lenin and his lieutenants, as alleged by Trotskyite dogmatists and bourgeois academics alike. The reality is much more straightforward. Kamenev and Stalin grasped the "central realities of the post-February situation" and proposed a mass campaign based "solidly on the existing Bolshevik programme". While not necessarily agreeing with every detail, Lenin had no reason to be "scandalised" by their efforts. On the contrary, he explicitly endorsed their rejection of "anarchist methods" and their search for a more effective slogan.⁵

Revolutionary defeatism was a perfectly serviceable weapon for inter-factional disputes and struggles in exile circles. However, slogans such as 'Down with the war' did not go down well amongst the masses, not least rank-and-file soldiers and sailors. They took revolutionary defeatism to be siding with Germany - that and an attempt to sabotage the war effort. Hence, instead of revolutionary defeatism the Bolsheviks fashioned popular demands, such as 'Peace without annexations' and 'Publish the

secret treaties'. They proved to be brilliantly effective, as proven by Bolshevik majorities in elections to the workers' and soldiers' soviets during the summer and autumn of 1917.

Fetishism puzzle

Comrade Roberts defends herself from charges of "fetishism with words" by claiming to be puzzled: "Have we not fought tooth and nail to keep the name 'CPGB' alive?" "Is that fetishism?", we are innocently asked.

Well, for my part, I very much like the CPGB name. It links us with the party founded in 1920 and before that the Communist Party of the Marx-Engels manifesto. Taking the name is, or could be, a real gain for the principled left, if the gumption was there. We did, I believe, a real service by rescuing the name from the Eurocommunist liquidators and keeping it from the grubby hands of the *Morning Star* clique.

However, no, we do not fetishise the name. Back in 2001 we published a little booklet, *Towards a Socialist Alliance party*.⁶ The entire one-thousand print run quickly sold out and we produced a second, revised, edition in the same year. What aim did we have? Our aim was announced loud and clear on the front cover. We wanted to unite the "six principal" organisations of the Socialist Alliance - SWP, SPEW, AWL, ISG, Workers Power and the CPGB - into a Socialist Alliance party. True, we would have probably bided our time and proposed, at some opportune moment, that together we call ourselves Communist Party of Great Britain.

We successfully defeated hiving off Wales from the Socialist Alliance (as sought by the SWP, ISG and others, who enthusiastically promote petty nationalism). We also did our best to reach out to the Scottish Socialist Alliance/Party. Not with the intention of bringing about some rotten compromise. No, our aim was to split internationalists from nationalists and organise on the basis of the 'one state, one party' principle.

Not that we would have insisted upon the CPGB name. To have done that would be stupid, unprincipled and would indeed fetishise what is, after all, a mere name.

"Also missing", announces a horrified comrade Roberts, "is the necessity of establishing a workers' militia - another long-established key weapon in the CPGB's propaganda arsenal". A necessary correction: our main programmatic demand here is for the "formation of a popular militia." A workers' militia might be a step in that direction, but what we are after is the "dissolution of the standing army and the establishment of a popular militia under democratic control".⁷

I am sure that there are many other demands, formulations and aims missing from the PCC's statement. But the implication is that we have somehow abandoned our established principles. Suffice to say, any such suggestion is entirely misplaced.

Anyone looking over the archives of the *Weekly Worker* will find not only references to the popular militia demand peppering numerous articles. There have been entire articles devoted to that one subject alone.⁸ Perhaps, though, if we had included the demand for a people's militia in the statement, comrade Roberts would have objected that this constitutes a barrier to left unity and cosy cooperation. Unfair? Well, maybe.

More to the point, though, when it comes to assessing a possible Russia-Nato war and phasing into World War III, the demand for a popular militia is tangential. If the world's standing armies have been dissolved

and replaced by "popular militia[s] under democratic control", then big-power (even small-power) conflicts become much, much more difficult, though not impossible. But, to state the obvious, that is not the case.

If the popular militia demand had been included in the statement, no-one on the PCC would have raised the slightest objection. But its non-inclusion takes nothing away from the main thrust of the argument and certainly carries no political significance whatsoever.

Now we come not to fetishising the words, 'revolutionary defeatism': rather comrade Roberts failure to understand what "*we actually mean* by revolutionary defeatism" (my emphasis). She fleshes out what *she actually means*, though, by saying that it involves support for "strikes, boycotts and actions by trade unions to disrupt the military supply chain". Elsewhere she has written about "sabotage".

Orthodox tradition

It would be silly to insist on one meaning when it comes to revolutionary defeatism ... and almost anything else for that matter. So I willingly grant that what pacifists of many kinds, anarchists and syndicalists too, mean by revolutionary defeatism is "strikes, boycotts and actions by trade unions to disrupt the military supply chain".

However, in terms of politics, I see myself standing in the tradition of the orthodox Marxism of the Second International, most consistently and effectively upheld throughout World War I by the RSDLP (Bolsheviks). And, of course, as everyone knows, they resolutely opposed the suggestion of organising a "general strike against the war". Pacifist nonsense, as far as a blunt talking Lenin was concerned.

For them revolutionary defeatism meant just that - turning what was an inter-imperialist war into a civil war - a revolution - for democracy, socialism and communism. Against leftist and rightist opponents, correcting the misconceptions of honest friends too, the Bolsheviks explained time and again that preferring the victory of the Central Powers, the Central Empires, over victory for tsarist Russia did not mean *wanting* victory of Hohenzollern Germany, Habsburg Austria-Hungary and Ottoman Turkey. Though, from the point of view of the workers' movement in Russia that would, on balance, be a "lesser evil" compared with a victory for tsarist Russia.

Most certainly, however, *their* revolutionary defeatism did *not* mean "strikes, boycotts and actions by trade unions to disrupt the military supply chain", let alone blowing up roads, bridges and railway lines. Lenin is quite explicit: "We do not sabotage the war, but we struggle against chauvinism ... It would also be erroneous ... to appeal for *individual* acts of firing at officers."⁹

Doubtless, though, that was the charge of the sworn enemies of Bolshevism ... they are filthy German agents who want to disrupt the "supply chain" to the front by agitating against the war on the home front and stirring up discontent amongst the ranks.

I have already referred to how neither Lenin nor the Bolsheviks treated revolutionary defeatism as a shibboleth. After February they remained opposed to the defencists, but, as argued, Lenin insisted - and he provided written evidence - they "were not defeatists".¹⁰ The Bolsheviks opposed calling for mutinies, soldiers abandoning their posts and heading off back to their village and all attempts to demoralise the army. It was, said the Bolsheviks, the right Mensheviks and Right Socialist Revolutionaries heading

the Provisional government who were doing just that: demoralising the army by their woeful mismanagement of the war effort and continued robber alliance with Anglo-French imperialism.

