

Australia before the storm



Huang Jingwen/Xinhua via AP; Official White House Photo by Daniel Torok

PM Albanese gets a glad-hand from President Xi in Beijing, three months before inking a critical minerals deal with Trump in Washington in October. Australian rulers dance the world stage before the music stops.

What in the world is going on? Tariffs and wars, bubbles and potential crashes; keeping up with world news over the past year makes one's head spin. Yet, the all-too-common refrain is of the chaos and craziness "over there"—that is, far, far away from Australia's shores. For the Labor government, and the ruling class it administers for, this is the natural course of events. As Treasurer Jim Chalmers repeats over and over again: "Australia is an island of reliability and opportunity in a sea of global economic uncertainty."

On the surface there is some reason to believe this. It is true the cost of living and housing crises continue, with real GDP per capita and real wages cratering. Nevertheless, compared to the world at large, Australia almost seems rosy. Amidst murmurs of global economic collapse, the *Australian Financial Review* blithely declares "The economy is roaring back to life." Internationally, you hear of an ascendant right-populism with millions on the street to match. In Australia, anti-immigration

marches are still relatively small and Pauline Hanson, while increasingly popular, is still incomparable to Nigel Farage. While overhyped by the left internationally, in Australia there is no semblance of a "Gen Z revolution" or ascending left that one can easily point to.

To the contrary, the left remains as weak and divided as ever and the working class very much on the backfoot. The CFMEU has now been under state control for over a year, with national secretary Zach Smith confident enough to carry out a ruthless purge in the Victorian branch. Though it is a testament to the militancy and vitality of the base that the union has not yet been gutted to the extent building developers dreamt of, it is clear that the CFMEU will not throw off the administration any time soon. The Palestine movement has exhausted itself too. Even groups like Socialist Alternative (SAIt), who have long chased after the Maritime Union of Australia bureaucracy, openly admit "the fact remains that not a single branch of a single union in this

country has authorised industrial action in opposition to the Australian government's role in arming Israel's genocidal military." The working class's bubbling discontent has, for now, in large part acquiesced to Albanese's promises to keep the good times good—an alternative not to the status quo but rather the trouble overseas.

It would be easy to forget that the liberal order globally is in existential crisis. Instead of the Coalition's leadership struggles being seen as attempts to keep up with a new post-liberal order, much of the bourgeois commentariat ridicule them as a waste of oxygen dithering towards the political fringe. The ALP has tightened its vice on workers and the oppressed—bleeding the CFMEU by a thousand cuts, increasing repression, pushing stringent anti-protest laws and banning young people from accessing social media—but even this has been doled out under liberal watchwords like "maintaining social cohesion." Even certain token liberal reforms, which in other countries have been done away with,

are still occasionally pushed forward, such as the recent Aboriginal Treaty in Victoria.

Australia in some ways feels frozen in time. It was by pledging to maintain the status quo and promising they could navigate future difficulties that the Labor leadership came out of the national elections riding high, decisively beating the Coalition who offered only a rip-off of the banal Albanese vision. But these illusions are just that: illusions. Their material basis is the relative stability of Australian capitalism, a holdover of the liberal world order which is poised to crumble in the coming period. While the ruling class still hold onto and propagate dreams of Australian exceptionalism, the coming storm will be a rude awakening. This will upend the liberal status quo, and thrust forward forces who stand opposed to it. The short to medium term beneficiaries will likely be right-wing demagogues. To fight back and resist the coming blows, the left and workers movement must stop hanging on to the coattails

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Why we are joining the RCO

and you should too

US imperialism today is jettisoning the liberal world order it erected some four decades ago, as it seeks to shore up its hegemony in the face of economic decline. This current political juncture promises an era of increasing militarism, burgeoning reaction and economic chaos. We believe this demands the boldest of initiatives if we are to overcome the impotent, fractured state of the left as a tsunami of reaction threatens to engulf the working class. It is for this reason that the Spartacist League of Australia (SL/A), established over a half-century ago, has taken the decision to end our existence as an independent entity and combine our

forces with those of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO).

In the previous period leftists including the SL/A either capitulated to the dominant liberal ideology or retreated into abstract r-r-revolutionary dogmatism (or a combination of the two). If the left is not to be rent asunder by the impending carnival of reaction a fundamental political realignment is imperative. It is necessary to regroup genuine revolutionary elements today spread across various organisations as part of cohering a collective of communist cadres able to steel left and

working-class militants against the coming storm. This requires a radical break with the strategy of the old left, which hitched itself to tailing the liberal politics of the leadership of the working class and various protest movements.

The comrades that came together to form the RCO in 2022-23 did so in reaction against the splintered and impotent nature of the existing left. This imprinted the RCO with a perspective to cut through the sclerotic sectarianism of the traditional left, and with a commitment to regrouping revolutionary-minded youth and others in a

unified communist party organised around a revolutionary program. In this the RCO is animated by much the same appetite that impelled the recent reorientation of the ICL and drove the fusion of the SL/A with the Bolshevik-Leninists in 2024.

Recognising the urgent need to unify the efforts of a weak divided left the SL/A and RCO have increasingly joined forces to participate in an array of united-front actions, from opposing the visit of King Charles to defence of threatened Nigerian activists in 2024 and protesting French state repression of pro-Palestinians in 2025. Our two groups have marched

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of the decaying liberal order, and pursue a fundamentally different strategy.

World in turmoil...

Contrary to what the ruling class peddles, Australia is not some little island insulated from the rest of the world. If we are to understand where Australia is going, it is imperative to place the country in an international context.

Recent shake-ups in world politics are not an accident of history, much less the result of the blind actions of a madman, but the product of a changing strategy of US imperialism. Since the '90s, the world has been defined by the unchallenged hegemony of the American empire. From this position of overwhelming power, it was able to set up a world order under the calling cards of free trade, democracy, and other liberal values, sinking its roots into every corner of the world. But those days are over.

The economic power of the US is in steep decline, and the globalised liberal order it set up and dominated has spawned threats to its dominance. To keep itself on top, the US is ripping up this status quo and lining the world up to bow to new diktats, ultimately with the aim of encircling and defeating China—the biggest obstacle to American hegemony. The political conduit for this goal is Trump. To quote Clinton Fernandes in his book *Turbulence* (2025):

“Trump is trying to accelerate the pace of the global restructuring. There is less need for US ‘soft power’ now that the neoliberal project is exhausted and the liberal international order as a global project has collapsed. The Trump agenda at home and abroad follows the Golden Rule... His goal is economic control over China.”

Fernandes outlines three “frontlines” that Trump pursues to this end: “Europe, the Middle East [it should be added: the Global South as a whole] and China.” For this he has bullied, blackmailed and twisted the arm of friend and foe alike to



David Rowe/AFR

take any advantage he can get. The results thus far have been mixed.

Trump’s “Liberation Day” tariff regime has proven to be but the opening salvo of his agenda. While the liberal elites of Europe are still holding on for dear life, Trump’s moves have put hot coals beneath their feet to accede to a new order in which the European imperialists are expected to “hold their own,” be a key auxiliary to America’s anti-China war drive and jettison the liberal baggage that remains a barrier to this goal. Victory after victory by the Russian military signals not just a coming collapse of the Ukrainian army but of the political order in Europe which has thus far been eking by.

As for the Global South, even the pretence of America playing a helpful hand has been done away with. Aid programs have been gutted, tariffs are imposed and concessions are demanded. This has further tightened the squeeze and will impose massive cuts on countries that already have

little fat to cut. And if these countries do not like the taste of the poisoned carrot of American diplomacy, Trump is happy to unleash the stick. Having waged a relentless genocidal war against the Palestinians, Israel is preparing its next offensive with US blessing, continuing to pierce a dagger in the region to maintain it under American auspices. Venezuela is threatened with full-scale military invasion: a clear message to the entirety of Latin America.

Thus far, these moves have been effective against countries which are heavily dependent on the US. But they have proven useless in the face of those with real hard power to resist bully-boy tactics. No amount of cajoling on Trump’s part can reverse the Russian advance in Ukraine wrought by blood and iron. And the tough talk, tariffs and trade wars have been relatively ineffective against China—which today holds industrial supremacy and dominates rare earth mineral production, key to the US military-industrial complex.

The US is currently in no position to wage war against China, for now seeking avenues around this, which may take years to eventuate. This has been made easier by the one-year trade deal inked with a Communist Party of China which, rather than pressing their advantage, are eager to vie for an American *détente*, under the illusion of maintaining the liberal world order which once allowed the Chinese economy to boom. This has afforded the US some breathing space to subdue allies and potential opponents. While this means a conventional war is not immediately on the table, and that economic war has temporarily cooled, it is no secret that China remains the ultimate target of all these machinations.

...Australia to follow

It is in this crevice, between two mighty tectonic plates whose movements have temporarily stalled, that Australian stability clings. Australian capital was a massive benefactor of the old liberal world order. It was through “enmeshment with Asia”—that is, the opening up of Asian markets to free trade and the penetration of finance capital—that the Australian economy was able to find a lucrative market for mineral exports, most critically with China as its economy soared. Last year Australia exported \$196 billion worth of goods to China. To the next biggest destination, Japan, Australia exported less than half of that. In turn, cheap goods imported from China have kept the Australian cost of living down. Last year Australia imported \$116 billion worth of goods from China, compared to \$32 billion from its next biggest source of imports.

It was thanks to these two pillars—a hegemonic US and a China rising on the back of the American system—that Australian capital was able to prosper, weathering the storm of the Global Financial Crisis. This enabled it to maintain the illusion that Australia could inoculate itself from trouble overseas. But today, in spite of whatever ebbs, these two forces are on a

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Defend Malema and the EFF

South Africa

The article below was originally printed as an AmaBolsheviki Amnyama supplement, published by Spartacist/South Africa on 8 October.

The East London Magistrate Court’s 1 October ruling against EFF leader Julius Malema is an outrageous attack which must be fought by all of us! While Malema and the EFF are the immediate targets, make no mistake: This is a deadly threat to *everyone* in South Africa who stands up against imperialism, black oppression, austerity and attacks on the working class. Every one of us, regardless of our other political differences, has a vital and direct interest in mounting a concerted struggle to overturn this ruling.

The court found Malema guilty on five

gun-related charges in a case instigated by AfriForum *seven years ago* after he allegedly fired a rifle into the air during the EFF’s fifth birthday celebration. Only fools will believe that this ruling, which carries the possibility of a 15-year sentence, is about “gun safety”. The racists of AfriForum have been after Malema’s head ever since the EFF’s founding, because the party’s radical demands like land expropriation without compensation strike a chord with brutally exploited black and coloured farm workers and threaten the parasitic interests of the white baas. What’s pushed AfriForum’s anti-EFF campaign into overdrive is the backing of the US imperialists, who call the shots. Donald Trump read Ramaphosa and Co the riot act at the Oval Office in May, basically ordering them to lock up Malema as a condition for any easing of the crushing

30% tariffs imposed on South Africa. Any leftists or workers’ leaders who remain neutral in this case are, no matter what fancy excuses they give, guilty of wretched capitulation to the US imperialist masters.

The ruling against Malema demonstrates once again that you can’t fight imperialism with the butchers of Marikana. Ramaphosa and the ANC tops are hellbent on appeasing Trump and his Fifth Column supporters within the country. This will only worsen the economic and social ruin. Already, the jobs bloodbath, de-industrialisation and privatisation are speeding up week by week. Water and other basic services are totally collapsing under the pressure of imperialist austerity and rampant looting. *Enough!* It’s urgently necessary to organise collective action to start defending ourselves against this onslaught. The defence of Malema can be a spark and a rallying point to start *fighting back*.

The EFF has announced that it will appeal the ruling with a top-notch legal team. It is certainly correct to make use of every legal avenue available. But this struggle cannot be won with a strategy of relying on the courts. EFF militants must just remember the campaign against the fuel levy hike earlier this year, which ended in a costly defeat after the party put all its hopes on judicial challenges to stop the attack. The last thing we need is a repeat of that, which can only feed into

the climate of helpless paralysis. Instead, left-wing militants in the EFF and other organisations must fight to push forward the defence of Malema with *class-struggle* methods. This means tying it to the struggle against imperialist austerity and for the needs of the masses. We must raise the pressure on the leaders of the mass organisations, particularly the trade unions, making a direct appeal to their members’ shared interest in joining a united-front struggle against our common enemy. *An injury to one is an injury to all!*

This approach guided the campaign to defend EFF member and trade-union activist Xolani Khoza, a campaign which ended in a rare victory when the charges were dropped unconditionally two months ago. Just as with AfriForum’s campaign against Malema, right-wing reactionaries hoped to silence Xolani’s opposition to the pro-imperialist “GNU”. But they were forced to back down, following a year-long united-front defence campaign waged by ourselves and EFF Ground Forces along with socialists and black liberation fighters representing dozens of organisations. This is the kind of campaign needed now, on a massive scale. The EFF is calling for protest at Malema’s sentencing hearing in East London on 23 January 2026. There’s no time to lose. We must start *now* with mobilising for this protest and organising for a struggle: *Hands off Malema! Hands off the EFF!* ■

RED BATTLER

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Fight for a People's Transitional Council without the generals & oligarchs!

PHILIPPINES

The following is a 26 November Tali-bang Anakpawis leaflet, publication of the Spartacist Group Pilipinas—Committee of Correspondents Overseas. Inset below is their earlier leaflet of 16 November.

We welcome the calls by National Democrats of BAYAN and the Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM) for an alternative to the corrupt Marcos/Duterte oligarchs, a government that represents and fights for the interests of the masses. While liberals and their social democratic allies of the Trillion Peso March Movement have opposed demands that Marcos be forced to step down, the BAYAN/PLM proposal to establish a People's Transitional Council has roused militant workers, leftist youth and oppressed masses in the hope that this Council will bring together the most militant, consistent and committed fighters and lead the struggle for power to achieve national and social liberation.

Contrary to the expectations of leftist supporters, BAYAN leader Teddy Casiño later announced that the People's Transitional Council will also include "reformist business leaders" and "retired AFP/PNP officers with integrity". Casiño has even dropped hints that conservative politician Senate President Tito Sotto is being considered for the role of senior leader of the Council. In a similar rightward turn, the socialist PLM launched their own alliance in which a retired commodore of the Philippine Navy plays a leading role.

