

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

REBUILD THE



TAX TOP WEALTH

Worker power can keep us cool

Strong unions are key to winning safe conditions at work

Page 6

"New party"? Not overnight

Interview with a "Corbynite" councillor, and more

Pages 7, 9

Birmingham mass picket 25 July

Labour councillors and commissioners go for "fire and rehire"

Page 21

The Trotskyists in Vorkuta

How Stalin wiped out all the steadfast Marxists in the USSR

Page 12-14

Fight to roll back cuts



Disability campaigns, unions, and Labour activists now need to come together to develop a plan to defend and improve disability provision.

The plan will seek alternatives to the “reforms” likely to be put forward by the Timms review. Those could include ending “two tier” regimes and replace them with a simpler, expanded financial support system for people with long-term serious health conditions

and disabilities, based on their individual needs.

We will also demand the government rebuild the NHS and expand mental health services, especially for children and young people. We want the government to tax the wealthy to fund public services and benefits, and not to be spooked by its self-imposed “fiscal rules”.

Forty-seven Labour MPs voted against the Universal Credit Bill as it passed its final Commons stage on 9 July. The Government had hastily, a week earlier, promised to remove cuts in access to Personal Independence Payments (PIP). Those will come, if at all, only after a [review](#) led by minister

Stephen Timms reports in late 2026.

The cuts remaining were still bad enough for the UN [Committee](#) on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to intervene, warning that the changes would “deepen the signs of regression”.

The health element of Universal Credit, formerly known as the LCWRA element, will be reduced from £97 a week to just £50 for new claimants. Around 750,000 people will lose this support (worth £3,000 a year) by 2030.

Some ministers have stooped very low, saying the concessions on PIP put in danger scrapping the two-child benefit cap, which Labour leaders now say they might do after suspending seven Labour MPs in July 2024 for voting

against the cap.

During the House of Commons debate, Debbie Abrahams, the chair of the Work and Pensions Select Committee, said the Universal Credit cut was unfortunate but she trusted the government would move to improve health support for people falling sick. She hoped there would be a realignment of the labour market (meaning, we guess, more jobs for disabled people) and better employment support.

It is not credible that the government even intends to get far on such issues. Meanwhile, vulnerable people will be further impoverished. And a two tier principle has been introduced (later claimants with the same needs get less than older claimants).

How to tax the rich

By Alan Gilbert

Solidarity has promoted the work of the economists cooperating with [Tax Justice UK](#), who propose a menu of ten tax changes which could immediately raise £60 billion a year in public revenue.

That would be enough to give some reality to the government’s talk of Neighbourhood Health Centres everywhere, to fix up the NHS and social care, to end the two-child benefit cap, and more.

At little more than 2% of total income, it would be nowhere near enough for a socialist transformation. That will need public ownership and democratic and workers’ control of major economic sectors, to gain control of the huge reve-

nues which currently flow as profits, dividends, interest, rent, and top salaries and bonuses.

But it would do a lot. And it is feasible. Not to campaign for it would be like a union refusing to contest for a wage rise on the grounds that profits and exploitation will still continue after the rise.

Top of the Tax Justice UK list is a wealth tax. The Unite union has also campaigned for that. Media attuned to the interests of the wealthy are, unsurprisingly, full of [claims](#) that a wealth tax can’t work because the rich will just move elsewhere. But Norway and Switzerland manage ok.

The Tax Justice UK list avoids top-rate income tax and corporation tax as

targets for increase. Their obvious tactical calculation is to avoid clashing with Labour’s pre-election pledge not to raise those particular taxes.

At *Solidarity* we do not claim to be tax experts. Instead, we make the general case for taxing top wealth, and point to Tax Justice UK as an example of people who are tax experts and offer detailed plans.

Some on the Labour left prefer to focus on calls for Reeves scraps her “fiscal rules”. We don’t.

The existing “fiscal rules” are geared to known-unreliable predictions of budget balances in five years’ time. The exact numbers mean little. The “rules” are just a way of the government signalling: “we’ll be careful

about inflation”.

Even a workers’ government would have “fiscal rules” of some sort. In revolutionary Russia in 1922, the Bolsheviks quelled inflation only by tying money-printing to gold reserves.

Nonsensical though the detail of the current “fiscal rule” is, if Reeves much loosened it, that would spark a bond sell-off. If she declared: it’s all right, I have a new “fiscal rule”, certified as adequate by the Trotskyist newspaper *Solidarity*, or even say by former chancellor John McDonnell, that would not save the day.

Better to say straight out: yes, fixing social provision does require more taxes, and campaign for taxes on the billionaires and millionaires. □

Spending Review

The Spending Review promised 3% rises in real terms for the NHS. At best that will patch some things up after years of Tory underfunding. It will not make room for expansion, especially for mental health services, long the “Cinderella” department of the NHS.

54% of disabled working-age people have jobs, and 82% of the non-disabled. The [gap](#) has remained around 30% for ten years. To close the gap completely may not be possible or even desirable. But the government has no plans to cut discrimination or press bosses to make adaptations to workplaces.

The government has set aside £1 billion for increased Employment Support. But this is channelled into “individually tailored conversations” and “work coaches”, of limited use to people receiving the health element of Universal Credit.

Campaigning and confronting the government’s rotten excuses for attacking poor and vulnerable people has got us a long way in the last few weeks. That is the positive lesson to take away from these events. We carry on fighting. We can win! □

Push labour movement to campaign for migrant rights

By Colin Foster

According to [Labour List](#), a clear majority of Labour Party members object to Keir Starmer’s substantive immigration policies, not just to the notorious “island of strangers” speech, which he has now backtracked from.

A 53%-36% majority oppose the tightening of work-visa requirements for some and making immigrants live in the UK for ten years before they

can apply for the right to stay indefinitely.

Most, or many, will also object to the government’s vindictive attitude to desperate asylum-seekers who risk their lives in small boats to reach Britain. Starmer’s latest move is a swap agreement with France under which Britain will deport some asylum-seekers to France and accept a similar number referred from France to Britain.

It has the odd virtue of cre-

ating a safe and legal route to Britain for a few asylum-seekers. There are almost no such routes now.

At Labour conference 2024 the platform withdrew a motion on “Border Security” because, after campaigning by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Labour Left Internationalists, and others, it looked sure to be defeated.

At its congress in June, the not-left-wing GMB union voted for: The repeal of Illegal

Migration Act 2023, Nationality and Borders Act 2022, and Immigration Acts 2014 and 2016; A guarantee of safe and legal routes for asylum seekers; Give asylum seekers day-one rights to work, education, and social security; Give asylum seekers and all citizens the right to family reunion; Abolish “no recourse to public funds” and NHS charges.

Solidarity works to get unions and Labour Parties to insist on these policies. □

Solidarity 749

We are on our summer schedule: 749 will be 6 August; 750, 27 August; 751, 10 September; 752, 24 September. □



Two states, equal rights

By Ira Berkovic

In the occupied West Bank, the Israeli military has erected a 16-foot-high fence around the town of Sinjil, trapping 8,000 Palestinian residents inside. Sinjil's deputy mayor, Bahaa Foqaa, said the fence was "designed to intimidate and break the will of the Palestinian people."

Standing Together said: "This fence is part of the economic suffocation of the West Bank. It blocks movement, and it aims to break the spirit of a town that has already lost so much. Sinjil's farmers are now cut off from over 6,000 dunams of agricultural land that sustained families for generations, land that represents both livelihood and belonging. This is not isolated or new. Since 1967, Sinjil's lands have been steadily eroded, most recently through the establishment of Givat Harel, an illegal settlement built on its private land, then legalised by the Israeli government in 2023. This system doesn't protect people, and it doesn't build safety. Nobody will be safe here while Palestinians live without freedom. Real safety will only come when every single person on this land can live in equality, freedom and peace."

At the time of writing, negotiations towards a potential 60-day ceasefire in Gaza were ongoing, although many media outlets have reported them as "stalled". A reported obstacle is Israel's refusal to allow the UN and other aid agencies to take charge of increased aid provision and distribution, insisting that the Gaza Humanitarian Founda-

tion, based on private US security firms, continue to oversee aid.

Meanwhile, Israeli defence minister Israel Katz has announced a plan to concentrate 600,000 Palestinians, and eventually many more than that, into what Katz calls a "humanitarian city" but which would in fact be a concentration camp. In the mind of Katz and other right-wing politicians, the move would undoubtedly be a precursor to the mass expulsion of Gazans into Egypt. Such a plan is unworkable, as it would require collaboration that the Egyptian government has no interest in providing. But its political effect is to widen the bounds of debate to encompass ever more extreme "solutions".

Any ceasefire, of any length, that puts an immediate halt to the slaughter of Palestinians and secures freedom for even some of the surviving Israeli hostages is preferable to a continuation of daily massacres. But any conceivable deal will leave open enormous questions of reconstruction and future governance for Gaza. The only consistently democratic settlement is for Gaza to become part of a genuinely independent, viable Palestinian state, along with the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Progress towards this requires the ousting of Benjamin Netanyahu's regime, a government whose foundational political programme is to prevent any exercise of Palestinian sovereignty and impose Jewish supremacy across the entire territory between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea.

The Israeli government is also attempting to oust Ayman Odeh, a Pal-

estinian socialist and member of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) from office. Standing Together and others have been campaigning in his defence.

The need to build a movement capable of forcing Netanyahu from office, and putting the maximum degree of pressure on any government that succeeds him, means the efforts of Standing Together to build social consent for a future based on equality are vital.

In Britain, some on the left have blocked efforts to make solidarity with Standing Together, for example in the RMT and Unison trade unions, on the basis that their emphasis on joint struggle towards a horizon of equal rights for both peoples is a form of "normalisation" of Israel. This approach, of obstructing solidarity with the most vigorous anti-war current inside Israeli society, serves the interests of the existing Israeli political establishment far more than those of the Palestinians.

For several decades, much of the revolutionary left has pursued an approach towards Israel-Palestine based, at best, on a utopian maximalism, and at worst on a vicarious chauvinism. The prevailing political narrative designates the entire Israeli Jewish nation, not merely the current Israeli regime or the infrastructure of occupation, as illegitimate, hence the cheerleading from currents such as the Socialist Workers Party for the massacre of Israeli civilians on 7 October.

Israel's actions since create an understandable emotional pressure for left-minded people more widely, people rightly motivated to express solidarity with the Palestinians, to fall in behind

those narratives. But they impede, rather than aid, struggles towards a horizon of equality.

Far better to act in the spirit of the activists from the Gaza Youth Committee, who recently organised vigils in Gaza to commemorate Israeli children killed on 7 October, in response to images of Israeli anti-war activists holding photos of Palestinian children killed by Israeli bombing. The Gazan activists said: "Even though we live under siege, hunger, death, and displacement, we do not turn our backs on peace. Even when the world turns its back on us, we do not give up the responsibility to speak in the name of peace. We don't want anyone to be the next victim. We want all of us to be the next hope." □

UK Friends of Standing Together

Standing Together, Israel's fastest-growing grassroots movement over recent years, unites Jews and Palestinians within Israel to fight for an equal and just society, for peace, and against the occupation.

UKFoST promotes their work in the UK: for peace, justice, and equality for Israelis and Palestinians – Jews and Arabs – including an equal right to self-determination, and for the full equality of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

UKFoST promotes the benefits of joint struggle by Jews and Palestinians to this end. • ukfost.co.uk

• [@omdimbeyachaduk](https://twitter.com/omdimbeyachaduk)

"I don't have another land"

Sondos Saleh is a former member of the Knesset and a Palestinian leader of Standing Together. She spoke at an anti-war rally on Saturday 5 July.

"We're here with a different call. A voice that says a ceasefire is not enough: we want to end the war. One of the dangers this government constantly imposes on us is normalising wars as part of our reality. In the past decade, we have gone from one war to another, and these wars have taken a heavy toll on all people on all sides. Wars will never bring security. We're here to build a camp of peace, equality, and so-

cial justice.

"I, as an Arab-Palestinian, also say: I don't have another land. There is someone who is trying to deceive us all. I say to him, for the past 70 years, they've tried the path of wars. It's time for a different path. Yes, a different way is possible. There is room for all of us. It's time to stop the wars and live in peace.

"Arab society [in Israel] is bleeding. Crime and violence are out of control. The people who feel most secure in Arab society are the criminal groups, because they know that [the government] truly doesn't care about the

security of Arab society, and we are paying a very heavy price for it. Every single day, someone is killed in Arab society. These are also costs of war, that this Knesset, this government and its ministries, which is packed with far-right, capitalist, and chauvinist politicians, who look past marginalised communities, and especially Arab society [have imposed on us]. I also say this, that what starts in Arab society and is allowed to continue there, will not stay only in Arab society. It will spread everywhere, unless we stand together and fight this policy." □



Activist Agenda

Template motions

Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties: bit.ly/mo-pe

Meetings

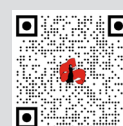
Wed 16 Jul: Working-class political representation. Sheffield AWL. University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Broomhall, Sheffield S3 7HG

Mon 21 Jul: Discussing socialist feminism. 7pm. Frieda Afary and Ruth Cashman debate on Zoom bit.ly/fa-rc

Sat 26 Jul: London Trans Pride. Noon, Langham Place, London W1B 3DG

Sun 27 Jul: AWL eco reading group: agriculture. 8pm, Zoom bit.ly/eco-rg

At work or on campus: we organise among health and local government, school and education workers, on the railway and London Underground, in the civil service, on uni campuses, and more. See workersliberty.org/



Scan the QR code to see our events & meetings page.

work-unions, Insta [@workerslibertystudents](https://twitter.com/workerslibertystudents), and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs

13 Jul: London. A short history of transmisogyny. 2pm, Effra Social, 89 Effra Rd SW2 1DF

Campaigns

For: UK Friends of Standing Together, Labour Left Internationalists, Workers Against the CCP, Free Our Unions, Solidarity With Iranian Workers, Neurodivergent Labour, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, Labour Campaign for Free Movement – contact details, activities, template motions, etc. – see workersliberty.org/agenda. For environmental campaigning email eco@workersliberty.org. □

Is Murray flying a kite?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Andrew Murray is a prominent figure in the Communist Party of Britain (CPB – the “official” British Communist Party) and a frequent contributor to the *Morning Star* where he doubles as Political Reporter and author of a weekly column entitled Eyes Left.

So what Murray writes can be taken as representative of the thinking of at least some elements within the CPB.

In his column of 25 June Murray wrote: “The ‘two state solution’ in Israel-Palestine, long-championed by the well-meaning as well as imperial cynics, is being buried under the depravity of the Israeli state. Too often presented as a ‘solution’ to the ‘Palestine problem’ – which is now scarcely plausible in any case – it leaves the ‘Israel problem’ untouched”.

Presumably, among the “well-meaning” people referred to by Murray, is his own organisation, the CPB.

“Two states” has been the position of the “official” British Communist Party for 78 years. In 1947-8, the party welcomed the creation of Israel and condemned the military attack on it by Arab states. In this it was following the lead of the Soviet Union, which gave “de jure” recognition to Israel on 17 May 1948, just three days after its declaration of

independence, and long before the UK gave even “de facto” recognition.

When Arab states attacked Israel, with one prominent Arab leader claiming they would “sweep the Jews into the sea”, Stalin, via Czechoslovakia, breached the arms embargo imposed on Israel by Britain and the US and sent arms that saved the newly-founded state. Stalin hoped to disrupt the British Empire in the Middle East: Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq were then UK semi-colonies.

But the working-class left, the Trotskyists, either sided with Israel in the 1948-9 war (with many criticisms) or backed neither side. None backed the Arab states. Most of the broader left sympathised with Israel and the Holocaust survivors trying to make their way there against British obstruction.

Attitude

Since then, the attitude of the broader left towards Israel has dramatically changed, especially after Israel’s war in Lebanon in 1982 and the sharp turn to the right of Israeli politics in recent decades. The tone of most CPs’ coverage has changed since the USSR gained good relations with Egypt and other Arab states in the 1960s.

But the formal stance of the “official” Communist Parties internationally (as of some semi-Trotskyists and Trotskyists like the AWL) has been that an Israeli Jewish nation now exists, and has the right to self-determination. Palestinians have the right to self-determination

too, which means a Palestinian state alongside Israel – the “two states settlement”.

So Murray’s attack upon this long-standing Communist Party policy is significant, especially as he makes his meaning clear in a way that many opponents of two states do not. He wants the Israeli state itself, as a political unit, and not just its reactionary leaders, wiped out. After describing some of Israel’s crimes since 1967, Murray goes on:

“Why any socialist would regard an arrangement which keeps such a state in existence a ‘solution’ to anything is an interesting issue. Alternatives are challenging to be sure, but Israel’s racism and its instrumentalisation as an imperialist asset are of its essence as a state.

“It is time to think outside the box, particularly when the box in question proves to be a bloody iron maiden. Weakening or destroying the imperialist basis for Israel’s continued existence as constituted in the US, Britain and elsewhere, would be decisive.”

The *Morning Star*, though controlled by the CPB, very rarely carries articles supporting “two states” and much more frequently carries material that is implicitly or explicitly for the destruction or “dismantling” of Israel), as argued by “absolute anti-Zionists” like the SWP, Palestine Action and some Islamist organisations.

The last time the paper carried a piece arguing for “two states” was in October 2024. It was by Nick Wright

and was headed “Without a two-state solution there will only be permanent war”.

Wright argued that the position of those who “deny the legitimacy of an Israeli state either within the borders established by UN resolution in 1947 or the 1967 borders ... “is a mirror image of the Israeli government position which denies the possibility of a Palestinian state”

Wright concluded that the “two-state solution” is the “only rational and equitable solution to today’s conflicts ... and in its place permanent war at the discretion of imperialism and its preponderance of military power remains.”

Murray and Wright are old comrades, both having been in a hard-line Stalinist group called Straight Left in the 1980s. Wright needs to take his comrade aside and tell him to stop advocating what amounts to permanent war in the Middle East. □



“Anti-Israel” does not equal “left-wing”



Eric Lee

I was talking the other day to a young man who was patiently explaining to me that to be “left” is to be “anti-Israel”. There was no difference at all in his mind. And he insisted that his was a view shared by his entire generation. He may be right.

Watching crowds of thousands at live music events chanting “Free, free Palestine” and “Death, Death to the IDF” is evidence that for a large number of young people, being anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian is a no-brainer. Perhaps for most of them, it is what defines left-wing politics today.

I do understand that sometimes there are era-defining events that shape and reshape existing politics. In the 1930s, for example, it was fair to expect anyone claiming to be left-wing to stand in solidarity with Spain, as nearly the entire left did. And today I and others have argued that solidarity with Ukraine in its war of self-defence against an aggressive Russia deserves the solidarity of the entire left, and indeed that if one is not pro-Ukrainian, one does not deserve to be called left-wing.

Having said that, I do reject the idea that being “anti-Israel” equals being left-wing and I’d like to try to explain why.

When supporting the Spanish Republic, while acknowledging its flaws (and they were many), it was clear to everyone

on the left that the Spanish Republicans were the right side to back in a war against the fascists led by Franco.

