





# Editor's Note

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I wish to keep this note very brief. Mainly this is because I am running out of time to write this and sat in a bookshop at 21:00 on a Thursday evening.

*The Free Forum* is a student-led political pamphlet. Lacking any editorial control, the forum intends to provide students with an outlet to discuss contemporary issues in an open format. The only requirement is that they do not write *War and Peace* and keep the word count to a minimum. Originating at The University of London's Institute of Paris, *The Free Forum* now spans across a number of universities in both Paris and London. This edition includes contributions from: The London School of Economics, University College London, The University of London Institute in Paris, The American University in Paris, and Sciences Po.

The third edition of *The Free Forum* is what I consider to be the best so far both in terms of the scope and quality of the pieces. I am incredibly fortunate to have the privilege of working with, and publishing the work of, such dedicated, passionate, and talented people. I can't wait for their work to be shared and appreciated as it deserves to be. *The Free Forum* would not exist without

their contributions. Thank you for sticking to impossibly tiny word limits, and for giving time out of your hectic schedules.

What separates this edition from the previous two is the speed with which it was put together. For this, I owe a great deal of thanks to three enormously lovely people. Namely, Henry Hughes, Luca La Cava, and Theo Baptista. I would like to briefly say a few words about each of them.

Henry has worked on every edition so far and, although he has no written contribution in this one, I want to make sure that he is appropriately credited. He has constantly supported this project since it was simply an idea and for each edition has remained on hand for an array of different tasks, including of a stylistic and editorial nature.

Luca, involved since the second edition, has written pieces and designed the artwork and front covers for both this edition and the last. He is a real professional, immensely talented, and, although he constantly claims that he enjoys helping, I feel like I owe him a great deal.

Theo actually needs thanking twice as much as I completely forgot to mention him in the second edition.

I hope this makes up for it mate! Theo has, in effect, relieved me of a huge amount of work. As the copy editor, he has scrutinised each and every contribution (other than this note which will be all too obvious). Given the size of this edition, that is a momentous task for someone who is also studying a full-time MSc. Not only this, but he did it in only a few days. In brief, without him, this edition would not have been published on time, or possibly at all.

I would also like to thank Conor Hatfield who seamlessly stepped in last minute to cover some extra copy-editing work and is also, as with the others, a very lovely man.

This issue presents a collection of work that is eclectic, interesting, and timely. In a world where early 20th-century levels of wealth inequality align with an early 20th-century (or even earlier) trading regime; where US presidents entertain the possibility of third terms; and where the post-war global order seems to be imploding from within the highest reaches of government, it is utterly essential that students—particularly those in the political and economic social sciences—have a space for discussion, disagreement, and, ultimately, intellectual progress. Only in this way can we

counter some of the divisive and disruptive forces of our current political moment.

I thoroughly hope that each reader finds something here that engages them. And, if you are reading this and wish to get involved, please email the address noted on the back of this issue. I look forward to hearing from you.

Hugo Jamison , LSE  
MSc Economic History

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# Why We Are Poor

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**I**t is approaching ten years since the World Economic Forum proclaimed that ‘you’ll own nothing, and you’ll be happy’. Whilst ranking this statement amongst the other egregious proclamations of the WEF would be an arduous task, its predictive power has held true – you own nothing.

Home prices have been rising, wages stagnating, and home ownership rates have long been declining, so barring miracles of divine financial intervention, you probably don’t own your home. Many of us don’t own our own technology – we rent it from tech companies or mobile phone providers, until they “generously” offer to replace it with a newer model! Spotify, Netflix, and the myriad other subscription services you keep forgetting you pay for have ensured that we don’t own most of what we choose to consume for entertainment or leisure. We don’t own our preferences or our time – you can thank Mr Zuckerberg for that – and while we’re at it, since we know time is money, a lot of us don’t own our money either – we ‘rent’ it from credit companies.

All this is to say that we are a far cry from the ownership models

of old. In fact, we’re a far cry from the ownership models of even just a few decades ago. The neoliberal in the corner has just raised his hand and informed me, in a characteristically irritating voice, that this is actually a good thing; our modern, globalised, financialised economy has, through the miracle of competition, vastly expanded consumer choice. A rising tide has supposedly lifted all boats. The fact that real wages have not kept up with productivity doesn’t matter, since we are able to afford a wider array of products for significantly lower prices ¡Viva la globalización!

Whilst it would be comforting to think that unimpeded access to avocados and thirty different types of cereal may be reflective of an improvement in our economic standing, I regret to inform you otherwise. Greater consumer choice, as the name implies, only applies to consumer goods – products which are substitutable for another. This argument, therefore, provides little comfort in a situation wherein we spend an ever-increasing share of our income, many of us upwards of 40 or 50 per cent, on housing – a good notoriously difficult to substitute.

The quantity of stuff to be owned going around has certainly not de-

creased, but paradoxically, we seem to own less and less of it. So who owns it then? “Asset managers” would be as accurate an answer as any. As providers of a financial “service”, asset managers pool money from private institutional investors, such as insurance companies and pension schemes – as opposed to household or “retail” investors – and invest massive amounts on their behalf, on the promise of a profitable return. On the face of it, nothing out of the ordinary – just another faceless form of financial fiddling.

## ***“You Own Nothing”***

The problem, however, emerges in what they own. CBG estimates the value of global “Assets Under Management” at around \$100 trillion – around 4 times the GDP of the United States or around 30 times that of the United Kingdom. In ‘Our Lives in Their Portfolios’, Brett Christophers estimates asset managers own, on average, 30-40 per cent of the average S&P 500 stock – an index of 500 leading companies in US stock exchanges. But most importantly, asset managers own almost \$6 trillion in real estate, and all of these numbers are only increasing.

The question of how we got into this situation is one for another time, but a re-examination of our concept of

“value” is undoubtedly in order. The claim that these financiers add value to our society, rather than detract from it is one difficult to justify – see Mariana Mazzucato’s ‘The Value of Everything’. Nevertheless, the point remains that if such vast amounts of housing are permitted to be bought, sold, and traded by financial institutions, it is to the detriment of everyone else. Asset managers have no interest in who gets housing and of what quality, nor whether the financial transaction that makes the property switch hands creates any “real” value – just that it produces a surplus they can parasitically skim.

The reason we are poor – or rather, the reason we own nothing – is not a cosmic accident. It is because asset managers have benevolently offered to take care of the ownership for us. This is the result of a deliberate shift of ownership away from individuals and toward financial institutions that extract profit without creating real value.

Ownership, once a marker of stability and autonomy, has been replaced by perpetual dependence on institutions that “manage” our homes, our wages, our choices. The real question is not just why we own nothing, but who does, and how.

**Luca La Cava, LSE  
MSc Economic History**



**A**rtificial Intelligence is the question of our time. We are on the edge of an economic revolution unprecedented since the advent of wage labour itself. What structure society will take in its aftermath is unclear, but the implosion of society as we know it is inevitable. In the 1970s, it was the automation of commodity production that threatened the capitalist mode of production. In response, capital reproduced itself through the service industry. Commodity production survived still by shortening the turnover time of capital. The marketing revolution of the late 20th century, evolutions in credit, and importantly the reliance on global reserve armies of labour in the global south and peripheries of Western capitalism sustained the existence of living labour power and supported the expansion of consumption in capitalist economies.

