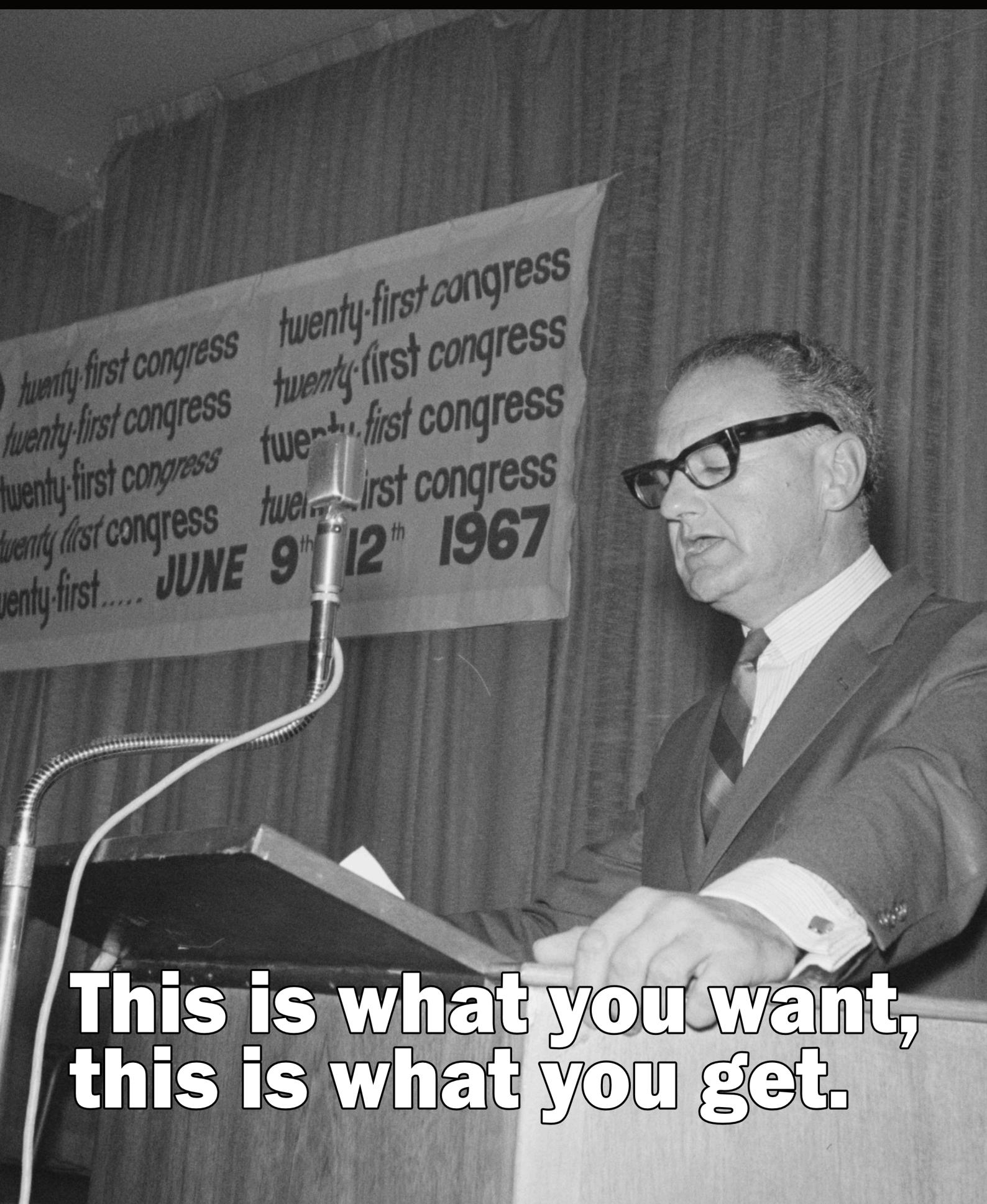


PARTISAN!

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About Partisan:

Partisan is the official publication of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO). We are a monthly journal of the 'partyist left' in Australia, and an organ of independent, communist journalism.

Alongside the RCO, we fight for a reunification of the left into a party that can carry out the tasks of the communist and workers movement: the establishment of a democratic republic and the dissolution of the capitalist prison-states. ■



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Who is the "RCO"?

The Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO) is a pre-party formation that works towards the re-unification of the socialist left in Australia into a single, mass communist party. We come from diverse political backgrounds and schools of Marxist thought, yet we are united by a common program.

We welcome rigorous debate and disagreement and are open to factions, yet act as one organisation. We are guided by the principle of diversity of thought, and unity of action. The capitalist mode of production is at the root of every social, environmental, and economic crisis today.

We fight for the liberation of queer people, Aboriginal people, and women, a liberation which can only be achieved through the destruction of the capitalist system. We are united by our determination to fight the capitalist mode of production at every turn, and our total commitment to its abolition. We are communists, unapologetically and without reservation.

We engage in every form of proletarian activity, whether protests or union drives, yet do not trail social movements; we aim in every instance to build the base for a mass workers' party, necessary to intervene in the class struggle and advance the communist movement. ■

PARTYISM: That section of the communist movement which sees the re-unification of communist forces into a single party representative of the movement as its primary task.

We do not reject the rest of the left - instead, we aim to work through the existing left to build a communist party. Such a party is united by a shared Marxist program, that is, a program for leading the working class to power and overthrowing the capitalist system.

For this reason, we eschew the malignant sect labels which are often thrown around amongst the left. We view all communist organisations as being "sects" - factional organisations which recruit to a particular tendency and viewpoint, as opposed to a Marxist program.

We aim to unite the sects into a party, being an organisation representative of the movement as a whole, and the political weapon of the working class. ■

One year of Partisan

August 2025 marks roughly twelve months since Partisan began publishing, replacing the RCO's previous publication Direct Action. It has been a busy, but interesting, year so far. Partisan improved on where Direct Action started, sharpening itself, developing a distinct style and identity for itself, and reaching a far wider audience than Direct Action did.

But, you may have noticed that Partisans have been releasing a bit late recently. This is for a few reasons. Primarily, this is because Partisan is in a state of flux. We are beginning to establish a proper editorial team, with clearly defined roles and workflows. We are also trying to establish two departments for Partisan: print and digital, on the basis that they both require different work.

So, Partisans have been releasing a little later than usual. They have also been mailing out a little later than usual. For that, we apologise. However, these structural changes are necessary to provide a skeleton for future

expansions. As the RCO grows, so too will Partisan. In order for Partisan to develop into a professional publication, as RCO comrades and supporters want, Partisan will need to look and act like a professional publication.

This issue is shorter than usual. This is because our output has been affected by structural changes, and other factors. Nonetheless, we ask that if you support Partisan, you consider providing financial support by subscribing.

This month's issue of Partisan features some interesting articles. Firstly, it features the letter sent to the RCO by the Spartacist League, signalling their intentions to join the RCO. The devil, however, is in the details. We also republish an interesting essay from Loren Goldner - serialised, first in a series. In her latest article, Mila Volkova asks and answers the question of whether Stalinism was the inevitable outcome of 1917. ■ **Max J, on behalf of Partisan Editorial**



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Revolution In Our Lifetime!

WHO WE ARE

The Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO) sees the current dogmatic socialist movement as hopelessly divided and immature. How can we hope to win more workers over to communist politics when we can not agree on a common message, demands, and plan for action? We believe that socialist militants must group together our resources, rather than divide them into dozens of petty sectarian groups.

We are a communist pre-party fighting group who believe that the most important next step for socialist militants in Australia is re-grouping and re-uniting into a single communist party. This party must have real internal democracy, with open debates and internal factions. It must not be a coalition of sectarian groups, or a wishy-washy "broad-left" front. It must be a majoritarian

Spartacist League to the RCO

The *Spartacist League of Australia* has sent a letter to the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO) calling for unity and stating their desire to join the RCO. Partisan publishes this letter in full below.

Dear comrades of the RCO,

We are living in a fast changing world where the international working class and oppressed are facing deepening attacks and reactionary winds as the US rulers fight to shore up their declining global position. Australia will not be an exception to the maelstrom of the increasing drive toward war, economic chaos and burgeoning reaction. In the face of this, the left stands wholly unprepared and is as small and isolated as ever. We need to change course.

While we are still studying Partisan! No. 11 closely, we welcome how the editorial statement argues against the “broad left unity” that “rejects the centrality of a coherent political program for such unity, accepted and democratically constructed by all involved.” We agree. This approach will only repeat the mistakes of the past three decades which has reduced the left to its current weak and divided state. We also concur with the repeated emphasis on the necessity of the fight to reforge a mass communist party on a revolutionary program. As you point out this cannot happen by ignoring the rest of the left and going “straight to the masses.” We similarly argued against this in “The Crisis in the Marxist Left and the Tasks of the ICL,” Spartacist No. 70. The fight for a revolutionary party can only be achieved by actively intervening to reorientate the socialist movement, “agitating for a communist orientation and organisation.”

It is with this in mind that we send you this letter to declare our desire for the SL/A to join the ranks of the RCO and fight for just this. I am sure RCO comrades already know that we have programmatic differences with the RCO, especially as outlined with Road to party, and we do not renounce our ideas for one second.

The Spartacist League is an Orthodox Trotskyist organisation whose international affiliated is the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist). They began as the Revolutionary Tendency within the US-Socialist Workers Party, but after their expulsion in the 1960s became the International Spartacist Tendency in the 1970s.

But as we said in Road to party, “our difference with the RCO is not that we reject the centrality of the struggle for a revolutionary party,” but rather what strategy is necessary to forge it. Furthermore, coming off our recent polemical exchange and subsequent discussions with RCO comrades, it is clear that these differences would be best clarified not as opposing organisations but by fighting side by side and doing common work within a single organisation.

We also recognise that the RCO is not a homogeneous organisation, but rather one which welcomes political differences. Like those comrades already within the RCO with divergent political views, we seek not to split or wreck the RCO but to help build the organisation on a communist basis—which necessarily entails arguing for our ideas for what best advances the RCO and the fight to forge a mass communist party. In turn, we believe we have a lot to learn from RCO comrades who are of differing political stripes and backgrounds.

The left has long been weak and divided. And while the fusion between the Spartacist League of Australia and Bolshevik-Leninist bucked this trend, it has only been a small step to unify the left on a communist program. We believe joining ranks with the RCO would be another step towards communist unity, and would mark the RCO as a pole of attraction to draw in broader forces within the workers movement for the fight to reforge a communist party that Lenin would recognise as his own.

We look forward to hearing from you and discussing the next steps toward how to best effect this.

Communist greetings,
C. Bourchier

For the Central Committee of the Spartacist League of Australia

This letter, sent to Partisan and the RCO by the Spartacist League of Australia (SL/A), was the first of many exchanges between the two organisations. Here, the SL/A signal their intentions to join the RCO to advance the fight for a Marxist party in Australia.

Stalinism: Was there an alternative?