And while there may be things we don’t like about the current Ukrainian government (including its treatment of the trade union movement), to most of us it is clearly the more progressive, democratic side in a war against Putin’s pro-fascist state.

Progressive

But when we look at Hamas, Hezbollah and the Islamic Republic of Iran, in what sense can those organisations and regimes be considered progressive or democratic, especially when compared with Israel? Do women have more rights in Iran than in Israel? Are LGBTQ people treated equally and with more respect in Ha-

mas-controlled Gaza than in Israel? Do workers have greater rights to join and form independent, democratic trade unions under Hezbollah than in Israel?

The only thing that all those movements seem to be doing – and this is why some parts of the Left consider them progressive – is to fight Israel. They take the slogan “Death, death to the IDF” and try to turn it into reality.

I think that for most people chanting violently anti-Israeli slogans, they are doing so because they are appalled by the behaviour of the Israeli military in Gaza. While very few people in Britain know a lot about Hamas (including its infamous Covenant from 1988), pretty much everyone is now an expert on how Israel has been

fighting. And there is a consensus that the IDF’s behaviour in Gaza is unacceptable.

The left should not, however, be chanting antisemitic slogans. Instead they should be expressing their opposition to Hamas and its allies at the same time as denouncing the way Israel is conducting its war in Gaza. Not “Free, free Palestine!” or “From the river to the sea”. Instead, “No to Hamas! No to Netanyahu! Yes to a two-state solution!”

That slogan – not the ones shouted in Glastonbury – should define what we mean by being on the left in Britain today. □

• Eric Lee writes here in a personal opinion column. He is the founder-editor of LabourStart.

War, power, and sexual violence



Women's Fightback

By Natalia Cassidy

Until November 2025, the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London is hosting the UK's first ever major exhibition dedicated to highlighting sexual violence in war.

The exhibit explores conflicts from the turn of the 20th century to those still ongoing and highlights the role that sexual violence has played as a weapon of war.

The exhibit features a slew of wartime propaganda from the past century, many depicting an idealised version of the male form, strapping and shirtless, while depictions of women largely focused on encouraging male soldiers not to sleep with locals for sexual health reasons or warned against the confiding in women for reasons of national security. The lone exception is

the Ukrainian recruitment poster that depicted a female Ukrainian soldier standing off with an orc intended to represent a Russian soldier, a nod to Russian invaders being called orcs by Ukrainians to liken them to the marauding orcs in the Lord of the Rings.

The exhibit draws out an important link in informing our understanding of sexual violence in conflict. It is not simply an individual exerting power over another by subjecting them to horrors. It is in many cases a performance on the part of the perpetrator.

Intimidation

Research by Vlachova and Biason in 2005 estimated that 90% of all rape in war is gang rape and takes place in the presence of other soldiers. It serves the dual purpose of performing to intimidate the survivors of this violence and their loved ones, and of promoting "solidarity" among the soldiers.

The performance almost always plays into gendered domination of man over woman, or man over man, and is almost



The Russian army raped hundreds of thousands of German women, maybe two million, in the run up to and after its capture of Berlin in 1945

always used as an expression of national dominance of one people over another.

The exhibit also examines responses to sexual violence in war and the movements seeking to redress these wrongdoings. The exhibit features the Korean grassroots movement seeking apology and recognition of wrongdoing by the Japanese state for the "comfort women" that were taken into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese occu-

piers. Many of these "comfort women" are now dead, but a handful have survived into their 90s.

The exhibit is well worth a visit to explore these challenging themes and the ways in which they have been opposed. Though it can feel at times as if the "to camera" video sections do not have a great deal to say, there is a fascinating range of artefacts telling stories that most of us have never had the chance to hear. □

Putin looks to a long war

By Michael Baker

Since Ukraine's audacious Operation Spiderweb drone attack on multiple airbases inside Russia in early June, the Russian army has responded with a gruelling advance through Eastern Ukraine, and a significant increase in air attacks across the country's major cities.

On Thursday 10 July, Putin had a phone call with President Trump. Shortly after the call ended, Russia launched its largest assault on Kyiv to date: 550 drones and 11 long-range missiles. Much of the city has spent the week hiding underground or in apartment block shelters.

The following night, Friday 11, Russia sent 597 drones and 26 long-range missiles at various targets in Ukraine, killing at least four. Nine people were injured in Kharkiv, including new mothers at a maternity ward that was hit while being evacuated.

Trump claimed to be "disappointed" at the attacks. In mid-July there has been talk of a shift in American policy towards the war: first, Trump overturned Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth's decision to block an aid delivery

to Ukraine, then it was announced on Monday 14th that Trump had greenlit a new deal with NATO, whereby the US will sell arms to other NATO states, which those states will then pass on to Ukraine.

It would be premature to call this a complete about-turn. The weapons that are being delivered (or just discussed) now are a fraction of arms deliveries that were given by the Biden administration, which themselves were a fraction of what Ukraine needed to win the war.

Deliver

Ukraine's military is severely underequipped. In particular, Russian air strikes (which have increased significantly since Trump took office) are having more effect, due to a lack of air defence missiles, which Ukraine has to buy or receive from other countries. Trump made a recent promise to deliver ten "interceptor" missiles to Ukraine. Even Ukrainian ministers, desperate to keep on Trump's good side, pointed out that this was a laughably small quantity for a country facing dozens upon dozens of missile attacks per week.

Russia's advances in Eastern Ukraine as part of its summer

offensive are significant, but by no means decisive. The towns of Pokrovsk and Kostiantynivka are both being flanked on either side, and after months of fighting, Russians have taken the remainder of the city of Kamianske, in the Zaporizhzhia region.

In mid-July many Russian government ministers were insisting that the Ukrainian side "recognise the situation on the ground" in negotiations, referring to the summer offensive's advances, and seeking to have them nailed down in case of a diplomatic deal. But analysis by the *Economist* suggests that even if the Russian offensive kept up its current pace - which is costing it an inordinate amount of material, lives and money, all in short supply - it would take them until February 2028 just to take all the territory of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts, where Russia has already claimed to have established functioning statelets.

Putin's plan is facing scrutiny in Russia as the war drags on, but he appears to be settling in for a long war. In talks with Western leaders over the last few weeks, the NYT reports that Putin has talked not of "denazifying Ukraine" but "push-

ing back NATO" as his primary goal - an open-ended target that could license war for many years. Marco Rubio has expressed frustration at Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov for being "insufficiently flexible" in discussions around a peace deal, and there is [apparently](#) growing pressure on Putin among the Russian ruling class to formally declare war.

Restructuring

That last decision may seem academic, given that Russia has been, in fact, waging war against Ukraine for over three years. But it would allow for an even more drastic restructuring of the Russian economy towards war production, a much larger percentage of GDP to be spent on defence, and a much larger mobilisation plan than is currently in place. The counterargument, which has so far been strong enough to convince Putin, is simple: war brings instability, and mass mobilisation breeds anger at the regime. With the economy suffering from high inflation, perhaps as many as a million casualties from the war, and many Russians struggling to make ends meet, Putin may not want to risk ramping up the war effort in the near future.

Vitaly Dudin, lawyer and leading member of Ukrainian socialist group Sotsialny Rukh, has produced a [valuable article](#) dissecting Ukraine's new labour laws, which were voted through at the end of last year but are yet to take effect. The Ukrainian government has claimed that the laws bring Ukraine in line with EU regulations, but the opposite is likely true: by systematically protecting employers' rights to ruin working conditions, and removing unions' and workers' rights to collectively organise against them, the law is a Thatcherite attack on the working class that we must fight against, alongside Ukrainian socialists and trade unionists.

The Unite union policy conference (7-11 July: see page 21) passed good policy, which Workers' Liberty members were central to winning. As negotiations stall, Western support falters, and Ukrainian workers fight both an imperialist invasion and their own government, British workers must commit to build links with their Ukrainian comrades, forging direct relationships and raising the voice of the Ukrainian working class on the world stage. □

Worker power can keep us cool



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

The TUC has produced some helpful resources for health and safety reps, and is encouraging a mass inspection of workplaces during a week of action, 14-20 July.

In the same week the [Heat Strike campaign](#) is organising press stunts and actions. London [Hazards Campaign](#) and Heat Strike are targeting bus companies who regularly put profits over safety and send bus drivers out on our streets operating 14 tonne vehicles without functioning air conditioning.

Bosses have insisted work proceeds as normal even as some workers are collapsing from heat stroke. The Unite union policy conference (7-11 July) heard of bus cab temperatures over 40°C, and at least three drivers who were hospitalised from heat exhaustion. I asked Transport for London for comment, and got no more than this: "These reports are not accurate. TfL and the operator Stagecoach take driver welfare extremely seriously and they have measures in place to support teams during hot weather".

Yet refusal of unsafe work comes with the threat that our livelihoods will be taken away through the docking of wages or even dismissal. Strengthening trade union organisation so workers are empowered to exercise our rights to refuse unsafe work is our main line of defence and the most effective way to force employers to act. Working in temperatures in excess of 30°C poses a serious and imminent danger to health and workers can refuse such work without detriment under section 44 of the

Employment Rights Act 1996.

Climate change is no longer a distant threat for the future, but something that we directly experience on increasingly hot summer days. Heat triggers physiological changes in our bodies as we go about our daily work with effects from fatigue and loss of attention through to collapse and death.

Temperatures are rising as a result of anthropogenic climate change and will continue to rise until humanity discovers how to organise production according to human and ecological ends, rather than in the blind pursuit of profit.

The 30°C plus temperatures we experienced in the UK this year are mild by international standards. Many places in the Middle East exceeded 50°C this June. Parts of South Asia and the Middle East are experiencing days when outdoor temperatures are approaching the limits of human survivability.

Heat sets off physiological effects for all lifeforms. Warmer waters have brought octopus to British shores in large numbers. Similar migrations of wild species will occur as agricultural and horticultural species also move North. The recent heatwave has triggered major wildfires in Scotland, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Syria and beyond.

The 2022 heatwave when temperatures in the UK reached 40.3°C claimed 68,000 lives across Europe, including 2,803 in the UK. The recent heatwave is thought to have claimed 600 UK lives. These UK deaths are preventable.

Most humans for most of human history have lived in places where summer temperatures exceed 30°C. But our current buildings, houses and workplaces, were designed for the cooler conditions of the Holocene (the era before human-made climate change).

90% of our buildings are ill-equipped

for extreme heat. A continuing Holocene-era building code and weak regulation means we continue to construct airless hotboxes, and extensive retrofitting is needed.

The 90% figure also applies to NHS buildings, where it compromises our emergency infrastructure. Health workers report many hospital wards and offices with temperatures in excess of 30°C recently, with patients sleeping on sofas in communal areas huddled around portable air conditioning units.

There is no maximum working temperature in the UK. The Bologna regional government, in Italy, introduced a ban on outdoor work in the middle of the day during heatwaves after the death of construction worker Aït el Azam Brahim from heat exhaustion in June.

Even in the UK, employers have a [legal duty](#) to provide a "reasonable" temperature.

Union safety reps should identify hot-spots, and then demand the employer controls for workplace temperature by applying the "hierarchy of controls". The most effective measures involve eliminating the hazard by preventing buildings getting hot in the first place. Even cheap retrofitting such as external blinds and painting roofs with reflective paint can substantially reduce indoor temperatures. Wide availability of cool drinking water on streets and work sites is important, too.

A white roof can reduce indoor temperatures by as much as 7°C, and widespread use would bring a 2-3°C reduction in the urban heat island effect.

As a stop-gap, many employers may offer air conditioning. It would be foolish to reject the offer on environmental grounds.

It should not be used to stall retrofit-

ting. It depends on reliable electricity infrastructure, which does not exist in many of the hotter, poorer parts of the world.

Demand for AC is expected to double in Europe and increase four-fold in India by 2050. One study found this could increase energy demand by up to 168 Twh and add 130 MMT CO₂ to emissions. Air conditioners' carbon emissions vary a lot, depending on their efficiency, how much they leak, and how they are powered.

With better building design air conditioning should not be needed in the UK and similar latitudes except in specific workplaces (kitchens and bakeries, road and rail passenger transport etc.)

After no solution at all (often offered), the next worst solution is portable air conditioning, which is noisy and extremely inefficient. In many workplaces, portable AC is rolled out each year as if once again the climate change is a surprise. As well as AC quick-fixes, we must insist on proper plans to invest in our workplaces so we have workplaces and infrastructure fit for the Anthropocene.

Heat is a workplace issue that affects hundreds of millions of workers simultaneously, way across national borders. Collective action to protect ourselves from the dangers of working at extreme heat could spread very quickly, with the potential for very large displays of working-class power to establish the principle that capitalist class must pay for the climate crisis and organised labour is the only force capable of making that happen.

Workers can become become safety reps and link up with the cross-industry rank and file network of safety reps already organising with the Heat Strike campaign. □

LGBT+ Labour suspends its AGM

By Simon Nelson

The official Labour "affiliated socialist society", LGBT+ Labour, has suspended its AGM and committee elections, set for 19 July. It claims to fear legal challenges. No such concern was raised when the AGM was organised and advertised. The suspension followed the announcement of the Trans Rights Alliance slate, candidates who want to challenge the committee's lack of fight against increasingly hostile official policy towards trans people and trans members of the Labour party. The majority of existing officers (who, it appears, voted to suspend)

claim that the nomination of a trans woman, Steph Richards, for women's officer will be a breach of party rules.

Incumbent trans officer Georgia Meadows says this sets a "precedent" that no Socialist Society can host an AGM if a transgender candidate stands for Women's Officer.

The Trans Rights Alliance is right to accuse the existing committee of being scared that it was on the verge of losing power. At the time of publication, the legal advice sought and received by LGBT+ Labour has not been made public.

LGBT+ Labour says they will organise a social in place of

the AGM. As I write, details of this have not been shared, nor have they revealed their plans to police toilets or other facilities at their events.

Meanwhile, The Women's and Equality Committee of MPs has questioned whether Dr Mary Ann Stephenson should be the preferred candidate for the Equality and Human Rights chair to replace Kishwer Faulkner.

Faulkner

Faulkner has, and Stephenson seems to have, views on trans rights that are at odds with dignity and respect for trans people's self-identification.

As *Solidarity* previously re-

ported, Stephenson's nomination was welcomed by Sex Matters, one of the groups keen on maximum extrapolation from the April Supreme Court judgement on "biological sex" and the Equality Act.

Stephenson has publicly defended women with "gender-critical" beliefs, condemning the alleged silencing of their views. *Solidarity* is for open debate and discussion, including on the issue of trans rights, but those who claim to have been silenced are able to make their views heard frequently and loudly. A donation by Stephenson to the legal fund of the "gender-critical" barrister Allison Bailey sug-

gests an alignment.

The Women and Equalities Select Committee, alongside the Joint Human Rights committee, states its reasons for objection as Stephenson's lack of experience running a large organisation and questions around her understanding and knowledge on questions of race equality. *The Times* reports that concerns about her "gender-critical" views also affected the decision.

Pressure like this on the government to think again is welcome but it looks as if Bridget Phillipson, the Equalities Minister, will push ahead with the appointment. □

New party “not an overnight process”



Interview

Interview with Phil Graham

Phil Graham, an ex-Labour, now “Community Independents”, councillor in Islington, talked to Solidarity.

From Zarah Sultana’s initiative, I am hopeful for a new way of doing politics. That is what’s needed, because at the moment the main parties are letting everyone down. They are full of lies and corruption, and inside them you’re worried about saying anything because you may get expelled or excommunicated in some way.

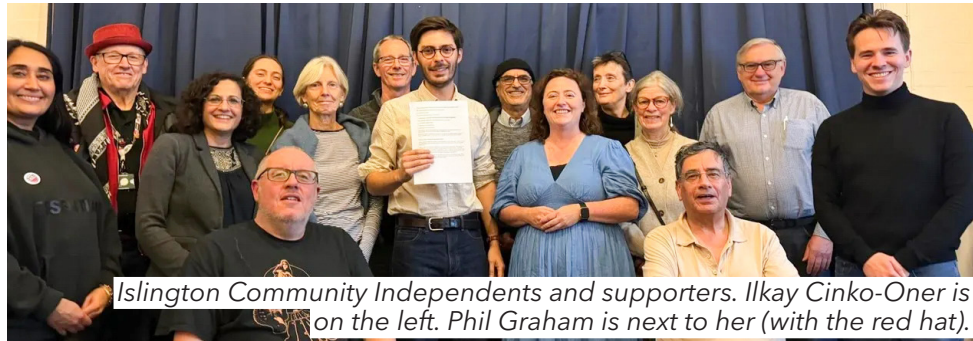
This is going to be different from the Greens, the same way as Labour has always been different to the Greens. We work well together with the Greens [on Islington council], but it’s only a working agreement. We’re not joining the Greens.

Q. How do you see a new party being organised? Collective was the first attempt at this, but, it wasn’t a party in any usual sense of having conferences, but an internet operation that would approve certain candidates. In Islington, since Jeremy Corbyn was elected as an independent, the nearest we’ve got to a party is the People’s Forum, which isn’t a party.

A. We’ve come together as the Islington Community Independents. We’re not waiting for a big party to start up. We’ll carry on doing what we do, and then go under the umbrella, hopefully, of a future party.

We’ve got Ilkay [Cinko-Oner] as our Independents group leader, and then there’s me, Asima Shaikh and Matt Nathan [all ex-Labour councillors]. We work as a group in the council with the Greens. We do joint motions as long as we agree. And as long we don’t agree, we agree to disagree.

A new party has got to be a bot-



Islington Community Independents and supporters. Ilkay Cinko-Oner is on the left. Phil Graham is next to her (with the red hat).

tom-up organisation. I’ve just come from a meeting online with Jeremy. He’s going around meeting independents all over the country, and trying to decide the best way of doing things. It’s not an easy process.

Q. What would you want to see as the main policy points of this new party?

A. Anti-austerity, international peace. Basically, if you think of a blend between the 2019 and 2017 manifestos when Jeremy was in charge, a lot of that will be taken into consideration.

But mainly we’re anti-austerity. I will admit, the Labour Party, since they got into power, have done a couple of good things. I’d be churlish not to admit that. But the problem is they’re still going after the weakest in society.

Q. Isn’t this a bad time to bail out of the struggle inside the Labour Party and the affiliated unions when we’ve just pushed back Starmer and Reeves on PIP and on the winter fuel payments?

A. Yes, there’s been a lot of pressure. But the thing is, we have to oppose this from all directions. We can’t have the government balancing the books on the backs of the most vulnerable in society, especially not when they’re going out spending fortunes on weapons of mass destruction.

Q. What did you say under Tony Blair?

A. I was still a member of the Labour Party then. I swallowed it, right up to Iraq, and then I left. I rejoined because of Jeremy in 2015.

This time I had tried my best. I’d stood up and I’d spoken out. I was suspended

three times because I was just speaking my mind.

But it’s a different type of politics now. The old two party system’s gone. You’ve got a leader who will say and do anything to get to where he wants to be without any consequences. At least Tony Blair mostly owned his mistakes.