It is to draw sharp lines of demarcation against social-imperialism, social-pacifism and centrism that we put forward 'revolutionary defeatism' as a concept, as a phrase in my string of 'Notes on the war' articles ... and going back, before that title was adopted, to my first Ukraine war article, 'Here we stand' in March 2022.¹¹

Not that we are hung-up about 'revolutionary defeatism'. We do not consider it a timeless formula, something akin to holding aloft a cross and throwing holy water at the capitalist vampire.

Lastly, the comrade complains that CPGB members "should at least have had a chance to see and amend" the statement before it was published. "We are, after all", she says, "not interested in building a 'follow the leadership' sect ... We want to build a real Communist Party, with fully engaged and active members." Indeed we do. But our statement was signed by the PCC, not a CPGB aggregate. It came about after a longish aggregate report by myself and a full discussion. There were no political disagreements of any substance.

No less to the point. The statement was written and published, knowing full well that it was time-limited, would soon be left behind by fast-moving events, would become a historical document to refer back to, but not a weapon to be deployed for years to come. Storm Shadow and other such weapons might get the go-ahead any time now. We are also fast approaching November 5. Everything regarding Ukraine will almost certainly change if Donald Trump becomes the 47th US president.

To have waited till the next membership aggregate in late October, and for the 'cut this and add that' amendments from comrade Roberts, the whole thing - even if she got her way - could all too easily become hopelessly dated by the time we published it in the *Weekly Worker* (November 7: ie, two days after polls close in the US).

The PCC is elected to speak on behalf of the organisation as a whole. Those are our agreed rules and democratic method of operation. If anything, we were too slow in agreeing the statement. Comrades proposed various amendments to the initial draft, however, and we had to delay and delay again because of various other commitments. Doubtless the statement does not flow wonderfully. It is no work of art - in some respects it resembles a camel (a horse designed by a committee). But to have delayed publication still further would have been mistaken.

Formulation 19

What about formulation 19, the other target of comrade Roberts? It reads in full:

Throughout the entire current conflict, the US and its allies have sought to strike a balance between giving Ukraine enough weapons to resist Russia, on the one hand, and not doing anything too overtly provocative, on the other. Naturally this has infuriated the Zelensky regime ... and its social-imperialist cheerleaders. They demand "full sanctions" against Russia (ie, siege warfare), claim that the Putin regime is "attacking democracy globally" and that Ukraine should get all the "arms necessary to liberate the country,

from wherever possible and without conditions". Effectively this 'Arm, arm, arm Ukraine' line poses a 'guns or butter' choice in Europe, with the social-imperialists demanding guns: ie, supplying Ukraine with massively increased supplies of the most up-to-date fighter aircraft, tanks and missiles.

Does comrade Roberts doubt this assessment of the US and its allies? Why refrain from condemning the complete surrender of the social-imperialists before the dominant western narrative? Why not use the 'guns or butter' line against them? All this was left unexplained in her letter (and elsewhere, for that matter). Perhaps she fears that readers will find this stuff ever so boring too.

When I made these very points, encapsulated in formulation 19, in my aggregate opening, no-one, including comrade Roberts, raised any objection. With the Labour government committed to raising arms spending from 2.32% of GNP to 2.5% over the course of its first term ... and with a generous slice of this going to 'Arm, arm, arm Ukraine' it surely matters.

Would it be unfair to blame the social-imperialists for the end to winter fuel payments to pensioners, the expected national insurance hike, the rise in alcohol duties, etc? No, it would be perfectly fair. And that is exactly what we shall do.

Where do we go from here? I would suggest a rigorous course of study, study, study. We are planning to hold our next (winter) online Communist University on the theme of war. Over the course of a long weekend in January 2025 we intend to explore the history, the issues ... including our real and imagined differences.

Positive

By way of conclusion, it is worth referring to a recent development on the left. In my last 'Notes on the war' article, albeit in a footnote, I asked about the position of RS21 - the SWP breakaway - when it came to the Russo-Ukraine war. It is, after all, no longer listed as an official affiliate to Chris Ford's dreadful social-imperialist Ukraine Solidarity Campaign.

Well, we now know why (at least in part). Not only has this still Clifflite organisation disaffiliated from the blue and yellow USC: it has, at last, moved in the direction of principled politics. Proposed by Steven R, Alfie H, Andreas C, Harry H, Danny B and Callum F, RS21's 'All Member Assembly' (ie, aggregate) meeting on September 15 2024 agreed a resolution that clearly parallels our position. Naturally, we have all manner of differences; nonetheless the new line is entirely positive.

I am only going to quote the section on Ukraine (the first section is on Palestine and 'Israel' - a "Zionist entity" whose official name the comrades dare not speak):

In Ukraine there is a genuine risk, for the first time in decades, of direct conflict between great powers armed with nuclear weapons ... the Ukrainian war effort is financed and armed by the dominant imperialist alliance, organised in Nato.

What are the US war aims? (a) "consolidate" domination of the US-led order; (b) "provide an outlet for arms sales"; (c) "dominate the economy of Ukraine"; (d) "destabilise and divide the Russian Federation; (e) "ensure American hegemony over the supply of gas to Europe; (f) "prevent the fracturing of Nato".

Almost inevitably, given their Clifflite antecedents, the RS21 comrades characterise Russia as an "imperialist power" traditionally dominating the region and seeking to recover power through victory in Ukraine. We have discussed and can further discuss what constitutes imperialism in future articles. Nonetheless, the comrades are right when they say that they "stand with the Russian peace movement".

We do not need to reproduce here the supporting argument. Instead, we shall jump to the conclusion: "During the course of the war it has become clearer that the inter-imperialist aspect of it is predominant in relation to the struggle of Ukrainians against occupation." In all honesty, comrades, this was crystal-clear from the very get-go. Nonetheless, the comrades are right when they say that, as "socialists in Britain", pursuit of this war "is an assault on the working class" and "must be opposed".

This passage is also worth quoting:

... regardless of the political character of the enemies of British capitalism abroad, it is the duty of socialists in Britain to fight the infernal imperialists at home, and to work unceasingly for their defeat, and the defeat of their allies, by any means necessary. This means calling for the British withdrawal from Nato and the disbandment of Nato ... Socialists who for whatever reason fail to do this, and call for arms to the allies of the imperialists, whether in Palestine, Ukraine, or anywhere else on earth, are aligning themselves with the imperial objectives of the British state ... The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign clearly falls under this designation and should be condemned. Their motions should be opposed or modified within trade unions, and they should be challenged on their objectively pro-imperialist politics in every situation. It was correct of RS21 to disaffiliate, and comrades within the organisation should not participate within the campaign.