Stalin's rise to power in the 1920s is mythologised by much of the Left (both pro- and anti-Stalin) as being inevitable. But, Mila Volkova writes, Stalinism was far from inevitable.

November 1917. The Bolsheviks launch an insurrection to dissolve the Provisional Government and place the Soviets of Worker and Peasant Deputies in power.

In 1918, the German ambassador to the Soviets is shot and killed by the Bolsheviks' coalition partners in the Left Socialist Revolutionaries (Left-SRs: a party of intellectuals with the majority support of the poorest peasants). Lenin is shot by a member of the Left SRs, leading to an illness that will eventually kill him. The Left SRs are suppressed. The aristocrats, capitalists, rich peasants, and Mensheviks (reformist socialists) revolt and organise themselves behind the White movement. The Mensheviks are banned. In Germany, sailors mutiny at Kiel, igniting a revolution that topples the German Empire. The newly formed government of the German Republic, made up of Social Democratic politicians, ends its own revolution. To defend their revolution, the Bolsheviks enforce War Communism on the population – the total mobilisation of the working class and conscription of the peasantry into a civil war that kills 7 million people.

In 1919, the German social democrats make use of fascist militias to slaughter revolting German workers. In Austria and Hungary, the Romanian army butchers the newly formed Soviet Republic.

In 1921, sailors and workers mutiny at the Kronstadt naval base, raising contradictory demands, including free elections and the end of the grain requisitions. Fearing French invasion, the Bolsheviks launch an assault to retake the base. In response to growing peasant unrest and strikes, the Bolsheviks respond with both the carrot and the stick. A peasant revolt is put down with mustard gas. Party factions are banned, ending internal democracy. The New Economic Policy (NEP) is implemented, restoring market relations and replacing the grain requisitions with a tax while keeping large businesses under state ownership.

By 1922, the Civil War is over, but internal



Stalin (centre-right) at the 14th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)

party elections are practically replaced with top-down appointments by the Central Committee. Joseph Stalin is elected General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

In 1923, Lenin orchestrates the expulsion of more than 100,000 Communist Party members who joined up post-1917, roughly a third of party membership, whom he accuses of careerism. The party divides into three informal factions: the Left (around Red Army commander Lev Trotsky) and the Centre (around Stalin) are opposed to the continuation of the NEP, favouring a class war against the peasants, while the Right (around the editor of Pravda, Nikolai Bukharin) supports the continuation of the worker-peasant alliance. Both the Left and Right oppose an increasingly bureaucratic party led by the centre

In 1924, Lenin passes away. Stalin implements the "Lenin Levy", recruiting over 500,000 under-educated peasants and workers into the party ranks.

By 1925, industrial growth is lagging, and rich peasants are demanding so much compensation for their grain that an economic catastrophe looms on the horizon.

In 1927, the Left is expelled from the party and public political dissent is prohibited. The final elements of non-Bolshevik socialist political activity are suppressed.

In 1928, the economic crisis reaches a boiling point with peasants refusing to pay the grain tax en masse. The internal right wing of

the party is defeated, the NEP is over, and work begins on drafting the first Five-Year Plan.

In 1929, the Five-Year Plan begins. Industrial capacity explodes with a pace never seen before; at the cost of millions of lives lost to a state-orchestrated famine-machine that deprives peasants of grain and forces them into collective farms. Although the last remnants of internal opposition are purged by 1936, the Bolsheviks are already the “monolithic party” of Stalin – an institution of total order and mechanical obedience.

What is the relevance of these dates and events to those of us who remain committed to the communist project? Deciphering their meaning is important for more than just defending ourselves from the rhetorical attacks of anti-communists. In defending ourselves, socialists have a habit of fetishising historical events. But understanding the Bolsheviks is about more than point-scoring: it is about understanding ourselves.

Socialism, as in the abolition of classes and the regulation of production according to a common plan, was obviously not achieved in the USSR. But it was communists who created it. Blaming the international bourgeoisie for the degeneration of the USSR serves no purpose; their inevitably violent response to revolution is a given. Rather, because the USSR is within our historical legacy as communists, even if it was not communism, we must learn from our errors if we want to avoid repeating them. This requires a systematic investigation into the character of Stalinism and the origins of the Soviet Regime. As Bini Adamczaks stated in Yesterday’s Tomorrow about the connection between the Bolsheviks and communists today:

“For them, there will never be any communism. There is no communism for them. There is no communism without them. There will never be any communism without them.”

What Was Stalinism?

“To tell the truth they are not directing, they are being directed. Something analogous happened here to what we were told in our history lessons when we were children: sometimes one nation conquers another [...] . Here things are not so simple [...] the vanquished nation imposes its culture upon the conqueror.”

-Opening speech in Eleventh Congress of the R.C.P. by V.I. Lenin

The proletariat, possessing nothing of their own and with nothing to lose but their chains, is the subject of communist politics.

Recognising that Russia was a majority peasant population, the Bolsheviks held the view that any successful revolution in Russia required a successful revolution in its more industrialised neighbours (Germany in particular). If the revolutionary wave began in Russia, the Bolsheviks took the line that the working class should ally with the peasants most sympathetic to the revolution, end feudalism, establish a state capitalist economy to industrialise the country and proletarianise the peasantry, and wait for rescue.

But that rescue never came. With the USSR surrounded on all sides and the Bolsheviks abandoned by all those it considered allies, they found themselves in an unsustainable position. They could claim the support, at most, 20% of the population. The Civil War made the situation truly desperate. Industrial production collapsed, so the cities emptied out as workers returned to their villages. After the war, around 10% of the population could be considered proletarian. The party itself suffered a manpower crisis, as much of its most experienced members were killed leading as front-line officers in the Red Army.

The gradual development of state-capitalism was replaced with the brute force of War Communism. Without a solid basis for democratic rule (which the Bolsheviks envisioned), but unable to surrender power for fear of being massacred, the Bolsheviks used the only apparatus capable of ruling the country – the old Tsarist bureaucracy, which had not yet been destroyed. Though they had planned to smash it and replace it with direct workers’ control, they instead subordinated it. Thousands of bureaucrats’ families were taken hostage and the Bolsheviks ruled through sheer violent terror against all opponents – real or imagined.

Once the Civil War concluded, this temporary measure was replaced by the also-temporary NEP, with the aim of keeping the worker-peasant alliance together and gradually expanding the size of the proletariat. But without democratic elections, the underlying logic of the process of bureaucratisation remained. Moderate political freedoms were re-introduced under the NEP, but geopolitical isolation and the horrors of the civil war had left the Bolsheviks that still lived with deep paranoid scars, so the Mensheviks and Left-SRs remained banned and there was little in the way of substantive democracy.

This process is often understood as the personal fault of Stalin. He is like a Luciferian figure for many – an original sin that infiltrated the party and filled it out with bureaucrats from

the old Tsarist regime. But this is an all-too-easy narrative. Before the 1920s, Stalin was as much a revolutionary social democrat as Lenin was, though theoretically unsophisticated. During the 20s, his centre faction represented not just those bureaucrats who had been absorbed into the party, but a sizeable minority of the pre-1917 membership (including Lenin until 1923). Though possessing an element of cynical autocratic logic, the Lenin Levy and Great Purge were attempts by Stalin and his followers to de-bureaucratise the party, not to subvert it. Its primary targets were Tsarist-era civil servants, not just those opposed to Stalin personally, and they were predominately replaced with peasants and workers.

This attempt, nonetheless, failed. Regardless of the class background of those recruited into the state apparatus, it began to occupy a social position objectively separated from the working class. The incorporation into the party of peasants and workers who had questionable commitments to revolution, or were theoretically underdeveloped, necessitated top-down appointment by the party elite to maintain ideological loyalty and coherence. Ideological lip-service and the cold mechanistic determinism of Marxist-Leninist theory was the result of these objective developments, as the party had no connection to radical working-class self-organisation. Often, it was involved in putting down such organisation. Without this element, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union found itself believing that communism was just a matter of having advanced enough technology – a socialism made of electric lines, concrete-mixers, and churning gears overseen by lab coats. Blaming Stalin is a cop out.

Was There an Alternative?

“How are we to remember them? How do we remember those of whom there is so little left to remember? And above all, with whom do we remember them? To whom do we raise the alarm, who do we warn or turn to for help? Who do we call to in the name of a justice deferred, past due, of zealous partisanship for those the party betrayed? With whom do we mourn the lost, the murdered, the abandoned revolutionaries... With whom to share their loneliness? At least that. At least to offer companionship, imaginary, belated companionship.”

-Yesterday’s Tomorrow by Bini Adamczaks

The Bolsheviks faced enormous structural obstacles. Socialism cannot be created in one country. Peasants are an unreliable ally of

communism, at best. Isolated, the degeneration of the USSR was inevitable. Many revolutionaries implicitly refuse to accept this, but in doing so they fail to see that every revolution is a risk taken. Guided by Marxist theory and assisted by analysis of objective conditions, this risk is a calculated one. But revolutions, by their nature, expand unevenly. From the perspective of any individual revolutionary, it is always an act of faith – faith in one another’s comrades and faith in the working class. No revolution, not even the one that finally ends capitalism, will be perfect.

But to suggest that the Bolsheviks were simply doomed is to mirror the mechanistic determinism of Marxism-Leninism. The situation of the communist movement, and the decisions it makes, exist in a two-way dialogue with social conditions. This is why it is important for us to understand the Bolsheviks. Could they have done differently? Could they have created communism? Can we? In Australia at least, we don’t have to worry about a worker-peasant alliance. Nonetheless, we can gather two more generic and seemingly contradictory insights from the USSR.

Firstly, that the communist movement must be a vanguard of the proletariat – it should only include those who are committed to fighting for a revolutionary program. If it expands beyond this and invites in reformists, opportunists, or populists, then there are two possible outcomes: conquest of the party by opportunism (as was the case with the German Social Democrats) or bureaucratic elitism. Secondly, the communist movement must win a mandate from the majority of the working class.

The maximally democratic direct rule by the working class squares the circle. The communists must act as leaders of the working class in its war with the capitalists ideologically, politically, and economically. Therefore, we must restrict our membership and engage in constant open struggle. We also need to work constantly to expand our base of support. Democracy, then, is a revolutionary tool; it ensures that those who have not yet – or, perhaps, will not – been won over to communism can represent themselves outside of the party. If we staunchly commit ourselves to workers’ control, there is no need to merge the party with the politically backwards or with the state.

It was possible for the Bolsheviks to democratise after the Civil War. The Left and Right factions in the party were close to concluding a pro-democracy coalition, and the NEP could have continued to have the majority

support of the party past 1928.

The Bolsheviks did not do this because they, correctly, predicted that they would be voted out of power. But they underestimated themselves. In fact, this may have saved the revolution. Would they have been massacred? Despite their dread, this was unlikely. Most peasants after the civil war were poor, disorganised, and had no interest in shooting at factory workers. The threat of foreign invasion loomed and suggested the need to industrialise quickly, but how many times can one ask, “what about stopping the Nazis!?” before we find ourselves defending a state that has become an end unto itself rather than an instrument for ending the global oppression of humanity?

