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Tax Justice UK [proposes](#) increased taxes on top wealth and incomes (mainly on “capital gains” incomes) which could yield £60 billion a year, enough to restore the NHS and welfare benefits and to tackle the chaos in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities provision in schools.

That is only a corner of the big picture. Total economic output in the UK, i.e. the total value added by our labour everywhere in the economy, is, according to the very flawed but available GDP figures, about £3,000 billion a year, or about £50,000 per child, woman, and man in the whole population. £60 billion is only 2% of that, a marginal adjustment.

Around £600 billion goes to profits. Then there is interest and rents. And ultra-salaries which are really pay-outs from profits rather than wages for labour. If you doubt that, consider the £1,000 billion pay offered to Elon Musk for the next ten years by his cronies at Tesla. What his labour may or may not contribute to actual production at Tesla is doubtful: he has no engineering



qualifications. But in any case he has not been making that contribution recently, because he has spent his time helping Trump, and then Tommy Robinson and the AfD in Germany.

Probably about half of the value added by our labour goes to the wealthy class and its immediate hangers-on. Some, of course, goes to small business people scarcely more prosperous than better-off workers. But the bulk goes to the top few who own and control most of the productive wealth

built up by the labour of the majority.

Total household wealth in the UK is £12,000 billion. Wealth inequality in the UK is much bigger than income inequality. Although in fact its current trend is relatively stable, rather than escalating, it has risen in some periods recently (figures each year depend on the ratio of prices of shares, bonds, etc., to the prices of houses, which are the main form of wealth held by better-off workers). Income inequality is concentrated round the gap between the top

1% (most of whom have high incomes from wealth as well as big salaries and bonuses) and the rest of us.

To build a society with good public services and comfortable and secure living standards for all, to end capitalism’s taunting kaleidoscope of super-luxury alongside insecurity and exploitation, we need common ownership and democratic control of all the main concentrations of the productive wealth built up by the labour of the majority. □

After 13 September, unite to beat far right!

By Dan Katz

As I passed through Waterloo train station on London’s South Bank at mid-morning on Saturday 13 September, a group of women were dancing and singing “Keir Starmer is a wanker” and filming themselves, howling with laughter. Hundreds of people were flooding off trains wearing patriotic t-shirts and carrying Union Flags and cans of beer.

At Waterloo roundabout several thousand had already assembled.

Police estimated the eventual numbers at the “Unite the Kingdom” march, billed as a protest for free speech, and which converged on Parliament Square, at 110,000. Certainly it was enormous. And it included many working-class men who know how to fight.

But because the march was so large many of the participants were women, some had brought their children.

The anti-Muslim, anti-im-

migrant right was in a party mood; they feel themselves to be in the ascendancy. And they’re right. The far-right street movement led by the grifter and hooligan Tommy Robinson is building, flanking the ascendancy of Nigel Farage’s Reform party.

By noon 300,000 were watching a live-stream of the protest on Robinson’s X account.

The right has gained from Trump’s second victory in the US and the political aftermath of the 2008 crash and Brexit in the UK. And another element is the policy and crassness of the Labour government, which has passed on cuts to working class people, solved none of the social problems workers and the poor face, and has chimed in with the far-right’s anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Keir Starmer spent the afternoon watching football at Arsenal’s ground, smug and complacent. Labour members and the union affiliates must force this government to act

for workers, not the rich and end the attacks on refugee and migrant worker rights.

Elon Musk spoke to the racists’ rally through a video link. He called for the “dissolution of parliament” and a change of government in the UK. He added, “Whether you choose violence or not, violence is coming at you. You either fight back or you die.”

10,000

By comparison the SWP-front Stand Up To Racism’s counter-demonstration mustered far less than 10,000. SUTR is union-funded and unions sponsored the counter-demo but failed to show up with their members. They leave “fighting fascism” to the SWP and that is becoming a serious, dangerous mistake.

The SWP-SUTR policy is bland, lowest-common-denominator, “don’t be nasty” anti racism, addressing none of the felt concerns of all workers across the UK. In contrast Workers’ Liberty advocates

working class mobilisation, black and white workers unity and socialist policies to defeat the racists.

The SWP had also failed to steward the anti-racist march, which was spectacularly stupid and casual with the safety of the anti-racist protesters. As the SUTR demo approached Trafalgar Square from the Strand hundreds of far-right marchers, many drunk and some coked up, stood on the facing pavement throwing abuse at us.

A well-organised protest would have seen stewards stand between the far right and the main body of the march and organise self-defence. A small number of police attempted to separate the contending protesters before the rump of the SUTR march was surrounded by police for its own protection.

In the ginnels and side streets leading to Whitehall from the Thames right-wing activists fought the police, firing flares and throwing bot-

tles. Frankly, if the police had not been present the anti-racists would have been bloodily routed. Presumably now we will see an increase in racist attacks and attacks on left-wing events.

We – the left, labour movement and minority communities – must be prepared to defend ourselves.

In particular the unions must take responsibility for campaigning and confronting the new racist right-wing movement. SUTR is clearly far out of its depth, unable to mobilise the union and Labour Party’s memberships.

The unions must heed the threat from the far-right. If a Reform or Reform-Tory government follows Starmer it will be a disaster for the labour movement. Act now in your union and Labour Party to force a change of direction.

Fight for socialist policies and workers’ action against the far-right threat! □

Israel's war party is on a land-grab

By Ira Berkovic

Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to attempt to assassinate Hamas negotiators in Qatar, on 9 September, violating a previous protocol of respecting Qatari sovereignty and paying at least lip-service to the negotiation process Qatar has mediated, appears to have been unsuccessful.

Hamas has claimed its senior leaders survived. The attack has moved the Islamist paramilitary party no closer to the total surrender, unconditional release of hostages, and promise to disarm that Netanyahu claims increased military pressure can eventually secure.

The attack did, however, reaffirm the Israeli war party's sense that it can operate with impunity. The operation provoked a few sharp words from Donald Trump, but no material consequences. With many senior figures in the Israeli military and security establishments openly declaring that the ongoing operation in Gaza City has no strategic justification, the aims of the war are



Protest in Israel against the war

now clearly political: to obliterate as much of Gaza as possible, and expel or destroy its population, in order to clear

the way for re-settlement.

The war in Gaza is part of a wider colonial effort by the Israeli government,

to establish direct rule over as much of the territory between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea as possible. Whilst few Israeli governments have made meaningful efforts to rein in the settler movement, most pre-Netanyahu administrations paid lip-service to the parameters put in place by the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, which granted limited Palestinian autonomy over certain areas.

The current government, the most right-wing in Israel's history, has dispensed with even lip-service, and openly declares that its aim is to definitively "bury" or "erase" all prospects for Palestinian self-determination, in any form.

Israeli troops now have control over large areas nominally under Palestinian Authority rule. Ibrahim Abu al-Rab, the mayor of Jalboun in the West Bank, quoted in the Financial Times, said: "An Israeli officer came into my office and said, 'There is no Area A, no Area B, no Area C [...] Forget Oslo – Israel controls everything.'"

Israel's far-right finance minister Bezalel Smotrich has regularly withheld tax revenue Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, another aspect of a strategy aimed at collapsing the PA entirely. Smotrich has described his aims for the West Bank as being "maximum land with minimum Arabs."

The Palestinian Authority is a deeply flawed institution, politically controlled by a political party, Fatah, based on a section of the Palestinian elite widely considered to be corrupt and self-serving. But its destruction at the hands of a racist and genocidal government would be a historic defeat.

International pressure could make some difference here. Recognition of the state of Palestine, a diplomatic entity effectively under PA control, could open up channels for more direct aid, which could help make the PA less vulnerable to financial isolation by Israel. On Sunday 21 September, the UK announced that it has recognised Palestine, and other states are also doing that at the UN General Assembly. □

Being a Palestinian activist in Israel

Rula Daood, the Palestinian co-director of Standing Together, was interviewed on the movement's Instagram page.

Q: Do you feel comfortable identifying as a Palestinian?

A: Today I do, but it's because I'm a political activist, and it's a choice I've made. For most Palestinian citizens in Israel, they don't feel comfortable, because of the discrimination [...] It can be very frightening to say that you are a Palestinian, this is how I think most Palestinian citizens of Israel feel [...]

Q: How do you speak up against the war?

A: I'm a political activist, and part of a grassroots movement, so there are more people with me, so it's somehow less scary for me to do that, and go out to protest. But for the 20% of Palestinians living in Israel, it's hard to say anything against this genocidal war. It's hard to speak about what's happening in Gaza, even when you relate to the pain of the people and the kids who are being killed. Being a political activist gives you a kind of privilege, but it's not the same sort of privilege Jewish citizens of Israel have. So I go out to the streets with my people, Jews and Palestinians, people who believe

we need a different politics in this place. But most Palestinians don't do that.

Q: Do you feel comfortable speaking Arabic in public?

A: I live in Yafo-Tel Aviv. My apartment is in Yafo, and when I go to Tel Aviv on the bus or the train, and my mum calls me, I feel scared to answer in Arabic. So I'm not that comfortable, and today, it's even more scary, because I know that on that same bus, soldiers who have been in Gaza could be sitting right next to me, and me speaking in Arabic could provoke a negative reaction.

Q: What is your relationship with your Jewish partners at

work?

A: This is a place where we work together, because we want the same things. We aspire and work towards changing the politics we have, ending this genocidal war, going back to real agreements between people. I am blessed to have these people, especially these Jewish people, around me. Unfortunately Israeli society has become more racist since 7 October, but it is still my home, and the same way I fight for my Palestinian people here, I believe we also need to fight for the Jewish people living here, because this is a home for all of us. □

"Now is the time to refuse"

"Now it's official: the world has declared Israel is committing a genocide. Netanyahu is doing everything in his power to preserve a forever war, even though it is possible to end the war, withdraw from Gaza, sign an agreement, and save the hostages. Yet more and more people are being dragged into it against their

will." – Ayala Metzger, daughter-in-law of Yoram Metzger, who was kidnapped from Nir Oz and murdered in captivity in Gaza

"The countless shattered families in Gaza will not bring our loved ones back, and they will not give us a future. The only results of the Israeli policy, this psychotic use of vio-

lence, is the collapse of our moral backbone, the tearing apart of the fabric of our society, unbearable suffering for Palestinians... it guarantees the bloodshed will go on, and eventually, justified international isolation." – Yonatan Zeigen, whose mother, the peace activist Vivian Silver, was murdered in her home in southern

Israel

"We cannot lie to ourselves any longer. We cannot pretend the red lines haven't already been crossed. The black flag [a term used for an illegal order which must be disobeyed] cannot be any bigger or more obvious. Now is the time to stop serving. Now is the time to refuse. Because

without us, there is no war." – Ron Feiner, military reservist jailed in May 2025 for refusing to serve in Gaza. Metzger, Zeigen, and Feiner were speaking at a die-in outside the Israeli army HQ in Tel Aviv on 16 September, organised by the binational (Palestinian-Jewish) left-wing social movement Standing Together. □

Branches, democracy, activity needed



Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

See bit.ly/yp-fl for an online article which is being continually reworked in line with developing events and can be printed off as a leaflet for local "Your Party" events.

Two weeks ago this column noted that leading figures in the Corbyn-Sultana project were suggesting the founding conference might not happen in November. On 15 September Your Party sent an email outlining a roadmap to a November conference.

However, the disagreements at the top, primarily (but not only) between Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana, soon reasserted themselves, when on 18 September Sultana unilaterally launched a "membership portal" to collect subscriptions. There may yet be a conference of some sort soon, but the process is looking more like a traditional mess than the "new kind of political party" promised in Your Party's founding statement.

It is now twelve weeks since Zarah Sultana announced her departure from Labour, pre-emptively declaring a new party and stating the goal as to win the 2029 general election and thus ensure "socialism" in place of "barbarism". It is ten weeks since sign-ups to "keep informed" began. That time could have been used to establish local structures, enabling debate and delegate-based accountability and indeed actual activity (anti-racist, pro-strike, anti-cuts, etc.) Rushed and imperfect though this would have been, it would have been good.

Instead, the designated leaders did nothing in the time. In some localities people have organised local groups (indeed, sometimes rival local groups for the same locality), but without being able to tell the 800,000 sign-ups about them.

Now the roadmap lays out a different path. Five "huge deliberative rallies" are planned, beginning with Liverpool (capacity 1,200 at most, already sold out with Corbyn and Sultana speaking) followed by Birmingham (hall capacity around 1,800 seated with Corbyn and local MP Ayoub Khan) with Hastings, Truro and Manchester scheduled without further detail. The roadmap promises that "thousands of members come together to listen to each other, debate and revise the founding documents face to face."

The format is not explained, but the likeliest model is table-based discussions with facilitators and feedback sheets. That raises obvious limits: how

can what will end up being thousands of pieces of flipchart paper be rendered into a few coherent amendments? It is reminiscent of the ANC's Freedom Charter. In 1955 mass submissions – a similar snowstorm of paper – were filtered by leaders politically dominated by the South African Communist Party, who produced a text that corresponded exactly with what those misleaders of the working class already thought. At the following congress delegates were offered only the chance to ratify this by cheering, with neither debate nor amendment. Symbolic consultation devoid of democracy – surely this cannot be the model intended here?

Before the first rally on 1 October, four key texts are promised: a Political Statement, Constitution, Rules and Organisational Strategy. At the time of writing, none have appeared. Rumours swirl that Karie Murphy is overseeing the drafting, supported by Seumas Milne, James Schneider and others from Corbyn's office when he was the parliamentary Opposition Leader – the same circle that limited democratisation of the Labour Party then. Those who centralised power in the past may shape the new party in their image unless the grassroots organise against it.

Beyond the rallies, members are told they can "comment, suggest changes, and track how each document develops." But if even a fraction of those interested contribute, how can these online submissions be turned into a coherent set of proposals? The founding "conference" itself will not decide policy. Delegates will be chosen by sortition, a method that bypasses democratic accountability (see page 5). The promise is that by some strange alchemy, this conference which, inevitably, will be composed of many unversed in conference procedures and local debates, will sift amendments into a coherent set of alternatives, after which an online one-member-one-vote ballot will finalise the texts.

Control

This is not democracy. It appears to be deliberately created to allow the existing leaders (if they can get a compromise among themselves) to control the outcome. Real democracy requires branches, delegates, and organised networks able to argue positions, elect representatives, and put forward alternative programmes. Without them, power remains in the hands of the only organised group, the leadership.

The party's structure remains under the control of an organising committee led by Corbyn, whose lead the four "Gaza Independent" MPs (and probably most of the ex-Labour "Independent" council groups) follow. What matters here is not the technicalities of

what Sultana has or hasn't done, but the political character of her interventions. At no point has she demanded structures that would give members real control. She has offered no detailed proposals for how the party should be organised, nor pressed for the immediate establishment of branches or delegate-based accountability. Instead, every move she has made has been populist: attempts to generate personal support and secure her own leadership role in the future.

Her claim to be more "anti-Zionist" than Corbyn, her denunciation of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, her designation of Labour as "worse than the Tories" and "the Nonce Party", the way she pre-emptively "declared" the party in July, and now the unilateral opening of the membership portal – none of these has advanced serious internal debate or empowered would-be members to organise. They have promoted Sultana herself, not the development of democratic structures. Some of her positions, such as support for trans liberation and opposition to the social conservatism of the Gaza Independents, are correct. Sultana's charges that the organising MPs formed a "sexist boys' club," and that Murphy and associates held "sole financial and constitutional control," may well have been accurate. But she is not opening a broad and honest political discussion. She is engaging instead in a crude game of political positioning, and from unclear and not-very-good political positions.

Corbyn and his allies reacted badly, denouncing the portal as unauthorised and urging supporters not to sign up. Corbyn even suggested referral to the Information Commissioner for data breaches. His threat, legally weak, only escalated the conflict. In the 24 hours after the conflict erupted, the Greens reported 1,400 membership applications.

If there is a silver lining, it is that some local groups have seized the moment to push for democracy. Stockport Socialists for Your Party, for instance, have circulated demands for a branch-based structure and launched, in effect, a Campaign for Your Party Democracy. These moves, however small, show the potential for a grassroots fightback.

By contrast, much of the organised left responded weakly. *Socialist Worker* blandly welcomed the roadmap, praising the prospect of "huge regional assemblies" while ignoring sortition and OMOV's stifling impact. The RCP's *The Communist* barely mentioned the party, criticising it only for not mobilising for the counter-demo to Tommy Robinson (one of the few recent demos against the far right to which the RCP have sent more than a token presence). The Socialist Party noted the absence of del-

egate structures, but its own insistence on union delegation as the only basis would delay the party's formation indefinitely, since it would need changes to union rules.

Only after the Sultana row did these groups stir. SWP members loudly championed her online, and *Socialist Worker* suddenly criticised Corbyn's bloc for narrow politics and slow progress, praising Sultana's positions on trans rights. But this was opportunistic: uncritical support for her posturing, with no strategy for democratic organisation. The RCP dismissed the whole project as reformist, urging people to join their own sect. The Socialist Party largely had nothing to add, so didn't.

Turmoil

Into this turmoil stepped Roger Hallam's networks. On 21 September, Just Stop Oil circulated an appeal for £150,000 to train "facilitators" for Your Party assemblies. Hallam, recently released from prison after thirteen months for JSO actions, has hailed Your Party as the most important political development (in the whole world) during his lifetime. In a book written in August to champion Your Party he promotes sortition as a way to bypass both party bureaucracies and state power in a formulation that echoes some old anarchist ideas, down to the need of an "invisible dictatorship" of organisers (under the control of Hallam).

His group Assemble has already "facilitated" assemblies for Jamie Driscoll's Majority and other projects. The Just Stop Oil email both promotes Your Party and suggests its dissolution into "Our Party," which Assemble would drive, with Your Party dissolving by transferring its data and funds to the new body. This is unlikely to succeed: legally the supporter database belongs to Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project Ltd, and transferring it would likely breach GDPR. Just 6,000 have signed up, so it is going nowhere.