Our web editors should put the entire RS21 resolution up online. As far as I am aware, at least at the time of my writing this article, RS21 has unfortunately not done this itself.

Can we claim credit for what is undoubtedly a rebellion against what was previously a social-imperialist position? Perhaps a little, perhaps a lot. But claiming credit matters nothing. What is important is direction: away from social-imperialism and towards a principled communist position. That is most welcome news ●

Notes

1. 'Slogan fetish', Letters, October 10 2024: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1510/letters](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1510/letters).
2. 'Establishing a principled left', October 3 2024: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1509/establishing-a-principled-left](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1509/establishing-a-principled-left).
3. H Draper *The myth of Lenin's 'revolutionary defeatism'* - see www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1953/defeat/index.htm.
4. This passage comes from Lenin's 'Tasks of the proletariat in our revolution' *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, pp65-92.
5. LT Lih, 'A hundred years is enough' *Weekly Worker* September 19 2024: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1507/a-hundred-years-is-enough](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1507/a-hundred-years-is-enough).
6. J Conrad *Towards a Socialist Alliance party* London 2001.
7. CPGB *Draft programme* London 2023, p32.
8. Perhaps the most recent being J Conrad, 'Sir Patrick Sanders' citizen army' *Weekly Worker* February 1 2024: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1476/sir-patrick-sanders-citizen-army](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1476/sir-patrick-sanders-citizen-army).
9. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 35, Moscow 1977, p163.
10. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 27, Moscow 1977, p193.
11. J Conrad, 'Here we stand' *Weekly Worker* March 3 2022: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1385/here-we-stand](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1385/here-we-stand).

SCOTLAND

Symbol of fatuity

Beginning as a left nationalist, he ended up as a nothing. A common pattern. **Mike Macnair** argues that claims for Scottish independence are illusory because small nations can never really be independent



He came to accept Nato, the monarchy and even keeping sterling

Alex Salmond, former leader of the Scottish National Party, died unexpectedly on October 12. The 'instant response' of other politicians displayed knee-jerk *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* (nothing but good about the dead): Salmond was characterised as an important political figure who had changed British politics.¹

In one respect this is certainly true. Plebiscitary fraudster David Cameron set three traps for his political competitors. The first was the 2011 alternative vote referendum - the 'price' for Liberal Democrat participation in the 2010-15 Con-Dem coalition government (a price as valuable as a £7 note). The second was the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. This was primarily a trap for the Labour Party, conned by Cameron into taking the lead role in defending the union, then knifed by Cameron's English nationalist speech on the day after the referendum. The result was an SNP landslide at the 2015 UK general election. Here the SNP

(and Salmond in his agreement with Cameron to the referendum) served as the Tories' political instrument.

The result was Cameron's third and highest-stakes gamble with plebiscite frauds - this time to 'do over' the Labour Party in England: the 2016 Brexit referendum. Cameron's project initially failed - Brexit passed, and Jeremy Corbyn avoided being the figurehead for 'Remain'. It was not until the Corbyn leadership let Keir Starmer as shadow Europe minister pursue persistent anti-Brexit parliamentary games, tailing the Tory remainers and nailing Labour as dishonest, anti-Brexit manoeuvrers, that Boris Johnson was finally able in 2019 to cash Cameron's expected gains from the 2016 fraud. But Salmond deserves, along with Cameron and Johnson, whatever odium is due for Brexit.

More generally, Salmond's career can stand as a symbol of the emptiness of small-nation nationalism, except as an

instrument for larger states and political forces; and, specifically, as a symbol of the fatuity of *left* nationalism.

Career

Salmond entered politics when he joined the SNP in his first year at St Andrews University in 1973. In 1979, after the defeat of the devolution referendum of March 1 ('yes' got 51.6% of the vote, but the referendum rules required 40% of *registered voters*) he was part of the creation of the '79 Group'. This argued for a left turn of the SNP (previously mainly based in rural areas, and seen as 'Tartan Tories') to present itself as a left alternative to Labour and seek to win urban seats; it was to campaign for an independent Scottish socialist republic.

In 1980, the 79 Group was reinforced by the supporters of Jim Sillars from the Scottish Labour Party - a 1976 initiative to create a left-nationalist formation. The SLP had been subject to an entry operation by the International

Marxist Group, which was shortly purged; as is usual when left projects seek to purge Trotskyists, the result was to create a climate of purges and an anti-democratic appearance, so that the SLP withered. Sillars argued in the SNP for a direct-action campaign in support of devolution, starting with an abortive attempt at an occupation of the building intended for the Scottish assembly under the devolution plans.

The 79 Group was in autumn 1981 invited to send a speaker to Sinn Féin's conference, giving rise to Tory press witch-hunting (the invitation was declined). In June 1982 the SNP voted to ban factions: both the 79 Group, and Winifred Ewing's right-nationalist 'Campaign for Nationalism in Scotland'. Not long after, Salmond and other 79 Groupers were expelled for violating the ban; but Salmond was readmitted in 1984, and by 1985 had become the SNP's publicity director.

In the 1987 general election, he was SNP candidate for the rural

and fishing industry constituency, Banff and Buchan, and took it from the Conservatives (he was to hold it until 2010, when he stood down). But this was by no means the end of Salmond as a *left* nationalist. On March 15 1988, as a pretty new MP, he disrupted the budget speech to protest the unconstitutionality of the introduction of the poll tax in Scotland, achieving instant fame and flagging the SNP as a radical anti-Tory party. In November of the same year, Jim Sillars won the Glasgow Govan by-election on a swing of 38.4% from Labour.

In this context, the SNP left clearly had the wind in their sails, and when Colin Wilson resigned as SNP leader in 1990, the choice was between Salmond and Margaret Ewing, also seen as a leftwinger. Sillars backed Ewing, but Salmond won.

Though coming from the SNP left, Salmond was an economics graduate and had been employed in 1980-88 by the Royal Bank of Scotland. His election thus

falls into the context of the strong ideological ascendancy of marginalist economics and financial engineering on the post-Eurocommunist centre-left. This ideological agenda resurfaced in the SNP idea - between 2000 and the 2008 crash - that Scotland could imitate Ireland as a 'Celtic Tiger' centre of financial services. Salmond thus committed to a radical reduction in corporation tax after independence - a commitment abandoned by Nicola Sturgeon after 2014.

Salmond held the leadership till 2000. In this period the SNP vote remained steady at the 1992 and 1997 general elections, though Sillars lost Govan in 1992 and, on the other hand, in 1997 the collapse of the Tory vote led to the SNP gaining three rural seats. In essence, the belief (misplaced in 1992) that Labour could get the Tories out at Westminster held the SNP down to a limited vote and a rural electoral base, in spite of Salmond's broadly left orientation.

