

weekly **worker**



Death of an absolute monarch who turned a blind-eye to death squads and mass murder

- Letters and debate
- SWP's WDC fiasco
- Covid-19 lies
- Netanyahu rebuffed

No 1535 April 24 2025

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10



SUPREME COURT: A CASE OF JUDICIAL USURPATION

LETTERS



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

Trans women

As an American communist, I found Mike Macnair's April 20 Online Communist Forum talk about the recent UK Supreme Court ruling enlightening as to the legal basis - and lack of legal sense - of the ruling. However, as a transgender communist, I found Mike's general ignorance on the subject disappointing, but unfortunately characteristic.

I say 'characteristic', because it is similar to his previous work on the subject ('Trans liberation and Marxism', August 11 2024), which proclaimed what we call self-ID (that is, the updating of the gender marker on legal documents on demand) a boon for various bad actors - a favourite hypothesis of anti-trans activists, but one that is easily shown to be false, as many jurisdictions - including several US states and Ireland - have had self-ID for years now (including, in some jurisdictions, the neuter X marker) with no such incident.

I take issue with several parts. First is the repeated use of "post-operative" to qualify which trans people might be entitled to equality. The gender recognition certificate (GRC) process has never required any surgical intervention; neither does any other guarantee of equality (indeed the guarantees offered by the Equality Act until this ruling required neither medical intervention of any kind nor a GRC).

One place this comes up - "Do you really think that post-operative trans women ought to be placed in men's prisons?" - is particularly concerning. I have to ask in response - does Mike really think that V-coding is something exclusively done to "post-operative" trans women?

Second is the dichotomy of socialists and "trans activists", calling certain socialists "useful idiots" for ... It's a little unclear.

Mike seems to take exception to the use of the term, 'transphobia', ignoring (or perhaps ignorant of) the way that 'transphobic' is used - by analogy to 'homophobic', as a broad term meaning 'anti-trans'. But there is also a rejection of this case and ruling as specifically anti-trans. While it is true this is ultimately in the service of separate-spaces politics, the sharp edge is nonetheless an anti-trans campaign. The stated goals of the American conservatives (and UK conservatives, notably JK Rowling), who are in part driving it, are specifically against trans people.

Part and parcel of this is 'trans activists' as a floating signifier for some segment of trans people whose goals and methods the speaker disagrees with. The use of 'trans rights activist' this way is quite a common thing among anti-trans activists in the form of 'I'm not anti-trans people, just TRAs', and, while I do not particularly wish to accuse Mike of being a useful idiot of this sort, his use of it echoes that - loudly.

Third is the rejection of 'Trans women are women'. The basis given - that there are differences in medical needs and prevalence of certain disorders - has no bearing on it as a political statement and the demand for equality. One could, on the same basis, say that disabled women are not women "for some purposes" or (based on the higher prevalence of skin cancer) that red-haired women are not women "for some purposes". Or nearly any other adjective.

'Trans women are women' is the alternative, solidaristic politics that Mike so longs for. Trans rights are women's rights and are workers' rights. Most of us, activist or not, are well aware that our oppression is grounded in the oppression of women broadly. And, although liberal identity politics is prevalent in trans activism, as it is in any other contemporary liberation movement, to equate the two and then accuse our supporters of being Clintonite useful idiots requires frankly deliberate ignorance.

By, the way, as a transgender woman myself, the claim that trans women are much less likely than cis women to get breast cancer did come as a surprise to me, because most medical risks are very similar (as one might reasonably expect). In fact studies differ on this (see 'Screening for breast cancer in transgender women' *UCSF Transgender Care*), and as a result screening guidelines for trans women are much the same as they are for cis women.

Amy Wilhelm
email

Irreconcilable

Andrew Northall writes: "Raising immediate demands, which are driven by what working people actually need, proceeds from where the class is now, but also challenges and potentially breaks the current artificial restrictions imposed by bourgeois society, also providing a real glimpse of what a socialist and future communist society can actually be like" (Letters, April 17).

But how does it do that, Andrew? As you are aware, a future communist (aka socialist) society (at least as Marxists envisage it) will be one in which we voluntarily contribute to society according to our abilities and freely take according to our needs without any quid-pro-quo transaction being involved at all. In other words, a moneyless, wageless, classless and stateless alternative to all forms of capitalism. I honestly cannot see how "raising immediate demands" affords us a glimpse into such a society, as Andrew claims.

He also writes: "It ought to be a fundamental principle for the labour movement that work should not only pay, but that anyone who works physically and mentally hard for 40 hours a week should earn enough to cover not only all basic living costs, but sufficient to fully participate in society."

Presumably, this is an example of what Andrew means by an "immediate demand", but I am puzzled as to how exactly the demand to be better paid under capitalism in itself allows us to better envisage a possible future in which we will no longer have to sell our working abilities to a parasite class for a wage or salary - in which we will no longer need to be 'paid'.

It seems to me that imagining a communist future amounts to a paradigm shift or, if you like, a leap of the imagination - a discontinuous break with the present. This was, I think, the point that Marx and Engels were getting at in the *Communist manifesto*: "The communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder that its development involved the most radical rupture with traditional ideas."

Of course, workers have to fight for their interests in the day-to-day class struggle. We in the Socialist Party of Great Britain fully support the principle that workers should militantly and democratically organise themselves in the industrial field to effectively wage class war. The real issue is how we should organise as a class on the political front. On what basis should we organise politically - on a programme of reforms (or immediate demands) or on a revolutionary programme of fundamentally transforming society?

The fact of the matter is that these two different kinds of programmes

are fundamentally irreconcilable. You cannot simultaneously strive to mend capitalism and also claim to want to end capitalism. I have yet to come across a remotely plausible explanation of how this could be possible.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. There is the (in) famous example of the German Social Democratic Party in the late 19th-early 20th centuries, which succumbed to the temptation of prioritising the minimum programme as a way of opportunistically attracting working class support. This inevitably led to the abandonment of its revolutionary maximum programme and the transformation of the SDP into a fully capitalist entity.

There is no other way of running a capitalist society except in the interests of capital and therefore against the interests of wage labour. That is what a programme of reforms will lead to. Administering capitalism as a supposed working class government will soon enough compel you to betray the trust of your working class electorate in the name of 'economic realism'. We have seen this happen over and over again.

You can only achieve a post-capitalist society if and when a majority of workers want it and understand what it entails. You cannot trick or coerce them into such a society. And it will not magically manifest itself as the materialisation of some quasi-mystical-cum-mechanical process of social evolution. It has to be explicitly advocated and sought after.

This quote from *The German ideology* would seem particularly apt here: "Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary - an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement: a revolution. This revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the

class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew."

Robin Cox
SPGB

Hamas out

Ian Spencer's article about recent events in Gaza is filled with important details concerning the total death toll (51,000), the number of dead children (17,492), the number of wounded (111,588), etc ('White coats, red blood', April 17). Clearly, he has done his homework. So how is it that he fails to mention the most important political development since the war began some 18 months ago: ie, the eruption of mass anti-Hamas protests, beginning in late March?

Even notorious Hamas apologists like *Drop Site News* and *The Electronic Intifada* have reported on the demonstrations, even while downplaying their significance. But Spencer goes one better by ignoring them altogether. While otherwise wide-ranging and informative, his report airbrushes them out of history the way Stalin once airbrushed Trotsky.

Why? The answer is obvious. The protests do not accord with the CPGB's nationalist viewpoint, which dismisses the importance of political conflict inside the Palestinian camp. Since Palestinians are victims of Israeli oppression, they must support the resistance. And, since they support Hamas, since the CPGB sees them as one and the same. The fact that Palestinians are furious with Hamas for bringing death and destruction down upon them is a complication that does not compute, as far as the CPGB is concerned. So the protests must not exist.

Yet they look very much like the first stirrings of a Palestinian spring. Just as Tunis, Cairo and other Arab capitals once surrounded with demonstrators chanting, "The people want the government to fall", Gaza, despite brutal Hamas repression, is now filled with crowds crying, "Barra, barra"

Online Communist Forum



Sunday April 27 5pm

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

Use this link to register:
communistparty.co.uk/ocf

Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and
Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk
For further information, email Stan Keable at
Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

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

Fighting fund

Another grand needed!

As expected, the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund running total for April shot up over the last week - thanks, in particular to two brilliant *three-figure* transfers from comrades SK and PM.

But there were also a number of other excellent contributions, including three PayPal donations of £50 - thank you, comrades KS, MS and PS - along with another PayPal gift from comrade ST (£30) and a number of other standing orders and bank transfers. Here thanks go to comrades MM (£75), GB (£25), JW (£24), DR (£20), GD (£15), plus JL and TT (£10 each). Finally, comrade Hassan handed his usual £5 note to one of our team.

All that came to £812 - not far below the £907 received in the 16 days of April prior to this week! Anyway, as a result, that takes our running total up to £1,719 towards our new monthly target of £2,750. In other words, we still need just over another grand to see us home, with exactly one week still to go!

That's a very tall order, but we really do need to make it happen. As readers will know, we've had to raise both our fighting fund target and the price charged to subscribers, because of the huge increase we've encountered in costs - especially for printing.

And, of course, we rely on our readers and supporters to see us home, just as they rely on us to provide them with the kind of paper that's so desperately needed - the only one that consistently fights for the unity of the entire Marxist left on a principled, democratic basis.

So, please, play your part if you can. Send us a cheque, click on our PayPal button or make a bank transfer - go to the web address below for more details.

We urgently need your help! ●
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

(‘Out, out’), as they demand the fall of the Hamas government as well.

Who can blame them? Hamas did not consult them before launching its criminal assault on October 7 2023. It didn’t ask if they wanted to become “a nation of martyrs”, as a top Hamas official named Ghazi Hamad described them on Beirut TV two weeks after the launch of the so-called ‘Al Aqsa Flood’. When Hamas commander Yahya Sinwar assured a colleague that Palestinian deaths “infuse life into the veins of this nation, prompting it to rise to its glory and honour”, no-one asked them whether they agreed with such perverse logic, in which death equals life and defeat somehow adds up to victory. Like most people on earth, they want peace, work and democracy and are therefore sick and tired of a party that stands for the opposite.

As one Gaza resident put it recently in a message to Hamas, “Why did you allow the building of malls, restaurants, the corniche, the beautification of streets, and the planting of trees? Why did you give us permits to build our homes and licences to run our businesses? Why did you allow Gaza to be beautiful if you hated it? Why did you let us dream of a future if you despised life?”

These are questions that demand answers, yet the CPGB refuses to hold Hamas to account. Spencer assails Keir Starmer for his hypocrisy in protesting against Israeli atrocities, while continuing to back the slaughter. But he should really look to his own hypocrisy as well. Like Jack Conrad, I’m a big fan of Jesus, particularly his statement in Matthew 7: “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own?” Such words are as relevant now as they were 2,000 years ago.

Daniel Lazare
New York

Valued comrade

It is with a terrific sense of loss that I report the death on April 10 of comrade Anne Scargill, the former wife of ex-president of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill.

For the last few years Anne had been a shadow of herself, having been struck down by Alzheimer’s disease, which robbed her of so much in her final years. But she died aged 83 surrounded by family and comrades. She was a truly lovely human being - a most extraordinary ‘ordinary’ working class woman. Kindness, warmth and humanity shone from her body.

Drafted in at the start of the mass Women Against Pit Closures movement, she - along with the indomitable Betty Heathfield, the wife of former NUM general secretary Peter Heathfield - were rapidly put in place to exercise some control over the volatile rank-and-file spontaneous women’s groups during the 1984-85 Great Strike. The women had moved rapidly as a wing of the strike movement, and showed no sign of becoming simply ‘kitchen staff’. Although their role was vital, they faced determination to keep them very much subsidiary and out of any involvement in the policy direction of the NUM or the strike.

As soon became apparent, neither Betty nor Anne had any intention of controlling the enthusiasm of the miners’ wives, daughters and girlfriends, and welcomed the advent of women’s pickets. These were at first forcibly condemned and frozen out of official structures set up by the NUM. There was quite a battle

for hearts and souls between the national office (including Peter and Arthur) and the majority of the area fiefdoms, especially Yorkshire. The women - and Anne to her great credit - showed they would not wait for democratic structures to emerge or entrenched male-chauvinist union bureaucrats to change, and simply did what they had to do anyway.

We thought we had won that fight after the strike, when Arthur put forward a visionary plan to absorb the women into a formal part of the NUM, which would have formalised the link and bond between the pit community and the union, and had the potential to take the NUM beyond simple trade unionism. But it was not to be: despite everything those women had endured - especially, but not exclusively in this strike - the big areas, not least Yorkshire, voted it down.

Anne’s dedication and commitment during the strike is well known. She and others toured the world, raising money, speaking in support of solidarity action, organising women’s pickets. But it was during the final move to industrial genocide under John Major in 1992-93 that the women as an independent force for the industry and union came into its own. Thatcher’s vision of a still large, highly profitable, non-union coal industry, with about a third of the less profitable ‘deadwood’ cut off and the NUM driven out by 1986, had failed decisively, following a national ballot for strike action which returned a 76% ‘yes’ vote. Premier John Major responded with a scorched-earth policy of killing the industry dead.

By the time the new offensive came in 1992, there was little belly for a fight. Jackboot management, victimisations and the offer of more money in terms of redundancy packages than the men had seen in a lifetime - all ate into the miners’ resolve. New laws were being enforced, which prevented us picketing any mines other than our own. The union was hogtied with injunctions and court orders, so Anne and the women swept into action. They deployed a wide range of civil disobedience (not all of it very ‘civil’). There were occupations of underground, then strategic surface, buildings. There were pickets of government premises, including the department for trade and industry, the digging up of environment secretary Michael Heseltine’s front lawn with an earth mover and - most poignant - the Women’s Pit Camps. By this time the old Betty had left us and the new one was Betty Cook - a lifelong comrade, who stood with Anne until the very end.