For now the crisis has cooled, with Corbyn dropping talk of legal action and Sultana withdrawing threats of (implausible) defamation suits. But problems remain unresolved. The project needs branches, structures, and a political focus on working-class activity and unity against austerity and the far right. □



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

For democracy, against sortition

By Will Roberts

*“Amongst the proletariat, the will to power naturally develops into the will to organisation. Its road to power is the road to organisation... Organisation is the achievement of the proletariat within the capitalist system of production. The worker can lose this achievement.” – Karl Kautsky, *Parliamentarism and Democracy*.*

How and when, or even if, the “Your Party” conference will be convened is unclear as of now. But the main current proposal for it is “sortition” – that those who can attend the conference and vote will be chosen at random from the membership. We believe that this method, like the e-plebiscites proposed to supplement it, is undemocratic, and having delegates elected after deliberation in local groups is much better.

Most modern advocates of sortition trace it back to ancient Athenian democracy. As democratic revolutions like the French of 1789-94 erupted, and as labour movements grew and flourished from the late 19th century, it was eclipsed by delegate or representative democracy. Even now, no-one proposes that union conferences, for example, should be made up of members picked at random.

But recently sortition has been favoured in anarchist circles and among student radicals. Many advocates from NGOs and thinktanks counterpose sortition to “politicians” and “traditional politics”. [Edmund Griffiths](#) and [Max Shanly](#) have argued for “sortition” specifically for “Your Party”.

Branch delegates emerge from a collective process of discussion. They come to the conference not as individuals shaped mostly by influences outside collective discussion, but as embodiments of that discussion.

They may be swayed by new and more informed discussion at a conference to vote against a branch mandate, but then, unless they can convince the branch, they can be rebuked (and not chosen again).

A sortitioned “delegate” is delegated by no-one except a random-number machine. What shapes the opinions they bring to conference is likely to be “broad” social-media influence, rather than informed and collective “party” discussion. There is no structure or body by which sortitioned “delegates” can be shown to have made a poor choice.

The leadership of Your Party has also proposed “local assemblies”, but those too are poor substitute for branches. If a branch debates and proposes amendments to a motion, the decision made at the conference has been meaningfully shaped by collective dis-



cussion beyond (probably) a few minutes at the conference. If the delegates are chosen at random, the discussions in branches have no direct bearing on the final result. If local organising is the “true” focus of Your Party, as some say, then elected delegates are the sensible option.

Some argue for sortition because it can be tweaked to have quotas of women delegates, for example. But delegate democracy can also be tweaked that way. Routinely it is tweaked in the Labour Party and unions.

Sortition is vulnerable to people who have signed up for individual reasons and have no real day-to-day involvement in activity or discussion. Especially in a party as amorphous as this one, delegates being selected at random from the membership allows for landlords, say, or transphobes, to decide on its policy. The same person would probably not be elected by a branch.

Paradoxical

As paradoxical as it sounds, throwing a vote open to the entire membership via a plebiscite can be an undemocratic manoeuvre. When Momentum scrapped its democratic structures via an office coup in early 2017 to avoid holding a conference, it promised a system of e-consultation instead. The e-consultation never really happened, but would not have been democratic [anyway](#). Kautsky’s *Parliamentarism and Democracy* contains useful discussion of this, but take the 2022-3 UCU dispute in Higher Education for a more recent [example](#). After the Higher Education executive (an elected body) voted to continue and escalate strike action, General Secretary Jo Grady, who had been advocating ending the strike and taking the poor deal on the table, released a video to the union’s social media channels claiming that she wanted a “more democratic” process – an e-plebiscite. By controlling the information given out, and having all members, including those who had never taken part in union discussion, vote on her proposal, Grady managed to impose her minority view on the

Higher Education executive.

There is a clear parallel with the new party and its leadership: an appeal to plebiscitary democracy, particularly outside periods of high political struggle, is an appeal to the unorganised, over the heads of the organised. Richard Nixon in 1969 referred to “the silent majority” as his mandate for continuing the Vietnam war, and in the 1980s and 1990s Labour Party, successive rightward-pushing Labour leaders – Kinnock, Smith, Blair – claimed to be standing up for passive Labour supporters and voters against the so-called “bedsit Trots” who came to meetings and voted for delegates. There is nothing in the branch delegate system that inherently advantages Trotskyists, beyond Trotskyists being active and able to argue well.

It is good and right, not a sin, for socialist factions to pool their resources, debate and refine their ideas, and then agitate for those ideas on a broader stage. For a socialist organisation to vie for seats in an election by standing candidates (either inside a party or nationally) is not just acceptable, it is to be encouraged. Socialist factions participating visibly in the democratic process is vital to the struggle for true workers’ democracy. Otherwise organisations are left with only one “licensed” faction, that is, the already-established leaders, MPs, paid assistants, councillors (or only two if that “establishment” is split).

Of course the forms of delegate democracy are no guarantee. New activists can easily be deflected by finer details of amendments, smooth speeches or technical points in meeting procedure. The best guard against that is to have experienced and capable democrats who know how to argue – and how to protest when the meeting is not being run democratically – and procedures which enable new young activists constantly to learn those skills (in a way that a randomly-selected delegate to a single conference can’t possibly learn).

One argument against elected del-

egates in the current context is that branches have not yet been formally established, and so any process for electing delegates would be undemocratic. The answer to this is simple: allow branches to be formally established, and let them advertise to members! In Sheffield (at minimum), local meetings of activists have developed into constituency-based groups which feed into a centralised, city-wide structure. This is more than capable of electing delegates, and easily replicable elsewhere in the country.

Divided

“Your Party” already has a leadership, albeit a divided one. To convince ourselves that the most democratic option is to bow to their wishes, rather than fighting for a structure that encourages accountability and collective organising, is to foreclose the very notion of genuine democracy in Your Party.

Sortition actually means that the policies of the established leaders (if they can find formulas they agreed on) will be presented to members as something only to be tweaked at the edges, and amended only by randomly-selected delegates. They will not be put under any heavy scrutiny or pressure by experienced activists at the conference itself.

The historian E P Thompson wrote that in the early (and little-bureaucratised) British labour movement, a “half-dozen workers could not sit down together without appointing a Chair, raising a point-of-order, and Moving the Previous Question”. That democracy has expanded and contracted over the decades since then – and contracted in recent decades. Many young activists will not have seen even the flawed democracy of lively local trade union or Labour Party meetings or of a student or youth organisation having regular deliberations on motions and amendments. Democracy in the working-class movement has to be fought for, won, and then fought for again. Sortition is a step away from that goal, not a move towards it. □

Excusing Putin's drone attack on Poland



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Putin apologists like the Morning Star and Stop the War have spent the last three years arguing that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a response to provocation by NATO, that it was no more than a defensive operation by Putin, and that the idea that Putin's regime was a threat to other countries to the west of Ukraine was alarmist warmongering.

On the night of 9-10 September that argument should have come to an end. Russia sent an estimated 19 drones into Poland. This was a small taste of what Putin would do should he win in Ukraine.

Russian claims that the incursion was accidental are – to put it mildly – unconvincing. This was a brazen demonstration of what Putin's forces are willing and able to do, effectively spreading the attack on Ukraine into the territory of an EU and NATO member.

At least some of the drones came across the border from Belarus, where Russian and Belarusian forces were gathering to wargame an invasion of



NATO territory. Poland's prime minister, Donald Tusk said, very plausibly, that the country was closer to military conflict "than at any time since the second world war."

One might have hoped the *Morning Star*, for all its willingness to alibi the invasion of Ukraine, would condemn this escalation and issue one of its frequent warnings about the imminence of World War Three. But on 11 September the paper simply carried a report on the incident, quoting Russia's Defence Ministry saying the strikes had targeted Ukraine's "military-industrial complex in the country's western regions, with no planned targets on Polish territory."

It wasn't until 13 September that the paper got its act together and decided that the "drone attack" (the paper's quote-marks) was, in fact, an accident caused by Ukrainian forces "that had interfered with the flight path of the Russian drones."

The evidence for this claim (in an

article by one Mark Hazelden entitled "Drones over Poland – some questions") is that the Belarusian military "gave Polish forces advance warning of drones which had gone off track".

It is true that Belarus warned Poland of drones heading its way, allowing the Poles to scramble their air defences. But far from proving that the incursion was accidental, this would seem to lend credence to the idea that Russia was deliberately testing Poland's response.

Hazelden's other main argument is that the drones themselves were unarmed wooden "decoys".

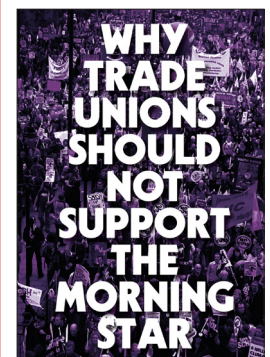
Again, this appears to be true, but proves nothing. The incursion was conducted at least in part with Gerbera drones; these are cheap long-range drones that Russia usually uses as decoys in its attacks on Ukraine. But their use on this occasion doesn't demonstrate that the incursion was an accident – in fact, quite the opposite.

Poland's foreign minister Radosław

Sikorski was almost certainly correct when he said "they [the drones] were all duds, which suggests to me that Russia tried to test us without starting a war."

The paper of "Peace and Socialism" is once again excusing Putin's belligerence and, indeed, suggesting that coverage of the incident has involved "misdirection" of "public perception... instigated by Ukraine and its Nato sponsors."

This is all of a piece with the paper's increasingly shameless support for Russia's invasion and its euphoric anticipation of a new autocratic world order so vividly on display as Putin and North Korea's Kim Jong Un were given pride of place at President Xi Jinping's military parade in Beijing earlier in the month – an event described in the MS as proof of the world's "inexorable multipolar dynamic." □



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Why street protests matter



Eric Lee

Do street protests matter? Many people in the UK are still stung by how gigantic demonstrations two decades ago could not stop Tony Blair from joining the US-led invasion of Iraq.

And today in Israel, people are surely feeling something similar, as weekly mass protests led by families of the hostages held by Hamas seem to be going nowhere. The far-right government is stubbornly proceeding with its plans to destroy Gaza, building by building and brick by brick, as Palestinians die in their thousands.

Something similar is happening in Georgia, where a government controlled by the billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili is facing unprecedented and ongoing mass protests in the capital city of Tbilisi and across the country. But those protests seem to be having little effect.

So why do it? Aren't street protests a waste of time and energy?

Protests are not just about getting a government to bow to pressure, though that sometimes happens. The main reason to organise street demonstrations and marches is to raise awareness – and to build the movements and political parties that can take the struggle to the next stage, which is the fight for political power.

In Israel, Netanyahu's proposed judicial reforms were stopped in their tracks by massive street protests and the Histadrut labour federation played a key role by shutting down the country with targeted strikes. By the time Hamas launched its attack on 7 October 2023, the Netanyahu government was tottering and may not have survived. The war has given it new life.

In Georgia, early attempts by the government to pass legislation modelled on Putin's "foreign agents" laws were initially defeated by very large demonstrations in the streets. By the

end, even Georgia's main trade union federation had taken the side of the demonstrators. The government was caught unawares and withdrew the proposed law, but soon learned lessons from their defeat.

Anger

Meanwhile, public opinion polls in Israel continue to show widespread anger at the government over its failure to get the hostages released and its failure to protect the country's borders on 7 October. Many Israelis believe that Netanyahu and his cronies are corrupt and are motivated solely by the desire to remain in power and out of jail. In recent years, both an Israeli prime minister and a president served jail time, so Netanyahu knows that the only way he remains a free man is if he remains in power.

The ongoing street protests in Israel, sometimes with hundreds of thousands of supporters, are laying the basis for a broad coalition government following the next elections – a government which will be

committed to ending the war, among other things.

The street protests in Georgia began in response to what were widely seen as rigged elections a year ago. They grew massively once the ruling Georgian Dream party announced the effective end of efforts to join the European Union. Since then, Rustaveli Avenue, the main thoroughfare in Tbilisi has seen almost daily protests. The government response has been to jail opposition leaders and shut down independent media, copying from Vladimir Putin's playbook while also growing closer to the Russian dictator.

While opposition parties in Georgia are divided about whether or not to participate in upcoming municipal elections, they are united in their opposition to the undemocratic and anti-Western politics of the government. If they can use the ongoing protests in the streets to build unity and focus on political change, they may be able to re-create something like the Rose Revolution of 2003. That event brought

down the autocratic post-Soviet government of Eduard Shevardnadze and ushered in an era of greater openness and democracy.

Power

In the end, it comes down to a struggle for political power. That's the only way to bring about real change in a country. Street protests are important because they raise awareness and serve as recruiting grounds for organised opposition parties.

On their own, the street demonstrations in Israel and Georgia are unlikely to persuade the right-wing governments in those countries to change course. But when Netanyahu is finally ousted from power, and when Ivanishvili and his Georgian Dream lose their grip, we will be able to look back and say: here, in the streets, the revolution began. □

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

Labour's leaders batten down the hatches

By Martin Thomas

Labour's Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC, dominated by trade-union reps, but surely under pressure from Starmer's office) is on a ruling-out binge.

The CAC has long had slippery powers to "rule out" motions, used widely some years, sparingly others.

Maybe Labour's leaders are smarting from their forced u-turns on Personal Independence Payments access cuts and Winter Fuel Allowance. For this year's Labour conference (28 Sep to 1 Oct in Liverpool) the CAC ruled out motions from local Labour Parties on:

- the two-child benefit cap
- housing
- green conversion
- Israel-Palestine

The two-child cap motions have been reinstated after protest, but many of the others have not. Some of them are very similar to texts which were "in order" in previous years. Some of the rulings-out say the issue has been substantively dealt with in the National Policy Forum report, though this year the report is very thin, saying little on these or any issues.

We've also heard of delegates being suspended from Labour membership to exclude them from conference, even though the thin charges trumped up against them are about long-ago (and in fact harmless) things, and they have been accepted as delegates at previous conference since those things.

Under Starmer, 2020 had no conference (on pretext of lockdowns), 2021 was mildly disputatious, and 2022, 2023, and 2024 have been leadership-dominated. Maybe the leadership is worried that this year's event, given a chance, will also be disputatious. Despite the big revolt in local Labour Parties over disability benefit cuts, the worries may sadly be ill-founded. On all accounts, Labour membership still dwindles (though it remains higher than before Corbyn), and attendance at meetings often more so.

However, we do not yet know what motions the unions will put to the conference. (CAC is unlikely to rule those out). And we do not know what the new soft-soft-left grouping [Mainstream](#) will do at conference. Mainstream has been put together by Andy Burnham, who has long worked on living down his deliberately-right-wing-tilted Labour leadership bid in 2015 and positioning himself as a soft-soft-left king over the water, with Alex Sobel's Open Labour and Neal Lawson's Compass.

It has some left-wingers in its inner circle – Jon Lansman, Clive Lewis, Dawn Butler, Julie Ward – but also, for example, Geoff Mulgan, who was Tony Blair's policy person at Downing St during High Blairism. (He is now a professor at UCL).

It has come out against the two-child

benefit cap, for taxing top wealth, and for nationalising utilities, and talks vaguely about party democracy and a bolder line against Netanyahu.

It is pushing Lucy Powell for deputy leader, although Powell herself has committed on none of those issues except (equivocally) the two-child cap. Even the Starmer candidate for deputy, Bridget Phillipson, says that repealing the two-child cap should be "on the table".

We would encourage Labour activists to join Mainstream and explore what can be done there, while also building a clearer left opposition with groups like Labour Left Internationalists. We'll know more about what Mainstream is up for after the conference.

The deputy contest has been scaled down by requiring a very high quota of MP nominators, and also by running the nominations contest among MPs *before* running it among CLPs, unions, and affiliates, rather than running it simultaneously in all sectors. (If it had been simultaneous, Bell Ribeiro-Addy might well have got impressive numbers of CLP and affiliate nominations, making it embarrassing for her to be excluded from the ballot paper for lack of MPs).

Powell does not need and does not deserve the support of the combative left to reach the quota of CLP and affiliate nominations. In the actual ballot, though (8-23 October), voting Powell ("without illusions") is the only way to make a protest against Starmer and Reeves.

Starmer's sympathetic biographer Tom Baldwin explains Starmer's shift from the "Corbynism-managed-competently" line of the 2020 leadership contest through to the wooing of Trump as a matter of Starmer being a pragmatist, focused on what will "work" step-by-step, rather than "any rigid ideology" (i.e. concern for what is right or wrong).

Starmer early set two guard-rails: to placate the older, conservative-minded "red wall" voters; and to be pro-business as well as "for working people".

"Red wall"? The voters are not stupid. Saying "I can wave as many Union Flags as Nigel Farage" just taunts them. (They will still – like Zarah Sultana now! – sneer at Labour as "the Nonce Party"). It cannot convince them as even bare-bones working-class politics could.

The pro-business-pro-workers nonsense is not new in Labour. But Harold Wilson and Tony Blair at least offered schemes to work the trick: "technological revolution" for Wilson, "education, education" for Blair. And Blair had the advantage of favourable world-capitalist conditions, and a previous Tory government under Major which had already (under pressure) started re-expanding NHS budgets. All Starmer could offer to square the circle was that his government would be



more "competent" and "stable" than the Tories. The guard-rails are tight. Few things "work" within them.

Reeves's October 2024 tax rises alienated business (employers' NI) but were too small to make much difference. Everything – restoring the NHS, green conversion, welfare benefits, migrant rights, trans rights – is squeezed between the two guard-rails. And MPs have the whip withdrawn, local Labour Parties have their motions ruled out of order, when they kick against the guard-rails.

The British government now has to offer financiers a higher interest rate on its IOUs (bonds) than any other rich country (4.6%: debt-swamped France is only 3.5%). It pays £100 billion a year in interest on outstanding IOUs.