The system of wage labour was threatened, but it survived, indeed it thrived.

Capital now finds itself approaching another crossroads. Artificial Intelligence has developed at an unparalleled rate. This time, the internal contradictions of capitalism have turned on service industries and, as

a result, the middle class. The class that was created by capital now faces its final dance. Capital was not just the means; it was always the end. It creates, and it destroys.

The result will be a society that is unrecognisable; the wage labour system will most likely dissolve. There will be no work, no labour. Just capital, and just capitalists. In this system, the capitalist ceases to be a capitalist, he is simply a feudal lord.

In this constant striving for development and growth, one thing must be remembered: *semel emisum volat irrevocabile verbum* (once a word has been allowed to escape, it cannot be recalled). We cannot be starry eyed in the face of AI. Despite all its potential benefits, we must be vigilant.

In the following two articles, Mary Olson and Lucas Mirani discuss the impact of AI. They represent, in some ways, the broad perspectives and divisions that exist within this debate, and present distinct visions of the future. Their differences can be summed up simply as a disagreement between an optimist and a pessimist (there are no prizes for working out which side of the aisle I fall on).

**Hugo Jamison, Editor in Chief**

# Good Robot, Bad Robot

## Essays on Artificial Intelligence

**T**he world is on fire, our jobs are disappearing, and a generation of COVID kids can't read. Who is to blame for these social ills? If you ask the average Atlantic reader, they'd likely adjust their Warby Parker glasses, sip their Blank Street flat white, and solemnly respond with the obvious—ChatGPT. We have undeniably entered an era of technological pessimism, where visionary founders aren't Robin Hoods who started this company in their garage, but "lifemaxxing" tech oligarchs who track their son's "nighttime erection data". But is AI the villain?

Automation anxiety is anything but new. Urban legend claims that the word sabotage originates from the French sabot (shoe or hoof), originating from when textile workers would resist new technologies by stuffing their shoes into machines. The Luddites, a group of 19th-century craftsmen-turned-protestors, donned masks to commit what Eric Hobsbawm called 'collective bargaining by riot'—destruction of new automated textile machines. Today's workers fear the replacement not of skilled textile workers, but of the middle class, fearing automation will destroy jobs, leaving workers with specialized knowledge that cannot be easily transferred to

jobs created by new technologies.

Epistemologists distinguish between two types of knowledge: 'knowledge-that' (what ingredients belong in carbonara) and 'knowledge-how' (how to avoid scrambling the eggs). As Michael Polanyi observed, productivity of knowledge-how goes up when technology increases productivity of knowledge-that. Economists have a term for work that is heavy in knowledge-that: "routine tasks". These include things like sorting packages, telemarketing, or hemming pants—brief, precise, repetitive actions that can be easily automated due to their programmatic nature. As economists such as David Autor have noted over the past decade, automation and offshoring have particularly hit middle-class jobs, limiting upward mobility previously promised to working-class men.

**"We need to acknowledge something else about routine tasks—they suck."**

AI excels at ‘knowledge-that’, and that means it might replace routine middle-class jobs, affecting workers who are already being squeezed by globalization. However, that is not to say that automation will further hurt the middle class. While routine work exists at Amazon warehouses, it also exists at Goldman Sachs. Sure, stacking boxes is routine, but so is what 99% of Google employees do.

We need to acknowledge something else about routine tasks—they suck. Walter Benjamin, lamenting the loss of Paris’ Arcades, wrote, ‘[t]he private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the interior to sustain him in his illusions’. Work that strips us of autonomy and creativity doesn’t just dull the mind—it severs our connection to community, reinforcing a rigid divide between the home, a space of comfort, and the workplace, a site of alienation. Companies like Amazon deliberately isolate workers, discouraging conversations that could lead to unionization. Routine-heavy jobs already treat humans like automata, reducing them to mind-numbing work in complete isolation.

Underpinning the debate on whether AI is taking our jobs is a bigger question—do we even want those jobs? Industrial capitalism demands productivity gains that can only be achieved when work is broken down into its parts. In this process, the

worker loses control over the creation of an item, seeing their labor split into repetitive, specialized tasks. AI could, in theory, be used to complement human capabilities rather than replace them—to automate the worst parts of jobs while leaving more time for tasks that require judgment, dexterity, and creativity.

Resisting AI is futile, but resisting who controls AI is not. When technology is controlled by a few powerful, unregulated firms, it becomes a tool for maximizing profit at the expense of workers. Rather than eliminating drudgery, AI is being used to micromanage employees, suppress wages, and deskill jobs. The answer is not pessimism—it’s regulation. Intervention from government bodies could ensure AI is used to target routine jobs while creating programs to reskill workers impacted by AI-driven unemployment.

We don’t have to accept a world where AI makes us dumber, lonelier, and more replaceable. Resisting that reality, however, requires greater government oversight, worker organization, and a public conversation about what kind of work we value. The future of work isn’t just about what AI can do—it’s about the choices we make in how we use it.

**Mary Olson, LSE  
MSc Economic History**

*And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them through the land of the Philistines, even though it was nearer.*

—Exodus 13:17

I used to have a middle school teacher who took us aside after a bout of adolescent misbehaviour and said forcefully, ‘You get what you ask for’. It took me a while to unwrap what he had meant. At first, I thought it was a warning against disruption and the sure-fire punishment that would follow. It took a good deal more time for me to realize the second meaning. Invoking Oscar Wilde and the two great tragedies of life, we get what we ask for—in the long run.

I challenge Mary Olson’s piece not from a place of ideological resentment but envy. I envy her optimism because I do not share it. I think the world is changing very quickly and in ways that are different from historical comparisons. The arc of progress is not a steady march but rather a long crawl interrupted by moments of sprinting forward.

Olson asks us to look back and ask if we are not simply following in the

footsteps of saboteurs and Lud-dites. I question whether technological progress can be considered a monolithic sprawl of invention across time—denoting increases in productivity and output. Under this lens, the roots of modern human progress, which we now know as the Industrial Revolution, should be known as an abnormality in the arc of history, or, as Vaclav Smil put forth: ‘history’s most remarkable discontinuity’. AI and ChatGPT are not the same as the steam engine. Rather, they are distinct and belong to separate epochs. Projects such as AI are the culmination of a project we call the digital revolution—and this digitisation, despite what its acolytes would want you to believe, has served as a distraction rather than progress, blinding us to the ways our mores have become static.

The fear should not be that AI replaces us—despite recent developments, ChatGPT’s efforts to reproduce Hayao Miyazaki will always be a mere soulless simulacrum—the fear should be that the existence of AI makes us unwilling to do the things that make us human. The calculator was a tool that allowed us to further investigate the languages of the universe, but it required us to delve deeper into our shared humanity—a task useless without a curious wielder. AI offers itself, not

as a tool, but as the easy way out; a way to disengage from the hard work of being human, to read and write difficult things, to communicate with someone who doesn't always have a response ready, to create art that reflects imperfection. No, AI is not the same as the technological advancements that came before it. Olson helpfully defines between 'knowledge that' and 'knowledge how,' but while I trust her distinction, I do not trust our collective ability to honour it and limit our utilization of AI to "knowledge that." Perhaps this is why the call for regulation as an antidote to pessimism falls deaf, in this case, the monster is within the walls.