Anne Scargill was a guest at countless universities and miners’ welfare events, and spoke to fellow pit women in various parts of the world - in a language only they understood, passed on from

mother to daughter: the grief of injury, death and disaster, and the injustice under state ownership and management, as well as the whole capitalist system. It should be noted that Anne was not politically myopic: her passion was just as deep on Ireland and Palestine, as well as other workers’ struggles.

She and Arthur parted company some time ago, but it never altered her commitment to the union, the industry and the battle for justice for our communities. Nor did it alter her standing among those communities and militants she served so loyally.

Her homely voice, her personable character and the plain honesty of the women she led was almost unique. She was a character without affectation - one of solid granite, which will stand on its own, so long as we live. Anne, it was great privilege to have fought alongside you, and sat and sung in your company. You were a giant of the mining unions.

David Douglass
South Shields

Great man

Following the critique by Paul Demarty of Owen Jones’s exposition of a singular form of ‘great man’ leftwing leadership, which focussed upon former Rail, Maritime and Transport union general secretary Mick Lynch (‘Socialism and star power’, April 17), readers of the *Weekly Worker* may wish to know of my socio-biographical study of Lynch.

Readers should also note that Jones was not the only one to push such an idea. Polly Smythe, labour correspondent for *Novara Media*, did so in *The Guardian* in early January this year, in an article entitled ‘Mick Lynch, you’re a legend - and the unapologetic working class leader the left is missing’, upon the occasion of the announcement of his retirement.

Published in January 2024 by Manchester University Press and called *Mick Lynch: the making of a working class hero*, my book broadly concurs on the issues of Lynch’s public performative prowess. This is why people started calling him a ‘working class hero’, hence the subtitle of the book. But it is not a term I would choose to use to describe him myself. The book tells the tale of how he operated within the RMT and his adherence to Labourism and the Labour Party, despite no longer being a member and leading a union that disaffiliated over 20 years ago.

Quite apart from being in his early 60s now, his *modus operandi* and worldview do not make him a suitable candidate for the kind of position Jones and Smythe urge - even if that was seen as being desirable in the first place.

The book currently has a 50% discount on it (so just £10) if bought from the publisher’s website.

Gregor Gall
Glasgow

Communist University

Thursday July 31 until Thursday August 7 inclusive
Central London venue, a short walk from Great Portland Street tube
Details of speakers and sessions will be posted here:
communistuniversity.uk

Cost:

Whole week’s attendance, including accommodation: £250 (£150 unwaged)

Weekend, including one night’s accommodation: £60 (£30)

Full day: £10 (£5).

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ACTION

Boycott Barclays - stop arming Israel

Saturday April 26: Day of action outside Barclays Bank branches nationwide. Barclays provides financial services worth over £6 billion to arms companies. Demand Barclays ends its complicity in Israel’s genocide. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/boycott-barclays-day-of-action-3.

Blockade Lakenheath

Saturday April 26, 12 noon: Protest outside the main gate, USAF Lakenheath, Brandon Road, Lakenheath IP27. Stop the return of US nuclear weapons to Britain. Coaches from London and Manchester. Organised by Lakenheath Alliance for Peace: lakenheathallianceforpeace.org.uk/peace-camp-events

Build a city-wide movement to defeat the cuts

Saturday April 26, 12 noon: Conference, Comfort Inn, Station Street, Birmingham B5. Debate how to end the cuts and win a needs budget for Birmingham. Also mobilise solidarity action with the striking Birmingham bin workers - no to strike breaking. Organised by West Midlands National Shop Stewards Network: www.shopstewards.net.

Stop arming Israel

Saturday April 26, 2pm: Regional march. Assemble Main Street, Shenstone, Lichfield WS14. March to rally outside UAV Engines, part of Elbit Systems. Disrupt the machinery of war and demand justice for Palestine. Coaches from Manchester, Preston and Leeds. Organised by West Midlands Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/groups/wmpsc/permalink/10161115778762828.

Bristol’s radical history

Saturday April 26 and Sunday April 27: Festival. Saturday venue: M Shed, Wapping Road, Bristol BS1; Sunday venue: The Cube Microplex, Dove Street South, Kingsdown, Bristol BS2. Talks, walks, exhibitions and stalls. All activities free except for the evening films. Organised by Bristol Radical History Group: www.brh.org.uk/site/event-series/bristol-radical-history-festival-2025.

Do workers need protecting from AI?

Wednesday April 30, 7pm: Talk followed by discussion, Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford M5. Speaker: Adam Cantwell-Corn (Connected by Data). Registration free. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: wcml.org.uk/event/do-workers-need-protecting-from-ai.

Welfare, not warfare

Wednesday April 30, 7pm: Public meeting, Elisabeth House, 2 Hurlock Street, London N5. Starmer’s government is introducing massive hikes in military spending, while imposing disability and welfare cuts. Speakers include Chris Nineham (Stop the War) and Kate Hudson (CND). Organised by Islington Stop the War: x.com/STWuk/status/1912067749238485059.

Squatting London: the politics of property

Wednesday April 30, 7pm: Book event, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Author Samuel Burgum introduces his account of the real lives of London’s squatters, challenging the logic of property which underpins the city. Tickets £3. Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/event/book-talk-squatting-london-with-samuel-burgum.

The shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes

Wednesday April 30, 9pm: Four-part drama-documentary TV series on Disney+. Recounting the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes by the Metropolitan Police at Stockwell underground station in 2005, after he was wrongly identified as a terrorist suspect. Production by Etta Pictures and KDJ Productions: www.facebook.com/DisneyPlusUK/videos/685951200576804.

May Day open day

Thursday May 1, 10.30am to 3pm: Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Visit for tours, displays and stalls, while the May Day march assembles outside. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/502

London May Day march and rally

Thursday May 1, 12 noon: Assemble Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. March to Trafalgar Square for rally. Organised by London May Day Committee: www.londonmayday.org.

Why and how to fight for a mass Communist Party

Thursday May 1, 6.30pm: Special online discussion for May Day. Speakers invited from Prometheus, CPGB and TAS. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Is British politics getting more Americanized?

Thursday May 1, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc/status/1905322121036771583.

What it means to be human

Tuesday May 6, 6.30pm: Series of talks on social and biological anthropology. This talk is online only, via Zoom: ‘Romani and Egyptians in Albania’s informal recycling economy’. Speaker: Arba Bektshi. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/1881787289248052.

Nakba 77: free Palestine, end the genocide

Saturday May 17, 12 noon: National demonstration, central London, venue to be announced. Commemorating the 1948 Nakba expulsion of Palestinians. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: stopwar.org.uk/events/national-demonstration-for-palestine-nakba-77.

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.

SWP

What's the point?

It was going to be the left electoral alternative. But the SWP soon found itself with no takers. Then the back peddling began, leaving We Demand Change as a completely pointless exercise, says **Carla Roberts**

It is rather amusing to watch from the outside the latest political scheme dreamed up by the Socialist Workers Party. To be fair, it did not set up 'We Demand Change' as an independent initiative, but was somewhat forced to, as a way to sneak into Jeremy Corbyn's maybe-party, Collective. At the end of last year, it looked like the launch of the Collective Party was imminent - with its chair, Pamela Fitzpatrick, announcing to all and sundry the happy news. *The Guardian* was tipped off and published a couple of puff pieces, quoting Jeremy Corbyn and Andrew Feinstein.

However, unlike its old rivals, the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the SWP had been told rather vocally by many of those participating in the secret organising meetings that there was no way it would be allowed in. There are - at least - two major reasons: Firstly, there is the ongoing refusal of the SWP leadership to stop Zionists from attending events and demonstrations organised by its front campaign, 'Stand Up to Racism'. This has made the SWP extremely unpopular with many in the pro-Palestine solidarity movement - and unsurprisingly so: you cannot fight racism by walking arm in arm with racists, duh. Secondly, the SWP also continues to suffer from its bungled attempt to cover up the rape allegations against its former national secretary, Martin Smith ('Comrade Delta'). It is still widely referred to as 'rape apologists'.

Collective

So the SWP scrambled around for ways to squeeze sideways into the proposed organisation. And, hey presto, WDC was born, and a 'launch rally' was announced for the end of March. It did not look like very much, because it was not supposed to be very much.

However, it turns out that Collective was doing even less. We are told that Corbyn was extremely unhappy about Fitzpatrick trying to bump him in, which has, in fact, achieved the exact opposite reaction she hoped for: rather than forcing Corbyn's hand to say 'aye', he pulled away.

There are probably a number of reasons why he opposes launching a new party (for now), pushing instead for some sort of 'network' of 'independent' campaigns and candidates. For a start, he is still a Labourite, through and through. He quite rightly does not believe the 'common sense' view of many of the left that the Labour Party is 'dead'. In his many decades on the Labour left, he will have heard that proclamation too many times. And, of course, the trade unions remain affiliated, because they judge that they will get more crumbs from capitalism's table if they stay in rather than walk out. Naturally, Corbyn is happy to speak from the platform at many a demonstration, but that is as far as his confidence in 'the power of the streets' goes. Add to that the fact that Collective has attracted no union backers, but lots of weird and wonderful groups and grouplets, and you can see why he has not been too keen to lend his name to this particular venture. The organising meetings are still continuing, incidentally - but all participants seem aware that Collective has had it.



Finding itself alone

Having said that, we understand that some of the groups within Collective are involved in yet another separate set of secret negotiations (god help us), and that these might or might not lead to the formation of a party - in a year or so, in time for the next general election.

Step forward WDC. It seems that Corbyn and his lieutenants are happy to go along for the ride ... as long as it does not go anywhere. Corbyn spoke at the WDC launch on March 29, as did the other Collective 'big name', Andrew Feinstein - this helped the event to morph from a planned 'rally' into the grand 'summit of resistance' attended by over 2,000 participants (not delegates, ie, something like half the SWP's claimed membership). It was a very enthusiastic event. The SWP knows how to generate lots of sound and fury signifying absolutely nothing. Interestingly, it was not visibly dominated by the SWP - in fact, the SWP had not a single official speaker on the platform. It did, however, run and staff the event.

Officially there are 10 organisations involved in WDC, as was explained in the 'organising meeting' on Zoom on April 23 (chaired by 'Artin' "from the Peace and Justice Campaign") - with the SWP not listed.¹ However, you would have to be naive indeed (and we know there are a few) not to

pick up on the fact that about half of the people who spoke on April 23 are, in fact, leading members of the organisation, wearing different hats. For example, long-time cadre Sean Vernell - the first and main speaker - was introduced as just a trade unionist from the UCU and, most amusingly, Lewis Nielsen as being "from Stand Up to Racism". He just happens to be the SWP's national secretary!

Lewis Nielson

After the SWP's conference in January 2025, *Socialist Worker* reported quite openly about WDC being the SWP's initiative. This is how comrade Nielsen was quoted: "One such initiative is to bring together all the forces of resistance in the streets and workplaces against the Starmer government. We need to work with wider forces to unite trade unionists, anti-racists, Palestine activists, climate campaigners and others to confront the Labour government's policies."

This is exactly what WDC has set out to do now, as unimaginative as that sounds. The same conference also agreed that the SWP wants to start "building a left electoral alternative to Labour [which] is both possible and necessary".² That explains why some SWP members at the March summit got a bit, shall we say, carried away, arguing for WDC

to stand candidates in the various local elections. After all, that is what the party decided, right?

It turns out the SWP seems to have 'forgotten' to brief its own members on what WDC is supposed to be. The more likely explanation is that, when it comes to standing in elections as WDC, Jeremy Corbyn said 'no', John Rees and Lindsey German of Counterfire said 'no', the Greens, of course, said 'no' ... leaving them isolated and embarrassed. Hence the desperate back peddling.

Comrades Lewis Nielsen and Jess Walsh, the SWP's workplace and trade union organiser, had to 'clarify' the leadership's view with an editorial in *Socialist Worker* a couple of weeks ago:

We Demand Change is not and should not be an electoral initiative or new left party that many want to see. Instead, it can bring together different parts of the movement, so that we can be more than the sum of our parts. This is no easy task. So what needs to happen next? The organisers of the summit have outlined three next steps - collating demands, mobilising for protests and days of action, and a roll-out of local summits.

But even that seems to have not been clear enough and we were told at the April 23 Zoom event (attended by over 300 people) that "there will be a clarifying statement going out soon", explaining why WDC cannot possibly be an electoral alternative. We very much suspect that it will not actually mention the *real* reasons.

Instead, Alex Callinicos tried his best to square the WDC circle in the latest edition of their paper:

The most important task of We Demand Change is not to strengthen existing coalitions, but to broaden resistance to Starmer and his austerity and militarism. 'Welfare, not warfare' is an old slogan, but its time has come again. It expresses the interconnection between resistance to Reeves's cuts, opposition to Starmer's rearmament, the movements against racism and the far right and in solidarity with Palestine. If We Demand Change helps to promote the development of mass struggles against Starmer, the resulting confidence can invigorate a left electoral alternative. Building the kind of broad and pluralistic network required to sustain this alternative is a delicate task.³

Clear as mud. Build, build, build - and then do nothing with it. As one SWP member from the floor said on April 23, "Take as many leaflets as you can, go out every night after work to distribute them all and then get some more and distribute those, so that you can build a local summit." And what exactly are these summits supposed to do? Nothing at all, it seems, apart from 'bringing people together' - and then watch them, as they all go home again.

The SWP, of course, does not want to build anything more coherent than that. After all, they are 'it' already - the revolutionary kernel that will massively grow in a revolutionary situation, overthrow capitalism and lead the masses towards socialism! Until then, keep your powder dry

politically and build 'united fronts' that fight for programmes that you *know* are well below what is actually needed.