So GB Energy is reduced to having touted, as its prime triumph, having just 11 schools in England install solar panels.

In 2025-6 schools will have budget cuts averaging around 1.1% to 1.2%. Large chunks of the NHS are still mak-

ing cuts. Almost all of local government is. The depleted Employment Rights Bill is through, but the repeal of the 2016 Trade Union Act 50% threshold for strike votes is postponed until introduction of electronic balloting (consultation promised "towards the end of 2025", then action spring 2026).

Reeves will surely raise some taxes in her 26 November Budget. But probably nowhere near the £60 billion accessible through Tax Justice UK's [ideas](#), let alone the public ownership of high finance necessary to begin major social investment.

The immediate prospects are for things to get worse. A fightback is necessary. It will be uphill and difficult, but as we showed over disability benefit cuts, can score some wins here and there even now. The alternative is a slide downhill toward a Reform UK government, or a coalition of Reform with Tories whose leader Kemi Badenoch has declared Argentina's far-right ultra-social-cutter Javier Milei as her [model](#). □

Russia's Ukraine war is also ecocide



Environment

By Michael Baker

Ukrainian researcher Darya Tsybalyuk has done a great service with this new book, *Ecocide in Ukraine: The Environmental Cost of Russia's War*, collating and summarising a wide range of research and historical data into a compact account of how Russia's invasion is damaging both Ukraine's ecology and that of the world.

The book is in six thematic chapters, covering water, earth/soil, air, plants, bodies (both animal and human), and energy. Tsybalyuk combines data and factual reporting with personal reflections and accounts of Ukraine's natural world and the experiences of the Ukrainian people. The result is readable and touching, while still conveying important information about the scale and significance of ecological damage.

Ecocide

The title should leave no ambiguity about the author's argument, but the word "ecocide" is no accident either: the Ukrainian government is one of only around a dozen states to have explicit laws against ecocide, defined as "the mass destruction of flora and fauna, poisoning of air or water resources, and also any other actions that may cause an environmental disaster". The Ukrainian government is recording information on ecological damage caused by Russia, and has begun



at least one court case on a charge of ecocide.

That case regards the one act of environmental damage that most will have heard of, the destruction of the Kakhovka dam and subsequent flooding. Occupied at the start of the invasion, the dam burst after what appeared to be controlled explosions from the inside on 6 June 2023. 18.2 square kilometres of water were released, damaging over 5,000 square kilometres of land, flooding or outright destroying 60,000 buildings and numerous towns.

Much of the damage of the area has been exacerbated by Russian control: residents of flooded regions were offered next to no help from the occupiers, leading to far more deaths than necessary – though with no independent researchers allowed in, we may never know exactly how many.

The effect of flooding on surrounding ecosystems is almost impossible to properly gauge without researchers being given access, which Russia systematically denies. To name just one example, reservoir water pouring into the Black Sea led to salt levels in that sea being three times lower than normal, putting a huge number of species of flora and fauna in danger.

The chapter on "air" contains a number of quite distinct stories. Much of the Ukrainian steppe and the country's warmer regions are significant in bird migration patterns across Europe and Asia, with countless species and millions of birds using Ukraine as a stop on their annual journey south through the Eurasian steppe. Bombing, destruction of habitats and the disruption of local ecosystems have had a terrible impact on these migration patterns, which will send ripples throughout global bird populations.

"Air" is also the air that humans

breathe: Tsybalyuk quotes Ukrainians in flooded villages recounting only being able to smell rot and mould for months on end after the Kakhovka disaster; bomb shelters, full of cold, damp air and hundreds of bodies, have become a standard feature of day-to-day Ukrainian life. The most striking quote is from Ukrainians in Chernihiv Oblast who were held as hostages in a school basement for almost a month: "the basement wasn't heated, but the air was hot from the hundreds of bodies. The walls remained cold and condensation from people breathing ran down them, so that the people by the walls sat in puddles. But the real horror was the lack of oxygen [...] as soon as you entered the room, you realised you should not go in, there is no air to breathe."

Landmines

Landmines will come to completely reshape the experience of Ukrainians for generations to come. More than six million Ukrainians currently live in close proximity to dangerous unexploded mines. At current estimates, it would take 500 sapper teams over 750 years to de-mine Ukraine, which is now one of the most heavily mined pieces of territory in human history – over 170,000 square kilometres. Ukrainian researchers are looking into comparable historical examples, such as southern Lebanon, where farmers switched from breeding cows to goats, which are lighter and less likely to set off embedded landmines.

The connections between extractive industries and warfare go beyond the use of oil and coal to power the

war machine. The bombs that were dropped on the Mariupol Drama Theatre in March 2022 used components supplied by Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska, who controls much of the region's production and distribution of bauxite and alumina. Bauxite residue is extremely harmful, and until the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Deripaska earned large profits from an alumina refinery in Mykolaiv, which produces large quantities of bauxite residue, a deeply dangerous substance for humans to breathe in. Another similar refinery in Halytsynove was measured to have tripled the local cancer rates.

Overhaul

Ecological disaster and grand-scale environmental overhaul are threaded throughout Ukraine's history. The regions that are now flooded by the broken Kakhovka dam were once overturned, and many settlements destroyed entirely, by the construction of that dam, which was completed in 1956. That was one of Stalin's grandiose, and often disastrous, "Transformation of Nature" projects, to which thousands of lives were lost and untold levels of ecological damage were wrought on the region.

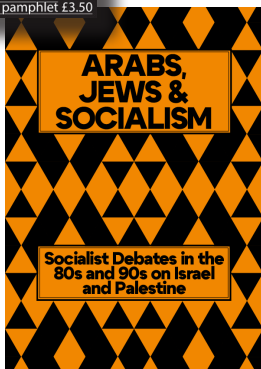
The Chernobyl disaster is remembered as an episode in the collapse of the Soviet Union, but its radiation lives on in Ukrainian cultural memory (and health indicators), and its implosion is a very real and live example that the residents of Zaporizhzhia – home to one of the largest power plants in Europe – now refer to daily, as Russian bombs come within metres of the plant's buildings. □



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Activist Agenda

Meetings

Wed 24 Sep: What will socialism look like? Sheffield AWL. 6pm, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill S3 7HG

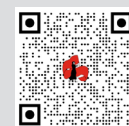
Wed 1 Oct: Feminism, class struggle and the far right. Sheffield AWL. 6pm, University Arms

Sun 5 Oct: Radical Bloomsbury Walking Tour. Meet 1pm at north-east corner of Russell Square, London WC1B

Mon 6 Oct: The right's war on "woke". North London AWL. 7pm, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Rd N1 9DY

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/work-unions, Insta @work-erslibertystudents, and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.



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

Template motions

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

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs

Manchester: Pink-pilled. 5 Oct, 3pm, The Gallery Café, 81 Princess Street M2 3JL

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 awl@workersliberty.org. □

Justice for Agnes Wanjiru



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

A Kenyan court this week ordered the arrest and extradition of a British soldier accused of murdering 21-year-old Agnes Wanjiru, a Kenyan woman, close to a United Kingdom army training camp in Kenya in 2012.

On the night of March 31, Wanjiru disappeared. Witnesses said she was last seen in the company of British soldiers on a night out at the Lion's Court Lodge. The British unit is vital to the local economy, and many women in the area supplemented their income with sex work or gifts from British soldiers.

On June 5, Wanjiru's body was found in a septic tank located close to the Lion's Court Lodge. An inquest found she had been beaten and stabbed, and



Secretary of Defence John Healey met with Agnes Wanjiru's family in April 2025



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was most likely still alive when she was left in the septic tank.

In 2021 the *Sunday Times* revealed that "Soldier X", whom Wanjiru was last seen with, had admitted to people in the barracks he has stabbed her, and revealed where he dumped her body. It was also claimed one soldier reported this to superiors.

The Tory government blocked further action, stating that Kenya had no jurisdiction over British troops stationed in the country and could not bring

charges against the soldier. The Ministry of Justice responded by saying: "The jurisdiction for this investigation lies with the Kenyan Police Service.". A UK Parliament vote in April 2023 amended security agreements between the two countries to allow for British troops to be tried in Kenya. The current government has not yet confirmed they will extradite the accused but has promised the Wanjiru family justice.

For decades reports have come out of emergencies about sexual violence

and gendered violence by serving British soldiers. The intrinsic violent and dehumanising nature of the work, the racism and sexism of the institution, and the lack of consequences for behaviour all fuel its continuation.

The Labour government should ensure British soldiers face consequences for their crimes. And they should also stop peddling nationalism and militarism if they want to be the government that stops violence against women and girls. □

Maoists fall from power in Nepal

By Chris Reynolds

On 9 September, the only Maoist government in the world (since Mao Zedong himself died in 1976) fell, in Nepal,

The Maoists ran an armed insurgency from 1996 to 2006, against Nepal's monarchy. The post-Maoist Chinese government backed the monarchy, but the insurgents made gains in the countryside. Then they negotiated their way to power. The monarchy was abolished in 2008, and since then Nepal has had a parliamentary government through varying coalitions of Maoist factions with the old sort-of-liberal Nepali Congress. As Kapil Komireddi put in the *New Yorker*, "The country's highest political office rotated among a cast of

three men: two Communists (Oli, Prachanda) and one centrist liberal (Deuba)".

Communist there should be "Communist", in scare-quotes. According to the World Bank, "the poverty headcount ratio measured at US\$6.85 [£5] per day... fell from 90% to below 50%" up to 2023. That was down not to socialistic reform, but mostly to a rapid rise in Nepalis working abroad and sending remittances which are now one-third of national income. (The parliamentary governments have reduced discrimination against Dalits ("untouchables")).

"Generation Z" people (from teenage to late 20s) remaining in Nepal's cities, including increasingly many university-educated young people, have a

choice of emigrating or scraping a living as domestic servants, street hawkers, porters, cleaners, etc.

Protests in early September targeted corruption. Many sons and daughters of the top politicians have become rich. The government responded by banning social media, which half the population use regularly for news and to keep in touch with friends and relatives abroad.

The capital city exploded. The army at first shot down protesters, then retreated. The Maoist prime minister resigned. Protesters burned down Parliament, the Supreme Court, Maoist offices, and politicians' houses.

The army has now installed Sushila Karki, an elderly for-

mer judge favoured by student protesters because she clashed with the government over corruption in 2016-7 and then retired. She promises elections in six months.

The uprising echoes events in Sri Lanka in 2022 and Bangladesh in 2024. Like them, it may not end well. Bangladesh is now heading for elections where the conservative Bangladesh National Party and Islamists look most likely to win. Another parallel may be with Egypt, where a series of street uprisings ended up by installing the dictatorship of a general, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

To win democracy and social reform (let alone socialism, which is not near to hand in a country like Nepal with only a small stable working class un-

less as an offshoot of regional revolution in India and elsewhere), street uprisings are not enough. Political parties, with structures, democracy, debates, voting, accountability, are needed. Even more, a workers' party is needed, and that needs a structured deliberative democracy, not e-consultations on the model of France's LFI. Nepal is one of the world's poorest countries, and a workers' party strong enough to take power there looks unlikely, but even a minority workers' party could be a big factor in sustaining and inflecting democracy.

And Maoism, despite its revolutionary allure in the 1960s and 70s, and nostalgia for it here and there, can bring nothing positive. □

Trump threatens our light and air

By Will Roberts

"He did not hate his opponents. He wanted the best for them. That's where I disagreed with Charlie. I hate my opponents, and I don't want the best for them."

An odd kind of praise, from President Trump's 45-minute eulogy for reactionary social media influencer Charlie Kirk, but certainly words the President lives by. In the weeks since Kirk was assassinated mid-talk on a college campus in Utah, the Trump administration has used his death to spearhead the latest tranche of reactionary policies in the United States. Many changes have been justified as combatting "hate speech", as well as quite openly taking vengeance against liberals and the left, those Trump has deemed responsible for Kirk's assassination.

Most high-profile was the pressure put by Brendan Carr, Trump-appointed chair of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), on the TV network ABC, who folded under the threat of having their license removed and suspended presenter Jimmy Kimmel. Kimmel had given a speech after Kirk's death condemning the President's attacks on the press and civil society, which earned an angry tirade from Trump and another from Carr. After a week, ABC shamefacedly reinstated Kimmel.

Nixon

This is not the first time that a president of the United States has put pressure on the FCC to revoke licenses. Richard Nixon began doing just the same in the early 1970s, leaning on the fact that many national networks' stations (which hold the FCC licenses) were based in red states. He was interrupted by the Watergate Scandal, and his threats came to nothing.

Whether Trump and Carr's behaviour amounts to a breaching of the First Amendment (the right to free speech) depends on interpretation of a legal precedent. Historically, the Supreme Court has found that the government is free to use the "bully pulpit" to persuade companies and the population, but that when this leans over into coercion, by threatening consequences if action isn't taken, this crosses the line. Last year, for example, the National Rifle Association successfully sued a New York state insurance official for suggesting that insurance companies shouldn't work with the association.

Republicans made great hay when the Biden administration, during high Covid, asked social media companies to remove tweets spreading misinformation regarding Covid. Since Reagan, "free speech rights" have been a staple of Republican politics.

But readers can judge for themselves

whether Trump crosses the line in his remarks: "I have read someplace that the networks were 97 percent against me, I get 97 percent negative, and yet I won and easily... I would think maybe their license should be taken away".

Liberal NGOs are another cluster of "opponents" that Trump has been going after. Trump openly named groups like George Soros's Open Society Foundations and the Ford Foundation, and has been campaigning for them to have their tax-exempt status removed. This would both force the organisations to pay taxes on all donations, and prevent people from writing off donations to them on their taxes, almost certainly taking enormous chunks out of their funding.

Trump has filed a lawsuit against the *New York Times* for biased reporting, with a rambling case that includes statements such as "*the Apprentice* represented the cultural magnitude of President Trump's singular brilliance, which captured the zeitgeist of our time". This follows cases against CBS and ABC news networks. Most of the cases are not designed to win, but to have a "chilling effect", encouraging reporters (especially from outlets smaller than the *NYT* and *Washington Post*) to cover other stories, rather than get embroiled in the cumbersome and extremely expensive court case.

All of these actions should be seen for what they are, an open attempt to suffocate the media ecosystem anywhere to the left of the MAGA movement itself.

The attempt has not come without controversy: Texan senator Ted Cruz, on many issues a staunch Trumpite, called Carr's speech about ABC "dangerous as hell", and reproached him for "mafia-like tactics".

Trumpian Attorney General Pam Bondi declared that, after Kirk's death, the government would "absolutely" be cracking down on "hate speech", which also caused large sections of the country to bristle. The American constitution has no definition of "hate speech", and usual free speech laws include no "except for hate speech" clauses. This means that in practice, "hate speech" is whatever the accuser says it is. Court appeals could overturn arrests and sentences made under such charges, but not before significant damage was already done, as with many of Trump's and Musk's actions which courts have ruled against.

Trump's own conduct here has been flagrant: in a social media post, Trump told Bondi "They impeached me twice, and indicted me (5 times!), Over Nothing. Justice Must Be Served, Now!!!" He specifically named former FBI director James Comey and California senator Adam Schiff as people Bondi should prosecute, and promised to appoint



someone from his personal legal team to the relevant attorney's office.

All of this seems nakedly and shockingly illegal, but with a majority of conservatives on the Supreme Court, Trump has been able to get away with a lot (including arrests and deportations) which is, in theory, against the law and the constitution.

Another piece of vague wording could lead to similar races against the courts to make hasty arrests and crack-downs. Trump announced, while preparing for his night's sleep in Windsor Castle, that "Antifa" would be deemed a terrorist organisation, and that swift punishment for them and anyone funding them would follow.

Hitches

There are some notable hitches to this plan: 1. "Antifa" doesn't exist. 2. The United States has no existing legal category for domestic organisations to be designated "terrorists". 3. Trump already attempted to declare this at the end of his last term in 2020, and it had no material outcome. The difference this time is that Trump has significantly changed the rules of the game in his favour, and even if a court were to overrule him down the line, there is a risk that the vaguely worded designation could be used to attack activists up and down the country.

This goes hand in hand with the ramping up of prosecutions by ICE, Trump's quasi-militia dedicated to deporting immigrants. Numbers of arrests and deportations have exploded in recent months, often carried out by officers in plainclothes who show no

identification and no required justification for taking action. Stephen Miller, White House deputy Chief of Staff and architect of the Trumpite Project 2025, was quoted in a meeting with ICE officials demanding a minimum of 3,000 arrests per day. When told that officers were focusing on identifying migrants with criminal records, he explicitly encouraged racial profiling, and asked "why aren't you at Home Depot? Why aren't you at 7/11?"

It is now extremely likely that where possible, ICE agents will be deployed near polling booths on election days, in an attempt to widely suppress voter turnout among migrants and people of colour.

For many decades, tenets like freedom of speech and freedom of the press have been taken for granted as the bedrock of liberal society. Socialists may feel inclined to sneer at liberal hosts like Jimmy Kimmel coming into Trump's firing line, or be unfazed by the *New York Times'* sizeable legal department and budget (like Harvard University's, or some law firms') having to do battle with the White House. We should not be so complacent. In the late 19th century, socialists called bourgeois rights like freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of association the "light and air" of the workers' movement, conditions without which it could not survive. Then, those rights had to be fought into existence. Now, we must fight to keep them. Trump's presidency is not yet a year in, and the threat to the workers' movement is already extremely apparent. □

Trans people and the toilet wars

By Riki Lane

Workers' Liberty supports trans people's rights. Some left feminists ("sex-based rights activists", SBRA) see those as threats to women's rights. The series of which this article is part attempts to thread a path within this hostility. How can left-wing activists reach more agreement?

This article examines access to toilets and change rooms. Following articles will look at debates around sport and prisons, followed by a summary about socialist attitudes.