Q. Why do you think this will do better than the Scargill Socialist Labour Party in 1996?

A. Now there is more of a hunger for it. When I knock on doors and I walk around my ward, and lots of people come up to me and say, what the hell’s going on with the Labour Party? Starmer is acting like a Tory. Personally, I think that he has acted more like Reform. His attitude on immigration is stinking.

This is not going to be an overnight process. It’s a big thing. You’ve only got to look at how many people go on the marches against austerity and for Palestine, and you can see that they’re not being helped by anyone in government. None of the main parties is doing anything for those people or to alleviate their concerns.

I’m really optimistic for the future, from what’s happening on the streets with people fighting back. Listen, we’re not going to win the general election in one session. That’s never going to happen. But I’d hope we are involved in a coalition, at least.

Q. With whom?

A. The Greens, whatever.

Q. Lib Dems.



A. No.

Q. SNP?

A. No. This is all blowing up because of what Zarah did last week. I’ve got enormous respect for Zarah Sultana as a politician. I think she’s one of the best. But everyone’s got a bit over-excited. We’re moving at a pace that is good. We’ve got some really solid independent groups around the country, and they know what they’re doing.

Q. Do you regard the Pendle council ex-Labour Independents as part of your movement, despite their coalition with the Lib Dems?

A. Yes. It’s their choice what coalitions they do in their own councils. We get on very well with our Green comrades here, but they won’t stop us, if we disagree with them.

Q. And the Independent Alliance in Parliament and the call by one of its members, Ayoub Khan, for the troops to be sent in against the Birmingham bins strike strike?

A. That’s a disgrace.

Q. But it’s one of your MPs in parliament.

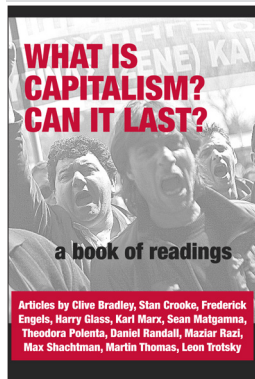
A. If they’re calling the army or scabs of any sort to break a strike... They’ve got no place. I’ve said Starmer’s got no place in the Labour Party, Emily Thornberry’s got no place in the Labour Party, if they won’t stand on a picket line.

You never see them doing that. You will see Apsana Begum, Nadia Whittome, Richard Burgon, but not them. □

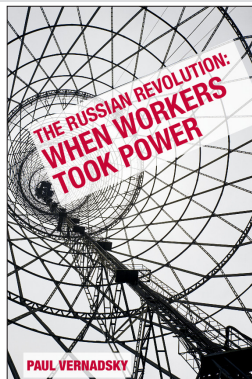


Buy our books

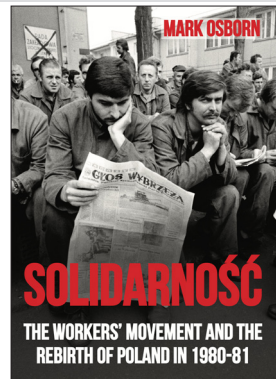
Order from workersliberty.org/publications



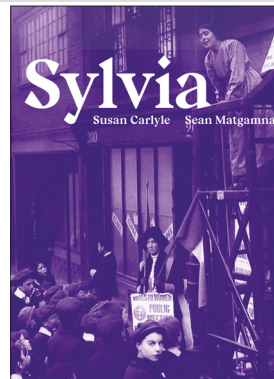
Socialist readings to understand and fight capitalism 128 pages **£5**



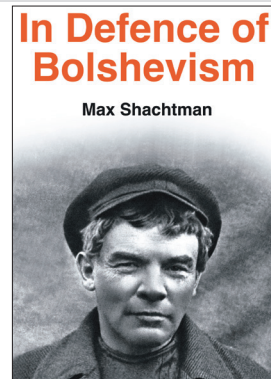
The 1917’s revolution’s real history, and lessons 374 pages **£12**



The history of Solidarność, from its dawn until the coup 116 pages **£5**



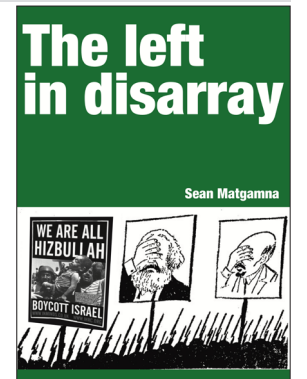
The story of Sylvia Pankhurst including her working-class organising. **£4**



Defending the Bolsheviks and their relevance today 312 pages **£10**



A debate on reform, revolution, Labour, democracy, more 107 pages **£5**



Critical history of the disoriented left, and the way forward 408 pages **£12**

Post-Covid and long neglect



Interview

By Asad Khan

In *Solidarity* 747 Asad Khan described his battle against NHS bosses for recognition of the Covid dangers which led to him developing post-Covid conditions which have stopped him working.

The official government figures are that 7.4% of NHS staff have been diagnosed with post-Covid conditions, but a recent study from King's College London suggests the figure could be as much as 33.6%.

There is no doubt that there is widespread under-reporting. First, there can be a delay between acute Covid and the onset of long Covid symptoms. People can even be asymptomatic from Covid and still get long Covid.

Second, there is no typical picture of long Covid. It is a condition that affects every part of the body and different parts of the body to different levels. The symptoms are non-specific. They include fatigue, pain, cognitive slowing. Third, there is an element of "medical misogyny" as long Covid predominantly affects women.

There is a substantial literature that shows "female diseases" are not taken seriously. They receive less research and attention. We see this with ME/CFS, endometriosis, fibromyalgia and MS. The attitude is "we don't know what this is, we don't know what to do about it, therefore so it must be psychological".

There has been a massive uptick in mental illness. That is often attributed to lockdown stress, but there were two brief lockdowns and there is no reason to think they would trigger mental health crisis. Some of the young children who are now long-term sick were not even in school at the times of the lockdowns.

What makes more sense is that living with long Covid is so miserable that of course people get anxious and depressed. There are some neuro-psychiatric conditions associated with long Covid such as mini-strokes. Also, the symptoms are so vague that they can often be mistaken for anxiety and depression. What we are seeing with these statistics is the tip of the iceberg.

Long Covid is a vascular illness and leads to increased risk of heart attack, stroke, pulmonary embolism, Parkinson's disease, diabetes, renal impairment, high cholesterol and such like.

Research into treatments has been extremely poor. We saw during the high points of the pandemic how fast medical research can move with the vaccines. But research into long Covid treatments is almost non-existent.

There just isn't the will or the funding to do the research. Government and to a large extent, the public, don't want to engage with it and want us to believe it's all over. In the USA, National Institute for Health funding for long Covid research has been [disrupted](#).

Underlying

One theory about the underlying pathology of long Covid is that the residual virus or viral fragments remain in certain cells of the body. Yet, five years since the start of the pandemic and there have been no studies looking at the effect of treating long Covid with long-term anti-virals. There is one study of anti-viral treatments led by Professor Mark Faghy from the University of Derby, but the funding for the trial was only sufficient for two weeks.

There are low-risk treatments that can help. For instance, there are a cluster of symptoms that look like allergic reactions and some people benefit from antihistamines. Covid is associated with clotting problems, and long Covid makes the blood thick, so some people may benefit from anticoagulants – however these are not without risk and as there are no clinical trials yet, few physicians are willing to confidently prescribe them.

One of the most debilitating long Covid symptoms is Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS). There are simple treatments for POTS, but there is not a single public POTS clinic in the northwest so patients have to go private.

The lack of research and hence evidence means that doctors are reluctant to prescribe and treatments generally are not available on the NHS. Many people have given up going to their doctors and long Covid services have been decommissioned, so there is nothing to refer to anyway. Often when long Covid sufferers do ask for help, all they are offered is talking therapy.

For other conditions it is accepted practice to prescribe low-risk treatments that work to alleviate symptoms, even if we do not fully understand why. But long Covid services have been slaves to the guidelines. Many people with long Covid have a lower quality of life than many cancer patients.

The government needs to acknowledge that its response to the pandemic, from the initial infection control measures to the subsequent treatment of long Covid sufferers, has been a catastrophe. They knew it was airborne very early on in the pandemic but downgraded the PPE requirements because they hadn't stocked up. Later, when they had sufficient PPE, nobody wanted to admit that they got it wrong. We are still suffering with poorly ventilated hospitals and workplaces, and no better protected against airborne



infection than in 2020.

Millions of people are suffering post-Covid conditions and as the risks of long Covid increase with each re-infection, it is likely that numbers will continue to rise. This will continue until we have effective treatments and this requires the resourcing of research.

The government should be monitoring wastewater so that it can identify spikes in Covid infection rates and put in place appropriate control measures such as mask wearing where necessary.

It should be insisting that workplaces in general and hospitals and care homes in particular are adequately ventilated. Workers need adequate sick pay so they can isolate and get longer term support when they need it. This is overwhelmingly an occupational disease and needs to be recognised as such.

There is a group of healthcare workers who are pursuing a compensation claim against the NHS for its failure to implement adequate infection control measures. □

Our videos

Watch Workers' Liberty's videos and playlists, and subscribe to our youtube channel! Many have subtitles. **Playlists include:**

- ABCs of Marxism, an introductory series
- Black Lives Matter
- The State, Crime, Prisons, and Police
- Socialist Feminism
- The struggle for LGBTIQ rights in the labour movement
- An introduction to Marx's Capital, in 19 parts, with Martin Thomas
- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

Watch, subscribe, like, comment and share: youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK

Behind the “new party” squabbles



Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

Zarah Sultana’s decision to quit Labour and declare she would co-lead a new left party with Jeremy Corbyn reveals much about how what many hope will be a radical alternative is being stitched together in secret.

Instead of democratic debate and open involvement, we see leaks, private Zoom calls, and decisions by an unaccountable clique. If this is how the Sultana-Corbyn group plans to challenge Starmer, it risks repeating the very bureaucratic politics that led to the downfall of Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party.

We only know the story behind Sultana’s 3 July “new party” declaration because it was reported in the capitalist press, not because anyone involved chose to explain their actions. The details of what happened among a small group – few of whom are elected politicians, still less accountable to any organised “base” – come to us via Gabriel Pogrund’s article in the *Sunday Times* (6 July). One side in the spat, presumably Corbyn supporters, leaked the version they wanted public.

Piecing things together, the story is roughly this. There were debates in Corbyn’s circle about what exactly to launch. Some favoured a party proper, but the dominant view – pushed by Andrew Feinstein, Corbyn himself, and Jamie Driscoll – was for an “umbrella” under which local candidates with existing profiles could stand. The “umbrella” model seems to have more support.

New divisions emerged on when to launch a project. By all accounts, Corbyn has been reluctant to move quickly. Why isn’t clear, but his public comments suggest he wants a broader network on the ground first, with groups of ex-Labour councillors. He appears to be busy co-ordinating with those groups of ex-Labour councillors and with others who have previously run as candidates in local and national elections. Meanwhile, Feinstein and others grew impatient.

Talks with Sultana appear to have been underway for some time. A few



weeks ago, Feinstein was cryptic when asked why the new party hadn’t been announced, referring to “sensitive” discussions – which we might guess were with her. Feinstein seems to have led talks with Sultana and is also the main conduit from the Corbyn camp to the SWP.

According to Pogrund, things came to a head on 3 July. A Zoom call was organised by the “organising committee”, apparently an inner core within the shell of the Collective proto-party launched in early 2024 but largely inactive since. The participants were selected by figures like Karie Murphy, Corbyn’s former Chief of Staff. Pogrund reports that Feinstein circulated a note backing a Corbyn-Sultana co-leadership, which Corbyn’s supporters rejected. But the chair, former Respect leader Salma Yaqoob, put it to a vote, and it passed.

Corbyn was reportedly furious, yet still appeared alongside Feinstein at events on Friday and Saturday, with no open comment on the rift.

The SWP is another player here. They were probably not on the Zoom call – Collective didn’t invite them under its umbrella, despite the SWP running a candidate in the 2024 general election. But *Socialist Worker’s* coverage last week (#2963, 9 July) stuck to the Collective omertà: they reported Sultana’s call for a new party (ignoring the “co-leadership” pitch), and Corbyn’s sort-of-support (“discussions are continuing”), without mentioning his 18-hour delay in responding.

Comically, they covered Corbyn’s speech at their Marxism event with no context, merely quoting his call to “build an independent political voice that unites independent groups all over the country”, apparently asserting his vision of an umbrella rather than a party.

SW declared it “urgent to turn this call into a real organisation” and endorsed the umbrella model, adding their own filters (no austerity, trans rights, free Palestine) with no means to enforce them. They also stayed silent on any idea that

such candidates should be rooted in the labour movement or democratically accountable. Where SW did implicitly criticise the Corbyn-Sultana project, their front page tellingly dropped the word “party”, merely stating that “the new left can take on Starmer” if linked to strikes and protests – hardly the clarity needed.

Secret meetings and unaccountable leaderships are not the way forward. Meetings based on class-struggle campaigns and built on open, democratic principles would be welcome. They must give space for debate about working-class socialist politics and ongoing political activity and discussion on the streets and in workplaces, not just electoralist manoeuvres. □

• More: bit.ly/zs-np

Who are the “independents”?

Who are the independents hoping to assemble under Corbyn’s umbrella might be. The four “Gaza Independents” elected in 2024 illustrate some of the problems. Worst among them is Birmingham MP Ayoub Khan, a former Lib Dem councillor and parliamentary candidate, who since becoming an MP has called for troops to break the Birmingham bin strike.

While many independents Corbyn seeks to organise are leftish ex-Labour councillors, there are other groups too. For instance, the group around Leanne Mohamad in Ilford North (Redbridge Independents/Ilford in Conversation), who nearly defeated Wes Streeting in 2024, looks to Aspire in Tower Hamlets as their model.

Aspire currently runs Tower Hamlets council. One notable figure defending Corbyn on the “organising committee” of Collective is Amy Jackson, who was Corbyn’s political secretary when Labour leader. She then (after a stint as a Unite union official) became Chief of Staff and Head of the Mayor’s Office for Aspire’s Lutfur Rahman in Tower Hamlets.

Whom does she represent? The

answer is no-one. If this is “community-based” politics, it is a narrow communalist version. Only two of them are women. It is doing more successfully what George Galloway’s Respect claimed to do back in its day. There is a real risk that Corbyn’s “umbrella” will encourage exactly this kind of communalist politics. □

SWP in retreat

The latest developments mark a considerable retreat for the SWP. In March, they launched We Demand Change (WDC). According to their own conference resolutions, it had two purposes: first, to unite the wave of demonstrations – over Gaza, trans rights, climate action, and the emerging disability benefit cuts – under their leadership; second, to use that to launch electoral challenges to Labour as early as the May 2026 local elections.

They promised WDC groups nationwide and pledged that when Starmer’s disability benefit cuts came to Parliament, WDC would spearhead a “day of rage.”

None of that happened. WDC-branded events have taken place in only a handful of places, and few structures beyond WhatsApp groups have been established. WDC has played no role in resisting the disability cuts. A revitalised DPAC has had significant impact, and there has been a revolt in the local Labour Parties, but nothing from WDC.

I was at the DPAC demos in Westminster before and during the second reading vote (30 June and 1 July). Some SWP members are active in DPAC, but there was no WDC presence – indeed no visible SWP presence at all, enraged or otherwise.

The SWP has dabbled in electoral politics. In the May elections, they stood an “independent” in a Chesterfield council by-election, winning 9% and mainly taking votes from the Greens. They declared that made them “the left opposition to Labour,” even though they neither ran as the SWP nor matched the previous Green vote.

In late June, another SWP “independent” in Edinburgh won just 39 votes out of over 6,000 – 0.6% of votes cast and only 0.2% of those eligible – coming 8th, behind assorted cranks and mavericks. It is striking that despite presumably running a campaign, the SWP failed so badly they did not even mention the result in *Socialist Worker*.

They appear desperate to be part of Corbyn’s umbrella, but also to realise they will not get a free hand to set up local groups under their leadership as they had hoped. □



For socialists to understand and confront left antisemitism from primitive or Stalinist roots to the “anti-imperialism of fools”. 265 pages, £9.99 □ bit.ly/shop-wl

The tariff war and Chinese capitalism

By Martin Thomas

Donald Trump has launched a tariff war – an erratic, zigzag war, but a war – with the whole world, and with China especially.

Who will win? No-one. Who will lose? Probably US-based capitalism more than most, and China less.

The consequences for workers will be adverse everywhere. Greater instability will prompt bigger class struggles, and the final outcome depends on those struggles.

As yet, no big world-wide spiral of retaliatory tariffs looks likely. Most governments and capitalists are looking instead to easing and increasing trade with non-US markets. But some countries which depend on exporting cheap clothing to the USA are heavily threatened. And the US is also threatening its own industrial base.

About half of world goods trade now is “intermediate” goods – not raw materials, not finished products, but parts or processed materials. US capitalists will have to pay more for their industrial inputs, and so their finished products will be less competitive on world markets.

Lots of capitalists in the USA know this. But for now Trump has political hegemony. The worried capitalists hope that Trump’s tariffs bite will be less than his bark.

That Trump could even start his trade war – i.e. rally a sizeable chunk of billionaire opinion to himself – comes from the untenability of the path that US capitalism has been on for 40-odd years. The US has run huge budget deficits, creating a vast market in US Treasury IOUs and paying (now) \$1 trillion a year (about \$3,000 for every person in the USA) in interest to the owners of those IOUs.

That market, and those payouts, underpin the US’s centrality in world financial dealings and speculation. The US can do it because the dollar is “world money”: every large-scale capitalist needs easy access to dollars.

The US has capitalist privilege. US capitalists have easy access to credit, and the US middle class can spend beyond its means, as nowhere else.

But the debt is growing faster than the production financed by credit. Investment is sucked into areas which are profitable for the operators, but do not expand total surplus value, such as finance and advertising. (Google and Meta, as commercial operations, are basically advertising outlets).

Costs are raised by the finance and advertising booms, and skilled labour is sucked into them, making world-market competition more difficult for other industries.

Trump’s economists have quack answers. They say high tariffs will raise government revenue and “re-shore” in-

dustries. Some of them hope to use tariff threats to force US trading standards on other countries (easier emission standards for vehicles, for example), but I doubt they can do that. The US ruling class still has much power in the world market, but not as much as Trump thinks.

The “re-shoring” is unlikely too. The Biden administration tried to “re-shore” by direct subsidy, for example, to chip factories, with limited success.

New high-tech factories take many years to build and need a lot of infrastructure. Few capitalists will bet on a costly new factory when they don’t know what tariffs will be years ahead.

Today no-one knows tariffs even weeks ahead. Trump is 79 years old, and even if he establishes a “Trumpite” succession, the successor may have different tariffs.

Moreover, the USA, like many other densely-built “old” capitalist countries with hypertrophied finance and similar sectors, and sizeable middle-class lobbies disliking development in “their” backyards, has diminished capacity for big construction projects. The 800 km high-speed rail link between San Francisco and Los Angeles was decided in 2008. Construction has dawdled. Now Trump has cancelled federal funding for it, and maybe little of it will ever be built. By contrast, China has 48,000 km of high-speed rail, most built since 2008. The American Society of Civil Engineers says that US infrastructure improved under Biden, but only from “C-minus” to “C-plus”.

