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SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



STOP REFORM



- » **Vote Labour on 7 May**
- » **Rally left against Starmer**
- » **Build workers' united fronts**

The Greens in Lambeth: see page 3

End the war! No to US-Israeli bombing!

For a secular republic and a workers' government in Iran!

Workers and the poor are suffering as casual threats are issued by ignorant and demagogic leaders.

The devastating results of the Israeli attacks on Lebanon after 2 March have become plain as displaced people from southern Lebanon began to attempt to return to their homes in the city of Tyre and the border towns and villages near Israel following a ceasefire.

In the first month of the war Israel made 5,200 attacks on targets inside Lebanon and destroyed about 40,000 units of housing.

Over 2,000 people have died in Lebanon since Israeli bombing began and 1.2mn, or one in five of the population, have been displaced.

Israel has imposed what it calls a "yellow line" of occupation, similar to the "buffer zone" it carved out inside Gaza, and is occupying villages up to 10km inside the Lebanon-Israel border.

In Gaza the Israeli Defence Force has killed 700 people and wounded more than 2,000 since a ceasefire was declared in October 2025.

Israeli troops have been using explosives to systematically demolish large numbers of houses in Lebanese border villages. According to the BBC 1,400 buildings have been levelled since 2 March, writing, "the true scale [of destruction] is likely to be much higher". The Israeli justification is that Hezbollah, the militarised-Shia party and Iranian ally, has extensively tunnelled under civilian areas to protect their

fighters while they launch rockets on Israel.

That may well be true, but does not justify collective punishment of civilian Shia Lebanese in the south of the country, the Bekaa valley area and the Shia southern suburbs of the capital, Beirut.

Hezbollah effectively acts as a government in Shia-majority areas and is more powerful than the Lebanese state. It is funded and armed by Iran. Israel claims Hezbollah has launched 3,000 missiles and drones at Israel since 2 March.

400 buildings including a mosque have been flattened in Taybeh, 4km from the border, and another 460 in Aita al-Shaab. Five other Lebanese towns have suffered similar devastation. On 22 March Israel's Defence Minister, Israel Katz, ordered that the "destruction of Lebanese homes [near the border] be accelerated," based on the "model of Gaza." Katz planed a security zone which would mean the occupation of one tenth of Lebanon. Israeli officials state that civilians will not be allowed to return to 55 Lebanese towns and villages. Thousands have been made homeless.

Previous War

Lebanon was the centre of a previous, recent war between Hezbollah and Israel which began after Hezbollah fired missiles at northern Israeli towns, and used artillery against Israeli positions, on 8 October 2023. Hezbollah was firing in support of the Hamas pogrom against Israeli Jews launched on 7 October.

That war cost 3,800 Lebanese lives, displaced over one million people, caused £6.7bn of damage and contracted the economy by 6.4%. 70 Israelis also died, the majority civilians.

A ceasefire was brokered in November 2024. The Israeli defence forces continued to bomb Hezbollah, perhaps killing another 400 of their fighters in the next 15 months, prior to the recent war.

Hezbollah, despite effective and intensive Israeli attacks continues to fight and remains a formidable force. It is estimated to have 40,000 fighters and 100,000 missiles.

The Lebanese workers have been the main victims of chronic corruption, the sectarian structure of society, the Beirut port explosion of 2020 which caused \$15bn in damages and which was caused by official high-level venality and graft, and an economic crisis in April 2023 which led to hyperinflation of 270%.

More than 80% of the population lives under official poverty levels.

Under US pressure the Israeli Prime



Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to a temporary, 10-day ceasefire on 16 April and talks aimed at a permanent peace. Netanyahu did not want this ceasefire and has underlined that Israeli attacks will continue.

Israel calculates the cost of the 40-day bombing campaign against Hezbollah and Iran is \$13bn in military expenditure and \$4.5bn in civilian costs. Over 28,000 claims for damages have been lodged in Israel, with 18,400 for buildings and 6,600 for vehicles damaged by Iranian missiles.

Ceasefire

Meanwhile, the two-week ceasefire that ended the US-Israeli bombing of Iran is due to expire on Wednesday 22 April. The Pakistani government, which is attempting to broker a more permanent peace seems to be expecting talks to reopen soon in Islamabad. The Serena and Marriott hotels have been told to clear their rooms of all guests and large US military planes have landed at Islamabad's military airfield.

Pakistan is mobilising 20,000 police, Rangers, and soldiers to protect the talks.

Iran, however, is demanding the US's blockade of Iranian ports is ended. On Saturday 18 April Iran apparently attacked ships in the Strait and the waterway remains effectively closed.

Donald Trump is now repeating threats to destroy Iran unless the clerical regime comes to an agreement he is satisfied with. Trump's approval rating is now only 37%, with 61% of Americans saying the US should take no further military action in Iran.

There is a very large gap between the stated goals of the US and Iranian sides, which may well lead to resumed fighting.

The US wants to reopen the Strait of Hormuz fully and permanently without an Iranian tariff on transit. The US also wants Iran to hand over 400kg of near-bomb-grade, enriched uranium. Iran is desperate to lift the sanctions imposed by Trump because of its nuclear pro-

gramme and to unfreeze assets.

Iran's economy has been devastated by the war and not just because of the widespread bombing of civilian infrastructure, hospitals, schools, universities. Iran has halted all petrochemical exports and frozen prices, following the bombing of two key production sites at Asaluyeh and Mahshahr, in early April. It says it intends to stabilise its domestic market.

The Iranian authorities have shut-down the internet inside the country – now for 1,100 hours – to prevent regime opponents from organising. However the Iranian authorities admit that 10mn people, or over 10% of the population, now directly rely on internet access to earn a living.

Iranian officials estimate the war damages at \$270bn, or 57% of Iran's GDP, or three times to government's budget, and several times larger than its annual oil revenues, a staggering cost. Iran's economy is seeing a sharp rise in inflation and a wave of unemployment as workers are laid off by firms with destroyed plant and disrupted supply lines.