The eight-point platform of WDC is not quite as 'motherhood and apple pie' as the usual recent trite offerings, though not far off. There is "Welfare, not warfare", "Tax the rich", the demand for "public ownership of water, rail, mail and energy", and there is also "Stop arming Israel", and the long-time SWP slogan, "Refugees welcome" (an aspiration rather than the true state of things).

There is also a serious lack of political and organisational transparency, as Archie Woodrow from Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century pointed out in the Zoom call:

I still don't really understand what We Demand Change is supposed to be. Is it an organisation or just a series of events? It's not a united front campaign on a single issue like Peoples Assembly or PSC, but it doesn't seem to be a political party either. Is it going to have local branches? Democratic structures? What is the plan of activity other than running some 'summits' and maybe some protests? Does WDC already have a leadership, and if so, who is it? Or are all the people who've signed up supposed to constitute the leadership?

Unsurprisingly, he did not get a coherent answer. I suspect the SWP does not quite know what it is doing with it now - apart from waiting for Corbyn to launch a new left party and recruit some people from WDC while waiting.

Socialism

Needless to say, no mention is made of the need to fight for socialism. But that is the usual way the SWP acts in its 'united fronts': subordinating its politics to the (perceived) views of the right. In Respect, for example, that led to SWP members arguing and voting *against* a woman's right to choose an abortion, open borders and, indeed, the demand for socialism.

WDC is also supposed to attract Reform voters! - another good reason to keep quiet about the real politics of the ostensive revolutionaries leading it. As Sean Vernell explained on April 23, "We want to go beyond the left and speak to those who want to vote Reform."

This marks a change from the SWP's usual attitude of characterising Reform voters (or Trump supporters or those being attracted to the Alternative für Deutschland) as "racists". Clearly, many of their supporters are working class people who are seriously alienated from the establishment and those running capitalism.

But there is one way to make absolutely certain you will *not* attract them (or others for that matter) in the long run: by lying and pretending that you are not actually socialists ●

Notes

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COVID WAR

Lies, damned lies and viruses

Trump is determined to use every propaganda weapon against China, so, argues Ian Spencer, it is time, once again, to blame it for the Covid-19 pandemic

On April 18, the White House issued a web document titled 'Lab leak: the true origins of Covid 19'.¹ It confidently asserts that the Covid-19 pandemic originated in the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in China. This seems to have replaced a previous White House web page that gave out useful information about Covid, including how to get tested and practical measures to take if infected. So far, so normal, for an administration that is distinguished by a disregard for science in general (and scientists who do not do as they are told, in particular). The document goes on to castigate Joe Biden, Kamala Harris and immunologist Anthony Fauci for their handling of the pandemic and their alleged cover-up of the 'real' origin of the virus.²

With Fauci, it is starting to look personal. Trump's website has not only poured scorn on the former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, but has removed Fauci's security details - even though Fauci has faced numerous death threats for his role during the Covid pandemic.

At the height of the pandemic in 2020, Trump famously said: "People are tired of hearing Fauci and all these idiots" - a bit rich from a president who wistfully speculated on the use of bleach and sunlight inside the body as a means of eradicating the virus.³ Of course, what Trump was really annoyed about was the potential limit on profits due to silly old, scientifically validated, public health measures.

Billionaires

He need not have worried: in the USA and beyond, the pandemic seems to have been instrumental in transferring a huge amount of wealth to billionaires. Elon Musk, for example, saw his wealth grow from an estimated \$25 billion in 2020 to \$185 billion at the beginning of 2024. He was not alone. In 2020, Forbes reported that the USA had 614 billionaires with a total wealth of \$2.947 trillion. By 2024, there were 737 billionaires with a total of \$5.529 trillion.⁴

The 'Lab leak' web document is derived from the 557-page 'House Oversight Committee report of a select subcommittee on the coronavirus pandemic of the Committee on Oversight and Accountability in the US House of Representatives'. Phew! Published on December 4 2024, it is a tortuous read - made up, in large part, of 'evidence', such as subpoenaed emails and other correspondence, purporting to show this, that or the other.

The report leads with bold claims, such as "The virus possesses a biological characteristic that is not found in nature",⁵ without saying what that is (leaving aside the fact that, logically, the statement cannot be true. After all, the virus *is* found in nature and therefore *all* its biological characteristics *are* found there). Of course, a further look at the report shows that what is meant is that there were viruses found with particular characteristics. A logical leap is then made to assert that these must have been due to laboratory manipulation, rather than as the result of evolution.

The report is largely compiled by politicians who seem to be determined to prove, one way or another, a series of pre-determined conclusions. It is quite unlike enquiries chaired by someone supposedly neutral that include



Crime scene? US is basing its case on outright lies

submissions from a wide range of experts and non-experts alike. For example, it was chaired by Brad R Westrup, a Republican member of the House of Representatives and doctor of podiatric medicine. Don't misunderstand me: Dr Westrup's opinion on my ingrowing toenails would be of the greatest interest to me, but I suspect his expertise on the genomic origin of zoonotic viruses is not his strong subject.

Much of the 'evidence' is marshalled to discredit research used by Fauci to show that, on the balance of probability, the virus originated in other species and crossed over to humans, as have many other viruses before.⁶ In particular, 'The proximal origin of Sars-Cov-2' published in *Nature* in March 2020, comes under attack. A lot of email correspondence is reproduced to show that the authors of the letter in *Nature* had somehow colluded to ensure that the 'lab-leak' hypothesis was downplayed in order not to upset the Communist Party of China. It also railed against US funding (tax dollars, no less!) being used for research by China's WIV lab. Moreover, they assert, this work was carried out with substandard levels of safety and focused on 'gain-of-function' research: that is, the modification of a biological agent, so that it confers new or enhanced activity.

The report then goes on to confidently assert that this is the origin of the pandemic, despite numerous other, reputable, peer-reviewed studies in highly respected journals that can show that the overwhelming balance of probability is that the virus occurred naturally in the wet markets of Wuhan.

Opinions

The problem is that the possibility of a laboratory accident cannot be entirely dismissed, and may be near impossible to falsify. But this conduit for emergence is highly unlikely, relative to the numerous and repeated human-animal contacts that occur routinely. What we are then left with is that the Chinese government has shown a "lack of transparency" about the working practices in the WIV. Which apparently means that good evidence from viral gene sequencing can be ignored in favour of a conspiracy theory used to attack China. Trump was, after all, very fond of calling Covid 19 the "China virus".

There are the opinions of scientists and others cited in the report. However, it is not clear what evidence they provide -

except to say, 'Look, we've got clever people on our side too, you know!' For example, Tim Spector, a professor of genetic epidemiology at King's College London, is cited as supporting the WIV hypothesis. His area of specialism in the Covid pandemic was genetic factors contributing to the transmissibility of the virus, garnered from a detailed study of identical twins and extensive evidence from his Zoe startup company, which developed a highly influential app to gather data.

Interestingly, Professor Spector is closely linked to Zoe Health Limited, which recently secured a \$15 million investment to expand in the US. Founded in 2017, Zoe provides at-home testing kits for customers to find out their blood fat, blood sugar and gut microbiome health. It also markets 'personal nutrition plans'. Zoe's rapid expansion during the pandemic faced a setback in April 2024, when the company's co-founder and CEO, Jonathan Wolf, announced layoffs to cut costs by 20%. While it might seem cynical to suggest that professor Spector's views would be influenced by Zoe's wish to penetrate the lucrative US health market, the inclusion of his opinion supporting the WIV hypothesis will not do him any harm.⁷

Professor Spector is best known for his specialist subject of the importance of gut biome for health. That does not mean he has nothing to say about viral genomes, but the precise nature of the evidence which supports his views is not easy to determine from the report. He has expressed them publicly on the Zoe podcast and they have been reported in the press as 'his opinion' rather than being based on original research. Instead, he draws on the congressional report that cites him and the fact that there was collaborative research between WIV and the US labs.⁸ This sits alongside another opinion cited in the report - that of former prime minister Boris Johnson, who was hardly well known for the suitability of his skill set, whatever that was, or his handling of the pandemic. The idea of 'following the science' always must be tempered with following the money!

Such opinions stand in stark contrast to an excellent dissection of the evidence in the *Journal of Virology of the American Society for Microbiology*.⁹ In their article, published in March 2023, James Alwin *et al* go through the evidence supporting the natural origin of Covid-19 as the most

plausible explanation. They also rigorously examine the evidence for the laboratory origin. Although that cannot be fully refuted, the overwhelming balance of probability is that the virus originated in the transmission and mutation of a virus from animals to humans, probably in one of the numerous markets trading in live animals in Wuhan. This view is also supported by research published in *Nature* in 2024, but that did not find its way into the report's bibliography.¹⁰

Further evidence, published in September 2024 in the highly respected journal, *Cell*, demonstrates clear links between the virus that infected some of the first patients to succumb to Covid-19 and samples from animal specimens in Huanan market in Wuhan. It uses genomic sequencing to show that the common ancestor of the virus was found in civets, bamboo rats and raccoon dogs.¹¹ A further study, also published in *Cell* at the same time, showed that "No epidemic has been caused by the escape of a novel virus, and there is no data to suggest that the WIV - or any other laboratory - was working on SARS-CoV-2, or any virus close enough to be the progenitor, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic."¹²

Left field

When what passes for the left takes up the subject of Covid, their views sometimes depend on how supportive they are of the People's Republic of China. For example, the *Morning Star* draws on reports from Reuters to assert that during the pandemic the USA ran covert anti-vax campaigns to discredit China and derail its 'vaccine diplomacy', which adversely affected the uptake of vaccines during the first Trump administration. This was particularly the case in the Philippines, where a Pentagon-directed social media campaign was used to sow doubts about the effectiveness of China's Sinovac vaccine and other forms of life-saving aid, from face masks to test kits. The *Star* goes on to quote Keith Bennett of Friends of Socialist China as saying, "The US accuses China, Russia and others of creating 'fake news' and spreading conspiracy theories, but again and again is revealed to be the worst culprit."¹³

While there is always plausibility about the nefarious actions of the US secret services, counterposing two conspiracy theories does not necessarily ensure the truth or a proper scientific understanding of

the history of the Covid pandemic. Understanding large-scale public health emergencies never results from just the history of the interaction of the causal organism with its hosts. Nor is it just about the actions of the state, however that is characterised. It is also about understanding the impact of a wider social context, such as the fondness of large numbers in China for wild animals, when it comes to prestige food.

The understanding of the history of disease and health entails a full scientific investigation of the factors involved. This can be seen from the black death of the 14th century, rooted in the development of world trade, to HIV/Aids, with its tragic history of imperialism, colonialism, African social dislocation, poverty and the international trade in blood products.

It is also not enough to take a world-historic event, such as a pandemic, and use it as an exercise in wishful thinking. For example, the World Socialist Web Site of the US Socialist Equality Party asserted that the pandemic is a 'trigger event', like the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, which led to World War I, and by implication the Russian Revolution.¹⁴ Of course, again, public health can have a world historical impact. For example, the development of malaria in the Roman empire was arguably a factor in the empire's decline - but one of only a number and not necessarily the most important.

Whilst few would disagree with the assertion that "the pandemic was not simply a medical issue, but primarily a political, social and economic crisis, arising from the broader world capitalist crisis", it is a bit of a stretch from that to assert that this is part of the beginning of the end for capitalism. Catastrophes like Covid-19 will exert a range of effects, as will climate change, future pandemics and the continued decline of capitalism. Undoubtedly, our duty as communists is to struggle for a more humane society, but that is not helped by using the latest disaster to build a sect.

Our task is to scientifically study the present in order to fully understand the decline of capitalism, which means using the evidence to inform the potential membership of a mass workers' party. That is as true of the history of a pandemic as it is of political economy ●

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RELIGION

Death of an absolute monarch

Pope Francis liked to parade his simple life, his identification with the poor and downtrodden. But, shows Jack Conrad, he turned a blind eye to mass killing and presided over a fabulously wealthy and thoroughly compromised institution

Predictably, Jorge Mario Bergoglio's death, announced on April 21 2025, witnessed an outpouring of official mourning, condolences and appreciation.

Giorgia Meloni, political heir of Benito Mussolini, described pope Francis as a "great man and a great shepherd". He called on the world to "seek the path of peace, pursue the common good and build a more just and equitable society. His teaching and his legacy will not be lost."

Donald Trump took to social media, saying: "Rest in Peace Pope Francis. May God Bless him and all who loved him." Sir Keir Starmer, a self-professed atheist, described Francis as courageous and praised his concern for "the poor, the downtrodden and the forgotten". Narendra Modi, Hindutva chauvinist, said that Francis would be remembered as a "beacon of compassion" and praised him for always looking out for the marginalised. For his part, Isaac Herzog, president of a genocidal Israel, touchingly called Francis a man of deep faith, who "rightly saw great importance in fostering strong ties with the Jewish world and in advancing interfaith dialogue". And so it goes on and on. No head of state, no prime minister wants to be left out of the unctuous dribblings and burlings.¹

Of course, it is not only the establishment: Bergoglio's countless statements of sympathy with the suffering of the "lowly, the poor and underprivileged", his call for the "rich and powerful" to repent, his condemnation of the "subtle dictatorship" of money that "enslaves men and women", found him (and not only on his death) gaining plaudits from sections of the left, including in this country.

Sections of left

Naturally, there is George Galloway, leader of the Workers Party of Britain and a self-declared devout Catholic. He boasted of the audience granted to himself and his wife by His Holiness. Crucially, for Galloway, there is Palestine: "No pope ever before was so engaged with the agony of the people of the Holy Land. Indeed his outstanding efforts for the Palestinians - in the teeth of trenchant hostility both within and without the Vatican - will be a lasting memory of his papacy."²

He is far from alone. John McDonnell sent condolences to his Catholic constituents and quoted the words of Francis on poverty as "inspiring to us all": "Poverty is a scandal. In a world where there's so much wealth, so many resources to feed everyone, it is unfathomable there are so many hungry children."³ Jeremy Corbyn too: "Pope Francis dedicated his life to the marginalised, displaced and dispossessed. A rare voice for humanity, he spent his final days on this earth calling for peace. Let his enduring legacy - of empathy, courage and kindness - inspire us to build a more humane world for all."⁴

Worse came in the form of an excruciating *Morning Star* feature article by Marc Vandepitte, a Belgium 'official communist' and all-round China apologist. With the death of Francis, the "world loses not only a church leader, but also a moral compass." Admittedly, he was no "revolutionary", on "micro-ethical issues" (!) he continued to adhere to church doctrine.