This is nothing but a replay of the failed EDSA "people power" model. We have been through this three times in the past and the result is more neocolonial slavery. Why? Because the oligarchs and their generals are committed to maintaining the social order in this country where they are the commercial agents and labor contractors for the United States, which in turn props up the corrupt government with military, financial and diplomatic support.

Makibaka! Huwag matakot!

The maneuvers by BAYAN/PLM leaders are not welcome! These represent surrender to the oligarchs, who seek to control and manipulate the anti-corruption movement to advance their self-interest. We denounce in the strongest terms the ongoing horse-trading with the bourgeois military cliques, politicians, and business



Manila, 30 November: BAYAN and PLM contingents join thousands in march against filthy rich Marcos and Duterte cliques looting of public infrastructure funds.

and financial interests. *We call on BAYAN and PLM: Advance the struggle for a Government of the Masses!* There needs to be a socialist, working-class alternative for people's liberation.

No to the Generals! The senior military brass belongs to the ruling class and are the loyal guard dogs of the United States, which trains and supplies them with arms. Their hands are stained with the blood of the masses. As part of the bourgeois establishment, the generals will not hesitate to unleash state terror against the workers and rural masses whenever our struggles threaten to overturn Philippine neocolonial society. To those who think the generals can be our friends, there is a long list of police-military atrocities which include the massacres in Mendiola Bridge (1987) and Kidapawan City (2016), the wholesale destruction of the Muslim majority city of Marawi in 2017, and the Bloody Sunday slaughter across Southern Tagalog in 2021.

No to the Tycoons! Business leaders, no matter how reformist or progressive they posture, have no place in the People's Transitional Council. Wherever in the Global South, capitalists under pressure from the restive masses will claim to be champions of the people. But this class cannot play a progressive role. The fortunes of many "reformist" business tycoons grew rapidly thanks to the privatization, denationalization and low wage policies imposed on

the country by the World Bank-IMF and American imperialists. As members of the neocolonial ruling class, they are highly dependent on U.S., European and Japanese banks and companies for loans, logistics and business contracts. Like their predecessors during the Filipino-American War and the Japanese Occupation, the neocolonial bourgeoisie will be the first to turn *balimbing* and capitulate to imperialist pressure.

Against "Civil Society" and Church Meddling! This is perhaps a most controversial issue among the Philippine left, who have for years been tied to the Non-Gov-

ernment Organization networks and the Church agencies for funding and support. As revolutionary Marxists, we assert that the NGOs, civil society organizations and the Church hierarchy should have no representation in the People's Transitional Council. Today it is the Church, NGOs and the CSO actors that are foremost opposed to ousting Marcos. They act as a control valve for mass unrest, keeping the outrage within check then safely releasing the pressure into the channels that are considered acceptable by the ruling class. Funded by the imperialists and oligarchs, the Church agencies, NGOs and civil society actors will not bite the hands that feed them. Instead, these forces actively work to undermine and compromise the struggle for national and social liberation.

It is urgent that the militant youth and socialist left of BAYAN and PLM act now! To stop the sell-out, it is necessary to wage a political fight inside our parties and mass organizations against the right-wing elements and the compromisers, who think a coalition with the generals and other bourgeois forces will aid the struggle to resolve the burning national and democratic demands.

Let us make Bonifacio Day a show of force for the left and workers movement and inscribe on our banners: *Fight for a People's Transitional Council with No Generals and No Oligarchs!*

Magkaisang Hanay tayo! Sulong sa Luneta sa Kaarawan ni Gat Andres Bonifacio! ■

URGENT APPEAL

For a BAYAN/PLM government of the masses!

Defend the nation! Throw out Marcos and the oligarchs!

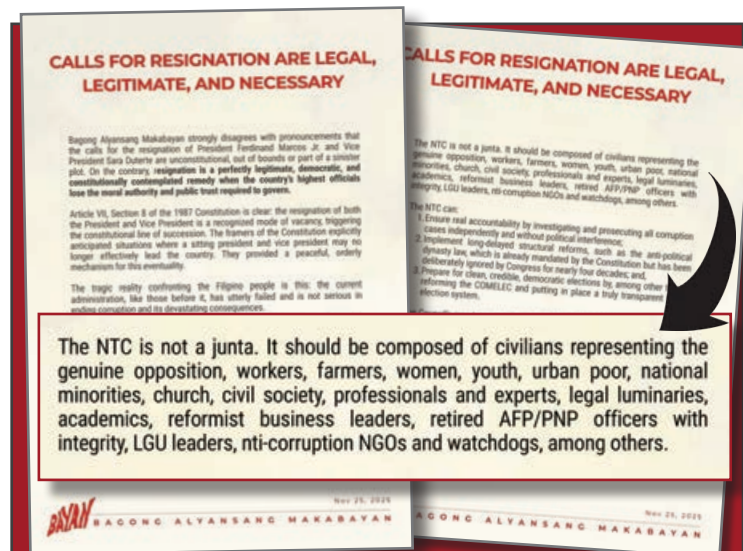
Workers! Comrades! Compatriots!

The nation is under threat! The administration of President Bongbong Marcos, bandit chieftain for the U.S. imperialists in the country, presents a clear and present danger to the Filipino masses.

Everybody knows that Marcos, the Dutertes and their cronies in Congress are robbing us blind and nobody has been thrown in jail. The catastrophic failure of the government's much-hyped flood control program claimed over 300 lives this year, displaced 4.8 million Filipinos, and wiped out ₱6.76 billion worth in property and livelihood. The bourgeoisie's syndicated looting of public infrastructure funds is rooted in the privatization and denationalization policies imposed on the country by the World Bank-IMF and the U.S. imperialists after the defeat of the revolutionary upsurge sparked by the February 1986 EDSA Popular Uprising.

As outrage over corruption and the high cost-of-living exploded into street protests and clashes with the police on the September 21 anniversary of the 1972 imposition of martial law by President Bongbong Marcos's dictator-father, the liberal opposition Trillion Peso March and their leftist hangers-on held back the anti-corruption struggle to the impotent parliamentary methods acceptable to the Makati Business Club and the Church hierarchy. Liberals like Tindig Pilipinas, the Akbayan Party and top leaders of FFW, TUCP and SENTRO are intent on shielding American lackey Marcos so the right-wing Duterte opposition does not come to power. Thus they plead so pathetically for Marcos to clean up his act. This was starkly revealed in the lead up to the EDSA Trillion Peso March when liberal and social democrat leaders stopped leftist militants from raising anti-Marcos signs at a media conference. In a public statement

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BAYAN statement calls for coalition with oligarchs and military brass.

Storm...

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collision course. This portends catastrophe for Australia's liberal order. But for the ruling class such a prospect appears as distant as the projected delivery of AUKUS submarines. It is in this context that the Labor government has its day.

The current strategy of Australian capitalism is summed up by Warwick Smith, former head of the Australia-China Business Council, as "dancing between two elephants." On one hand, Albanese, surrounded by a posse of business leaders, makes trips to Beijing, receiving the red carpet from Xi Jinping. On the other hand, he heads to Washington to kiss the ring, affirm AUKUS and sign a critical miner-

Curtin who, seeing the decline of Britain, hitched Australia's cart to the US empire. Beneath the perennial whining about their subordinate status, Australia's rulers have always bent the knee to their master.

Australia's place in the world order depends on being a junior link in the American imperialist chain. It has been with the blessing of the US that Australia has been able to play deputy sheriff in the region, helping to cow the Pacific and Asia to suit American, and with it Australian, interests. Australia today holds neo-colonies from Timor Leste to Tonga, not in spite of the US, but thanks to its support and on its behalf. Investments in the region are tightly bound up with American finance capital, and protected by American guarantees. Even Australia's banks are dominated by American capital.

largest submarine maintenance and ship-building hub in the southern hemisphere," with the war industry even beginning to compete with Western Australia's mining industry—perhaps offering a glimpse into Australia's industrial future when trade with China is cut off.

Coming off Albanese's deal with Trump, the US has committed to developing \$13 billion worth of critical minerals projects in the country. This is on top of the Labor government's "Future Made in Australia" agenda which has pledged billions to dig up critical minerals and subsidise faltering smelters. Industry Minister Tim Ayres envisions Mount Isa becoming "the Silicon Valley of critical minerals processing." More bluntly, Trump boasted Australia will "have so much critical mineral you won't know what to do with it."

The fact is, Australia has long been "all the way with the USA." There is no middle route for Australian capitalism, and the vice is tightening all the time. Even during the Obama era, the US complained of Australia's relations with China being too close. As things heat up, Trump will not be afraid to give the directive for Australia to go hardline, sending the country into economic kamikaze well before any war proper begins. If the ruling class wants a slice of the plunder, if it wants to secure its position in this new world order, when the time comes it will not just follow America's diktats but go above and beyond to demonstrate its relevance. Already, while Europe and Canada threatened retaliation, Australia's response to Trump's tariffs was to send hundreds of millions in AUKUS money in a bid to demonstrate subservience and usefulness to its American master.

Even before this juncture arrives, Australian guarantees of stability have greatly diminished. China is no longer growing at the pace it was, much less pumping massive investments into infrastructure and housing, which Australian mineral trade once depended on. Today, the international economy is held up by speculation and an AI bubble. The question is not if this bubble will pop, but when. When this does happen, alongside a receding mining industry, we will see how "stable" the Australian economy is.

Beneath the deep illusions held by the ruling class and peddled by Labor, the base of Australian stability is rotting. Albanese's mandate depends on maintaining a stability that is untenable. All the conditions are in place for the rug to be pulled out from under him. This will send political jolts throughout the country. The working class, thanks to the yeoman's work of the union bureaucracy, has for now been subdued by empty promises and occasional scraps from the bosses' table. When the Australian dream is exposed for the nightmare it is, discontent will thrust forward those who present themselves as alternatives to this rotten status quo. Thanks to the betrayals of the current-day leaders of the workers movement, those best placed to take advantage of this are One Nation and right populists generally.

Growing reaction

In the period leading up to, and following, the "Building Bad" hitjob against the CFMEU, there were real opportunities for the working class to launch a fightback. War was declared on a crucial section of the working class by the so-called "Labor" government. Working class anger was real, and the workers movement seemed prepared to flex its muscles. The workers of the CFMEU and other construction industry unions poured out their outrage against Albanese and even the union bureaucrats pledged a struggle "to the ends of the earth." There was lots of talk of building a real working-class alternative to Albanese and to "shut the city down." If made real, this had the potential to bring the Albanese government to its knees. Even after the CFMEU

was put under administration there were a smattering of strikes, from Woolworths warehouses to the docks and Sydney rail, which if successful could have changed the political landscape of this country.

But at each juncture these struggles were betrayed by a union leadership whose allegiance was, directly or otherwise, tied to the Labor government. The CFMEU was put under administration without a shot fired. Since then, all the horse-trading schemes of the leadership-in-exile have proven fruitless distractions. Hamstrung by their ties to the leadership-in-exile or the Labor machine, remaining officials are caught between either following in the grovelling footsteps of Zach Smith or being purged. Working-class actions have either fizzled out or faced humiliating defeat thanks to "Fair Work"-toeing bureaucrats. This was the case with the Woolworths warehouse strike around this time last year. Each time, when it mattered, the union bureaucracy capitulated and kowtowed to the Labor government that it helped put into office in the first place.

This came to a head at last May's federal elections. Despite all the talk of "burying Labor" and fighting for a real working-class alternative, the union bureaucracy lined up in support of the union-busting Albanese government on the excuse that the Coalition are...union-busters! After months of tirelessly funnelling discontent back into the Labor fold, and despite the anger of wide layers of the working class, Albanese was able to pull off a landslide victory. Lacking an alternative, the quiet blackmail of avoiding the end of the Australian exception prevailed.

Far from stopping the rise of the right, this has only paved the way for forces more reactionary than Dutton. Despite the best efforts of the union bureaucracy, the working class has not flocked to Albanese. It has temporarily acceded to him out of a lack of alternate options. What has been achieved, however, is the continued discrediting of the workers movement as a viable alternative in the eyes of many.

Sooner or later the growing discontent will be channelled somewhere. As things stand the trend will be rightwards. Already, One Nation is polling record highs and anti-immigrant protests continue to be organised in major cities. These stand as a taste of what is to come.

Today, the bourgeoisie, imbued with illusions that liberal tinkering can maintain the status quo, are certainly not convinced of any right-wing solution. Think-piece after think-piece has been written warning against any "political lightning rod" and of the "political system's capacity to transcend the nation's rising polarisation and fragmentation." Some pundits have even argued that Australia's longstanding anti-"boat people" policy (for which Trump once declared to ex-PM Turnbull "You are worse than I am") has staved off right-wing populism.

That this has uniquely inoculated Australia from anti-immigrant sentiment is wishful thinking for one of the economies in the imperialist world most reliant on immigrant labour. Nevertheless, such talk speaks to the reality that channelling discontent against "illegal immigration" in Australia will prove only a fraction as effective as Farage's Reform UK. Meanwhile Hanson's old refrain of being "swamped by Asians" threatens the immigration numbers that Australian capitalism needs to remain economically viable.

Only time will tell how the political jolts of the coming period will express themselves. But the death of any hope of "engagement" with China will make it increasingly likely that attempts will be made to channel working-class discontent into anti-China jingoism, "Red Alert" 2.0. There is an increasing need for the ruling class to regiment society for war, to line up the population against China, militarise the economy and gut social services for this



Australian Defence Department

US Marines' firing exercise in Australia, 2023. Australia is fast becoming stomping ground and launching pad for US military.

als deal to bolster America's drive towards encirclement and war against China. Since then, Albanese has met with Chinese premier Li Qiang, doubling down on Australia's deals with America while preaching the good word of free trade, China-US engagement and Australia's commitment "to the stabilisation of the relationship [with China], to progressing practical co-operation in areas of shared interest."

For now, there are plenty who indulge the illusion of indefinite engagement-*sans*-confrontation. Xi Jinping for instance, pursued a charm offensive during Albanese's most recent trip to China, hosting him for a special lunch featuring a band performing covers of old Australian favourites including Paul Kelly, Powderfinger and Midnight Oil, after which he proclaimed relations as "stable and constructive."