Qualified

Manufacturing and construction in the USA are short of qualified workers like electricians and welders, rather than those manufacturing-qualified workers being short of jobs. (The USA has twice as many lawyers as it has electricians). The leading US-based capitalists, who draw revenues from many countries, still thrive. US-based capitalist industry, not so much so, though it has an advantage over European in easier credit, weaker union organisation, weaker workers’ rights, lower social overheads, a bigger home market (the EU “single market” is still not quite “single”), and more immigration. Trump’s far right aims to increase some of those advantages, but lose the immigration advantage.

Chinese capitalism has the cruel advantages, too, and more (no legal unions at all). It has gained from rural-to-urban migration (it was 18% urban in 1978; 65% today). And it has greater adaptability than US-based industry in several ways.

The US government limited the 2008-9 crash by debt financial therapy, essentially stuffing billions into banks so that they would not go bust and in due course would start lending again.



To the surprise of many, including me, the Chinese government got through 2008-9 and its sequels with no crash. It was exporting 36% of production in 2006, and quickly adjusted to exporting only 20%.

It did that by vast state efforts which directly financed infrastructure and housing construction, plus letting real wages rise so that hundreds of millions of people got fridges, washing machines, phones, etc. for the first time. Investment came mostly via local rather than central government. That has created a vast overhang of local government debt, but it meant China was able to combine some of the capitalist “advantages” of direct state allocation with those of market competition. (By contrast, the attempted investment drives of the old USSR and Eastern Europe, in which all factory progress depended on lobbying central bureaucrats for favour, usually fell into stop-start delay, outside military production).

China has also drawn expansive power from its substratum of small capitalist enterprises.

Tsarist Russia, so Trotsky argued, had unusually weak small-workshop capitalism in its cities. Much of that collapsed with “war communism”. With the New Economic Policy from early 1921, the workers’ government relicensed small cooperatives and private workshops. Those few small workshops were extinguished in Stalin’s forced-march “Second Revolution” from 1928-9.

China followed the Stalinist model in political and social repression, but not in small-industry economics.

“Street industry”, producing intermediate as well as consumer goods, was endemic in the cities before 1949. Even in the hyper-statist period of 1958-62, it continued, though then much “street industry” had to hand over revenues to the “urban communes”. It was damaged but not abolished in the “Cultural Revolution” (1966-76).

For decades now, since the end of the 1970s, private “street industries” have regrown, and successful ones have been allowed or even helped to expand on a private-profit basis.

In areas like Yiwu, clusters of small workshops have become big players in world trade. BYD, now the world’s biggest electric-vehicle maker, started in 1994 as a company with just 20 workers making mobile-phone batteries.

China still has a basic old-age pension of only US \$25 a month, but is developing a workforce more suited to world-market capitalist expansion than the USA’s. At Chinese universities, 36% study engineering; at US universities, 19% study “business” courses from which they learn little, and another 13% health courses where they learn, but not for export production.

Clumsy

Chinese capitalists are likely to be able to find new markets and find ways round Trump’s clumsy tariffs.

Now, in many sectors China-based industry is more technically-advanced, and has greater research outreach, than US-based. And, to put it another way: the Chinese ruling class has greater capacities for rapidly imposing costs of adjustment on the working class and still keeping control.

China has had big surges of inflation at times since the 1980s, though at present it is closer to deflation. It is only slowly recovering from a property crash in 2021 which at one point left 80 million dwellings built but unsaleable. It has had youth unemployment rates of 15 to 20% in its cities for many years. Some 200 million there live on scraps of pay from the “gig economy”. The political regime keeps the lid on.

The growth of Chinese capitalism, slower now than at its peak, but still strong, is the growth of capitalism with all its contradictions. It is also the growth of the working class. It is groundwork for growth of working-class revolt, already visible for many years in numerous strikes and the workers’ rebellions which were part of ending China’s Covid ultra-lockdown.

Xi Jinping has tightened control over bureaucrats and managers. Why? More development, in choppy world-market conditions, will bring more crises, and more disputes or even clashes of interest within the ruling class. Xi seeks control to pre-empt or stifle those disputes.

He can’t do that forever, any more than the US ruling class can thrive forever by clocking up more and more debt. Eventually, conflicts within the ruling class will break out into the open, and when they do this time in China, there will be a vastly stronger working class able to intervene than there was in previous rulers’ fallings-out. □

Fund higher education, fee-free!

By Vicki Morris

The outlook for Higher Education is grim. The House of Commons Library [says](#): “The financial sustainability of the higher education sector in England has come under increasing strain following reductions to government grants and undergraduate tuition fee caps not keeping pace with inflation in recent years. Recent inflationary pressures have also placed demands on universities in relation to pay settlements, energy costs, and building projects.”

In November 2024, England’s HE regulator the Office for Students (OfS) estimated three quarters of HE institutions could be in deficit by 2025-26. Universities are trying to balance the books by cutting jobs and courses. The Queen Mary uni UCU branch blog (bit.ly/cuts-uni) struggles to keep up with the mounting toll of cuts.

With governments creating a hostile environment for international students, they are taking their money elsewhere and the sector’s over-reliance on international student fees means universities are now in trouble.

Students are noticing the cuts, and at some universities like Sheffield have actively supported workers’ strikes. But they are often preoccupied with making ends meet and having enough time to keep up with their courses in between part-time jobs.

The democracy of the national students’ organisation, the NUS, has been

gutted and they are not currently a force that can galvanise students to resist the cuts. NUS are running four worthy but ineffectual petition campaigns: to keep the graduate route visa for international students; to equalise the minimum wage rate, currently lower for young people; on student housing; and for lowering the voting age to 16 in England, the same as Wales and Scotland. But they are doing nothing about the cuts or HE funding beyond urging the Government to look into reform.

To fight back we need to build local campaigns of students and campus unions!

UCU is running a campaign of its branches reporting their employers to the Health and Safety Executive for excessive workload and workplace stress. So far so gloomy.

University bosses’ answer is to look into mergers, sharing back office functions, and lobbying the Government to index tuition fees to inflation. Those that can continue to compete for international students, but that will not plug the gaps.

Priorities

Higher Education is way down the list of priorities for the Government, especially while the NHS and other public services are facing so much pressure. It is easier to ignore this divided sector of competing institutions whose leaders rely on polite lobbying and avoid having too much Government interference in their autonomy or scrutiny of how they run their own affairs, especially if it might mean too bright a light shone on their own inflated salaries.

University chiefs were happy that tuition fees have recently been put up.

Most Higher Education (HE) unions are against relying on tuition fees for funding and argue instead for free education, funded through progressive general taxation, with tertiary education free for all that can benefit from it.

Countries with free education include Czechia, Finland, Germany, Sweden, and even, for home students, Scotland.

Even there, for example, Scotland, the money available from the centre may not be enough.

But free education is the best way to fund a public service that benefits the whole of society and allows people to realise their learning potential unburdened with debt.

The Labour Government made economic growth one of their key targets. Whatever one thinks of that, they are failing to acknowledge the role that HE plays there.

They simply insist on universities solving their problems through “efficiency”, that is, through attacking workers’ jobs and welfare, damaging the student experience, and, increasingly, cutting courses in arts, humanities, and pure

sciences that are less popular with applicants because less focused on improving job prospects.

At individual universities there are industrial action ballots and strikes to pressure the management to back off job cuts, but there is little coordination at a national level in any union. UCU has organised the most industrial action ballots, but still fewer than one might expect. Unison has been slow to move to industrial action ballots but its Service Group Executive will re-focus on pushing this in branches in the next period.

Typically at a university facing cuts, formal consultation on them opens simultaneously with the opening rounds of voluntary redundancy (VR). By the time the unions have built their campaign, VR is happening. Industrial action ballots then may or may not, and at several unis the unions have struck against compulsory redundancies (and even won).

HE unions need to be quicker off the mark with ballots. They should also look to resist job cuts altogether: work is heavier even if the cuts are by VR.

It’s important to keep organising throughout the summer so that action can be taken at the start of the 2025-26 academic year when it can have a big impact.

UCU passed policy at its annual conference to explore opening a general trade dispute with the Secretary of State for Education, but that seems held up somewhere in UCU HQ. It would be hard to pull off. Universities are individual employers. But coordinated local disputes alongside a national fight over pay could make an impact on the Labour government as well as on individual institutions.

Represented

Five HE unions are represented in pay talks with the employers’ representative, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA).

This year HE workers have been offered a 1.4% pay rise, on all grades, which if it is imposed will be yet another real terms pay cut and a big one, with inflation above 3%.

UCEA are also blackmailing the unions, saying that progress on an overdue pay spine review and other reforms depends on the unions committing not to ballot over the pay offer. “It’s all or nothing”.

Unison and Unite have just held a consultative ballot on pay and recommended rejection; UCU has set dates for a consultation.

The prospects for a fight on pay are iffy. Many staff are nervous that asking for a decent pay rise will make redundancies more likely. Most staff, however, simply have no economic choice but to seek a pay rise. The unions are

PUBLIC SECTOR PAY 2025

Junior Doctors	5-6% (4% + £750)
Armed Forces	4.5%
RPI (year to April)	4.47%
Consultants	4%
Teachers	4%
Prison Officers	4%
Civil Servants	3.75%
Nurses and other NHS Staff	3.6%
Inflation (year to April)	3.5%
School and Council Workers	3.2%
Higher Education Staff	1.4%

aiming to coordinate their response, and a united fightback on pay, with action in the first term, could run alongside and help to build the fightback against cuts.

The fight for decent pay is closely linked with solving the wider HE funding crisis.

Alongside industrial battles, for staff and students, we need a growing and sustained political campaign for free education!

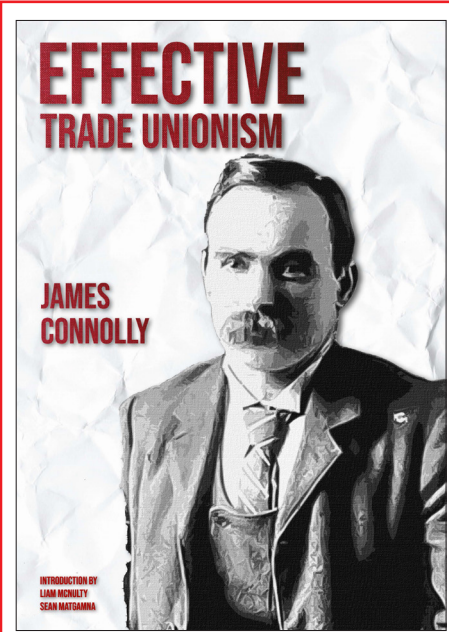
Current disputes include:

- Unite at Liverpool University struck on 20-21 June in a dispute over hybrid working. Their picket line was visited by a delegation of HE Unison members attending their national conference.

- UCU at University of Nottingham will strike on 24 July against potential compulsory redundancies in Phase 1 of a year-long process of “right-sizing” called “Future Nottingham”. Phase 1 has targeted support staff, mainly administrators from central teams, with 258 jobs to go. Most will go through VR but compulsory redundancies have not been ruled out, and from September the university will move to Phase 2, cutting courses, academic roles, and admin staff who support them. Phase 3 will look at the estate and could lead to outsourcing. Unison has just completed a consultation ballot and is racing to catch up with UCU to enable united action in September.

- UCU members at University of Bristol’s Centre for Academic Language Development have voted to strike against the threatened redundancy of 45 staff.

- University of Birmingham Unison has voted for strikes in a local dispute over pay. Unison is claiming 6+% against an offer of 4.1%. □



Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly’s organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death was industrial unionism, workers’ solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. 64 pages £5 □

workersliberty.org/publications

The Trotskyis

An eyewitness report by "MB"

From the mid-1930s, for decades, to be called a "Trotskyite" by the official "Communists", the Stalinists, was to be branded a "wrecker", a "fascist", or, where Stalinists were strong enough, to be targeted for murder.

Of the tens or hundreds of thousands of supporters of the 1926-7 United Opposition to Stalin within the Bolshevik Party, as far as we know three got out of the USSR. Trotsky was exiled in 1929, when Stalin did not yet reckon his bureaucratic power sufficient simply to kill the oppositionists, and survived, with difficulty, until a Stalinist agent murdered him in Mexico in 1940. Victor Serge was released in April 1936 thanks to his status as a well-known writer, and survived to die of a heart attack in Mexico in 1947. Ante Ciliga got out in late 1935 thanks to his Italian citizenship, wrote an important memoir, and then moved to the right.

The regime killed all the others, as far as we know, including those who had, under immense pressure, capitulated politically to Stalin. Long before the time the Gulag began to empty, after 1953, the Trotskyists had been wiped out.

Outside the USSR Stalinists usually did not have sufficient power to kill Trotskyists at will. But in some countries there were many murders. Stalinists continued to harass and slander Trotskyists (as "wreckers") well into the 1970s.

The mass Communist Parties of the 1950s-80s are long gone. But Stalinist politics continue influential, and their denunciations of "Trotskyites" have even had a new vogue in recent years. Back in the 1930s "Trotskyist" came to be accepted, reluctantly, by the rebel Marxists as a descriptive word which could be used by friends, enemies, and the indifferent alike. "Trotskyite" was always a specifically Stalinist accusation-label.

In an era when many leftists see China's vicious Stalin-inspired regime as something like a socialist model, we need to remember.

During the middle and at the end of the 1930's, the Trotskyists formed a quite disparate group at Vorkuta: one part of them kept its old name of "Bolshevik-Leninists." There were almost 500 at the mine, close to 1,000 at the camp of Oukhto-Petchora, and certainly several thousands altogether around the Petchora district.

The orthodox Trotskyists were determined to remain faithful to the end

to their platform and their leaders. In 1927, following the resolutions of the Fifteenth Congress of the party, they were excluded from the Communist Party and, at the same time, arrested. From then on, even though they were in prison, they continued to consider themselves communists; as for Stalin and his supporters, "the apparatus men," they were characterised as renegades from communism.

Among these "Trotskyists" were also found people who had never formally belonged to the CP and did not join the Left Opposition, but who tied their own fate with it to the very end – even when the struggle of the opposition was most acute.

In addition to these genuine Trotskyists, there were in the camps of Vorkuta and elsewhere more than 100,000 prisoners who, members of the party and the youth, had adhered to the Trotskyist opposition and then at different times and for diverse reasons (of which the principal were, evidently, the repression, unemployment, persecutions, exclusion from schools and university faculties, etc.) were forced to "recant their errors" and withdraw from the opposition.

The orthodox Trotskyists arrived at the mine during the summer of 1936 and lived in a compact mass in two large barracks. They categorically refused to work in the pits; they worked only on the surface, and for only eight hours, not the 10 or 12 required by the regulations as the other prisoners were forced to do.

They did so on their own authority, in an organised manner, openly flouting the camp regulations. In the main they had already served nearly ten years in deportation.

In the beginning, they were sent into political isolators and then afterwards exiled to Solovka; finally, they arrived at Vorkuta. The Trotskyists formed the only group of political prisoners who openly criticised the Stalinist "general line" and offered organised resistance to the jailers.

Nevertheless, there were significant divergences within this group. Some considered themselves disciples of Timothy Sapronov... and insisted on being called "Sapronovists" or "democratic-centralists." They claimed to be more to the left than the Trotskyists and thought that the Stalinist dictatorship had already reached the stage of bourgeois degeneration by the end of the 1920's, and that the rapprochement of Hitler and Stalin was very probable. Nevertheless, in the event of war, the

"Sapronovists" declared themselves for the defense of the USSR.

Among the "Trotskyists" were also found partisans of the "Right Wing," that is to say of Rykov and of Bukharin, as well as followers of Shliapnikov and of his "Workers' Opposition" platform.

But the great majority of the group was made up of authentic Trotskyists, supporters of L D Trotsky. They openly defended the so-called Clemenceau thesis: "the enemy is in our country. It is first necessary to get rid of the reactionary government of Stalin and only after that to organise the defense of the country against the external enemies."

In spite of their differences, all of these groups at the mine lived in a friendly enough fashion under one common denominator, "the Trotskyists." Their leaders were Socrate Guevorkian, Vladimir Ivanov, Melnais, V.V. Kossior and Trotsky's ex-secretary, Posnansky.

Guevorkian was a calm man, very balanced, reasonable, full of good sense. He spoke without hurry, weighing his words, without any affectation or theatrical gestures. Up to the time of his arrest, he had worked as an expert for the Russian Association of the Centers of Scientific Research of the Institute of Human Sciences. He was an Armenian, and, at this time, was at least 40. His younger brother was imprisoned with him.

Opposition students

Melnais, a Lett, was a little younger than Guevorkian. After having been a member of the Central Committee of the Young Communists, he studied at the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of the University of Moscow, where, in 1925-27, he headed a very important group (several hundred people) of Opposition students. At University meetings, when Melnais intervened, the Stalinists stirred up a storm of hues and cries, preventing him from speaking. But obstinately, doggedly, Melnais waited; when the howlers were out of breath, exhausted and silent, the chairman of the meeting rang the bell and told him, "Your time is up!"

Melnais replied, "Excuse me, that was your time. You have conducted yourselves like devils and you have screamed; I have been silent. Now, it is my turn to speak." He then spoke to the audience.

At the end of 1927, Melnais was one of the first members of the Opposition at the University to be arrested. His arrest provoked an explosion of indignation among the students. The



**СТЕРЕТЬ С ЛИЦА ЗЕМЛИ ВРАГА НАРОДА ТРОЦНОГО
И ЕГО КРОВАВУЮ ФАШИСТСКУЮ ШАЙКУ!**

Stalinist poster from 1937: "Wipe Trotsky, enemy of the people, and his bloody fascist gang off the face of the earth!"

Text at the top says: "Destroy the
beast"

revolting details of the arrest were repeated in the corridors and classrooms of the University. Melnais was married and lived in a private apartment. His wife, also a student, was pregnant. During the night, her labour pains started. Having phoned for an ambulance, Melnais nervously paced to and fro in the apartment, waiting for the doctor. Hearing the doorbell ring, he eagerly opened the door and let in three people dressed in civilian clothes. "This way please, my wife is really in pain," he said, showing the way.

"Just one minute!" one of the men stopped him. "For a moment we are not interested in your wife, but in you," and he showed him a warrant for his arrest. The doctor and ambulance men arrived very soon; Melnais' wife was taken to the hospital ... and he to the Lubianka prison.

Melnais had been imprisoned ever since. In political isolators and in exile, he spent a lot of time working on economic problems and soon turned out to be an eminent and talented economist.

Vladimir Ivanov was a hearty man, with the round and full face of a successful merchant, with a big black mustache and intelligent grey eyes. In spite of his 50 years, one sensed in him a strong will and the strength of a bear. An old Bolshevik and member of the Central Committee, Ivanov, until his arrest, directed the Eastern Chinese railroad. He, as well as his wife, had belonged to the "Democratic Centralist" group and were among the support-

ts at Vorkuta

ers of Sapronov. When the Fifteenth Congress decided that belonging to the Opposition and to the Party was incompatible, Ivanov quit the ranks of the Opposition, but this did not save him; he was arrested after the assassination of Kirov.