Official inflation was already above 50% in December and 70% at the end of February. Now the inflation rate for basic foodstuffs (meat, dairy, oil, rice, vegetables) is above 110% Medicines, including insulin, are now either unavailable or many times their cost 40 days ago.

Iran's regime is in a corner and is responding with great brutality against its own people, who largely detest the religious dictatorship. At least 127 people have been recently arrested for "planning sabotage" and "preparing the groundwork for a military attack". The recently strengthened espionage laws allow the state to impose the death penalty on those accused of spying together with the confiscation of property.

The vast misery caused by the US-Israeli bombing and the responses of the Iranian regime and its proxies are outrageous. The Iranian state remains in possession of weapons-grade nuclear materials, Hezbollah and the Iranian regime remain intact, there is massive disruption to the world economy and thousands of people are dead.

The socialists say:

No more bombing! Israel out of Lebanon!

A secular republic in Iran, real equality for women, and a workers' government.

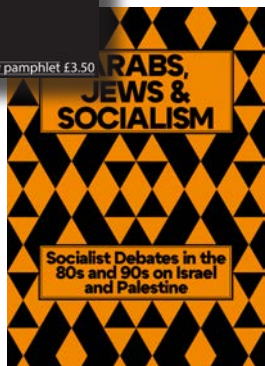
We want a democratic peace where the rights of Iran's minorities are respected, the Kurds have the right to self-determination, and a real independent Palestinian state exists alongside Israel. □



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Block Reform on 7 May

By Cathy Nugent

As we approach the 7 May English council elections, Reform UK is polling at 25%, a few points down, but in the lead. In Scotland Reform is on track to win 18 of the regional seats. In Wales Reform is polling 25%, enough to be in close competition with Plaid Cymru and to beat Labour into third place.

These elections could bring a far-right party closer to power: a party committed to scrapping union rights, renters'

rights, and net zero targets while enforcing brutal mass deportations of migrants, including people already settled in the UK.

Strategy

Reform's strategy — scooping up rightwards-moving disillusioned Tory voters and exploiting the backlash against Labour — has pushed it up the polls. The things Labour has done to appease Reform-curious voters — attacking migrants — have failed to appease. Labour should have done what voters expected it to do after the 2024 general election — tax the rich and rebuild public services. Increasingly people look to the Green Party to deliver.

Meanwhile Labour remains the party to which the UK's biggest trade unions are affiliated. The unions could, if stirred into action, change Labour's political course. That is why Workers' Liberty, as we work to build a socialist alternative out of labour movement struggles, continues to argue for a vote for Labour.

In the run up to and after 7 May trade unionists and socialists should:

- organise community leafletting and workplace talking campaigns against Reform, using materials that highlight working-class unity against the landlords and the bosses.

- build existing or set up new labour movement local initiatives against Reform and the far right. Support the national network, [Trade Unions Fighting the Far Right](#).

- Get Labour Party, Your Party and Green Party members together to help with these initiatives.

- Push for SUTR and the Together Al-

liance to open up to their campaigning — including days of action against Reform — to democratic decision-making.

- Develop specific strategies to fight back in Reform-led councils.

- Combat Reform on campuses as students and Uni workers.

- Push our unions to organise migrant workers. □



The Greens in Lambeth

Our default, all-other-things-equal, policy for 7 May is to vote Labour, because of our long-term orientation to the labour movement.

In Lambeth, south London, however, Workers' Liberty people excluded from the Labour Party are working with the Greens in the local election, campaigning for a Green vote. There are several reasons.

- The local Greens are unusually left-wing. If they win the council, which looks likely, they have committed to using it as a platform to rally a national fight to restore central government funding for local government services. They have worked closely with unions against cuts by the current Labour

council.

- The local Greens have also drawn a lot of young people newly into politics. Of course we want to work and discuss with them. And for now the main way available to do that is electioneering.

- The local Labour council has been a flagship of Blairism since 2006 at least. It has got even worse recently, cutting off previous regular budget consultations with the council unions. It is planning to close a daycare centre this year, although pressures from central government do not enforce that. As of now, the local Labour Parties, led by right-wingers triumphant in their "revenge" for the Corbyn years, are not resisting. □

Support the Tube strikes! A union mobilisation for 16 May

From Tubeworker

Strikes by London Underground (LUL) drivers in RMT, planned for late March, against longer-working-day plans, were called off, after the company offered renewed negotiations. Tubeworker supporters opposed this at the time, arguing the talks were simply a delaying tactic by the employer that would amount to nothing.

Unilateral

We take little pleasure in having been proved right.

Not only has LUL refused to change a single dot or comma of its proposal, it has pointedly refused to give guarantees about the alleged "voluntary" nature of the scheme, suggesting it may be planning to impose it unilaterally.

Remember, 58% of all Tube drivers, across both unions, rejected LUL's proposals.

So Tube train crew will be on the picket lines on 21-22 and

23-24 April. Two further sets of staggered 48-hour strikes are planned for May and June.

We all hope that a solid strike in April will force movement from the company. But if it doesn't simply doing the same thing again a month later is unlikely to budge them. We will need to escalate.

The simplest way to do this is to name an extra day in May, turning a two-day strike into a three-day strike, and an extra two days in June, meaning an escalation from two days in April to three days in May to four days in June.

For now, the focus must be on ensuring the liveliest possible picket lines next week. As the old saying goes, "The longer the picket line, the shorter the strike". The stronger our action, the greater the impact on the employer, and the better our chances of securing concessions. □

• More: page 22

By Cathy Nugent

On 16 May Tommy Robinson will attempt to repeat the "Unite the Kingdom" mobilisation of September 2025 which drew 150,000 people or more.

On the same day the annual Nakba Day demonstration is planned by the Palestine Solidarity Committee and others. Robinson had clearly planned the Unite the Kingdom rally to clash — and the police have given permission for the far right to take over Whitehall.

Stand up to Racism (SUTR) are now mobilising people to join the Nakba Day demonstration after weeks of being unclear about plans, and then telling people there would be a supplementary counter-demonstration. This is a big mistake.