The opportunity to forge socialism in Europe and Asia did not die with Luxemburg in 1919. The revolutionary wave continued for another twenty years. The Bolsheviks would have been free to throw all support behind these revolts had they been separated from the

state apparatus, rather than backing the capitalists as often as they did the workers in their vain attempts to save the USSR.

In such a position, who knows what may have happened? Would the communists have won the Spanish civil war in 1936? What of Britain, France, Italy, and Germany in the 20s, 30s, and 40s? Would things be different in China? Would we have communism today?

These questions may seem like childish alternate history. To some extent, they are. But the USSR’s failure was not inevitable, despite the structural obstacles. To recognise that and open-mindedly accept that the Bolsheviks failed on their own terms is to open ourselves up to the possibility of our own success. Our failure is not inevitable either. Despite neoliberalism, deindustrialisation, and all the other difficulties, there is a communist future. A future that we can create. Creating that future means understanding our communist past. ■

Platypus holds first Oceania conference

The Platypus Affiliated Society (PAS), an international political society founded in 2006, recently held its first official conference for its Oceania sections in Australia and New Zealand. This conference was held over three days, from July 11th to 13th. It featured several panels which brought together elements from the Australian and NZ Left to discuss issues such as Bonapartism, Neoliberalism, and the National Question.

Panelists included Amal Samaha (International Bolshevik Tendency NZ), Anthony Furia (RCO), Arthur Dent (C21 Left), and Quentin Findlay (Canterbury Socialist Society). Controversially, Guy Rundle, formerly of Crikey, was also a panelist. Many had expressed to Partisan that the decision to include Guy Rundle was one which alienated other potential panelists. The Spartacist League of Australia briefly attended on July 12th to sit through the panel on the National Question, where member Neil F. quizzed panelists Amal Samaha and Anthony Furia.

A Partisan reporter was able to speak with panelists and audience members on July 12th. One young audience member described Arthur Dent as “a comic relief character”. Panelist Anthony Furia told Partisan that the panel was “excellent... a good time”. CJ (the panel’s moderator) told

Partisan that “the panel went fairly well, but it was a bit rocky with big personalities throwing a lot of ideas out”.

The Platypus Affiliated Society has three main chapters in Australasia: Canberra, Melbourne, and Auckland. There are also Platypus members based in Sydney and Wellington, among others. PAS appears to be aiming to expand its reach in Australasia, or at least make itself more well known. PAS is a controversial organisation for its attitude toward the Left, as well as polemics produced by its leading theorist Chris Cutrone. ■ **Max J for Partisan**



Ryan M. opens July 12th panel on “Lenin & the National Question” ft. Amal Samaha, Anthony Furia, Arthur Dent, and Isaac. Photo: Max J

Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and the Russian Peasant Commune: Origins of an Ideology

The following is the first part of an essay by the late Loren Goldner concerning revolution and theoretical under-development in the Soviet Union. We are publishing it as the first in a series, and are hoping to reprint more extracts from this text in subsequent issues. - Edith Fischer, Content Editor

In the 1870s, Karl Marx first took a serious interest in the Russian revolutionary movement, partly through the (initially) surprising impact of his own work in a country he had previously viewed as the colossal “gendarme of Europe,” and even more so by contact with the Russian Populists, both through their impressive actions and through their correspondence with him, requesting advice on strategy and tactics.

In short order, Marx set aside work on volumes 2 and 3 of Capital, taught himself Russian, and spent much of the last decade of his life studying Russian agriculture. He concealed this turn in his work from his lifelong collaborator, Engels. Aside from important correspondence with Russian revolutionaries, he never wrote a text of any length based on his new interest, but at his death left two cubic meters of notes on Russia.

What ensued was a fundamental step in the transformation of Marx’s work into an ideology, one whose influence reached into the 1970s. When Engels discovered these materials after Marx’s death, and realized they were the reason that Marx had not finished Capital, he was furious, and apparently wanted to burn them.

Marx, in his research on Russia (as well as on other non-Western countries and regions) had discarded his earlier claims of a single path of world capitalist development, one in which “England held up to the world the mirror of its own future,” and had also recognized that the validity of his work up to that point was confined to the conditions of western Europe.

At the center of Marx’s “Russian road” was the peasant commune, or mir (also called the obschina). The mir had been studied in depth in the early 1840s by the German Baron Haxthausen, whose three-volume work of 1843 led to a controversy in Russia about the mir’s significance, involving every Russian



Meeting of Russian Peasant Elders in a Mirskoi Skhod

intellectual faction from the backward-looking Slavophiles to the exile Alexander Herzen to the Westernizers. The commune then became central to the Populists’ claim that Russia could, or should, skip the capitalist “stage” of development, a sentiment reinforced by Marx’s preface to the 1882 Russian translation of the Communist Manifesto, not to mention the portrayal of real conditions in England which they found in Capital.

In his discovery of the still-viable Russian commune, Marx was reconnecting with his 1840s writings about “community” (“Gemeinwesen” in German). He was reasserting that for him, communism was first of all about the “material human community,” and not about forced-march industrialization and productivist five-year plans.

This debate between the self-styled Marxists of different kinds and the “romantic” “subjectivist” Populists about the viability of the mir lasted into the early 1900s, greatly skewed by Engels’ suppression of Marx’s Russian studies. Even some of the Populists who had received Marx’s letters about Russia’s unique possibilities resulting from the mir, who had then become Marxists themselves, all but participated in the suppression. Later, the Social Revolutionaries (SRs), the rivals to the Bolsheviks and many of whose members considered themselves Marxists, claimed to be the true heirs of Marx based on his suppressed letters on the mir.

One should not romanticize the mir; Chernyshevsky, who had known it close up near the provincial town of his boyhood, had distinctly mixed feelings about it as a prototype for socialism, yet he was one of the first, in the 1850s, to argue that the mir, combined with Western technology after a successful revolution in Europe, could be the basis for a “communist development,” as Marx and Engels later put it in 1882.

What exactly was the mir as a lived experience for Russian peasants? Franco Venturi, author of the classic study of the Russian Populist movement of the nineteenth century, wrote about how the mir figured in the modernizing plans of the Tsarist state prior to the serf emancipation of the 1861, which was intended to put Russia on the path of capitalist development, and sketched themes that would remain present right up to Stalin’s destruction of the mir in his 1929–1932 collectivizations:

The enquiry of 1836 had shown how much this spirit of equality, latent in the very forms of serfdom and peasant tradition, had in fact been undermined by the rise of a group of richer farmers who began to have considerable influence on the entire life of the obshchina [or mir–LG]. These farmers, for instance, tipped the scales of periodic redistribution in their own favor and...subjected the community of poorer peasants to their control. But the enquiry had also shown how deeply these traditional forms were rooted. The assiduous inspectors were often shocked by the disorder, the vulgarity and the violence which prevailed in the meetings of the mir, and also by its many obvious injustices. Nevertheless it was in the obshchina and the mir that the peasants expressed those ideas on land ownership which had so impressed and irritated Kiselev and Périer. It was through these organizations, the only ones at its disposal, that peasant society defended itself. The communities naturally differed from district to district, reflecting the entire range of peasant life... Yet, despite all this variety, there was one common factor; the obshchina represented the tradition and ideal of the peasant masses. How then could it be broken?”

That latter question would continue to vex Tsarist planners right up to 1917, and in a different way, would be the barrier on which different Bolshevik plans for industrialization as well would break up in the 1920s.

From Engels to Plekhanov, “the father of Russian Marxism,” to Kautsky and Lenin, the



Russian peasant protest in Moscow, 1917.

linear, evolutionist, “matter-motion” view of “dialectical materialism” spread worldwide as the orthodoxy of the Second International. With the consolidation of Stalinism, it became identified with “real existing socialism” itself.

‘Dialectical materialism’ was in fact the vulgar recapitulation of the bourgeois materialism of the eighteenth century, and not accidentally promoted by movements and regimes which were, like the eighteenth century template, completing the bourgeois revolution, in the eradication of pre-capitalist agriculture, whatever their ideology and stated goals. Elements of this ideology persist today in various types of productivism that confuse the tasks of the bourgeois and socialist revolutions.

But a still larger context was shaping this post-Marx ideological development: the global transition from the formal to the real domination of capital. In the formal phase, capital takes over pre-capitalist production (e.g., guilds, cooperation, manufacture) without modifying them materially; in the latter, real phase, capital reduces all aspects of production, reproduction and of life generally to its adequate capitalism form. In industry, the German and American “rationalization movements” (i.e., capital-intensive innovation) of the 1920s were the cutting edge of this “materialization of a social relationship”; in agriculture, this meant, ultimately, California-style agribusiness, and comparable developments in other major grain exporters such as Canada and Australia, as well as the professional, agronomy-trained farmer who has replaced western Europe’s classical peasants since World War II.

In the arc from the United States to Russia, by way of the smaller agricultures of France, Italy and Germany, one finds a near-perfect congruence of lingering pre-capitalist agriculture, i.e., the agriculture of formal domination (exemplified in the individual

land-owning peasant who emerged from the French Revolution) and, later, Communist Parties: the stronger pre-capitalist agriculture, the stronger the Third International parties after 1917. Pre-1914 Social Democracy and post-1917 Communism were the adequate form of working-class organization to propel this transition, and were notably marginal in countries like the United States or Great Britain, where these tasks were complete.

We can thus agree with Lars Lih when he argues that Lenin was an “Erfurtian Social Democrat” in the extreme conditions of Tsarist autocracy, as long as we recognize that Erfurtian Social Democracy in Germany, like the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, were the organizational expression for this transition. One might sketch the two phases like this:

Formal Domination Extensive Accumulation

1. trade unions combated
2. parliamentarism
3. non-militarist
4. colonialism
5. liberal professions
6. peasants into workers
7. state as minimal consumer
8. laissez-faire capitalism
9. secondary role of finance capital
10. low financial-interrelations ratio
11. gold standard (Ricardo)
12. working class as pariah class
13. Urbanization
14. absolute surplus value
15. primitive accumulation off petty producers
16. labor retains craft aspects
17. labor struggles to shorten the working day

Real Domination Intensive Accumulation

1. trade unions tolerated, promoted
2. state bureaucracy
3. militarist
4. imperialism
5. technical professions
6. expansion of tertiary sector
7. state as major consumer
8. concentration, regulation
9. hegemony of finance capital
10. high FIRO
11. fiat money (Keynes, Schacht)
12. “community of labor”
13. suburbanization
14. relative surplus value

15. primitive accumulation by internal wage gouging
16. rationalization, Taylorism
17. technical intensification of the labor process

The roots of “Erfurtian Social Democracy,” as a project for state power, then, were ultimately in the absolutist state of the 16th–18th centuries, which in its Tudor phase in England (1485–1603) had begun the process of clearing the countryside, a process which then spread to the continent, in the French Bourbon state and its taxation of the peasantry, and the Prussian state, with the Stein-Hardenburg top-down reforms during and after the Napoleonic wars. Thus the linear evolutionist “matter-motion” world view developed by Engels, Plekhanov, Kautsky and inherited by Lenin, as opposed to Marx’s discovery of “another road” for Russia in the combination of the mir with a western European revolution, amounted to a latter-day “modernization” ideology for countries still dealing with pre-capitalist agriculture, a “substitute bourgeois revolution” with a key role played by the working class, a continuation of the bourgeois revolution with red flags.