At the camp, he was in charge of the narrow railroad that linked the mine of Vorkuta to the Oussa River. In 1936, following directives from headquarters, the NKVD of the camp concocted a charge accusing Ivanov of sabotage of this laughing-stock of a railroad, 60 kilometers long. A special jury of the high tribunal of the Autonomous Soviet Republic of Komis came to the camp. In secret session, after having read the indictment, they said to Ivanov: "What can you say to justify yourself?"

"You have your orders," he replied. "You are assigned to carry out all the necessary formalities and to cowardly enforce them with the death penalty. You are forced to do this. You know as well as I that these accusations are manufactured from whole cloth, and have been prepared by compliant Stalinist police functionaries. So, don't complicate your job; do your business. As for me, I refuse to participate in your juridical comedy." Then he said, pointing a finger at three false witnesses taken from among the common criminals: "Why don't you ask them? In return for a package of makhorka they will not only tell you that I am a saboteur, but also a parent of the Mikado."

The tribunal could get no more out of him; they could only interrogate the hand-picked "witnesses." The examination at the hearing was cut short. On the other hand, the deliberation of the jury lasted a very long time. First a telephone call, then a long wait for the answer, and finally, the sentence was pronounced: "Deserves the highest penalty; but taking into account this ... and that ... sentence is commuted to ten years imprisonment at hard labour." And with shifting eyes, not daring to look at Ivanov, the members of the jury quickly collected their papers and departed trembling. The false witnesses, approached Ivanov, seeking to justify themselves. "Get out of my way, you dirty swine!" he roared, and returned to his barracks.

Kossior was a middle aged man, very short (almost a dwarf), with a large head. Before his arrest, he occupied a leading post in the management of the petroleum industry. His brother, Stanislas Kossior, then sat on the Politburo, and, at the same time, was secretary of the Central Committee of the Ukra-

nian Communist Party. (He was later liquidated by Stalin. His case was mentioned by Khrushchev in his report to the Twentieth Congress.) In the camp, V.V. Kossior worked in the boiler room, carrying coal in a wheelbarrow to keep the boiler going. Also at the camp were both his wives, the first, a Ukrainian from whom he was divorced, and the second, a Russian whom he had married in exile.

Posnansky, a handsome well-built man about 35 to 38 years old, was deeply interested in music and chess. Trotsky's second secretary, Grigoriev, was also at Petchora.

In the autumn of 1936, soon after the frame-up trials against the leaders of the Opposition, Zinoviev, Kamenev and the others, the entire group of "orthodox" Trotskyists at the mine, got together to confer with one another.

Opening the meeting, Guevorkian addressed those present: "Comrades! Before beginning our meeting, I ask you to honor the memory of our comrades, guides and leaders who have died as martyrs at the hands of the Stalinist traitors of the revolution."

The entire assembly stood up. Then, in a brief and very trenchant speech, Guevorkian explained that it was necessary to examine and resolve the key problem: what should be done and how should they conduct themselves from now on?

"It is now evident that the group of Stalinist adventurers have completed their counter-revolutionary coup d'etat in our country. All the progressive conquests of our revolution are in mortal danger. Not twilight shadows, but those of deep black night envelop our country. No Cavaignac spilled as much working class blood as has Stalin. Physically annihilating all the opposition groups within the party, he aims at total personal dictatorship. The party and the whole people are subjected to surveillance and to summary justice by the police apparatus. The predictions and the direst fears of our opposition are fully confirmed. The nation slides irresistibly into the Thermidorian swamp. This is the triumph of the centrist petty-bourgeois forces, of which Stalin is the interpreter, the spokesman, and the apostle. No compromise is possible with the Stalinist traitors and hangmen of the revolution.

"Remaining proletarian revolutionaries to the very end, we should not entertain any illusion about the fate awaiting us. But before destroying us, Stalin will try to humiliate us as much as he can. By throwing political prisoners

Lenin's General Staff of 1917

STALIN, THE EXECUTIONER, ALONE REMAINS



From Socialist Appeal 9 March 1938. Muranov survived in obscurity, and Kollontai lived on as a diplomat in Sweden. All the others died or were killed by Stalin

in with common criminals, he strives to scatter us among the criminals and to incite them against us.

"We are left with only one means of struggle in this unequal battle: the hunger strike. With a group of comrades, we have already drawn up a list of our demands of which many of you are already informed. Therefore, I now propose to you that we discuss them together and make a decision."

Hunger strike

The meeting lasted only a short time; the question of the hunger strike and of concrete demands had already been debated for some months by the Trotskyists. Some Trotskyist groups in other camps (Oussa station, Tchibiou, Kotchmess, etc.) had also been discussing the matter and had sent their agreement to support the demands and to participate in the hunger strike. These demands were ratified unanimously by those present. They stipulated:

Abrogation of the illegal decision of the NKVD, concerning the transfer of all Trotskyists from administrative camps to concentration camps. Affairs relating to political opposition to the regime must not be judged by special NKVD tribunals, but in public juridical assemblies.

The work day in the camp must not exceed eight hours.

The food quota of the prisoners should not depend on their norm of output. A cash bonus, not the food ration, should be used as a production incentive.

Separation, at work as well as in the barracks, of political prisoners and

common criminals.

The old, the ill and women political prisoners should be moved from the polar camps to camps where the climatic conditions were more favorable.

It was recommended, at the time of the meeting, that the sick, the invalids, the old should not participate in the hunger strike; however, all those in question energetically rejected this proposal.

The meeting did not decide the day on which the hunger strike should begin; a five member directorate, headed by Guevorkian, was delegated to inform the other Trotskyist groups spread over the immense territory containing the camps of Oukhto-Petchora.

Three weeks later, October 27, 1936, the massive hunger strike of the political prisoners began, a strike without precedent and a model under Soviet camp conditions. In the morning, at reveille, in almost every barrack, prisoners announced themselves on strike. The barracks occupied by the Trotskyists participated 100 percent in the movement. Even the orderlies struck. Close to 1,000 prisoners, of whom half worked in the mine, participated in this tragedy, which lasted more than four months.

The first two days, the strikers stayed in their usual places. Then the camp administration busied itself in isolating them from the rest of the prisoners, concerned lest the latter followed their example. In the tundra, 40 kilometers from the mine, on the banks of the Sylaga River, there were primitive half-de-

continued on page 14 →

→ from page 13

molished barracks, which previously had been used during the preliminary boring of the mines. In great haste, these barracks were put into make-shift condition; a call was sent out to the inhabitants of the region, who, with their teams of reindeer, transported the hunger strikers there, where they soon numbered about six hundred. The others were brought together not far from Tchibiou.

After having isolated the strikers, the GPU took measures to prevent the movement from spreading in the country and from becoming known outside the frontiers. The prisoners were deprived of the right of corresponding with their families; the salaried employees of the camp lost their holidays and their right to leave. Attempts were made to incite the other prisoners against the strikers. At the mine there were food reserves beyond what was required to sustain those who worked in the pits; the camp administration contended that it had to use up its large reserves of fat and sugar, intended for the underground workers, for artificial feeding of the Trotskyists.

At the end of the first month of the strike, one of the participants died of exhaustion; two others died during the third month. The same month, two strikers, non-orthodox Trotskyists, voluntarily gave up striking. Finally, just a few days before the end of the strike, still another striker died.

Having begun the end of October 1936, the hunger strike lasted 132 days, ending in March 1937. It culminated with the complete victory of the strikers who received a radiogram from the headquarters of the NKVD, drawn up in these words:

"Inform the hunger strikers held in the Vorkuta mines that all their demands will be satisfied."

The Trotskyists were then taken back to the mine, received food reserved

for the sick and, after a period of time, they went back to work, but only above ground; certain of them worked in the office of the director of the mine, in the capacity of paid workers, bookkeepers, economists, etc. Their work day did not exceed eight hours; their food ration was not based on their production norm.

But little by little the other prisoners' interest in the strikers began to diminish. Everyone's interest was now focused on the new trial at Moscow, which was being broadcast by radio; besides, new prisoners began arriving at the end of June. Their stories described mass arrests, outrages, executions without trial behind the walls of the NKVD, and this all over the country. At the beginning, no one wanted to believe this, particularly since the new arrivals spoke unwillingly and rather enigmatically. But little by little, the bonds between them became tighter and the conversations franker. Without letup, new prisoners arrived from Russia; old friends and acquaintances discovered each other: it no longer was possible not to believe the stories.

Impatience

In spite of these obvious facts, a certain number of prisoners waited with impatience for the autumn of 1937 and the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution; they hoped, on this occasion as in 1927, that the government would declare a large-scale amnesty, particularly since a little while earlier the very promising "Stalinist Constitution" had been adopted. But the autumn brought bitter disillusion.

The harsh regime of the camps grew abruptly worse. The sergeants and their assistants in maintaining order – common criminals – having received new orders from the camp director, armed themselves with clubs and pitilessly beat the prisoners. The guards, the watchmen close to the barracks, tormented the prisoners. To amuse themselves during the night they fired on those who went to the toilets. Or else, giving the order, on your bellies, they forced the prisoners to stretch out, naked, for hours on the snow. Soon there were massive arrests. Almost every night, GPU agents appeared in the barracks, called out certain names and led away those called.

Certain Trotskyists, including Vladimir Ivanov, Kossior and Trotsky's son, Serge Sedov, a modest and likeable youth, who had imprudently refused to follow his parents into exile in 1928, were taken in a special convoy to Moscow. We can only believe that Stalin was not satisfied simply to hurl them into the tundra; his sadistic nature thirsted not only for blood; he wished first to immeasurably humiliate them and torture them, coercing them into false self-accusations. Ivanov and Kossior disappeared without trace behind the walls of the Lubianka prison...

Toward the end of the autumn, about 1,200 prisoners found themselves in the old brick field; at least half of these

were Trotskyists. They were all lodged in four large barracks; their food ration was 400 grams of bread a day and not every day. The barracks were surrounded by a barbed wire fence. Nearly 100 freshly recruited guards, supplied with automatic arms, watched the prisoners day and night.

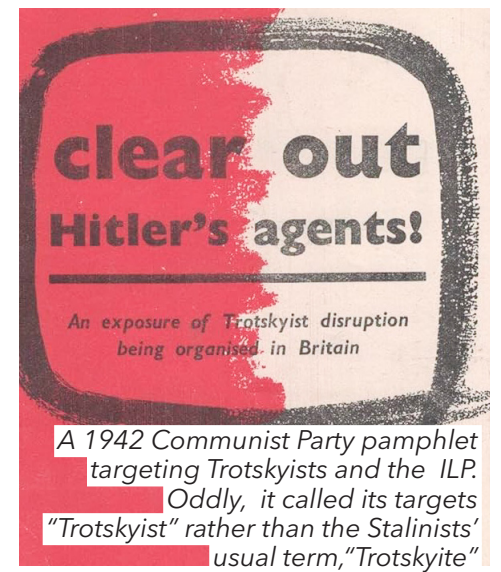
The prisoners arrested at the mine, at Oussa and in other nearby camps were taken to an old brickyard. Those arrested in more distant camps – at Petchora, Ijme, Kojve, Tchibiou, etc – were kept near Tchibiou.

The whole winter of 1937-38 some prisoners, encamped in barracks at the brickyard, starved and waited for a decision regarding their fate. Finally, in March, three NKVD officers, with Kachketine at their head, arrived by plane at Vorkuta, coming from Moscow. They came to the brickyard to interrogate the prisoners. Thirty to forty were called each day, superficially questioned five to ten minutes each, rudely insulted, forced to listen to vile name-calling and obscenities. Some were greeted with punches in the face; Lt. Kachketine himself several times beat up one of them, the old Bolshevik, Virab Virabov, a former member of the Central Committee of Armenia.

At the end of March, a list of 25 was announced, among them Guevorkian, Virabov, Slavine, etc. ... To each was delivered a kilo of bread and orders to prepare himself for a new convoy. After fond farewells to their friends, they left the barracks, and the convoy departed. Fifteen or twenty minutes later, not far away, about half a kilometer, on the steep bank of the little river Verkhni-aia Vorkuta (Upper Vorkuta), an abrupt volley resounded, followed by isolated and disorderly shots; then all grew quiet again. Soon, the convoy's escort passed back near the barracks. And it was clear to all in what sort of convoy the prisoners had been sent.

Two days later, there was a new call, this time of 40 names. Once more there was a ration of bread. Some, out of exhaustion, could no longer move; they were promised a ride in a cart. Holding their breath, the prisoners remaining in the barracks heard the grating of the snow under the feet of the departing convoy. For a long time there was no sound; but all, on the watch, still listened. Nearly an hour passed in this way. Then, again, shots resounded in the tundra; this time, they came from much further away, in the direction of the narrow railway which passed three kilometers from the brickyard. The second "convoy" definitely convinced those remaining behind that they had been irremediably condemned.

The executions in the tundra lasted the whole month of April and part of May. Usually one day out of two, or one day out of three, 30 to 40 prisoners were called. It is characteristic to note that each time, some common criminals, repeaters, were included. In order to terrorise the prisoners, the GPU, from time to time, made publicly known by means of the local radio, the list of those



shot. Usually these broadcasts began as follows: "For counter-revolutionary agitation, sabotage, brigandage in the camps, refusal to work, attempts to escape, the following have been shot ..." followed by a list of names of some political prisoners mixed with a group of common criminals.

One time, a group of nearly a hundred, composed mainly of Trotskyists, was led away to be shot. As they marched away, the condemned sang the Internationale, joined by the voices of hundreds of prisoners remaining in camp.

Shot

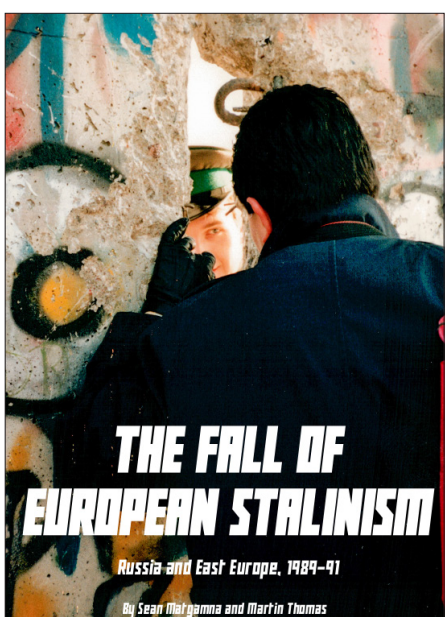
At the beginning of May, a group of women were shot. Among them were the Ukrainian communist, Choumskaia, the wife of I.N. Smirnov, a Bolshevik since 1898 and ex-People's Commissar; (Olga, the daughter of Smirnov, a young girl, apolitical, passionately fond of music, had been shot a year before in Moscow); the wives of Kossior, of Melnais, etc. ... one of these women had to walk on crutches. At the time of execution of a male prisoner, his imprisoned wife was automatically liable to capital punishment; and when it was a question of well-known members of the Opposition, this applied equally to any of his children over the age of 12.

In May, when hardly a hundred prisoners remained, the executions were interrupted. Two weeks passed quietly; then all the prisoners were led in a convoy to the mine.

There it was learned that Yezhov had been dismissed, and that his place had been taken by Beria ...

Among the survivors of the old brickyard, several orthodox Trotskyists found that they had escaped execution. One of these, the engineer R., was very close to Guevorkian and was one of the five leaders who had organised the great hunger strike. At the mine, it was said that R. had saved his life at the cost of treason to his comrades; these suspicions were probably well founded since after the executions, R. enjoyed the confidence of the camp administration and rose to the rank of a director. □

• Slightly abridged from *International Socialist Review*, Vol.24 No.3, Summer 1963, which in turn took the text from the *Menshevik Socialist Messenger*, October-November 1961



In 1991 the USSR collapsed. It was a turning-point in world history. The book surveys socialist responses at the time. £6 □

workersliberty.org/publications

Dangers in the new NHS plan

By Alice Hazel

The government's new NHS plan (see outside pages) talks about community-based provision "ending outpatient care as we know it by 2035". Taking care to the patient is generally good, but the cyclical "in/out" tug of war that goes on between more generalised "cross-disciplinary" care vs inevitably more centralised specialist services is unnecessary.

Both can be appropriate and with reasonable funding both would be available when needed. Instead the plan is for robbing one area of health-care, hospital based specialist services, to expand another, community healthcare, "delivering a shift in investment over the next three to four years as local areas build and expand their neighbourhood health services."

The idea of tech revolutionising healthcare runs throughout the document, with an alarmingly vague, wishful and star-struck tone. The document declares AI, wearables, robotics, genomics, and data as "our five big bets... chosen both on their potential to accelerate healthcare reform but also to secure the financial sustainability of the NHS".

Yes, "people have long turned to their phone as a first port of call for health advice", but the document appears to

recognise no limits to the benefit of this trend. The talk of the NHS developing "relationships" with private providers of health apps and personalised wearables (smart devices doing health observations) must have the tech bros drooling, but patients not so much.

The government has announced £10bn to be spent on technology and transformation over three years from capital and revenue budgets. Care is to be provided "digitally by default" by a "doctor in the pocket" in the form of the NHS App. For example, "in the case of mental health, that could mean virtual therapists providing 24/7 support for mild or moderate need".

Fewer staff

By 2035, the document states "there will be fewer staff than projected in the 2023 Long-Term Workforce Plan" due to the use of tech.

We are reassured that "technology is to enhance care, not replace its human quality". But maybe to replace humans. Digital access will "ensure rapid access for those in generally good health". There won't be a wait to talk to a chat bot, but...

The plan resolves to "start a big conversation on significant contractual changes that provide modern incentives and rewards for high quality and productive care," and "work with staff,

trade unions and employers to modernise terms and conditions".

The plan commits to revive the 2002 model of Foundation Trusts (Trusts with more autonomy). "Every Trust a Foundation Trust by 2035" is surely a mechanism to break the NHS's national term and conditions under the 2004 "Agenda for Change" agreement and to give employers "the power to undertake meaningful performance appraisals, to reward high performing staff, and to act decisively where they identify underperformance."

Rhetoric

Transparency and accountability has been a core element of government rhetoric about the NHS since the Mid Staffordshire Inquiry in 2013. The most effective mechanisms of accountability in NHS history have been compulsory democratic collective input from patients and workers. However the emphasis here is put on such things as a charter of choice, personalised budgets, choosing care based on performance ratings, and funding linked to feedback on an app. This is healthcare by Amazon star ratings not meaningful patient input.

The last Labour government massively increased funding in the NHS, and consequently the service improved a lot. But its measures also expanded

private provision, in the name of addressing shortages, and opened the way for further piecemeal Tory privatisation, undermining the NHS as a comprehensive service, universally available, based on clinical need, free at the point of need.

With this plan, this Labour government continues that Blairite tradition, committing to "continue to make use of private sector capacity to treat NHS patients where it is available... we will enter discussions with private providers to expand NHS provision in the most disadvantaged areas".