Many in this country also dream of an independent Australian capitalism. Has-been ex-Labor prime minister Paul Keating, who has repeatedly proclaimed his opposition to AUKUS, now paints Trump as a "peacenik," declaring "He has the peace consciousness, and he is too street smart to pick a fight with Beijing"—concluding that the Labor government's "independent" diplomacy is set to keep chugging along. Joining the choir are all sorts of little Australian nationalists, pacifists and liberals who litter the Australian workers movement. Clinton Fernandes, for all his acute analysis of the vested interests behind the actions and strategy of this sub-imperial power, believes that with enough "public discussion" Australia can steer itself clear of rocky shoals.

Bolstering such illusions and posturing as an independent statesman, Albanese, citing the tradition of WWII Labor prime minister John Curtin, has proclaimed his commitment to "follow our own course and shape our own future." But the myth of an independent foreign policy for Australian capitalism is as much a folly today as it was in Curtin's time. Indeed, it was

Australia's domestic industries are also tied by a thousand strings to American capital. The mining industry is sometimes touted as a bulwark against anti-China moves due to its vested trade interests. In reality, Australian capitalism's development of its mining industry has long been dependent on vying for foreign, principally American, investment. It is not by accident that almost all "Australian" mining companies (BHP, Rio Tinto, Newcrest Mining, South32) are majority, or close to majority, owned by Wall Street.

If they do not toe the line when the time comes, Trump will not be afraid to give Australian capitalists a reminder of their position. Though barring a fightback by the working class it is clear that the US will not even need to go that far. The fact that Australia is barely an afterthought for Trump, who couldn't even remember what AUKUS was, goes to show how confident American rulers are in Australian servility.

Australian military, intelligence and economic "interoperability" plays a critical part in the US war drive against China. Under AUKUS, Australia has already handed over hundreds of millions of dollars, and pledged hundreds of billions more, for nuclear submarines that America is not even contractually obligated to deliver. The top end of Australia has been increasingly transformed into a US military stomping ground, while the Pine Gap spy base serves as a critical node for American intelligence.

Meanwhile, Australia holds the dubious "honour" of harbouring some of the only foreign industries that Trump is looking to develop. The south-east is gearing up arms production to serve as a reserve for American industrial power away from potentially hostile, or otherwise precarious, countries in the Global South. The *New York Times* labels Australia the "51st state for defense production," set to produce weapons "no different from the ones built in the United States." Perth is poised to become "the

most reactionary cause. Veteran Canberra bureaucrat Mike Pezzullo cut to the chase, remarking that “We can have social benefits or we can have a country. This is the new world Australia has to live with.”

With the erosion of the material basis of Australia’s liberal order, the ideological project of multiculturalism so integral to the past decades of advancing Australian capitalism is under increasing pressure. The cracks have already begun to show, with Muslim and Asian immigrants the increasing targets of a deepening rupture with liberal multiculturalism.

What is clear is that it will be workers, women and oppressed minorities that will bear the brunt of this reaction. This course, while increasingly likely, is not inevitable. But for us to fight back, the left and workers movement *must* stand as a real alternative to the Albanese status quo.

The languishing left and the tasks ahead

Unfortunately, the left stands disarmed, frequently imbibing the ruling class’s illusions and fatuous optimism. Today, in articles such as “A new international political situation,” SAlt waxes poetic on the “crisis of the global liberal order” while discussion of *Australia’s* liberal order is completely omitted! A truly myopic article by James Eisen, published in *Partisan!*, declares Albanese “Son of the Century,” adding that “The Labor party seems well prepared to rule for the rest of the decade.”

For much of the left, this fatuous optimism has been reflected in “the fight goes on” rhetoric—which serves to amnesty past mistakes and denies the need to draw any lessons altogether. As late as June, close to one year after the CFMEU was put into administration, Solidarity put on the order of the day mass meetings and even a national strike as a “first step” of a potential “industrial campaign to beat Administration.” Around the same time, many groups on the left were declaring that the tide has turned in the Palestine movement following protests which saw an ephemeral increase in numbers and union recognition.

When coming crises are addressed by socialist groups they are generally projected to favour an immediate resurgence of the left. SAlt writes that “The world is rapidly changing—2025 has provided us with the strongest signs in years that the space for socialist politics is opening.” When the rise of the right wing is not downplayed, declarations of a “wake up call” are matched with very little waking up. More often than not, left groups have continued to tail the union bureaucracy or otherwise double down on



Socialist Alternative march toward the minefield of the new world order with eyes closed.

Defend Palestine! Defend Iran!

Below is a speech given by Neil Flannagan for the Spartacist League to the Palestine demonstration in Melbourne on 22 June, the day the US bombed Iran’s nuclear facilities.

US imperialism today is on the verge of doing to Iran what it did to Iraq, to Syria, to Libya, to Afghanistan. This US attack on Iran will give its Israeli attack dog a free hand to further the extermination of the Palestinians and to terrorise the entire region. And the US will gain more leverage to tighten its vice on China and the Global South.

This will bring increasing barbarity abroad back home with more repression, regimentation for war and economic devastation for the masses. To defend ourselves from being trampled by the rampaging US rulers, working people must join together to take a stand right now with Iran and with Palestine. Workers all around the world mobilise against Israel and the US! **Defend Iran! Defend Palestine!**

Donald Trump just said he’s for peace now, after bombing Iran. Appeals for peace don’t stop bombs. Just as moral outrage has not prevented nearly two years of genocide. Palestinians do not need more liberal tears. They don’t need more blind cheer-leading. Palestinian people are being exterminated. Hamas had hoped to provoke real action from the Axis of Resistance and subsequent US pressure to restrain Israel. This has proved a cruel illusion, a disaster.

There is another course. A blow against the imperialist butchers by a united union movement can stay their hand and give workers and the oppressed worldwide time to regroup and strengthen their defences. But to mobilise this social power we need to ask why the union movement here has not tried to stop one single arms shipment to Israel, or carried out one real stopwork against the genocide.

We have had union leaders up here on Sundays speak the finest words of solidarity. Then they go back to their weekday job promoting the genocide-supporting Albanese government, and pushing “jobs for Aussies” nationalist poison to their members. The union leaderships’ support to the ALP tops who are committed to the US alliance is a millstone around the neck of the working class.

The “friends of Palestine” union leaders must be told: **Enough words, choose a side!** Being for Palestine means breaking with the leadership of the ALP and the union movement. Unity with these servants of the US’s Australian deputy sheriff means unity with murderers of Palestinian people. I say: **Break the American connection! Chuck the US lackeys out of the labour movement!**

Now many people today say “Stop this war.” This comes from many leftists. It comes from some imperialists. Well



RB photo

look, if you want to stop this war you need to defeat Israel and drive the imperialists out of the region. You need to unleash popular sentiments for democratic and social change behind working class leadership—against those Arab regimes that proved themselves to be imperialist pawns, not lifting a finger to support the Palestinians.

The Iranian rulers themselves have been more concerned to preserve their repressive theocratic regime than defending Gaza. The region needs an anti-imperialist united front of the masses—one that also seeks to win the Israeli working class to the cause of Palestinian liberation, to undermine the Zionist fortress from within. Nothing good will come from the liberal institutions: the UN; the EU; the ICC. They have shown themselves to be either complicit in Israel’s crimes or utterly impotent.

The Zionist outpost was set up *by* the imperialists to ensure their division of, and domination over, the Middle East. The strategy of looking to these *very* imperialists to “do the right thing” and cut ties with—or even sanction—their *own* outpost, I am sorry, is Fantasyland. These same imperialists, from the US to France to Australia, vilify, witchhunt and jail those standing up for Palestine. Only workers and oppressed peoples of the world can put a stop to the ever-growing spiral of barbarity.

This movement here must connect and fuse its struggles with those of the working class. A small start can be made by standing together in defence with all those victimised for their defence of Palestine, whoever and wherever they may be. The Partisan Defence Committee provided a tiny example of that with last Monday’s protest against draconian French state repression of pro-Palestinians.

But key is the fight to mobilise union power. Unions must take industrial action: in defence of partisans of Palestine; against arms to Israel; and against this US attack on Iran. I’m Neil. I’m with Spartacist. I encourage you to join with the Anti-Imperialist bloc in today’s march. **Don’t let the US and Israel get away with it once again. Defend Palestine! Defend Iran! ■**

liberalism—keeping the left as little more than *attachés* to the status quo.

Take the response to the right-wing demonstrations by the left. SAlt has repeatedly declared that there are no “legitimate concerns” amidst the right-wing protesters, that they are just “racist dogs” and “pigs” “to be crushed, not understood.” This is pure liberal moralising. Behind rising anti-immigrant sentiment is deep frustration with the liberal order of Albanese and his predecessors. Many of those pulled into supporting the right wing’s reactionary “solutions” are workers faced with declining conditions and the absence of a left alternative. They need to be won over. Liberal politics and moral outrage, denouncing all protesters as racists animated purely by bigotry, only pushes these layers further into the arms of reaction.

Workers have every interest in defending immigrants—many of whose present position on the bottom rungs of society have been used as a battering ram against organised labour, as well as supplying an ample population for the maintenance and enforcement of a casualised job market. To its credit, Solidarity recognises “that the far right feeds off real concerns about housing and the cost of living results” and that moralising is not a response to their arguments. It goes so far as to say

that “Today, a Labor government has no answers to the cost of living crisis, higher rents and falling living standards.” But Solidarity’s arguments don’t go beyond common economic struggle mixed in with some platitudes against racism. Declaring “don’t let the bosses divide us” and preaching for workers to focus on class struggle ignores the central question that dominates these protests. Without a struggle to win Australian workers to the understanding that defence of immigrants is also in their material interests, it will be impossible to build unity in the working class and undercut the rise of the right.

Furthermore, Solidarity has another problem. Against these demos, it puts forth a perspective to work “with Greens, unions and Labor Party members” or more forthrightly, to “approach union leaders and left-wing Labor figures.” It is no crime to “approach” union bureaucrats, but this must be on the political basis of sharp opposition to the status quo, making such bureaucrats *choose a side*. Instead, Solidarity’s strategy has been to build bridges towards Albanese’s gang and liberals like the Greens, the very forces which have fuelled the growth of the far right. Despite Solidarity and SAlt arguing over this question, their strategies converge in seeking to draw together “progressives” of all stripes on the basis of moral appeals and liberal platitudes, against the “bad ideas” of the far right. The result is a left which continues to be seen as agents of

the status quo rather than a real socialist alternative to it.

This strategy is mirrored in the Palestine movement. Two years of weekly demonstrations were characterised by moral outrage and liberal speechifying. Instead of fighting to forge bonds with the working class on the basis of shared interests against their common oppressor, US imperialism and its Australian lackeys, these protests ended up a vehicle to draw in and promote “friends of Palestine” union bureaucrats. These figures were more than willing to come up to the stump to make moral appeals and put up empty motions, but would never do anything that would fundamentally frustrate their patrons in the genocide-aiding Labor government. The result is self-evident. The Trade Unionists for Palestine formation is moribund. Protests have exhausted themselves. There has not been a single meaningful union action in defence of Palestine in this country. The so-called return of the Palestine movement has proven a last hurrah.

Despite this reality, some have clung on to projections of a left on the march, citing some visible growth among socialist groups. While this growth is real, it has been largely drawn from a small layer of disenfranchised petty bourgeois—not resulting from a leftward surge in the working class and society at large. The left remains as detached from the workers movement as ever, a fact which will

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The following was originally published as a Red Battler supplement on 20 March.

We appreciate comrades of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (RCO) taking the time to respond to our criticisms laid out in *Red Battler* No. 2 (Summer 2024/25). Anthony Furia's article ("Party first, then split the class," *Partisan!* No. 7) is correct to highlight many of the real and deep problems that have plagued the left for decades. In particular, we concur with his assessment of the left as "a fragmented, disorganised mess" whose combined social weight is dwarfed by the Laborite behemoth. For decades the left has dwindled and splintered and now, on the precipice of major world shocks, stands confused and isolated. To repel further blows it is imperative that there is a fight to, as Furia says, "[clean] up our own backyard" and change course. The question is, *how?*

Breaking down the sectarian barriers that exist on the left is critical, from struggling for united-front efforts to engaging in discussion and debate for the sake of programmatic clarification. Fundamentally, however, breaking the left from its fractured and weak state requires breaking with the strategy that has led us to this juncture. As Furia's article puts it, it requires a fight for the "reunification of the communist left on a revolutionary program" (our emphasis). We agree. Only on this foundation can we build a party capable of breaking the working class from Laborism. However, the RCO fails to live up to these words. While recognising the crisis facing the left, the RCO fails to put forward a program that can fight for a way out. In fact, they repeat many of the same mistakes that have haunted the rest of the left, including our own tendency until recently. *This* is the "stark distinction" between our strategies which this exchange illuminates.

So, what is the source of the disorganised state of today's left? The past three decades have been characterised by the hegemony of the American empire, with its ideological bedrock in post-Soviet liberalism. The Australian ruling class adopted this ideology as its own, using it to justify their attacks on the workers movement—further putting the unions in a straitjacket while overseeing the continued deindustrialisation and privatisation of key industries. Far from fighting this course, the Laborite union leaders were firmly hitched to it. Dragged through the mud by "leaders" incapable of fighting for their interests, workers began to leave the unions *en masse*. The resulting state of the workers movement is self-evident.

The left too adopted this liberalism. Most of them tailed the "left" wing of the labour bureaucracy. Often they went even further, colouring themselves Green in their pursuit of alliances with liberal ele-

A reply to the RCO

Road to party

ments. Others on the left clung to empty revolutionary rhetoric and doctrinal purity while doing nothing to break the working class from this trajectory (as was the case with our tendency before reorientation). Thus, the left tied themselves to forces subordinate to the ruling class or had nothing to offer in counterposition. Consequently, workers repelled by the liberal order and its labour lieutenants did not

at each juncture, a strategy and perspective to advance the interests of workers and the oppressed, demonstrating concretely the superiority of our revolutionary strategy to that of the Laborites. This demands a program that facilitates just this, that acts as a *guide to action*—assimilates the lessons of yesterday, assesses the balance of class forces today, outlines the obstacles and puts forward tasks accordingly. In



Jono Searle/AAP

Brisbane, 27 August 2024: Construction workers protest ALP government subjecting the CFMEU to state control. Working-class anger offers a concrete road forward in the fight to forge a revolutionary workers party.

see the left as an alternative but rejected them along with it. The rump of the workers movement remained solidly shackled to the Laborite misleadership that allowed this to happen in the first place.