The PSC has every right to go ahead with their demonstration, but we should not pretend that merging a counter-protest into it is a clear

and effective mobilisation against the far right and their programme of racism against migrants and false promises to working-class people.

We now have the ludicrous situation of seeing a huge march against the far right in London on 28 March (organised by the Together Alliance/SUTR) followed by a weak mobilisation a few weeks later, in the same city, when the far right will actually be there.

What was the point of 28 March if not to prepare trade unions and others to confront the far right more consistently and strongly?

TUFF

The Trade Unions Fighting the Far Right (TUFF) network has called a trade union mobilisation for 16 May — a counter demonstration with properly organised stewarding and alternative politics. This is the right thing to do.



They have been putting pressure on general secretaries to do more than pay lip service to fighting the far right. It is still not too late to get those so-called leaders to respond and for trade union activists to carve-out a more effective mobilisation against the far right on 16 May.

[TUFF](#) is a new network of trade union activists. It wants to organise union members to directly oppose the far right on the streets and in challenge them in workplaces with working-class politics — or social equality, stand with migrants, against transphobia. □



Workers and the fuel protests

By Micheál MacEoin

In the second week of April, Ireland was impacted by widespread fuel protests, in response to rising fuel prices and wider pressures on the cost of living in the context of the ongoing US war on Iran.

The protests were largely led by farmers, hauliers, and some agricultural workers. The primary methods of protest included blockading roads, depots and filling stations, as well as protests in cities.

The demands of the protests have often been unclear or contradictory. Common themes have been a cap on fuel prices, the suspension of carbon taxes on fuel, and energy credits for households and businesses, as well as general cost-of-living measures.

In some places, the Irish far-right have sought to capitalise on the protests. Some of the most prominent spokespersons who have emerged, mainly agricultural contractors, have a history of involvement in far-right or anti-migrant activity. This has not, however, been universally the case, and the far right has not been welcomed in many areas.

The Irish state has responded with a combination of concessions and repression. The police have used pepper spray in County Cork to disperse protests, and public order units to clear O'Connell street in the centre of Dublin.

This should be opposed, if only because the same measures can, have and will again be used against the labour movement.

At the same time, the Taoiseach [prime minister] announced further reductions of duties on fuel and a delay in a carbon tax increase – a package costing about 505m euro (£440m) – on top of 250m euro (£218m) worth of measures announced almost three weeks ago.

This has not been without political cost. The Government survived a motion of no confidence tabled by opposition parties by 92 votes to 78 but lost the Independent Kerry TD Michael Healy-Rae as an agriculture minister, who said the government had “let the people of Ireland down”.



Fuel protest on O'Connell Street, Dublin

The protests raise a number of issues.

Agriculture

While criticising the tactics of the blockades and the lack of coherent demands, the left-wing researcher and writer Conor McCabe has argued that the protests shine a light on the very structure of Irish agricultural capitalism. Ireland exports 90% of its agricultural products, which are oriented narrowly towards the production of milk and beef for processors, slaughterhouses, and exporters.

This form of agriculture is land-hungry and dependent heavily on fertiliser, pushing out horticulture and tillage to the extent that Ireland now imports 83% of its basic fruit and vegetable needs.

Such a model of intensive agribusiness is also heavily dependent on agricultural contractors who provide heavy machinery and agricultural labour at key times of the year, carrying financial risk on behalf of farmers and the bigger capitalists involved in exporting food to wider markets. These contractors, who are to the fore in the protests, are having margins squeezed by rising cost of fuel and credit.

As we said of the UK fuel protests in 2000, the “fuel blockades were essentially a movement to assert the interests of one particular section of capital, mostly but not all small capital” and where workers were involved, it was under the banner of small capitalists.

While sympathetic to the cost-of-living pressure, the protestors' demands

by the end of the first week were shading from cuts to fuel tax to demands for increased drilling for oil.

Moreover, the lack of unified demands will mean the Irish government will strike bargains only with certain sectors of capital, rather than focus on the interests of workers and the wider population.

The truth is: cost-of-living pressures, in the form of fuel in a car-dependent economy as well as higher prices for basics including food, will most greatly impact the working-class.

The labour movement itself needs to be in the fore in tackling this crisis, with demands which point the way towards democratic social ownership and production for need rather than profit, as well as tackling the ecological crisis threatening the planet.

Tackled

These issues can only be tackled by a roused labour movement, something not possible if workers individually fall in behind small capitalists or the roads lobby in pursuit of demands which privilege their particular interests.

That is not to argue that the labour movement has nothing to say on these issues. It should seek to pull in farmers and groups of small capitalists (and not the other way around) through calling, for example, for taxes on the oil companies and the rich to fund a free and publicly integrated public transport system. A transition from domestic heating oil to green energy should be effected to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

Rather than opportunistic ambulance-chasing of protest movements, socialists should also be rooted in the Marxist tradition. Engels, in response to sections of the right-wing of the German Social Democratic Party in the 1890s, did not agree with demands for farmers which simply preserved small-scale agricultural production.

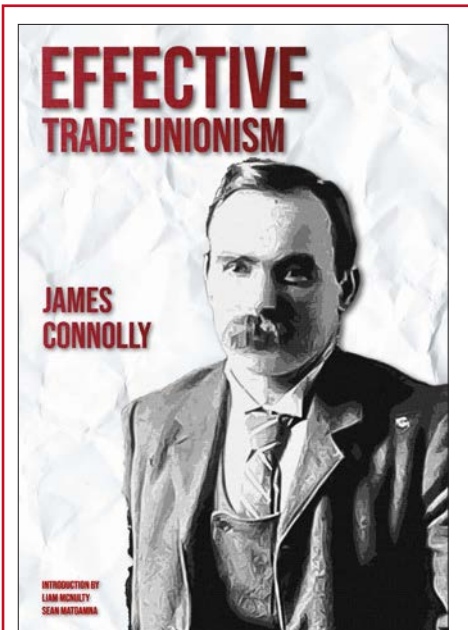
Socialist should hope to effect “a tran-

sition of...private enterprise and private possession to cooperative ones, not forcibly but by dint of example and the proffer of social assistance for this purpose.” This could include, for example, offering co-operatives or cheap credit “for the establishment of large-scale production”, in order to make farmers understand “that we can save, preserve their houses and fields for them only by transforming them into co-operative property operated co-operatively.”