My pessimism would be severely diminished if AI's founders seemed capable of grappling with the power of that which they have wrought. It is worth contrasting today's driving agents to those that came before. One such example is found in the words of Bill Joy, the co-founder of Sun Microsystems, who, in 2000, wrote; 'Having struggled my entire career to build reliable software systems, it seems to me more than likely that this future will not work out as well as some people may imagine. My personal experience suggests we tend to overestimate our design abilities'. Instead of this self-reflection, however, our captains have revealed themselves just as susceptible to the human foibles that we complain of seeing in col-

lege students, who now "don't do the reading", and demonstrate bemusement toward anyone that expresses trepidation at their power to alter our interrogation of the self.

I don't know what AI will do to human TFP or how much of a GDP increase it will induce over the coming decade, and I would question anyone who claims certainty. It seems likely that the impact of calibrating and optimizing our existing production processes will be somewhat positive, although debate rages as to the magnitude of this number. I am not implying that we are doomed or that AI will rise up to erase us from the earth in a moment of cyber revolution. The future of our current path seems much more mundane and grey-- we will continue to drift away from each other, digitally closer together than ever before, with more money in our pockets, but more isolated and fragmented in our informed stupidity. It may well be that our overlords, such as Altman and Musk, whom we anointed as champions, will pause their digitally induced madness and deliver us to Mars. The more pertinent question seems to be whether we'll bother to look it up.

**Lucas Mirani**  
**MSc Economic History, LSE**

# Practices of Living

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**T**he practice of living with our environments has all but vanished for most of us. It is a practice that sustains our relationships with all other living things, yet it is one from which we are excluded. The practice, relationship, or system, I see as the first and most profound loss is that of land – when the first ‘cheap’ thing – was no longer a common good.

Now, familiar practices feel unfamiliar, inefficient, or even radical. Growing our own food is a ‘hobby’ – not a necessity. Climate change is seen as an obstacle to ‘development’. We keep to the uniform hedgerows and paths around barren, poisoned-orange fields to avoid ‘trespassing’ on private land. The age-old system of giving in order to receive has been co-opted for the profits of the few. It is the ultimate disorientation – payment for land, shelter, food, care, and now even carbon, biodiversity, and entire ecosystems.

Market systems have replaced what once tied our bodies to the earth.

We have lost a shared rhythm, a sense of deep reciprocity, that comes with a collective responsibility to our environment. Individual people have stopped harnessing the

earth’s power, stopped enjoying its plentiful resources, stopped appreciating what we receive, leaving with us no feeling of debt, no need to be resourceful, and no desire to protect.

I’d like to turn now to a practice I have grown committed to, one I hope to weave as deeply into other aspects of my life. Tragically, only as soon as I am able to afford it – land.

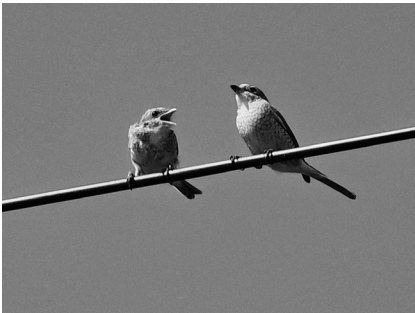
This practice is tied to the (re)discovery of my love for the world. After all, many of us grow up with a deep resentment for our local place – something I now see as a product of this disorienting system. A practice as simple as sitting, watching, or drawing birds.



## Rathlin

It was like reuniting with a long-lost friend. It was the loudest chorus I had ever heard. It was a sea-bird colony of a quarter of a million-odd flapping wings, all of which would soon return to sea.

Over the coming weeks, I would learn from those who had spent their lives studying, watching, and animating them: what it means to be a truly social being. Feeling the sorrow of a bird when a fledgling would die, feeling their joy when a lost mother returned, feeling their relief when, after a winter apart, wandering different paths of the North Atlantic Ocean, they were finally reunited with their loved ones, knowing, trusting, they would meet again.



The more time I spent with the guardians of these birds, the more I became aware of each voice in the chorus – “Kitti-wake” cries, Fulmars, Gannets, Oystercatchers, and Shags. The more I noticed the

lives of the birds around me, the more I felt the ocean’s effect on the mood of the colony, the more I felt the weight of the atmosphere as rain brewed, the more I felt the sun warming my cheek, the more my body longed for the sensory experience of my environment.

The feeling of sitting indoors, sleeping encased by four walls, began to disorientate me.



Waking up every morning to bird song, walking the winding paths of the island’s edge, greeting the same birds again and again, became an act of love and curiosity. I grew to know each voice, to feel as their guardians did, and to wonder about the world in a way that felt only familiar with childhood...



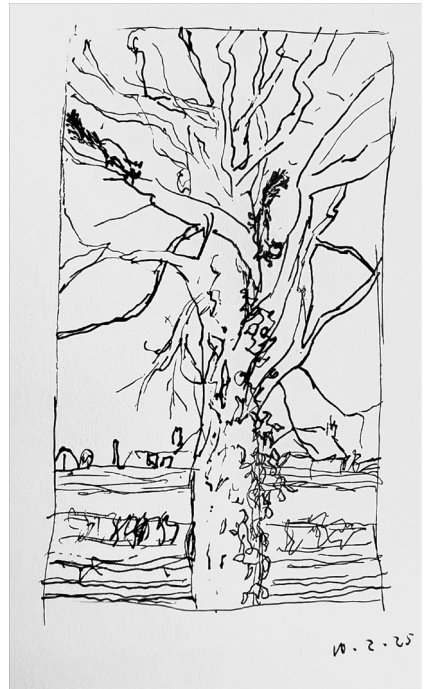
before all of these familiar practices started feeling so unfamiliar.

Staying up late, we would practice our identification of birds found on every shore, thicket, moorland, forest, and heath across Britain and Northern Ireland.

### **London**

I used to wake up to them, be sung to sleep by them, and be awoken by their absence. Now, the silence has been replaced by noise, keeping us awake and pulling us ever further from our natural rhythms - the wail of sirens, the hum of engines, the shuffle of people, the drone of a washing machine, the flickering of screens. Some find this their chorus, but only after leaving the rural landscape I grew up in, the island I visited with the birds who greeted me, did I realise that it had never been, and never will be, mine.

**Martha Cosgrove, UCL  
MSc Environmental Anthropology**





# How to Spot a Fascist

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**A**s Donald Trump warms up to the Russian dictator Vladimir Putin, freezing out democratic allies, a flurry of adjectives have been thrown to describe Trump: egotistical, idiot...fascist. In this article, I wish to elaborate on the latter.

Fascism is a far-right, authoritarian, ultranationalist ideology and movement that believes the existence of a social hierarchy prevails. Hailing from the 1800s, fascism became prominent in the 20th century, particularly during the two World Wars. Through fascism (including both victims of genocide and war casualties), 30-35 million people lost their lives.

Neo-fascism, while drawing heavily from fascism, differs in that their programs have been modernised and possess a democratic façade. Moreover, neo-fascists wear suits and ties instead of “jackboots and brownshirts”.

Umberto Eco, a 20th-century Italian philosopher, in his book *How to Spot a Fascist*, notes that “they” must never do it again. But who are “they”? Benito Mussolini? Adolf Hitler? Oswald Mosley? Vidkun Quisling? Does “they” also encom-

pass Trump’s far-right politics?

I argue yes.