A papal cult still venerated by millions

What are these Vandepitte "micro-ethical issues"? We are not talking about whether or not Catholics should refrain from eating meat on Friday, or telling their children white lies about Father Christmas. No, what Vandepitte is referring to are little matters such as "abortion, homosexuality, contraception, gender". Still, no worries, "his tone was conciliatory, his style humane".

However, on "macro-ethical issues" such as war, climate and migration, Francis was "innovative". Indeed, his "criticism of capitalism was unprecedented for a pope". In short, Francis was a "voice of moral clarity in a time of great confusion and uncertainty".⁵

In fact, pleading for peace, condemning naked greed, expressing love for the poor - all constitute bog-standard Catholic themes. In a decaying Roman empire, during the period of high feudalism and with the rise of capitalism, the church preached that the rich had a moral duty to help out their poor brethren; indeed the church itself offered practical help in the form of alms, running schools and hospitals, and providing shelter for the old and infirm. Charity always walks one step behind class exploitation. It should be stressed, therefore, that pope Francis loved the poor only insofar as they remained passive. Primarily, he viewed them as a collection of souls waiting to be saved by the church. His stress lay on religiosity, not obtaining what might be called 'social justice'. So, he was one of those mildly reforming popes in the tradition of John XXIII (1958-63), who essentially relied on the rich and powerful seeing the light of god's truth and mending their wicked ways.

Jesuit

Born in 1936, pope Francis was the eldest of five children. His parents, Mario José Bergoglio and Regina María Sívori, were respectable and middle class and seem to have left Italy for political reasons in 1929 to settle in Argentina. Seemingly they had no liking for Mussolini's fascist regime.

Jorge Mario was bright, hard-working and did well at school. Once he overcame his initial shyness, he loved to tango too. Purportedly after dances nothing happened with the girls other than a chaste goodnight kiss.

Staunchly Catholic, he effortlessly gravitated towards the reactionary populist politics of Catholic Action - an organisation which combined a detestation of liberal capitalism with opposition to secularism and socialism. That meant leaflets, marches, meetings and promoting Catholic social values. He was a member for five years.

It was, though, when he was 21, after recovering from a life-threatening attack of pneumonia, that Bergoglio discovered his true vocation. He became a Jesuit novice in 1958 and took his final vows of chastity, poverty and obedience in 1973 and was duly ordained. Despite occasional setbacks, he progressed up the church's bureaucratic ladder. In 1992 he was appointed auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires. However, he was never in tune with the once modish 'liberation theology' and there was a "virtual estrangement from the Jesuits" till his election as pope.⁶

Note, during the 1960s the Jesuits - the largest Catholic male order - shifted their emphasis to working for the poor and what they called 'social justice'. Naturally, this was not to the liking of military dictatorships in Latin America... nor John Paul II, who, with the help of cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, imposed a 'white martyrdom' on priests and lay theologians alike. The Catholic church's religious orders were thoroughly purged of the liberation theology infection. Dissidents were silenced or expelled.

Bergoglio found himself on the front line of revolution and counterrevolution. Having once been - in the late 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century - amongst the richest five or 10 countries in the world, Argentina spiralled into relative decline. By the 1970s the country was gripped by economic crisis, hyperinflation and falling living standards. The military-civilian dictatorship of Arturo Illia collapsed in 1973 and Argentina's Bonaparte, Juan Perón, returned from his Spanish exile. He was elected president for the second time. When he died just a year later, in 1974, his wife, Isabel, replaced him as both the figurehead of the Peronist movement and as president.

However, class antagonisms intensified, there were general strikes and political turmoil. Rural and urban guerrilla organisations grew massively and for many, especially

the young, promised to bring about a social revolution. Some were Castroite, some Trotskyite, some left Peronist, some left Catholic.

Isabel Perón agreed to unleash the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance death squads against them... and anyone on the left. Egged on by Henry Kissinger, the 'dirty war' qualitatively intensified with the March 1976 military coup headed by Lieutenant General Jorge Videla. His junta's terroristic war of extermination saw between 20,000 and 30,000 killed or disappeared.

Bergoglio headed the Jesuit order in the country from 1973 to 1979 and was widely viewed as sympathising with Videla and his armed forces junta. He was even accused of involvement with the kidnapping of Orlando Yorio and Franz Jalics, two radical Jesuit priests. He certainly kept any doubts about the Videla junta, if he had them, strictly private. Naturally, he later pleaded that the Catholic church found itself in a "painful situation". Doubtless, true, but not as painful as it was for those who were arrested, executed, imprisoned, tortured or fled into exile.

In 2000 the Catholic church issued a public apology for its failure to take a stand against the Videla junta: "We want to confess before god everything we have done badly," Argentina's Episcopal Conference declared. The hierarchy - ie, Bergoglio - "closed its eyes" to the killing of its own priests... and some 20,000 to 30,000 others.⁷

Liberal reformer

Those who fondly imagine human liberation coming via the supposedly inexorable forward movement of science and technology will have problems explaining the outpouring of *genuine* mass grief that followed the April 21 Vatican announcement of the death of Francis. After all, here was an ailing, 88-year-old man, who ruled an institution with an entire history of heresy trials, torture, burnings, child abuse and anti-scientific obscurantism, which blesses, but still refuses to conduct, weddings for gay couples and which bars women from entering its priesthood as a matter of holy doctrine.

Francis was a liberal reformer, perhaps, but only when compared with his immediate two ultra-reactionary predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Even

then it was more about form of presentation, rather than substance. Rhetorically he knew how to play to, and please, the naive end of leftist public opinion.

Either way, how can such a man command such popular enthusiasm? One explanation lies in social psychology. People feel anxious, insecure and seek to shelter under the reassuring roof of religion. Laboratory experiments have shown that an increase in a subject's anxiety and insecurity "makes them say they are more religious".⁸ Likewise creating conditions where people feel they lack control strengthens their belief in a controlling god. In another study Kurt Gray demonstrates that people "invoke god as a moral agent" to explain negative events.⁹

Almost needless to say, capitalist development engenders precariousness, uncertainty and a tearing destruction of established relationships. For those who need to sell their labour-power to survive, the resulting anxiety goes way beyond the tyranny they daily experience in the workplace: they fear family break-up, they fear their children going off the rails, they fear joblessness, they fear homelessness, they fear being denied proper medical treatment, they fear nuclear war, they fear runaway global warming, etc. And, no surprise, since the 2024 election of Donald Trump, people consider themselves ever more insecure and vulnerable.

Being anxious, insecure and feeling that life lacks meaning is not confined to the masses. Even billionaire capitalists and members of the political elite find themselves victims of events which are beyond their control. Hence they too seek solace, stability, meaning and guidance in religion. Given the requirements of necessity, and the dominant tradition of pragmatism, especially pronounced in the Anglo-Saxon world, there is inconsistency and muddle. Naturally then, while members of the ruling class, and this or that state actor - eg, Tony Blair, Boris Johnson and JD Vance - claim to intellectually buy into the complex doctrines of the papal cult, they freely, wantonly, disregard what is personally inconvenient or politically inexpedient.

Ordinary Catholics demonstrably turn a deaf ear to the church, when it comes to their sexual lives. Priests, of course, then solemnly absolve the 'straying sheep' at confession. But the gulf separating theology and practice does not chart an inexorable line pointing to the eventual extinction of the Catholic church as an institution - the sort of atheistic wishful thinking argued for by the likes of Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett. There is an inbuilt doctrine-practice gulf. A moment's thought shows that it could not be otherwise. Neither god nor heaven exist. Religion is a system of *reversed* and *projected* reality.

The reactionary reformism of Francis is easy to dismiss: part 13th century dogma, part 21st century vogue. But that very dichotomy actually helps explain what is reassuring, what is attractive about the Catholic church, not least for generation Z, the 18-34 age group.¹⁰ Francis appeared to uphold values that were simultaneously timeless and contemporary. The flock are allowed to admit falling for all the modern temptations. But, given the inevitability of tragic events, the demoralising grind of daily life and

the emptying commercialisation of seemingly everything, the Catholic church becomes their rock - an ancient certainty that answers their present-day spiritual needs.

Feudalism

Since at least the 3rd century the Catholic church has claimed to be the living embodiment of the risen Jesus. Yet, though supposedly the depository of god's grace and truth, the church is in many ways the embodiment of exploitation and oppression. For centuries popes sold high offices with abandon, persecuted opponents, fathered numerous illegitimate offspring, ran brothels and amassed huge riches.

Of course, with the late 20th century, it is the public scandals about child sex abuse within the ranks of its clergy which is the cause of public outrage. A secular organisation would surely have been totally discredited and perhaps even forced to close down, if it admitted, or was shown to have engaged in, such systemic abuse (and a monumental cover-up). Not surprisingly, all of this goes unmentioned by Francis' numerous establishment friends and admirers. They see the Catholic church as a highly useful political ally, not a morally bankrupt feudal relic.

The Catholic church was, it hardly needs saying, the ideologue, clerk and co-ruler of feudal Europe. Indisputably, only the Catholic church had the ability to take the lead against external threats - either by conversion and incorporation (eg, the Normans) or by "diverting" the feudal appetite for war into crusades against the "heathen".¹¹ Indeed, the popes were the "organisers of the crusades, the Normans their champions".¹²

Besides monasticism, retreating from the world and "pure asceticism", the church was intimately bound up with "administering great wealth".¹³ Something like a third of all land was under the command of the church. Antonio Gramsci attributes this success and endurance of the Catholic church to the "fact" that it feels "very strongly the need for doctrinal unity of the whole mass of the faithful and strive[s] to ensure that the higher intellectual stratum does not get separated from the lower".¹⁴ He could have added, though, the formal imposition of celibacy upon the clergy.

This helped ensure unity by avoiding *legitimate* children and therefore dynastic temptations and the division of church property along the fragmenting lines of heredity. On top of that, every class under feudalism had an interest in sustaining the church - it served monarchs as intellectuals, promoted trade in towns and provided alms for the poor.

Being secular princes in Italy - the most advanced region in Europe, which also contained countless glorious reminders of antiquity - the popes happily sponsored the greatest artists and thinkers of the day. Hence the Renaissance and the reactionary-revolutionary humanism of the popes (humanism originally denoted not the non-divine; rather "studies which are 'humane' - worthy of the dignity of man").¹⁵

Popes, cardinals and bishops opposed the *rise* of capitalism. Political economy rooted the church in the past. However, that soil had become exhausted. After the last of the crusades the church sank deeper and deeper into corruption, absurdity and its own version of naked greed. Ecclesiastical posts, blessings and indulgences were sold on an ever larger scale. New relics and saints were discovered and extravagantly marketed. In effect the Catholic church became a machine for

enriching the papacy. Paradoxically, as the church grew richer, giving to the poor was increasingly begrudging and tight-fisted. Amongst those below, the church became an object of hatred and derision.

Epistemologically there was a natural antagonism between the church's doctrines and the needs of a rising capitalism. There certainly had to be a break with the church's scholasticism. In part that happened spontaneously. Advances in astronomy and navigation, the conquests in the Americas, the discovery of a sea route to, and unmediated trade and contact with, India, Indonesia, China and Japan - all created new mental horizons, which in turn thoroughly discredited the church amongst the educated classes.

The introduction of the printing press destroyed the church's virtual monopoly over knowledge. Lay thinkers quickly left the hidebound priests far behind and came to regard them as amongst the most ignorant sections of the population. Finally, in terms of destroying the church's intellectual ramparts, there was the heavy artillery of Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume and the French materialists. State administration increasingly passed from the church elite into the hands of bureaucrats who just happened to be members of the church. As an institution, the church became increasingly superfluous. Conditions were ripe for national schisms and the invention of Protestantism.

Yet, once capitalism had firmly established itself as the dominant mode of production, the Catholic church moved to adapt. It shifted its main source of revenue from indulgences and selling posts, feudal tithes and traditional monastic enterprises on to new foundations: capitalistically renting out real estate and income from investments in stocks and shares.

To the degree the Catholic church assisted in neutralising the working class danger, the legal system, the whole capitalist state apparatus, could be relied upon to defend its riches and privileged role in indoctrinating children in Catholic-run schools. That was the deal, the concordat, the social contract, the *quid pro quo*. Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum* marked a turning point. It was pro-capital, pro-private property, but also cynically claimed to be pro-labour. In Europe and Latin America the Catholic church sponsored Christian-democrat parties and trade unions, preached social justice and simultaneously became an institution within, of and for capitalism.

Right critics

Francis's criticisms of the excesses of capitalism resulted in a few annoyed responses and brought about a certain friction. Cardinal George Pell, the Australian traditionalist, wrote a notorious memo that circulated anonymously, calling Francis's pontification a "catastrophe".¹⁶ Hard-line Zionists in Israel hated him with a passion and, inevitably, accused him of anti-Semitism because, when it came to Gaza, he refused to turn a blind eye.¹⁷ Former Catholic Marjorie Taylor Green seemed to positively celebrate his death: "Evil is being defeated by the hand of god."¹⁸ However, papal sympathy for the poor, criticising unbridled greed and warnings about runaway global warming, it hardly needs saying, were intended to prop up, not undermine, the capitalist system.