Salmond elected to back the Blair government's limited devolution proposals in 1997, generating opposition from both SNP leftists and hard-line independence advocates; and the scheme won. But, at first, Labour seemed to have successfully neutered the SNP through the devolution regime, with Labour as the clear largest minority in the 1999 Scottish parliament elections, which formed a coalition administration with the Lib Dems that continued until 2007.

Salmond, meanwhile, had been a 'naughty boy' from the British state's point of view, by criticising the Nato bombing of Serbia in 1999. Stories of dictatorial behaviour on the part of the SNP leadership, which if he had backed the bombing would have been evidence of "strong leadership", became publicised by the press as "suppressing democracy within party ranks".² Salmond was induced to resign as leader, but replaced by his chosen successor, John Swinney - another man from the financial services sector (Scottish Amicable Life Insurance 1992-97) and supporter of the pro-devolution 'gradualist' wing of the SNP.

This was the high period of the left-nationalist Scottish Socialist Party: it had won one seat at Holyrood in 1999 (Tommy Sheridan), but that rose to six in 2003; the Greens also increased their seats from one to seven. The SNP vote went down by 5% and they lost seven seats. This poor showing led to Swinney resigning as SNP leader. Salmond, who had been vocal in opposition to the Iraq war, was triumphantly returned as leader with 75% of the vote. The SNP campaigned on an anti-war platform in 2007; meanwhile, the senseless 2006 split in the SSP knocked both wings of that party out of Holyrood; the Greens also sharply lost ground. The SNP narrowly edged Labour out, gaining enough seats to form a Holyrood coalition with the Greens; Salmond became Scots First Minister.

2008 saw the death of the dream of an independent Scotland as a 'Celtic Tiger' financial powerhouse, with the crash and bailouts of the Royal Bank of Scotland and Halifax Bank of Scotland. But the creation of the Con-Dem coalition at Westminster in 2010 restored the conditions for SNP success: the idea that the Tories were entrenched at Westminster and the SNP (and perhaps independence?) could shelter Scotland from Toryism.

The 2011 Holyrood election saw the SNP make sharp gains at the expense of both Labour and the Lib Dems. The SNP now had a Holyrood majority, and the question of an independence referendum was posed. After extensive negotiations, agreement between Edinburgh and Westminster on the referendum terms was reached in October 2013, and the referendum went ahead on September 18 2014.

Resignation

This returns us to where we began: Scottish independence was defeated. Salmond resigned as SNP leader and First Minister, and was replaced by his preferred candidate, lawyer Nicola Sturgeon. In the 2015 UK general election the Labour Party was electorally wiped out in Scotland, losing 40 of its 41 seats, while the Lib Dems lost 10 out of 11. The Holyrood elections were deferred to 2016; in these, Labour was pushed into third place by a Tory recovery, and the Lib Dems continued to lose ground, while the Greens gained, and the SNP lost its absolute majority. The principal winners from the 2014 referendum were, therefore, the Tories.

The subsequent history is of relatively marginal importance. Salmond won a Westminster seat (Gordon, south of Aberdeen) from the Lib Dems in 2015, but lost it to the Tories in 2017. He then took a job as a presenter with *Russia Today*, repeating his 1999 scandalous breach of the Nato solidarity required of senior British politicians.

At this point Sturgeon, seeing a need to take political distance from Salmond, seems to have decided to push hard #MeToo complaints against Salmond: the #MeToo movement was in any case then at its height, with 'Pestminster' figuring heavily, and had brought down SNP minister Mark McDonald in November 2017. The Holyrood internal complaints procedure against Salmond was challenged in court, and condemned in January 2019 as procedurally unfair and tainted with apparent bias;³ the Scottish public prosecutors immediately doubled down with a criminal prosecution of Salmond for sexual assault and rape, which ended in his acquittal in March 2020 - but not without Salmond admitting to conduct that, though not technically assault or rape, clearly amounted to exploitation of his authority for sexual advantage.⁴ The Alba Party, created for Salmond to offer a more 'radical' alternative to the SNP, fell flat, with 1.66% of the vote in the 2021 Holyrood elections.

More recently, Nicola Sturgeon announced her resignation (February 15 2023) - brought down by the implausibility of her proposal to treat the next general election as a referendum, by the ability of the Tories to turn the 'gender recognition' issue against her and by the alleged financial scandal that was to see her husband's arrest in April and her own arrest in June 2023. Current polling for the Holyrood election due next year (or at the latest by 2026) suggests a sharp Labour recovery.⁵

The advertising funding of the media, and especially the daily press, amplifies the proprietors' chosen voices and drowns out or silences other voices. As a result it allows the management of electoral processes by the choice of 'scandals' and 'issues' to be agenda-setting. The use of these powers can be seen in relation to

the SNP, to *force the party towards the political centre*, to become merely an alternative bribe-taking group of professional politicians.

In reality, this can already be seen in the election of Salmond as leader: a 'radical' project, but also one that accepted the market order. It is also visible in the witch-hunt of the 79 Group over Sinn Féin, in the attack on Salmond in 1999-2000, and most recently the attack on him in 2018-20. The point is not that he was not guilty of abuses: it is that the *choice of who and what to pursue* served state and newspaper-proprietor interests (as was also true in the case of Tommy Sheridan).

In the push for the hope of independence, the SNP was induced to drop opposition to Nato in 2012, with the result that the call for getting rid of the nuclear submarine base at Faslane appeared inconsistent. In 1997 the SNP had called for a referendum on the monarchy; this too was dropped. The line of the SNP in the 1990s-2000s had been to adopt the euro; this had to be abandoned, and in 2012-14 debates it became clear that the SNP hoped to cling to the pound. And so on. In steering quite a lot of this through, Salmond became the sort of ex-leftist who attracts praise as a 'statesman'.

But 2014 failed to achieve independence, and the Tory governments after 2015 proved to be willing to play hardball with the SNP. It turned out that there was no alternative route to independence that did not involve an illegal unilateral declaration of independence and a split in the British armed forces and security apparatus. Indeed, the SNP majority and minority Scots administrations were not able to offer obviously better government and public services than the Westminster government in England. Forced into the political centre ground in order to govern, the SNP was just as unable to make fundamental change as Labour or the Tories (or the Lib Dems), and were reduced to tinkering and dodgy dealing.

Throughout the period of Alex Salmond's political life, the SNP could be talked up when it served Tory electoral interests, or when it could be used to put pressure on Labour to move more into the bribable centre. Or talked down - as it was between the mid-1990s and 2003, and as it has been since 2022 - when the Tories had lost so much electoral support that the state needed to put its Labour 'second eleven' into office.