Graciously provided by Eco, fourteen features of fascism brought me to this conclusion:

1)

The Cult of Tradition - This refers to the nostalgia of the past. Trump embodies this with his 2020 election campaign slogan ‘Make America Great Again’, reiterated in his 2024 campaign.

2)

The Rejection of Modernism - More specifically, a suspicion of culture, intellect, and science. Trump has frozen academic research funds and employed renowned anti-vaxxer Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as health secretary.

3)

The Cult of Action for Action’s Sake - By this, we see the erasure of the pedagogical idea of thinking before acting and speaking. Frequently, Trump’s speeches are incoherent and rambling. In fact, according to one speech, a voter ID card is necessary to buy cereal.

4)

Disagreement is Treason - During his second term as President, Trump is clamping down on the press. Furthermore, he surrounds himself with media giants such as Elon Musk, Rupert Murdoch, and Larry Ellison, allowing him to monopolise and control global information flows.

5)

Fear of Difference - Fascists are racist by definition. Trump's election promises include the homogenization of the US by deporting millions of illegal (and legal) immigrants, as well as facilitating the deportation of some American citizens by halting birthright citizenship.

6)

Appeal to Social Frustration - Despite insulting numerous demographics, Trump has capitalized on Republican frustrations and humiliation regarding the Party's performance recently.

7)

The Obsession with a Plot - The list of conspiracy theories promoted by Trump is endless. He promotes the Great Replacement Theory, alleging that immigrants, in this case non-white, Latinx immigrants, seek to displace Americans

from housing, jobs, and schooling.

8)

The Enemy is Both Strong And Weak - During the election campaign, Trump's political opponent, Kamala Harris, was subjected to a torrent of insults ranging from 'stupid' to 'mentally unfit'. However, Trump has also backhandedly complimented Harris' tenacity, public speaking, and loyalty, showing a see-sawing rhetoric typical of fascism.

9)

Pacifism is Trafficking with the Enemy - Regardless of his "anti-war" comments, Trump has increased troop levels, increased the defence budget, dropped more bombs, and utilised suffocating sanctions to coerce states to do his bidding.

10)

Contempt is for the Weak - Eco reveals, 'elitism is a typical aspect of any reactionary ideology'. Trump has permitted a new elite to rise and replace the old, whose aim is to smash out any 'wokeism', a term referring to liberal values, and weed out any 'democratic insiders' within the party.

11)

Everybody is Educated to Become a Hero - In 2021, amid anti-state

protests, Trump ordered the creation of a 'Garden of American Heroes [...] to reflect the awesome splendour of our country's timeless exceptionalism'. This indicates the creation of a nationalist imaginary which reinforces patriotic feelings.

12)

**Machismo and Weaponry** - Trump wields toxic masculinity like a weapon. Countless times, Trump has publicly expressed misogynistic comments aimed at subjugating women. Despite this, he has been elected. Twice.

13)

**Selective Populism** - On 6th January 2021, encouraged by Trump, approximately 2000-2500 people

attacked the capital. Despite this attack on democracy, Trump dubbed this day 'an act of love', pardoning over half the rioters.

14)

**Newspeak** - Coined by George Orwell, Newspeak refers to ambiguous language chiefly used in propaganda aiming to impoverish vocabulary and 'limit the instruments for complex and critical reasoning'. Amidst the plethora of examples, the biggest is renaming the Gulf of Mexico with the Gulf of America.

Using these criteria, we have spotted a fascist: Trump.

**Jennifer Wendorff, ULIP  
BA International Politics with  
French**



**How to spot a fascist (in the wild)**

# Overcoming the Suez Syndrome

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*What would you have me do?  
Seek the patronage of some great  
man,  
And like a creeping vine on a tall tree  
Crawl upwards where I cannot  
stand alone?  
No thank you!*

-Cyrano de Bergerac in the Micheal Gordon film adaptation of Edmond Rostand's play, *Cyrano de Bergerac*

**I**n 1956, the nationalisation of the Suez Canal prompted the United Kingdom and France, who were formally its majority shareholders, to use Israeli military efforts against General Nasser's Egypt in order to regain control of the strategic choke point. It is not the business of this article to take sides in this conflict but rather to take stock of its consequences.

The United States of America, led by President Dwight D. Eisenhower saw this seemingly anachronic imperial escapade as nothing more than a distraction from the global fight to contain Communism. Furthermore, President Eisenhower was personally offended at not having been consulted by his allies before they took military action. As a result, the United States threatened the end of International

Monetary Fund assistance to the United Kingdom, in addition to voting against its allies in the United Nations (UN). Faced with an imminent economic crisis, Sir Anthony Eden and his French allies had little choice but to back down and accept UN Resolution 1001, which brokered a ceasefire.

The message was clear: the European era was over, and Pax Americana had arrived. Since then, significant decisions in the West have not been made without the approval of the United States, especially regarding geostrategy. Thankfully, the Americans seemed to be onside. The quaint European kingdoms could deal with their day-to-day activities and fund their little welfare states while Uncle Sam kept the peace. Free Riding, the Europeans were no longer steering the bus. Even when they wished to have their own defence capabilities, this seldom translated to a defence industry, as arms production had been outsourced to the United States. Thus, having lost confidence in her own abilities, damsel Europe became reliant on her American knight in shining armour. This happy loss of agency is what I refer to as 'the Suez Syndrome'.

The Suez Syndrome was further-

more characterised by the loss of a sense of legitimacy in European countries. What was the Suez Crisis? For many, it was the symbol of a century-old malevolent imperial ideology that irreparably stained European history. Europe thus chose to no longer affirm itself; many countries, including the United Kingdom, emphasised an American-style “cosmopolitan” culture domestically at the detriment of their local customs and traditions. On the global stage, Europe, almost in repentance, deemed herself the bearer of the onus of the environmental transition in the manner of “climate justice”, at the cost of her own agricultural and industrial competitiveness, while other states developed theirs.

Is this model sustainable? The answer has become apparent. The landslide victory of President Trump was in part due to the impression of the average American voter that their country was paying for the security of others. The Americans want to defend their own interests, and there is little illegitimate in that. Perhaps it is time that European states did the same.

Among the NATO member states in Europe, France has been most resistant to the Suez Syndrome. General De Gaulle made it a point to remain independent from the United States. Instead of Harold Wilson’s emphasis on the fact that

the United Kingdom was ‘no longer a superpower’, De Gaulle maintained a ‘certain (exceptional) idea of France’ that influenced the political discourse and policy around defence. This influence is only relative, as defence spending had fallen by a percentage point as a part of GDP between 1989 and 2019, according to the World Bank. Nevertheless, it has kept France’s military-industrial complex largely separate from that of the United States, sustained through government spending and the sale of arms to countries such as India and Saudi Arabia, as well as making France less ashamed of defending her own interests.

For Europe to regain her political weight on the global stage, there are of course concrete steps to take. The development of pan-European defence companies, such as MBDA, that have the potential to use economies of scale to efficiently produce weapons is a necessity. But if the Suez Syndrome has to be highlighted, it is because concrete actions are defined by the cultural base. It currently seems that there is an appetite for European strength in reaction to current events, but cultural change based on reactions to current events can be ephemeral.

In order to have a long-lasting cultural shift that may sustainably steer policy in the right direction, it is necessary for European countries to regain their sense of legitimacy.