Fundamentally an international organisation - it has national sections - the Catholic church, once stripped of its diminutive territorial dimension by Italian unification in 1870, has sought to stabilise the

capitalist global order by promoting a counterrevolutionary peace. That was the effective content of Francis's comment about Nato "barking at Russia's door".¹⁹ In that same spirit, and equally ineffectively, Benedict XV said more or less the same thing during the bloodbath of World War I.

Showing its moral worth, in the 1920s and 30s, Pius XI and the Catholic church shamefully stood aside as Mussolini and then Hitler imposed their fascist dictatorships. Just as Bergoglio did with Argentina's Videla junta. These regimes were seen as antidotes to the forces of communism and the revolutionary working class. Not that there was political indifference. The Catholic church actively backed Franco's "crusade for god and Spain": it then formed the "second pillar" of his state.²⁰

Bergoglio testified in two separate cases that he did not know what was going on with the AAA death squads. Obvious perjury, and to boot, a violation of the ninth commandment! Pius XII adopted a similar position in World War II. This too involved maintaining a criminal diplomatic silence. The Nazi extermination campaign was never condemned - though in 1943 Himmler's black tornado hit Rome itself.²¹

Seeing the French Revolution's emancipation of the Jews as a "tragic mistake", the papacy regarded their disenfranchisement by Nazi Germany and Vichy France as "a positive step forward".²² Meanwhile, showing where the loyalties of the church lay, Pius XII aggressively and relentlessly issued instructions against Stalin, the Soviet Union and 'official communism'. One of Pius XII's last pronouncements was a call, *Ad apostolorum principis*, which urged Catholics to resist the Maoist regime in China.

During the early 1960s John XXIII did advocate east-west détente - in the age of the nuclear bomb, that helped promote the rapid growth of Catholic-pacifist organisations like Pax Christi. Indeed there was a definite rapprochement with the Soviet bloc. Eg, making amends, bishops in Cuba announced it was no longer the duty of Catholics to pray for counterrevolution. They also came out with belated opposition to the hated US blockade and recommended guarded cooperation with the Castro regime.

If one thing concerns the Catholic church above all else, it is self-preservation. Certainly, as an institution which is acutely sensitive to history, possesses unequalled international connections and enjoys a truly global, 1.4 billion, popular following, the Catholic church has learnt how to manage the transition from one political order to another, even one socio-economic order to another. So, when the post-World War II balance of forces appeared to be tilting in the direction of bureaucratic socialism, the Catholic hierarchy adjusted accordingly. As it turned out, an error of judgment.

By the early 1970s, bureaucratic socialism had lost much of the dynamism it once possessed. There were unmistakable signs of decomposition for those who could see. Bureaucratic socialism proved to be not a mode of reproduction, but a dead end. Karol Józef Wojtyła had an insider's view of the whole process and wanted no more to do with accords and compromises. Indeed, as John Paul II he swung the whole weight of the Vatican machine behind the revived cold war policies of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. 'Human rights' was the 'roll back' mantra of both presidents. Naturally then, John Paul II presented himself as an indefatigable defender of 'human rights' too. A claim which should not be taken at face value.

Though no Nazi sympathiser, John Paul II desperately wanted to draw a sanitising veil over the disgraceful role played by the Catholic church in the 1920s and 30s. Eg, he took the lead in moves towards canonising José María Ecrivá, the pro-fascist reactionary who in 1928 founded Opus Dei. His own fast track to sainthood was, of course, in part, a posthumous reward for his role in ending the 'evil empire'. That is what he will most be remembered for by the ruling classes.²³ And there can be no denying it: John Paul II - now patron saint of Poland, World Youth Day, young Catholics, and families - did play a lead part in defeating bureaucratic socialism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. As detailed by Carl Bernstein, he negotiated and agreed a "secret alliance" with the Reagan administration and through priests and other agents helped channel \$50 million of CIA funds into the coffers of Solidarność.²⁴

Without the Catholic church perhaps things might have taken slightly longer. But not by much. Even under Stalin himself, a section of the bureaucracy hankered after capitalism - not only as a socio-economic regulator, but as a means to put politically obtained privileges onto reassuringly solid legal foundations as private property. So it is facile to credit John Paul II as being responsible for the 'fall of communism' - any more than Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher. The unviability of these regimes made collapse inevitable.

Services rendered

Despite using the pulpit to promote so-called bourgeois democracy in eastern Europe, it should never be thought that the Catholic church practises what it preaches. Leonardo Boff - the Brazilian liberation theologian - calls it a "spiritualist absolute monarchy".²⁵ Indeed the Catholic church was consciously constructed in imitation of the Byzantine empire. Till the 15th century popes claimed, on the basis of a crudely forged imperial document, *Donation of Constantine*, to be the direct source of spiritual and temporal power. The Catholic church remains in many ways unaltered - St Augustine still exercises a powerful ideological influence. As recommended by him, it aspires to an alliance between *civitas dei* and *civitas terrena*: in other words the 'city of god' and the dominant conservative states. Paul is quoted in scriptural justification: "... there is no authority except from god, and those that exist have been instituted by god. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what god has appointed".²⁶

Prior to Italian unification in 1870 the bishop of Rome was an earthly prince with all that that entailed: not only territories and glorious buildings, paintings and music, but prisons, torture chambers, garrisons of mercenaries, and wars. However, papal authority has always been primarily ideological - in religious terms its unique relationship to the kingdom of heaven. The pope is officially described as the "vicar of Christ" on earth.²⁷ A notorious vote by Vatican I in 1870 - obviously a low point in terms of papal self-confidence - decided that the pope could issue infallible pronouncements. An extraordinary doctrine, which still stands, though it is rarely, if ever, invoked nowadays.

Like feudal monarchs, popes surround themselves with obsequious advisors. There is no legislature in any meaningful sense. The general council, the college of cardinals and the synod of bishops are not sovereign bodies. The general council is first and foremost

the pope's way of constituting an "extraordinary governance".²⁸ He sets and controls its agenda and conclusions. As he does with the synod of bishops. The college of cardinals has the most power - it does, after all, elect the pope. Yet every one of them is a papal appointee!

So an incumbent pope, at the very least, strongly influences who will succeed him. If he lives long enough, it amounts to self-perpetuation. Francis picked 80% of the cardinals who will chose his successor.²⁹ The pope also appoints the bishops - paradoxically, because of democracy and the looser ties between church and state, this ancient rule has nowadays, in general, been normalised (feudal kings, absolute monarchs and fascist, military and Stalinist dictators thought that such appointments should be within their remit).

Bishops rule over their own particular diocese. Each is a little pope. Every five years they report back to their master in Rome. Besides these national bishops, the pope has available to him parallel organisations. Eg, the Franciscan, Benedictine and Dominican and other monastic orders, the Jesuits, and mixed bodies such as Opus Dei. As to the Vatican's vast web of trusts and business fronts, they are run by the pope, using a wide body of specialists within the papal curia.

There can be no doubt, by the way, that the Vatican is fabulously wealthy. In terms of property alone, one estimate gives it a net worth of \$316 billion in "visible titles" and around another \$2,623 billion in "hidden" assets. Of course, no-one really knows - there are no published accounts ●

Notes

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24. *Time* February 24 1992.
25. leonardoboff.org/2012/09/23/the-origin-of-the-popes-monarchic-absolute-power.
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LAW

Case of judicial usurpation

The Supreme Court decision on the legal definition of 'woman' poses more questions than it answers, but there can be no doubt that it marks a huge victory for the Tory Party and the rightwing media, says **Mike Macnair**

My Online Communist Forum talk is titled 'Usurping the legislative power in the interests of Tory Party and Tory press campaigning', and its subtitle was the name of the case: *For Women Scotland Ltd v the Scottish Ministers*. I have to apologise at the outset because some of this is going to be slightly technical law.

I start in perhaps a slightly surprising place in the 1970s and the Centre Point tower block, near Tottenham Court Road station, which was put up in the 1960s and consisted at the time mainly of office space, but with some maisonettes. It was left vacant, because that gave a saving on the rates, while the developer could speculate on the expected rise in the property values. In consequence, in January 1974 it was squatted by homelessness campaigners - being property intentionally left vacant in the context of the London housing crisis, a crisis which has got significantly worse since the 1970s.¹

Camden London Borough Council then attempted to compulsorily-purchase the luxury maisonettes in Centre Point for the purpose of using them to house the homeless under statutory powers that it had for this purpose. This proposal, naturally enough, attracted a Tory press campaign: the council was 'wasting money' on the homeless by trying to expropriate luxury properties to house them.²

The owners sued to invalidate this compulsory purchase, in the case of *Sovmots Investments v Secretary of State for the Environment*; and Forbes J, the judge at first instance, agreed with them (July 16 1975), on the ground that the local authority had no power to compulsorily-purchase rights that did not previously exist, but which were needed for the maisonettes to be habitable: the 'easements', rights of access for water, sewage, electricity and so on. The Court of Appeal (July 9 1976) perfectly sensibly reversed this, and decided that it is legally permissible for local authorities to compulsorily-purchase flats or maisonettes that are above ground level; and hence, by necessary implication, they must have the power to acquire the easements.³

This decision in the Court of Appeal was politically embarrassing to the Conservative Party, and the House of Lords (April 28 1977) reversed it. The ground of decision was that the local authority does not have the power to compulsorily-purchase the easements. Nor could the easements be "implied in" to the deed of conveyance of the maisonettes under common law (because the conveyance was not voluntary), or under section 62 of the Law of Property Act 1925, which implies various rights into conveyances, because there were no pre-existing easements.⁴ Therefore the Conservative press campaign was right: Camden Council was wasting money trying to compulsorily purchase the maisonettes. Success for the Conservative Party.

The decision was, however, violently inconvenient. It was sufficiently so that the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher reversed by statute the core decision, that new easements cannot be compulsorily purchased. By Part V and schedule 3 of the Acquisition of Land Act 1981, the local authority gets a clear statutory power to compulsorily acquire new easements



Full Supreme Court line-up

for property where needed.

The *Sovmots* rules about implied easements more generally have become controversial, and in *Platt v Crouch* in 2003, *Kent v Kavanagh* in 2006 and *Wood v Waddington* in 2015 the Court of Appeal offers divergent views about them.⁵ *Kent v Kavanagh* follows *Sovmots*; *Platt v Crouch* and *Wood v Waddington* do not. Now, normally in legal precedent, House of Lords decisions bind the Court of Appeal, so that *Kent* should be right and *Platt* and *Wood* wrong. But in practice *Sovmots* is not treated as authoritative (it is not even cited in *Platt* and *Wood*). The underlying reality, that lawyers cannot say openly, is that *Sovmots* cannot really be treated as an authoritative precedent, because it was simply a decision with a view to avoiding political embarrassment to the Conservative Party.

For Women v Scottish Ministers, in my opinion, is the same as *Sovmots*: a decision in which legal reasoning is subordinated to the political interests of the Conservative Party.

UKSC

The UKSC decision reverses the decision below of the Inner House of the Court of Session (the Scottish equivalent of the English Court of Appeal). In this case (unlike *Sovmots*), the Inner House had upheld the decision at first instance of the Lord Ordinary. So the UKSC decision presents a narrow majority: five judges in UKSC overruling four, the Lord Ordinary plus three judges in the Inner House.⁶

The disputed issue is much narrower than the UKSC makes it. By section 1 (1) of the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018, "The 'gender representation objective' for a public board is that it has 50% of non-executive members who are women."⁷ This is, clearly enough, part of the usual managerialist project of the proportional 'representation' of oppressed groups in elite institutions.⁸

The Scottish government's project (following Theresa May) of gender recognition on the basis of self-identification having previously been defeated by the Tory government and in court, Scottish ministers have still issued guidance on this section:

There is no definition of 'woman' set out in the Act with effect from 19 April 2022 following decisions of the Court of 18 February and 22 March 2022.

Therefore 'woman' in the Act has the meaning under section 11 and section 212(1) of the Equality Act 2010. In addition, in terms of section 9(1) of the Gender Recognition Act 2004, where a full gender recognition certificate has been issued to a person that their acquired gender is female, the person's sex is that of a woman, and where a full gender recognition certificate has been issued to a person that their acquired gender is male, the person's sex becomes that of a man.

The narrow question is: is this guidance, for the purposes of a 50% women rule for quangos, legally valid?

This issue is *not* about gender self-identification - the original kick-off for the British side of this debate. To have a full gender recognition certificate under the 2004 act, the holder has to have been issued an official certificate, on the basis that the applicant (a) has or has had gender dysphoria, (b) has lived in the "acquired gender" for two years immediately prior to applying, (c) intends to live in that gender until death, and (d) has provided medical evidence of gender dysphoria and a statutory declaration in relation to their marriage status. This is a much narrower group than trans people generally, and *mostly* consists of people who have had surgery and are continuing hormone treatment. Indeed, the reason for the original self-identification gender-recognition proposals was that Theresa May - and, at that time, a majority - recognised that it was *too* difficult to get a certificate under the 2004 act.

The decision in the Court of Session, in essence, is that the way in which the Gender Recognition Act 2004 is drafted means that reference to sex *cannot* mean simply a reference to biological determination. Thus, for example, at paragraph 37:

The legislation achieved that change in strong, clear and unequivocal terms in section 9(1)

by providing that, where a certificate has been issued, the person's gender becomes "for all purposes" the acquired gender, so that, if the acquired gender is the male gender, "the person's sex becomes that of a man" and, if it is the female gender, "the person's sex becomes that of a woman". It could hardly be more clearly stated that in this connection there is no distinction between sex and gender, and that reference to sex within the GRA is not a reference to biological determinants. This is not surprising, given that, as the court noted in Fair Play for Women, there is generally no default meaning of sex or gender, and the terms are frequently used interchangeably ...

Rather, the word 'woman', in the Gender Recognition Act 2004 and the Equalities Act 2010 read together, has different meanings, depending on the particular context: so that trans women can be women for some purposes, and at the same time not be women for other purposes. Those different purposes essentially reflect the judgments that were made by parliament in 2004 and 2010. This point is an important point. Parliament, having said in the GRA that where there is a gender recognition certificate, the person's sex is taken to be that of the acquired sex, then produces a series of specific carve-outs in relation to, for example, service in the armed forces, prison, and so on.