Independence

2014 failed to achieve independence at the end of the day not because of dirty tricks from Westminster, but because the project was only persuasive to 44.7% of voters on an 85% turnout. 55.3% voted 'no': a clear, not a marginal rejection. This rejection seems to have been primarily motivated by fears for the economic consequences of Scottish independence. The 'yes' vote was a vote to gamble with the Scots economy, and this character as a gamble was reflected in the fact that it was primarily a vote of the youth, of men and of the worst-off (which is not quite the same thing as the working class).⁶

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the SNP's offer was 'independence in Europe', analogising Scotland to the 26-county state in Ireland and to other smaller countries in the EU. This had a certain level of plausibility, but was always illusory: both France and Spain would veto such an encouragement to their own secessionists. European

backing for Scottish independence would need something a lot more hard-edged to happen before it would become likely: eg, a Franco-German-led Europe breaking with the USA and, in consequence, resurrecting France's 'Auld Alliance' with Scotland as a full military alliance *against* England.

Without this prospect, Scots independence would only work economically if the remaining UK was prepared to grant Scotland highly favourable deals for trade, freedom of movement, and so on. It should have already been apparent that this was unlikely from the way in which Scotland was forced *into* the union by the English Alien Act of 1705, to block Scots trade with England as a response to the Scots Act of Security 1704.⁷ (After Brexit, it should be even more obvious, given the very tough negotiations between the EU and the UK and the limited concessions made to the UK.)

More recently, the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and tsarist empires at the end of World War I in each case led to economic regression. The Austro-Hungarian case is particularly clear; but Polish independence, severing western Poland from its existing markets in Germany and eastern Poland from its existing markets in Russia and the Baltic states, produced sharp weakening of industry and the working class, and a clear ascendancy of the *szlachta* feudal nobility between the wars. Only in Czechoslovakia, which the Entente powers promoted as an ally in central Europe, was pre-war prosperity preserved.

This was not an unpredictable result. It was actually predicted both by the Austro-Marxist writers on the national question (Otto Bauer and Karl Renner) and by Rosa Luxemburg. The Bolsheviks' line was to support the *right* to self-determination, but to argue *against* separation where the issue was actually posed. It was only Karl Kautsky who argued that states *must* be nation-states (and this position led him in 1917 to support the war aims of the Entente powers).⁸

Nor should we imagine that more recent history argues for separatism. We have, after all, seen 77 years of neocolonialism since Indian and Pakistani independence in 1947, leaving aside many more recently 'decolonised' countries; and in spite of the 'neo' in neocolonialism, the form of economic dependence, irrespective of formal legal independence, goes back to Dutch relations to Baltic countries in the 17th century, and to British and French relations to Latin American countries in the 19th.

In the feudal world, arms production and actual military operations were artisanal in character. Hence Scotland could obtain independence from England, Poland from encroaching Germans, Japan from China. Under world capitalism, in contrast, arms manufacture and military operations are industrial-scale. Hence political independence only yields economic independence if your state territory contains a powerful enough arms industry to be able to act independently and to operate effective protectionism. Conversely, the lack of economic independence unavoidably produces political dependency: very visible, for example, in 26-county Eire's relations with the UK between the creation of the Free State in 1922 and EU entry in 1973.

Scotland is currently not a colony of England, but a home territory

subsidised (as Wales, the Six Counties and the 'peripheral' parts of England also are) out of the proceeds of London-run offshore operations. An independent Scotland in the 21st century would, unavoidably, be a neocolony of someone; most probably of England.

Left?

I said at the outset that Salmond's career could serve, specifically, as a symbol of the fatuity of *left* nationalism. My reasons for saying this were partly that - as we have seen over the course of this narrative - Salmond began as a left nationalist in the 79 Group, and in certain respects continued to be a left nationalist down to the point of his taking a job presenting for *Russia Today* - not *actually* left, but part of the common delusion of a part of the left that the FSB regime in Russia headed by Vladimir Putin is in some weird way 'progressive'. But this 'leftism' withers away into nothing.

Secondly, Salmond's career began at the time of the collapse of Jim Sillars' and others' 1976 Scottish Labour Party project into the SNP left; and it saw in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s the rise of Scottish Militant Labour, its successors in the Scottish Socialist Alliance and Scottish Socialist Party - and the abrupt fall of the SSP, leaving nothing behind but wreckage. And both Salmond and the SSP display the complete uselessness of leftists relying on capitalist political techniques of media management, rather than steadily criticising the advertising-funded media as an engine of political corruption and building up our own workers' and party media.

This relates back in turn to the points I have just made about the fact that small-nation independence is illusory and leads merely to functioning as an instrument of some larger state or force; and that breaking up larger states leads to economic regression. By leading to economic regression, it weakens the position of the working class as a class.

The political left is significant (to the extent that it is significant at all) through its connection to the dynamic of the working class as a class tending to organise itself for its collective interests. The imagination of the left that it can jump on nationalist bandwagons is, then, to abandon this core class perspective, and as a result to abandon the reason for its own existence. It is unsurprising that the result should be collapse ●

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Notes

1. Eg. www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/oct/13/alex-salmond-had-huge-political-impact-says-john-swinney-scotland.
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3. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-46428570.
4. There is a brief summary at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alex_Salmond_sexual_harassment_scandal.
5. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_next_Scottish_Parliament_election.
6. Eg. www.france24.com/en/20140919-why-scotland-said-no-independence-scottish-referendum-uk; lordashcroftpolls.com/2014/09/scotland-voted; strathprints.strath.ac.uk/53562/1/Curtice_IPPI_2015_How_Scotland_voted_economic_perceptions_in_the_Scottish_independence_referendum.pdf.
7. scottishhistorysociety.com/the-union-of-1707-the-historical-context; T Devine (ed) 'The making of the union of 1707: history with a history', in *Scotland and the union 1707-2007* Edinburgh 2008 chapter 2.
8. K Kautsky, 'Nationality and internationality' (1907-08) translated by B Lewis in *Critique* Vol 37 (2009), pp371-89, Vol 38 (2010), pp143-63. The 1917 texts are *Die Befreiung der Nationen und Serbien und Belgien in der Geschichte* (Stuttgart 1917).