This was, for obvious reasons, hardly recognized or articulated at the time, and required an historical unfolding over decades of the American, German or Russian variants to become visible. Nor were these outcomes a “telos” of the earlier (Lassalleian, Social Democratic, or Bolshevik) formulations on organization; the road was hardly straight and narrow and major working-class defeats were required to bring the later form to maturity. Nonetheless, looked at in comparative perspective, the road is there, as it emerged in the pre-1914 world when capitalism was converting peasants and farmers into production workers in the advanced sector,³⁶ whereas after World War I and especially World War II it was increasingly using high productivity to support the rapidly growing population of unproductive consumers in the “service sector,” with production workers as a declining percentage of the total work force.

It is hardly surprising to find agriculture and the vast Russian peasantry (85–90 percent of the population in 1917) as the decisive factor in the fate of the revolution, once the anticipated world revolution that would materially aid backward Russia failed to materialize. The Reds won the civil war ultimately because they had at least the grudging support of a significant part of the peasantry against the Whites who, with their ties to the old regime,

could not bring themselves to accept land reform. Stalin triumphed in the debates of the 1920s, which centered on the agrarian question. Stalin's collectivization of 1929–1932 irreversibly ruined Russian agriculture, costing the regime the previous, reluctant acceptance by the peasantry, with ten million dead and the destruction of 40 percent of all livestock (horses, cows and pigs) by the peasants themselves.

For the remaining six decades of the Soviet Union, Russian agriculture, prior to 1914 a major grain exporter to the world, never fully recovered, making impossible the decisive cheapening of food as a portion of working-class consumption that had opened the way for

mass consumer durables in the West, and Russia was itself compelled to import grain by the mid-1950s.

Most Marxist attempts outside the Soviet Union to analyze the mode of production there, with the important exception of the Italian Communist Left (which had other problems), had the same urban-industrial bias as the Second International, focused on the relations between the party, the state and the working class, to the neglect of the peasantry, and in their own way embraced elements of the linear-evolutionist assumptions of the Engels-Plekhanov-Kautsky world view that emerged from the suppression of Marx's Russian studies. ■

Letter from CPGB to TAS: Reconsider your decision to break from FCU

Letter from the CPGB to Talking About Socialism

Comrades, your announcement, breaking off talks between TAS, the CPGB and the pro-party faction of Prometheus is something that we deeply regret. We still have before us a great opportunity to take forward what is our joint project of forging communist unity and building a mass Communist Party in Great Britain.

You, however, have set this project back by your decision to walk away from what we

always envisaged as a highly promising, but prolonged, process.

The CPGB is and remains committed to talks, debates and, crucially, the perspective of fusion in the struggle for a mass Communist Party. Our door remains open.

We would, therefore, ask you to reconsider your decision to break from FCU. We would ask you to invite a member of the CPGB's PCC to speak at a TAS membership meeting. An invitation that ought to include the pro-party faction to Prometheus too. This is, remember a tripartite process that also reaches into RS21 and, in fact, considerably beyond. Good communists here in Britain, and internationally, are closely following our debates and efforts to achieve organisational unity.

If you seriously believe that the CPGB has behaved in an underhand, reprehensible or unprincipled manner that is something that ought to be openly addressed. We are certainly ready to account for our commitment to robust and open polemics.

We therefore issue our own invitation. Provide a speaker for one of our regular Online Communist Forums. You will be given as much time as you feel you need.

TAS, surely have nothing to lose. Together our cause has everything to gain.



Socialist Coffee Break

A weekly meet up to discuss socialist politics, world news, and more.

Every week @ The Press Bookhouse (462 Hunter Street, Newcastle)

WEDNESDAY 11AM

STARTING JULY 30

Hosted by Newcastle Socialists & Newcastle RCO

In solidarity,
Provisional Central Committee
CPGB

Pakistan: General strike to free political prisoners!

Imran Khan has been languishing in Adiala Jail since August 2023 because he dared to challenge Pakistan's servility to the US and refused to support Ukraine. Since then, the establishment has slapped more bogus charges on him to keep him locked up and crush his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, and supporters.

As communists, we don't agree with Imran Khan's politics. But we firmly believe that it is not up to the US or the Pakistani military to decide who should rule the country. Therefore, we support the fight for Khan's freedom. We differ in our strategy, however: to free Imran Khan, it is necessary to mobilise all the masses of Pakistan! For an all-Pakistan general strike!

The Sharif-Bhutto government is fearful for its stability due to its extremely narrow base and a collapsing economy. To maintain itself, it is carrying out mass repression against anti-government activists—from the arrest of hundreds from Khan's party and the Pakhtunkhwa National Awami Party, to the recent arrest of members of the Awami Action

Committee in Gilgit Baltistan, to leaders of leftist political parties such as the Mazdoor Kisan Party, not to mention daily state violence against the Baloch people.

To fight back, the struggle to free Khan must be joined up with the struggle to free other leftist political prisoners because they all have one common enemy: the Pakistani government, backed by the US. When Khan supporters demand the freedom of those fighting for Gilgit, KP and Balochistan, it will forge ties of unity between the oppressed nationalities in Pakistan and the majority. This could strengthen the overall movement against the government and the US, which is bleeding Pakistan through the IMF, and could inspire a similar struggle on the other side of the border where Trump is slapping huge tariffs on India and Bangladesh.

For a general strike to free Imran Khan and leftist political prisoners!

Down with US imperialism! Inqalab Zindabad! ■ **Workers Hammer**

Demand Freedom for Leftist Political Prisoners

As Russia continues to wage an imperialist war against Ukraine, Communists of all stripes have fallen under the boot of state repression (both in Russia and Ukraine). Oppose the Moscow and Kyiv gangsters, demand the release of all political prisoners. Russian Marxist Boris Kagarlitsky was imprisoned by the Russian state under phony "anti-terrorism" charges in 2023. As of February 2024, he has been sentenced to five years in a prison colony (Meduza).

Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk was arrested by the Ukrainian Security Service on April 25th 2024. As of writing, he is being held in Nikolaev in deplorable conditions. He is being falsely charged with being a Russian state operative and a propagandist for Moscow's imperialist invasion. If found guilty, he faces a life sentence (WSWS).

Many more communists, trade unionists, and anti-war protesters are being incarcerated arbitrarily by the Russian and Ukrainian governments. We must support them all, and demand their immediate release.

In addition, the Partisan calls for the freedom of all political prisoners, such as Mumia Abu-Jamal and Leonard Peltier who still languish in the prisons of the American imperialists. In Britain, the Filton 10 now face years in prison for their actions against the war profiteers at Elbit Systems. One of these comrades, Zoë Rogers, has just spent her 21st Birthday behind bars.

We echo calls by the Revolutionary Communist International (RCI) for the release of Pakistani socialists who face repression in Gilgit-Baltistan. We must not forget the tens of thousands of Palestinians who languish in Israeli prisons and detention centres. We encourage communists and militants of all kinds of agitate for the release of all political prisoners, be they communists, militants, activists or other kinds of radicals. ■ **Partisan**

Red Anti-Imperialist Collective National Congress 2025: Building the foundations

The Red Anti-Imperialist Collective held its National Congress in Melbourne from July 11th to 13th, with members flying in from its Perth and Sydney branches. The congress had two objectives. First, to develop and cohere Red Ant's analysis of the current conjuncture in Australia. Second, to discuss and agree on a set of concrete strategies for Red Ant in the medium term.

The first two days of the Congress were dedicated to the first goal; the last day was devoted to the second. The first two days featured panels on a wide range of topics to do with Australia's political and economic situation, and on the role that Red Ant can play in developing a socialist and anti-imperialist perspective throughout the working class. The research presented was the result of collective study and social investigation that took place over the course of 2025, and demonstrated Red Ant's commitment to historical materialism, not only in theory, but in practice.

Day one saw panels on the Palestine solidarity movement in the suburbs, campuses, and within unions. The challenges to organising, and particularly the constraints of state and institutional repression, were a key point of discussion along with reflections on the broader aims and strategies of the Palestine movement.

We also heard research presentations on the political economy of Australia and its particular development. This then led into discussions of Australia as a junior partner in the world imperialist alliance—one that relies on U.S. imperialism, and the imperialist world order more broadly, to project regional power and secure a share of the surplus extracted from the Global South.

Panelists outlined Australia's historic position as an eager vassal of U.S. imperialism in the Asia-Pacific—a geopolitical role that culminated in the AUKUS treaty and the deepening incorporation of Australian military and industry into the U.S. war machine, which is currently gearing up for a war on China. A key topic was the contradiction between, on the one hand, Australian capital's economic ties with China and, on the other, its security ties with the U.S., and on what divisions this may cleave within the ruling class itself.

The second day of the Congress began with a fascinating presentation from a long term activist associated with the Belgian Workers Party. The speaker explained how the party had grown from its doctrinaire beginnings in the student movement of the late 1960s to a party with over twenty-five thousands members with representation in the Belgian parliament. Reflections were also shared on other socialist parties within Australia and what practices are worth emulating and which practices are worth avoiding!

A powerful presentation was made from two Perth comrades which emphasised the importance of embedding Marxist Feminist theory within our collective, and how our practices need to be consciously shaped to ensure we are not replicating the patriarchal values that dominate many leftist spaces. Gender-based oppression, it was argued, is an essential element of the reproduction of capital and capitalist relations of production. Any supposed opposition between the class struggle and the struggle for women's liberation is therefore wholly false.

A panel examined the first hand experiences many migrants in Australia have with imperialist oppression. This led into a discussion on the necessity and possibilities of organising for socialism within Australia's migrant working class.

Another panel considered the character of the Australian capitalist class. In particular, an examination of the class basis of the Labor Party was forwarded and discussed.

The day finished with an examination of the union movement in Australia and how it has been weakened over the last forty years through the class collaborationist policies of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. The theory of the labor aristocracy was explained to deepen our Marxist understanding of this process. Lastly, there was a discussion on the communist approach to union organising, which highlighted the opportunities (and risks) of rank and file socialist organising within unions.

On our third day, we thrashed out our key organisational priorities and strategies for the year ahead. The fact that Red Ant is not dominated by a leadership clique but is instead nurturing a comradely space for collective

decision making was on full display here.

We began the day by consolidating our long and medium-term objectives as an organisation. We reaffirmed that the ultimate objective of any serious socialist organisation is to bring the working class to power, and that, to do this, a strong party is necessary—a party composed of cadre who are the best organisers and the best advocates for socialism among the working class. Our principal task in the medium term—as a small organisation in a relatively stable imperialist country—is therefore to build a party of this kind, with the proviso that this can only be done if, from the very beginning, we maintain the closest contact with the class and participate in mass organising of all kinds.