I use "assigned sex at birth" for biological sex (e.g. assigned female at birth AFAB), and "gender identity" for psychological and social identification. I am a university and gender-affirming health clinic researcher. I identify as a gender-non-conforming man (he/they). Nothing here represents my employers' stance.

Over the last ten years there has been increasing attention to which public toilets and change rooms trans people are allowed to use – particularly in the US and UK. Prior to that it was largely a matter of social conventions. There was often hostility to trans people, but it was expressed in wanting to exclude them from jobs, from medical care, from having their chosen gender on official documents, from elite sport, etc., not over toilets and such.

In most jurisdictions there have never been laws that restrict who can access women's toilets – it is a matter of social convention. Even today "bathroom bans" remain uncommon. Since around 2015, a range of US states have passed "bathroom bills", aiming to stop trans people using these facilities in schools and sometimes some other places, based on the idea that they pose a "threat" to women. What the EHRC proposes in Britain now goes much further than any US state law.

A key argument of the SBRA is that self-ID for trans people poses safety risks in women-only spaces. Yet there is no evidence of increased physical or sexual assaults in countries which allow people to choose their public gender by self-ID. There is no evidence that trans women (or masculine lesbian women) actually represent a threat to non-trans women in toilets and change rooms.

Some non-trans women may experience discomfort at having those people in the space. Several years ago Australian SBRA academic Holly Lawford-Smith set up a web page for non-trans women (but not trans women) to report their bad experiences. The reports are about women feeling uncomfortable about having recognisable trans women in their spaces; no accounts of those trans women harass-



ing others are visible.

I draw on Julia Serrano's 2021 online article [Transgender People, Bathrooms, and Sexual Predators: What the Data Say](#). She cites a 2019 peer-reviewed study that used Massachusetts as a case study "to empirically assess whether reports of safety or privacy violations in public restrooms, locker rooms, and dressing rooms change in frequency in localities that have gender identity inclusive public accommodations nondiscrimination ordinances (GIPANDOs) as compared to matched localities without GIPANDOs." They report that: "By using public records and statistical modeling, we found no evidence that privacy and safety in public restrooms change as a result of the passage of GIPANDOs."

By contrast, there is much [evidence](#) that trans people (and masculine lesbian women) are harassed in toilets and change rooms. Especially in the UK and parts of the US now, there are many reports of verbal harassment and of physical assaults. Serrano cites a 2019 peer-reviewed article. "In our sample of transgender and nonbinary US adolescents, the 12-month prevalence of sexual assault was 25.9%, substantially higher than national rates of 15% among cisgender high school girls and 4% among cisgender boys. After adjusting for potential confounders, compared with nonrestricted youth of the same gender identity and sex assigned at birth, school restroom and locker room restrictions were associated with 1.26 times the risk of sexual assault for transgender boys, 1.42 times the risk for nonbinary youth AFAB [Assigned Female At Birth], and 2.49 times the risk for transgender girls."

Policing

Policing trans people's access to toilets can only be by "vigilante" action. Building elaborate medical (or birth-certificate-checking) facilities to vet entrants outside every toilet or changing room is obviously unworkable. So the EHRC ban on trans people can be implemented only by increasing the already-high unofficial harassment of people who look "unusual" and driving

them out of large areas of public life. Anyone who does not meet gender stereotypes will be at risk of exclusion or threat.

At a trans expert advisory group meeting I attended, one non-binary AFAB attendee reported being gender-checked in the female toilets. A senior government advisor (also non-binary AFAB) said they only ever felt comfortable going to gender-neutral toilets. Holly Lawford-Smith has advocated for such gender checking, and said it was fine if it meant non-trans women with a masculine appearance got gender checked. This reinforces "passing privilege" where both trans and non-trans women need to "pass" by conforming to social standards of femininity, and means social exclusion for those who can't or won't conform.

Forced

A wide "bathroom ban" would also hit trans people who "pass". They may elude the ban at sports or cultural venues; but at work they may be forced to "out" themselves, and to explain repeatedly to new staff, or hostile older staff, why they use apparently "wrong" facilities.

Much of the SBRA argument replicates earlier tropes about gay men and lesbians being a threat in these spaces, and especially fear campaigns about sexual assault on children. Julia Serrano points to a shift away from gay men being portrayed as the "dangerous people" to trans women. Earlier "moral panics" focussed on black people as the danger, suggesting that desegregation would increase sexual assaults on white women by black men. All these claims have no basis in research, and the anti-black and anti-gay panics have subsided in recent decades.

Most trans people try to avoid public toilets or only go to single-cubicle or non-gendered ones. As they don't have that option in change rooms they usually use toilet cubicles to have privacy. Trans organisations in Australia advocate for converting single sex toilets into all-gender ones preferably with single cubicles. They also advocate for

"labelling what facilities are available ... whether the bathroom has toilets, urinals, or change table".

Such gender-neutral facilities already exist in many places – e.g. in most private homes, and many restaurants etc. Many have to be gender-neutral, because they are designed as places where any parent can take small children.

There is no evidence that trans people using bathrooms aligned with their gender identity poses an actual danger to non-trans women. Some non-trans women feel uncomfortable in sharing these spaces with trans women. But some women feel uncomfortable sharing spaces with lesbian women, and, historically racist white women did not want to share with non-white women.

By contrast, trans women do face danger in using men's facilities, and do face social exclusion or forced "outing" if they are banned from using women's facilities in workplaces, swimming pools, cinemas, etc. The social cost of "bathroom bans" far outweighs any gain. □

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A critique of Monthly

By Paul Hampton

Notes and references for this feature are in the online version: bit.ly/mr-ph

The *Monthly Review* magazine and its current editor John Bellamy Foster have a very high profile on the international left. It has a particularly high profile on Marxist ecology, where Foster has published numerous books, articles and chapters over more than three decades.

But *Monthly Review* has espoused erroneous, Stalinist politics since it was founded. Although Foster is often associated with the metabolic reading of Marx, he is neither its originator nor the best interpreter of its importance.

I provide a critique of the *Monthly Review* school and its links to Stalinism. I evaluate Foster's contributions on ecology, to distinguish where his work has added to our knowledge of Marxist metabolism, in contrast to the mistaken notions Foster has bolted onto Marxist eco-theory.

Monthly Review

Paul Sweezy (1910-2004) and Leo Huberman (1903-68) founded *Monthly Review* (subtitled 'An Independent Socialist Magazine') in 1949. They started their own publisher, Monthly Review Press, in 1952. Their best-known books include Sweezy's *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (1942), Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth* (1957) and Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* (1966). Sweezy summarised their perspective:

"The central theme is that in a mature capitalist economy dominated by a handful of giant corporations the potential for accumulation far exceeds the profitable investment opportunities provided by the normal modus operandi of the private enterprise system. This results in a deepening tendency to stagnation."

Within the Third Camp Marxist tradition, the *Monthly Review* school was criticised from its inception by Hal Draper and Sam Bottone, and later notably by Robert Brenner and Steve Zeluck. Draper described "the new Stalinoid front which has been crystallising in this country from a coalition of several grouplets of independent Stalinists and pro-Stalinists". He wrote:

"The political nature of this tendency is quite easy to define... organisationally independent of the official Communist Party and not under CP discipline... In theory: Russia is 'socialist', or 'socialistic', or a 'workers' state'. The Stalinist empire is 'the socialist world' or 'transition to socialism' etc. In politics: Support of the Stalinist war camp as against

the Western capitalist war camp; Russia is not imperialist, heavens no..."

The AWL has published important critiques of their political economy.

Stalin

Baran and Sweezy's correspondence reveals how Stalin's works were the immediate trigger for their views on capitalism. In late 1952, Baran wrote to Sweezy:

"I have received and perused with some care Stalin's opus [*Economic Problems of the USSR*, 1952]... Most interesting in the whole thing, I feel, is his discussion of the capitalist world. There the really new and important point is that dealing with the 'fundamental law of capitalism'. What he is trying to do is to get away from the Marxian notion of a competitive capitalism in formulating his 'fundamental law'. It is not the 'law of value' which is fundamental to capitalism, nor is it the 'law of the average rate of profit' but what is 'fundamental' is the 'law of maximum, monopolistic profit'... What I think this really comes down to is in a sense disregarding the entire Marxian concept of competitive capitalism and approaching the whole business from the standpoint of monopolistic, imperialistic capitalism. This implies really 'new economics' where the labour theory of value, equalisation of the rate of profit, value-price transformation etc. etc. recede in importance and where the determination of the monopoly price, monopoly profit, monopoly-caused income distribution etc. moves into the foreground."

In 1953, *Monthly Review* lamented Stalin's death, propagating an embarrassing eulogy. Huberman and Sweezy wrote:

"Whatever one may think of his methods, one cannot deny him his achievements... only Stalin of all the Soviet leaders had the vast organising ability, the unerring judgment, the steady nerve, and the iron will that were required... he did more than anyone else to bring socialism out of the realm of hopes and into the realm of facts, and he did more than anyone else to keep the road to socialism open to the peoples of the world. Whatever may be said of Stalin now, by way of praise or denigration, it is for these great achievements that history will honour him as long as the human race survives."

In 1956, the Hungarian revolution was suppressed by Russian tanks. *Monthly Review* expressed some opposition, arguing that "any claim the Soviet Union had to moral leadership of the world socialist movement is now extinguished". Sweezy joined Max Shachtman and others on a platform

to protest the crushing of the uprising. None of this stopped Sweezy attending the Stalinist "celebrations" of the fortieth anniversary of the Russian revolution in Moscow the following year.

From Mao to Castro

However *Monthly Review* began shifting its allegiance to other Stalinist currents. At the height of Maoist China's Great Leap Forward, which would cost at least 30 million lives in famine, they lauded the experiment:

"Nineteen fifty-eight was the year of China's 'big leap forward'... It is now widely recognised that successes approaching the fantastic were achieved during 1958... Why shouldn't the great majority of Chinese approve of the commune system, and work harder under it... The Chinese are being passionately denounced precisely because they have committed themselves to by far the greatest attempt yet made to put these socialist ideals into practice."

Sweezy and his co-thinkers were also quick to embrace Castro's Cuba. They held discussions with Che Guevara and others in Castro's government. In 1960, they already concluded:

"For our part, we have no hesitation in answering: the new Cuba is a socialist Cuba..."

"We base our view that Cuba is and will remain essentially a socialist society on forces at work in Cuba today which are tending rapidly to reduce the relative importance of the private sector. These forces are partly rooted in the present policies of the revolutionary regime and in part result from pressures over which it has no control."

New class

By 1970, after the USSR's split with China and its intervention into Czechoslovakia, Sweezy concluded that "there is a ruling class in the USSR and that it is of a new type". He argued:

"The Soviet Union... is neither capitalism nor socialism as these social formations have been traditionally understood by Marxists, nor is it, as Trotskyists maintain, a transitional society between the two which has been temporarily stalled by a bureaucratic deformation. It is, in my opinion, a society with enough basic differences from both capitalism and socialism to be considered and studied as a new social formation in its own right."

Sweezy held a peculiar "new class" theory, in which Stalinist formations were considered an historical stage beyond capitalism, while still exploitative societies. He argued that "the Soviet workers have not lost all the gains they made in their period of political



Paul Sweezy

ascendancy, e.g., in such matters as job security, health care". He concluded:

"In this sense – and I believe only in this sense – the post-revolutionary societies of our time mark an important historic advance over capitalism. But for most people in the exploited periphery of the global capitalist system, where over half of the world's population still lives, this advance is an enormous stride forward."

Sweezy claimed it was the "suffocating pressure" of the United States that was the problem, above the class nature of the Soviet Union. Sweezy was interviewed for *Workers' Liberty* magazine after the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe. He reiterated: "I do not think these systems were capitalist. They were class societies, and exploitative societies, too." He never explained what the collapse of the USSR signified about the place of Stalinist societies in history.

Working class written off

The *Monthly Review* school also took from Stalinism the erroneous dependency theory of capitalism.

In *The Political Economy of Growth*, Baran concluded that "the main task of imperialism in our time: to prevent, or, if that is impossible, to slow down and to control the economic development of underdeveloped countries".

In *Monopoly Capital*, Baran and Sweezy reiterated the same perspective: "In the rest of the capitalist world scores of colonies, neo-colonies, and semi-colonies are doomed to remain in their degraded condition of underdevelopment and misery. For them the only road forward leads straight out of the capitalist system."

Baran and Sweezy were clear about the political implications of their theory. They abandoned the working class as the revolutionary agent of change in

Review, 1949-2025

the advanced capitalist states. Foster recently published their letters. In the 1950s, they claimed:

"The real point is that the advanced capitalist systems have been able to domesticate their working classes, and there is no compelling reason to assume that this must come to an end. They are not to be treated as revolutionary or potentially revolutionary material – on that we agree... The fact is that there is hardly anything to it; the masses are as reformist as their leaders."

In *Monopoly Capital*, Baran and Sweezy stated that "the revolutionary initiative against capitalism, which in Marx's day belonged to the proletariat in the advanced countries, has passed into the hands of the impoverished masses in the underdeveloped countries". They concluded:

"The answer of the traditional Marxian orthodoxy – that the industrial proletariat must eventually rise in revolution against its capitalist oppressors – no longer carries conviction... their organised cores in the basic industries have to a large extent become integrated into the system as consumers and ideologically conditioned members of the society."

Current politics

John Bellamy Foster is Professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon and the current editor of *Monthly Review* magazine. He has been the most prominent and intransigent defender of the magazine's perspectives for the last four decades. Foster published his first article in *Monthly Review* in 1981. He sat on its editorial advisory committee from 1989. He was *Monthly Review*

co-editor from 2000 and sole editor since 2006. Foster has written, edited or co-authored more than twenty books, including a dozen on ecology. He has published scores of papers in academic journals, other left publications and *Monthly Review*.

Foster emerged in the late 1970s as the most obdurate defender of the *Monthly Review* school. In 1981, his first article was a rather intemperate defence of monopoly capitalist theory in *Monthly Review*, responding to Zeluck's critique in the first issue of *Against the Current* magazine. In 1984, Foster finished his doctoral dissertation at York University in Toronto, published as *The Theory of Monopoly Capitalism* (1986). It is a shameless defence of Baran and Sweezy's Stalinist worldview.

In *The Theory of Monopoly Capitalism*, Foster ended by dismissing the working class in the West. He wrote: "The idea of a long revolution is meant to suggest that the revolutionary potential in the advanced capitalist countries in the foreseeable future, if left to their own devices, is extremely weak."

In 2014, Foster republished *The Theory of Monopoly Capitalism* with a laudatory new introduction claiming vindication. Foster continued to dismiss the working class in the United States and elsewhere:

"Workers, partly through the action of trade unions in the monopolistic sector of the economy, were able to raise wages above the value of labour power – or the level necessary under given historical conditions to guarantee the supply of labour. However, this increase of wages above the value of labour power was hardly a straightforward progressive development since this primarily took the form of the incorporation of unproductive labour/waste."

Monthly Review politics

Since Foster became *Monthly Review* editor, its politics have worsened compared to the last years of Sweezy. They are certainly far worse than the short period when Ellen Meiksins Wood was co-editor (1997-2000).

Foster responded to 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq by ramping up an "anti-imperialism" reminiscent of third period Stalinism. In books such as *Pox Americana* (2004) and *Naked Imperialism* (2006), the emphasis was entirely on the United States as an empire in pursuit of global dominance. Foster was an early advocate of the interpretation of Donald Trump as a fascist (or neo-fascist), even in his first term.

Foster's contribution to the collection,



Washington's New Cold War (2022), includes uncritical apologism for Russia's war against Ukraine. The whole book is one long justification for the Chinese ruling class. Last year, Foster dismissed anyone on the left opposing his views on imperialism as "Eurocentric", while claiming that "the locus of revolution for more than a century has been the periphery, not the centre, of the capitalist world". He wrote off the working class in the West:

"At the root of the criticisms of economic imperialism emanating from Western Eurocentric circles has been the rejection of Engels's and Lenin's labour aristocracy thesis. Thus, the whole notion that a section of the working class in the imperialist core of the global economy benefits from imperialism was generally placed out of bounds as politically objectionable. Yet, the existence of a labour aristocracy at some level is difficult to deny on any realistic basis. An indication of this is that study after study has confirmed that the AFL-CIO union leadership in the United States historically has been oriented to business unionism and is closely tied to the military-industrial complex. It thus has been complicit with the established order. AFL-CIO leadership has worked with the CIA throughout the post-Second World War era to repress progressive unions throughout the Global South, backing the most exploitative regimes. There is no doubt that in these and other respects, the upper stratum of labour (or its representatives) has opportunistically opposed the needs of both the majority of workers in the United States and the world proletarian movement as a whole. The labour leadership in Eu-

rope associated with social democratic parties has historically exhibited similar propensities. The overwhelming whiteness of the leadership of most unions in Western countries and the racism so apparent in them further helps explain reactionary support for imperialist policies by their governments."

Venezuela

The *Monthly Review* were cheerleaders for Hugo Chávez when he was president of Venezuela. *Monthly Review* Press published a stream of eulogies, such as *Understanding the Venezuelan Revolution: Hugo Chávez Talks to Marta Harnecker* (2005), Michael Lebowitz, *Build It Now* (2006) and Harnecker, *A World to Build* (2014).

Foster recounted his 2011 trip to Venezuela, "when I was the sole U.S. participant in a small group of socialist intellectuals from the Americas and Europe invited to Caracas to confer with the country's top ministers on the future of the Bolivarian Revolution". He lamented that "although our group of socialist intellectual invitees (including István Mészáros...) had lengthy discussions with the Bolivarian ministers... a sudden onset of illness prevented President Chávez himself from meeting with us as scheduled". Foster claimed: "My own role in the discussions was mainly to put a strong case for a social-ecological metabolism as a defining aspect of twenty-first century socialism."