REVIEW



Remains our bedrock

Ahmet Tonak and Sungur Savran *In the tracks of Marx's Capital: debates in Marxian political economy and lessons for 21st century capitalism* Palgrave Macmillan 2024, pp485, £99

This is an important new book by two well-known Marxist economists from Turkey. It brings together a series of works written by them over the last 40 years that 'track' the development and relevance of Marx's analysis of the capitalist mode of production to the present day. Sungur Savran teaches at Istanbul Okan University and Ahmet Tonak is a research affiliate at Smith College and teaches at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

The book is divided into four parts to explore the core ideas of Marxian political economy relevant for modern-day economies. The first part gives an overview of *Capital* and its methodology, while the second discusses the application of these ideas to the question of measuring what is 'profit on alienation', the rate of exploitation, the reconstruction of input-output tables and the role of the welfare state and social wage.

The third part discusses new research in Marxian analysis in the 21st century, facing the challenges brought about by digital labour and the global economic crisis and, in the final part, Sungur Savran looks at the differences between Marxist value theory and Sraffian, neo-Ricardian economics. Overall, the aim of the book is to develop an "adequate analysis of capitalism, with a view to counter and finally overcome the exploitation, oppression and alienation that this mode of

production offers humanity" (p13).

In part one, Tonak takes the reader on a trip through Marx's first notes on his analysis of capitalism, as expressed in what is now called the *Grundrisse*, written during the year after a major economic crisis in 1857. Tonak discusses the historical context and the content of the text in detail and summarises Marx's main arguments on alienation, value and post-capitalism.

Key points

Savran takes up the story with two chapters dealing with the key points in all three volumes of Marx's masterpiece, *Capital*. He emphasises the radical difference between Marx's understanding of capitalism, compared to the 'classical' economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Savran makes the very important point - often ignored by other Marxist economists - that *Capital* was seen by Marx as 'critique of political economy', as it was in the 1850s - not just a development of the classical school, as many eminent contemporary Marxist economists, like Anwar Shaikh, appear to argue.

As Savran says, *Capital* "should be understood as a wholesale criticism of that school" (p63). While the classical economists recognised that value in an economy was created by human labour-power, they denied the contradictory character of capitalist accumulation

**Marx and Engels
and their works
continue to inspire,
stimulate and guide**

ie the exploitation of labour by capital and so the causes of regular and recurring crises in capitalist production and investment. As Engels said, one of the great discoveries of Marx was surplus value - how the owners of the means of production appropriate a surplus from the producers of value, the labour force, seemingly through equal exchange: wages for labour. This is ignored by the classical economists. What is more, Savran insists that, while the classical economists assumed that capitalism as a mode of production is here to stay forever and never questioned the categories of capitalism such as value, money, wage-labour, profit, etc, Marx dwelt at length on these categories themselves and laid bare the historically specific and transitory relations of production that they embodied.

In the next chapter both authors combine to present the very important distinction in capitalist production between productive and unproductive labour, by looking at the different branches of activity in the modern economy. Marx says that new value is only created by human labour-power - but not all labour. Productive labour for capital consists of those sections of labour that create new value for the owners of the means of production. Unproductive labour is due to those sections of labour that meet often

very important economic needs, but do so in exchange for wages paid out of the surplus value created by the productive sectors. "Major sections of the working class in capitalist society are unproductive workers", but "this does not imply in any sense that they are less important either for the well-being of society or the class struggle" (p117). State employees, teachers, social workers, health workers are unproductive for capitalism, as they do not deliver new value and surplus value for capital - indeed their wages are a deduction from overall surplus value. That partly explains why capital is so opposed to state spending and investment and in favour of privatisation. And from the point of view of Marxist analysis, it clarifies the need to look at the profitability of productive labour as the key indicator of the 'health' of capitalism.

Tonak was joint author with Anwar Shaikh of the seminal work, *Measuring the wealth of nations: the political economy of national accounts*, which measures the production of nations, using Marxist categories of productive and unproductive labour. And in another chapter Tonak and Yiğit Karahanoğulları clarify the distinction between productive and unproductive labour. It first defines the meaning of exploitation, based on the Marxian labour theory of

value, on which the sole criterion of being exploited becomes the appropriation of surplus labor - even of those unproductive labourers - and then empirically estimates rates of exploitation of those unproductive workers in Turkey's government, finance, and trade sectors. In another chapter, Tonak joins with Alper Duman to apply the Marxist classifications of productive and unproductive labour to economies, using input-output tables. This reveals the dynamics of capitalist production, unlike mainstream classification left simply at 'manufacturing' and 'services'.

Extra profit

In part 2, Tonak and Alper Duman discuss the vexed (in my opinion) question of the category, 'profit on alienation'. Profit on alienation (POA) is presented as an extra source of profit in capitalist economies in addition to the profit appropriated in capitalist production. This rubs against my view of Marx's value theory of equalities of value: namely that total value equals total prices of production in the aggregate after the redistribution of value between capitals; and so total surplus value will also equal total profit, interest and rent. These equalities support the view that only labour creates value and it is the distribution and circulation of that value that leads to unequal shares of total value.

The idea that there is another source of profit does not work for me. 'Profit on alienation' is an idea that comes from an early classical economist, James Steuart. Some Marxist economists like Anwar Shaikh,¹ and it seems Tonak and Duman follow him, interpreting Marx to have accepted Steuart's concept of profit from alienation as another source of profit that does not come from the exploitation of labour in production, but from the

circulation of capital.

But I do not think Marx says this about Steuart's concept - on the contrary. Marx writes:

Before the Physiocrats, surplus value - that is, profit in the form of profit - was explained purely from exchange: the sale of the commodity above its value. Sir James Steuart on the whole did not get beyond this *restricted view*; [but] he must rather be regarded as the man who reproduced it in scientific form. I say "in scientific form", for Steuart does not share the illusion that the surplus value which accrues to the individual capitalist from selling the commodity above its value is a creation of new wealth.²

And Marx goes on:

This profit upon alienation therefore arises from the price of the goods being greater than their real value, or from the goods being sold above their value. Gain on the one side therefore always involves loss on the other. *No addition to the general stock is created.* [But] his theory of "vibration of the balance of wealth between parties", however little it touches the nature and origin of surplus value itself, *remains important in considering the distribution of surplus-value among different classes and among different categories such as profit, interest and rent* [my emphasis].

So there is no new profit from trade or transfer. This 'relative' profit is just that - relative.

Why does Shaikh, however, want to make much of this? Unfortunately, Shaikh accepts that Marx's equivalences (total value = total price; surplus value = profit)

do not hold, which is the neo-Ricardian critique. So he seeks to restore the equalities by finding new value from outside the exploitation of labour in production. Also, this supposedly helps explain how in the 20th century, finance capital can gain extra profit from outside production. This extra profit comes from 'revenue' (ie, profit circulating or hoarded and now outside production). Just as a burglar can gain profit from stealing and selling on, so can a banker from extorting extra interest and fees from workers' savings and mortgages.