Europe, the continent that pushed the sciences to new heights, was the first to abolish slavery, and whose heritage includes the creation of democracy, is legitimate in her history. European countries, as sovereign states, are legitimate in pursuing their own interests. This pursuit of interest is necessary, as in a world characterised by powerplay, it is better to be powerful. If the European countries find it difficult to weigh on the Russo-Ukrainian War negotiations, it is because they lack power. It is as such necessary to overcome the Suez Syndrome.

In order to have a long-lasting cultural shift that may sustainably steer policy in the right direction, it is necessary for European countries to regain their sense of legitimacy. Europe, the continent that pushed the sciences to new heights, was the first to abolish slavery, and whose heritage includes the creation of democracy, is legitimate in her history. European countries, as sovereign states, are legitimate in pursuing their own interests. This pursuit of interest is necessary, as in a world characterised by powerplay, it is better to be powerful. If the European countries find it difficult to weigh on the Russo-Ukrainian War negotiations, it is because they lack power. It is as such necessary to overcome the Suez Syndrome.

**Tinahy Ramamonijiarisoa, ULIP**  
**BA Internaitonal Politics**

## The Irony.

“Amazon Rainforest cut down to Build Highway for COP climate summit” *BBC News*

Viktor Orbán emerges as an unlikely advocate of transgender rights:



**Orbán Viktor**   
**@PM\_ViktorOrban**

**Je suis Marine!**

**@MLP\_officiel**

# The Art of the Tariff

## Trump's Economic Masterplan

**A** Trumpian promise since early in his first campaign trail was to bring industry back to America, settle deficits with “freeloading” countries, and accomplish this through the protectionist’s favourite buzzword since the dawn of the baker, the butcher, and the brewer: tariffs. While the tariffs in his first term were largely symbolic and inconsequential for global trade, his economic master plan for his second term has aggrandized.

Firstly, he has invested far too much political capital into the promise of lowering the national debt (even with career conservatives of his own party) to completely abandon this idea. Secondly, and far more importantly, his game plan is far more cunning and sophisticated than nearly anyone left of the political aisle would like to admit, and here is why.

Tariffs to a classical economist functioned as a tool to balance growing trade deficits with other nations and/or as a speedy revenue-raising device but were largely abandoned for other mediative tools. Trump’s court economists, however, have devised a third, uniquely American, function thanks to the “exorbitant

privilege” of the dollar. Because the dollar is the world reserve currency, it is only normal for foreign central banks (particularly those representing export nations) to hoard dollars and drive down the demand (and price) of their own currency, rendering their own exports more competitive and allowing them to easily re-invest in the American economy to garner safe returns after having sold their goods for dollars.

**“He knows very well that tariffs will not reduce the national debt on their own standing”**

The problem for Trump here is that the American economy is appreciating only because it can extend its bank sheets and easily sell its debt, but as American income is growing far slower than the national debt, Trump fears this relative difference will eventually send the dollar across the River Styx with investors running to another coin. He knows very well that tariffs will not reduce the national debt on their

own standing; he knows very well this problem is deeply entrenched in the current economic order but will nonetheless use them as his sword of Damocles, forcing dollar-hoarding central banks between Scylla (paying tariffs) and Charybdis (lowering interest rates). While the choice is admittedly less bifurcated than Odysseus', central banks around the world have already begun to lower interest rates to maintain the sacred relationship between their domestic exporters and American consumers. By doing this, they will evaluate their currency relative to the dollar, and the inflation of goods imported into America will be softened (perhaps cancelled out). The tariffed nations will therefore directly pay to lower the American national debt, thanks to the tariff-raised revenue, to the dollar's devaluation, and any combination of the two.

In all likelihood, he will subsequently negotiate a removal of the tariffs with some (mostly Asian exporting) nations, contingent on the repurchase of their own currency with their hoarded American dollars (evaluating their currency), but the foreign nations that resist will continue to provide Trump with a river of cash that (according to American code) will be receiptless and therefore immune to congressional oversight.

Like all plans, though, it isn't per-

fect: the bankers and financiers will not see the same returns without the national debt extensions, and a new Chinese, renminbi-based system of payment could be swiftly introduced, threatening the dollar's exorbitant privilege and further endangering American financialised capital.

All things considered, Trump upped the ante because he knew he controlled the chip, the dealer was his friend, and the casino was bankrupt...but one day, the other players may just leave the table.

**Benedict Marra, ULIP  
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# Catching the Wave

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**T**hose who have tried surfing will surely know how challenging it may be to catch the wave. Firstly, it can come in different shapes, heights and lengths. Then, there is the board, with all of its dimensions of variability that affect how easy it is to maintain balance (size, volume, etc.). Finally, there is the surfer, who has to steer the board appropriately as it rides the wave – otherwise, he ends up in the water.

In what follows, I argue that the above stylized, yet complete description of surfing can be understood as an analogy for how economic ideology drives individual-level economic outcomes, as mediated by the impact of two factors – formal and informal economic institutions. First, I explain how the worlds of surfing and economics are related. Then, I explain how the analogy can be used to complement the current thinking about the relationship between institutions and economic outcomes.

Think of the surfer as the individual – the standard unit of analysis – who operates subject to a certain set of informal economic institutions: culturally-influenced norms, values, and beliefs, all of which are

encoded in his “utility function” (just like the surfer has an idea about steering the board successfully). Think of the board as the contemporaneous set of economic formal institutions – the North-like “rules of the game” that shape human interaction through formally legitimising economic policy. Think of the wave as the economic ideology – roughly, a set of ideas, values, and beliefs that directly map into prescriptions about how economic policy should be done. Finally, think of economic outcomes as the direction taken by the board, as a result of the wave, the board, and the actions of the surfer together.

The implications of the above analogy are two-fold. Firstly, the exact way in which the surfer steers the board depends on both his innate ability to do so (regardless of whether this is pure talent or knowledge of surfing that he acquired before), and the characteristics of the board – for many reasons, some boards are harder to surf on than others. It follows that economic outcomes are driven by human behaviour, which is constrained by both informal and formal institutions. This first implication is not particularly controversial and is supported by a body of literature, including the recently celebrated work of Ac-

emoglu, Johnson, and Robinson.

The second implication is less trivial and proposes that the wave has a defining impact on the behaviour of both the board and the surfer. Consider the following two observations: the wave is what fundamentally allows the board to be driven towards the shore – there is no surfing without waves, is there? Additionally, the surfer will act on the board differently given different waves – they are not going to behave the same while riding a 2-meter wave during a Baltic Sea storm and a 25-meter one in Nazaré.

Although the above two points may seem intuitive as far as surfing is concerned, they have concrete implications once we take surfing to the economic world. One, the formal economic institutions, which completely describe the shape of contemporaneous economic policy, are driven by economic ideology. Two, economic ideology affects individual-level behaviour through two channels – through formal economic institutions as well as informal economic institutions, both providing constraints on agent behaviour. The first channel is rather intuitive, yet not straightforward to measure – it has been a long-standing conviction that ideology changes the shape of economic policy. Yet the second one suggests that ideology “alters the utility functions” of individuals to produce different

sets of economic outcomes, on top of the first channel. This seems to offer an interesting avenue for future research: ideology is a deep, latent variable that affects economic outcomes by impacting both formal and informal institutions.