We decided to change our name! Moving forward the Red Ant Collective will be called the “Red Anti-imperialist Collective”. We believe this better explains our key goal of building an anti-imperialist socialist movement among the Australian working class. We are keeping the shorthand “Red Ant”, as well as the Red Ant logo!

The collective voted to ensure that all members must be educated to become Marxist Feminists, recognising that women’s liberation from patriarchy is inseparable from the broader struggle to overthrow capitalism. Instilling this perspective in the socialist movement is not something that can be achieved by a single vote, but only through

ongoing, consistent education and discussion.

The collective also recognised the need for us to deepen our understanding of the Chinese Revolution and China’s subsequent development. As part of this process we voted to start the planning for a study group to visit China.

A strategy around how to most effectively be involved in social movements was also adopted. Organisational changes will also be made to streamline our online presence.

As a relatively small and young organisation, many of our decisions were focussed on how we build a confident and theoretically grounded cadre through education. However, as Marx’s famous maxim decrees “Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it”. The Red Anti-Imperialist Collective is determined to apply our learning to build a revolutionary movement in Australia. We believe that this Congress was a small step in this process. Contact us if you want to be involved! ■ **Red Anti-Imperialist Collective**

Encourage & support the bravery of Israeli draft resisters

Two years into the genocidal assault waged by Israel against the Palestinian peoples, more and more Israeli youths are refusing compulsory service in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). Though these youths are widely marginalised in Israeli society, they are taking a stand against Israel’s genocidal assault by refusing to serve in the IDF. They follow a similar path to the draft dodgers and evaders in the U.S and Australia in the 1960s and 70s who refused military service – they chose prison over joining the imperialist assault against the peoples of Vietnam.

Workers and socialists across the world must not only support but encourage draft resistance in Israel. We must encourage Israeli youths to say no to service in a terroristic, genocidal military force (the IDF). Only through wide support by the world movement can more Israeli youths take part. Israel’s genocide highlights the

state endorsed terror of conscription: it forces young people to throw their lives away in the armed service of oppressive capitalist states.

Young Israelis who resist the draft are subjected to torment and state violence, and are widely maligned by Israel’s highly militaristic and reactionary society. But this is no different to the draft resisters of the West in the 20th century: they too were widely maligned and hated by society, until opposition to the war became mainstream. Israeli society must be turned against the war, and it can only be turned against the war by supporting draft resisters and fighting Zionism.

We urge comrades across the world to support Israeli draft dodgers, alongside the continuing struggle by Palestinian militants to resist the genocidal assault waged by Israel. ■ **Temokalati (Democracy)**

Reflections on the RCO's three years of publishing

2025 broadly marks the third year of the RCO producing a frequent publication. **Max J**, who has worked on the RCO's publications from their beginning in 2023, reflects on the lessons and futures for the publishing wing of the organisation.

Communists have broadly recognised the importance of the press in disseminating communist ideas to the working class, as well as organising serious communist cadres. This is because the press, being publications such as leaflets, pamphlets, newsletters, newspapers and magazines, is an effective means of disseminating such ideas.

Publications are generally easy to distribute (you can hand someone a physical leaflet or magazine), don't individually take up much space, and can usually be easy to produce (if it isn't too sophisticated). Publications also help communists develop essential skills such as writing, reading, critical thinking, and communication in general.

There are a few reasons why publications which print are far better than digital-only publications, or simple internet posts. Mainly, a print publication can be shown to and handed to someone at a rally, or while tabling. A physical publication also provides some level of legitimacy to a group or campaign which cannot be accomplished by social media posts, blog posts, or infographics. They make the politics seem 'real' moreso than a purely online presence would.

Since its inception, the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO) has always stressed the importance of its publications. The launch statement of the Marxist Unity Circle reads: "We see our publications, particularly Direct Action and The Militant, as being at the centre of our political work. Writing for, reading, and distributing our publications is not a secondary matter, but rather the primary task of our comrades - it is an educational tool, a means to reach sympathisers and supporters, and the means by which we will reach larger layers of socialists and militant workers and youth. As such, we support strengthening our publications, giving them dedicated editorial committees, and placing them at the centre of daily political work" (Strengthen Our Publications).

The RCO has had five main publications over its existence so far: Weapon of Critique,

ISSUE 1

VOICE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISTS

DIRECT ACTION

The Knife at Your Throat

by Phil A. Neel, published first in *The Brooklyn Rail*

Swipe through any newsfeed and tales of creeping horror will press up from beneath the touchscreen: prices rising undead from the depths of the grave called globalisation, paychecks shrivelling to ash, marauders emerging from the suburban forests to siphon black gold from boreholes drilled into gas tanks. The nightmare of inflation is back. As with any horror story, there must be a monster. What, exactly, is the cause of rising prices? The political message is often as clear here as in the little boomer-humour Biden stickers popping up on gas pumps across the country. Pundits track their favoured monster to its bone-strewn lair, brandishing torches. When the monster is unveiled, there is not really a surprise: high wages, free-flowing stimulus checks, too much money spent on social programs—all different ways of saying too much money in the hands of those who were born to have less. New spending must be curtailed, the minor wave of youthful interest in unionisation drawn back, all of that too-much-money out there siphoned back into the familiar too-few-hands. The Fed, which harboured such monsters, must now take responsibility by finally raising the blade of the interest rate like Paul Volcker, patron saint of brutal technocrats and bruiselless beatings.

"The Left" takes aim at a different monster, but a monster nonetheless. Inflation isn't induced by high wages, but by price-gouging corporations

and war profiteers. If anything, price increases justify demands for higher wages, reversing the chicken and the egg. This account is usually adorned with some acknowledgement of the state of emergency in the supply chain, thereby pairing price gouging with shocks to production in a narrative that, at its most earnest, concludes that the only way to slay the monster is through a pragmatic package of price controls similar to those instituted during wartime. Here too, the lead players remain the "policymakers," foremost among them the technocrats at the Fed. In fact, both rightwing and leftist narratives have tended to portray the past decade or so of economic turmoil as something like a prestige drama focused the intrigues of financiers and central bankers. Stephanie Kelton, former Chief Economist for the Senate Budget Committee and advisor to the Bernie Sanders campaign, does something similar in her recent bestseller popularizing "Modern Monetary Theory" (MMT), the gist of which is that all the legal and theoretical prerequisites are already in place for fiscal and financial authorities to pour money into social programs, if only they choose to. The result is that even many "socialists" have come to see the only way out of the crisis—that of inflation, certainly, but also the more general crises of economic stagnation and ecological catastrophe—as the mobilization of the Federal Reserve and the Treasury to "Fund a People's Climate Revolution" or similar seemingly plausible programs pursued within the existing institutional environment. The strategy is to approach utopia through political compromise. But remove the embellishment and we find a more straightforward logic: The only thing that can stop a bad guy with a bank is a good guy with a bank.

The actual mechanics of inflation aren't particularly difficult to trace at any given moment.

Direct Action #1, released April 2023.

The Militant, Direct Action, Partisan, and Bread & Roses. These have existed to serve various purposes: some for communist analysis of news & events (Direct Action & Partisan), others to provide longer, more theoretical analysis (Weapon of Critique). Bread & Roses also existed as a publication of the Communist Women's Front, organised by QLD-based RCO members.

Weapon of Critique to Partisan (2022 to Today)

"The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser."

V. I. Lenin, Where to Begin?, 1901

The RCO's first publication was Weapon of Critique. It was intended to be a theoretical journal which would publish seasonally. Plans for Weapon of Critique were made primarily by

DIRECT ACTION

¤ A Monthly Communist Magazine ¤

May '24 #13

The Student Intifada



(Photo: Surena)

Student encampment at the University of Sydney (USyd)

Take the campus, Fight for democratic control, Resist the police and administration, For maximum unity of students and workers.

Occupations established in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane. Adelaide to come. Perth and Newcastle next?

Student protesters hold strong in the US in face of police and reactionary thugs on campus.

CAMPUS OCCUPATIONS SWEEP THE US

From the 17th of April, a series of pro-Palestinian university demonstrations have taken place at universities opposing the continued support of their governments and universities towards weapons manufacturers and Israel amidst its occupation of the Gaza Strip (Goldstein, 2024). The demonstrations have occurred in western countries supporting Israel, and have demanded that their respective universities divest from Israel and companies enabling the conflict. (continued on page 10)

Are you a student protester? Tell us your story: directactionmagazine@proton.me

Direct Action #12, released May 2024.

Edith F in 2022, continuing to 2023. By early 2023, the editorial team for Weapon of Critique included: comrades Claude, Edith F, James Y, Levi P, Max J (myself), Morgan L, Nera, Roland T, and Sam. However, Weapon of Critique did not materialise. This was for a few reasons, but mainly, inexperience. Debates over the editorial content and direction of Weapon of Critique certainly bogged it down as well.

In April 2023, Weapon of Critique morphed into Direct Action. Direct Action was launched originally as a collection of essays and articles republished and packaged for RCO members and sympathisers. Direct Action released monthly. Each issue had a general theme. For example, Direct Action 3, Womanhood and other Misfortunes, was focused on women's liberation and feminism. Direct Action was mainly edited and produced by Edith F and myself. Edith would provide the copy, while I would format it into each issue.

Direct Action was a modest success. It did not, however, develop a distinct identity, until Direct Action 5 (September 2023). By this point, Direct Action began the slow transition away from simply republishing essays and articles, and toward publishing written material from RCO comrades. It also shifted design-wise: while the first four Direct Actions were put together in Google Slides (an object of

RCO Congress Special Edition

Direct Action!

A magazine of Communist ideas

July '24 #15



INSIDE: RCO comrades condemn ANU's expulsion of student activist Beatrice Tucker ¤ A reflection on the student movement and what it means for Communists and the Left ¤ Whither Activism? ¤ RCO's Congress and what it means for the RCO and Direct Action ¤ and more

Direct Action 15, released July 2024.

great shame), the remaining eleven were put together using Canva (an object of lesser shame).

Design-wise, Direct Action looks abysmal in hindsight. Text boxes are unevenly placed. Boxes are outlined not using strokes, but using other boxes placed underneath them, leading to wildly uneven and inconsistent dimensions. Images are inconsistently sized and placed. It was a very amateur magazine. In spite of this, our commitment to iterating on design and editorial direction, and commitment to consistently producing an issue each month, demonstrated our willingness to learn more and develop our skills.

And so Direct Action continued for all of 2023. It even managed to survive the Newcastle schism that took place in August/September. By Direct Action 8, we began publishing action reports from RCO comrades – these were mostly written reports about protests and rallies that comrades went to. Direct Action 8 also featured a lengthy 'feature' (what we called smashing 3-4 articles together into one themed section) about the People's Blockade that Rising Tide hosted at Newcastle.