The result of all of this is a fragmented left, cannibalised over the course of decades. This trend has only accelerated in the face of a rapidly changing world in which right-wing populism is in ascendance. The disorganised and splintered state of the left is not the result of mere sectarianism (although that is certainly a big contributor), neither is it just an organisational question. It is a symptom of programmatic bankruptcy. "Cleaning up our own backyard" means fighting for a break with the leaders who have dragged us down this path. This will not and cannot be achieved with high-sounding words against Laborism but by putting forward,

other words, a revolutionary program. It is this we have sought to put forward in "The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power" (*Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023) and the programmatic documents included in both issues of *Red Battler*.

This doesn't mean, as Furia argues, that we have illusions that the workers movement will magically flock to our banner *en masse* by virtue of a "sacrosanct 'correct line' and program." Neither does it mean "putting the cart far before the horse," ignoring the rest of the left in favour of going "directly to the masses"—or doing "entryism into Labor" for that matter. In fact, the fight for revolutionary regroupment (as with the SL/A and Bolshevik-Leninist fusion) and engagement with others on the left has been central to our recent work, as we are sure RCO members will recall in light of our recent joint united-front actions. What we are arguing is that it is only on the basis of struggling to advance the interests of the class and break it from its liberal-Laborite misleadership that we can cohere the forces in the left and workers movement necessary to do so. It is precisely because the RCO rejects this perspective that they see-saw between grand (but empty) proclamations against the Laborite leadership and latching on to these very leaders when offering a "concrete approach." The two examples comrade Furia takes up—the 2024 Queensland elections and the takeover of the CFMEU—are indicative.

Take for instance the state takeover of the CFMEU. The RCO and the SL/A both recognised that the union needed to be defended. Both were also quick to criticise the CFMEU leadership. But

where we diverge is precisely on how we took on said leadership. In the face of openly union-busting moves by the state, most militant workers believed that the CFMEU leadership would "shut the city down" and fight to the bitter end. The SL/A sought to demonstrate that confronting the Labor government was contrary to the very core of the CFMEU leadership's Laborite program, and that in fact this leadership constituted the main obstacle to defending the union.

Not only did we say this, we fought for CFMEU workers to take the initiative and fight for a class-struggle defence of their union, which could have drawn a line and exposed which side the union bureaucrats were really on. This offered a path forward to advance the class and dispel in practice the illusions workers had.

In contrast, the RCO penned plenty of fine words calling to defend the CFMEU and declaring their desire for revolution. But when it came to showing why revolutionary leadership was critical *at that moment* to defend the CFMEU? Nothing! Instead, the RCO substituted little more than a wagging of the finger at the CFMEU leadership for being corrupt and class-collaborationist. That is all fine and dandy, but CFMEU militants do not have illusions in their leadership because they think they oppose class collaboration, or because they see them as being squeaky clean. They have illusions that the strategy of the CFMEU leadership is one that can advance or at least defend their conditions. At the critical moment that meant believing Setka, Ravbar and Smith would defend the CFMEU as a whole from state attack. If you do not fight to expose these beliefs, you are leaving CFMEU members in the hands of the very bureaucrats who handed the union over to the state administration.

As for last year's Queensland elections, in which the RCO called for "preferring the Greens and Labor ahead of all other candidates" (*Partisan!* No. 3), Furia opines "why the fuss when we offer a concrete approach to the election?" The answer is simple. The federal Labor government backed by their Queensland counterparts had just enacted one of the biggest attacks on the working class in generations. They showed themselves to be open servants of the bosses, prepared to go after their own base to prove their subservience. In response, much of this base reacted in outrage and was looking for a (genuinely) working-class alternative. To call on workers to vote for Labor in this context was to do the union bureaucrats' job of dragging the working class kicking and screaming back to the Labor government that had just betrayed them. To call to vote for the Greens was a call to direct working-class anger back into the hands of the liberals. Instead of being seen as an alternative, this strategy keeps the left discredited as little more than hangers-on to the liberal order that is kicking workers in the teeth—which ironically has paved the way for a Liberal/National government in Queensland and perhaps nationally.

It would be remiss if we did not address the central argument throughout Furia's article—why the hell does any of this matter without a revolutionary party? To argue this, he says: The SL/A's forces were too small to break the CFMEU base from its tops at that moment. The RCO is too small to really have an effect on the Queensland elections. The left is small, we can't split the class without a party. All true. But our difference with the RCO is not that we reject the centrality of the struggle for a revolutionary party. As Trotsky wrote of Lenin: "The struggle for the independent political party of the proletariat constituted

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RED BATTLER

How Hawke and Keating beat the left

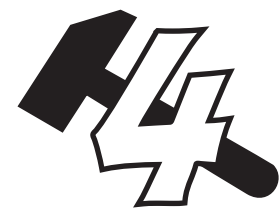


icfi.org/pubs/rb/2/hawke-keating

...the document "How the Whitlam government passed the test for socialism"

...there was a growing weariness and despondency among workers who recognised that despite years of militancy their livelihoods were going downhill. Clearly in spite of the combatsiveness of the working class, left Laborite trade-union milit-

to bring about "national reconciliation" and develop a political solution for the bourgeoisie. Working with treasurer Paul Keating and ACTU head Bill Kelty, Hawke's election came in the form of...



Indonesia Where to now?

By O. Dziga

“In the Global South, where there is no fat to cut, an offensive by the U.S. will have devastating consequences that will likely provoke massive social explosions. In many countries, all it takes is a spark for massive explosions to erupt. The question is: will these be directed against the imperialists or will workers turn the guns against each other? This all depends on the question of leadership.”

—Editorial, *Spartacist* No. 70, May 2025

The wave of large and militant protests by Indonesian youth which began late August is among the most significant in Indonesia since 1998. Sparked by anger at the announcement of new privileges for parliamentarians—and inflamed by a brutal police response that saw multiple deaths—the scale and virulence of these demonstrations reveal a deep accumulation of anger and political and economic grievance among broad layers of the Indonesian masses.

Though large-scale demonstrations quickly receded, the government has no ability to stem the tide of discontent which created them. As the crisis in the imperialist order deepens, the Indonesian national bourgeoisie and political elite find themselves under increasing pressure, with the cracks in the post-*reformasi* order widening. *Where to now?* This is the question which neither the national bourgeoisie, the liberals, nor the leaders of the workers movement have a real answer to.

The shallow bases of economic stability for the masses are eroding. Indonesia has the highest unemployment rate in Southeast Asia, while the price of food and basic services increases year after year. Workers face layoffs and deepening deindustrialisation as manufacturing continues to collapse. New jobs remain almost entirely informal and low-wage. Life for the peasantry continues to be defined by rural poverty and exploitation by big business. Similarly dim are prospects for the large layer of educated petty bourgeois. A brutal job market for university graduates creates slim opportunities for economic stability, driving a decline in “middle class” spending as more and more are pushed back into the lower ranks of the proletariat and informal precariat.

Inequality is therefore increasingly stark. While conditions worsen for the masses, a narrow layer of deeply politically connected national bourgeois have reaped the benefits of a decade of investment-driven development, especially within the capital-intensive

commodities sector. Indonesia thus faces a situation of combined and uneven development, under which a relatively enriched national bourgeoisie continues to expand its global and regional weight, as life for the masses remains defined by *underdevelopment* and *worsening* precarity.



Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

Jakarta, 25 August: protesters clash with police outside House of Representatives (DPR) building.

Nationalist economic policy and investment in visible public infrastructure projects have, for over a decade, been sufficient to sell Indonesian workers a dream of peaceful, gradualist development towards national prosperity. Yet the conditions for this project—a more stable period of imperialist hegemony under which it was possible to navigate between the US and China—are rapidly eroding. As US imperialism tightens the screws on the neocolonial world, Indonesia walks on increasingly shaky ground. Every new crack makes it clearer that the real beneficiaries of the preceding period were a narrow political and economic elite. In this context, it is clear how salary hikes for well-paid parliamentarians could light a tinderbox of anger at corruption and inequality.

As in all of the neocolonial world, there is little fat to cut for the Indonesian masses. Yet as Prabowo attempts to navigate the approaching storms, a deepening program of austerity is the order of the day. Central government budget cuts are resulting in massive local tax hikes (sometimes by tens or even hundreds of percent). Workers and the petty bourgeoisie are thus increasingly

squeezed from both sides. Directly leading into nationwide protests, local regencies from Central Java to Sulawesi saw explosive demonstrations over this issue. In Pati, an announced 250 percent property tax hike resulted in popular protests in which thousands clashed with police and

teenagers—many from poor and working-class backgrounds.

Yet rather than representing a fundamentally new development, these demonstrations fit into a pattern of ebb and escalation. For years there have been consistent mobilisations of layers of youth (and more inconsistently, layers of organised workers and peasants). But every serious demand has been lost so far. Inevitably, these demonstrations ebb away, winning no substantial gains, while the situation which sparked them continues to deteriorate.

While protesters sought a reversal of DPR salary increases, and an end to police brutality, the demands raised were generally amorphous and disparate. Some called for the dismissal of Prabowo and Gibran, but for most anger was not directed at the presidency in particular but at inequality and government corruption in the abstract. Broader demands at the height of protests were often opaque. Among the most angular and angry calls taken up was for the dissolution of the DPR. Yet there was no clear or unified conception of what this would mean, or who would carry it out.

Meanwhile, various liberal demands for specific or abstract reforms were raised by student movement leaders, social media influencers, and NGO activists. Frequently during protests, these figures were invited to present their demands to state officials in exchange for attempting to calm the youth outside. As protests began to shrink, the so-called “17+8 demands of the people” (for “transparency, reform, empathy”) began circulating online and in the media. Put together and promoted by a coalition of NGO-liberal types and social media influencers, these were a hodgepodge of immediate demands for an end to state repression and abstract liberal appeals for broader democratic *reformasi*.

The hold of this segment of liberal civil society over the organised political expressions of social movements in Indonesia—its stepping in to articulate the “political demands” of the “*rakyat*”—is a central obstacle to advancing a revolutionary struggle. The problem for this segment of politics is that it has sufficient organisation and influence to divert disorganised explosions of political anger into a dead end, while at the same time being totally impotent to achieve even its own aims. Though always representing a narrow layer in the petty bourgeoisie, today it stands more isolated than ever in the general political landscape: the pillars of *reformasi* are crumbling, and the great

breached the local DPRD building.

Capitulation to US ransom conditions in tariff negotiations last July will only further tighten this squeeze. Prabowo continues to posture as a firm-fisted pragmatist at home, and a proponent of the “multipolar” order internationally. But the drama surrounding these negotiations and the explosive anger of Indonesian youth reveal a rapidly narrowing space for the political manoeuvres he needs to succeed. These are only portents of crises to come which will surely escalate mass discontent and shatter elite unity.

The pattern of protest

The wave of demonstrations which began on 25 August cannot be viewed as an out-of-nowhere explosion, but as the product of an already combustible situation which has, to varying degrees, broken out in a rolling series of local and national protests since 2019 especially. Recent protests were of heightened scale and militancy, and mobilised more than the usual crowd of university students. Notable was the broader participation of some of the most precarious layers of society, *ojol* (motorbike taxi) drivers and others, as well as school-age

liberal hope Jokowi (initially backed to the hilt by liberal “civil society”) amounted to more of the same dynastic politics. Most importantly, the global ideological hegemony of liberalism is a dead letter.

While the liberals can raise demands concerning workers and unions, they have no interest in a program of *class struggle*. Instead they alternate between total despair at the state of the country and a dreamland of rescuing bourgeois democracy and reviving *reformasi* through a new surge of “grassroots” protest. What they can’t see is that *global* conditions have changed since 1998. The partial victory of bourgeois-democratic reform was not simply the product of “spontaneous” mass protests; it was conditioned by the global hegemony of liberal US imperialism, which no longer had use for such a Cold War holdover as Suharto—and

Liberal celebration of the masses’ “spontaneity” not only fails to address the underlying forces driving social explosions, but disarms any ability to locate and fight the *obstacles* to advancing a revolutionary struggle. Though many on the Indonesian left, and even among the liberals, recognise the cycle in which Indonesian social movements are trapped and the deficiencies of a lack of organisation, the solutions posed tend to be abstract, purely organisational, or both.

It is not just “solidarity” or “greater coordination” that Indonesian social movements desperately need, but revolutionary leadership: a *program* and path towards victory against imperialism. It must be made clear to the progressive layers of the masses that in the absence of such a leadership, social explosions can only remain a platform for conflict and

deployed, and intelligence services keep close tabs on activists. There is a long history of riot incitement by military and police (most strikingly in 1998) and a number of acts of violence do appear to have been organised. Factional conflict within the elite is deep and extends into the state bureaucracies, including between the police and the military. And liberal NGOs *are* funded by the imperialists and ideologically subservient to them.

Disentangling the webs of influence beneath the surface, parsing through which acts were or weren’t committed by state-linked provocateurs (or simply by anarchist groups and angry high schoolers) is a fool’s errand. Yet it would be naive to deny outright that inter-elite, reactionary, and imperialist-linked actors played any role, especially given the amorphous and malleable nature of the protests.

However, to write off the demonstrations as purely reactionary or compromised would be equally naive. Over-fixation on questions of elite and imperialist manipulation risks political disorientation for Marxists. The situation in the country is dire and increasingly intolerable, the whole of the neocolonial world is feeling the squeeze of the imperialist vice. It does not take conspiracy for explosions of violence to occur in such a situation; when they did, it is striking how clearly directed at symbols of state power they were. Police stations and parliamentary buildings were the overwhelming targets of protest, with no pogromist or communal-type violence (anti-Chinese, etc.) occurring as it did widely in 1998.