After Chávez died in 2013, Foster's obituary bordered on canonisation:

"In everything Chávez did he was a revolutionary, which he saw, like Che, as the expression of love for humanity. What stands out in all his actions and words was the absolute authenticity of this commitment... It was his attempt to create socialism as a social-metabolic form, unifying all of society, which represented his most important advance in the theory and practice of the transition to socialism."

The references to "metabolism" are gratuitous. The contradictions of Venezuela's oil-rent economy for the environment are forgotten. Foster's *Monthly Review* defends Maduro's authoritarian rule, despite its hostility to independent workers' organisations and to democracy.

"Yet, more often than not, the now 25-year-old Venezuelan revolution has found ways to spiral up in a process of creative reinvention and implicit self-critique. In fact, nothing could better illustrate commune-building as a part of a comprehensive anti-imperialist and socialist strategy of the kind

continued on page 14 →



→ from page 13

that Marx would endorse than the way the Bolivarian Process has accumulated definitions: it became anti-imperialist in 2004, then incorporated socialism in 2006, then began using communes as the basic cells of its anti-imperialist socialist project in 2009-2010... Further, in the next year, the government put into law the idea that communes should be connected through communal cities, federations, and, finally, the 'communal state'...

"However, the most telling expression of the anti-imperialist potential of the Venezuelan commune occurred in the spring and summer of 2024, when the communes became the grassroots force that President Nicolás Maduro turned to under the grave imperialist assault that occurred in the context of the most recent presidential elections."

China

The *Monthly Review* school was soft on Maoist rule of China from beginning to end. Starting with the 1949 take over to the great famine, the Cultural Revolution and Mao's death, they glossed over the exploitation and national oppression carried out by the Chinese ruling class. Foster continued the nostalgia for Chinese Stalinism. He wrote: "The history of the non-capitalist world offers a few glimpses of other possibilities... in China under Mao things were different... impressive advances were made in agricultural production."

Sweezy and his co-thinkers became more critical after 1978, especially with Deng Xioping's market reforms. They criticised the Tiananmen Square massacre and published a book by disillusioned Maoist William Hinton, *The Great Reversal: The Privatization of China* (1990).

In 2004, *Monthly Review* produced a special issue by Martin Hart-Landsberg and Paul Burkett on China and socialism, published in book form by *Monthly Review Press*. In their foreword, Harry Magdoff and Foster described the book as "a careful, clear, well-grounded

Marxist study of how a major post-revolutionary society turned away from socialism". Hart-Landsberg and Burkett argued, "it is our position that China's market reforms have not led to socialist renewal but rather to full-fledged capitalist restoration".

Foster has repudiated this critical position over the last twenty years. Since at least 2009, he has been visiting China, speaking at universities in Suzhou, Shandong and Beijing. Engaging with academics is no crime. But flattering the regime, claiming it is informed by authentic Marxism, and ignoring exploitation and oppression in China are heinous political errors.

Foster has supported a number of publications sponsored and supported by the Chinese regime. He has been an editorial board member of the *World Review of Political Economy*, starting from its first issue in 2010. Foster has also published in *International Critical Thought* journal, edited and staffed by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He wrote recently in another journal, *Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly*, that despite all the changes in China, "Marxism in political economy has still been central to the party as well as to the management of the state and corporations. It has guided China, which can be seen in every aspect of its development".

In his book, *Capitalism in the Anthropocene* (2022), Foster claimed that "post-revolutionary societies did not have the same inner drive to environmental destruction – since they were not inherently ruled by the capital accumulation process". He also argued that "the existence of planning... made it more likely that such countries could effectively address environmental problems once these were brought to the forefront of their societal agendas".

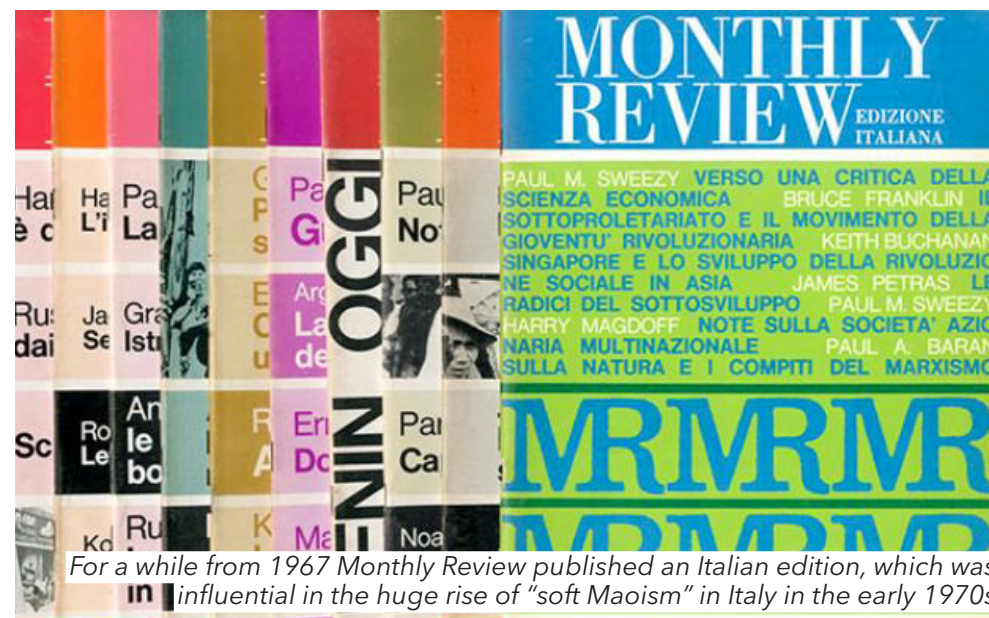
Foster makes no effort to stand up for the millions-strong Chinese working class or the oppressed nationalities within China. Instead, struggles over Hong Kong, Taiwan and Xinjiang are demonised or ignored. The Chinese state is awarded the role of substitute social agency.

Ecology

For more than fifty years, Marxists have framed ecological questions with the language of metabolism, the English translation of Marx's concept of Stoffwechsel from *Capital*, Volume I and III.

In 1971, Alfred Schmidt's book *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (1962) was translated into English with significant discussion of Marx's framing of nature-society relations in terms of metabolism. Schmidt argued:

"With the concept of 'metabolism' Marx introduced a completely new understanding of man's relation to nature... The nature-speculation inherent in Marx... is nothing but an attempt, which runs through the whole of his work, to provide an appropriate concept for the mutual interpenetration of nature and society within the natural whole. To this end Marx used new and



in part peculiarly biological metaphors, of which the expression 'metabolism', used throughout *Capital*, seems finally to have been chosen as the best formulation."

In 1974, *New Left Review* published a widely-cited article on Marxist ecology, by Hans Magnus Enzensberger. He wrote:

"What is actually meant are disequilibrium and dysfunctions of all kinds in the metabolism between nature and human society occurring as the unintentional side effects of the industrial process... Alterations in the atmosphere and in the resources of land and water traceable to metabolic causes such as production of smog, changes in climate, irreversible changes to rivers and lakes, and oceanographic changes must also be taken into account."

In 1976, the new translation of *Capital* Volume I was published, with the translation of Stoffwechsel as metabolism. In 1977, Howard Parsons published a comprehensive collection of quotations, *Marx and Engels on Ecology*, as well as commentary. Although the text used the older translations, Parsons himself used the more recent nomenclature in his introduction. He wrote:

"In the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, he [Marx] used the scientific term... Stoffwechsel, variously translated as 'exchange', 'circulation' and 'metabolism'... an economic system that breaches the laws of nature by which wealth is produced will bring on inevitable reactions: impairment of nature's 'metabolism' of ecological cycles, depletion of nature's resources, impoverishment of human society, and a relapse of nature

into the slumber of undevelopment."

In 1981, the revised translation of *Capital* Volume III was published, translating Stoffwechsel as metabolism and, for the first time, Riss as "rift" (rather than "break").

In 1984, Neil Smith's book *Uneven Development* elaborated and extended the concept of metabolism, for both ecology and geography. He wrote:

"It is not necessary in the first place to scour Marx's entire collective works in order to isolate his different treatments of nature. This painstaking and ambitious project has already been accomplished by Alfred Schmidt in his difficult but definitive study of *The Concept of Nature in Marx*..."

"Schmidt is particularly perceptive in identifying the source of Marx's historical originality, for it is not the concept of metabolism itself that is new but the context in which Marx used it. Specifically, Marx saw the labour process as the motive force of this metabolic interaction."

After this time, numerous Marxist authors such as James O'Connor, Ted Benton and Reiner Grundmann referred to metabolism in their critical, varied interpretations of Marx.

In parallel to Marxist uses of metabolism, some social ecologists such as Marina Fischer-Kowalski and advocates of material flows analysis also began referring to metabolism in the context of nature-society relations.

Marxist geographers such as David Harvey, Eric Swyngedouw and Noel Castree made widespread use of metabolism, often taking their cue from



Mural of Hugo Chávez and his ascension to heaven, in Venezuela



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Neil Smith. By the 1990s, the relevance of Marx's metabolism was acknowledged by ecologists. For example, Tim Hayward wrote:

"The 'human metabolism with nature'... captures fundamental aspects of humans' existence in both natural and physical beings... Now the idea of a human metabolism with nature, in much this sense, originated with Marx: it served to characterise the materialist basis for his critique of political economy."

Starting in 1995, Paul Burkett made a series of interventions about Marx's conceptualisation of human interaction with nature in terms of the "people-nature metabolism". Istvan Meszaros used the term metabolism, especially in his book published by *Monthly Review Press*, *Beyond Capital* (1995).

By the 1990s, references to metabolism were common in Marxist ecology discussions. Whatever innovations Foster may be credited with, he was not the originator of Marxist metabolism. Foster himself explicitly acknowledges many of these predecessors.

Foster

In 1991, Foster published his first article on ecology in *Monthly Review*, about clashes between timber workers and environmentalists in the Pacific Northwest. He wrote a number of articles for *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* journal, mostly on concrete matters.

In 1994, Foster produced his first book on ecology, *The Vulnerable Planet*, published by *Monthly Review Press*. It contains the quotation from Marx's *Capital* Volume III, about "an irreparable rift in the interdependence process of social metabolism". However, it was a passing reference, with nothing made of the significance of metabolism or the rift in the text.

Foster published further ecology articles in *Science & Society*, *Against the Current*, *Contemporary Sociology* and other journals. Foster's 1995 article *Marx and the Environment* did not refer to metabolism or the rift (he used the older translations, of "interchange" and "break").

Foster recently stated that his first theoretical publication on metabolism

was in 1997, in German for the *Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch Des Marxismus*, in the entry 'Erde' (earth).

Foster's first theoretical discussion of metabolism in English came in article published in *Organization and Environment* journal, in September 1997. He would also refer to metabolism in the 1998 *Socialist Register* and soon after, in *Monthly Review*.

Foster's first theoretical elevation of the metabolic rift came in a long article published in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1999. This was followed by his book *Marx's Ecology* (2000), published by *Monthly Review Press*. Since then, Foster has elaborated much more on ecology, but little more on metabolism.

Foster and metabolism

Foster first laid out his own account of Marx's metabolic theory in 1999-2000. These early expositions mostly replicate previous renderings by other Marxists. Foster accepted the prior readings, which found the concept of metabolism in Marx's mature political economy, drawing in the insights from his earlier writings on the relationships between nature and society. Foster wrote:

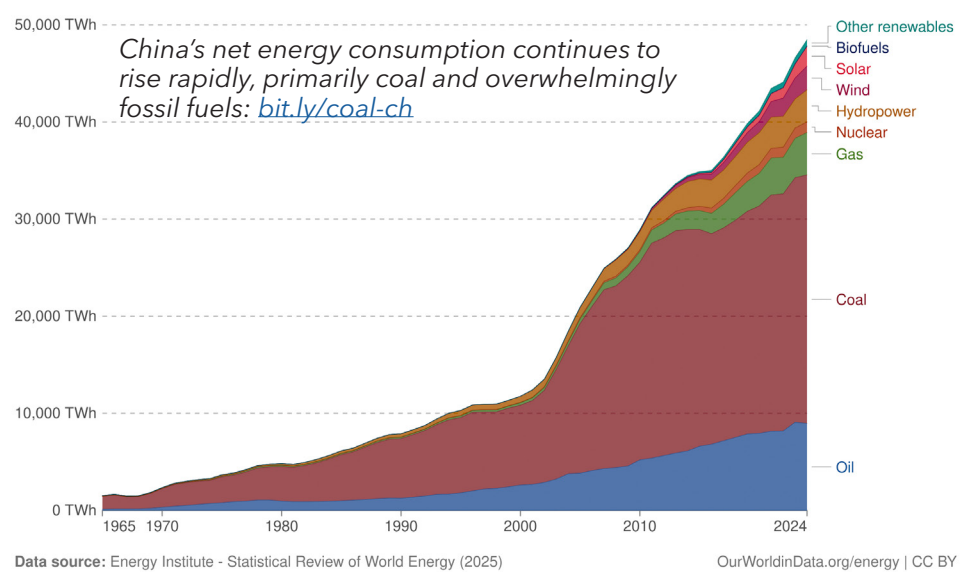
"Marx's later concept of metabolism, however, allowed him to give a more solid and scientific expression of this fundamental relationship, depicting the complex, dynamic interchange between human beings and nature resulting from human labour. The concept of metabolism, with its attendant notions of material exchanges and regulatory action, allowed him to express the human relation to nature as one that encompassed both 'nature-imposed conditions' and the capacity of human beings to affect this process."

Just as Marx's examination of production was the key to unlocking the nature of exploitation and therefore of class societies across history, so production was the starting point for the explanation of ecological questions.

Foster's first step was to repeat the insight expressed by Alfred Schmidt and echoed by numerous Marxists subsequently, about the centrality of the labour process. Foster wrote: "The key

Energy consumption by source, China

Measured in terms of primary energy using the substitution method.



to Marx's entire theoretical approach in this area is the concept of social-ecological metabolism (Stoffwechsel), which was rooted in his understanding of the labour process." He argued in *Marx's Ecology*:

"The key conceptual category in Marx's theoretical analysis in this area is the concept of metabolism (Stoffwechsel). The German word 'Stoffwechsel' directly sets out in its elements the notion of 'material exchange' that underlies the notion of structured processes of biological growth and decay captured in the term 'metabolism'. In his definition of the labour process Marx made the concept of metabolism central to his entire system of analysis by rooting his understanding of the labour process upon it."

Second, Foster took up earlier arguments that only socialism, with common ownership and democratic planning under workers' control, could guarantee the sustainable relationship of human society to nature. The concept of metabolism "constituting the complex, interdependent process linking human beings to nature through labour", played "a central role in Marx's vision of a future society of associated producers".

Third, Foster drew out starkly and more clearly than earlier interpretations the middle premise between labour processes in class societies and the recast relations under socialism – namely the element of ecological damage or breakdown. The best-known formulation used by Marx in *Capital* Volume I, and by many Marxists before Foster, was that "capitalist production... disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth" (or in the earlier, poorer translation, "disturbs the circulation of matter between man and the soil").

Foster tied this idea of the "disturbance" in the metabolic relationship of nature and society from *Capital* Volume I to the quotation in *Capital* Volume III, of "an irreparable rift in the interdependent process between social metabolism and natural metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of the soil". Foster's innovation was to compress this passage into the expression

"metabolic rift", as a taut summary of Marx's notion of ecological crisis.

Foster regards his 1999 article and Paul Burkett's *Marx and Nature* (1999) as the founding texts of their metabolic approach. This is a useful insight, because while Burkett certainly adopted the metabolic approach and referred to the main Marx quotes from *Capital*, Volume I and its earlier drafts, for *Capital* Volume III he used the old translation of an "irreparable break in the coherence of social interchange". This is further proof, if it were needed, that their use of metabolism did not extend far beyond other contemporary readings, nor did they fetishise the word "rift".

All Foster did at this point was to take the modern translations of metabolism from Marx's *Capital* and meld them into a readable narrative for understanding modern ecological questions. It was a closely argued rendering of Marx's mature but unfinished conception of ecology, a theoretical starting point for Marxists to approach today's concrete ecological questions. It barely went beyond the earlier accounts by Alfred Schmidt, Neil Smith and others. The addition of the "rift" quotation was a useful heuristic from which to develop Marxist ecology – no more and no less.

Foster's contributions

Apart from his reading of metabolism, widely held by other Marxists, Foster's early work also added significant clarifications to our understanding of Marxist ecology.

First, Foster's historical investigation rightly attributed Marx's original source of metabolism to the renowned scientist, Justus von Liebig. Earlier Marxists, including Schmidt, believed that the physiologist Jacob Moleschott was the most likely source. Marx read Moleschott, but further investigation of Marx's notebooks and unpublished papers – notably by Kohei Saito – has confirmed Liebig as the earliest source and the seminal influence on Marx.

This is not a trivial matter. Marx did not suck Marxism out of his thumb. Marx refined and altered his views by reading and interacting with other nineteenth century figures. Tracing the

continued on page 16 →



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real development of Marx's ideas helps us understand his method. Marx's project was unfinished. Such insights help us to extend Marxist theory and apply it to questions in our own time.

Second, Foster was able to point to other Marxists who had referred to metabolism in their own engagement with ecological questions. He was not the first to highlight the Bolshevik Nikolai Bukharin's contribution on metabolism, but it was a useful connection. Foster also located echoes of this approach in Kautsky, Lenin and other Marxists from the beginning of the twentieth century. Although other writers had noticed some of these references, Foster's account in *Marx's Ecology* made the connections clearer and more explicit.

Third, Foster's account – particularly when allied to the parallel work of Paul Burkett – successfully addressed a range of critics who found Marxism lacking in ecological foundations. While O'Connor, Benton and others accepted the language of metabolism, they were so critical that they undermined the case for Marxist ecology. Others such as Robyn Eckersley and Joan Martinez-Alier took the argument further to reject Marxist ecology almost entirely.