Now finance capital can gain profit from slicing off a bit of workers' wages in bank interest or from squeezing the profit of enterprise (non-financial capital), which is perhaps what Tonak and Duman mean. But this is not an *extra* source of profit: merely a redistribution of surplus value or a reduction of the value of labour-power. It does not mean that finance capital 'creates' a new source of value in the circulation of capital.

In my view, it is wrong that an extra source of profit must be added into economic accounts within Marxist theory or, for that matter, even with the 'classical tradition', as suggested by Steuart. This concedes to the ambiguities of the modern 'financialisation' theories: namely that it is finance alone that is now the exploiter, not capital as such.

That does not mean we should not estimate the amount of profit being gained from workers' wages through mortgage interest and house prices by the financial sector - and Tonak and Duman provide just that with their empirical examples in the chapter. But this financial profit is just a part of total surplus value appropriated by producer capitalists and redistributed to finance capitalists through interest and rent and/or from workers' wages (variable capital). The examples show financial profits (much of it 'fictitious' in the Marxist sense). Moreover, it is not necessary to find another source of profit to balance the Marxian equations, because the neo-Ricardian critique has been refuted by successive Marxist analysts: Marx's equivalences are consistent within his model.

Digital economy

In part 3, Tonak looks at the new forms of exploitation of labour in the digital economy. He argues that the digital economy can, as opposed to the opinion of many, be analysed on the basis of Marx's theory of surplus value and profit. Facebook produces commodities just like other companies. Moreover, the surplus value produced by the productive workers of Facebook is the main source of the profits of the company and the wages of its unproductive workers, not some extraction of 'rent'.

In another chapter, Savran demolishes theories that claimed after the 1980s that the world capitalist economy had entered a new stage that could be characterised as 'post-Fordist', implying that somehow 'flexibility' was equally good for the worker as it was for the capitalist. On the contrary, he demonstrates that the present digital methods of labour process control are even more brutal forms of the subordination of labour to capital.

In a later chapter, Tonak makes a very important point about modern imperialism. New theories of imperialism mostly focus on its political manifestations (such as wars and military invasions) or on the economic consequences of capitalistically imperialistic relations (such as inequality and poverty). But the real focus should be on the role played by uneven

economic relations between the north and south in constituting the basis of political domination. The profit motive is fundamental to imperialism and the mechanisms of value transfer must be viewed as the means of reproducing unevenness among capitalist economies sustained by the global processes of capital accumulation. This is a view that Guglielmo Carchedi and I also expressed in our work, *The economics of modern imperialism*.³

In an excellent chapter - it is worth reading the book for this alone! - Tonak and Savran summarise their views on the causes of crises in capitalism. Like me, they characterise the world economy in the aftermath of the so-called "global financial crisis" of 2008-09 as in a long depression "in the lineage of the 1873-1896 Long Depression and the Great Depression of the 1930s" (p338). Depressions are an expression of the historic decline of capitalism. Tonak and Savran survey all the modern theories of crisis and trenchantly demolish them to show the superiority of Marxist theory, based on the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, for understanding the post-2008 crisis - and some of the empirical data they use to support this view come from my own work.

Finally in part four, Savran takes up the Marxist cudgels in the debate with the neo-Ricardians, who deny Marx's theory of value and, from that, his theory of crises. This controversy raged among leftwing economists throughout the 1970s and 80s. Savran concludes that there is no need to abandon the Marxist theory of the capitalist economy. He rebuts the neo-Ricardians' claim that Marx's theory of value is inconsistent, in that it led to 'negative values'. As 'negative values' are pure nonsense, this was the basis for the neo-Ricardian proposition that Marx's theory should be consigned to history. Negative values for a value creation theory would indeed be inconsistent nonsense, but Savran shows this neo-Ricardian claim is a fiction. Behind the neo-Ricardian critique lies the theory of value or production presented by Piero Sraffa. Savran argues that it is Sraffa's theory that is internally inconsistent, not Marx's.

Tonak and Savran show convincingly that Marx's *Capital* remains the bedrock for understanding the laws of motion of capitalist production despite fashionable attempts to revise and refute *Capital's* analysis. Marx's great work still provides the only searchlight for guiding us towards a new social formation for humanity that is not based on exploitation of the many by the few, but brings human beings and nature together in a world of cooperation and freedom ●

Michael Roberts

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/10/13/shaikh-at-greenwich.
2. K Marx *Theories of surplus value*: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch01.htm.
3. www.academia.edu/66353020/The_Economics_of_Modern_Imperialism.

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Online Communist Forum



Sunday October 20 5pm
Volodymyr Zelensky's so-called 'Victory plan' - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain

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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Promises
not to attack
nuclear and oil
facilities

Leave or starve

Threats to halt the supply of some arms owe more to next month's presidential election than any real concern for the population of north Gaza. Meanwhile, the world awaits Israel's latest 'retaliation' against Iran. **Yassamine Mather** reports on a region spiralling into hell

After more than 42,000 deaths, when we thought we had witnessed some of the worst war crimes committed this century, the US-backed Zionist state has managed to perform even more horrific acts.

In the early hours of October 14 the Israeli military attacked tents sheltering displaced people at Al-Aqsa hospital in central Gaza, igniting a fire that killed four and injured around 70 others. Social media footage showed tents engulfed in flames, while people attempted to extinguish the fires and rescue those trapped. A local resident described waking up to the bombing and rushing to the scene, where he witnessed the fire spreading after gas canisters ignited.

At the same time, we are witnessing the realisation of a strategy initially proposed by a group of retired Israeli senior officers. This is called the 'Generals' Plan', as the group is led by retired major-general Giora Eiland, a former national security advisor. In a nutshell, the 'Generals' Plan' tells the population of northern Gaza to leave or starve.

A letter from the Biden administration to the Israeli government, reportedly leaked and later confirmed by the US on October 15, sets a 30-day deadline for Israel to take "urgent and sustained actions" to improve humanitarian conditions in Gaza. The letter cites the US Foreign Assistance Act, which mandates the halting of arms supplies to any country obstructing US-approved humanitarian aid. A few aid trucks are running now, but far too few, meaning that the situation continues to deteriorate.

Genghis Khan

As Gideon Levy writes in *Haaretz*, "The helplessness of the international community, especially the United States, reinforces the sense of intoxication. Everything is possible. It seems that Israel can continue its Genghis Khan campaigns of conquest and punishment unhindered. America begs it to stop; its pleas make no impression on the Israelis."

The leaked letter is a cynical move by the Democratic Party apparatus, which is desperate to avoid losing more votes amongst anti-Zionist Jews, Arab Americans, anti-war activists and young voters in general in next month's presidential elections. But, for all the publicity this has gained in the media, it is too little and, of course, too late. It is not that they will turn out for Trump, it is that they simply will not turn out at all. Note, while Harris is some 2.4 points ahead in national polls, Trump leads in the swing states, albeit by a tiny margin.