Any commitment to a universal system contained here is placed firmly within the context of advantages of data collection and AI models – "as need becomes more predictable, insurance models begin to break down – as insurers compete to avoid covering high-risk individuals. On the other hand, the NHS covers each individual 'from cradle to grave' and has a natural incentive to take advantage of this new science, which will in turn create huge health and economic benefits."

As Blair opened the NHS up to the likes of Virgin and United Healthcare, so Starmer and Streeter are building the bridge for the tech corporations. □

Serbian protests challenge Vučić

By Will Roberts

On Saturday 12 July, Serbia's President Vučić visited a new bridge being constructed in the city of Novi Sad. Protestors were held hundreds of metres from the President by police, who told the camera crews that, in the protests since November 2024, "we were faced with the best-organised colour revolution on European soil".

The protests began after the concrete roof of a newly-constructed train station in Novi Sad, Serbia's second-largest city, collapsed, killing 16. Students have led the movement. The largest single demonstration, 15 March, Belgrade, drew 350,000.

Vučić says this "colour revolution" wants to depose him (Prime Minister Vučević resigned in April), and install a "puppet" regime which they fear would recognise the independence of Kosova.

Among the few actual demands are accountability for the corruption that led to the collapsed train station, the resignation of Vučić, and a snap election. Not much more, yet. The organised left in Serbia is small.

The government has responded by staunchly refusing any election before the next scheduled general election in late 2026/early 2027. Instead of negotiating with protestors, it has used increasingly violent police force to try and wipe out the movement.

Protests

28 June saw 140,000 people in the centre of Belgrade – not the largest protest by far, but still 10% of the capital city's population, and eight months on from the movement's outbreak. Police used tear gas and indiscriminate beatings of peaceful protestors with batons to disperse the demonstration over the course of

several hours, and that has had a rallying effect among protestors.

Amnesty International has published a [call](#) for an investigation into unnecessary police brutality at the protests.

A new protest tactic has taken over post-28 June: blockades. Rather than static rallies, protestors will use dumpsters to block major roads and junctions, or simply walk repeatedly back and forth over road crossings to stop all traffic. When police arrive, the blockade either disperses immediately, only to appear again at another junction, or just sits at the roadside and waits for the police to leave again.

Protest tactics have changed, but so too has repression: in early July a student was left with a broken collarbone after police came into Belgrade University's Law Faculty. Hundreds have been arrested and many beaten for taking

part in blockades, and police regularly hand out "misdeemeanour" charges to random pedestrians around city centres, as a way of stoking anger at the protest movement.

Serbia is not Russia, and Vučić can't be truly indiscriminate in his repression: he is careful to stay on the right side of the EU for fear of consequences, and so far has faced none. But discontent in the country has clearly spread beyond the students that began these protests. A statement has been signed by more than 100 current and former Serbian police officers, urging their colleagues not to enact unlawful orders from the government.

The movement against Vučić's government has not been inherently left-wing by any measure. It is a heterogeneous grouping of liberals, nationalists and young people, all – for the moment – united around vaguely defined com-

mon demands and the wish for new elections. While solidarity with the protests against repression and against the Vučić government is essential, there will need to be an organised, worker-led force to cohere a consistent programme of demands if the protests are to develop well. Either way, as it stands there is no sign of either side backing down. □

More online

Dmitri Shostakovich

An appreciation by
Ian Dolphin and John
Cunningham
bit.ly/w-shost

Norman Tebbit

Thatcher's "semi house-
trained polecat"
bit.ly/n-teb

The SWP and political Islam

By Dashty Jamal

Dashty Jamal is a member of the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Britain holds a soft and controversial stance towards political Islam. Their viewpoint is rooted in an anti-imperialist framework. The SWP's perspective on political Islam understands it primarily as a response to imperialism. The SWP argues that political Islam, including movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, or Hezbollah, generally emerges as a reaction to Western imperialism, occupation, and oppression, particularly in the Middle East. It sees these movements representing a genuine struggle for many ordinary people against dictatorial regimes, Israeli occupation, or American intervention. Although the SWP does not politically support the ideology of political Islam, it alleges that it often fills a void left by the absence of a strong left. According to SWP, Political Islam is not inherently reactionary and must be understood within its material and historical context.

For us, political Islam is a reactionary contemporary movement. The rise of political Islam as a movement is the result of an ideological-political vacuum stemming from the bankruptcy of the nationalist movement and the disarray of the local bourgeoisie in the Middle East. It is one of the alternatives of the Right in society for the renewal of the bourgeois state and ruling structure, which emerged in the context of confrontation with the left and the working class that developed alongside the expansion of capitalism... From our perspective, political Islam is a general title for movements that use Islam as a primary tool for right-wing mobilization by the ruling class and a form of its governing regime against the left in Middle Eastern societies. By this measure, it competes with other sections of capital for its share in global power, particularly with the dominant poles,

According to the political view of the *Socialist Worker*, which is "anti-imperialist and anti-American," America is the source of all conflicts in the Middle East – and it denies the existence of class conflict in these societies, like any other capitalist society based on exploitation and wage labour. In these societies, the bourgeoisie and the working class come into conflict with each other. However, the Socialist Workers believe that nationalism, political Islam, and capitalism in these societies, i.e., the Middle East, must be supported. In this way, it seeks to obscure the class struggle and the working class movement in the Middle East, which stands against capitalism and political Islam, because it believes that in the absence of a strong left, it is political Islam that fills the field.

This view demonstrates its complete incompatibility with communism and the struggles of communists, as well as the internationalist struggle and solidarity.

It is precisely this political interpretation and method that have led the Socialist Workers Party throughout its history to stand in defense of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq. It is appropriate to recall that in September 2001, shortly after the September 11 attacks, the Stop the War Coalition was formed as a response to the planned US-led war on Afghanistan when Afghanistan became the first arena of American retaliation, turning it into a field for American and Western military aggression and the fight against political Islam. The Stop the War Coalition quickly became a central force in the British anti-war movement, especially in the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This movement was active on the ground. In Britain, I, as a communist activist, was a member of the Stop the War Coalition. Within the committee, we held different views on the war. We held different opinions on the war and believed that the Middle East was the theatre of a struggle between several social movements that existed before the war was launched by the United States and the West against sections of political Islam, shaping various political trends in these societies.

Silenced

Unfortunately, the Socialist Workers Party, in the mass protest demonstrations, gave much more space to speakers of Taliban and political Islam than us to express our analysis and views of the war from the perspective of the working class. They altogether boycotted and silenced us! During the Iraq war, they applied the same political approach towards me and my comrades in the Worker-communist Party of Iraq. We, who were anti-war and defended freedom, equality, human and progressive values, and civility in society, were marginalised. Meanwhile, they provided a platform for representatives of movements that practice terror, bombings, femicide, honor killings, and target civilians, portraying them as symbols of resistance and thought! They glorified and entrusted this position in the mass protests in Britain to the reactionary movement of political Islam under the pretext of gathering large crowds at the expense of attacking us as communists and socialists who are staunch defenders of the working class, secularism, progressivism, progressive society, and people's rights and freedoms.

The history of contemporary Iraqi and Kurdish society has been a history of conflict and confrontation between two opposing social movements: The nationalist and Islamic movements working to impose backwardness and

reaction on society and deprive people of fundamental rights and freedoms, of modern life, versus the worker communist, progressive and secular movements advocating free, equal, and prosperous society.

The Worker-communist Party represents this latter front. It is a party that prepares the working class to liberate society. It aims to represent the working class in the struggle and offer a working-class solution to humanity in the political power struggle, which is key to revolutionising the economic foundation of society. Its main struggle is for power and the fate of society...

We are victims of those reactionary currents in the Middle East and have always fought against those movements to end their influence on people's lives. Simultaneously, the struggle against imperialism is part of our strategy for socialist revolution. Unfortunately, they did not want to acknowledge that there are communists and socialists in Iraq who could lead the people's struggle and resistance against occupation and who advocate a clear socialist revolutionary program. These criticisms expose the SWP's strategy of a tactical alliance with Islamist forces as short-sighted and antithetical to socialist principles, and highlight the need for unity based on class and uncompromising opposition to any anti-working-class ideology, whether religious or secular.

Yet, the SWP sees political Islam as a force that has a place in the political landscape of Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Due to its populist and demagogic nature, it obscures the criminal nature of Islamist movements – evident in the Islamic Republic of Iran, terrorist groups in Syria, the Taliban in Afghanistan, ISIS, and other currents in Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Syria... These are concrete examples of crimes, beheadings, mass killings, enslaving women and children, and committing terrorism against civilians.

Recently, at a rally concerning the Israeli war against Iran, they provided a platform to speakers who shamelessly defended the Islamic Republic of Iran. That reactionary, murderous regime that for over 45 years has brutally suppressed workers and people fighting for their freedoms. Routinely executes leftist, socialist, and activists of labour, teachers, youth, women, and political opposition figures. Tens of thousands of activists of the labour and women's movement and political dissidents languish in the dungeons and torture chambers of Evin Prison and other jails. Yet, the same party, under the banner of anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism, portrays the Islamic Republic as a hero standing against America and the West, showering this reactionary regime with

praise!

It is truly shameful that while freedom-loving and progressive people of the world and the international anti-war movement stand against American and Israeli military aggression in the region, the ultimate responsibility for ending this dangerous situation falls on us – we who have no interest in starting or continuing these crimes against humanity – we can raise our direct, strong, and vocal objection to end this ongoing war in the Middle East... They provide a platform for the reactionary regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran to justify the crimes of that misogynist, murderous regime! They divert mass movements of millions demanding an end to the war, calling for an end to the crimes of the Netanyahu government and its allies in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran... into the swamp of legitimising the Islamic regime of Iran, at the expense of the working class and freedom-loving and progressive people of the Middle East!

They cover up the crimes of political Islam! With this political stance towards political Islam and the Iranian regime, the Socialist Worker Party insults the struggle and sacrifice of those thousands of communists, socialists, progressive workers, and progressive people who have been imprisoned or killed by the Islamic regime of Iran or who have been assassinated by Islamist forces and groups in the region! With their stance, they become complicit in the crimes of political Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran against the working class, the workers' movement, and the communist and egalitarian movements in the Middle East. □

Our pamphlets

Browse, download, buy, or listen to [our pamphlets](#) including:

- China and Trotskyism
- Women's Fightback
- The German Revolution: selected writings of Rosa Luxemburg
- For Workers' Climate Action
- Two Nations, Two States
- Workers Against Slavery
- How to Beat the Racists
- Shapurji Saklatvala: Socialist Rebel in Parliament
- Stalinism in the International Brigades
- The story of Sylvia Pankhurst
- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine
- The Occupation of the Cammell Laird Shipyard, Birkenhead 1984
- When workers beat the fascists
- Automation and the working class □

workersliberty.org/publications/

Anti-Trump protests on 17 July

By Martin Thomas

The next day of protest against Trump in the USA will be 17 July, dubbed "Good Trouble" after a phrase from the 1960s civil rights leader John Lewis. (In Britain, there will be a protest 17 September, when Trump arrives for a visit).

The big SEIU union backed a day of [protest](#) on 1 July against ICE raids.

Zohran Mamdani has won the Democrat primary for New York mayor and leads in the polls for the actual election on 4 November. That marks a welcome rallying of the "Sanders movement" left in the USA, which sprouted in 2016 but

more recently has mostly had defeats in Democrat primaries.

Soberly, however, Trump is on a roll. He got his budget Bill through Congress. Elon Musk broke with Trump and said he would finance challenges to Congress people who backed the Bill, yet all but one of 241 Republicans in the House of Reps voted for it.

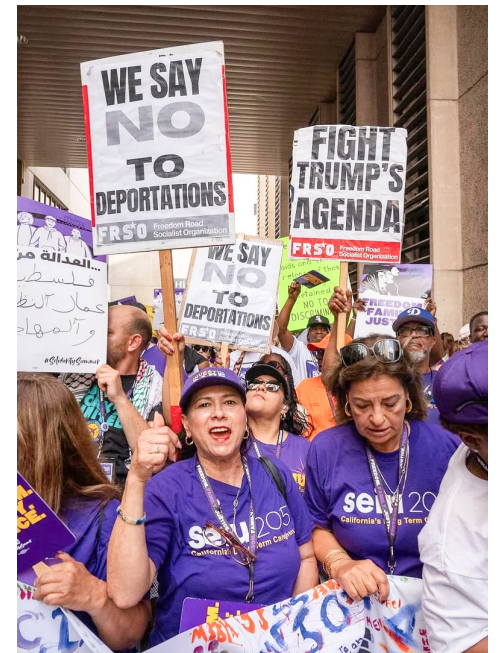
The Bill gives Trump \$28 billion yearly for ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) in place of \$8 billion. He plans to recruit 10,000 more ICE cops and build new detention centres. He has said he is "not necessarily against" a scheme for a 100,000 strong armed

civilian-auxiliary force, but thinks he can do without.

ICE, backed up by National Guard, Marines, and other forces, is terrorising the streets of Los Angeles with mass round-ups.

Some court cases continue to go against Trump, but those do no more than make him swerve, and the Supreme Court has gone with him on important cases.

Trump was always going to have to swerve on his tariffs. In his "90 days" to 9 July he made not the dozens of deals he promised, but two semi-deals, with the UK and Vietnam. But he retains high



Bernie Sanders on the BBB and on the media

As Congress passed Trump's Budget bill, Independent Senator Bernie Sanders said:

At a time of unprecedented income and wealth inequality, the passage of Trump's so-called "Big, Beautiful Bill" by the House represents the largest transfer of wealth from the working class to the obscenely rich in American history.

This bill includes the largest cut ever to Medicaid in order to pay for the largest tax break for billionaires that we have ever seen.

As a result of this legislation, over 16 million Americans will lose their healthcare, 50,000 Ameri-

cans will unnecessarily die, one out of four nursing homes in America may be forced to shut down, 30% of Americans who receive primary care at community health centres may be denied the care they need, over a million hungry kids will be unable to receive nutrition assistance and working-class Americans will be unable to afford to go to college.

Make no mistake about it: This bill is a death sentence for working-class and low-income Americans.

And for what? The Republicans are inflicting all of this pain on the working class in order to hand out a \$1 trillion tax break to the top 1% and a \$900 billion tax break

for large corporations. □

The previous day, Sanders commented on Paramount's deal with Trump.

The decision by the Redstone family, the major owners of Paramount, to settle a bogus lawsuit with President Trump over a 60 Minutes report he did not like is an extremely dangerous precedent in terms of both the First Amendment and government extortion.

Paramount's decision will only embolden Trump to continue attacking, suing and intimidating the media which he has labeled "the enemy of the people"... It is a victory for a president who is attempting to stifle dissent and undermine

American democracy.

It's pretty obvious why Paramount chose to surrender to Trump. The Redstone family is in line to receive \$2.4 billion from the sale of Paramount to Skydance, but they can only receive this money if the Trump administration approves this deal. In other words, the Redstone family diminished the freedom of the press today in exchange for a \$2.4 billion payday.

Make no mistake about it. Trump is undermining our democracy and rapidly moving us towards authoritarianism, and the billionaires who care more about their stock portfolios than our democracy are helping him do it. □

tariffs, he threatens more rises in a short timescale (to 1 August), he pledges a new 50% tariff on copper soon – and without the sudden bond (government IOU) sell-off which his April announcement triggered.

Realistically, 17 July will be smaller than 14 June (which was maybe the biggest one-day protest in US history). Realistically, Mamdani is candidate of a loose campaign coalition, the main organised socialist force in it (the DSA) is in poor health, and his campaign planks are city-specific "cheap services" pledges which he can only implement if the mainstream-Democrat state legislature approves the tax rises he wants.

Realistically, the feistiest of the big unions, the UAW, which backs Mamdani, also backs Trump on tariffs.

But the workers and the unions of the USA are far from having said their last word. □

Union slams Trump's record

This summary is abridged from a [statement](#) by the United Electrical Workers

President Trump signaled his hostility to workers' rights within his first weeks of office, taking the unprecedented step of firing a sitting member of the National Labor Relations Board, Gwynne Wilcox. This left the board without a quorum, and therefore unable to issue decisions...

This was just a taste of things to come. In March, Trump issued an executive order which effectively shut down the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, and later that month began issuing ex-

ecutive orders which seek to cancel collective bargaining agreements covering over one million federal workers...

The executive orders seek to not only overturn existing union contracts, but strip workers' rights to be represented by a union at all...

An even more disturbing and bizarre attack on the ability of the NLRB to protect workers' rights was revealed in mid-April when a whistleblower from the NLRB's information technology department revealed to Congress and NPR that operatives from the so-called "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE), likely removed around 10 gigabytes

of sensitive information from the Board's case management system...

DOGE was at the time headed by billionaire Elon Musk, whose company SpaceX has been the subject of NLRB complaints filed by its workers, and who has shown himself to be rabidly anti-union.

Priorities

Through a combination of DOGE activities and executive orders, Musk and Trump have cut or threatened to cut federal funding to services and programs from healthcare and education to scientific research and environmental protection. They have also carried out

mass firings of federal workers who do everything from administering Social Security to taking care of veterans, and have announced plans to privatise the postal service.

In late May, the House of Representatives passed a budget reconciliation bill by one vote. The "big, beautiful bill," as Trump has styled it, makes clear what Trump's and the Republicans' priorities are – cutting services to the American people in order to pay for tax cuts for themselves and their rich friends. Alongside cuts to Medicaid, education, and other services, the bill also includes massive increases to the military budget, to Immi-

gration and Customs Enforcement, and to military aid to Israel, to assist with their brutal assault on the Palestinian people.

UE locals and members have joined national days of action, including... "Hands Off!" rallies against cuts to federal services on April 5... May Day mobilisations... [and] the "No Kings" mobilisations... June 14. □

- A court case initiated by Elon Musk's SpaceX against the Labor Relations Board, contending that the 1935 worker-rights law setting it up is unconstitutional, is still working [its way](#) through the system.

Bureaucrats, bureaucratisa

By Bill Williams

It is not uncommon to hear trade union activists talk of the “union bureaucracy” and of union “bureaucrats”. It is less common to hear trade union activists explain what they mean by those terms, other than to express their disdain.

Yet an analytically meaningful, and therefore politically useful, understanding of union bureaucracy and “bureaucratisation” is vital to understanding the unions we have and how we might render them more effective as the basic organs of working class self defence.

To that end, the following general considerations take us a long way, perhaps not the whole way, towards an adequate understanding of trade union bureaucracy and bureaucratisation. We:

- Need to see beyond the fact that some people are “union officials” as employees of the union, more or less good at their jobs, more or less helpful.

- Need to avoid narrowly seeing union officials as people of various political stripes who too often are unsupportive, unreliable and liable to sell out. That view contains some truth but lacks explanatory power, which cannot explain why officials sometimes sell out and other times hold their ground, why some prove to be much better than others even with woeful politics – Scargill during the 1984/85 miners’ strike.

- Should understand union officialdom as a social phenomenon, in a materialist rather than a moralistic manner; that is to say, we understand it in what the American Marxist Hal Draper called “... the institutional aspect, the social role and function of the union officialdom or bureaucracy... as an institution.”