Many ecologists had argued that Marx and Engels responded indifferently or even negatively to Sergei Podolinsky's attempt to introduce certain elements of thermodynamics into socialist theory.

Burkett and Foster sourced and translated four different versions of Podolinsky's account, published in Russian, French, Italian and German.

They established that Marx had actually taken detailed extracts from Podolinsky's work and offered comments. After getting extant material translated, Burkett and Foster concluded that "Podolinsky had not even come close to establishing a plausible thermodynamics basis for the labour theory of value that could have been adopted by Marx and Engels".

Engels also engaged critically, warning that Podolinsky's energy-produc-



tivity calculations failed to account for human production as "squanderer of past solar heat", especially by "squandering our reserves of energy, our coal, ore, forests, etc". As Engels put it, "Podolinsky went astray... because he sought to find in the field of natural science fresh proof of the rightness of socialism and hence has confused the physical with the economic". These warnings of energy-reductionism are prescient against many material flows ecologists today.

Mistakes on ecology

John Bellamy Foster has promoted Marx's metabolism on ecology since the turn of the century. At the same time, Foster has introduced error and confusion into ecological discussions – by trying to inject rotten Stalinist concepts, such as dependency theory, and manufacturing his own tradition. This is the real source of his political errors on degrowth, anti-nuclear and solar engineering, not his references to Marx's metabolism.

Foster took his attitude on Stalinism from Sweezy, adopting the descriptor of a "post-revolutionary society". Foster claimed in his book *The Theory of Monopoly Capitalism* that the USSR, China and Cuba were not driven toward expansion like capitalism and might have more latitude "to move in the direction of socialism in the fullest sense of the term". In 1989, Sweezy argued that these "actually existing planned economies" offered the best chance for humanity in terms of the rapid transformations in production and consumption needed to confront the global environmental crisis.

Foster's view of Stalinism, as more progressive than capitalism, was central to his worldview long before he began his ecological writings. It was not the result of his metabolic reading, but adopted before.

Manufactured tradition

Foster has manufactured a Stalinist tradition within Marxist ecology that simply doesn't hold up. The Stalinist ruling class that expropriated workers' rule after 1928, imposed forced industrialisation and collectivisation with no regard to the ecological consequences. Foster put too much weight on Bukharin, but he did not survive the

Moscow trials. Many of the most gifted Russian scientists, like Nikolai Vavilov, ended up in the gulag or were killed by the early 1940s. They were not able to defend Marxist ecology from the savagery of Stalin. Continuity was broken.

Foster therefore falls back on a number of scientists and writers, such as Christopher Caudwell, Hyman Levy, J D Bernal, J B S Haldane and Joseph Needham, who were influenced politically by the CPGB during its high Stalinist phase. Whatever the merits or criticisms of their scientific views, their Stalinist politics were simply dreadful. In no meaningful sense did they preserve some Marxist ecological essence within the shell of their open espousal of Stalinism.

Foster's preconceived Stalinism also explains his hostility to what he regards as Western Marxism. Although his evaluation has softened, Foster has generally been critical of György Lukács. Foster's Stalinism comes out more clearly when he downgrades Alfred Schmidt's contribution and expresses hostility towards Neil Smith (especially after the latter died). Foster's approach is largely factional, to claim the metabolic reading by rubbishing the earlier advocates, who had mostly better politics.

Foster has taken the manufactured tradition a stage further, arguing that the last years of the USSR before its collapse had traces of an authentic Marx-

ism. No doubt many Russian scientists contributed to the sum total of human knowledge on ecology. However, this was not the result of their politics or the system they lived under. It could not result from a political regime that allowed no workers' self-organisation, or much autonomy for scientists to express views at variance with the ruling class. Foster's efforts to find Marxist ecology in the "late Soviet" period are a complete cul-de-sac.

China

Perhaps Foster's worst lurch has come with his embrace of the contemporary Chinese ruling class. In 2007, the Chinese government proposed building an "ecological civilisation". This term was written into the Chinese Communist Party's constitution in 2012. This appears to have been the pivot for Foster's descent into apologism for the ruling class and its government, led by Xi Jinping. Foster expressed this openly to Chinese audience recently, repeated for English readers in *Monthly Review*:

"The notion of ecological sustainability embedded in the concept of the community of life is exemplified in 'Xi

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From the 1960s Maoist "Four Pests" campaign, contributing to a famine killing tens of millions bit.ly/four-p

Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization'. Xi has stated that if we have to choose between 'mountains of gold' and 'mountains of green', we need to choose mountains of green, recognising that 'lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.' Adopting a Marxist materialist approach to ecology, Xi has argued ecology is 'the most inclusive form of public well-being.' Echoing Frederick Engels on the 'revenge' of nature, Xi has indicated that, 'Any harm we inflict on nature will eventually return to haunt us.' The question of nature, moreover, he insists goes beyond mere material sustainability, embracing aesthetics as in his concept of 'Beautiful China'."

If a capitalist minister uttered such trite clichés, Foster would no doubt denounce the hypocrisy – not least with reference to the damage done to the environment. Instead, *Monthly Review* has descended into a mutual appreciation society: Chinese academics have cultivated Foster and borrowed from his works; Foster has become an open advocate for the regime.

Similarly, Foster took the term "ecological imperialism" from Alfred Crosby's 1986 book of that name, which described the destruction wrought by European colonisation. Some of his early ecological applications, such as the British Empire's exploitation of bird excrement (guano) for fertiliser during the nineteenth century, were historically accurate and consistent with Marx's own reading.

However, Foster had a pre-existing commitment to dependency theory and unequal exchange for at least a decade before he wrote about ecology or metabolism. As he developed his own version of Stalinoid anti-imperialism in the twentieth first century, Foster integrated these predispositions into his ecological writing.

Foster was not the first to adopt the argument that imperialism in the modern world is mainly about transfers of surplus value from countries in the "periphery" to those in the "core". Nor was he the first to fuse it with ecological

damage. In *Capitalism and the Anthropocene* (2022), Foster acknowledged his debt to earlier writers. Beginning in the 1980s, Howard Odum developed what he called "ecologically unequal exchange" rooted in "imperial capitalism". Odum argued that embodied energy ("emergy") exchanged was typically "several hundred percent higher" per dollar for the peripheral, primary resource-exporting countries than for their core counterparts. Similarly, Stephen Bunker promoted this kind of theory in his book, *Underdeveloping the Amazon: Extraction, Unequal Exchange, and the Failure of the Modern State* (1985). Again, Foster's engagement predates his work on ecology and metabolism.

Political mistakes

Foster's political mistakes on concrete questions do not flow directly from his metabolic account of ecology.

For example, Foster opposes the use of nuclear power. This was the policy of *Monthly Review* before Foster became involved in it. Magdoff and Sweezy wrote an anti-nuclear article in 1978, before the Three Mile Island nuclear incident. In 2008, as editor of *Monthly Review*, Foster republished the article, along with an editorial note rejecting nuclear power's role in combating climate change. In 2013, Foster reiterated his opposition to nuclear power, even after NASA scientist James Hansen made a robust case for it.

Similarly, Foster's advocacy of degrowth is unrelated to his commentary on metabolism. Foster cites the precedents in the *Monthly Review* school. Recently he argued:

"Since at least May 1974, *Monthly Review*, beginning with Harry Magdoff and Paul M. Sweezy, has explicitly insisted on the reality of the limits of growth, the need to rein in exponential accumulation, and the necessity of establishing a steady-state economy overall (which does not obviate the need for growth in the poorer economies)."

Ironically, Foster has also written some useful critiques of degrowth. In 2011, he pointed to the contradictions in the works of Serge Latouche, one of the instigators of degrowth theory. More recently, he has rejected Saito's "degrowth communism", which has no basis in Marx's works.

Foster has embraced degrowth because he believes it is an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist stance, which advances "ecological revolution". His view ignores the implications of degrowth for workers in wealthier states where he wants it applied. Working class agency in the fight for socialism is absent. Foster's stance is not about metabolism, but rather prior assumptions and political opportunism.

There is much to criticise in Foster's ecology. He makes numerous political mistakes. But they do not derive from metabolism. Rather, it is the *Monthly Review* politics before Foster ever engaged with metabolism that best explain his blunders.

The Monthly Review tradition

A number of other writers have taken up Foster's terminology, including the "metabolic rift". It might appear that a Marxist school has been created in his image. Authors such as Richard York, Brett Clark, Rebecca Clausen, Stefano Longo, Hannah Holleman, Ryan Wisheart, Mauricio Betancourt and others have published in their own right. Most have co-written academic articles or book chapters with Foster, and contributed to *Monthly Review*.

Many are graduates of the sociology department at the University of Oregon, where Foster is a professor. Most have built an academic career on the back of their published work. Few have made a reputation in Marxist organisations or through their activism. They have applied Foster's ideas to empirical studies, sometimes quite fruitfully. But their Marxist credentials are pretty thin, confined within the prism of *Monthly Review*.

Perhaps the high point of this enterprise is the book by Stefano Longo, Rebecca Clausen and Brett Clark, *The Tragedy of the Commodity: Oceans, Fisheries, and Aquaculture* (2015), published by Rutgers University Press.

Clausen contributed a detailed empirical study of the decline of wild salmon fishing in the Pacific Northwest, while Longo carried out a similar study of the decline of wild tuna fishing around Sicily. Both identify the ecological damage wrought by fishing, particularly from capitalist methods involving larger vessels and advanced technologies. They suggest the "metabolic rift" consisted of overfishing these waters. Although they acknowledge the growth of aquaculture (fish farming) and point out it has significant ecological drawbacks, they elide that such capitalist methods have managed to avoid the feared slump in fish supplies. By contrast, they promote Cuban fisheries as some kind of alternative, despite qualitative differences in global scale and productivity.

Conclusion

The *Monthly Review* group is a second camp Marxist tendency that has a long track record of apologism for Stalinism and Third World nationalism. It began with support for Stalin's Russia. They championed Maoism in China, Castroism in Cuba and other regimes. They hold to a peculiar theory of 'monopoly' capitalism, emphasising stagnation. The *Monthly Review* school propagates nationalist theories of dependency, unequal exchange and Stalinoid anti-imperialism. Mostly significantly, they write off the working class in the "West".

Since the collapse of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc, *Monthly Review* has changed its allegiances but not its fundamental political methodology. It is a regular mouthpiece for the Chinese ruling class. It treats Venezuela as "socialist". It rationalises Putin's war against Ukraine. Foster and his cohorts bring these mistakes into ecology, both theoretically (such as unequal ecological ex-



change), and politically, with degrowth, anti-nuclear and anti-solar engineering. They are far from the third camp Marxist tradition. Stuart does not draw out these criticisms when he advocates for *Monthly Review*.

Foster's contribution on metabolism stems mostly from close engagement with Marx and other Marxists, not from his longstanding semi-Stalinist politics, which predate his ecological writing. Foster's errors on ecology stem from the *Monthly Review* tradition (Stalinism, Third Worldism, monopoly capital), not from metabolism.

Foster's mistakes are not derived from metabolism. I can distinguish between Foster's exposition of metabolism derived from Marx and the embellishments levered in from the *Monthly Review* tradition. That is not "over-generous" to Foster; it simply differentiates theoretical steps forward from ideological regression, Marxist ecology from reactionary politics.

If the ideological front of the class struggle is decisive, then it is necessary to understand our most difficult adversaries – including other Marxists – and figure out the real disagreements. If Marxists are to develop our own ecological theories to understand the modern world, then we have to honestly render opposing views. □



How can councils defeat the cuts?

By Rhodri Evans

Labour, Reform, the nascent “Your Party”, the Greens, are all looking to the May 2026 council polls as the “next big thing” electorally. 2025 was a light year for council elections, but over 4,200 seats, including most big-city councils, will be contested in 2026.

Under Blair-Brown Labour went from controlling 136 councils in 2002 to just 37 in 2009, and from 10,600 councillors to 4,400, even though after the first Blair years the government was increasing, rather than cutting, funds for councils. In the earlier part of that period left (Socialist Party) or sort-of-left (Respect) candidates won some seats, but by 2008-9 that left representation was in steep decline. Labour’s lost seats went mainly to Tories. Ukip, forerunner of Reform, made its best scores a bit later, with a peak of over 300 councillors in 2014-6, and then declined very fast.

This time round, Reform already has about 700 councillors and control of ten councils. Its pitch is that it will do to councils what Elon Musk’s DOGE did to the US federal government. That is unlikely to work even in its own terms, but May 2026’s polls will be in areas not contested in 2025, so chaos at Reform councils may not sway them.

Labour, Greens, and the nascent “Your Party” all oppose social cuts by councils. However, they are all doing cuts already in councils they control. (Pendle council, the jewel in “Your Party’s” crown, run in coalition with the Lib-Dems, announced it was seeking some 7% “savings” in 2025-6). No-one is yet advocating a new policy by which councils can defeat cuts rather than manage them less hurtfully.

In the early 1980s, under Thatcher, several councils said they would fight cuts. Some proposed big increases in local taxes (then “rates”) to balance the books. The then-left Labour council in Lambeth, south London, raised rates by 49% one year. That policy soon ran out of road. Nothing similar is even possible now, since councils need government permission to raise local levies (“council tax”) by more than 5%.

Liverpool Labour council, where Militant (now Socialist Party) people were hegemonic, said in 1984 that they would set an “unbalanced” budget, and meanwhile mobilise action up to and including a local general strike to put pressure on the government.

They never did it. The council ran with no budget at all until July 1984, when the Tories, worried that strikes in Liverpool could combine with the miners’ strike, “bought off” Liverpool by allowing it to postpone financial problems to 1985-6.

Before budget-setting in 1985 the miners had been defeated. The Tories then went after Liverpool. The council eventually set a cuts budget (softened

by borrowing from Swiss banks, which had always been available). The Labour councillors got surcharged and disqualified for delaying the budget. Councillors in Lambeth also got surcharged for delay (not for refusing cuts).

The only Labour council actually to set an “unbalanced” budget was Hackney under Hilda Kean in 1985. It quickly retreated – under pressure from the local council unions which, though left-wing, thought the policy too risky, and preferred a mild cuts budget under which they would not lose jobs.

The Tories triumphed. But they changed the law in many ways to avoid such trouble in future, and tactics now would have to differ from the 1980s.

Councillors can no longer be surcharged. But any “unbalanced” budget is now, by law, invalid (it cannot act as authority to collect council tax), and an *unelected* council Financial Officer is legally required to refuse it. The officer must give the council 21 days to reconsider, and if it doesn’t, override it.

The officer can issue a “Section 114” notice which allows for the council to be put under the control of government-appointed commissioners.

“Section 114” is usually described as the council “going bankrupt”. But the council will not have liabilities (debts) exceeding its assets (buildings, etc.) Rather, because of limits on its tax-raising powers, and on its capacities to borrow, it cannot match income to spending.

Reserves

However, most councils can set no-social-cuts budgets for a year by drawing on reserves and selling off assets. They could then start a year-long escalating campaign of demonstrations and strikes demanding central government restore funds the following year. That is likely to work better if local unions and communities can see it as a basic defensive necessity (i.e. the budgets are deliberately “minimal”, and items like top salaries and consultants are cut).

In 2010 a few Labour councils made a timid start along that path. Those soon petered out. The path won’t work on a new attempt, either, unless strong local labour-movement anti-cuts committees are built, pushing along the councillors. There were such committees in 2010, but the battles soon scaled down to ones to save particular services (particular libraries, children’s centres, leisure centres), which sometimes succeeded.

Under post-1988 law, the councillors would not face surcharge. Since 2011 they would not even face being taken to the Standards Board and getting disqualified. It is possible that the council Financial Officer would declare the budget unsound and invoke “Section 114”, and the councillors might face some legal challenges over that, or



Pic: Mark Simmons

over non-cooperation with government commissioners, but that is untested territory. They would very likely face exclusion by the Labour Party, since a change to the party’s rulebook (made in the Corbyn years, in 2016!) makes it party rule, not just law, to comply with government restrictions. That is something to be fought inside the labour movement.

Council Finance Officers are legally required to insist the council keeps a good level of reserves and a prudent Medium Term (three-year) Strategy (even though the council can’t know what it will get from central government in those three years!). Finance Officers could invoke “Section 114” and bring in commissioners.

Several councils have gone into “Section 114”, not because of anti-cuts militancy, but because a combination of central government funding cuts and local calamities (like Robin Hood Energy in Nottingham) leaves them unable to cover even legally-required services.

In all those cases, the councils have cooperated with the commissioners, partly from general timidity, partly because they think cooperation will persuade the commissioners to squeeze a little extra funding from the government for them (sometimes it does).

It would be better, though, if council leaderships refused to cooperate and declared themselves as a sort of council-in-exile, campaigning against the commissioners’ actions rather than mitigating them (they hope) and presenting them as unavoidable. Councillors tend to say that cooperation is a lesser evil, because commissioners alone will

impose much worse cuts; but commissioners will be in a weaker position to impose social cuts if confronted by a united local labour movement rather than having their cuts given apparent democratic legitimacy by council assent.

None of this will happen unless and until strong local labour-movement cuts committees are built, and they build strength and confidence in the local government unions. That will surely start from campaigns such as already exist which mostly target particular service cuts, and which can and do win victories. Thanks to the Trades-Council-initiated anti-cuts campaign in Nottingham, where the Labour council is in Section 114 and cooperating with commissioners, three libraries scheduled to close remain open, and at least three community centres. Marches, rallies, public meetings, and lobbying council committees and full council meetings made a difference. If councillors want to make a difference, they should start with building such campaigns, and discussing with them which council-chamber tactics will best advance the cause. □

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Myanmar military goes for “proxy” unions

By Hein Htet Kyaw

Myanmar trade unions, including the Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar (CTUM) and the Industrial Workers’ Federation of Myanmar (IWFM), have been campaigning for the International Labor Organisation (ILO) to invoke Article 33 of its Constitution, which empowers the ILO Governing Body to recommend punitive or corrective measures, including sanctions, to enforce compliance with COI (ILO Commission of Inquiry) recommendations.