I must stress that I don’t know much about surfing – in fact, I haven’t surfed once in my life. Yet I have a strong conviction that ideology – as a force endogenizing both formal and informal institutions – has been consistently omitted from mainstream thinking about economic outcomes for too long.

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# The What If's of the EU

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**L**ast June, citizens across the EU voted in the European Parliamentary Elections. Over the course of 4 days, the future of Europe was decided.

We witnessed a decline in the dominance of traditional centre-right and centre-left parties and instead saw a rise of populist, nationalist and green parties, reflecting the ever-growing polarisation among voters. But why?

In simple terms, Brussels is out of touch. The EU is starting to be seen as an institution that imposes regulations without fully understanding the unique challenges each member state faces. From Bulgaria's political instability and corruption to Ireland's housing crisis and tax reform debates, the EU fails to recognise that the last 20 years, through financial crises and pandemics, have led to deep economic divides. This growing Euroscepticism has allowed issues like migration to become central to politics and overshadow much bigger problems.

With the prioritisation of migration issues and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU has started discussing European Defence Initiatives. Historically, the Union has re-

lied on NATO for security, however, recent events have accelerated the push for greater autonomy. But can the EU become a serious global security actor, or will it continue to rely on external alliances? Yes and no. Some countries prioritise national sovereignty over collective security. Hungary and Poland have consistently hesitated to commit to joint military initiatives. Any increase in military spending requires substantial financial investment which remains a very divisive issue among members. Despite these challenges, the EU is taking steps to enhance its defence capabilities through investments in military research, cybersecurity, and rapid-response forces.

Arguments could be made that the rise of the far-right has made these changes possible. In Italy, Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia has gained power. In France, Marine Le Pen's National Rally has expanded its influence. In Germany, the Alternative for Germany has grown in popularity. Their opposition to immigration has capitalised on the fear of mass migration, pushing for stricter border policies and stronger national sovereignty. These parties advocate for policies that prioritise domestic industries and oppose globalisation. It goes without saying that right-wing movements often view the EU

as an overreaching institution that infringes on national decision-making. While some view this as a threat to democracy, others see this as a response to the failure of the EU to address citizens' concerns.

This political shift may seem scary to many, and there are challenges in addressing the underlying factors. EU policymaking is a slow process. The multi-layered structure often results in the slow implementation of policies, and it can take months for a consensus to be reached. For the EU to remain functional, it must streamline its decision-making processes, enhance cooperation, and ensure that policies reflect the wants and needs of all citizens.

The EU has, however, demonstrated remarkable unity in the face of glob-

al crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the war in Ukraine, showing its ability to coordinate economic sanctions, defence initiatives, and financial recovery programs.

Unfortunately, the division remains. Opinions on migration, economic policy, and national sovereignty cut a cleavage through our society. As the world becomes more and more polarised, the EU must find an equilibrium between integration and respect towards every member state. Whether the EU can evolve to meet these challenges without fracturing depends on its ability to reform the institution while maintaining the long-standing values of democracy.

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## **Gen Z and American Politics**

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**W**hile still emerging as adults and forming unique identities, Generation Z may be the most polarized, siloed, and isolated peer group the world has ever seen—and the one most likely to change the United States as we know it today.

Defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, Gen Z is the most

divided cohort due to various societal actors focusing on external characteristics such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and most importantly, political identity. As an American citizen and member of Generation Z, I can attest we see the world differently than the Gen X and Millennial parents who raised us. For example, Gen Z does not have a widely accepted unifying force in

America, as both the Republican and Democratic Parties are failing to offer younger voters hope for a better future. Unlike the Silent Generation who were comforted by an archetypal saviour like Franklin D. Roosevelt, liberal Zoomers have been raised in a political culture without a centripetal public figure to reassure them of a compelling future, whereas conservative Zoomers have a polarizing figure in Donald J. Trump.

As a result, Zoomers have solely associated themselves with pre-disposed characteristics and cultural attributes, becoming more willing than previous generations to shun anyone who does not subscribe to the same belief system. In other words, my generation has become tribalistic in every sense of the word. Young centrists are all but extinct in America.

If we do not change course, both liberal and conservative members of Gen Z will respond aggressively to President Trump's second-term policies—an enhancement or over-correction that could ultimately tear down the core infrastructure of American government by limiting (or increasing) future Executive Branch powers, increasing (or decreasing) the number of votes needed to pass legislation in Congress, and eliminating (or expanding) the Electoral College.

For this reason, America's political

parties must channel the raw determination of Gen Z in a balanced manner that allows for the implementation of certain policies—especially those relating to climate change, healthcare, gun control, immigration, and reproductive rights—while not altering the fundamental framework of the United States.

A 2024 Morning Consult poll states that 63 per cent of Zoomers turn to social media at least once a week for news. As a result, Zoomers have been exposed to more diverse opinions and conspiracy theories than prior generations. This has produced a pluralistic environment where nearly all views—including those deemed mainstream, conspiratorial, or extremist—are presented. Above all, we learned how our peers felt on global issues, making us more interconnected than previous generations.

As discovered by the research firm Edelman, 70 per cent of Zoomers around the world say they are involved in a social or political cause, perhaps the reason why many sociologists and journalists consider us “The Activist Generation”.

Simultaneously, Gen Z also recognizes the complexities and difficulties of securing the bi-partisan agreement needed to pass legislation to create meaningful, positive change in America. For example, Gen Z witnessed firsthand the lack

of progress both parties have made in the area of gun control legislation despite the increased number of mass shootings over the past decade. In 2024, *Newsweek* reported that 40 per cent of Gen Z Americans agree with the view that ‘rule by a strong leader, where a strong leader can make decisions without interference from the legislature or from the courts’ would be a good system of government for the United States, whereas only 27 per cent thought a dictatorship would be bad. The implications of this are incredibly dangerous, nudging Zoomers to question the process of democratic lawmaking altogether.

This statistic highlights just how ripe we are as a country to allow an autocratic leader to bypass our constitutional democracy for the sole purpose of removing the bottleneck of stalled bills championed by either side. As a result, American history—shaped by President Trump’s rapid form of legal and cultural change by issue of Executive Order—is unfolding right before our eyes. Whether one agrees with Trump’s policies or not, the pace of change in the United States today is breathtaking. But at what cost to our youngest citizens?

We are the first generation to completely lose faith in the American Dream. We are the first generation to associate the word “Capitalism” with money hoarding and institu-

tional poverty. We are the first generation to question the benefits of marriage and parenthood. We are the first generation to lose abortion as a right, and not even understand why anyone would consider it a moral or religious issue. And most of all, we are the first generation to denigrate the reputations of our Founding Fathers, question the purpose of the Supreme Court, and disparage the intent behind the drafting of our Constitution given its initial exclusion of women and people of colour.

Moreover, as older generations pass away over the next two decades, Generation Z will drive our country to the extreme Left and to the extreme Right. For some, this is excellent news. For others, this is the end of the American experiment. A sharp turn in ideology in either direction could force our country into creating a one-party state that will either address the needs of Gen Z or encompass the ideals of those who vehemently oppose it—either way excluding ideological dissent and party competition from the other side. For this reason, America’s political parties must be prepared for the severe reckoning of Generation Z in the coming years, or watch America evolve into something we never imagined.