- Should do so while recognising



that a trade union bureaucracy is not a bricks-and-mortar institution but a historically derived set of hierarchical, internal and external, relationships operating within a legal framework, internal politics and factions, union rulebook and policies, and within the ebbs and flows of the class struggle, including the pressure of the ruling class and the capitalist state, as well as the challenges of grass-roots activists.

Trade union officialdom has a dual role. Union-employed officials are to one extent or another:

- Our “service providers” (for example, providing legal advice, press releases, conference organisation).

- A vital part of our organising framework (for example, maintaining central membership records, conducting strike ballots, assisting with recruiting).

- Our negotiators or part of our negotiating teams.

- Our public face to the media and to the state.

- The national face of our unions to members.

- In considerable part, our leadership.

And yet trade union history is littered with union officials obstructing or undermining action, settling for less than they should, blocking democratic channels, witch hunting representatives, working behind members’ backs, keeping us in the dark. All too often they wrap our struggles up in system-supporting banalities and misrepresentations rather than frank and honest challenges to the system that exploits us.

The officials are simultaneously our leaders and our controllers, both our agents and agents for bourgeois, government, and state influence upon us.

In normal times, most times, trade unions are bargaining for a deal within capitalism. It is the senior officials who invariably lead those talks at national or company levels. They grow accustomed to that limited role, develop relationships with employer representatives which they become reluctant to damage with membership action, and are simultaneously, in a self fulfilling process, fearful of finding that the troops, who they rarely meet, are not with them.

Compounding this situation, bargaining has an often unrecognised momentum, drawing in officials (and lay negotiators) as they come to identify with the “deals” that begin to emerge, believing their prestige is bound up with the delivery of those deals irrespective of objections amongst members and activists.

Officials conduct negotiations – often under formal or informal confidentiality agreements – as “professional” (in their heads!) negotiators who “know” better than critical members and activists. Their sense of their own importance, of their “specialist” expertise as union “professionals”, renders them all too often hostile to uppity representatives and members who challenge them. Officials who would like a quiet life do not need disputes and challenges and end up seeking to control and narrow the channels through which opposition might flow.

Officials are, in important respects, custodians of our unions, and wish to preserve the unions’ resources. But preservation becomes more important than winning for workers, the *raison d’être* of unions, because the latter entails costs and risks. A winning dispute should see an increase in members, but

a losing dispute might see members leave and the employer disengage to one extent or another from the union.

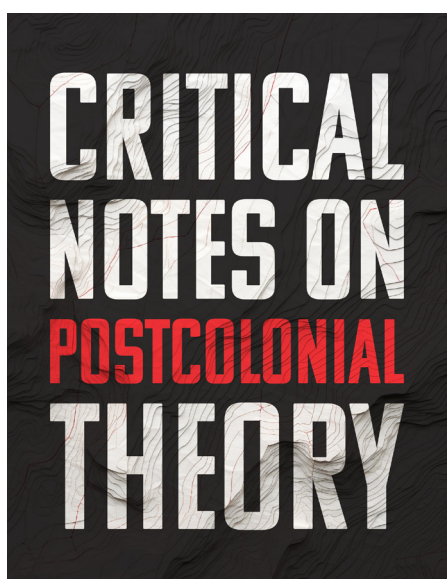
And the officials have material interests that tend to render them relatively content with society as it is. The development of unions historically is also the development of a hierarchical, employed, union workforce – of a labour movement-based career, which a goodly proportion of officialdom see as a career, rather than as a labour movement commitment to which they will give their hearts and souls.

Career

It is a career which lifts them out of their workplaces and into different lives from members and representatives. They usually move onto better salaries, often with more leave and fewer hours, with more flexible working, with fewer line management pressures, fewer membership pressures than workplace reps (because they have moved to become no longer visible or easily contactable), and generally much less pressure than many lay representatives drowning in myriad union responsibilities trying to cover many of these responsibilities in their own time.

Today, the big public services union Unison employs 1,200 staff. Some of them are admin or clerical back-up workers, not officials who negotiate or organise. But such numbers create a whole structure in which people, often coming into such work because of socialistic or pro-worker ideas, can get locked into developing “careers”.

At top levels the officials are elevated into lifestyles that members can only dream off. At year end 31/12/2023, the General Secretary (GS) of Unison received a gross (before tax) salary of £125,450 plus London Weighting of



A critical look at theories now dominant in leftish academia.
£3

workersliberty.org/publications

tion, and how to beat them

£6,273 (and pension contributions of £4,826); the [GMB](#) GS, £113k plus £5k in car benefits (and pension contributions of £25,000); the [TUC](#) GS, £116,749 plus £5,106 car allowance (and pension contributions of £23,350). By way of contrast, in April 2024 the median gross annual earnings for full-time employees were £37,430, with 50% earning less.

To this difference in earnings we must add “expenses”, nice hotels, trips abroad, free meals, high pensions, and the general sense of status enjoyed by top officials. As long ago as 1910, Fred Knee, of the London Society of Compositors, remarked that “there are some trade union leaders who are so prosperous that they at any rate have in their own persons achieved the harmony of the classes.”

If we think of Marx’s comment that conditions determine consciousness, we begin to understand why too many officials are too often an obstacle to representatives and members.

But few if any British unions are simply run and controlled by the officialdom. The bureaucratic distortions of the life, processes, democracy, and competency of our unions is the work of employed officials and some lay representatives, whom they in part rest on and work in tandem with.

Many of these lay representatives are motivated by similar political views, sometimes as members of the same political faction, and in some cases by careerism and patronage. Some are on substantial or 100% union time (either at the expense of the employer or the union) but do relatively little to build and represent the membership, are comfortable in their relationships with employer representatives, and in some instances enjoy the benefits of substantial union “Travel and Subsistence”.

We can see across unions how lay officials work with employed officials. For example, to:

- Bar unwelcome motions from conference consideration or to bury them deep down in the agenda so that they are unlikely to be reached, and to prolong debates of uncontroversial motions to ensure the controversial ones are not reached.
- Obstruct NEC majority decision making.
- Permit the GS to unilaterally hire and deploy officials, to promote their allies and mates, all the better to determine which union policies get priority and which union sectors get effective support.
- Obstruct the calling of industrial action, to call off strikes without membership consultation, to lean heavily on strikers to accept a call off.

Consequently, despite the considerable overlap, we should distinguish



between the union bureaucracy and union bureaucratisation, i.e., the use and abuse of rules and processes to prevent or limit democratic participation, debate, and decision making; to restrict the ability of lay representatives and members to hold employed officials (and other lay representatives) to account and to extract effective support; to delay or prevent or derail challenges to employers; and to undermine lay control of lay structures.

The combativity of working people is itself subject to the ebbs and flows of the class struggle and is not a perpetually bubbling pot always held back by bureaucratic obstruction. But the bureaucratisation of our unions does circumscribe the potential for membership anger and “rank and file” leadership to flow through democratic channels and it does sometimes block anger, challenge, and resistance.

What is to be done?

Precise tasks, demands, motions, and tactics will vary from union to union. There is no magical formula to render our unions better fit for purpose irrespective of circumstances and tactical considerations.

Nevertheless, the preceding analysis points to certain attitudes and approaches. Activists must:

- Be willing to do the necessary work to win, run, and build branches.
- Prioritise recruitment and the organising of unorganised sectors, recognising that union power turns on membership density and union spread.
- Find the most favourable ways of organising activists – through individual membership or branch sponsored groups or some other organisational

form – around a principled but not overly restrictive programme for change or around specific campaigning issues.

- Focus on replacing, at all union levels, passive or regressive leaders while simultaneously building membership levels, confidence and activity, and developing new layers of activists.
- Listen to members to identify the issues and tactics which might move them into local, sectoral or national action.

- Find the right slogans and test them, within and across unions. In the 1920s, one radical demand was for workshop organisation, to bring together workplace shop stewards irrespective of their different unions, with a view to overcoming the consequences of territorial union branches and the sectional divides between different unions on site. Would a similar demand be relevant today in some areas?
- Seek to tie the leadership to key fighting policies through the systematic preparation for delegate conferences, agreeing priorities and proposals, circulating model motions, fighting for them in well-built branch meetings to maximise debate and agreement.

- Present clear proposals for “opening the channels”. For example, to enable lay structures: to more readily promote debate and campaigns across the union; to increase the possibilities for “rank and file” control of disputes; to give delegates greater ability to determine the business of conferences and to get through the agenda; to sharply subordinate senior officials to the NEC; to elect officials and tie their pay more closely to that of members.
- Link groups fighting for change

across the unions wherever possible.

- Fight for the removal of anti-union laws, which strengthen the bureaucracy.

The best militants wish to fight because working class people should “have more and better”. Militants and Marxists can campaign and fight together on this basis. But, additionally, Marxists see:

- Action on the basis of this sentiment as the class or a section of the class in movement, asserting itself against capitalists and the capitalist state.
- The widening that movement – the spreading of strikes within a union and across unions – not only potentially gives workers greater leverage but also strengthens the logic for a united front of workers, rather than for individual settlements; opens the possibility for greater demands; runs more strongly into capitalist and capitalist-state claims that the demands cannot be afforded; brings more clearly into question the capitalist boundaries within which workers live and trade unions bargain; and throws a spotlight on the arguments for moving beyond those boundaries.
- The need to relate politically to such developments, drawing out the logic of the struggle in our papers, leaflets, speeches, and conversations, and to win militants to our perspective and our organisation.
- Workers should not stop at the boundaries of the system, always bargaining within it, however militantly, and always vulnerable to later counterattacks: we should seek to be the “bosses” of our own system and the “masters” of our own destiny. □

The Supreme Court and extrapolations



Letter

Modern trans rights campaigning started with the socialist Magnus Hirschfeld in the early 1900s (certainly not with Judith Butler in 1990), and revived from the early 1970s. Its chief aim has been: everyday respect.

Specific “demands” have varied. Hirschfeld (and the SPD and early Communist Party) wanted an end to Germany’s constitutional ban on homosexuality (§175, fully scrapped only in 1994), assuming that would bring the necessary respect. Today, apart from access to medical care (technically much easier than in Hirschfeld’s day), respect means the right for trans people to use facilities such as toilets and changing rooms of their choice; and not to be stigmatised in public by being denounced as “really men” or such. In the US, before Trump 2.0, 61% of trans people avoided public toilets for fear of harassment.

Dale Street (*Solidarity* 747) defends the Supreme Court ruling of 16 April. It did reaffirm that bosses sacking workers for being trans is illegal. Beyond that? “Woman” in the Equality Act 2010 (not other laws) must be read as “birth-sex woman”, and “women’s” places on some official committees in Scotland must go to birth-sex women.

No-one is much bothered either way about the committees. But the Supreme Court ruling has triggered a series of harmful extrapolations.

The EHRC’s “interim update” (not binding) says that trans people cannot use toilets (etc.) as they choose. It suggests they use “unisex” facilities (if they exist).

The Labour Party has postponed its women’s conference indefinitely for fear of legal challenge whether it makes it trans-inclusive (as in the past) or excludes trans women. The “LGBT Labour” affiliated society has postponed its AGM indefinitely, for fear of “legal jeopardy” however it runs its election.

Debbie Hayton is a trans woman feted by some for declaring she is still “a man”. (Religion may play a part for her). Yet she records that when she transitioned, she started using women’s facilities automatically, and without problem. Why should not others have her rights?

Even if there were a good argument for sex checks on toilets, the costs of the “cure” would be much worse than the problem.

Olympic authorities strove for decades to find a reliable “sex test” for athletes, and gave up. Not even the EHRC

imagines building a higher-grade medical facility outside every toilet to check every entrant.

In practice a trans toilet ban will mean more “vigilante” harassment of anyone who looks “unusual”, trans or cis, and trans workers who prefer not to “advertise” their transition at work having to “out” themselves or quit jobs.

The Supreme Court paved the way for this by declaring that “biological” sex is “self-explanatory” and can only be “woman” or “man”. But intersex people (“hermaphrodites”) have been recognised for many centuries. And even Debbie Hayton writes: “my body is now female to all appearances”.

Immutable

In the late 1970s Janice Raymond’s anti-trans book *The Transsexual Empire* (deploring the doctors involved) wrote of “transsexuals”. Everyone talked of “sex changes”. To say sex, let alone gender, is absolute-binary and immutable, with no grey areas, is not to restate Enlightenment science. It is a new fad.

The Supreme Court, writes Street, was “saving lesbianism from erasure”. In fact the slow advance (until recently, and with zig-zags) of public acceptance of gender transitions has gone together with respect for lesbians booming.

“Radical lesbian” (lesbian-and-cis only) groups couldn’t operate until the Supreme Court ruling? But they could! There has been no rush since the Court ruling of lesbian groups rejoicing that now they can expel trans women (and cis lesbians attracted to a trans woman)?

Street cites women’s rights connected with pregnancy and childbirth. The “problem” there does not come with seeing trans women as women. Many cis women can’t or don’t become pregnant or give birth. The “problem” is with trans men who become pregnant before the hormone treatment makes them infertile, but may not be covered by Equality Act “women’s” provisions.

Yes, the Equality Act is unclearly worded there. But, again, the “solution” (Court as interpreted by EHRC) is worse than the “problem”. There has been no rush of trans men rejoicing about new protections from the Court ruling.

The Supreme Court, as usual in such cases, heard several groups besides plaintiff and defendant. That it refused to hear Victoria McCloud, England’s only trans High Court judge, is not trivial. If the Court had heard McCloud, it would have had to explain its view on “biological sex”, rather than just asserting it; and it would have had to consider the likely extrapolations affecting trans people’s right to everyday respect. □

Martin Thomas,
London

Unions slack on benefits fight



Letter

I very much agree with the core idea in *Solidarity*’s 1 July editorial that “union-Labour rebels can beat cuts” – on the welfare reform bill and generally.

Campaigning against the welfare bill, however, has underscored how far we have to go to mobilise the trade union movement for that.

Unison was [particularly bad](#), soft-peddalling opposition to cuts and, once the government made its initial concessions, switching to virtually endorsing them. But pretty much all unions have done little to agitate about this, even on social media; let alone mobilise members for protests; let alone more.

The Fire Brigades Union, I think the most vocal, sharp and consistent about publicly opposing the cuts, did not advertise any of the protests organised by DPAC and others until, a few days before the vote on the bill’s second reading, a member wrote to head office requesting it do so.

Nor was it just a problem of union machines. There were very few union activists, branch banners, etc, at the protest

at Parliament the evening before the vote (30 June). This even though it took place literally next to multiple relatively strongly unionised public-sector workplaces.

If the picture was different anywhere outside London, it would be good to hear about that.

I’ve decided not to name specific left groupings and networks within the unions, as the problem was general and I don’t want to come across as haranguing particular groups. But the main left grouping in my union put nothing out about this struggle until very late on, after being repeatedly pushed; and it called an online event on a different topic the evening of the Parliament protest. A left group in another union that I have worked closely with and have a lot of respect for put nothing out about this issue at all.

Virtually everyone has their own defensive battles to fight at the moment, and clearly the labour movement is not in a brilliant state. Even so, given the importance and high profile of this fight, I found this lack of union engagement pretty surprising. It’s worth registering and considering. □

Samuel Akhtar,
South London

Two queries



Letter

Oscar Davis’s [review](#) of *The Fall of European Stalinism* says that he now believes that the old USSR was an exploiting class society. But, he says, was dissuaded against that view as a young activist in the 1980s by “polemics... in a collection of Trotsky’s essays called *In Defence of Marxism*” against “Max Shachtman’s concept of bureaucratic collectivism”.

The introduction by Joseph Hansen and George Novack to that Trotsky selection (made in 1942) presents Trotsky as polemicising that way. So does Isaac Deutscher in his three-volume biography of Trotsky.

But the facts are different. Trotsky never wrote against “Shachtman’s concept of bureaucratic collectivism”. Shachtman did not develop his variant until after Trotsky’s death (and used different terminology even then). In 1939-40 Trotsky used a crank book by one Bruno Rizzi as a foil for discussing the idea of unavoidable slide into a Stalino-fascist world regime, but argued explicitly against comrades who said the very “concept of bureaucratic

collectivism” was revisionist. This is discussed in the [Introduction](#) to our 1998 book *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*.

Another query. [Luke Hardy](#) says, rightly I think, that Reform is not fascist, but equates fascist with “violent national revolution to overthrow the entire political system”. Hitler, after 1923, eschewed conflict with Germany’s established armed-forces staff, and slapped down Nazi “leftists” to hold that line. He came to power constitutionally, appointed chancellor by the elected president and confirmed by parliament.

Mussolini said he had made a violent revolution, but it wasn’t true. His March on Rome was a weak affair, and set off only after the king made Mussolini prime minister constitutionally.

Dollfuss instituted Austro-fascism by a “self-coup”. Pilsudski, in Poland, organised a military coup, but in the belief there would be no resistance and no violence. In fact there was a little, but Pilsudski’s nominees took power by constitutional procedures after the previous president and prime minister had resigned.

Fascism involves much violence, but can gain office constitutionally. □

Rhodri Evans,
London

Unite union votes for Ukraine solidarity

By Sam Myerson

The two-yearly Policy Conference of Unite the Union (7-11 July, Brighton) took place against the backdrop of the Labour government having been significantly humbled on its benefit-cuts plans. Unite is also in a protracted dispute with the Labour-run council in Birmingham, which is under the watch of government commissioners.

On Ukraine, motions had been composited. The composite called for the Unite to organise delegations to Ukraine to meet with Ukrainian trade federations, to organise speaker tours in the UK of Ukrainian trade unions, to twin Unite branches with their respective Ukrainian counterparts, and for Unite to support and promote financial appeals launched by the Ukrainian trade union federations.

The main motion was got to conference by Stan Crooke and the composite seconded by Tyrone Falls. It had been drafted by a Workers' Liberty activist, and our distribution of hundreds of conference bulletins focusing on Ukraine had real purchase with delegates. There were two speeches in favour, and none against. In the vote we saw no hands against and a handful of abstentions.

For a union where there are strong influences from the *Morning Star* and from the Socialist Party, which both are (differently) unsupportive of Ukraine, this was overwhelming positive.

Workers' Liberty activists and supporters organised for and at the conference. We distributed hundreds of copies of our conference bulletin and of a special bulletin for the international debates, focusing on solidarity with Ukraine, and arguing against boycotts in favour of building links with the Palestinian-Jewish anti-war movement in Israel and Palestine. We had an impact in every session where we spoke.

The Socialist Party and the SWP were also present. The RCP now claim to be the largest group on the British far left, but they had no visible presence at the conference. (They did get a motion to it on defence of their activists in Pakistan who have been arrested).

The rift between the current leadership of the Union, under Sharon Graham, and the former leadership grouped round the United Left faction, was on full display from the opening speech of the conference from Andy Green in the chair. Unite's reports on allegations of wrongdoing under the previous administration around the building of the hotel complex in Birmingham have not been made fully available to members, but what has been made available is damning.

But on day one, after the chair's speech, conference passed without much controversy.