Protests began to recede following announcements by Prabowo both that some DPR privileges would be revoked and that police and military had been ordered to crack down on “terrorism” and “anarchism.” He and other ministers also made vaguely placating statements that the “17+8” demands would be “considered” seriously. Out of fear and acquiescence, protests were thus subdued, with scheduled demonstrations cancelled or rescheduled and attendance shrinking to the organised activist milieu. Lacking a revolutionary leadership capable of seizing political energy, demonstrations could indeed serve only as new terrain for elite manoeuvre—sometimes benefiting certain factions. Prabowo took the opportunity to reshuffle his cabinet, replacing a number of long-standing ministers (some targeted by protesters) with more personally loyal appointees.

The workers movement

The mainstream trade unions played a delicate game during the demonstrations. On 28 August, scheduled strike rallies took place, called by the pro-government “yellow” trade unions around Said Iqbal’s Partai Buruh (Labour Party). Union leaders reiterated that these protests were unrelated to demonstrations that had begun days earlier, and focused only on their sectoral demands for a minimum wage increase, the abolition of jobs outsourcing, and the creation of a government task force to prevent layoffs. Several thousand organised workers attended, most in Jakarta, joined in some places by groups of *ojol* drivers.

The rally in Jakarta ran short, which Iqbal justified by declaring “there were no House lawmakers who wanted to talk with a labour representative” and that many workers “had to return for the afternoon shifts.” In reality, Iqbal—a pro-government bureaucrat who last May Day spoke alongside Prabowo at a mass rally—was keen to minimise any crossover of the union base with the protests kicking off again later that afternoon. Organised contingents of workers were therefore dis-

banded by the early afternoon of the 28th, though many workers surely did remain at and attend demonstrations.

Protests that evening marked a turning point in the escalation of demonstrations, following the police killing of *ojol* driver Affan Kurniawan. Union bureaucrats urged “calm” and “unity” from members, asking them not to engage in illegal or “anarchist” actions. At the same time, they urged the government to take swift action to meet the demands of protesters and “demonstrate its commitment to listening to the aspirations of the people.” Ultimately, mainstream union bureaucrats demobilised their base, while attempting both to appeal to protesters and present themselves to the state as loyal partners able to stabilise and temper working-class anger.

The small minority of “red” unions attempted to intervene with a more militant affect. These are “activist” and broadly anti-government unions, usually led by former student activists and in some cases current supporters of socialist groups. These unions were rhetorically in support of protests and generally called out members to demonstrations. But contingents were usually small, with left unions far from able to initiate large-scale political strikes.

The Labour Movement with the People (GEBRAK) coalition organised a reasonably-sized demonstration in Jakarta on 4 September, when protests had already shrunk significantly. While not tiny, this protest represented a small fraction of the workers movement. Though more militant in affect and raising its own slightly more left-sounding demands, the protest in some ways was not particularly distinguishable from those of liberal and NGO activists.

In fact, “red” unions tend to be deeply entangled with the liberal NGO sector. GEBRAK’s founding statement is co-signed by union federations, socialist groups (from the post-PRD milieu, Perserikatan Socialis and Pembebasan), and just as many NGOs (including Greenpeace and the Jakarta Legal Aid Foundation). Many small “left” unions themselves operate more as legal-advice NGOs than militant trade unions. These politics mean that *pink* trade unions tend to offer not an *alternative* to the liberal dead end but rather a “left” and “working-class” face for it.

It is certainly possible that, in future periods of political struggle, the union bureaucracies will act more to mobilise their (often restive) bases. Large-scale strikes by even the yellow union bureaucracy took place during the 2020 protests against the anti-worker Omnibus Law, for instance. But these political strikes always



Indonesian president Prabowo greets Donald Trump at October summit in Egypt. Prabowo advocates multipolar order but has little wiggle room as US squeeze tightens.

which ideologically favoured a “democratic” shell for neocolonial exploitation.

The liberals will not resolve today’s political impasse. There will be no “completion” of an already eroded *reformasi*. The prospects facing Indonesia today are either a deepening spiral of bonapartism, an explosion of reaction in some form, or the seizing of the initiative by the working class. Advancing the democratic struggle in this context will depend on a class-struggle fight against imperialist domination.

For Marxists, the key task is to point a progressive path out of today’s dead-end pattern of protest escalation and ebb, one that is able to link the anger and aspirations of Indonesian youth to the workers movement with a class-struggle, anti-imperialist program. This task demands a clear break with the politics of the liberal NGOs (deeply entwined with imperialism) and the collaborationist/careerist student political milieu, posing key questions of leadership and program.

While the militancy of Indonesian youth is heroic, to simply cheer “solidarity” with demonstrations, as much of the left does (especially internationally) is totally insufficient and anti-Marxist.

contestation among different factions of elite and imperialist interest—contributing ultimately to a spiral of reaction.

Provocation and elite conflict

Narratives of the manipulation of protests by elite actors have been widespread in the aftermath of demonstrations. The figure of the *penyusup* provocateur and *dalang* puppet-master behind political events are recurrent archetypes, and the argument today comes from all corners. Prabowo declares that protests were “paid for” and “manipulated” by “corrupters,” foreign powers and “mafia” figures. Many liberal activists and academics argue that violence was deliberately incited by police or military provocateurs, either to delegitimise “peaceful dissent” or as part of inter-elite conflicts. A minority of leftists view the protests (entirely or partially) as a US-backed “colour revolution,” in which NED liberals and elements of the state bureaucracy incited demonstrators in an effort to undermine Indonesia’s BRICS posture.

Part of the strength of these narratives are the sometimes important kernels of truth. Provocateurs certainly were in the crowds, police agents are extensively

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end up symbolic actions, usually lasting one or two days and far from aiming to shut down the economy.

The fact is, the Indonesian working class is not today undergoing a period of political upsurge which gives it confidence to go on the offensive. Declining conditions and a weakened and politically disorientated union movement can foster passivity as much as they drive discontent. For the workers movement to step up as an independent and decisive force, both sides of the split in the union movement must be politically exposed.

The pro-government leaders of Partai Buruh are committed to a doomed strategy of attempting to prise minimal reforms out of the bourgeois parties by proving themselves loyal and useful partners. Today, they seek a coalition with Prabowo—who despite a populist posture is firmly committed to driving down the conditions of Indonesian workers in an effort to attract foreign investment into the country's ailing industrial base. The "red" unions are rightly repulsed by this but, unable to put forward a revolutionary anti-imperialist strategy, seek instead a liberal "activist" alliance doomed to impotence. The whole basis of the organisational split is, in many ways, premised on *avoiding* the necessary political struggle against Iqbal and the rotten yellow bureaucrats.

The left

The small and splintered organised left in Indonesia reacted with enthusiasm to the surge of struggle. Though all intervened separately with their small forces, there are common threads in the approach of each group that hindered the left's ability to provide a real alternative to the liberals in the contest for leadership over mass political energy.

Perhimpunan Sosialis Revolusioner (PSR) and the Front Muda Revolusioner (FMR)—Indonesian section of the Revolutionary Communist International (RCI)—were thrilled at the opportunity to join in the revolutionary rhetoric of their comrades. Days after protests began they published an article titled "The revolution has begun" which recounts the radicalism of protests, declares the working class must take collective action, and calls for "action committees," a general strike, and a "revolutionary government of the working class and the poor." While abstractly correct and orthodox on many points, the RCI's intervention existed largely separate from the material balance of forces on the ground. As protests entered a period of retreat they published a flurry of articles: calling on students to go to the factories to "meet the workers" and "spread this revolution to the working class." Once the revolution (which days earlier they proclaimed "showed no signs of stopping") was demobilised, they correctly noted that the question of leadership was critical to using the lull in struggle to prepare for coming

offensives. Yet while abstractly denouncing the "reform from above" perspective of the "17+8" liberals, the concrete steps they proposed were continued calls for (proto-soviet) action committees and to "build now with urgency" a revolutionary organisation (i.e., "join the RCI!").

Perserikatan Sosialis (PS) were less bombastic than the RCI, proposing their own slate of "Demands of workers and the people," most of which are reasonable agitational (even transitional) demands that at least attempt to connect with the actual grievances driving the masses. The practical dimension of PS's intervention was, like the RCI, to call for (proto-soviet) "resistance committees." While such organs are desperately needed, calling to form them without properly clarifying the political obstacles (and necessity of a political split) can only render the demand meaningless. In fact, PS's approach to democratic struggle leads them to describe the central task today as the "national consolidation of the movement, including even with the 17+8 Movement" (in fairness they add the caveat "we must not moderate our program or our demands"). PS has not seriously accounted for the political collapse of the PRD (from which they emerged), nor the popular-frontist orientation of that party towards Megawati's PDI-P in the service of the "democratic struggle" of the 1990s. Thus, while they can quite correctly attack the liberals and (yellow) union bureaucrats, they lack an orientation that can actually combat them politically—a basic precondition to building revolutionary committees.

Painfully absent from the interventions of the RCI and PS was any attempt to advance a concretely *anti-imperialist* program—the hinge point of the democratic question in the neocolonial world. A hard line always seems to exist between anti-imperialism abroad and the struggle at home. This emerges from a correct revulsion to capitulating to the (brutal and reactionary) national bourgeoisie. But Marxists must compete with this class for hegemony over anti-imperialist sentiment, not leave it to present itself as the "defender of the nation."

Much of the left fell short on other fronts too. Most could not seriously address the political impasse facing the labour movement. Intervention on this point was limited to denouncing the most openly reactionary, pro-government bureaucrats like Iqbal and calling for more militancy. And while the whole left can critique the liberals, they tend to do so largely in the realm of political abstraction, without demonstrating concretely the impotence of liberal strategy at this juncture.

Indonesian "National Democrats," aligned with the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS), did raise slogans against the imperialists (among whom they erroneously include China). However,



Australasian Spartacist
Sydney, December 1986: Spartacist League emergency protest against threatened execution of imprisoned Indonesian communists, survivors of 1965 anti-Communist massacre that launched blood-soaked military rule of Suharto.

the real axis of their intervention, mainly through the student Front Mahasiswa Nasional (FMN), was the call to fight back against the "fascist Prabowo-Gibran regime." This is a seriously disorienting analysis. Though reactionary and increasingly bonapartist, the Prabowo presidency is simply not one based on an organisation of extra-legal paramilitary terror. More importantly, this perspective is the product of a Stalinist misinterpretation of the national question: reflecting a stageist and essentially class-collaborationist search for a progressive wing of the national bourgeoisie to help carry forward "national democracy" against the fascist-comprador wing (today supposedly represented by Prabowo-Gibran).

The reactionary unity and anti-communist hysteria of the Indonesian elite today tends to mask these politics, giving Indonesian "National Democrats" something of a left cover. But as crises escalate in the country and world situation, a shifting political landscape will deepen both the opportunist and adventurist pressures—on them as well as on the rest of the Indonesian left.

Dispersed, underground anarchist networks exist across Indonesian cities. Most have their base among lower-class youth and school-age students (in contrast to most Marxist groups, which exist largely on campus). The weakness and semi-illegality of the (especially Marxist) left is an important factor in the relative significance of anarchist groups. In recent years state scaremongering over anarchism has become increasingly acute. The aftermath of demonstrations saw *kelompok anarko* [anarchist networks] widely fingered as responsible for violence and targeted with serious state repression. Hundreds have been arrested for connection to anarchist networks or alleged "anarchic acts" at demonstrations. What has happened since is difficult to discern, with some level of media blackout nationally, but it is certain that many are still in jail or facing sentences.

"Black Scare" hysteria is a threat to the entire left and workers movement. The defence of anarchists, along with all those arrested at demonstrations, is critical. Liberation will not be won by small bands occasionally throwing molotovs,

and radical anarchist-inclined youth must be won to a Marxist perspective. Doing so, however, will depend on advancing a revolutionary program and struggle concretely.

Where to now?

At this juncture, peddling empty revolutionary optimism is facile. The workers movement and the left in Indonesia remain programmatically and organisationally impotent, and though the coming period presents real opportunities, the objective situation is far from *certain* to benefit the left and the workers movement. The national bourgeoisie remains in possession of many reactionary tools. Though reactionary alternatives to the present political order are underdeveloped in different ways, socialists must be prepared for the threats and obstacles ahead.

Powerful state-connected *ormas* paramilitaries are always a latent threat to workers and social movements in Indonesia. Although recent protests did not see their mobilisation, *ormas* were put on notice and had the crisis become more acute *preman* (thugs) could certainly have been deployed as shock troops of "public order." Firmly reactionary, these groups rely on networks of patronage, which under conditions of deeper crisis could lead them to destabilise as much as shore up the stability of the bourgeois order.

Political Islam has been greatly empowered since the fall of Suharto and remains a wellspring of reaction. Islamist mobilisations of hundreds of thousands against former Jakarta governor Ahok in 2016 are proof enough of this. While massively successful in deepening cultural Islamisation, political Islam in Indonesia is also rife with contradictions. As a political force, Indonesian Islam is deeply internally divided and its major organisations and parties are firmly integrated into the status quo political system. Yet it has long served as a container for religio-cultural discontent with Western imperialism, an attraction which could grow in a period of political crisis and would undoubtedly be mobilised against any advancing left.

Prabowo's first year in power has been marked by an increase in bonapartist methods of government and rising military political power. Revisions to the Armed Forces Law early this year

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removed restrictions on active-duty military personnel holding civilian bureaucratic posts, sparking panic in some sectors of a return to *dwifungsi*. While it is important to avoid liberal hysteria on this question, increasingly bonapartist attempts to lean on the army to preserve political order are inevitable as world crisis escalates. At the same time, much of the elite have an interest in avoiding a real return to military rule, which could threaten the systems of patronage that sustain them. Additionally, the bureaucracies of the state's repressive arm are themselves politically unconsolidated: police and military are often in conflict, and the army has its own internal divisions. In short, Prabowo is not Suharto, at least for now.

The trajectory of Indonesian politics is uncertain. Conditions for the masses are worsening and the relative political stability of the last twenty years shows real signs of cracking apart. The elite unity which today holds is under increasing threat of collapse as the global situation decomposes, yet all alternatives are underdeveloped. This offers real opportunities for the left and the workers movement, but also even greater dangers. Imperialist pressures could easily turn this powder keg of a situation into an explosive spiral of reaction. In the current lull in political struggle it is more urgent than ever that the Indonesian left take seriously the tasks of programmatic and organisational rearmament.