In response to that, the Ministry of Labor, under military control, has been actively recruiting former trade union members, many of whom resigned following the 2021 coup, to install a sham trade union organisation. On 22 January 2025, union representatives who are still living inside Myanmar from various factories were summoned to a meeting where they were instructed to post anti-Article-33 statements on Facebook. Workers were told that opposing the sanctions could help them avoid conscription under recently enacted military laws.

Several former-unionist individuals who had previously resigned from the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM) and IWFM, including Thaung Nyunt, Myo Myint, Myo Zaw Thet, Myo Thet Soe, Soe Min Hlaing, Ye Thu Ya, Win Shein and Mya Hnin Thet became the useful idiots for Myanmar military junta in this. Basically, the military junta is trying to adopt the CTUM, a legally recognised trade union, to become their controlled trade union, by stealing the CTUM’s identity.

The Deputy Minister of Labor has been holding regular meetings with pro-military union groups in industrial zones, delivering speeches and disseminating official statements through state-controlled media using CTUM’s logo and identity. The Myanmar military junta even tried sending their fake CTUM and other pro-military union groups to the ASEAN migrant workers’ conference.

In retaliation, CTUM issued a pub-



lic warning – via the Burma Lawyers’ Council – targeting individuals accused of impersonating its identity, emphasising the potential legal repercussions. Nonetheless, this action unfolds against the backdrop of a broader assault by the military junta on Myanmar’s rule of law. The Myanmar military regime has charged all members of the CTUM’s duly elected Second Congress Central Committee with high treason under Section 124(A) of the Penal Code, it has annulled their passports, and it has officially stripped CTUM President U Maung Maung of his Myanmar citizenship, informing foreign embassies of these punitive measures.

The Myanmar military junta is attempting to legitimise a faction of trade unionists who are less politically outspoken and more aligned with reformist labour approaches and position them as the official successors to CTUM. In parallel, it is actively targeting the CTUM’s duly elected Second Congress Central Committee, who have been vocal in their opposition to the regime. CTUM’s legal status is now under threat, primarily because its recognised leadership residing abroad maintains strong ties with international labour movements critical of the junta.

The regime appears willing to tolerate CTUM’s existence only if it can establish a “CTUM” which refrains from challenging military authority and is led by individuals inside Myanmar who can be easily targeted or manipulated or exploited.

Such attempts are not limited to CTUM. The Industrial Workers Federation of Myanmar (IWFM) also had to issue a formal statement on 30 January 2025, condemning the unauthorized use of union names and logos by former members.

Afraid

The Myanmar military junta seems to be afraid of Article 33. Its attempt to usurp the identity and authority of genuine trade unions with the purpose of opposing the sanctions by Article 33 is the best evidence of that.

Even though there are some independent revolutionary syndicalists who are both anti-military junta yet share concerns about the economic consequences of the sanctions, a significant section of trade unions inside Myanmar or exiled are willing to suffer the economic consequences of international sanctions, if the sanctions are helpful in overthrowing the military junta.

According to *Myanmar Labor News*, a former trade union member voiced deep concern over the worsening conditions under military rule. While acknowledging the potential consequences of international sanctions, that former trade union member emphasised that the current environment has become intolerable, with the absence of legal protections, relentless work schedules, and complete subjugation to military directives.

The Myanmar military is now actively working to establish counterfeit trade unions in collaboration with pro-military labor groups. This effort includes targeting legitimately elected union leaders and attempting to usurp the identity and authority of genuine trade unions.

Workers inside Myanmar remain highly vulnerable to coercion by the military junta, and those in exile can be actively targeted via family members.

Now is the moment for global trade unionists, leftist political groups, and revolutionary syndicalists to stand in active solidarity with CTUM and IWFM – mobilising support for the people of Myanmar, with particular attention to the working class under siege. □

Dempsey: don’t sidestep “Reform”



Off The Rails

Asked about the growing support for the Reform party, and how to win back to the left those trade unionists, both current and former, at Reform recent conference, RMT [rail union] General Sec-

retary Eddie Dempsey chose to sidestep the question. He answered: “The place for anybody who is thinking of voting for Reform is to be in their trade union, I don’t care what your political outlook is ...”

This response is hardly in keeping with the spirit or letter of the motion titled “Opposing Reform UK In Our Workplace & Communities” that was passed at this year’s RMT Annual Gen-

eral Meeting.

As that motion points out: “We note Reform UK’s political programme pledges to divert NHS spending to private health care, cut investment in renewable energy, end Britain’s commitment to achieve Net Zero carbon emissions and to scrap employment laws. Reform UK says: ‘We must make it easier to hire and fire so that businesses can grow.’”

That party’s rise is an existential threat to the trade unions, workers, oppressed groups and the environment. For the GS to pass up the opportunity to harshly criticise Reform UK and promote union policy at the same time is both breathtakingly blasé and a dereliction of duty.

The motion calls for the development “of a specific training module for RMT Officers,

Branch officials and workplace representatives on how to engage with trade union members and transport workers on the false claims of right-wing populist parties, particularly their targeting of migrant workers as the cause of social inequality in Britain.”

Hear, hear! And the General Secretary should be the first to read it. □

Immigration raids up under Labour

By Owen Flood

One of the few promises the Labour government has kept is to bring down immigration. Net migration fell sharply in 2024 following the introduction of new visa restrictions, particularly targeted at the families of care workers and international students. Other changes included: more removals of foreign criminals (up around 14% since July 2024), increased fines for employers caught employing undocumented migrant workers, and increased spending on immigration raids (up around 50% since July 2024). As Labour boasted on social media, it has deported around 35,000 migrants since coming to power.

As Reform gains in the polls and the far-right grow more confident, Labour has tacked right. The result has been that Labour has lost voters to the Lib-Dems, Greens, and abstention, and Reform and the far-right's anti-migrant

talking points are seen as validated.

The primary factors that dictate migration patterns are labour demand in destination countries and the level of development in origin countries. Immigration increases as a result of increased labour demand and often through active recruitment by the state or employment agencies. That happens through policies being introduced to create a more "hostile environment" for migrants.

Tories

Under the Tories, post-Brexit, immigration actually increased and according to the Migration Observatory reached "unusually high levels in 2022 and 2023". This net increase was due to, among other things: facilitation of post-study work routes for international students, more active recruitment of international students by UK universities, and more active recruitment of migrant social care workers by agencies.

In addition humanitarian visa routes were made possible for Ukrainians and Hong Kongers.

The UK, like most rich capitalist countries, is highly dependent on migrant labour. Were the UK really to curtail immigration, the main result would be to tank the country's economy as bosses fail to fill jobs – cleaners, social carers, delivery, healthcare, social care – the country wastes money on expensive raids. The immigration raids targeting food delivery couriers, nail salons and garages can only be described as a kind of performative cruelty – done more to give the impression that the government is "tackling" immigration than anything else.

July

Back in July of this year the government engaged in a week of such immigration raids, dubbed "Operation Equality", with a particular focus on raids of food delivery couriers. The Home

Office proudly announced it stopped and searched over 1,700 food delivery couriers, arrested 280 for "illegal working activity", and reviewed asylum applications for at least 53 as a result. This was coupled with the Home Office giving food delivery apps the location of asylum-help hotels.

Workers' Liberty calls for free movement and for the right of all migrants to live and work in the UK with equal rights to native-born workers. Immigration controls empower employers to intimidate migrants, divide workers along national and racial lines, and whip up nationalism.

We encourage socialists and others on the left to oppose the ramping up of immigration raids, by mobilising opposition to them in their unions, in the Labour Party and by getting involved in local anti-raids groups and initiatives. □



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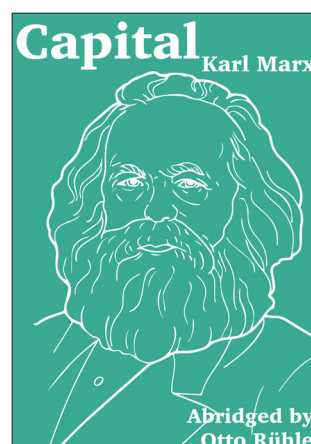
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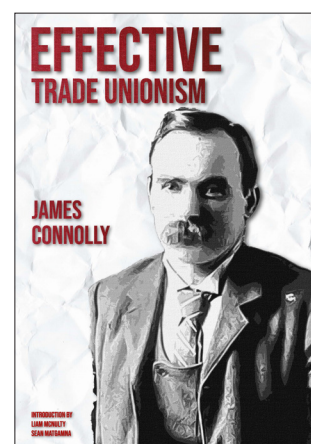
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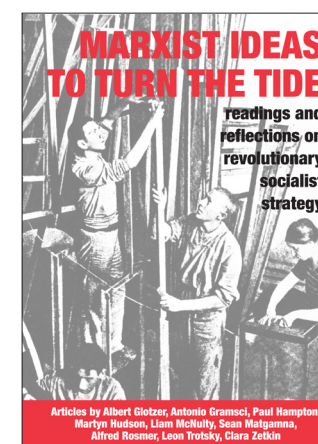
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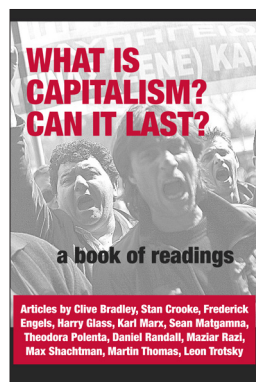
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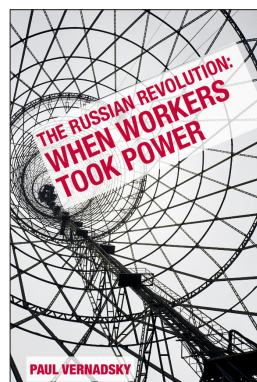
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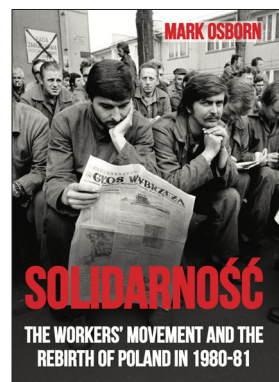
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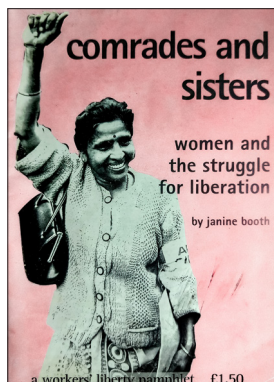
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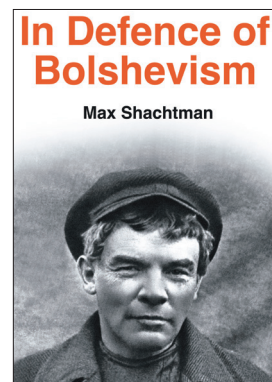
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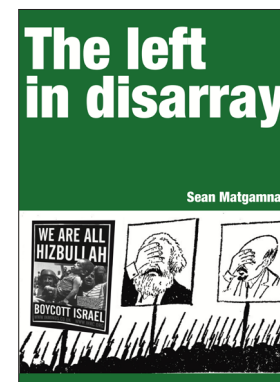
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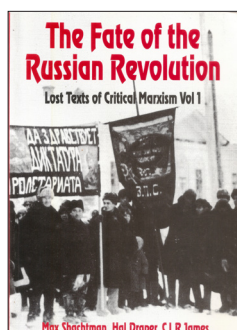
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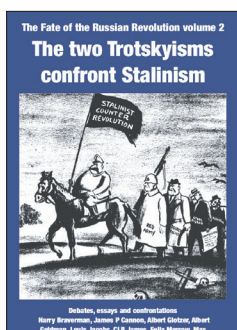
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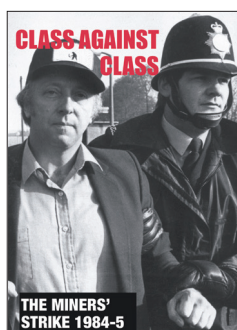
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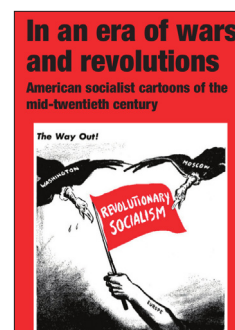
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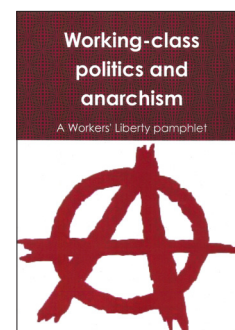
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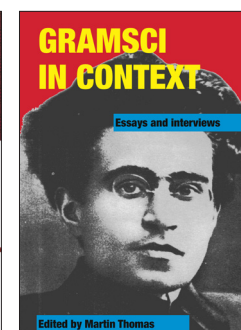
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Outsourced workers demand NHS rate

By Gerry Bates

Outsourced NHS workers at Newham Centre for Mental Health have started their industrial campaign for NHS pay, terms and conditions with a twelve day strike. On 1-5 September and 15-22 September, domestics, chefs, porters, reception staff refused to work for the poverty wages, terms and conditions imposed on them by their employer. They remain determined to escalate their strikes until their management agree to pay the NHS rate for the job.

The workers are employed by Grosvenor Facilities Management (GFM), which is part of a group of companies directed and, to a large extent, owned by multimillionaires Peter Copley and Robert Austin. In 2000, one of Copley and Austin's companies secured the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deal to build and maintain Newham Centre for Mental Health (NCMH), and this year GFM and their PFI associates will extract around £6 million in profits

and executive salaries.

GFM workers are among the worst paid in East London's NHS, earning just above the minimum wage. At neighbouring hospitals, workers in exactly the same roles already receive NHS pay, terms and conditions. At Bart's NHS Trust, where determined strikes by Unite won an insourcing deal in 2023, a domestic or porter will be paid over £3,200 more than a GFM worker doing the same job. They also get full sick pay, up to 11 days additional annual leave, unsocial hours payments and the dignity that comes from union recognition.

The GFM workers lack of sick pay has been a controversial issue since the pandemic. The NHS Trust Unite branch has been extremely vocal about the need for all NHS workers to have full sick pay as a basic infection control measure. The Newham Centre for Mental Health and mental health hospitals in general had extraordinarily high rates of Covid-19 hospital-acquired infection (around 67.5% according to official figures).

According to union activists, one member of staff in NCMH died of likely hospital-acquired Covid-19 in December 2020 (although this has never been formally acknowledged by the Trust).

Some limited isolation pay was established in autumn 2021 after a union health and safety inspection but it has since been withdrawn. Hundreds of frontline ELFT workers have signed a Unite run petition arguing for full sick pay for all workers as a necessary infection control measure. In response, last winter, East London NHS Foundation Trust wrote to GFM asking them to introduce full sick pay in order to reduce the risk of infection.

Nine months on despite this clear demand from both the NHS and the union, GFM workers still get only £118.75 a week statutory sick pay, and nothing for the first three days of absence.

As millions pour into the profits of the PFI partners, mental health services are being cut. Despite promises of new NHS funding from the Labour government, mental health services are suffer-

ing a continuation of Tory austerity. The Trust cut around £30 million last year and are planning a further £40 million this year. Life-saving frontline services such as psychology, CAMHS, district nursing teams and mental health crisis services are being cut in the name of "efficiency savings". Student nurses who qualified last summer cannot find work while understaffing is rife and those nurses in post are experiencing record levels of stress and burnout.

Despite their multi-million profits, GFM refused to settle the dispute and instead mobilised national and regional management and bussed in workers from Kent to attempt to break the strike. Unite plans a further 14 day strike starting on 29th September and workers are determined to escalate until their demands are met. □

- Strike fund: bit.ly/gfm-f – model motion for union branches, and unabridged version of article: bit.ly/gfm-s

TUC calls for higher taxes on the wealthy

By a TUC delegate

On the Tuesday (9 September) of this year's TUC congress, Unite general secretary Sharon Graham got a standing ovation for her big speech on a motion about local government.

Graham criticised the Labour Government: "What are they doing?" She focused on Birmingham City Council threatening to use Tory anti-union legislation to cut the pay of Birmingham refuse workers. She warned this tactic would be copied by other councils if Birmingham got away with fire and rehire.

She raised a big cheer when she announced that the bin workers had just delivered a 99% yes vote to continue their strike.

She warned that any fines against the union would come out of Unite's affiliation fees to the Labour Party.

Unison's motion on the same issue also called for more central government money for councils, and neither was much more specific on that, but Unite's spelled out "unequivocal support for the Birmingham bin workers".

Unison general secretary Christina McAnea's big speech was on "subcos" (subsidiaries set up by NHS Trusts so they employ cleaners, for example,

indirectly). She emphasised the poor situation Labour had inherited and how long it might take to fix, and declared an ambition of "shifting the dial just slightly in favour of working people".

She noted that "We've not seen much progress toward the promised 'biggest wave of insourcing in a generation'" in Labour's election manifesto.

On Sunday evening (7 Sep) there was a well-attended fringe meeting on trans rights, organised by CWU South-west Region, Unite Southeast Region, and the FBU, which included discussion of building campaign networks of union activists in each town. The full congress denounced the EHRC "interim update", resolved to "campaign publicly... for gender self-declaration... social equality for all transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people".

Welfare

On Monday (8 Sep) a composite criticised the Government for cutting welfare benefits, "as a direct result of the continued refusal to tax wealth and acceptance of self-imposed fiscal rules.... this approach is leaving the door open to the far-right Reform, who offer no solutions and only sow more division." It called for higher taxes on wealth, and asked the

TUC to "consider a national demonstration against austerity in spring 2026."