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# The Misery of Narrative

## How History Repeats Itself

**T**his article is the result of me getting personally pissed off. As often happens, we get angry when the issues are particularly close to our hearts. In my case, I care about history, the discipline to which I have decided to dedicate myself. My anger arose when I read a book written by an Italian historian who has become a real pop star in the world of information in my country, Alessandro Barbero, at the beginning of the second year of my bachelor's degree. Entitled 'Charlemagne: A Father of Europe', in his preface he set himself the ambitious goal of demonstrating how the idea of a political Europe as we understand it today had its origins in the deeds of the Emperor of the Franks. I'll give you a brief summary: a load of crap. Based on primary sources that have been known for centuries and on historiography that has remained mostly unchanged since the 1950s, the book creates a splendid narrative by rehashing the same evidence without adding anything new or original.

I wanted to start with my personal experience to point out a serious illness that I believe has been affecting the historical discipline for some time now: the obsession with narra-

tive. This problem was first raised in the academic world in 1979 by the English historian Lawrence Stone. According to him, narrative history had regained ground because historians had lost sight of the great whys of history, as tradition would have it from Thucydides to Gibbon and Macaulay. It is a narrative directed by some 'pregnant principle', and which possesses a theme and an argument. According to Lawrence Stone, the way in which the historian must develop his story is through the exercise of rhetoric, as a tool to connect the elements that emerge from the sources. Without this rhetorical structure, the story would lose its founding soul.

**"If history becomes an exercise in rhetoric... history is dead"**

Especially with the emergence of cultural history and historians such as Hayden White, this line of thought has increasingly imposed itself in the research of scholars, who have progressively dedicated themselves to writing books full of bombastic redefinitions of entire historical eras in light of a different interpretation. So they decided to mainly play at

finding the bias of the historian in question, trying to highlight what ideological prejudices informed his narrative and interpretative choices. These biases often become a way to discredit an author without even trying to understand his work.

This attitude poses two deadly risks to the validity of history as a reliable discipline. First of all, if history becomes an exercise in rhetoric, in order to convince the more or less educated reader of one's thesis, history is dead. What should convince a historian of the validity and originality of his analysis are the sources on which that analysis is based. Far from being a science tout court, lacking the fundamental experimental component, history cannot ignore the evidence of testimonies from the past. Tell me the sources you use and I'll tell you your analysis. This must be the golden rule that has guided and should continue to guide the historian's research. Only by starting from the sources is it possible to start a debate on the interpretations from which historiography derives. The Cold War is a perfect example of this: only in the 1990s, with the opening of the Soviet archives for the first time, did we have a breath of fresh air from historians.

Secondly, however difficult it may be, it is necessary to be able to go beyond the biases of those who reconstruct history. By definition, we

all have social and political inclinations. This is a fact that is difficult to eradicate from human nature. And since I don't believe it's a viable option to deny any historical contribution because it's biased, the effort must be similar to what Schumpeter did in *History of Economic Analysis*: distinguishing the analytical contributions of each author from his political prejudices. In other words, saving the good fruit from the bad fruit of thinking.

P.S. If you are interested in narrative building, there are plenty of non-fiction books to read out there

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# A Radical Centre: Empty and Hollow

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*The 'common sense' non-ideology of radical centrism is a pithy but pathetic response to our political moment. Its bared teeth have been on full show in the recent repression of a pro-Palestinian protests at Sciences Po in Paris.*

**T**he market-oriented policy implications of neoliberalism – deregulation, privatisation of industry, and the rolling-back of state welfare structures – are antithetical to the leftism that had defined workers parties across Europe. However, the increasing dominance of such policies, first at national levels in the 1980s and later incubated at the international level throughout the 1990s, have occurred alongside a political shift. Traditional left-wing parties began to abandon class-based understandings of politics in favour of a ‘Third Way’ that was better suited to the ‘end of history’ that had supposedly arrived. New Labour’s Tony Blair defined his politics as a ‘social-ism’ – a set of values held in contrast to the ‘outdated’ “economic determinism” of traditional left-wing ideology. The vast changes wrought by the globalised economy, they argued, had

rendered left-right divides obsolete; thus, a commitment to effective, ‘humane’ management of the country was what a forward-thinking political party ought to offer. The ‘Third Way’ left styled themselves as the safest, friendliest pair of hands to steer the ship. This necessitated a move away from robust examination and discussion of the ship itself.

In a 1997 article for *Soundings*, Chantal Mouffe defines this ‘Third Way’ politics as the ‘radical centre’. Radical centrism, she argues, amounts to a conception of politics as a contest between managers of varying aptitude: “a simple competition between interests which can be harmonised through dialogue, [...] an exchange of arguments, and the negotiation of compromises”. Mouffe argues that the dangerous implication that follows is that one pretends that society is no longer structured by social division. This ‘Third Way’ insists that conflicts between left and right – and between capital and labour – can be transcended in favour of more efficient governance: ‘common-sense’. What makes radical centrism is its insistence on defining democracy as a consensus-building exercise in nations which are so clearly still structured by societal division. In societies with rising wealth ine-

quality for example, policy cannot avoid being zero-sum: there are losers and winners. If there are differences in wealth and power, there is no rational 'solution' to managing an economy, but rather a variety of policy avenues that variously benefit and detriment sections of the populus. To pretend that this is not the case is to radically de-politicise the political arena.

Mouffe claims that recognising the above need not require calls for a revolution – pluralist democracies are perfectly compatible with antagonism as she writes, “consensus is needed on the institutions which are constitutive of democracy, but there will always be disagreement concerning the way social justice should be implemented in and through these institutions [...] [and thus,] a vibrant democratic life requires real debate about possible alternatives”. Instead, radical centrism disregards such debate, and instead insists on discussing tweaks to the current model. One profound effect of this approach has been the increasing dislocation of the economy from the realm of political decision-making. It is no coincidence that as radical centrism has pulled traditional parties ideologically closer together, rates of turnout have steadily decreased across Western nations in recent decades. Voters understand that there is less at stake at today's ballot box.

But of course, division and conflict have remained inherent to social life despite the modern success of radical centrism. As the left have receded to the centre, elements of the right have stretched outwards, and the success of radical-right xenophobia in the wake of a devastating global financial crisis must be seen as linked to the insistence by establishment politics that there was no alternative to austerity cuts and deepening wealth inequality. In fact, Mouffe herself noted the potential for this schism in 1997. She writes that the “growing ideological convergence between the main governing parties” in Austria and France had allowed populist far-right parties to attempt to present themselves as “anti-Establishment forces [...] [being] the only guarantors of the sovereignty of the people” – a situation enabled by a lack of ‘real’ differentiated political choices. Even though radical centrists across the Western world have largely succeeded in holding back the far-right populism wave, the former's return to power has failed to reverse far-right gains, and indeed has seen them grow. This should not be a surprise. Radical-centrist governments do not have an alternative vision to offer. Their platform consists of improving the managerial efficiency of a crisis-ridden politico-economic system that is failing to deliver for a majority of voters. Moreover, their mistaken conception of the

democratic process as one where division is transcended prevents radical centrism from acknowledging the fundamental inadequacy of the existing neoliberal structure to tackle contemporary challenges.