Direct Action became exciting by Issue 13, when the Palestine student movement kicked into gear with encampments across Australia. Issues 13 and 14 are both concerned with these

encampments, and feature in-depth reports on protests and rallies that took place as part of this campaign. They also featured a new visual look and relatively improved design, though the earlier quirks remained.

The last issue of Direct Action was Issue 15, released in July of 2024. This issue coincided with the RCO's 2024 conference, which instituted various changes to the RCO, that also impacted the publications. Two motions raised at this conference addressed Direct Action and publications in general:

Motion #E02 – Building Our Publications

MOTION: This congress acknowledges the centrality of the communist publication to the establishment of a revolutionary socialist movement and the creation of a mass socialist workers party. In our context, this means building Direct Action (DA) into an invaluable publication of the socialist movement in Australia.

That the Publications Committee, the editors of Direct Action, and the incoming Central Committee be tasked with making our organisational publication the centre of our political work. That this task include:

- strengthening DA through a dedicated editorial committee.
- ensuring regular original content for the online and print editions of DA.
- building a pool of staff writers for DA, producing at least an article a month.
- organising reprints of relevant articles for the print edition of DA.
- increasing the readership of DA, as well as establishing a subscription system to
- distribute physical copies around the country.
- establishing a coherent style and identity for DA, both in form and in content

Motion #E03 – The Partisan

MOTION: In light of the clarification of our organisational tasks, the organisation shall change the name of its central organ to The Partisan.

That the name Direct Action be reserved for a future workers bulletin.

The Marxist Unity Circle, a faction which existed for the duration of the 2024 conference, stated the following in their internal statement:

Strengthen Our Publications. We see our publications, particularly Direct Action and The Militant, as being at the centre of our political work. Writing for, reading, and

Issue #1
August '24
\$5

PARTISAN!
The Monthly Partyist Magazine



The Setka Circus p3
Popular Fronts and the Left p7
Alliance of Sahel States p13
Letters p22



Partisan 1, released August 2024.

distributing our publications is not a secondary matter, but rather the primary task of our comrades - it is an educational tool, a means to reach sympathisers and supporters, and the means by which we will reach larger layers of socialists and militant workers and youth. As such, we support strengthening our publications, giving them dedicated editorial committees, and placing them at the centre of daily political work.

Both motions passed. And so, after fifteen months, Direct Action became Partisan. Partisan was the culmination of the last fifteen months of experience and developments. It was the first step toward developing a more professional publication suited to the tasks and aims of the RCO.

Partisan certainly improved on what Direct Action had produced. For example, while the design of the early Partisans was spotty, it was far better than Direct Action. While Direct Action was produced using Canva, Partisan is now produced using professional publishing software (Affinity Publisher).

Partisan's incumbent staff team included myself, Brunhilda O, Sylvia R, and Luca. Partisan was benefited by the introduction of Luca, the first of two dedicated graphic designers to enter the Partisan team.

Partisan developed a more clear editorial line. The stated purpose and aim of Partisan is to act as a “platform for open polemic in and amongst the Left”. Since August 2024, we have certainly tried to live up to this purpose, and I believe we hit the mark as best we can.

Partisan also developed two things that Direct Action really should've had: a dedicated website/social media wing, and a subscription system. Partisan's website was originally cobbled together on wordpress, and it took a while to develop a more professional looking site (it still needs some work). However, our social media side (Twitter & Instagram) were a positive development. Social media outreach has been one of many means by which we disseminate Partisan and find new readers. As of writing, our Instagram has 176 followers, while our Twitter has 160.

Partisan continued to publish monthly. It is currently a monthly magazine. With the exception of January 2025, Partisan has released an issue monthly since August 2024. We currently handle subscriptions via the Patreon platform, though the team is working on a way to transition away from Patreon to handle subscriptions internally.

Partisan's finances have been a recurring issue. Currently, we distribute Partisans “by donation” – generally, it is a “pay what you can” system. Initially, we listed Partisans as having a \$5 cost, but found that this limited our audience. Partisan is primarily funded by the RCO directly.

By Partisan 6 (February 2025), the team had changed again. This is broadly the current composition of Partisan's editorial team: Myself, Mila V, Luca, Jason B, Edith F, and V. Alice, formerly of Militant (the RCO's former internal bulletin), was also added to the team in April-May.

In July-August, Partisan has started the process of restructuring. This is mainly to formalise the editorial team, establish a coherent workflow, and set the stage for any future expansions.

Who is Partisan's audience?

Partisan is aimed at the Australian Left, as well as militants and sympathisers. It is not intended for a broad, mass audience. For this reason, Partisan skips around the troubles most sect papers have, of trying to make niche politics appeals to a broad, mass audience. Instead, Partisan aims to promote the politics of the RCO to people who are already more or less amenable to something resembling socialist politics.

What makes Partisan different?

Every sect has their own paper. This is a non-exhaustive list of left-publications in Australia: Solidarity (Solidarity), Red Flag (Socialist Alternative), Marxist Left Review (Socialist Alternative), Vanguard (CPA-ML), Guardian (CPA), Australian Left Review (CPA), Militant Monthly (ACP), Red Battler (SLA), GreenLeft (Socialist Alliance).

Why do people read Partisan? Because Partisan does what the other sect papers (with perhaps the exception of Red Battler) don't do: it reports openly and transparently on the rest of the left and what it does. This has earned Partisan the label of “tabloid” and “gossip rag” by sectarian detractors.

Such denunciations of Partisan demonstrate, primarily, that Partisan is doing a good job at what it sets out to do. Our transparent and open reporting on the Left, unrestrained by bureaucratic busybodies, upsets the sensibilities of those on the Left who would prefer the working class to be totally clueless about what they're doing.

How on earth are we meant to win the working class over to communism if the working class has no clue what communists are doing or believe in? This is why Partisan is important: at our best, we do “public interest journalism”. It is within the public interest, insofar as the working class benefits from knowing this information.

Partisan sets itself apart from the rest of the Left's publications in a few ways. Mainly, it is the public interest journalism. Other sect papers generally exist to only espouse the positions of the sects that publish it. This makes them only valuable insofar as they are the main way workers and militants can learn about what these sects believe about any given issue.

Communists must be journalists. They must work constantly to provide information to the working class in such a way that is informative and beneficial, and in their interests. Journalistic skills, such as writing, critical thinking, research, etc, are themselves beneficial to communists, and easily transferable to other endeavours. Writing for Partisan trains comrades to be journalists.

By focusing on our role as journalists, Partisan can become an “agenda-setter” on the Left. Agenda setting in Journalism broadly means that the news determines what the overall discourse is based on what its reporting, and how it reports on it.

The CPA once had two big publications: Tribune and Arena. Tribune was a goliath on the Australian Left. Partisan can very well

become the next Tribune, becoming the dominant publication on the Australian Left, through taking up and upholding the journalism angle.

Partisan is not a theory journal, nor is it aimed toward an academically inclined audience. It is aimed at the broad Left and sympathisers in general. This doesn't preclude Partisan from publishing complicated theoretical texts, but these should be minimal.

What do people read Partisan for? Communist journalism. People read Partisan to learn about the Left, what the Left is doing, and for Partisan's partyist perspective (reflecting the politics of the RCO). People tend to read Partisan not for the Marxism 101s, but for the communist journalism. These are things like reporting on splits in the Left, as well as coverage of rallies and other events.

Partisan fills a clear niche in left publishing.

For this reason, Partisan should focus on the communist journalism and analysis of the news, the main thing setting it apart from Red Flag or GreenLeft. Partisan should not aim to do something that another publication does better – though the RCO should consider establishing its own separate theoretical journal (if it is deemed necessary, but this task should not be handed to Partisan).

Partisan is also open to the views of other militants, including those with views opposed to the RCO. This is also a rarity in left publishing, since most sect papers exist solely to promote the views of the particular sect.

Many on the Left debate over whether or not print media is worth engaging with. This is a silly and backwards argument. Digital-only media, while having a broader appeal, is totally incapable of having the same impact on society as print media does. It abandons the working class to anti-literacy and anti-critical thinking.

It is detrimental to radical politics, most of all communist politics.

Lessons & Futures

Some lessons can be taken from Partisan: mainly, that if you consistently produce a quality magazine with content that isn't too esoteric, you won't have the hardest time finding some kind of audience. Partisan's current audience is predominantly RCO members and sympathisers. However, Partisan is also read by sections of the Australian Left, including members of Socialist Alternative, the Communist Party, Red Ant, the Spartacist League (who has engaged intellectually with Partisan), and others. Partisan is not aimed at a broad, working-class audience, so it is currently reaching the layers that it is aimed at.

Throughout three years of publishing, Partisan and the RCO have learned crucial lessons which have sharpened and developed our skills. While there is much progress to be made, I believe we are well on track to developing Partisan into a professionally produced magazine capable of competing with historical mastheads such as the CPA's Tribune or Arena. In fact, Partisan should aim to take the role of Tribune or Arena as the dominant organ of the organised socialist Left in Australia – and do it better than they did. ■



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Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism – the Zionist wish list to attack academic freedom in Australia.

In July 2024, Jillian Segal was appointed Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism in Australia. This move was done in the wake of a year of protesting for Palestine Liberation and against support for Israel, framing opposition to Israel as being antisemitic. Owen H writes on the latest developments from the Special Envoy and their implications.

Launched on July 10th, the Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism should be concerning for anyone who values the preservation of democratic rights in Australia. The report proposes the adoption of laws for the option to withhold federal university funding for universities, programs or individuals that fall afoul of the envoy. Nominally, the report seeks to use these special powers in cases where they are perceived to facilitate or enable antisemitism, but this can be applied subjectively and potentially be used to undermine critical historiography, and other academic fields of inquiry. This measure would have serious implications for academic freedom, and could also constrain political life on university campuses.

With a special focus on young people and education, in the introductory section of the report it states:

“Since 7 October 2023, antisemitism has risen to deeply troubling levels in Australia. This has been driven by conflict in the Middle East, manipulated narratives in the legacy media and social media and the spread of extremist ideologies.”

“Research commissioned by the Special Envoy highlights a stark divide between Australians under 35 and those over 35, reflecting generational differences in media consumption and the perceptions younger Australians have of the Middle East and the Jewish community.”

“Antisemitism is evident within schools and universities and has become ingrained and normalised within academia and the cultural space. We need to resolve this urgently. We are on a dangerous trajectory where young people raised on a diet of disinformation and misinformation about Jews today risk becoming fully-fledged antisemites tomorrow.”

The report has pushed for a strategic focus on “institutional accountability and university

reform” under which the envoy will develop and launch a ‘report card’ for universities, and a commission of inquiry into campus antisemitism, that will be used to make the business case for federal funding to be withheld “where possible, from universities, programs or individuals within universities that facilitate, enable or fail to act against antisemitism.”

These laws if adopted would effectively give Segal veto power over university funding nationally. It is a direct attempt to mirror Trump's attacks on higher education with the revocation of USD\$400M in federal funding for Columbia university.