Some motions were carried on developing the union's position on an ecological just transition, with a specific clause that this must be worker-led, and others on housing and funding for the NHS.

Remitted

A very good motion on decriminalisation of sex work was remitted to the Executive Committee, with a promise that a working group would be set up to explore what the union's position should be and organise activity.

Because this motion was remitted to the Executive, and not passed at conference, this working group will not have a mandate to make its decisions on union policy. This was an undemocratic move. The leadership of the union, said explicitly in the debate that it would support the policy, but also clear the working group would only go ahead if the motion was remitted. The conference should have voted.

The motion got an overwhelmingly

positive hearing, and support from delegates during the discussion, but without it being passed as policy, there could be blocks on activity at a regional and national level.

Chairing of conference was often appeared haphazard. In multiple debates the chairs failed, intentionally or not, to take dissenting views or to seek to balance the debate with speeches against. Speakers were often allowed to run over time, impacting the ability of conference to carry out business. On day two conference voted to extend the session in order to complete the day's business.

Sharon Graham gave a long speech to conference framed in three ways: corruption of the old leadership of the union; Labour's failings as the gateway to the rise of the far right; and the unions industrial successes since her leadership.

Graham said she wanted a Labour government like in 1945, but if Labour won't stand with members, then the political fund could be further redirected to Unite campaigns. Placing the blame of the rise of the far right and reform at the door of the Labour Party, while failing to advocate for the trade unions to respond seriously with activity of their own, was poor.

Graham, much like her predecessors, made a big deal of British jobs, British Steel, defending British businesses, and military spending on British made Typhoons and fighter jets. It was soft-sold British nationalism, with a trade union badge on it.

In the debate on Palestine, there was an statement, and nine motions and composites. Although the union has done little to back the Palestinians, Graham made explicit before the vote that "what is happening in Gaza is a genocide and war crimes", and that members who refused to build or handle weapons and supplies for the Israeli



army had the full backing of the union to do so.

The chair initially said there would be speeches for and against, but did not follow through. However, one very good speech did get through, specifically against "Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions" and for building links with workers and the anti-war movement in Israel.

On trans rights an emergency motion was carried. Another motion, on "Affirming Support for Women's Rights", contained wording that reaffirmed the rights of all women regardless of their sex assigned at birth. It declared that the fight for trans equality and the fight for women's rights share similar goals and strengthen each other. □

THE STOP THE WAR COALITION AND UKRAINE:

a decade of political and factual illiteracy

Коаліція "Stop the War" та Україна: десятиліття політичного невігластва та незнання фактів
Dale Street, 2024

60 pages. £5 (inc. postage).
Order
bit.ly/stw-pi

Birmingham mass picket on 25 July

By Jim Denham

On Wednesday 9 July Birmingham's Labour City Council announced it is shutting down its negotiations with Unite and that waste service staff who do not accept retraining or redeployment now face compulsory redundancy.

The bin workers are striking over pay cuts of up to £8,000 – up a quarter of their wages for some – and have an industrial action mandate until December. The dispute began in January when Unite members began their action over a

threat to "delete" around 170 jobs.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said of the latest development: "Let's be very clear, what Birmingham city council has proposed is fire and rehire in a Labour council under a Labour government".

The breakdown in negotiations and the "fire and rehire" threat led to Unite's policy conference voting to suspend the membership of Rayner and Cotton.

The emergency motion also commits the union, if the redundancy process is con-

tinued, to "discuss our relationship" with the Labour party overall.

No principled trade unionist would oppose the suspensions, or "discussion" on Unite's relationship with Labour, but what is really needed is a strategy to win.

An elected strike committee would provide a forum for the discussion of tactics, how to deal with the redundancy threat and what the "red lines" should be for any settlement. Regular mass meetings would also help boost morale, involve the rank and file in de-

cision making and keep the workforce united in the face of the council's attacks.

The very successful "Megapicket" on 9 May, joined by hundreds of trade unionists, shut down the Lifford Lane site. Now "Strike Map" is organising "Megapicket II" on 25 July, across five sites on the same day.

Picket lines from 6am on 25 July at: Atlas Depot, B11 2AS; Lifford Lane Depot, B30 3JJ; Perry Barr Depot, B42 2TU; Ryton site (Cov), CV8 3EJ; Veolia Incinerator, B11 2BA.

The Strike Map call is sup-

ported by: Artists Union England, Aslef, BFAWU, Blacklist Support Group, Birmingham TUC, British Medical Association, Campaign for Trade Union Freedom, Equity, FBU, GFTU, HCSA, National Education Union, NHS Workers Say No!, NSSN, PCS, Peace and Justice Project, POA, Psychotherapy and Counselling Union, Royal College of Podiatry, RMT, Security Industry Federation, Troublemakers at work, UCU, and We Demand Change. Add your organisation: strikemap@gftu.org.uk □

“What we stand for

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

Capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, blighting of lives by overwork; imperialism, environmental destruction and much else.

The working class must unite to struggle against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, in the workplace and wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses, to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement
- A workers' charter of trade union rights – to organise, strike, picket effectively, and take solidarity action
- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. Reproductive freedoms and free abortion on demand.
- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
- Maximum left unity in action, and full openness in debate

If you agree with us, take copies of *Solidarity* to sell – and join us! □

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Let's not fall into a summer lull

There is a risk, as we head into the summer and the school holidays, when many of our readers and supporters will take time off, that the donations may start to dry up.

This is a crucial period for us as our Summer Camp is just under six weeks away and we need to hit our £20,000 tar-

get. With two donations in the last two weeks adding only £165 to the total, now is the time to dig deep.

Our total stands at on £16,785.

• Donate: workersliberty.org/fund

Flurry of Ofsted-induced mania



Diary of a social worker

By Wilson Gibbons

The email came in after hours on a Tuesday, "We're very pleased to let you know that you've been selected to join a practitioner cohort supporting [one of our key development areas]... We recognise that this is an additional commitment on top of your day-to-day and want to say how much it's valued... thank you for your willingness to be part of this important work, it makes a real difference to the lives of the children and families we work with."

"Have you seen we're being given extra work as a reward?" The Teams message got a flurry of reactions. "The real piss-take is that it's written like we volunteered", one colleague said later in the day.

None of us could even understand the brief. The meeting the following day had been set to clear things up. A consultant social worker – brought in on agency service manager pay – spoke in corporate riddles for 20 minutes before opening up the floor. The tension was palpable, six overworked

and undervalued social workers bristling at being told to do extra work and showered with platitudes for the pleasure. "He can sit here and tell us that it's because we're good social workers, but he tried to give me a red audit earlier in the week" popped up in the private chat.

Questions ranged from why they had chosen us, all in our second year post-qualifying, to what the time commitments would be and what the project actually was. As they were answered, it became clear that the senior management team were flying by the seat of their pants. They didn't know what they wanted or were asking us to do yet really, or how much time it would require on top of our actual work.

By the end of the meeting we still had no idea what this project was but one thing was clear that the flurry of Ofsted-induced mania was already beginning.

They won't come until September at the earliest but management is already in a tailspin. "It's a piss-take" one colleague said in hushed tones huddled around a desk. "They just have no regard for how hard we are already working, I've worked until 1am every day this week" said another. "How can they just tell us we have to do something completely beyond the remit of our job

roles? I've barely got time to manage my caseload let alone faff about with whatever this turns out to be."

"I bet this is that they want us to be able to talk to Ofsted and show how they're developing new staff and that they know what the issues are and are addressing them".

The trouble with all of this, of course, is that the problem in the borough, and many others, isn't workshy, lazy social workers, but a system on the brink of utter collapse. Social workers can't work 20 high-risk cases safely. Gaps in case recording and issues around statutory timescales aren't because social workers don't care, they're because we've been in a staffing crisis for over a decade and there aren't enough hours in the day. But the message from management remains the same. You just need to do more and manage your time better.

Over the next few months, the pressure will likely pile on further as management scrambles to duct-tape over the gaping cracks. Much as in schools, Ofsted isn't a measure of how well a children's social care department runs but rather a measure of the performance they can put on for a week and how much excess labour they can squeeze out of an already exhausted workforce. □

Football and women in Iran



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The UEFA European Women's Championship is upon us, but there is not much to choose from in terms of women's football films: *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), *Gregory's Girl* (1983), and a few others and that's about it. So let's rewind to Iran in 2006.

The (Men's) World Cup qualifier with Bahrain is eagerly awaited by football fans all over the country – the problem, however, is that if you are a woman you cannot attend the match. In Jafar Panahi's *Offside* a young woman (played by Shima Mobarak-Shahi), disguises herself as a man and attempts to gain entry to the Stadium. She buys a ticket on the



black market but is apprehended by a security guard and locked up with a number of other women all attempting the same ruse.

Iran wins the game one-nil, and while being taken to the police HQ, the vehicle transporting the women is surrounded by noisy, jubilant fans. The military escort are sympathetic and they open the van's doors and, along with the women, they join the jubilant crowds waving sparklers. Despite much critical acclaim and winning the Silver Bear at the 2006 Berlin Film Festival,

the film is banned in Iran. □

• *Offside* is not available to watch online.

Join Workers' Liberty!

Want to be part of an organised long-haul collective effort to spread the socialist ideas you read in *Solidarity*, and to link together activities in diverse campaigns and conflicts around that consistent socialist thread? Then take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell each week, and contact us to discuss joining Workers' Liberty, the group that produces and sustains this paper. Check it out and contact us via workersliberty.org/join-awl □



Why Rayner won't talk to her union reps

By a PCS member

Members of the PCS union in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) are continuing to take action over office closures, rigid office attendance policies, and abandonment of the location-neutral policy that enables staff to take up any departmental role from their current locations.

Following strike action, an indefinite work to rule began in MHCLG on Monday 30 June, with the option of a return to further strike action. Disgracefully, MHCLG, under the ministerial leadership of Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, again tried to use anti-union legislation to stop action.

Management claim to have engaged with unions about its plans to close six offices over the next two years, but it has presented its "proposals" as fixed. PCS members do not confuse consultation and negotiation with a fait accompli.

PCS has seen zero movement from MHCLG management and Rayner has chosen not to meet PCS MHCLG representatives even once since Labour won the general election in 2024. The reality of imposition from on high under Rayner stands in stark contrast to Labour's 2024 general election manifesto which promised to "strengthen the collective voice of workers, including through their trade unions."

The Newcastle office has now closed, with members "choosing" to work from home or in Darlington. Five other offices are still due to close. National PCS should be politically laser-focussed on the gap between ministerial rhetoric and practice as part of a campaign to link the struggles of members in different areas of the civil service. □



Labour: back the bin strikers!

By Kayden Jones

On 9 July at 6am, 150 trade unionists formed a mass picket to support striking Veolia workers at Lumley Street Depot, Sheffield. The bin workers' strike for recognition of Unite, the union of their choice, has entered its eleventh month.

Supporters came from Sheffield and trades councils across the country. It also included striking Birmingham bin workers and former miners. It was an impressive display of solidarity.

Later on, workers and supporters went to the Town Hall to protest the inaction of Sheffield City Council over the eleven months of the strike.

A supporter of Workers' Liberty

speaking at the Town Hall protest said: "The right to be represented by a union of your choice is a democratic right. It should be defended by Labour politicians who claim to represent the working class."

"There is political pressure you can put on the council. Unite is affiliated to the Labour Party, that's a lever you can use to put pressure on the council—but that's not the whole point. You can turn up to labour meetings en masse, get all your family and friends to do the same."

"And a movement of people in Sheffield – people who have been on strike, people who want to strike, people who know what it's like – they can get involved in politics and win."

The City Council voted to refer the matter to the Waste and Street Scene Committee.

Political pressure needs to be brought to bear on the councillors that sit on the committee. Further mass action will be needed to make Veolia negotiate with its workers. □

Get Solidarity every week

Trial sub (6 issues) £7; Six months (22 issues) £29 waged, £15 unwaged, €33 European rate.

Visit workersliberty.org/sub

Or, email awl@workersliberty.org with your name and address, or phone 020 7394 8923. Standing order from £5 a month: more to support our work. Forms online. □

Nottm HCSWs talk of escalation

By John Ryan

Rounding off 14 days of consecutive strike action, Health Care Support Workers (HCSWs) at Nottingham University Hospitals Trust (NUHT) marched to the Executive Board meeting on 10 July to ask for the back pay they've so far been denied, but they got a non-committal response. More positive was a request from the Trust management for a new round of talks at ACAS. Debbie, a HCSW, said she was happy about this but hoped that it would be offer-

ing more than last time, which was one day's leave for this year only.

Those talks will probably take place towards the end of July and staff are talking about striking then for four weeks straight in a bid to concentrate management's mind. Escalation will obviously put a strain on the union's finances, so donate: Unison NUHT 20122 Branch, a/c 20370066, 60-83-01, Ref: Hardship Fund NUH. Or to Unison East Midlands regional office, Unit E Nottingham One, 154 Canal Street NG1 7HG. □

Contact us

020 7394 8923

solidarity@workersliberty.org

Write to: 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG

Production team: Martin Thomas (editor), Kayden Jones, Dan Katz, Simon Nelson, Will Roberts, Zack Muddle □

Rebuild the NHS! Tax top wealth!

By Alice Hazel

On 3 July the government published its 10 Year Health Plan for England, *Fit for the Future*. This latest “long-term plan” for the NHS follows the 2019 Long Term Plan, and the Five Year Forward View of 2014.

Entirely missing is the main thing we need: expanded funding, to pay workers well and renovate buildings and equipment, covered by taxing the rich.

Across the 11 years of plans, the headlines have changed little. Each long term plan has declared with appropriate zeal that the NHS will be transformed by moving from hospital to community based care, by technology, and by a shift to preventive care. A lack of commitment to the necessary funding is also common to all of these plans.

Report

The Health Foundation reports the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)’s total budget will only increase by 2.8% per year in real terms between 2025/26 and 2028/29 – a rate below the long-term historical average of 3.7% and far below the average 6.8% during the 2000s under the last Labour government.

However, the new plan has more detail in terms of proposed change here, and a lot of it is not good for patients or NHS workers.

The idea of moving care closer to home in com-

munity-based services is generally a good one. Many elements of these patient-facing services including Hospital at Home, Primary Care Area Community teams and Community Mental Health Hubs are well on the way to being established in many areas.

The plan goes further, committing to Neighbourhood Health centres “in every community... open at least 12 hours a day and six days a week”. The fact that the NHS capital budget is being frozen from next year might seem fatal for this hope. Reference to new forms of public/private partnership to fund these centres suggests that falling back on a version of the Blairite debacle of PFI (Private Finance Initiative), which ended up costing the NHS at least £80 billion, is the likely “solution”. Much of what little new money there is for the NHS risks being siphoned off as private profit.

The Casey Enquiry into Adult Social Care has been set up to look at a national care service, and report in 2026 (interim), and 2028 (final), but this NHS plan has no acknowledgement of the centrality of the crisis in social care. Missing it entirely suggests a siloed approach.

There is talk of joined-up work with Local Government, particularly in recognising the social basis of health inequality in housing, air pollution, and nutrition, but there is no suggestion of adequate funding for improvements. □

• More: page 15

Gaza: stop the bombs!

By Ira Berkovic

On 10 July, an Israeli air strike killed 16 people in Gaza, including ten children. They were waiting in line for nutritional supplements, needed because of the mass starvation deliberately imposed on Gaza by Israel. Israeli military officials will undoubtedly claim, as they have consistently claimed in response to all such episodes throughout nearly two years of onslaught, that the strike was based on “precise intelligence” and that steps were taken to minimise civilian casualties.

We cannot see into the hearts and minds of the military and state bureaucrats who make such utterances to know whether they truly believe the words they say. The death toll tells its own story.

A week previously, another Israeli bomb struck the al-Baqa cafeteria, a popular beachfront destination for Gazans. 29 people were reported killed. Israel says the strike targeted Hisham Ayman Mansour, a Hamas field commander. The bombing illustrates with grim perfection the strategy Israel has pursued throughout its war, wreaking enormous destruction to civilian life and infrastructure in order to eliminate a single Hamas fighter. It is a strategy that has, in effect, rendered all Palestinians legitimate targets. If merely drinking in the same cafe as a Hamas

commander makes you acceptable collateral, then no-one is off limits. A war pursued on this basis has an inescapable annihilationist logic.

The binational (Palestinian-Jewish) left-wing social movement Standing Together said: “Gaza has become a slaughterhouse, where massacres against children, fathers, the elderly, and people living with disabilities are carried out day after day. The policies that enable this mass death are so cruel and indiscriminate that they do not pretend to distinguish between civilians and combatants [...] For our government, merely existing in Gaza has become a crime punishable by death.

“There is no system left to handle the dead, no morgues with space remaining, no refrigeration to delay composition, no forensic teams to identify bodies or limbs. Only tents stuffed with corpses, clinics turned into storage for human remains, and body bags laid out like cargo, often bearing a scribbled name [...]”

“In Gaza, the living walk amongst the ruins of the dead. While international bodies demand investigations and accountability, the only response on the ground is more bombs, more mass graves, more destruction of evidence; the very infrastructure needed to expose these crimes, the deliberate erasure of Palestinians.” □

• More: page 3

Support the resident doctor strikes!

By Wade Ferguson

BMA resident doctors will strike over pay on every shift due to start after 6.59am on Friday 25 July or before 6.59am on Wednesday 30 July.

A ballot returned a six-month mandate (from 21 July), after 90% of resident doctors voted in favour on a turnout of 55%. No strikes have yet been scheduled for after 30 July.

Resident doctors – formerly known as junior doctors – make up nearly a quarter of the doctor workforce. They include all those who are not consultants, Specialty and Associate Specialist (SAS) doctors (those with the same clinical experience as consultants but who have not completed specialist training), and GPs.

The ballot was held after the doctors’ pay body recommended a deal for this year that represented pay erosion against RPI inflation, so that doctors’ pay is still 22% down in real terms over the years since 2008. The renewed mandate provides further support for the BMA’s campaign to restore pay to 2008 levels.

However, the turnout was significantly lower than for previous ballots (77% in February 2023, 71% in August 2023, 62% in March 2024). Health Secretary Wes Streeting has already argued on X that “most BMA resident doctors did not vote to strike.”

BMA representatives point to a combination of fatigue and apathy among doctors with a less engaging campaign from the BMA.

More decisive than this, however, may have been that for many members pay was not the key issue. Doctors frequently voiced their frustration about underemployment and unemployment, in a year when the BMA projects that 20,000 qualified doctors will be unable to enter speciality training due to soaring competition for places, and 1,000 newly qualified GPs will be out of work.

Many are also worried about the growing substitution of the doctors with “medical associate professions” such as physician associates and anaesthesia associates, which further undermines morale and raises important concerns about patient safety. □

SOCIALIST SUMMER CAMP 2025

22-25 August
Haslemere,
Surrey



Join Workers’ Liberty for our
annual Socialist Summer
Camp.

Come along for a weekend of
fires, partying, nature, good
food and socialist education.



Solidarity

For a workers' government

TRUMP IS ON A ROLL

*"No Kings" protest 14
June, USA*



See page 17

UNIONS CAN STOP HIM!