James Connolly, similarly, envisaged a society in which “agriculture ceases to be a private enterprise, when a free nation organises the production of its own food stuffs as a public function, and intrusts [sic] the management of the function to the agricultural population, under popular boards of their own election.”

“The same shrewd sense”, argued Connolly, “which has inspired the Irish farmers to appreciate the advantages of agricultural cooperation in dairies and banks, with only their little savings to finance the enterprise, will also lead them to appreciate the advantages which might be derived from cooperation on a national scale with the entire resources of the nation to equip it.

“And such cooperation applied to industry as well as land is the basic idea of the future socialist republic.” □



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

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A coffin brought to a fuel protest

Violence “insane and cannot continue”

By Ira Berkovic

On Thursday 16 April, hundreds of Palestinian and Jewish protesters in Tel Aviv demanded an end to settler terror and occupation in the West Bank. The protest was called by the Peace Partnership, a coalition of left-wing, anti-occupation, and peace groups, including Combatants for Peace, Breaking the Silence, Peace Now, left-wing political party Hadash, and the left-wing binational (Palestinian-Jewish) social movement Standing Together.

Following another recent spike in settler violence, Israel's security cabinet passed a directive setting out stronger actions against “nationalist crimes”. But the Tel Aviv protest rightly drew the link between settler terror and state policy, with slogans including “The terror and hatred are generated by the government”. Numerous Israeli politicians have stated explicitly that the aim of the regime in the West Bank is to “kill”, “bury”, or “erase” prospects for a Palestinian state, via road construction, settlement expansion, and displacement. An old adage says that war is merely politics carried out by forcible means; armed settler gangs carrying out pogroms against Palestinian villages are prosecuting a war in support of government policy.

Standing Together wrote: “Settler violence is happening across the West Bank every day with full backing of our government and it has reached the highest number since recording began. We cannot allow this to continue! We're mobilising our society and raising a voice against this unbearable reality and building the power to end the occupation for good.”

Amin Amara, a Palestinian leader of Standing Together, said: “We're in Tel Aviv protesting against settler terror. Every day we see settler terrorism, we the army protecting the settlers who commit terrorist acts against Palestinians. This reality can't continue: a reality of wars, a reality of settler terror in the West Bank, a reality where the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza are being slaughtered. We must put an end to this [...] We're forced to take the streets. We're here in Tel Aviv, Arabs and Jews, to raise our voices.”

Yael Agmon Nacht, an Israeli Jewish activist in Standing Together, said: “We're here, Jews and Palestinians, protesting against the settler terror that is happening across the occupied West Bank with full support from our government. Palestinians are being attacked by settlers daily, beaten inside their homes, their houses burned, their cars smashed, and their communities terrorised. Let's be clear, they're being ethnically cleansed. This reality is insane and

cannot continue. There is another way, a way of real Israeli-Palestinian peace, and we need to build the political power to get there. For all of us, we must end the occupation.”

On the same day, 16 April, US president Donald Trump announced a 10-day ceasefire in Israel's war on Lebanon. Although Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the ceasefire represented an opportunity for a “historic peace agreement”, some reports indicate the ceasefire was essentially imposed on Israel by the US, with more hawkish elements in the Israeli government frustrated at being unable to continue the destructive bombing campaign that has seen major devastation to civilian infrastructure, with millions displaced and thousands killed.

Occupy

Israel has declared its intention to occupy territory between its own northern border and the Litani River, 18 miles into Lebanon, by establishing a military-controlled “security buffer”. Direct negotiations between Israel and the Lebanese government have commenced.

A pause of any length in the ongoing destruction and slaughter is preferable to its continuation. But a 10-day ceasefire imposed by the USA is not “peace”. It simply freezes the situation. The first step in any meaningful peace agreement must be the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon. The Lebanese people have a right to self-determination, free from occupation. A peace agreement must also facilitate reconstruction and resettlement for those displaced by Israeli bombing. However, the likelihood of the current Israeli government providing aid to fund that reconstruction is next to nil.

Hezbollah, the Shi'a Islamist paramilitary party backed by Iran, which is Israel's military opponent in Lebanon, is a deeply reactionary force. Many Lebanese leftists rightly see Hezbollah as a proxy for Iranian regional imperialism. A former member of the Lebanese National Resistance Front, a defunct coalition of secular-nationalist militias, including some shaped by Stalinism and Maoism, was recently interviewed in the US-based left-wing magazine Jacobin. They said: “Why do [Hezbollah] need long-range missiles? We quickly understood that Iran's agenda is to dominate the region. Their weapons are used in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen [...] They became a regional army [...] Hezbollah's slogan is that they are a resistance against Israel. But it is a cover.”

But as long as Israeli militarism and occupation continues, causing devastation and displacement in Lebanon, Hezbollah will remain able to consoli-



16 April protest in Tel Aviv

Pic: ThePeacePartnership/ Instagram

date a social base by presenting itself as the resistance.

Longer term, a genuine peace will require democratic upheaval in Israel, to win a government committed to peace with its neighbours, and which aims for secure sovereignty within its own borders rather than pursuing territorial expansion and occupation beyond them. An Israeli government that waged a campaign of regional peace, mutual recognition, and reconciliation would do more to undermine clerical-fascist Islamist forces such as Hezbollah and Hamas, which seek the destruction of Israel, than a militarism that vainly seeks to “destroy” movements which take root in the conditions of oppression and devastation the current Israeli regime has imposed.

Report

A new report from the United Nations and European Union estimates that reconstruction efforts in Gaza will cost more than £50 billion. It says that 60% of Gazans lost their homes, with 370,000 homes destroyed. 1.9 million people, around 80% of the entire population, were displaced during the war, with many people displaced multiple times. 50% of Gaza's hospitals remain non-operational. The Gazan economy shrunk by 84% during the war. The report suggests £19.5 billion is required over the next 18 months to restore essential services.