Columbia became a target of Trump after it was the site of a very active university encampment calling for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and an end to US military assistance for Israel. Described as the largest student campaign since the Vietnam war, it was the site of a large skirmish as it was violently attacked by counter protesters in May 2024. The encampment was later permanently closed down by police in a wave of arrests.

Following Trump's move to cut funding, Columbia has capitulated and prostrated itself by expelling or suspending students, and in some cases revoking degrees. This is alongside a slew of other concessions that have been implemented while university administration desperately negotiates to restore funding.

Harvard, Princeton, Cornell, and Northwestern are embroiled in similar cases as Trump seeks to strip them of funding due to pro Palestine activism, which he has labelled antisemitic.

If implemented, the ability to withhold funding for universities would have grave implications for academic freedom. For instance, any academic working on Arabic studies would have to be very careful when writing about events such as the Nakba, the Naksa, the Oslo accords or the Great March of Return Protests. One would have to only use anodyne source material, or avoid the topic, for fear of being accused of facilitating antisemitism and falling afoul of the censor.

It is noteworthy that within Israel there is the Nakba law, that allows the minister of finance to withhold funds for any government-funded institution that observes Palestinian

Nakba Day as a day of mourning, officially promoting denial of the 1948 Palestinian mass expulsion.

The Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism would also have implications for student organising on campus, as university management would be effectively blackmailed into harshly censuring political expression on campus or risk losing funding.

Regarding these potentials, Universities Australia write: "The danger of such a power being abused for political purposes is high and the chilling effect that such an approach would have on scholars and students is real."

This is a reactionary plan, in service of reactionary ends. It is an attempt to control academic freedom in the face of an alleged "dangerous trajectory". The envoy is declaring that fake news is driving young people into becoming antisemites, and as such has targeted emergent criticism of Israel's actions in Palestine within universities.

The plan would curtail the ability to discuss these issues and to politically campaign on campus. If adopted, the plan would be a political gift to Zionism – giving unprecedented power and free reign to effectively dictate how history is written, and to silence criticism of Israeli war crimes etc.

Despite this, the report has met a receptive audience, with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese welcoming the report and politely noting that his government was currently

considering adopting the proposals. Criticism of the plan has been fairly tame so far within civil society, as commentators have noted the plan's unreasonableness, thinking it is unlikely to progress as acquiescing to the envoy's demands "would surely also lead to demands for similar powers from other community groups."

Writing in 1938, Leon Trotsky wrote:

"Before exhausting or drowning mankind in blood, capitalism befools the world atmosphere with the poisonous vapours of national and race hatred. Anti-Semitism today is one of the most malignant convulsions of capitalism's death agony."

Often described as the socialism of fools, we wholeheartedly oppose antisemitism, and seek the unity of the working class across ethnic divisions. But we declare no support for this reactionary set of proposals which is part of a wave of repression globally aimed at the Palestine solidarity movement.

We must defend the democratic rights of the working class against these attempts to limit academic freedom and freedom of expression, which are being completed in preparation for silencing dissent for the conflicts and war crimes of the future. US imperialism and its junior partners across the world are attempting to place limits and proscribe what can and cannot be discussed when referring to their beachhead in the Middle East, the state of Israel. ■

NSW Socialists hold official launch

The recently formed NSW Socialists held its official launch on July 27th, at Petersham Town Hall. The launch featured several speakers, as well as stalls advertising Red Flag (the newspaper of Socialist Alternative). Speakers included Eleanor of NSW Socialists, as well as Zach Schofield of Rising Tide. While Jordan Van Den Lamb's attendance was widely advertised as a selling point for the event, he was absent due to personal reasons (a pre-recorded video of his talk was played instead).

The event was well attended, with the unofficial count hitting over 350 (potentially closer to 400). Political groups in attendance included the Revolutionary Communist Organisation, Rising Tide, Socialist Alliance, members of the Greens, and a small detachment from the USYD Grassroots group. Solidarity, a similar group to Socialist Alternative, was instead present at a concurrent Sydney Anti-AUKUS Coalition

panel in Marrickville.

The launch was the first official event held by the NSW Socialists – previously, there had only been informal "meet and greets" held at pubs. The NSW launch did not feature a questions-and-answers session, nor an open mic (such as in Canberra), so the audience was not able to formally engage with the speakers during the event. The restriction of debate and formal engagement reflected negatively on the launch, which relied on speakers cultivating hype from the audience (See: Megachurch Socialism at Marxism 2025).

Party discussions were thus limited to informal conversations at Public House Petersham, a nearby pub. While the launch was attended by potentially four hundred people, the informal social held afterwards was attended by significantly less, the majority of whom were members of Socialist Alternative. ■ Max J for Partisan

It only takes forty minutes: Culloden (1964) and “anti-war films”.

August J takes stock of pop culture’s “anti-war” film collection to decisively end the debate over whether or not it’s possible to produce an “anti-war film”.

French director and film critic Francois Truffaut may or may not have said that “there is no such thing as an anti-war film”. Many have nonetheless attempted to produce a convincingly ‘anti-war’ film, against the odds. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. There are many reasons as to why it is near impossible to produce a convincingly anti-war film. The main reason, in my view, is that cinema is not capable of conveying the full scale of the horrors of war and brutality in a way that doesn’t turn violence into a spectacle. Standard films, with the trappings of narratives, are by their nature forced into personalised portrayals of warfare: the audience comes to empathise with certain characters, detest others, ‘root’ for a side, so on. Narratives have conflict, which requires an antagonist of some kind. In war stories, the antagonist invariably is the ‘opposing side’ in the armed conflict, especially when the protagonist is a soldier, which is true of the vast majority of war films.

Take, for example, *Apocalypse Now* (1979, dir. Francis Ford Coppola). While far from being an ‘anti-war’ film (by intention or otherwise), it nonetheless is a critical portrayal of America’s invasion of Vietnam. Despite this, as an audience, we are nonetheless invested in Cpt. Willard (Martin Sheen) and his mission; when he is attacked by Vietnamese and Cambodian soldiers, we are ‘rooting’ for Willard, not the Vietnamese or Cambodian soldiers. We revel in the spectacle of Lt. Col. Kilgore’s (Robert Duvall) violent assault on a Vietnamese village, as American soldiers gun down Vietnamese guerillas and villagers. We are exalted when Willard finally slays Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando) at the film’s climax.

The 2005 film *Jarhead* (dir. Sam Mendes) is often cited as one of many 21st century ‘anti-war’ films, despite it falling into similar trappings as *Apocalypse Now*. Swofford (Jake Gyllenhaal), a U.S Marine serving in the Persian Gulf war (1990-1991), is our protagonist, and despite his abhorrent behaviour, we are drawn toward empathising with him. The first act of the film does an excellent job of humanising Swofford, no doubt uncritically adapting Swofford’s own memoir



British officers sit on horseback in Watkins’s Culloden (1964)

of the same name (from 2003). While *Jarhead*, like *Apocalypse Now*, critically portrays America’s invasions and participation in imperialist warfare, just like Coppola’s film, it does so in a way that nonetheless pushes the audience toward siding with the invaders. *Jarhead* in particular is a ‘shoot and cry’ – initially an Israeli genre of media which took the approach of soldiers ‘regretting’ their military service, but nonetheless being proud of it.

It is a genre which is a mainstay of media across the imperialist world: Australia has its own ‘shoot and cries’ (*Danger Close*, 2016, dir. Kriv Stenders comes to mind. I was taught screenwriting by one of the writers of that film. This fact is irrelevant), though most of the ‘mainstream’ entries in this genre are from America. While U.S Marines belt out *TEENAGE DIRT BAG* in *Generation Kill* (dirs. Susanna White, Simon C. Jones), they slay scores of unnamed Iraqi bad guys. We’re meant to feel bad about the dead Iraqis, but it’s an unfortunate reality that the dregs of imperialist society must fly to other people’s countries to slaughter them for college grants. So too are we led to believe that Anthony Swofford, U.S Marine Scout sniper, is a victim of circumstance. In the first act of the film, he proudly tells his drill sergeant he joined the corps because he “got lost on the way to college”. The ‘terror’ of *Jarhead* is not the imperialist intervention into Kuwait, but the endless waiting: Swofford goes insane (and we are meant to sympathise with him) because he can’t kill anybody. A pivotal scene in the film, coming at its climax, is Swofford’s first

potential kill snatch from him by the air force. In other terms, Swofford is 'blue-ballsed' by the US imperialists for the entirety of the film.

U.S Marines are a particular folk hero of American shoot and cries. Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) is an infamous entry into the Vietnam war genre of war films, and another cited as an 'anti-war' flick. The film's stark portrayal of U.S Marines as a gang of mindless, racist hooligans did little to deter people from supporting them. In fact, there are many anecdotes of young men walking out of screenings of *Full Metal Jacket* wanting to join the corps. On the corps, General Pershing once said (allegedly): "the deadliest weapon in the world is a marine and his rifle". GySgt Hartman, the infamous ball-busting drill sergeant portrayed by the late R. Lee Ermey, proudly tells his cohort of recruits that Charles Whitman (the Texas Tower shooter who slew fifteen people at the University of Texas in 1966) and Lee Harvey Oswald (who may or may not have assassinated President John F. Kennedy in 1963) were taught to shoot good in the marines. As good a sales pitch for joining the corps as any! This obsession with the U.S Marines would continue for decades: Clint Eastwood's *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986), Rob Reiner's *A Few Good Men* (1992, of "you can't handle the truth!" fame), and Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (in 1989) are some of many late 20th century films which helped to build up the mythos of the U.S. Marine.

What about *Come and See* (1985, dir. Elem Klimov)? A Soviet film, it is cited as a quintessential 'anti-war' classic. It is a harsh and brutal portrayal of a young partisan's struggle to survive the onslaught of Operation Barbarossa. A harrowing film, it nonetheless falls into similar traps as its Western counterparts. While being far from a shoot and cry (its protagonists are the victims, not the perpetrators, of the terror), it is nonetheless a narrative in which the audience is invested in the main character's (Alexey Kravchenko's Florian Gaishun) struggle to survive. The antagonists, the invading Nazis, are too villainous and evil an antagonist to view humanely, especially after the numerous atrocities they commit in the film. *Come and See* thus is less an 'anti-war' film, and more an 'anti-fascist' film: it is hard to imagine a scenario in which we humanise and seek peace with the Nazis. Even in the closing scenes, where the partisans triumph over the Nazis and the partisan leader Kosach (portrayed by Lithuanian actor Liubormas Laucevicius) prepares to burn them alive, the audience must find it difficult to empathise with the same



"You will not laugh! You will not cry! You will learn by the numbers, I will teach you!"

people who moments earlier pretended to execute Florian for a photo and did a similar mass burning of villagers. *Come and See* depicts the brutality of warfare and the way it impacts young people drawn into it, war is unrestrained brutality, it is an orgy of violence, and many get into wars with dreams of glory only to find that 'war is hell'.