Now, we may well disagree with the choices that were actually made in parliament in relation to either the primary rule or the carve-outs. But these are choices that were made *by parliament in the legislation* on the basis of extensive discussion, and so on. It is not the job of the courts to substitute their choices for those of parliament. Hence, the Court of Session's judgment seems to be that of a court attempting to loyally apply statute law.

Two sexes

Turning to the UKSC, in paragraph [265], which is not the final paragraph, the judges say, "We are aware that this is a long judgment ..." It is indeed: 88 pages in pdf. The sheer length of the judgment buries all the argument on the core question

in a mass of narrative history and textbook-style writing, whose purpose is merely *rhetorical* support of their conclusion.

What, then, are the central operative points in this long judgment? First, the word 'woman' has to have one meaning throughout the statute and cannot have different meanings for different purposes (having regard to the carve-outs, and so on). Secondly, that meaning is biological sex. And thirdly, there are only two sexes. These operative arguments are *framed* by claims at the beginning of the judgment about the interpretation of statutes, which amount to a claim of judicial supremacy over parliament, and argument at the end of the judgment in which the court is, in my opinion, using reasoning that is only appropriate to a legislator, and which would be appropriate reasoning in a discussion in parliament, but is not appropriate reasoning for a discussion in court.

To start with the first operative point that there is only one meaning, the justification is offered at paragraphs 12-13:

12. As Lord Hope DPSC stated in *Imperial Tobacco Ltd v Lord Advocate* [2012] UKSC 61; 2013 SC (UKSC) 153, at para 14, "The best way of ensuring that a coherent, stable and workable outcome is achieved is to adopt an approach to the meaning of a statute that is constant and predictable. This will be achieved if the legislation is construed according to the ordinary meaning of the words used."

13. The presumption that a word has the same meaning throughout the Act when used more than once in the same statute is consistent with this principle: see *Bennion, Bailey and Norbury on statutory interpretation*, 8th ed (2020) para 21.3. That presumption is based on the idea that the drafters of the statute were seeking to create a coherent statutory text.

Whenever judges claim that they are relying on the ordinary meaning or the ordinary natural meaning of words, we should assume that they are about to make an arbitrary decision. Here they are about to reverse the judgment of four judges below. So

the meaning of the word is precisely not 'ordinary', but 'controversial'. In reality, predictable outcomes are more likely to be achieved by *purposive* interpretation than by alleged 'ordinary meanings'.⁹

Secondly, this meaning is to be biological. A series of separate paragraphs contain the spin (it cannot really be called an argument). For example:

158. There is no provision in the EA 2010 that expressly addresses the effect (if any) which section 9(1) of the GRA 2004 has on the definition of 'sex' or the words, 'woman' or 'man' (and cognate expressions), used in the EA 2010. The terms, 'biological sex' and 'certificated sex', do not appear anywhere in the Act. However, the mere fact that the word 'biological' is absent from the EA 2010 definition of 'sex' is not by itself indicative of Parliament's intention that a 'certificated sex' meaning is intended. The same is true of the absence of the word 'certificated' in the definition of 'sex'.

171. The definition of sex in the EA 2010 makes clear that the concept of sex is binary: a person is either a woman or a man. Persons who share that protected characteristic for the purposes of the group-based rights and protections are persons of the same sex, and provisions that refer to protection for women necessarily exclude men. Although the word 'biological' does not appear in this definition, the ordinary meaning of those plain and unambiguous words corresponds with the biological characteristics that make an individual a man or a woman. These are assumed to be self-explanatory and to require no further explanation. Men and women are on the face of the definition only differentiated as a grouping by the biology they share with their group.

Thirdly, there are only two sexes. That is already there in these quotations, but is also reaffirmed at para [97]: "legislation across the statute book assumes that all individuals can be categorised as belonging to one of two sexes or genders and those terms have been used interchangeably".

I add that "only two sexes" seems to be absolutely fundamental to the argument in the UKSC. The court is legislating a Christian-fundamentalist view of Genesis 1, 27: "male and female created he them". Intersex people, it appears, do not exist. For this purpose it is quite irrelevant whether they are 1.7% of population (A Fausto-Sterling and UNHCR) or 0.018% (L Sax and K Stock): they *exist* and the biological claim for *rigorous* binarism is thus false (I point out that Roma are 0.0013% of world population). The claim that the UKSC decision is a victory for 'common sense' is thus analogous, if on a much smaller scale, to the claim of the early Christian writer, Lactantius (c250-c320 CE), that the flat-earthism he detected in the *Bible* was more common sense than the implausible speculations of the pre-Christian philosophers that the earth might be round.

Interpretation

The three core claims, then, concern only one meaning; that meaning is biological; and only two sexes. Backing up these claims are arguments about how courts 'interpret' acts of parliament. 'Interpret' in quote marks, because this is some way from what one would ordinarily call interpretation.

Firstly, the court says at paragraph [81] that they will not use the explanatory notes published

with the GRA 2004, and at paragraph [104] that these notes are simply wrong. This has provoked a sharp criticism from Melanie Field, the former official concerned in drafting the Equality Act 2010.¹⁰ The explanatory notes in the GRA do say that the legal sex of a person who has a full gender recognition certificate is changed. They were published with the bill and formed part of the reasons MPs voted to pass it.

If the explanatory notes had said the legal sex of the person who has a full gender recognition certificate will not be changed, but there will be a new 'third category', or whatever, it is unlikely that the legislation in that form would have passed parliament. This is partly because the *point* of the 2004 act was to avoid the UK having to repeatedly pay out damages to trans men and trans women in the Strasbourg European Court of Human Rights, because the ECHR had held that UK law denying recognition to sex changes was a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. The refusal to use the explanatory notes here is strikingly artificial reasoning. Again, we do not have to *agree* (whichever way) with what parliament decided in 2004, or with the prior decisions of the ECHR. The point is that the refusal to use the explanatory notes signals that the UKSC is not seeking the intention of parliament, but to oppose this intention.

Secondly, at paragraph [9] the court (adopting a statement in an earlier case) says: "... Statutory interpretation involves an objective assessment of the meaning which a reasonable legislature as a body would be seeking to convey in using the statutory words which are being considered ..." Not an objective assessment of the meaning, which parliament actually sought to convey, but an objective assessment of the meaning that "a reasonable legislature ... would be seeking to convey in using the statutory words".

What does a *reasonable legislature* mean? Back in 1955 Lord Radcliffe in *Davis v Fareham UDC* - a case about contract terms and unexpected circumstances that change the effect of the contract from what the parties originally intended - offered an explanation of the "reasonable man":

... it might seem that the parties themselves have become so far disembodied spirits that their actual persons should be allowed to rest in peace. In their place there rises the figure of the fair and reasonable man. And the spokesman of the fair and reasonable man, who represents after all no more than the anthropomorphic conception of justice, is, and must be, the court itself¹¹

The 'reasonable man', then, means simply what the court thinks is reasonable. So if we interpret acts of parliament on the basis of what a reasonable legislature is taken to have intended, it means merely on the basis of what the current members of the court think is reasonable.

This takes us back to a relationship between the courts and parliament before the revolution of 1688. Back, indeed, to *Doctor Bonham's case* in 1610, and Sir Edward Coke's claim in his report of that case that "in many cases, the common law will controul Acts of Parliament, and sometimes adjudge them to be utterly void: for when an Act of Parliament is against common right and reason, or repugnant, or impossible to be performed, the common law will controul it, and adjudge such Act to be void".¹² That is, where an act of parliament is impossible or *logically incoherent* (taking us back

to the "coherent statutory text" in paragraph [13] to require a single meaning of the word in all contexts), the judges can ignore it.

Doctor Bonham's Case is not the last example. *Godden v Hales* in 1686 was a collusive test case, in which a friend of the government prosecuted the Catholic Hales for failing to swear a test oath against Roman Catholics holding (among other offices) military commands. He pleaded that King James II had given him a dispensation under the royal prerogative from the obligation to swear the test oath. Like Coke's claim in *Bonham's case*, the court decides for Hales on the basis of impossibility. Powys, the solicitor general, arguing for the defendant, said: "This Act would entrench upon an inseparable branch of the King's prerogative, which no Act can take away." Lord Chief Justice Herbert, giving the judgment of the court, stated "that the King had a power to dispense with any of the laws of Government as he saw necessity for it; that he was sole judge of that necessity; that no Act of Parliament could take away that power; that this was such a law".¹³ It is again an example of something that is against common right and reason being repugnant or impossible to be performed.

Now, what happened after *Godden v Hales* is that King Billy came over with the Dutch fleet and army, and King James was chased out of the country, and the entire senior judiciary were arrested and jailed, except the ones who fled to France along with King James. And the Bill of Rights 1689 ruled against *Godden v Hales*: "That the pretended power of dispensing with laws, or the execution of laws by regal authority, as it hath been assumed and exercised of late, is illegal".

So my point is that the nature of the reasoning that the Supreme Court adopts, in order to get in terms of statutory interpretation to its conclusion, is essentially the same sort of reasoning as the reasoning in *Doctor Bonham's case* and in *Godden v Hales*. It is a usurpation of the legislative power.

Legislators

Towards the end of the judgment, the judges are writing like legislators. Two examples of this. The first is that they cite in Section 19, which is also the (long) paragraph [247], the Equalities and Human Rights Commission recognition of problems in their interpretation of sex as certificated sex - that is to say, actually, when the Conservative government leaned on the EHRC to produce an ambiguous report on the issue, which government and the Tory press interpreted as demanding a 'biological definition'. The EHRC openly said that dealing with the problems they identified needed new legislation. The use of the EHRC report is, then, the UKSC acting as if it was parliament. But, because it is a court, it does so without hearing all sides of the argument, or the level of opportunity for consideration of details and difficulties that happens in passing acts of parliament.

Secondly, the court says that it is unnecessary to adopt the interpretation of the Court of Session, because without adopting that interpretation trans people are still protected from discrimination in other ways. For example, the Equality Act protects from discrimination people who are *thought to be gay* but are not: if they are discriminated against because they are believed to be gay, that can nonetheless be discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. So, therefore, trans women can be protected from being discriminated against because they are believed to be women, although they are not. The discussion in section 20, paras [248]-[263], is

elaborate. Again, this is reasoning that would be entirely appropriate for parliamentary discussion, but is not appropriate for what purports to be *judicial* discussion of the particular use of words in the relationship between the Equality Act and the GRA.

The rational course of action, and the one which displayed loyal subordination of the courts to parliament, would have been for the Court of Session ruling to be upheld. That is to say, trans women are women for some purposes. Certainly post-operative trans women are women for the purposes of being discriminated against as women. They are not women for the purpose of becoming pregnant - but then, there is a much larger class (around 15%) of women who are infertile. And indeed, the court *admits* that trans women are women for the purpose of being discriminated against as women, in so far as it wants to give them protection from being discriminated against as women on the basis that they are believed to be women, although they are not.

Trans women are women for some purposes, not for others (for example, much less likely to get breast cancer). Trans men are men for some purposes, not for others (for example, much less likely to get prostate cancer). The basic shape of the decision of the Court of Session was thus broadly sound. But if the UKSC had upheld it, it would have been politically embarrassing to the Tory media and the Tory Party.

To prevent this embarrassment, we get an extremely artificial piece of reasoning on the part of the UKSC. The case is thus like *Sovmots*, though we are too close to it for its character as *per incuriam* to be as obvious as *Sovmots*. It also involves UKSC asserting a judicial right to overrule statute by way of "interpretation" - which depends on reasoning of a sort that was condemned in the Bill of Rights 1689.

As communists we fight for political democracy. That includes fighting against the overweening claims of the judicial power. The UKSC decision in *For Women Scotland Ltd v Scottish Ministers* is exactly an example of why the workers' movement should oppose undue trust in judges.

Useful idiots

The responses of the left, however, display 'useful idiots' of different sorts. One sort is the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and its Young Communist League, who have issued a statement welcoming the UKSC decision.¹⁴ "This materialist outcome", they say, "corroborates our view that 'sex' must mean biological sex for the purposes of the Act and any other interpretations would negate its single-sex statutory protections." What about intersex people? But equally, do you really believe that post-operative trans women ought to be placed in men's prisons, or that post-operative trans women ought to be forced to use men's public toilets? Or, indeed, are you for a climate where, as we have in the US, we see butch lesbians getting arrested for using women's toilets?¹⁵ Useful to *the Conservative Party*, because they are defending what is in essence a judicial action to promote Conservative Party and rightwing media electoral campaigning.

It is, of course, true, as the CPB/YCL statement says, that the present dispute is not the product of "transphobia". It is worse than that. It is the product of an entirely cynical, dishonest manoeuvre that was originated by political operatives around the US Republican Party in 2017-18,

to target trans people on the basis that they are a vulnerable minority who can be targeted as a way of performing a dog-whistle campaign. And this dog-whistle campaign is not, in fact, in favour of feminism. It is actually in favour of separate-spaces conservative (small c) gender politics, and the restriction of women to *Kinder, Kirche, Küche*. The political operators who launched the campaign to take up 'gender-critical' politics beyond its narrow original context are also promoting 'trad-wives' and 'surrendered women'. The pretence that trans people, who are an extremely small minority, are a serious threat to women is merely a cover for promoting *real* threats to women. For example, the Trump administration, which has been very vigorous in promoting 'anti-gender' politics, also pressed for Andrew Tate, although on bail for alleged sexual assaults, to be allowed to visit the United States.

On the other side of this coin, *also* useful idiots are those on the left who merely tail the dominant politics of trans activists and the slogan, 'Trans women are women'. As I have just said, not for all purposes - particularly in relation to medical treatment. Because of tailing the single-issue activists, all that Anti-Capitalist Resistance, RS21 and Workers Power do in their responses to the UKSC decision¹⁶ is to line up behind the model of accepting the gender binary and demanding state recognition for the transition.