The report says the “minimum conditions” required for reconstruction are “a sustained ceasefire and adequate security”. It calls for an increase in humanitarian aid, and free movement between Gaza and the West Bank.

Despite the nominal ceasefire in Gaza, the Israeli army has continued attacks. Nine-year-old Saleh Badawi was shot and killed in Gaza City on Thursday 16 April. There is little evidence of sus-

tained civilian reconstruction efforts, with some reports suggesting Israeli forces are building permanent military placements.

Representatives of Hamas, the Islamist paramilitary party that ruled Gaza prior to Israel's assault, recently met US officials to discuss the implementation of the US-brokered “Peace Plan” that ushered in the current ceasefire in October 2025. According to an article in the *New York Times*, Hamas officials have said the movement is prepared to give up stocks of automatic rifles and small arms belonging to its police force and other security services. The US and Israel want Hamas to disarm more fully and speedily.

On 25 April, the first elections in 20 years will take place in Gaza. Due to the devastation caused by the war, elections will only take place in one municipality, Deir al-Balah. Around 70,000 people are registered to vote, a tiny fraction of the 930,000 who were eligible to vote during the previous municipal elections scheduled for 2021 but ultimately postponed. The elections are part of municipal elections taking place across the occupied Palestinian Territories, including the West Bank, and are administered by the Palestinian Authority, the semi-state run by Fatah, a secular-nationalist party which leads the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Following a decree issued by Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority, in January 2026, some municipalities have religious quotas, with allocated seats for Christian and Muslim candidates.

Participation in the elections requires adherence to the PLO charter, meaning Hamas cannot participate. Hamas previously won elections in Gaza in 2006, then fought a bloody civil war against Fatah to drive it from Gaza and establish one-party, authoritarian rule. □

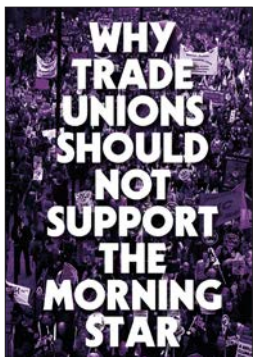


Orban: a strangely delayed reaction

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* writer could scarcely contain his excitement: in an article headed "Central Europe in revolt as Hungary and Slovakia defy Brussels", he enthused over the "scathing attack" launched by ministers of the two nations against "the EU's handling of the Ukraine war, its energy security failures and its perceived incompetence in negotiating trade terms with the US."

In particular, the article noted (with obvious approval) the words of Hungary's foreign minister and Slovakia's vice-president "tearing into Brussels' approach to international diplomacy ... over the EU's insistence on prolonging the war in Ukraine, instead of pushing for negotiations."



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The piece (written by one Rainer Rupp – a name well worth googling) was published on 12 April 2025, and concluded: "That battle lines are drawn with Hungary and Slovakia refusing to fall in line behind Brussels and there are signs this could quickly spread... with Brussels finding itself facing an internal revolt unlike anything seen before."

Exactly one year later, Hungary's Kremlin-friendly prime minister Orban, who had been blocking EU financial support to Ukraine, was ejected by a record vote after 16 years of increasingly authoritarian rule. Putin's money and Trump's public support could not save Orban – indeed, the intervention of Trump's hapless veep J D Vance is widely believed to have been counter-productive.

Result

The result was known on Sunday evening – early enough for most UK papers to carry the news in their Monday editions. Maybe the *Morning Star* goes to press earlier than the mainstream papers, or maybe the editorial team needed time to work out their "line".

Either way, Monday's MS had nothing whatsoever to say about this momentous election (though it did carry an ed-

itorial calling upon the "belligerent and deluded governments of Western Europe ... [to] stop pursuing an impossible military victory in Ukraine and accept as the United States has been forced to, that peace comes from negotiation and compromise").

On Tuesday the paper carried a short factual report that did at least describe Orban as "fanning the flames of far-right movements across Europe."

Comment

Finally, on Wednesday, the paper carried an editorial comment: it noted that Orban's defeat "was welcomed by the European Union as removing an obstacle to its federalising ambition" (so, presumably a Bad Thing for the fanatically anti-EU publication), but at the same time "conversely a setback for Trump's USA and Putin's Russia". A setback for Trump is, presumably a Good Thing, but what about Russia? After all, the editorial noted "Orban was helpful in disrupting the EU's drive to keep the war in Ukraine going by all possible means" – a disruption entirely in line with the MS's stance on Ukraine).

After noting that the result was unwelcome in Israel (further complicating matters for the MS) the editorial

declared that for the left "the outcome is therefore ambiguous. It is entirely welcome that a far-right leader who squeezed media freedom and judicial independence while demonising migrants and wallowing in corruption has been repudiated."

"But if the victory of Peter Magyar in an election where the left was entirely absent empowers neoliberalism and the forces of war, nothing has been gained" (I think by "the forces of war" here we can safely assume the MS means, first and foremost, any form of support for Ukraine).

Of course, the editorial was correct to point out that left forces were absent from the election and, indeed, it could have gone on to point out that Magyar was until two years ago, a leading figure in Orban's party and remains firmly in the camp of right wing, anti-immigrant nationalism.

But the underlying reason for the MS's reluctance to express an opinion is that Orban backed two closely connected causes that the MS itself supports: the breakup of the EU and the defeat of Ukraine. And for that, as Rainer Rupp made clear last year, the Stalinists rather admired him. ☐

Housing

Land ownership and reform in Scotland

By Robert Bau

As far as I can see, Scotland is the only part of the UK where there has been a sustained and serious debate about land ownership. There are several reasons for this. Collective memory of the Highland Clearances may still matter, but more important is the visible reality of land concentration in Scotland, the survival of crofting, and the fact that feudal obligations on some tenants existed until relatively recently. These have kept land ownership firmly in the public view.

Whatever the reasons, it is a fact that both Labour and SNP governments have passed land reform legislation in Scotland. The most recent example is the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025, which places new duties on large estates over 1,000 hectares.