Culloden (1964, dir. Peter Watkins) is not a standard film. It follows unnamed TV war reporters as they cover the 1746 Battle of Culloden, in which Charles III Stuart was decisively smashed by the Duke of Cumberland. The film pays special attention to the backgrounds of the soldiers – many of the Scottish and Jacobite soldiers are 'peasants' in the Highlander clan system, pressed into service by their ruling class. Many others were present at the battle to resolve disputes between clans (revenge against clans that sided with the British), or out of honour due to being bound to the clan gentry (tacksmen, who ran estates under the authority of a chief). The TV reporter style gives the film a journalistic flair. Our point of view is never named, and we only get occasional commentary from the narrator. Characters within the film, textually men from the 18th century, react rather anachronistically to the presence of a film crew.

Culloden feigns objectivity in the way it portrays the battle, though it does so with a sense of muted sarcasm. It describes the battle as "one of the most mishandled and brutal battles ever fought in England". Its use of non professional actors, who give 'amateurish' performances, helps cement the 'real-ness' of the events taking place. Unlike most contemporary war reporters, the unnamed reporters in *Culloden* are able to interview and cover all sides of the battle: the Jacobites, the British, civilians, etc. It is certainly a unique way of portraying and covering a historical



Highlanders charge and die during the battle.

event. It is a film style that Watkins would continue to use for his 1966 film *The War Game*, which instead covers a nuclear war between NATO and the USSR. *The War Game* would only be screened to select audiences in 1966, only broadcast publicly by the BBC in 1985. 1984's *Threads* (dir. Barry Hines) is a film of a similar genre, though it takes a more 'cinematic', narrative approach to the story.

Forty minutes is the amount of time it takes for Charles III's army to be devastated, both by his incompetent leadership and by the sabres, bullets, cannonballs, grapeshot and bayonets of the British soldiers. Starved, sleep-deprived Highlanders armed with swords and shields charge helplessly against lines of dirt-caked British infantrymen to be aimlessly slaughtered as the reporters record their deaths in black-and-white shakeycam. Just as *The Last Samurai* (2003, dir. Edward Zwick) was ostensibly a film about feudalism being shot to pieces by capitalist modernity, so too is *Culloden* a film about feudalism being shot to pieces by the footsoldiers of progress. Violence is gratuitous and ever-present in Watkins's early films, for which *Culloden* is the prime offender, being his first full length feature film. However, the violence is rarely a spectacle in *Culloden*, as precious few minutes are spent depicting the outbursts of violence itself – most of the film concerns itself with interviews of random soldiers, explaining who is who, 'setting the scene' of the battle, etc. The battle itself only takes up twenty minutes of run time in an hour long film. Much more of the film's time, especially after the battle, concerns itself with the battle's aftermath.

The field of Culloden moor is a circus of misery and suffering. Destitute, press-ganged Scots starve on the field as unwashed Englishmen (and their highlander allies) stew in their own filth. The moor is a wet patch of disease where the battle is a welcomed reprieve

from the waiting. Contrasted with the battles in Ken Hughes's *Cromwell* (1970), *Culloden* does not have you rooting for the triumph of either side – instead, it has you despair as the 'human rents', Scotsmen who were no more human than sheep were, wait eagerly to be maimed and slaughtered.

Culloden is not content to only depict the events of the battle itself. The battle concludes swiftly, and the British celebrate with an orgy of violence: dying and wounded men are battered to paste on the battlefield, cavalrymen ride down fleeing highlanders and women on the roads to Inverness, British soldiers barge into houses in villages across the area to slaughter Scots at their dinner tables. Warfare is no longer contained to the battlefield, to begin and end with marches and charges: it follows you home and kills you in your sleep. War and violence are inescapable.

Culloden works as an 'anti-war' film despite not necessarily intending to be one. It has a journalistic focus on the battle, with the reporters invested in learning the stories of the people involved. The reporters don't pick sides, though they are sympathetic to the civilians who are slaughtered by British forces, and take an angle that portrays Charles III and his staff as stubborn, while covering the abuse of the British. They are the perfect journalist: they master the balance between objectivity and highlighting the humanity of the people involved. It is 'Brechtian' (invokes Bertold Brecht) in the way it pulls the audience out of the narrative to remind them they are watching a film. For this reason, an 'anti-war' film must necessarily be a non-standard film. By breaking the chains of a standard narrative, a film can portray conflict, or at the very least its impacts on combatants and non combatants, in a way that avoids turning war and conflict into a spectacle. This is more or less what documentaries and news reports do, or aim to do on paper anyway.

So Francois Truffaut did not believe that anti war films could exist. And neither do I, more or less. But if Truffaut had seen *Culloden* (1964), I believe he would've made an exception. ■

Letters

At the Sydney 'March for Humanity' Porco, Sydney

The RCO and a contingent of former Spartacists united at the corner of Wynyard park to join the "March for Humanity". We handed out flyers and chatted with new friends and comrades. The turnout was so massive you could imagine it taking up the entire CBD if you spread out enough. It rained heavily in unpredictable waves as the marchers trudged towards the bridge, determined to exert our increasingly negotiable rights to protest.

The march was a somber demonstration of solidarity with the Palestinians. We only walked to the edge of the north side of the bridge when we were turned around by tired and nervous police officers who were clearly taken aback by the massive turnout. Everyone held umbrellas for each other and took care not to push. Socialist Alternative members got to bang on drums and revel in their legendary 'people power'. There was a palpable feeling of moral responsibility, determination and desperation in the crowd, as women wearing headscarfs pushed babies in prams, and teenagers marched arm in arm with grandparents chanting "from the river to the sea".

The march was historic, and that shouldn't be forgotten. It felt like a protest from a bygone era. However, for an RCO member in the crowd, there was an air of sadness to the disparate and separated socialists. I saw the Solidarity contingent hurry past the Socialist Alternative camp, shouting slogans and attempting to disseminate pamphlets.

I even confused an Socialist Alternative organiser for a Solidarity comrade as I asked him kindly to attend our upcoming Talking Reds event "Building Revolution". For the socialists in the crowd, we were disunited, small and overshadowed by the likes of Julian Assange and Bob Carr.

Josh Lees, one of the leading organisers for the Palestine movement in Sydney, is a Socialist Alternative member. His contribution to the legal victory in the courts shouldn't be understated. The march was also organised extremely smoothly given the turnout, contrary to the hysterics of the police commissioner who claimed something "catastrophic" could've happened. So Socialist Alternative played no small part in the success of this rally. But at

New Message

To  partisanmagazine@proton.me CC BCC

LETTER: [Letter title]

[NAME]

I enjoyed the article *Article Name* in *Partisan* #number, but have questions about the author. The author says this thing, but I think a different thing. Something to think about, comrades.

Send ▾

what cost?

The politics of the Palestine movement is now becoming a mainstream sentiment in many parts of Australian society. This is necessary for real change to happen at the level of government. But for a disunited socialist movement, the more this positive sentiment grows, the harder it will be for our obscure revolutionary politics to influence the direction of the protests.

This is not to say we even should attempt to direct or dictate a movement to end the genocide in Palestine. But in some ways we have seen this all before. The Iraq war protests, Occupy, the environmental movement and the Black Lives Matter protests in Australia were all ultimately directed into the liberal and progressive mainstream. This can only develop the professional opportunities of careerists in the NGO industrial complex, the Labor Party and the Greens. Without a revolutionary mass party, the socialist tendency in this society will always fall short of cohering these mobilised, outraged protesters into supporters of a longterm socialist project to destroy capitalism.

When attending the SAIt forum after the rally, there was no mention of the NSW Socialists. It seems absurd that this project that SAIt are driving shouldn't be front and centre for the radical left. This party could be the place of revolutionary contestation with the mainstreaming of Australian progressivism. But instead, the forum consisted mostly of sentimental screeds about our loss of humanity under capitalism, or why we should all quit our jobs, and the "hypocrisy" of the ruling class saying "never again". Strategy and politics were not on the agenda.

Marches like the 'March for Humanity' are vital and empowering political acts. They mobilise masses of people who often never engage in political work and are merely passive progressive liberals or demobilised social

democrats. Let us not confuse rallies with revolution. Communism is a positive political program, not an anticapitalist protest. Building it will require more than just crossing the harbour bridge and presenting a forum afterwards. ■

Reactionary defeatism

David McMullen, Online

While we wait with fingers crossed for the collapse of the Tehran regime, I thought I would cast my mind over some unfinished business on the Ukraine Front. I am thinking of the "anti-imperialist" supporters of "revolutionary defeatism".

According to them, the war is merely a case of inter-imperialists conflict where we should not take sides. "We" should engage in revolutionary defeatism and turn the imperialist war into a civil war. This civil war will be a class war where the working class takes on the bourgeoisie. "No war but the class war" as the saying goes.

I am afraid if Ukraine were defeated you would not have a civil war in that country but Russian occupation and guerilla resistance. In that situation normal Ukrainians would be aiming to build a united struggle against the occupier, very few of whom would be radical left in any sense. The mercifully few trotskyites and other ultra-leftists would of course be aiming to oppose all "bourgeois reactionaries" and in that way assist the Russians.

A defeat for Ukraine would mean millions of people fleeing to the West and those who don't escape would be the victims of rampaging vengeful ruscists. Victory on the other hand would mean one more bourgeois democracy free of tyranny, and with ties to the west and prospects for a degree of economic development.

Defeatism would of course be an great idea in the case of Russia. A Russian defeat would lead to considerable political turmoil and possibly civil war. The critical battle line would be that between the fascists and democrats. As in Ukraine, there is no radical left worth

mentioning. So any talk of proletarian revolution is ridiculous.

A victory for bourgeois democracy and the return of normal ties with the West would be an excellent outcome. Russia would then be part of the democratic (aka "Western Imperialist") camp and no longer a nuisance. It would likely to be keen for NATO membership or other security guarantees given the threat from China. Indeed, China may by then have already taken a bite out of Russia, particularly those bits with valuable mineral resources and which they can claim as being originally part of China. ■

Write us a letter

Writing us a letter is easy, and is a good alternative to writing a full article or essay. Letters are submitted like normal articles are, through our email. A letter could be any kind of statement or observation, in around 500 words or less. The shorter the better. In a letter, you should give your opinion or statement on something, then finish off with your name and city (any name works - many of our writers use pseudonyms). In particular, we encourage letters written as a reply to other articles. Of course, you are also free to write a full article in reply to another article, but sometimes it may be better to simply write a letter in. Letters may also be replies to other letters, and of course, an article can also be a reply to a letter.

You could also write one directed to the editorial team at Partisan, and if you do, we will submit a reply in the following issue. We aim to build a lively letters section as part of our overall goal to establish Partisan as a platform of open debate and polemic between and amongst the organised Left. Letters should be sent to partisanmagazine@proton.me and contain the subject "Letter: [heading]". The content of your letter can be sent within the body of the email as opposed to a document attached to the email. ■

Have any news, tips, reports, or statements to make?

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