This is a line *designed* for the Clintonista/Democratic Leadership Council model of the coalition of the minorities with Wall Street through intersectionality. And the result of that, as we saw in 2016: vote Clinton, get Trump; and as we saw last year: vote Harris, get Trump. You actually get the opposite of what you are seeking, and the inability of the tailist left to offer an alternative to that politics is fundamentally a real trap ●

This article is based on Mike Macnair's talk to the April 20 Online Communist Forum which can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsL00357zkU

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Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/17/centre-point-occupation-housing-homelessness-1974-anniversary.
2. A side aspect of this Tory view can be seen at hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1976-05-07/debates/204a4b82-b7d9-4949-ad38-b8281409bd95/RequisitioningOfEmptyPropertiesBill.
3. Both Forbes J and CA are reported at [1977] QB 411.
4. [1979] AC 144.
5. *Platt v Crouch* [2003] EWCA Civ 1110; *Kent v Kavanagh* [2006] EWCA Civ 162; *Wood v Waddington* [2015] EWCA Civ 538.
6. Court of Session: [2023] CSIH 37. UKSC: [2025] UKSC 16.
7. 'Public boards' means various quangos.
8. The general context of such schemes is discussed by W Benn Michaels *The trouble with diversity* New York, NY 2007.
9. The point is well argued by RA Posner in *The problems of jurisprudence* Cambridge MA 2003: the meanings of words derive from the contexts of their use. See also W Murphy and R Rawlings, 'After the ancien regime: the writing of judgments in the House of Lords 1979/1980' *Modern Law Review* Vol 44 (1981), pp617-57, and Vol 45 (1982) pp34-61.
10. www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/18/ruling-on-woman-definition-at-odds-with-uk-equality-acts-aim-says-ex-civil-servant.
11. [1956] AC 696, pp728-29.
12. (1610) 8 Co Rep 113b, 118a.
13. Comb 11, at p23 (Powys); 2 Shower KB 475, at p478 (Herbert).
14. morningstaronline.co.uk/article/communist-party-and-young-communist-league-welcome-supreme-court-ruling-definition (April 18).
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MIDDLE EAST

Netanyahu is rebuffed

Israel wants Iran attacked, degraded and broken. But the latest US-Iran talks make it clear who is in charge, argues **Yassamine Mather**

Iran and the United States have both reported progress in their second round of indirect nuclear negotiations. Talks are described as “constructive” and it has been confirmed that a third round will occur on April 26 in Oman. Technical experts will meet in the days leading up to that, indicating momentum in the discussions.

The latest talks were held in Rome, with Iranian and US delegations in separate rooms, as Omani officials mediated. Iran’s foreign minister Abbas Araghchi said that this time “we managed to reach a better understanding of a series of principles and goals.”

Even if these negotiations fail, the very fact that they took place must be disconcerting for Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel sees Iran as a regional rival and it certainly wants to retain its monopoly on nuclear weapons in the Middle East. That is why Netanyahu wants war-war, not jaw-jaw.

However, *The New York Times* reported that Donald Trump rebuffed Israeli proposals for a coordinated military campaign against Iranian nuclear facilities next month, favouring diplomatic engagement over military escalation.¹ According to the report, Israeli officials had developed plans - discussed with their US counterparts - for a May operation. This was contingent on American support, but internal divisions within the Trump administration ultimately led to their rejection.

Sources familiar with the proposed strikes indicated that the operation aimed to degrade Iran’s nuclear breakout capacity by at least a year. However, after months of deliberation, senior US officials reportedly reached a consensus against Israeli military action, especially after Tehran signalled that it is open to negotiations.

When Netanyahu called Trump on April 3 to discuss the situation with Iran, the US president avoided addressing operational plans and instead invited Netanyahu to Washington. During their Oval Office meeting on April 7 Trump announced the initiation of direct talks with Iran, which, in fact, commenced on April 12.

Briefed

According to officials briefed on Israel’s strategy, the proposed strikes would have required critical US involvement, both in executing the attacks and mitigating Iranian retaliation. The head of the US Central Command, general Michael E Kurilla, and national security advisor Mike Waltz reportedly engaged with Israeli officials on potential US support, leading some in Jerusalem to believe Washington might approve of the operation.

Initial plans reportedly included a joint aerial campaign supplemented by Israeli commando raids on underground nuclear sites, backed by US air cover. However, logistical complexities necessitated a streamlined approach, shifting focus to a large-scale bombing campaign. The operation would have first neutralised remaining Iranian air defences - partially degraded by Israeli strikes in 2024 - before targeting nuclear facilities directly, and probably triggering retaliatory missile strikes requiring US defensive support.



He came with war plans, only to be told of talks plan

During Netanyahu’s April 7 visit - ostensibly centred on trade issues - Trump publicly diverged from Israel’s stance, announcing nuclear talks with Iran. Privately, he reportedly made clear that the US would not back an Israeli strike, while negotiations were underway.

Former Trump advisor Steve Bannon commented last week that Netanyahu had “forced his way” into two meetings with the US president and accused him of “arrogance” in trying to “force the issue”. The Israeli prime minister has been to Washington twice since Trump’s inauguration in January in a bid to lobby the White House into supporting a strike against Iran. Bannon stated: “*The New York Times* story plays into the ‘tail wagging the dog’. You’re not going to wag Trump. He could not be clearer.” This ‘tail wagging the dog’ idea is based on the claim that Israel, and the Israel lobby in the US are so strong, exercises so much influence, that presidents are forced to act against the objective interests of America and instead serve Israel. And, in fact, what the *New York Times* story conclusively shows it that the tail does not wag the dog. Whether or not the dog wags the tail is another matter ... Israel is reliant, but self-willed.

Following his visit to the White House, Netanyahu stated in a Hebrew video message that he and Trump both agreed that Iran must never be able to obtain nuclear weapons. He emphasised that this could only be ensured through a deal that not just restricts, but completely dismantles Iran’s nuclear capabilities.

Netanyahu argued that a diplomatic solution would only work if it mirrored Libya’s 2003 nuclear disarmament, where US forces dismantled or removed all components of the country’s nuclear

programme: “We enter, destroy the facilities, and take apart all the equipment - under US oversight and execution. That’s the right approach.” However, he warned that, if diplomacy fails and Iran prolongs negotiations, “then the only remaining option is military action. Everyone knows this.” He claimed that he and Trump had extensively discussed this possibility.

Key ally

According to reports, the Oval Office meeting was tense, particularly regarding Iran. A US official said: “Trump and Netanyahu have very different views on a potential military strike against Iran ... The president seemed to enjoy pushing back on him about Iran. Their private discussion mirrored their public dynamic.”

Nevertheless, do not expect any reduction in US political, military and economic support for its key Middle Eastern ally, Israel - which is America’s unsinkable aircraft carrier in the region. Trump will support Israel the way he chooses, with US long-term interests in mind, as opposed to doing what the current Zionist government tells him.

In the last few months as the threat of war against Iran has become more serious, some Iranians, both inside and outside Iran, including some claiming to be on the left, have repeated the notion that US foreign policy is directed entirely by the Israeli lobby. In making such allegations they cite authorities such as John J Mearsheimer, the Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago. His initial article pushing the ‘tail wags the dog’ idea, which first appeared in the *London Review of Books*, provoked strong reactions - both criticism and praise.²

This was followed by a book authored jointly with Stephen M Walt, *The Israel lobby and US foreign policy*, where they expanded upon the original argument, incorporating developments in Lebanon and Iran.³ They examined the extraordinary level of US material and diplomatic support for Israel and argued that this cannot be fully justified by either strategic interests or moral values. Instead, they attribute it largely to the influence of a broad, informal network of individuals and organisations working to steer US foreign policy in favour of Israel. In other words the Israel lobby.

The authors claim that the lobby’s influence extends widely across the US Policy in the Middle East - including in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - often does not align with either America’s national interest or Israel’s long-term wellbeing. They also suggest that this influence wielded by the lobby complicates the US relationship with other allies and heightens global risks, including those posed by “jihadist terrorism”.

Michael Massing, writing in *The New York Review*, noted that the original article had an impact comparable to Samuel Huntington’s ‘The clash of civilizations?’ published by *Foreign Affairs* way back in 1993.⁴ However, critics like Walter Russell Mead argued that the authors’ “realist” perspective, which typically downplays domestic influences on foreign policy, is inconsistent with their emphasis on the lobby’s domestic political power. Others, including Noam Chomsky, contended that Mearsheimer and Walt overstated the lobby’s influence and neglected other factors shaping US Middle East policy, such as its own strategic and economic interests.

In reality, it is clear that the notion that it was the Israeli lobby which

played a key role in US policy - even regarding the war in Iraq - is doubtful, to say the least. At the time Israel was in favour of a war against Iran and the Israeli lobby was expressing concerns that the coming to power of a Shia government in Baghdad would strengthen the position of Iran’s Islamic Republic. However, irrespective of all this, the current position of the Trump administration and the obvious disappointment of Netanyahu with the continuation of the bilateral nuclear talks between the United States and Iran makes a mockery of such claims.

Racism

Yes, inevitably, some go further and make stupid and deeply reactionary comments about the power of “Jewish capital”. Of course, such arguments edge towards anti-Semitism and only harm the Palestinians, who in their just struggle for an independent homeland have mostly avoided anti-Semitism.

In Iran, historically, we have witnessed elements of racism among sections of the population towards Arabs. This is related to Iranian nationalism, tracing back to the Arab invasion of the 7th century, which led to the fall of the Sasanian empire and the spread of Islam into Persia. Some of the work of Iran’s legendary poet, Ferdowsi, memorised by both educated and even illiterate Iranians, is clearly racist.

As Hamid Dabashi puts it,

This racism is not limited to the history of the Islamic Republic and extends well into the Pahlavi period and before it to the Qajar dynasty, when leading Iranian intellectuals, ranging from Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani to Sadeq Hedayat, harboured the most pernicious anti-Arab racism. They categorically attributed what they thought was Iranian backwardness to Islam, Islam to Arabs, Arabs to fanaticism and stupidity, and thus began ludicrously to celebrate a lopsided reading of pre-Islamic Iranian history that was informed mostly by the figment of their perturbed imagination.⁵

Some academics believe this historical background explains the failure of Iranians to rally in support of Palestinians. However, one thing is clear: in Iran, there is no deep-seated history of racism specifically directed at Jews. The term *Sami* (Semite) in Farsi refers to both Arabs and Jews, and in Iran it has traditionally been used only in reference to anti-Arab sentiments. So the repetition, by the Islamic Republic and its apologists, of claims by people like Mearsheimer and others regarding the power of the Israeli lobby should be seen in the light of current political interests.

However, as always, we must draw clear lines between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism - and those on the left who repeat the idea that Israel determines US foreign policy fall, sometimes inadvertently, into the trap of anti-Semitism ●

Notes

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TURKEY

Rise of DEV-GEN Z

University students and high school students have taken the lead. Workers too have moved into action. Esen Uslu reports

The recent blunders of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's regime have led to a huge upsurge of opposition. While the Republican People's Party (CHP) seemed to take the lead, the honour of carrying the torch has passed to a new generation of student activists - and now the regime is determined to make them pay the price.

Hundreds of university students were arrested during the impromptu demonstrations at the end of March. Around 300 of them were charged with public order offences and imprisoned. To dampen things down a nine-day-long holiday - conjured up by adding together the Eid al-Fitr religious celebrations and a weekend - led to many students returning to their home towns.

The detained students were subjected to ill treatment, such as strip searches, deprivation of their prescribed medicines, denial of their school books, and not being allowed to take exams. They were then released in batches after appearing in court. Today only 95 of them remain in detention, and their court appearances are scheduled for October.

However, high school students also got involved. They staged boycotts and sit-ins in support of their teachers, who were arbitrarily transferred to other schools. There was a new wave of arrests in many provinces. In every major city, students took their protests to the courthouses on the day those detained were brought before the judges. Released students were greeted with celebrations that turned into demonstrations.

Questions

Meanwhile hundreds of high school students have been subjected to disciplinary investigations by the administration, and forced to answer questions such as "Why did you stand by your teacher?" Eğitim-Sen, the teachers' trade union, declared its support for the students, as demonstrated in the city squares with the slogan: "Don't be shy. If you remain silent, you will be the next." Many parents have formed support groups to provide legal defence and moral and material support for their children. Many students will lose their grants and scholarships as well as their beds in public dormitories. So the state is trying to 'educate' them by inducing poverty.

Meanwhile Ekrem İmamoğlu, the mayor of İstanbul, remains in pre-trial detention, while a bill of indictment is prepared. Protests and calls for early elections are growing. Increased economic hardship amid exorbitant inflation, as well as the recent cold snap that damaged crops, have also spurred farmers to protest. In Yozgat, one of the quiet towns in central Anatolia, thousands of farmers took part in a demonstration along with their tractors.

There are many strikes in the factories - including the leading petroleum products distillery, Tüpraş, one of the biggest private companies in Turkey - over wages and conditions. The situation is the same in state enterprises. In most cases the wage increases offered are far below the expectations of workers, who have suffered a lot from the hyperinflation of recent years and have seen their real wages hugely decrease.

The state bureaucracy is unable and unwilling to meet these expectations and demands. While, in the crisis of confidence caused by the



PKK: cutting a deal with Erdoğan and US imperialism

arrest and trial of İmamoğlu, it was ready to eat into Turkey's foreign currency reserves to the tune of \$50 billion in just a few days, it claims it is unable to pay better wages to public-sector workers.