A composite on the far-right followed, calling on "the Labour government to... push back on far-right narratives – to end the demonisation of migrants and refugees – and to commit to delivering for working people quickly... improve jobs... invest in our public services and communities." The composite's demands on the TUC itself, however, were weak, such as "collaborate with civic society organisations to resist the far right organising".

Composite 3 said: "Closing the Social Care Visa scheme to new applicants while increasing income thresholds for renewals leads to vital care workers being deported and unsafe staffing levels.

"Congress condemns this policy failure and calls for the repeal of the existing legislation with an immediate replacement developed in full consultation with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and include robust protections for all current visa holders, particularly those already contributing to public service.

"Until such reforms are enacted, Congress commits to supporting all workers facing deportation under this flawed system."

A composite 4 called for the

TUC to "draft a comprehensive workers' rights package" (effectively, an Employment Rights Bill #2) including: immediate repeal of all anti-union laws; a full ban on "fire and rehire" and zero-hour contracts; a £15 per hour minimum wage with no age exemptions; a statutory right to collective bargaining for all workers.

It contained some more detailed demands including for the right to strike to be restored to prison officers.

Throughout the Congress there were rhetorical warnings that Labour should not water down or delay the ERB: in fact it seems that the government has defeated the Lords amendments, though the repeal of the 50% strike ballot threshold remains delayed.

Military spending

A UCU motion against increased military spending was opposed by Unite and GMB, among others, who said that it would cost some of their members' jobs. The public sector unions effectively carried it, against unions with more members in private manufacturing.

Groups such as the SWP are seizing on this motion to say that it means no further support for Ukraine, but that is not what it said. The UCU's new president-elect Dyfrig Jones

had attended a Ukraine Solidarity Campaign fringe meeting the evening before and in the debate the FBU speaker emphasised raising taxes on the rich to rebuild public services.

On climate action, an amendment from the GMB and Unite, supported by the General Council, said "future fossil fuel production can only be ended when and where a fully-funded workers' plan for jobs has been agreed and delivered in full". As the BFAWU argued, the motion already called for a just transition, and the amendment meant putting off action on the climate. The chair said the amendment carried on a show of hands, ignoring calls for a card vote. □

- Much abridged. More: bit.ly/tuc-2

More online

Advertising and unproductive labour

Further debate: bit.ly/adv-more

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- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
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- 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
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• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Reinstating the idea of a “clean wage”



Diary of a Tube worker

By Jay Dawkey

“Drivers need something out of it”. This is a common theme in conversations over pay. If there is any spin or suggestion that some part of a deal might be more beneficial to another grade, often station staff, someone will want to know what will sweeten the deal for “us”.

It's not surprising when you have one union on the job that is only interested in drivers and a few managers. Aslef exist solely to promote the position of drivers, and damn the rest! If the offer of £400 as a bonus payment for non-driving staff for working Boxing Day comes

to fruition, then some are already asking what we will receive. After all, we only *already* get a sizeable bonus if we volunteer to work on Boxing Day.

The concept of a “clean” wage seems to drift further away: that everyone doing the same job gets the same pay, with all allowances, bonuses, etc. folded into it. Now there are extra payments for working Boxing Day, after 0130 on New Year's Eve, and for Night Tube shifts on the Friday and Saturday, so we have competition for these shifts, which, apart from Boxing Day, are all “extreme” turns – working nights.

“We can't have a clean wage, makes no sense”, one Aslef member argues. “We do extreme turns, bank holidays, that deserves something. Might be OK if you work 9-5s, but some depots don't even have any of those, and where we do, it's stiff competition”.

The syndicate system in many depots

means we have some choice over our shifts. Lots of us work patterns we prefer, while fewer follow the roster and do the full range of shifts. That means there is competition for shifts, and demand increases for alternative methods to earn a bit more. The spectre of overtime looming large in the Aslef-backed four-day-week/longer-working-day deal is yet another chance for some to argue it is a fair and reasonable way to boost our wage.

This is frustrating in the context where Aslef are not yet in dispute over the pay offer from management and will only benefit from any improved offer the RMT strikes may generate. If all our unions could work together to campaign and strike for a higher wage across the board for all workers on the job, we wouldn't need to ask “what's in it for us”. □

Cuts fight rekindles at Sheffield Uni

By Sam Myerson

Sheffield University UCU (University and College Union) branch is balloting again for strikes against cuts. The ballot closes on 30 September.

To beat the cuts at this university, not just delay them a little, the UCU is going to have to stand up to uni bosses, and follow through with industrial action. It will need to work closely with other campus unions, and get support from students standing up to fight for the future of higher education, for their courses, for their

teaching and support staff.

The student Anti-Cuts Coalition, active last academic year, will restart its work in earnest as students return. “Welcome week” is 22-27 September, and the Anti-Cuts campaign will meet on 22 September to discuss next steps, including leafletting and banner drops during that “Freshers' Week”.

Uni bosses had suggested that the previous round of cuts would allow the university to return to a “surplus position”, but now the goalposts have been moved, and they say further cuts must be made. Those are due to

fall predominantly on the humanities. The humanities and social sciences have long been under attack, with universities deriving rankings from statistics of earnings after graduation.

Sheffield University, like many institutions, had previously cited the drop in international students as the driving force for cuts. Now, they say the restructure (read cuts) is intended to address more general concerns about the “size and shape” of the university.

In May of this year the UCU branch voted two-to-one to stand down its dispute and

accept a management offer for no compulsory redundancies before December 2025, and a guarantee that a voluntary scheme would be in place for any future cuts until July 2026. Under the deal, staff were expected to make up “lost” working time due to strikes or action short of strike.

Other universities are also coming back with more cuts, and Greenwich and Kent universities have announced a merger to reduce costs. The UCU at Nottingham University is [striking](#) 22-24 September. □

Battleship Potemkin is 100 years old



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Rated by many (including yours truly) as one of the greatest films ever made, Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film about a mutiny in the Russian Imperial Navy can still inspire and enthuse today. For the centenary the film has been re-released with a new sound track by The Pet Shop Boys.

Based loosely on real events in the Black Sea in 1905, the film depicts the disgruntled sailors aboard the Potemkin rebelling against their mistreatment, famously triggered by the maggot-infested meat they are expected to eat. They throw the officers overboard and host the red flag. The



citizens of Odesa rally to their support only to be massacred on the Odesa Steps by Tsarist troops. The sailors' response is to shell the theatre used by the officers as their headquarters.

In the final scene the crew weigh anchor to face the Tsarist squadron sent to destroy them. However, the squadron refuses to open fire and allows the Potemkin to sail on.

Potemkin is a propaganda film and

there are many discrepancies between it and real history, none of which detract in any way from the impact of the film. The film does not mention what in fact happened next. Having escaped to Romania, the sailors were eventually promised a pardon and allowed to return to Russia; but then a number were arrested and executed. If you haven't seen this film you must. □



Tube: name more strike dates now!



With rolling strikes on 5-12 September, we stopped the job entirely, reminding our employer – and perhaps even more importantly, ourselves – of the power we have. Two rounds of negotiations have been held since, with no new offer tabled. Unless we name further dates soon, we risk letting the momentum and energy from our strikes dissipate.

Ideally, those strikes should escalate on our previous action, but as a minimum should repeat the rolling strike tactic. One possible form of escalation could be to “book-end” a week of rolling action with two additional days where all grades and functions strike together.

We are fighting for both an increased pay offer, and a reduction in the contractual week. The pay settlement must also include a flat-rate minimum, to ensure lower paid grades benefit more. Any reduction in the contractual week must be for all functions and grades, including drivers, and therefore mean the Aslef/LUL so-called “four-day week” gets taken off the table.

We need a reps’ assembly to debate and decide the next steps.

Tubeworker has long argued that there should be an even more direct and constitutional link between the deliberations and decisions of workplace reps and what the union does. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/lu-dates

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Bus drivers strike in Burnham’s patch

By David Axon

Around 2,000 bus drivers in Greater Manchester struck over the weekend 19-22 September, closing down most bus routes across the city region.

On the Oldham picket line drivers were talking about Stagecoach Manchester’s refusal to provide any figures to the union about their local revenues or profits. Sadly, someone who could put pressure on bosses about this has entirely failed to do so. GM Mayor Andy Burnham, the ultimate contractor of services subcontracted from the “Bee Network”, instead put out a public statement taking their side of the bus operators and calling for the union to cave in:

“We can assure people everything possible and reasonable has been done to try to avert these strikes. Proposals are on the table from the bus operators that would result in a significant lift in pay for some of our lowest-paid drivers and headline rates of pay for the rest that are amongst the best in the country. In addition, we have tabled a commitment to introduce a standard minimum rate of pay across all Bee Network operators from 2028.

“We appreciate the hard work of our drivers and support the objectives of the union. Whilst we are unable to deliver everything in one year, we believe what is on the table is enough to allow the strikes to be suspended for further talks and would ask union representatives to work with us on that.”

The drivers are employed by Stagecoach, First, and Metrolink – companies contracted to run the services by the GM Mayor-controlled “Bee Network”. Drivers voted to strike after below-inflation pay offers following years of low pay.

Bee Network drivers are on currently on different rates according to which contracted company employs them. Unite points out that First Bus Rochdale are currently the lowest paid in the region on £15 per hour for all shifts, compared to those at some local rivals who earn £17 per hour Monday to Friday and £19 per hour on weekends.

Meanwhile, cleaners, supervisors and engineers at First Bus Rochdale are some of the lowest paid in the area. First Bus Rochdale is part of First Group PLC, which had an operating profit of £204.3m in 2024 while dividends paid to shareholders were increased by 45 per cent compared to the previous year.

Stagecoach, First, and Metrolink have all seen a rise in profits in recent years. Metrolink is set to bid for tenders in Liv-



erpool City Region and West Yorkshire as those areas move to franchising.

A further 200 workers directly employed by Transport for Greater Manchester are also balloting. Unite report that the workers, who undertake a variety of roles including ticketing, passenger assistance and information services for the bus and tram network, have rejected a 3.2 per cent pay offer. The offer is a real terms pay cut as the current rate of RPI inflation stands at 4.8 per cent.

This pattern in Greater Manchester is replicated across the country. Drivers at First Bus West of England have just taken strike action over pay, finishing the day the GM strike started, and will be striking against for the first two weeks of October. Drivers at Brighton Bus Company and Metrobus Crawley (both owned by the profit-rich Go Ahead group) are striking on 6 and 15 October. Threatened strike action by Arriva drivers in the south east has just won pay increases for drivers at depots in Luton, Milton Keynes, Stevenage, Ware and Hemel Hempstead.

Levelling up

There is a case for developing this into a national campaign, levelling up pay in regionals and across employer groups.

In Manchester, Stagecoach is already mired in another scandal, arising from the erosion of working conditions for drivers over the years, including loss of access to toilets. Doing nothing about the actual issue, a recent email sent to drivers by management instead just told them to take bottles with them if they need to urinate. A group of women bus drivers at Stagecoach are already working through Unite on a “Need to Pee” campaign, and one of them has brought a grievance under the company’s Dignity at Work policy.

Local support was shown at the Stockport picket lines by Labour MP Navendu Mishra, who posted to say: “This morning, Councillor Jon Byrne and I joined Unite members on the picket line, standing in solidarity with bus workers, who are taking industrial

action in Stockport and many parts of Greater Manchester. We fully support them in their fight for fair pay and decent conditions.” The Stockport Your Party group visited the Stockport picket lines, and Labour Party members visited pickets to give their solidarity in Oldham.

One Oldham councillor put out a press statement calling for “Stagecoach and other operators listen to their staff and ensure any pay offer is fair and above inflation.”

Drivers in Greater Manchester will be striking again 30 September to 2 October. The labour and trade union movement across greater Manchester should show tangible support, including pressure on Andy Burnham to drop his pro-profit stance. □

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Against Farage, push for solidarity

By Colin Foster

The conviction (23 September) of asylum-seeker Hadush Kebatu for sexual assault is bound to turbo-charge the new Trump-style push by Nigel Farage and Reform of "mass deportation" and to abolish "indefinite leave to remain".

The claim that asylum-seekers drive crime is a lie. Of course some asylum-seekers commit crimes. But a 2018 report from the Migration Advisory Committee found that between 2012 and 2016, 4.7% of all criminal convictions or cautions for crimes in the UK were among people from outside the European Economic Area (EEA), who were 4.3% of the UK population aged 16 or over.

And that although crime rates everywhere are higher among economically worse-off young men, and migrants are disproportionately worse-off young men.

Higher asylum-seeker and migrant numbers

in recent years have not reversed or halted the long-term decline in violent crime. Most risk to women and girls in Britain is from violent male partners or parents, mostly locally-born.

Reform scare-stories will increase the risk for asylum-seekers and ethnic minorities of becoming victims of racist crime, including deportation.

The Labour government has responded, shamefully, by criticising Farage mainly on grounds that his bluster won't "work" in its own terms, and boasting about how many migrants it is deporting.

Don't let Farage and the bosses divide us! We need solidarity of workers Black and white, migrant and locally-born, atheists and of all religions, and freedom for people to move across borders. Asylum-seekers should have the right to work from day one (as they have in Canada, for example), and the "No Recourse to Public Funds" rule should be scrapped. See page 20. □

March backs Birmingham bin workers

By Jim Denham

Thousands of people took to the streets of Birmingham on Saturday (20 September 2025) in solidarity with striking refuse workers as the city's industrial dispute continues.

Union members from across the country joined the demonstration, with the FBU, RMT and various trades councils strongly represented.

The protest marked more than six months since the refuse workers escalated industrial action into an all-out strike.

The fight began last January when Birmingham City Council (BCC) scrapped the Grade-3 safety critical role, a loss of up to £6-8,000 per person. The sporadic action was escalated into an all-out strike in March.

Since then the council have gone further, with plans to remove HGV driver team-leader role through what amounts to "fire and rehire", again a loss of up to £8,000 a year.

Government changes to the Employment Rights Bill have handed "bankrupt" councils (like Birmingham) the right to fire and rehire at will.

On 9 July Birmingham City Council's Leader announced that the Labour-run council was "walking away" from ongoing negotiations with Unite.

Prior to this Unite almost reached a deal, but it was blocked by government commissioner Max Caller, who has since left his role. Sharon Graham told the rally following the march that she is now demanding the deal is put back on the table.

The feeling of many strikers is that the council

doesn't want them back. They have built a service propped up by agency labour supplied by an agency whose earnings from BCC have doubled to £8 million. Meanwhile some strikers have been driven to take redundancy, a trend that the council clearly hope will continue and increase, undermining the strike.

The council boasts about its "successful" collections. But they cost more money and are unsafe. Their own social media shows agency staff in shorts, T-shirts and trainers – no hi-vis, no PPE.

The strikers have recently reballoted, with a 72% turnout and a 99.5% "yes" vote to continue the action. Despite some taking redundancy, the vast majority of the workers remain strong and determined. However, there is a feeling that Unite, both locally and nationally, have no strategy for achieving victory or even an acceptable compromise. An elected strike committee would provide a forum for the discussion of tactics and what the "red lines" should be in any settlement.

Regular mass meetings would involve the rank and file in decision making and keep the workforce united.

Meanwhile, left wingers in the Labour Party are demanding that the council reopens negotiations with Unite, with no preconditions and without the involvement of the commissioners. □

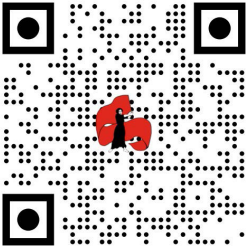
• Strike fund – Unite WM/7186 Branch, account: 20308397, sort code: 608301, ref: BCC Strike Donation. Messages of support to @UniteWestMids. Petition [tinyurl.com/bhambins](https://www.tinyurl.com/bhambins)



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Italian unions strike for Gaza

On Friday 19 September, the CGIL, Italy's biggest union confederation, organised strikes and demonstrations in support of the Palestinians and in protest against far-right prime minister Giorgia Meloni's refusal to recognise Palestine.

The CGIL demanded all military intervention in Gaza be stopped and "humanitarian corridors" secured for food and medical supplies.

It called for all commercial and military cooperation agreements with Israel to be



suspended until the war in Gaza and the occupation of the West Bank are halted, and action to recognise the state of Palestine.

On 22 September, further strikes were organised by smaller but more radical union groups - Unione Sindacale di Base (USB), Confederazione Unitaria di Base [it] (CUB), Sindacato Generale di Base (SGB) and ADL. Dockworkers in Genoa and Livorno in the centre-north blocked the ports See inside, page 3. □



Trump threatens our light and air

On 17 September thousands marched in London to protest at Donald Trump's state visit. In the US, Trump is stepping up attacks on

anyone who criticises or denounces him. The next "No Kings" protest day in the USA is 18 October. See inside, page 10. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

GAZA: STOP THE HORROR!

The Israeli military's ongoing assault on Gaza City has led to at least 200,000 displacements since mid-August, including 55,000 since Saturday 13 September.

Bombardment in Gaza City has been near-continuous, involving air strikes, helicopter and drone attacks, and ground incursions by tanks and infantry. Entire neighbourhoods are being demolished.

In response to a UN inquiry concluding that Israel's actions constitute

a genocide, Israel has pointed to the fact it issues evacuation orders prior to attacks, and has provided some aid and medical provisions in the so-called "humanitarian zone". But evacuation orders are meaningless when there is no safe area to escape to; the "humanitarian zone" is overcrowded and dramatically under-resourced with necessary supplies of food and medical aid, and has in any case often been subject to air strikes.

International campaigns for external pressure on Israel, such as arms embargoes, direct aid to Gaza and the West Bank, and targeted sanctions on Israeli political and military officials, must combine with practical support for those resisting from within, especially amongst Israel's 20% Palestinian minority, in movements like Standing Together. □

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London, 13 September, the counter demo was vastly outnumbered by the far right

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UNITE TO BEAT FAR RIGHT