Outlines for a program

The following five points are presented as a basis for political discussion, debate, and consolidation. This report makes no claim to have the answers to the myriad political questions facing socialists and the workers movement in Indonesia. Clarifying programmatic principles is, however, the only basis on which to rebuild a fighting vanguard.

1. For united defence against state repression. Recent demonstrations resulted in the most significant period of state repression in Indonesia since 1998, with every tool short of a formal declaration of martial law deployed. Thousands were arrested in this crackdown, hundreds detained for extended periods, and many remain imprisoned awaiting trial. This includes both those caught up in the anarchist “Black Scare” (or accused of “anarchic acts” at protests) as well as numerous



Free West Papua Campaign/Facebook

West Papua, 28 October: Protesters march against Indonesian military occupation and killings.

others facing charges of “incitement,” often simply for social media posts. Many face years in prison, including some prominent liberal activists and NGO figures. There is an urgent need for socialists to take the lead in mobilising a united campaign in defence of all those caught up in this wave of repression. This struggle must be directly linked with defence of Papuan activists, who have also faced a wave of arrests and escalated military violence in recent months.

2. Towards 100% merdeka: the anti-imperialist struggle is the democratic struggle. Inequality, corruption, the dire conditions of the Indonesian masses, the predatory and bonapartist nature of the Indonesian elite—all are ultimately the product of imperialist subjugation and neo-colonial oppression. In the face of a rising bonapartist, advancing the democratic struggle demands a break with the politics of liberal *reformasi*. Tied to the imperialists and this ideological remnant of US hegemony, the left will never break the hold of the national bourgeoisie on the masses. Marxists must demonstrate to the masses that only our program offers real direction in the struggle against imperialism. Cancel the imperialist debts, expel the imperialist agencies, tear up the capitulatory deals, refuse military cooperation in the war drive against China, **complete the tasks of national liberation and 100% merdeka.**

Despite nationalist posturing, the elite have a doomed strategy which cannot defend the country from the imperialist

death grip. Prabowo is desperate to maintain the balance between US imperialism and “multipolarity.” But when the hammer comes down he can only sell out in economic negotiations (and beg Trump for an audience with his son). Moves towards greater military coordination with US imperialism—including offers by the state shipbuilder to turn the archipelago into a repair and refuelling platform for the US war machine—promise only greater disaster. When the national bourgeoisie does move against the imperialists, in their own selfish way (as in the past decade of “resource nationalism”), Marxists must fight for the working class to push this **forward**, far beyond their carefully prepared limits.

3. Against gradualist developmentalism. With the conditions of workers, peasants, and the petty bourgeoisie in decline, the masses continue to yearn for real solutions to the problems of national development. Today's economic woes reveal that in reality (in spite of decades of investment and nominal infrastructural development) the national bourgeoisie and their representatives have enriched themselves at the **expense** of genuine national development for the masses. This is the direct result of their inability to combat imperialist subjugation. Marxists must demonstrate why the national bourgeoisie cannot fight imperialism or truly develop the country, and why these tasks are one and the same. Development under the imperialist boot will never be sufficient. Only a revolutionary alliance of the working class of Southeast Asia with workers of the imperialist centres and the Chinese workers state offers true allies in the struggle for national development.

4. Defend national minorities! For the right to self-determination! Papua merdeka! As crises worsen, it is more urgent than ever that the defence of national minorities and the right to self-determination is made central to socialist agitation. History shows that every period of political and economic crisis in Indonesia leads directly to an explosion of the national question. The 1990s saw communal violence across the country (in the major cities most brutally against the ethnically Chinese) and acute struggles for self-determination in Timor, Aceh, and Papua. There have not been major instances of communal violence in recent years, but the danger remains latent. Likewise, the national question is subdued in most of the archipelago by post-*reformasi* “decentralisation,” but its re-ignition is not out of the question under

a potential splintering of elite unity. In Papua, brutal repression of the national movement continues to escalate in scale and violence. As the bodies of fighters and civilians pile up, and jails are filled with political prisoners, the West Papuan national-liberation movement finds itself at an impasse to which it has no solution.

Only a revolutionary alliance of oppressed nationalities and ethnicities with the Indonesian working class offers a real path to emancipation. Yet for most workers, approaching these taboo issues tends to provoke deep hostility—seen as nothing short of an attack on the nation and its sovereignty. The workers movement will not be won to the fight for West Papuan liberation through appeals to liberal concern over human rights. Neither are abstract appeals to class solidarity alone sufficient to build unity across national and communal boundaries. What must be demonstrated in struggle (and patient explanation) is the common interest of the peoples of the archipelago in the struggle against imperialist subjugation. This is the only basis on which the special interest of the Indonesian working class in the liberation of oppressed minorities can be concretely revealed.

5. The workers movement must lead the way. The conciliatory and liberal-idealist politics of the presently dominant “leaders” of Indonesian social movements are a dead end. For the struggle to advance the workers movement must become its leading force, carrying behind it the rural peasant masses and radical layers of the petty bourgeoisie. But the present leadership of the workers movement, “yellow” and “red” alike, are not up to this task—committed to a strategy of pro-government class collaboration or seeped in petty-bourgeois liberalism. Building a revolutionary leadership of the class will require engaging with the workers movement to advance a genuinely anti-imperialist program counterposed to the existing misleadership. Only behind a revolutionary workers movement can the masses' anger be directed in a productive direction, and only with the militant youth behind it can the workers movement advance itself.

Engaging with and fighting to consolidate the splintered Indonesian left behind united-front actions and, ultimately, a revolutionary program is the first practical step towards advancing this struggle. ■

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Road to party...

(continued from page 6)

the main content of his life.” But it is precisely this fight, for the “conscious construction of such a party” as Furia says, that we believe the RCO rejects.

The RCO talks a lot about “refounding the communist party.” How did Lenin forge them in the first place? In the wake of the betrayal of the Second International in WWI, Lenin fought tooth and nail for a *split* not just with the open traitors of the workers movement but most especially with the centrists who fought to maintain unity with the former at any cost. Centrists such as Karl Kautsky talked a big game on the fight for socialism, but sought unity on the basis of “mere words,” in practice trying to “reconcile” the masses with their opportunist leaders. For all the principled demands in Kautsky’s *Road to Power* (1909), without directly taking on the social-democratic roadblocks to this goal they would remain nothing more than words. Maintaining unity with these opportunists meant maintaining unity between the proletariat and “its own” capitalists—that is, submission to the latter and a split in the international revolutionary working class! In contrast, Lenin built the Bolshevik Party of revolutionary fighters and “iconoclasts” through an unrelenting, principled struggle against the Menshevik, social-democratic and centrist obstacles, not because he thought that at that moment he had the social forces to win, but because



Sovfoto/Universal Images Group
Russian revolutionary leader V.I. Lenin addressing the Third Congress of the Communist International.

cohering and uniting the forces necessary to forge a mass revolutionary party could only be done on this basis! As Lenin put it in “Opportunism, and the Collapse of the Second International” (1915):

“We do not say that an immediate split with the opportunists in all countries is desirable, or even possible at present; we do say that such a split has come to a head, that it has become inevitable, is progressive in nature, and necessary to the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, and that history, having turned away

from ‘peaceful’ capitalism towards imperialism, has thereby turned towards such a split. *Volentem ducunt fata, nolentem trahunt.*”

This was the strategy that enabled Lenin to forge the Bolshevik Party and build the Communist International, which was united on the basis of struggling against the social-chauvinists and their conciliators. It is this, not abstract dogma or socialist phrases, which separates revolutionaries from all manner of *poseurs*

and opportunists. As *Partisan!* editor Mila Volkova wrote: “...being a socialist is not a matter of self-identification, theoretical principles or vague aesthetics. To be a socialist is to be proactively committed to a revolutionary political program for working class rule and the transition to communism” (*Partisan!* No. 6). This means being *proactively* committed to the struggle against the central obstacles to this in the workers movement!

Of course, many things have changed 100 years on. Furia is right to say that today the left’s social weight is pathetic, and that our capacity to intervene and change the course of class struggle is objectively limited by this. Like the RCO, we think that in this context it is of especial importance to engage with and cohere as many forces on the left as possible on a revolutionary basis. That struggle can only be waged in opposition to the Laborite obstacles standing in its way. It has been the left’s failure to wage this struggle that has resulted in the weak and splintered miasma we see today. We ask, if not on this basis, on what basis does the RCO fight for unity? For all the high-sounding words in the RCO’s program praising socialism and denouncing Labor, it means nothing if not based on struggling against, and in irreconcilable opposition to, the social-chauvinists and all who conciliate them. Otherwise it is little more than unity on the basis of “mere words.” Yes, we need a communist party to split the class, but this party can only be built on the basis of fighting for this split. ■

Join the RCO...

(continued from page 1)

together in anti-imperialist contingents at Palestine rallies as well as at recent counter-mobilisations against the right.

These actions helped draw both our groups out of a previous insular existence and led to increasing political engagement between us. This has ranged from informal discussion and political debate to Spartacist presentations at Talking Reds forums and the RCO’s Crisis & Critique conference in September. Articles by the SL/A have been welcomed in the pages of *Partisan!* and on its website.

Polemical exchanges between our organisations have also contributed to our mutual understanding and a growing convergence between our political perspectives. An important exchange over the question of *how* to advance the struggle to forge the desperately necessary mass revolutionary party helped focus debate on this critical question (see “Road to

party,” page 6). What has been clear since is that resolving continuing differences and unclarity would best take place in the framework of fighting for this party side by side in the same organisation. The RCO’s open and democratic nature provides a perfect platform to air and clarify pressing questions. And the most effective path forward will only be demonstrated by together testing differing strategies in practice in the turbulent times ahead.

We understand many revolutionists would have serious disagreements with different elements of the RCO’s program or perspectives. We do too. We do not shy away from fighting to thrash these out. But we recognise that it is only on the basis of common struggle for the party we all agree is essential that these differences can be clarified and resolved.

The comrades who have been grouped in the Spartacist League join the RCO with our existing ideas and continuing support to the ICL. As such it would make sense that we constitute a distinct political tendency within the RCO. But we stand

shoulder to shoulder with the RCO comrades as a whole, placing ourselves under the discipline of the majority and upholding all obligations of membership. We aim to bring all our resources and experience to bear in the service of building the RCO as the indispensable catalyst for the construction of a mass revolutionary party that Lenin would recognise as his own.

We call upon our supporters and other leftists to follow our example and join the ranks of the RCO. We will cease publication of *Red Battler* and instead put all our energies into making the press of the RCO

the sharpest voice for revolutionary socialism in Australia today.

We believe this move will be truly transformative for both our organisations. Further it will set itself as a powerful example to the fractured left both here in Australia and throughout the world. We believe the RCO can become the rallying point for all those who today recognise the burning necessity to forge a communist cadre capable of building a revolutionary party without which the working class cannot triumph. ■



RB photo
Spartacist and RCO join together in anti-imperialist contingent at Melbourne Palestine rally, August 2025.

To our subscribers

As noted in the accompanying article, “Why we are joining the RCO and you should too,” *Red Battler* will cease publication with this issue. Those who have ongoing subscriptions will receive an equivalent number of the RCO’s publication as a replacement. You will also continue to receive *Spartacist* and *Women & Revolution* for the duration of your subscription.



RCO monthly magazine of Marxist politics and polemic

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Turning point...

(continued from page 16)

surely building the foundations of a new, multipolar economic order. This view is wrong on two counts. First, it denies that there is a fundamentally antagonistic relationship between China's social regime, established by an *anti-capitalist revolution*, and the world *capitalist economy*. In the long run, capitalist economic relations, domestic and international, will not favor the CPC's "socialism with Chinese characteristics" but undermine and destroy it. The second mistake is to think that the U.S. will simply dig its own grave, guaranteeing China's rise. This downplays the danger posed by a decaying U.S. empire. Left to its own devices, the U.S. will spread misery, chaos and war on an untold scale. China cannot insulate itself from this. Its own development, and that of humanity, demands that the U.S. empire be ended as swiftly as possible.

If one looks at the world situation with the slightest degree of objectivity, it is obvious that China is playing a *conservative* role, wary of shocks and conflicts, while the U.S. is the *main agent* of disruption and chaos. That is not how a rising imperialist power behaves; it is how a bureaucratically ruled workers state like the Soviet Union behaved. No doubt China will play an important role in the coming period of turbulent world politics. But because of its conservative political nature, the CPC will continue to play second fiddle to Trump, reacting to events rather than shaping them.

Gen Z revolutions?

For most on the left, the rising tide of reaction is matched by an equally rising tide of popular struggles. The RCI speaks of a "Red September" and a "dramatic turn in the world situation." This optimistic analysis is largely based on the wave of uprisings in the semicolonial world that have been coined the Gen Z Revolutions. Over the last several months, countries such as Nepal, Indonesia, Madagascar, Morocco, Peru and Tanzania have all seen explosions of discontent.

Every movement has had its own distinct political dynamics. But they have all been fundamentally caused by the deteriorating conditions for youth in a world where social mobility and development are distant prospects. Previously, the U.S. order fostered illusions in economic and democratic progress while at the same time using emigration and NGO money as pressure valves. This is all over. With no prospect for a viable future, social explosion has become the only outlet.

The recent uprisings have been met with massive repression (Indonesia, Morocco, Peru, etc.) and in the case of Madagascar resulted in a new regime led by the military. For now, a sharp turn toward the left does not appear to have taken place in these countries. And on the scale of global politics, the Gen Z revolutions remain a *subtrend* that has not halted the general drift toward imperialist reaction.

The main reason for this is that these popular explosions have not found political vehicles that could channel their energies in a progressive direction. Overwhelmingly, the left has not been able to offer leadership to the mass uprisings. In Nepal, the uprising was in fact directed *against* the various communist parties that have governed the country. In Sri Lanka, the mass uprising of 2022 eventually brought a communist-led coalition to power, but already it has betrayed the aspirations of the masses by bowing down to the IMF.

The problems caused by a lack of leadership in these uprisings are compounded by the fact that the organized working class has not played a major role. In fact, despite the social explosions in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the industrial working

class of the Global South, the overwhelming majority of the world proletariat, has not yet shown signs of increased militancy. This is in no small part due to the worsening economic prospects for industrial workers. Were the proletariat to flex its muscles in countries like China, Mexico or Indonesia, this would bring much more social weight to the struggle and could dramatically shift world politics.