These include:

- a requirement to produce

Land Management Plans,

- stronger duties to engage with local communities,
- tighter controls over land sales, and
- oversight by a new Land and Communities Commissioner.

The Act also introduces a public interest test. This allows Scottish Ministers to intervene when large estates are being sold, and the proposed sale would harm the public interest. Ministers may impose conditions, delay the sale, or require the land to be offered in smaller lots to diversify ownership.

Despite frequent media claims that the SNP can now "break up estates", no estate has been broken up, no sale has been blocked, and no public interest test has yet been applied in practice. The powers exist in law, but their use depends on secondary legislation, guidance, and commencement orders that are still to come.

Indeed SNP Ministers have also described these powers as a future backstop, intended to influence behaviour in the land market rather than to be used routinely.

So over more than 20 years of land reform, a clear pattern emerges in Scotland: radical powers are placed on the statute book, but are used cautiously, slowly, or not at all, especially when they affect the property rights of powerful landowners.

Unfortunately there is no indication that this approach will change if the SNP forms the next Scottish Government. Indeed, at present, the only party campaigning for more fundamental reform is the Scottish Greens.

They argue for:

- a 500-hectare cap on land ownership, unless a clear public interest case is made,
- a mandatory public interest test for large land purchases,



and

- compulsory sale powers for vacant and derelict land, including in urban areas.

Yet, as said, there are already laws on the statute book which could be used by a more radical government in Scotland to actually challenge the large land owners.

Could England, Wales, and Northern Ireland follow the

Scottish example, or even in a more radical form? In England in particular, the material basis for such a debate clearly exists, as land ownership is one of the most unequal in the industrialised world.

How could landownership be raised? One possible gateway into that debate is the role of the Crown Estate. More on that in the next article. ☐

A drift to “BDS” as the universal answer

By Simon Nelson

In spits and spats, BDS, once a policy special for Israel, has moved into being seen as a general answer to war and repression.

The 28 March Green Party in England & Wales (GPEW) Spring [Conference](#) had motions submitted that called for BDS-like campaigns against the US (for its policies in Venezuela) and against all countries involved in continuing the Sudanese civil war.

Workers' Liberty has long campaigned against Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) on Israel as a meaningful or effective tactic to achieve Palestinian self-determination. It has proved ineffective in achieving even steps towards that, in many places where it has been applied. It has even been actively harmful to Palestinian solidarity, used for example to block British union support for strikes within Israel, or to “boycott” speeches in Britain from the Palestinian-Jewish anti-war social movement within Israel. Blanket BDS targeting Israel can quickly slide into left antisemitism, with, for example, Israeli art people excluded from international forums.

The “exceptionalisation” of Israel as a uniquely evil state, supposedly founded on genocide, remains a problem. In fact, the histories of most modern states include persecution of populations that did not “fit”, as for example the Armenian genocide and persecution of Kurds in Turkey.

The “success” of the BDS campaign has apparently been less to put pressure on Israel from the outside, more to educate a layer of activists into believing that BDS is now the catch-all solution to states behaving badly. Nix bad capitalists by getting the good capitalists and governments to shun them?

Sudan

The Sudan motion rightly highlighted the growing humanitarian crisis in Sudan and supported action to address it. It resolved to “support Sudan-specific boycott, divestment, and sanctions measures against individuals, corporations, financial institutions, and state actors complicit in genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity in Sudan, until such violations cease and full accountability is achieved”. Those would be nigh on impossible to implement and could not possibly be effective.

For one, it was asking the GPEW to support a campaign that does not really exist. (GPEW itself presumably does not have billions in investment funds to redirect).

And if there were a broader campaign (by whom?), what role could it play? Appealing to capitalists and governments to boycott Egypt, Russia, the UAE, Iran and Turkey might allow you to feel that something is being done, but is unlikely to “work”. Look at the current sanctions regimes against Russia and Iran. The Russian sanctions have done nothing to stop Putin's war against Ukraine. Associated measures to ban Russian tourists or Russian literature are positively destructive. Sanctions on Iran have damaged and impoverished the country, and have not stopped the regime from waging war against its own people.

Venezuela

The motion on Venezuela, which had no criticism of the Maduro government, called for “boycotts of, divestment from, and sanctions against US companies which profit from the US war machine”. Given the US's outreach as the world's biggest capitalist power, there is a good chance this would mean “boycotting” most of the world economy.

In the case of Sudan, the movers may genuinely be hoping for pressure to stop the war. No one can seriously believe a boycott of the US will even gain any grip, let alone change its foreign policy.

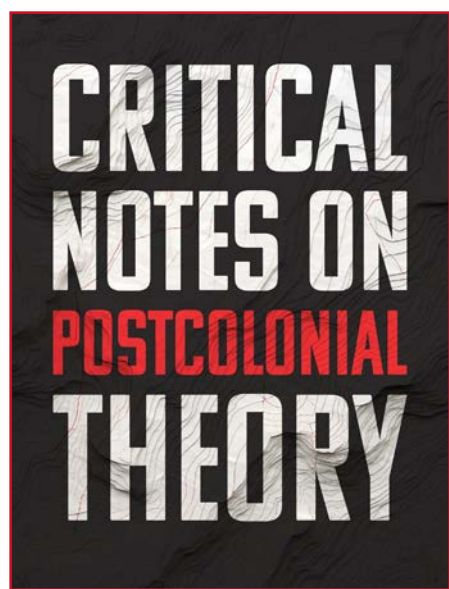
There is a campaign to boycott Turkey from “Rise up 4 Rojava”, aimed at what they term “fascist” Turkey's repression of what was the autonomous Kurdish area in Syria. I know of no trade union



passing motions for that policy. And would the intent be to ban links with progressive and leftist organisations and people in Turkey (and USA, etc.), or, let's say, to stop people seeking cheap holidays in Turkey, or ban academic links with Turkish universities?

If no, then a boycott is not the right word; if yes, then the boycotters may actively harm what they wish to support.