After a couple of weeks of speculation about the timing and nature of the Israeli retaliation against Iran, US media reported



US-manufactured Israeli F-15s: used to pound south Lebanon

early this week that Benjamin Netanyahu might have softened his stance regarding his next move.

Targets

NBC News reported on October 12 that the US believes Israel will not target Iran's nuclear sites, although it is considering strikes on military targets and energy infrastructure. However, no-one should believe any of this. For all we know, a retaliatory attack on Iran might have happened by the time you read this article.

The Israeli prime minister's office stated that Netanyahu had informed Joe Biden that Israel would refrain from targeting Iran's oil or nuclear facilities in response to the major missile attack two weeks ago, focusing instead on military installations. It added that the timing of the attack will ensure it does not influence the outcome of the presidential election, due about three weeks from now.

The US administration is claiming all this is a consequence of a phone call with Biden. However, it might also be related to the unprecedented escalation of the war in Gaza, as well as the war in south Lebanon. Contrary to all Israeli Defence Forces claims, Hamas and Hezbollah might be weakened after the assassination of their respective leaders, but they are far from being defeated. Following leaks of footage from damage caused by Iranian missiles and news of a Hezbollah drone reaching the Golani Brigade training base in central Israel, the 'Iron Dome' air defence system does not seem to be as impenetrable as Israel and its allies had claimed.

According to Amos Harel, writing in *Haaretz* on October 15,

... although Israel has been working on the issue for 10 years, it still hasn't developed an effective system for detecting, identifying and bringing down drones the way the Iron Dome protects against short- and medium-range rockets.

Both the laser system that's being developed and old anti-aircraft cannons that are meant to return to service will considerably improve the defensive system, but that will take time.²

This explains the offer of deployment of a US ballistic missile interception system, as part of preparations for a possible strike on Iran and a potential Iranian response. No exact date has been set for the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD). Still, according to various sources, the talks are described as "at an advanced stage, but not yet finalised". Yet already some 100 US specialists have arrived in Israel. There is also speculation that this was part of a quid-pro-quo deal agreed during the Biden administration regarding the time and extent of Israel's retaliation against Iran.

As Israel prepares for a retaliatory strike, it keeps a close watch on both Iran and the US. A THAAD battery was previously deployed to the Middle East "last year following the October 7 attacks, to protect American troops and interests in the region", according to one statement. In 2019, the system was deployed in Israel during an air defence drill with the US military, following then-president Donald Trump's announcement of plans to withdraw most US forces from Syria.

At the time, Netanyahu said: "The system is considered one of the most advanced systems in the world and, together with our defense systems, we're even stronger [and can] handle threats, near and far, from all across the Middle East."

Gulf Arab officials responded to the rising tensions between Iran and Israel on October 2. The Gulf Cooperation Council addressed the situation, calling for adherence to UN security council resolution 1701. This mandates Israel's withdrawal from Lebanese territory and the disarmament of armed groups in Lebanon.

During a press conference with Iranian president Massoud Pezeshkian, who was visiting Qatar for the Asian Cooperation Dialogue summit, Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, highlighted the risks of Israel's actions and stressed that Qatar prefers mediation as a means to address regional conflicts.

Oman expressed significant concern about the escalating situation, warning of its serious consequences and urging restraint to maintain regional stability. Meanwhile, Saudi economy minister Faisal Alibrahim described the developments as "unfortunate" and called for de-escalation, dialogue, and broader regional and international cooperation!

This week Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Baqher Ghalibaf piloted a plane to Lebanon, highlighting Iran's confidence despite the ongoing conflict and recent deaths of several members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. In his role as pilot on part of the journey, he was trying to portray a sense of defiance and seeking to make a regional statement. Upon arriving in Beirut, Qalibaf met with significant political figures.

This visit marks Ghalibaf as the second high-ranking Iranian official to visit Lebanon since Israel's recent air strikes (earlier, foreign minister Abbas Araghchi visited on October 4 for talks).

Fake news

Last week, Masoud Asadollahi, former Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) commander of the al-Quds Force, said that an Iranian company was the mediator in the purchase of 5,000 Hezbollah paggers that exploded in Beirut. On October 13, Iran's judiciary announced the summoning of Asadollahi for this statement. The Meezan news agency says that Asadollahi "admitted" that the information he raised was "wrong, quoting unreliable sources", and he has now realised his mistake.

Some news agencies were claiming that IRGC commander

Esmail Ghaani is under investigation over Israel's successful infiltration of Hezbollah's command structure. Ghaani, who now heads the IRGC's al-Quds force, was in Beirut during the attack on Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah. Iranian officials maintain that he might even receive an award for bravery. The Qatari-backed *Middle East Eye* suggested Ghaani has been placed under house arrest due to the security lapses that allowed Israel's infiltration.

The *Jerusalem Post* claimed Ghaani died from a heart attack during interrogation, combined with torture, and the London-based Iran International TV station duly repeated the *Jerusalem Post* claim. All this turned out to be fake news, as Ghaani was later shown to be alive and well at a ceremony in Tehran marking the death of IRGC commander Abbas Nilforoushan, who was killed in Lebanon on the same day as Nasrallah.

Statement

On a positive note, a considerable number of leftwing Iranian activists and academics both inside and outside Iran have signed a joint statement entitled "A collective call to action against the imposed 'new order' on the Middle East". The nine-point statement includes these paragraphs:

We are a group of Iranians inside and outside the country consisting of academics, researchers, social and political activists, and artists declaring our disgust with Israel's genocidal assault against Palestinians in Gaza, the oppressive apartheid regime in the occupied West Bank, the ground offensive into Lebanon, the bombardments of Yemen and Syria, as well as all actual and potential military acts against Iran under any name. We recognise these acts as the extra-judicial unleashing of mass violence against the collective living conditions of the peoples of the region, a violence enjoying the full material and ideological support of western governments and global capital flows.

Signs and discourses indicate that Iran will be among the next targets of Israeli aggression under the banner of 'the new order'. This statement contains an urgent warning against indifference towards systematic crimes upon our geographical, cultural and historical coexistence in the region •

Notes

1. www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-10-13/ty-article/premium/hubris-is-back-israels-unchecked-arrogance-is-a-recipe-for-disaster/00000192-825d-dd80-af9a-dffbc5d0000.
2. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-10-15/ty-article/premium/lethal-drone-strike-on-idf-base-exposed-the-soft-underbelly-of-israels-aerial-defenses/00000192-8c93-d9c2-a7f3-8c97c2930000.