These observations do not in any way downplay the *revolutionary potential* in the Global South, including in countries peripheral to the world economy. As the world sinks deeper into the chaos of the decaying American empire, the pressure on these countries will increase: fostering



Luis Tato/AFP via Getty Images

Madagascar, 13 October: One of many Gen Z protests demanding the resignation of President Andry Rajoelina.

what will most likely be the most important revolutionary current of the coming period. The recent uprisings were largely spontaneous and politically amorphous. But as repression and reformist solutions fail to contain popular anger, the most advanced elements will draw lessons.

It is the task of Marxists to accelerate this process by helping revolutionary fighters of the Global South learn from past failures and cohere around a unified anti-imperialist strategy (see "In Defense of Permanent Revolution," *Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023). This requires serious, long-term and systematic work. Unfortunately, the all-too-common practice on the revolutionary left is to cheerlead a popular upsurge, call for some sort of independent workers committees and then move on to greener pastures as soon as the opportunity recedes. Such methods spread illusions and cynicism; they do nothing to organize revolutionary struggle in the Global South.

Right-wing populism in the West

What about the West? Are we on the brink of fascist dictatorships or is revolution around the corner? Neither, for the moment at least. Again, we must put hysterical impressionism to the side and look at the actual political trends. Throughout the West we see the political center collapsing under the blows of an *insurgent populist right wing*. The strength of this movement comes from the fact that it is generally the only political force firmly opposing the liberal status quo of the past decades. Indeed, most major left-wing forces, while sometimes radical in their rhetoric, are fully committed to supporting the center against the right. Not only is this not stopping the right, it is also setting up the left to go down with the collapsing edifice of liberal democracy.

Different countries are at different stages of this process. In the U.S. and Italy, right-wing populism is already in power. However, internationally and domestically such forces still face political opposition

from the leftovers of the previous era, hampering their actions but not providing a real challenge. In Britain, France and Germany, the centrist governments of Starmer, Macron and Merz are empty shells, despised by both the right and the left. They must turn to increasingly repressive and bureaucratic means to maintain their position. But with each maneuver they only further alienate the masses and fuel the ascent of reaction.

Then there are countries like Canada, Australia and Ireland, which think they will resist the Trumpist winds. In Canada, the U.S.'s aggressive economic measures have temporarily strengthened the liberal center. In Ireland and Australia, the

hope is that these island nations will be isolated from the great currents of world politics. The problem is that these countries are all fundamentally dependent economically and militarily on the U.S., and for all their defiant words, their elites *will* bend the knee. Communists cannot allow themselves to be lulled by a false sense of security. It is just a matter of time before the liberal center collapses in these countries as well.

...And the rise of the left?

But what about the left? Many of the countries referred to above have also seen an uptick on the left: Zohran Mamdani's victory as New York City mayor, Catherine Connolly's election as Irish president, the rise of the Green Party and Your Party in Britain as well as the recent strikes in France, Italy and Greece. For many, these developments confirm that the rise of the left is at least equal to the rise of the right. Unfortunately, this view is wrong and based on a false reading of political dynamics.

To the extent that there has been a shift to the left, it has overwhelmingly been among layers of the liberal middle classes and students. Its impetus has been fear of the rising right and outrage that traditional liberals are betraying the values they claimed to stand for. It is not based on an organic rise of *working-class consciousness and militancy*. In the main, the working class is *not* moving to the left but constitutes an important part of the base of right-wing populist parties. Other layers are demoralized, which also benefits reactionary forces. Since the ruling class is also moving to the right, left-wing progressive forces find themselves with no decisive social weight to support them.

Moreover, most of the left presents itself as the most consistent and militant defenders of liberal imperialism, not as a force aspiring to lead the working class toward socialism—Catherine Connolly, the Green Party in Britain and Die Linke in Germany are typical of this. Even in the soon to be

formed Your Party, which has the *potential* to adopt a radical working-class program, most of its supporters and leaders are still very attached to traditional British liberalism. In all these cases, the task for socialists is to fight for a *political break with liberalism* and a clear orientation to *building ties to the working class*.

In the U.S., with Trump in the White House and the Democratic Party in disarray, the dynamics are slightly different. Mamdani's victory against both MAGA and the Democratic Party establishment has many parallels with left-wing movements in other countries. However, there are at least two major distinctions. The first is that Mamdani emerged from *within* the traditional two-party system of U.S. imperialism. While many in the Democratic Party oppose him, he does not cross any red lines for the ruling class. Already figures like Barack Obama have reached out to Mamdani, seeking to bring him into the establishment fold. Second, Mamdani's campaign was not really based on defending the old liberal status quo. It raised minimal economic demands and for the most part stayed clear of social issues like immigration, black oppression and the trans question. As such, Mamdani, unlike the leftover politicians in Europe, may offer a glimpse into the future of the Democratic Party: more economically interventionist, less socially liberal.

The key thing to understand is that Mamdani is not rising on the crest of militant sentiments in the New York working class. Most workers are terrorized or demoralized and some still support Trump. For now, workers are still overwhelmingly concerned with keeping their heads above water as every aspect of life gets worse. This is particularly true among immigrant and black workers. And while sentiments among the middle classes and student youth are important, Marxists understand that without working-class support there can be no viable basis for radical left-wing politics. Thus, understanding sentiments in the working class and adjusting interventions accordingly must be at the heart of communist work in the current period.

Many will no doubt point to the recent strikes in Italy and France as a counterargument to the outline above. It is true that both countries have seen important days of strike action—in Italy's case, the largest in decades. However, these are exceptions that confirm the rule. Fundamentally, trends in Italy and France are not different from those in the rest of Europe. The center is collapsing, the right is in power or ascendant, the bulk of the working class is moving to the right and the liberal middle classes are panicking.

In France, the traditional one-day strike and parade was supplemented with radical agitation by urban progressive supporters of Mélenchon to "block everything." But the left is still on the backfoot, the reactionary Rassemblement National is closer than ever to power and workers continue





Spartaco

Mass protest in Rome, 4 October. Banner says: "Throw out the government, accomplice to genocide!"

to reel from the defeated struggle against the pension reform in 2023. In this context, ultraleft agitation for a general strike only strengthens the right and the trade-union bureaucracy, who can present themselves as responsible agents of stability as opposed to an out-of-touch left.

As for Italy, the general strike in defense of Palestine was a show of force. But many workers resent the fact that these same union leaders have not waged any serious struggle against attacks by the bosses and the Meloni government. Moreover, the October strikes do not seem to have radically altered the political dynamics in Italy, and Meloni remains firmly in the saddle. Unfortunately, in both France and Italy the recent mobilizations were consistent with these countries' strong syndicalist traditions and appear more like the death throes of the old order rather than the first signs of a working-class awakening against the populist right.

Fascism not around the corner

Does our analysis mean that fascism is imminent and inevitable? No. Although bigotry and right-wing populist forces are on the rise, this is not the same as fascism, which consists of paramilitary mobilizations to crush the workers movement and the oppressed. Racist violence from reactionary thugs is increasing, but it consists mainly of atomized incidents, not organized mass movements like those of the 20th century. As for increased state repression and authoritarianism, such as the ICE raids in the U.S., they point to a dangerous trend but not yet to the physical destruction of all forms of political opposition that comes with a fascist regime.

Since fascist violence targets the organized workers movement and oppressed groups and minorities, who compose much of the proletariat, it *will* face resistance from the working class. There is nothing inevitable in fascism's rise. The point of our analysis is not to be defeatist but to insist that stopping fascism and reaction requires a strategy proceeding from *real conditions*, not those we *wish* existed.

Here we must insist that what is indeed inevitable is the collapse of the liberal center. No amount of electoral maneuvers or bureaucratic repression will save the old order. The frantic cries about the danger of fascism are simply desperate attempts to rally the left around the politics of the status quo. Like a drowning man, the liberal center will grab on to the left in a desperate attempt to stay afloat. The workers movement must respond by kicking liberalism in the face, not letting itself get dragged down with it.

The only real question for communists is how quickly the collapse of liberalism can lead to the rise of a new revolutionary working-class trend. Hastening this development must be the focus of our efforts. This requires no longer playing the role of a left appendage of liberalism. But it also requires engaging with concrete political developments, not simply shouting revolu-

tionary verbiage into the wind. Only then can Marxists start rebuilding their own independent influence in the working class and undermine the hold of the right.

PART II: SHOCKS ON THE HORIZON

Now that we have elucidated some of the main political trends in world politics, we can turn our attention to the future. The current situation is very much on a knife's edge. Multiple simmering volcanos threaten to explode at any time and reshape the global order. A correct orientation in the period ahead requires an analysis of these various points of tension, of how they are likely to evolve and of the political impact they may have.

China: the sleeping giant

The biggest long-term source of geopolitical tensions is the conflict between the U.S. and China. That said, these do not seem about to explode quite yet. The tariff war between the U.S. and China has revealed just how strong China's position has become (a fact underplayed in our recent analysis). Not only does China dominate global industrial production, but it also has a chokehold on rare earth minerals that are critical to the U.S. military-industrial complex. This forced the U.S. to partially retreat in its economic war against China and has made clear that the U.S. is in no position to provoke a conventional war either. The U.S. can and most likely will find a way around China's control of such critical economic choke points. But this process will take years.

If China were intent on defeating the U.S., it would make sense for it to press its advantage and paralyze the entire supply chain of the U.S. armed forces. However, as we have already seen, the CPC is a conservative bureaucracy that has no such intentions. It has opted instead to stabilize its relationship with the U.S. by agreeing to a one-year trade deal. We shall see how long this agreement holds. But in the interim, it gives the U.S. time to address gaps in its supply chain and gives it a free

hand to attack weaker countries—developments that may well come back to bite China in the future (see "China: Do Nothing, Lose," *Spartacist* No. 70, May 2025).

Venezuela in the crosshairs

The most immediate threat is to Venezuela, which has been the focus of a huge military buildup. A full-on war between the U.S. and Venezuela would profoundly shake all of Latin America. If the U.S. is successful in overthrowing President Maduro, this could lead to a major political realignment on the continent, reversing the democratic gains made in past decades and bringing back the days of pro-U.S. right-wing military dictatorships. The fall of Maduro would also significantly tighten the noose around the Cuban workers state.

While military aggression against Venezuela, limited or full-blown, is a distinct possibility, there are reasons the U.S. might want to avoid this. In the first instance, a war with Venezuela would be very unpopular in the U.S. itself. There would certainly be huge opposition to a major ground invasion. Not only would a war threaten to turn into another quagmire, but nothing guarantees that it would be a success. Military aggression could easily backfire and rally the Venezuelan population behind the regime, while also fueling massive opposition to the U.S. throughout Latin America.

No doubt certain people in the State Department hope that the simple threat of American firepower will be enough to cause the Maduro regime to collapse. Over the past decades, the regime established by Hugo Chávez and now headed by Maduro has restrained and dampened the revolutionary energy of the Venezuelan masses. This and the brutal consequences of U.S. economic sanctions have steadily weakened the regime's popular support, leading it to become increasingly brittle and repressive. Nevertheless, for the working class, a capitulation by the Maduro regime without a fight would be the worst-case scenario. It would give a massive victory to the Venezuelan *gusanos* at minimum cost to U.S. imperialism and profoundly demoralize the masses throughout Latin America.



Andrew Caballero-Reynolds/AFP

Busan, South Korea, 30 October: US President Trump and China's President Xi Jinping meet for trade talks.

We can't know what the U.S. will decide to do. Unfortunately, in this case Trump holds all the initiative and has few immediate restrictions on what he can do. But once the genie is out of the bottle and a military conflict is engaged, the consequences could be unpredictable and the outcome may very well not be in Trump's favor. No matter what happens, revolutionaries must stand steadfast in defense of Venezuela, and any other country the U.S. sets its sights on.

Ukraine at an inflection point

When it comes to the Ukraine war, we have a totally different situation. Here the initiative is firmly in Russia's hands, and Putin has no qualms about playing his hand to the full extent. Trump's diplomatic flailing about has run its course. There was no bluffing his way out of the fact that Russia is winning. Recent negotiations have only confirmed that the conflict will be decided by force of arms, not diplomacy.

The pace of Russian gains has been increasing over the last two years, and we are now at a major inflection point in the conflict. The fall of the city of Pokrovsk not only represents the loss of a major logistics hub but also potentially opens the way for a collapse of Ukraine's whole position in Donbass—the epicenter of the war. The fall of Donbass would leave the way open for Russia to march all the way to the Dnieper River, Ukraine's key economic artery. It's possible that the onset of winter and Ukrainian resistance will delay this for a couple of more months. But the writing is on the wall, and it is only a matter of time before the Ukrainian lines collapse under the relentless Russian offensive.

Current developments are causing catastrophic and irreplaceable losses of manpower and equipment for Ukraine. They are also setting the stage for a sharp political crisis in Kiev, further undermining the war effort. The consequences of Ukraine's defeat will not only be felt in the country itself but will cause a political earthquake throughout Europe. The German, French and British governments have sunk an enormous amount of military, economic and political capital into Ukraine, and its collapse will shake the political establishment to its core. The shock will also be felt in the U.S., but Trump will benefit from having slightly more distance from the whole affair than his European counterparts.

Only after a Ukrainian military collapse will diplomacy play a more decisive role. The question will be whether the U.S. and Russia are able to agree on a settlement that would at least freeze the line of fracture between the pro-American bloc and Russia or if the conflict will continue. In the first scenario, we could see a reactionary order imposed on Europe based on a Russo-American pact. That outcome would be ideal for Russia, which has neither the ambition nor the economic weight to seek the domination of Europe at the present time. The main obstacle to reaching an agreement is that the U.S. has been unwilling to swallow its pride, accept defeat and roll back its influence in Eastern Europe. The U.S. also faces strong opposition from Ukraine and the EU to any substantial settlement with Russia.

If military hostilities continue, this would leave Europe extremely unstable and could eventually lead to a military collision between Russia and NATO, the outcome of which could be cataclysmic. Unfortunately, because of the craven capitulations to nationalism by the workers movement in Ukraine and Russia (not helped in any way by the international socialist movement), the possibility of a working-class solution to the conflict appears very remote at present. This could rapidly change under the blows of a sharp crisis, but the near future appears bleak. More than ever, communists must work toward building a revolutionary pole in the region, uniting the proletariat through a common anti-imperialist

program (see “Ukraine War: Where Do You Stand Now?” *Workers Vanguard* No. 1184, April 2025).