It is surely better for the left to support working-class and left-wing allies within the states that wage reactionary wars. BDS as a Swiss-army-knife universal tool will cut against that. □



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

workersliberty.org/publications

Trans rights

Will new guidance allow inclusive spaces?

By Will Sefton

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is likely to have its new Code of Practice on services, public functions and associations put by the government to Parliament after the 7 May local elections.

The EHRC ran consultations through late 2024 and mid-2025 on how to rewrite the services code to reflect the April 2025 Supreme Court judgment and its implications for single-sex and separate-sex spaces.

The “interim” guidance

caused more confusion and went far in the direction of excluding trans people from public spaces. Eventually the EHRC withdrew it and took it down from its website.

Harassment

Trans organisations such as TransActual and the Trans+ Solidarity Alliance documented sharp increases in harassment and exclusion of trans and gender-non-conforming people in toilets, changing rooms and other public settings.

The Trans Solidarity Alliance has said any new code as a minimum must “defend trans

people's right to access spaces in line with their lived gender”, “protect inclusive spaces and freedom of association from anti-trans laws” and “bring the UK back into line with its human rights obligations”.

On 13 April 2026, the EHRC delivered a further updated Code to the Minister for Women and Equalities, Bridget Phillipson. This draft will go to Parliament in May 2026.

Legality

Legally, the Code is a statutory code of practice, not a new Act. Under section 14 of the Equality Act 2006, the EHRC must

submit a draft to the Secretary of State, who can approve it and arrange a “negative resolution” process in Parliament. If neither Commons nor Lords pass a motion to reject it in that window, the Code automatically comes into force on a commencement date set by ministers.

A code of practice does not itself create new legal duties, but courts and tribunals must take it into account when deciding whether service providers and associations have complied with the Equality Act, making it highly influential. □



A drastic tipping point may be close

By Stuart Jordan

New research has found the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) is slowing and approaching collapse at a much faster rate than previously anticipated. AMOC collapse would be a catastrophic, global climate tipping point resulting in an abrupt changes in planetary conditions, irreversible in human time scales and triggering further tipping points in Earth systems.

For the last 12,000 years the AMOC has been a key component of Holocene-era climate system. Warm surface water from the tropics flows northwards, warming Europe and the Arctic, where it cools and descends, returning to the tropics along the ocean floor. This "oceanic conveyor belt" moves at a rate of one cycle every 1,000 years, and has played a key role in creating the stable climatic conditions necessary for settled agriculture and the past 11,000 years of human development.

The AMOC is running at its slowest rate in 1,600 years and its slowing further. The reason is that the poles are warming faster than the tropics. That reduces the temperature gradient that drives AMOC. The slowing means that more rainwater accumulates on the surface, diluting the denser salty water, which then slows the sinking of water in the polar regions.

Both dynamics create self-sustaining feedback loops and beyond a tipping point the processes becomes irreversible.

Estimates

Scientists now think the AMOC tipping point could be passed at any moment. The best estimates are for it to come around "mid-century".

Even AMOC weakening will have profound climate impacts. AMOC collapse is likely to be the first abrupt and catastrophic climate jolt of the Anthropocene. Measures to cut carbon emissions and so increase the chances of avoiding that collapse are urgent.

In Europe, AMOC collapse would mean



much colder, drier winters. For the UK, the collapse of the AMOC would mean sub-zero winters for three months of the year in London, with temperatures as low as -20°C. Scotland will freeze for more than five months a year. Polar sea ice will extend down to Norfolk.

At the same time, the planet would generally be warming, and so summers would be hotter than they are at present. The drastic climate change would significantly affect our ability to grow food. Some studies suggest Britain would lose 80% of arable land. Every region of the globe will be affected.

In North America, AMOC collapse would cause more extreme storm weather and add up to a metre of sea level rise, threatening major US cities, such as New York, Dallas, Boston, and Miami. In Africa, AMOC collapse would reduce rainfall, causing widespread drought. AMOC collapse will move the tropical rain belt southwards, affecting the monsoon-dependent regions like India and Sahel. Studies suggest we could lose more than half of the land currently used for growing wheat and maize, crops which currently provide 30-35% of the global calorific intake.

AMOC collapse is further linked to 45% of other tipping points. Research

from Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research has found AMOC collapse will flip the Southern Ocean from carbon sink to carbon source, adding an extra 0.2°C of additional global warming.

Future

At the start of the 21st century, Earth system tipping points were considered as high-impact but low probability events for the distant future. Difficult to model, they were generally left out of official climate models and ignored for the purposes of major climate negotiations. It was assumed until recently that no tipping points would occur prior to 4°C warming.

Only in the last ten years, since the 2015 Paris talks, has scientific attention shifted and brought tipping points into sharper focus. The current consensus has shifted as a result of these findings and is extremely alarming.

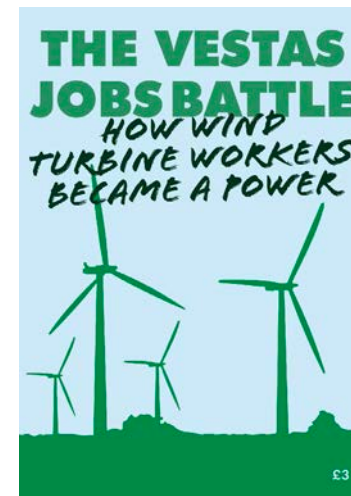
Some irreversible changes are already locked in, and current trends indicate warming substantially beyond 1.5°C. We are currently at 1.4°C warming, and CO₂ emissions are rising rather than falling. Other tipping points include coral bleaching, Amazon dieback, and the collapse of polar ice sheets. We will discuss them in future articles.