The current bureaucratic state was inherited from the Ottoman regime, however, it has become a self-supporting cycle and today 5.5 million people in Turkey are state employees. In 1931, when the population was 13.5 million, there were 115,000 civil servants. That meant one civil servant for every 120 people. In 2024, when the population reached 85.7 million, there were 5.2 million civil servants: ie, one civil servant for every 16 people. Given all the improvements in information technology that have allowed other countries to reduce the number of people they need to employ, this increase in public employees is actually a very good indicator of the populist policies of governments that hands out 'jobs for votes'. Not surprisingly, Turkey is in the 'low output-high employment' category in the efficiency ratings of countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

We also have to take into account that 30.6% of young people of Turkey are not in employment, education or training, while the OECD average is just 16.8%. And the regional variation is also very important, as the average for Kurdish provinces is around 44%. As a result of all this - ie, only the well-connected could get state employment, and even their wages or salaries were barely enough to survive on - it is not surprising that there is a brain-drain, which will continue as long as western countries are willing to accept well-educated young-people.

The other aspect of the same story is rising crime. Turkey and Cyprus are fast becoming fertile ground for smuggling, illegal betting and money-laundering, and gangland assassinations. A scandal involving Turkish foreign service officers and Greek and Turkish Cypriot gangsters was recently exposed by a journalist from the daily *Bugün Kıbrıs* (*Cyprus Today*).

Kurds

However, the 'Kurdish problem' is still poisoning the minds of the petty-bourgeois opposition, and hindering the formation of a bigger front, while the Erdoğan regime is doing its utmost to prevent such an eventuality. Indeed it is attempting to bring the Kurdish freedom movement in its tow.

The main mechanism that moves the Erdoğan regime in this respect

seems to be developments in Syria. The recently installed regime arrested two high-ranking representatives of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad organisation in Damascus and closed its offices. That earned Ahmed al-Shara brownie points in the US and Israel, as his organisation, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, was one of the most ardent supporters of Hamas. Clamping down on Islamic Jihad was part of the long list that the US presented to the new regime in Damascus. Its foreign minister has recently visited the US and he delivered the good news to the Trump administration.

Another point was the agreement to convene the Kurdish National Unity Congress in northern Syria. Under the auspices of the US, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Kurdish Nationalist Council in Syria (formed by 14 small parties supporting Masoud Barzani, former president of the Kurdish region of Iraq) will meet on April 26. It is expected to provide the basis for Kurdish representation in the future of Syria - a key demand of Turkey, which does not want SDF to appear as the sole representative of the Kurds. In this way, Turkey will save face when entering into negotiations with Kurdish leaders.

In return, the US is halving its current troop numbers in Syria and has begun to withdraw them from all smaller bases in the oil production fields except Tishreen Dam. The SDF has also started to withdraw its forces from Dair al-Zor and Raqqa, after leaving Kurdish-controlled districts of Aleppo and transferring military control to the new Syrian regime. As long as this process of 'normalisation' continues, the Erdoğan regime's breathing space will grow.

Another aspect of these developments concerning the Kurds is the Turkish-Israeli non-conflict agreement reached in Baku with the help of the Azerbaijan regime (the main supplier of oil products to Israel). The agreement is a body blow for some sections of the Kurdish movement, who expected to see Israel pitted against Turkey.

Now the clock is ticking for the congress of the Kurdistan Workers Party in Turkey to be held in order to decide on ending the armed conflict. No date has been set and most probably we will never hear about it before it is actually held. Meanwhile, a reduced delegation of the left, pro-Kurdish People's Equality and Democracy Party has once more visited the prison island of İmralı to talk to Abdullah Öcalan, the undisputed leader of the Kurdish freedom movement. The delegation

was reduced because two of its leading members have suffered from serious health problems.

Despite these setbacks, the peace process still seems to be working. As long as it delivers at least some of the expected results, there is a chance for the Erdoğan regime to remain in power. However, there are still many uncertainties that could derail the process.

The most important possibility is that the new opposition, which is coalescing around the CHP leadership, starts to bridge the gap between it and the Kurdish freedom movement. There are still many vibrant forces within the left wing of that movement which prefer to work with the opposition instead of being seen as a prop of Erdoğan's regime. Will they be able to lead the movement or will they be forced to toe the line dictated by circumstances?

The new petty-bourgeois left is not able to give any support to the Kurdish freedom movement, because it has not got rid of its own Kemalist version of nationalism and secularism, which leads it to see Kurds as separatists and religiously backward. And nowadays these left forces tend to evaluate the developments in Syria (and especially the US ploys there) as an aspect of the Kurds becoming a toy in the hands of imperialism.

Youth

In short, the burden of resisting the Erdoğan regime is falling on the shoulders of a new generation of youth. They are very different from the old times, but they have their strength and refreshing vigour. In the 60s the revolutionary youth organisation was called DEV-GENÇ which is an abbreviation for 'Rev-Youth'. But in the abbreviated form, DEV also meant 'Giant'. So, it sounded like Giant-Youth. The older generation sniff at the new generation as the apolitical 'Generation Z'. The young people marching in the streets adopted the old traditions and insults and started calling themselves 'DEV-GEN Z': ie, 'Revolutionary Generation Z' ●

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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Administrators
are committed
to a business
model

MAGA versus Harvard

With America's oldest university offering token resistance to the attacks of the Trump administration, Paul Demarty looks at academic freedom and the parlous state of higher education

On April 14, Harvard University released a statement signed by its president, Alan Garber, promising to fight back against onerous demands from Donald Trump's administration.

Garber's letter was received rapturously among Stateside liberal opinion-makers and, while we will offer a more critical account of the university's recent conduct in due course, it is difficult not to share at least a sense of relief that *someone* in the American elite is prepared to offer token resistance to what is, without doubt, the most serious direct assault on higher learning in the country for some decades. Garber's conclusion reaches for some stirring notes, and mostly finds them:

Freedom of thought and inquiry, along with the government's longstanding commitment to respect and protect it, has enabled universities to contribute in vital ways to a free society and to healthier, more prosperous lives for people everywhere. All of us share a stake in safeguarding that freedom. We proceed now, as always, with the conviction that the fearless and unfettered pursuit of truth liberates humanity - and with faith in the enduring promise that America's colleges and universities hold for our country and our world.¹

In response, the government has announced the cancellation of over \$2 billion in research grants. Trial balloons are flying for revoking the school's tax-exempt status - which would be far more costly than any grant cancellations - and fiddling with its ability to recruit foreign students. All of this will be dragged through the courts at great length, assuming some deal is not struck.

What are the demands of the government? A sweeping clear-out of all affirmative action and diversity initiatives in hiring and admissions; the subjection of effectively the entire humanities to state ideological policing for alleged 'anti-Semitism'; plus a laundry-list of anti-'cancel culture' measures that, taken *together* with the bogus 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunting, reveal themselves as purely hypocritical measures to defend *only* rightwing speech from 'cancellation'.²

Courage

It took several months for Garber and the rest of the Harvard administration to find their courage. In that time, they had already given all the signs of capitulation to an earlier, less drastic set of government demands. Notably, Harvard adopted the infamous International Holocaust Remembrance Association 'definition' of anti-Semitism, which is the cudgel of choice, whenever the Palestine movement is to be harassed and marginalised in such institutional settings. Fortunately, the administration faced intense countervailing pressure from the



Executive orders keep on coming

faculty - who hardly look forward to Trumpite and Zionist thought-policing of their research - as well as students, alumni and even the city council of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Even Garber's statement of defiance is equivocal on the question of Palestine: "Although some of the demands outlined by the government are aimed at combating anti-Semitism, the majority represent direct governmental regulation of the 'intellectual conditions' at Harvard," he laments. He also qualifies his defence as that of the rights of a *private* university (as opposed to the USA's large public university system).

Nevertheless, the somewhat stiffened spines of Harvard are to be contrasted with the utter cowardice and cynicism of the other Ivies so far. Yale president Maurie McInnis cancelled a much-trailed speech on her vision for that institution - in spite of the fact that this colourless bureaucrat can surely not have had anything grander planned than an hour of interminable business-school pabulum, she was not prepared to risk making herself too visible under current conditions.

Most egregious of all is the conduct of Columbia University in New York City, which has rolled over and begged like a beaten dog. At stake for Columbia is \$400 million of research funding (which no amount of grovelling will bring back) - a lot of money to you or me, but certainly survivable for an institution with an endowment that is two orders of magnitude larger. The university authorities are plausibly implicated in the rendition of Mahmoud Khalil, sundry deportations and mass arrests of participants (and some mere bystanders) in the pro-Palestine encampments. It has agreed to subject its Middle Eastern Studies department to federal government oversight.

In return, it has gotten ... no concessions, except perhaps the ability to continue operating as a

glorified real-estate investment trust and paying its top brass obscene salaries. The conclusion is difficult to avoid that the Columbia administration in fact supports the sort of clampdown demanded of it, but lacks the *cojones* to take action without the face-saving appearance of having been forced into it. Harvard's stance, limited as it is, reflects extremely badly on these people, and deservedly so. Indeed, there is some merit to the assertion of Justin Smith-Ruii - an eccentric philosopher and Columbia alumnus - that the school "*de facto* does not exist anymore, at least not as a university in the proper sense of the term".³

History

Whether or not Harvard's move stiffens the resolve of other institutions, the outlook seems bleak for American higher learning. This fracas takes place at a moment when the public reputation of universities (especially elite private schools of the Harvard or Columbia type) is at a nadir - by some measures *worse* than other institutions facing what is a well-documented crisis in public trust. The schools are on their own. It also comes at an important inflection point in the history of the American academy, reflected to some extent in many other countries, including Britain, in which the internal cohesion and institutional strength of colleges has become the property of precisely the people - administrators who are effectively corporate managers - least likely to put up a fight.

The history of Harvard itself is illustrative of the kind of historical transformations we are talking about here. It was founded in the 1630s - mere decades after the arrival of the first English colonists in the north-east of today's USA - with an explicitly religious purpose. These people had undertaken a dangerous voyage in order to build a properly Christian society, as they saw it - radical, low-church Protestantism

of a distinctly Calvinist flavour. They needed pastors to watch over them, and so Harvard was founded to churn them out. Its products were often widely and well-educated, but also given to small-mindedness and superstition - a contradiction embodied by Cotton Mather, a clergyman who conducted extensive scientific experiments in botany, but also became a protagonist in the notorious Salem witch trials.

As the young colonies outgrew the Calvinist theocracy of the 17th century, so Harvard evolved, becoming somewhat secularised and less focused on producing good Protestant clergymen. Its first great transformation was undertaken in the second half of the 19th century, however, when it was remade in the image of the German research university (the modern conception of academic life, in which professors are expected both to teach students and to conduct research, dates to the Prussia of the early 19th century). With the ascension of the US to global hegemony, Harvard, and other elite American research universities, became the model to be followed everywhere; it was affected by initiatives like the GI Bill, which provided for veterans to attend college, again like the sector as a whole, somewhat diversifying its student body from the New England WASP elite.

Since the abandonment of the post-war consensus, however, Harvard has followed the sector as a whole in being subjected to increasingly philistine managerialism. Skyrocketing inequality in society at large has removed what fetters existed on the marketisation of degrees - never very strong in the States - with the result that tuition fees have ballooned over the course of a four-year degree to the kind of price you would pay for a modest house outside the great cities. Like housing, this is financed by debt; and therefore students expect some return on their investment. Thus the promotion of 'business-minded' executives, who treat the thing much as any other CEO of a blue-chip firm must protect the brand.

But job growth in the sort of professional careers to which a Harvard degree might be expected to buy access is pretty stagnant (this is, of course, all the more painfully true further down the university pecking order.) There is the smell of a bubble about all this. The neoliberal era was sustained in part by the technocratic idea that university education would equip people with the skills they needed for the new information economy, in which the production of physical commodities would be rendered invisible by outsourcing. The overproduction of graduates was the inevitable ultimate result, and consequently the risk of a rapid 'correction' in this market.

This political-economic situation makes fighting back very risky for the average college, even if they want to. But the consequent

degradation of the actual activity of these institutions tends to make a mockery of any attempt to do so. The humanities are being run down; the sciences and related fields reduced to the sort of thing that can get you a good job at the end, which means a corresponding degradation in fundamental research. Of course, useful work still takes place; but Harvard's job is to be Harvard, such that the price of a Harvard degree remains high.

Mafia

There is a certain idea abroad - particularly among humanists - that we are witnessing more than a brazen assault on free inquiry by a mafia-like administration, but rather something like the death of the research university itself. The crisis of the humanities is well-enough documented, but the truth is that many of the so-called STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) are on equally shaky ground. Much work in mathematics and the sciences is only doubtfully relevant to future earnings; it is undertaken purely to push human intellectual endeavour into novel territory, and in that respect more closely resembles philosophy or literature than, say, civil engineering. So far as the more obviously vocational courses are concerned, in many cases (and notably in my own profession of software engineering), it is clear that academic training is not nearly as effective as apprenticeship in the actual work.

Thus there is much chatter about rebuilding intellectual inquiry somewhere outside the ivory towers, whose walls were taken by the philistines long ago. As a mere endeavour of academics, this is surely hopeless: Who will fill the libraries with books? Who will pay the teachers? Who will feed the students?

The workers' movement, in times of greater organisational strength, *did* create libraries, and *did* find ways to open higher education to broad masses precisely for its own sake. It was able to do so because of its mass roots in society, and the institutional sinews that came with it. It was willing to do so, because its aim was ultimately a more encompassing idea of human development. There was no reason why Seneca, the Stoics or the sciences should be the private property of the ruling class - no reason except the injustice of exploitation itself.

We have here, then, one more instance where the custodianship of an aspect of human flourishing falls to us. It is up to us to take it on ●

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Notes

1. www.harvard.edu/president/news/2025/the-promise-of-american-higher-education.
2. www.harvard.edu/research-funding/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2025/04/Letter-Sent-to-Harvard-2025-04-11.pdf.
3. www.the-hinternet.com/p/can-the-humanities-survive.