Sciences Po in Paris, France's highest ranked social sciences university and a behemoth in French political life, is a bastion of radical centrism. It is Europe's premier training ground for civil servants, diplomats, employees of international organisations, and politicians. The last five French presidents are all alumni, as are dozens of former international heads of state, with past students having occupied directorship roles at institutions including the IMF, the World Bank, the UN, the EU Parliament, and NATO. As a premier educational institution, Sciences Po is the stockist of centrist governments globally and the institutions that maintain adherence to neoliberal tenets globally. It thus professes the essential pedagogical commitment to free speech, debate, and multiplicity of beliefs.

Simultaneously, it is committed to a radical centrism that – due to its understanding of democracy as the pursuit of consensus – struggles to “make room for the conflict inherent in social life”. The fundamental difficulty in reconciling one with the other has been exposed by the administration's response to pro-Palestine demonstrations on

campus. Mouffe makes clear that in radical centrism, “every expression of dissent is seen as the manifestation of an antagonism that will threaten [radical centrism's] existence. Politics without an adversary is a flawed conception. [...] Alas politics always calls for decision. When the stakes are on the table, one needs to choose one's camp, there is no ‘third way’. The centre – radical or not – has to take sides.

Advocating against the Israeli subjugation of Palestinian people has long been known to be an exception to the liberal commitments to free speech. Since the conflict's sickening escalation in the last 18 months, it has been made clear that no amount of dialogue and consensus-building is close to sufficient to bring about an equitable solution to an ongoing genocide – the inadequacy of radical centrism is exposed in this instance. As noted by Mouffe, the radical centre has had to take a side, and it is not with the Palestinians. Because radical centrism cannot conceive of democracy as necessarily adversarial, it works to firmly suppress the opposition that has emerged against its collaboration with the Israeli government.

Sciences Po has acted accordingly. A series of occupations and protests organised by student-led pro-Palestine movements have advocated for the cessation of ties with Israeli universities complicit-

it in the genocide; a demand that coheres with Sciences Po's previous work in securing partnerships with Ukrainian universities following the Russian invasion. The administration has not just refused this demand: they have responded with a brutish forcefulness, suspending several student organisers for peaceful actions while regularly calling in scores of French riot police (CRS) to break up protests.

Moreover, after an allegation of antisemitism during a protest in March of 2024, then-Prime Minister of France (and former Science Po alumni) Gabriel Attal made the extraordinary step of appearing uninvited at the University's Board of Directors meeting to demand that leadership take steps to combat a "dangerous minority" who "reject debate". Just last month, a 'teach-in' organised by a pro-Palestine student group on Palestinian history had run for less than two hours before sixteen riot vans had begun to assemble outside the university building. The handful of students that remained in the building by closing time were removed by a squadron of close to a hundred police officers armed with tear gas, truncheons, and shields. Such events have become a familiar sight for Sciences Po students, and indeed a similar mobilisation of police inside campus occurred again later that same week. That this occurred a week

after the detention of Mahmoud Khalil in the United States is no coincidence. It indicates that, although the radical centre regularly voices its disgust at the flagrant authoritarianism of Trumpism, it will deploy similar tactics when faced with democratic dissent that does not fit within its consensus-building model. 'Third way' centrism does not hold: it must take a side.

Political upheaval has accelerated in 2025. An increasingly brazen and oligarchic Trump administration has firmly veered away from established democratic norms at home and abroad while centrist European leaders have shifted ever further to the right in an attempt to quell popular dissatisfaction. The genocidal annihilation of Gazans has continued with no effective international opposition, and progressive social policy has been abandoned across Europe to finance greater militarisation in the face of Russian aggression that shows little sign of ceasing. The radical centre will not hold in light of these developments. To provide a viable alternative to both the centre and the far-right, asserting the necessity of antagonistic dissent in our democracies, will be essential.

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# The Political Economy of Georgian Wine

*This April I will be traveling to Georgia (The country, not the state – for my fellow Americans) Why? For wine.*

**I**n recent years, Georgia has seen an explosion in wine tourism following the discovery of it having the oldest known wine history in the world, dating back 8,000 years. Being so old, the country has a substantially unique method of wine creation utilizing earthenware vessels, buried underneath the floorboards of many a family's home, called Kvevri. Wine producers, often families, throw white grapes (skin-on) into these human-sized, egg-shaped vessels. Would then press them into juice and let them sit which after some time produces a wine. Deep in amber colour, these wines taste unique – an acquired taste to some. Because the skins are left on, a very uncommon process in white wine creation, the wine yields this distinct amber colour, while boasting a tannin structure you won't find elsewhere. But there is more to this story than just a unique wine. Wine and politics have always been strongly intertwined... this case is no different.

Firstly, as per my American conditioning, Fuck the USSR and Fuck Communism. However, I feel somewhat justified here as upon Georgia's invasion by the USSR the wine world lost thousands of unique wine grape varieties which had been cultivated and passed down from family to family for generations. When the Russians came, they tore up many an eclectic variety of grapes, asserting, through their ideology and economic system, the need for one standardized wine for distribution throughout the USSR. This tragedy was not fully realized by the outside world until the empire's dissolution.

Then recently, in 2008, there was a "slight" hiccup in Russian-Georgian relations as Russia thought it was privy to Georgia once again and determined invasion was necessary. Before this crisis, Russia was the dominant export partner for Georgia. Naturally, Georgia said, well shit, we should probably trade with other people – The US was watching.

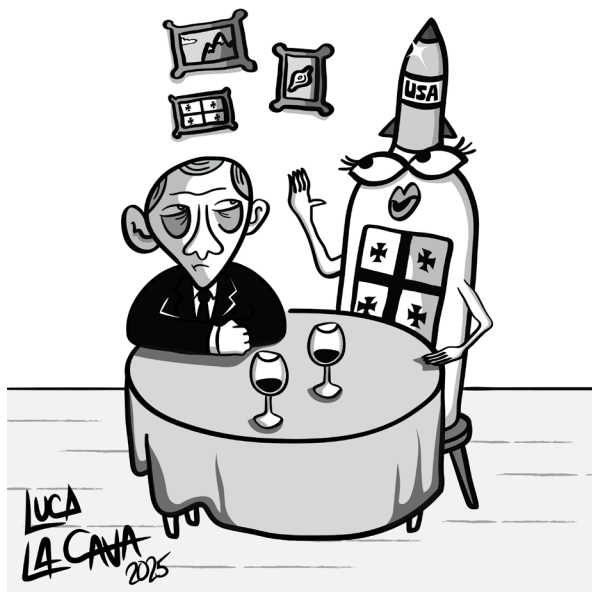
**"They want power, and what better way than through wine?"**

Knock-Knock, it's the Americans. They want power, and what better way than through wine? Here we get to see the world's two favourite things – The US government and Deloitte Consulting, which have spent an exorbitant amount of funds on Georgian tourism, particularly marketing their wine and vineyards. A sort of consulting industrial complex? This spending in parts would seem to have reached me given that as I mentioned I will be traveling there. Those willing to dig will discover a 70-page document published by the US on this topic. Furthermore, a look at any map will show the strategic merits of such a

location with the country bordering both Russia and the Black Sea.

Most reading this will see such behaviour as “classic” American international policy and affairs, which it is. However, one should also view this as one of many events in the canon of intersections between wine and political history. Next time you go shopping and happen to find Georgian wine... I urge you to try some (ensure Qverri is labelled somewhere on the bottle) and appreciate the unique style and story which brought it into your hands.

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**“Oh you like it? It’s American!”**

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