Israel prepares next bloodbath

Since October 7, Israel continuously escalated its campaign of genocidal terror against the Palestinians. Because of the divisions and political vacillations of the Axis of Resistance, it was able to engage the components of the Axis separately and at the time of its choosing. This allowed Israel to keep up its war effort for two years despite being overextended. Now the U.S.-brokered ceasefire allows Israel to pause, as it undoubtedly prepares for its next wave of carnage.

We can summarize the outcome for the Axis of Resistance as follows: Hamas has been dealt a severe blow but has held on, Hezbollah acted like a paper tiger and is licking its wounds, Assad’s collapse resulted in a strategic defeat, and the Houthis emerged with their reputation enhanced. As for Iran, the senior partner of the alliance, it was able to hold its own during the 12-day war with Israel and the U.S. However, its position in the region has been weakened and it faces growing internal tensions.

Despite the brave face put on by the Resistance, no doubt many will ask: “Was all this worth it?” Following the outcome of the last two years, there is pressure to draw defeatist conclusions and make concessions to the U.S., Israel and the UAE. Such attitudes must be **opposed at all costs**. Israel and the U.S. will continue their carnage in the region until they are forced to stop. Resistance is not a choice! The recent conflict has confirmed that fact and shown how conciliation and vacillation only lead to more Israeli butchery. The Palestinian cause is not only righteous but also a question of **self-preservation** for the entire Arab population in West Asia.

We must be clear that the conflict is still active and Palestinians are still being killed; it has only been reduced in intensity and will explode again. We must make sure that when it does, the correct political and military lessons will have been drawn (see “Kill the Deal!” *Spartacist* supplement, 8 October). This will not happen automatically; communists must help draw out these lessons and bring them to vanguard elements of the anti-Zionist struggle, in the Arab world and abroad.

South Asia unraveling

South Asia has been shaken by increased instability. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal have all witnessed popular uprisings in the last few years. Tensions in Kashmir are simmering. Only some months ago, Pakistan and India were at war and recently Afghanistan and Pakistan engaged in hostilities. Now tensions are ramping up once again following bombings in both New Delhi and Islamabad. As the various governments in the region feel the increasing weight of geopolitical tensions and imperialist economic pressure, it is difficult to predict what will happen next. However, further shocks are sure to come. Given the demographic and economic weight of the Indian subcontinent, these are sure to have important consequences for the world situation.

Rising tensions in South Asia are themselves largely the product of an increasingly fraught international context. India, the region’s hegemon and most stable country, is itself increasingly squeezed. The rapid



Abdalkhem Abu Riash/Anadolu

Gaza, 30 July: Palestinians in line for food as Israeli blockades cause starvation.

deterioration of relations between Trump and Prime Minister Modi surprised and shook the Indian political class. Many have speculated that India will seek a rapprochement with China and turn away from the U.S. Little credence should be given to such notions. The Indian capitalist class remains deeply integrated with the West. It will take a much deeper crisis to sever those bonds, not least because relations between China and India have historically been extremely hostile.

As tensions threaten the region, the left must rise above the hairsplitting historical debates it revels in and set itself toward organizing a unified struggle against imperialism and the venal capitalists selling off their countries and pitting their peoples against each other (see “South Asian Powder Keg,” *Spartacist* No. 70, May 2025).

The decisive factor: the global economy

The single most important factor in the development of world politics is the global economy. It fundamentally underpins everything else and its evolution will be decisive in shaping the course of events. While it is impossible to predict exactly when the next major economic crisis will hit, there is no doubt that one is approaching and that it will have devastating consequences.

The global economy never fully recovered from the 2008 crisis. The overall growth of the real economy has been muted and living standards in most countries have been stagnant or have gone into reverse. The main factors propping up global growth have been huge investments in infrastructure and housing in China, Western governments’ gigantic monetary and fiscal stimulus to their economies and a speculative frenzy in asset prices centered in the U.S. Of these three factors, only the third continues to this day.

The CPC has slowed the rate of investment in infrastructure and has burst the housing bubble, bringing the market into a depression. In response, the regime has invested massively in “new productive forces,” driving down the price of many industrial goods, including electric cars and solar panels. This massive investment has created a deflationary cycle in China and accelerated the tendency toward deindustrialization in other parts of the world. Across the globe, we can observe a slowing down of production and an oversupply of industrial goods.

On the monetary side of the equation, most major economies saw increased

interest rates in response to the spike in inflation following the Covid pandemic. This marked a break with the ultra-loose borrowing conditions that had been in existence since 2008. The result is that borrowing is growing ever more expensive, pushing many governments to try to limit their deficits. Most imperialist countries now find themselves with historically high debt burdens, which threaten to cause great political and economic instability in the future. These problems are all exacerbated by the drive to drastically increase military expenditure.

As for the stock bubble centered on the U.S. market, it has continued to expand following the correction in the early days of the Trump presidency. This has enabled those who own stocks to continue consuming at high levels. Meanwhile, everyone else is struggling more and more to get by. The massive spike in tech stocks due to the supposed AI revolution has continued to be the main, and increasingly the only, driver of stock market gains. The stock valuation of the chip designer Nvidia recently hit five trillion dollars, which means the company is worth as much as the entire annual output of the German economy. Clearly this is insane. So far, the bubble has been able to continue growing by leveraging the rising value of AI companies to purchase more AI products, causing an upward spiral in valuations. This will necessarily end in a catastrophic collapse. When exactly this occurs can’t be predicted. But we can see that there is a decreasing number of factors supporting the stock bubble, which is reliant on the continued growth of a declining number of stocks.

When the music stops, we will get a glimpse into the true state of the world economy and the real balance of economic might between the great powers. In the first instance, a major shock will probably not lead to a rise in working-class militancy. Fear for the future and for self-preservation will probably be the prevailing attitudes, allowing governments to further squeeze working people despite their growing unpopularity. This coming economic hardship is one of the main reasons we insist

on the need for the working class to adopt a defensive posture (see “What Union Militants Should Do,” *Workers Vanguard* No. 1186, August 2025).

However, there are certain limits to the working class getting pushed around, and it will eventually come to the realization that collective struggle is necessary to survive. Particularly when the economy picks up again, we could see the rise of working-class struggles on a massive scale.

Revolutionaries in a reactionary period

As communists, we recognize the importance of the subjective element, that is, the ability of individuals and parties to shape history through their actions. At certain points, such as the October Revolution of 1917, the conscious action of a revolutionary vanguard can be decisive. But the role of individuals is only decisive to the extent that they place themselves within the development of objective historical processes. To bring this into the realm of sailing, it is obvious that knowing how to position a sail is decisive if a boat is to catch the wind, but without wind there is no sailing.

What, then, are revolutionaries to do in a period where the winds of class struggle are not blowing in our direction? Certainly, this greatly limits the direct impact on the masses that we can have. We cannot through our own subjective efforts push the masses into struggle. But this does not mean we are irrelevant. Quite the opposite. Under difficult objective conditions, it is all the more important to be deliberate and conscious in deciding where we place our energies. We must anticipate future political developments and position ourselves to meet them successfully (see “The Crisis in the Marxist Left and the Tasks of the ICL,” *Spartacist* No. 70, May 2025).

No doubt our analysis will be considered too pessimistic by most, even defeatist. We can only shrug our shoulders at such critics. Their blind optimism in the face of growing reaction is a crude caricature of Marxism. Rather, we lean on the experience of the Bolshevik Party as described by Trotsky:

“In these immense events the ‘Trotskyists’ learned the rhythm of history, that is, the dialectics of the class struggle. They also learned, it seems, and to a certain degree successfully, how to subordinate their subjective plans and programs to this objective rhythm. They learned not to fall into despair over the fact that the laws of history do not depend upon their individual tastes and are not subordinated to their own moral criteria. They learned to subordinate their individual tastes to the laws of history. They learned not to become frightened by the most powerful enemies if their power is in contradiction to the needs of historical development. They know how to swim against the stream in the deep conviction that the new historic flood will carry them to the other shore. Not all will reach that shore, many will drown. But to participate in this movement with open eyes and with an intense will—only this can give the highest moral satisfaction to a thinking being!”

—*Their Morals and Ours* (1938) ■

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President Trump (top right). Bandung, Indonesia, 29 August: Protest following the death of a motorcycle taxi driver hit by a police vehicle (centre). US aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford which has now been deployed to Caribbean as part of US military threats against Venezuela (bottom).

Brendan Smialowski/AFP; Sipa USA/Alamy Live News; US Strategic Command

The following article was published as a Spartacist supplement on 13 November.

Where is the world going? Are we witnessing “a worldwide chain of mass movements, insurrections, uprisings and revolutions,” as the Revolutionary Communist International (RCI) claims? Or is “the Land of Lincoln...being transformed by Trump and his arrogant satraps into the land of a would-be Führer,” as the Socialist Equality Party believes? Maybe it’s a bit of both, and “in the coming months, we could see a combined process of wars, revolutions and counterrevolutions which might open a *pre-revolutionary or even revolutionary world situation*” (Revolutionary Communist International Tendency). If Trotskyists have conflicting views on where we are heading, they aren’t alone. Everywhere you look you’ll find comments about “the rise of fascism,” “the collapse of the dollar,” “stock bubbles,” “the AI revolution” and “world war.” There is no coherent picture, and the whole thing is dizzying.

If there is so much confusion, it’s because the world is rapidly approaching a decisive *turning point*—and like the calm before the storm, we’re receiving a lot of mixed signals. But the question remains, where are we heading? To answer this as Marxists, we cannot just jump from headline to headline or look at the latest opinion polls. We need to understand the inner dynamics of world events and distinguish the dominant currents from secondary countercurrents. This method does not rule out mistakes or unforeseen events, but it provides the only way to avoid being swept up in impressionism.

We in the International Communist League believe this is the dawn of a *reactionary period* of capitalist offensive, in which the living conditions of working people will be attacked on a scale not seen in decades. This is not to say that it will be a one-sided battle and we should simply

stand by and give up. Quite the contrary. It calls for steeled resolve, defensive actions and serious preparation. The stronger the resistance, the quicker the working class can go on the offensive. But to do this effectively, advanced workers and the socialist movement need a correct understanding of the rhythm and direction of events.

Unfortunately, as the examples above suggest, most leftists have a view of the world that is totally at odds with reality, not least regarding the dominant moods in the working class. Mostly they are turning left, agitating for general strikes and uprisings, just as the world is moving to the right. To avoid a painful clash with reality, communists need to take off their partisan blinders and *seriously* study and debate the current world situation.

PART I: THE MAIN TRENDS OF WORLD POLITICS

To understand what’s going on we need to start from the top. The main factor shaping world politics is the increasing gap between the dominant role the U.S. plays on the world stage and its declining economic power. The uncontested dominance of the U.S. in the 1990s and 2000s ensured an oppressive yet stable global order. Now that the centripetal force of the U.S. is weakening, more and more regional conflicts are breaking out, the global economy is teetering and the U.S. rulers are tearing up old rules in a desperate attempt to maintain their position. This is where Donald Trump comes in.

What the hell is Trump up to?

Over the last year Trump has shaken world politics, attacking friend and foe alike. But is there any logic to his actions, or are they totally incoherent? Many commentators have mulled over this question.

The tricky thing is that the answer is both. Trump is a moron who obviously doesn’t have a coherent plan, but he is a moron with strong class instincts. He understands that the U.S. has a large reserve of hard power and that it needs to do something drastic to halt its decline. So like any good real estate tycoon, he is blackmailing and bullying his way to any advantage he can get. He attacks, then observes the reaction. If he bites off more than he can chew, he backs off. If he senses weakness, he doubles down. This approach is chaotic, but it has been effective in squeezing concessions out of dependent countries of the Global South as well as U.S. allies. However, it has proved useless in pushing back against Russia and China, both of which have the material means to stand up to American threats.

The problem Trump has is that for all the power of the U.S. state, he cannot reshape the global economy as he wishes. Nor can he reverse decades of relative economic decline—at least, not in the short term. This explains why so much has remained the same despite Trump’s antics. Fundamentally it is objective forces, the economy and the outcome of wars, that are the main drivers of history. Short of nuclear war, there is nothing Trump can do to reverse Russia winning the war in Ukraine. Nor is he currently in a position to choke off the Chinese economy with tariffs.

Otto von Bismarck once said, “A statesman cannot create anything himself. He must wait and listen until he hears the steps of God sounding through events; then leap up and grasp the hem of his garment.” Trump isn’t wasting any time waiting; he grasps any straw he can. But great shocks are on the horizon, and as history lurches forward Trump will be at the helm of the most powerful state in the world. As such, the political current he represents, the aggressive right-wing populism

of a decaying imperialist ruling class, will most likely play a commanding role in reshaping the world order.

China isn’t taking over

What about China? Will it not play a key role in the coming shocks to the global system? China, and its role on the global stage, is one of the most important yet misunderstood factors in world politics. China is seen by most as a rising superpower intent on supplanting the U.S. Some think this will lead to progress, while others are horrified at the prospect. Both are fundamentally wrong. While it is true that economically and socially China’s rise has been phenomenal and that the country does challenge U.S. domination in a range of areas, the Communist Party of China (CPC) does *not* seek confrontation with the U.S. imperialist system. Rather, it lives under the deluded idea that it can continue its gradual development *within* this hostile system.

One does not need a full analysis of the Chinese state (see “The Class Nature of China,” *Spartacist* No. 69, August 2024) to notice that something isn’t right with the narrative of an aggressive, rising China. If China is the young and dynamic pretender to the throne of world domination, why is it the U.S. and not China that is blackmailing and attacking every country on Earth? Why hasn’t China built an alliance to confront the U.S.? Why isn’t it flooding Iran, Venezuela and Palestine with modern weapons systems to repel imperialist aggression? No, instead of any of this, the CPC continues to drone on about win-win cooperation and preserving the multilateral order—while its main guarantor, the U.S., is tearing it to shreds.

Defenders of the CPC and proponents of BRICS often argue that China is being smart by not directly challenging the U.S. They contend that China is slowly but

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