However catastrophic the prognosis, we can have no faith in the ruling class to take the necessary action. Dire warnings over many decades have left them still increasing carbon emissions. As Marx says: "Capital that has such good reasons for denying the sufferings of the legions of workers that surround it, is in practice moved as much and as little by the sight of the coming degradation and final depopulation of the human race, as by the probable fall of the earth into the sun. In every stockjobbing swindle every one knows that some time or other the crash must come, but every one hopes that it may fall on the head

of his neighbour, after he himself has caught the shower of gold and placed it in safety. Après moi le déluge! [After me, the flood] is the watchword of every capitalist and of every capitalist nation. Hence Capital is reckless of the health or length of life of the labourer, unless under compulsion from society." (Capital, vol. 1, ch. 10)

We can have no hope of avoiding these tipping points so long as the Earth's natural resources and all our heavy machinery is owned as private property and exploited for profit. Social control of the means of production is the only way to avoid catastrophe and the only way to minimise the suffering of the catastrophes that are already locked in.

Currently the world's three billion wage-workers are set to work in ways that drive us ever faster towards Earth system tipping points, whilst we suffer the many hardships and humiliations of exploitation. Through organisation and solidarity the international working class has the strength and interest to put an end to this madness. Only through social control of the means of production can we redirect production away from Anthropocene enhancing efforts and towards efforts that stabilise the climate, halt biodiversity loss and make the necessary adaptations to the environmental conditions that are already locked in. Only through social control of the means of production can we distribute increasingly scarce resources equitably and adapt to the environmental convulsions. The first step to winning social control is to orient the workers' movement to this alarming new reality and win the argument for the ecological necessity of socialism. □



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Reform's two strands of misogyny

By Jill Mountford

If Reform win the next general election, would they lead the UK to the Republic of Gilead? After all, they are doing well enough in the polls with a wild-eyed, far-right theologian as "Head of Policy", and a Christian on a mission to reassert a Christian social order who is "Head of Preparing for Government".

Dr James Orr and MP Danny Kruger hold two important posts in the party. They are traditionalist right-wingers. They oppose same-sex marriage, are against no-fault divorce, and, of course, oppose abortion rights. They stand for the "regulation of sex", are against pornography, and want "to get sex back where it belongs, behind closed doors..." That sounds pretty damn serious, and it has, at least, a hint of Handmaid's Tale about it.

Or will the macho sexist politics of the boorish "libertarian" leader, Nigel Farage, carry the day? The man who defended Trump's "grab them by the pussy" remarks and dismissed them as "locker room banter" and "alpha-male boasting"? Who himself boasts often about his penchant for strip joints and



claims Andrew Tate is "an important voice for men"? He describes his party's culture as "blokeish" and feeling like a "Rugby club on a day out".

Maybe Farage, in the style of Italy's former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, will persuade Bonnie Blue, actor and sex worker, who has endorsed him just as much as Orr and Kruger have, to join his leadership team to balance things up?

Any which way, Reform is surely the party promoting misogyny, homophobia, and racism, whether in "libertarian" or "traditionalist right" variants. Any which way, it's bad news for women,

LGBTQ people and anyone of colour. It's bad news for humanity. Both sides of the Reform leadership coin are repugnant and reactionary. Both sides would set us back decades and beyond.

Change

Interestingly, Reform voters don't seem too fussed on the detail of either side. This is a real problem. According to the recent research by Hope not Hate, most Reform voters are voting for neither the traditionalist nor the libertarian side of Reform. They are voting for a better economy, they're voting a change from

mainstream parties who they feel have let them down, they are voting against "the political elite", and they see immigration and asylum as the issue where the "elite" have let them down and damaged them economically.

Among Reform voters there are a whole bunch of sexist, racist and homophobic men, and a bunch of trad-wives. And a significant chunk of the 46% of young men aged between 16 and 34 who believe abortion should be illegal may vote for Reform.

A better Labour Party, one that fights in the interests of the working class, that builds council homes, invests in the NHS and fosters the idea of solidarity, could win over a lot of Reform voters and would never have lost millions of voters already.

Reform is a hotch-potch coalition that may well not stand the test of time. Good if it doesn't. But for now we need to take up the arguments now at every level, wherever we can — challenging their reactionary ideas and, importantly, talking rationally and persuasively about our positive and progressive agenda for building a better, inclusive world for everyone. □

Religion

The Pope is not the anti-Trump

By Will Roberts

As Trump's fury attaches itself to an ever-wider array of targets, some on the left are tempted to rally behind liberal anti-Trump figures and lend them political credence. Pope Leo XIV has become one such figure, most recently praised by [Bernie Sanders](#) and [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#), along with a

number of left-minded activists in and around the labour movement.

The temptation must be resisted. Our political power as a movement is founded on our ability to speak from our own mouths, not those of a higher order. As the earthly embodiment of the institution of the Catholic Church, the Pope is an enemy for our goals, no matter his personal views or whom he chooses as an enemy.

Freedom

Marxists support the freedom of individual religious expression and oppose persecution on religious grounds. This does not, however, transfer into political support of any kind for organised religion, the critique of which is central to the Marxist movement. American Trotskyist James Cannon once said that "our business is not to save souls for another world, but to tell the truth in this one". In this world, the Catholic Church is an institution rife

with abuse and corruption, a store of untold wealth for the benefit of a privileged few, and a reserve of conservative communalism that has historically been used to oppose the workers' movement, and doubtless will be again.

It is and does these things not because the previous popes have been too conservative, and a new individual will put it right. These are the logical outcomes of a fundamentally feudal power structure, based upon the preservation of a patriarchal hierarchy and hoarding of wealth. Unless the Catholic Church were to abandon its basic functions, give up all its land and property, and renounce its principles of human subservience to higher powers, it will continue to play a conservative role on the world stage.

Fighting Trump and his global movement is an urgent task for the left today. Because of this urgency, because of the need for a real transformation

of the conditions around us, we must not rely on figures like the

Pope to carry out our political fights for us. □



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Thu 23 Apr: Grenfell was social murder. Lewisham AWL. 7pm, Deptford Lounge, 9 Giffin St, SE8 4RJ

Thu 21 May: Poisoned by Stalinism: Chernobyl. Lewisham AWL. 7pm, Deptford Lounge, 9 Giffin St, SE8 4RJ

Campaigns

See workersliberty.org/agenda.

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 [@workerlib](https://twitter.com/workerlib)

[libertystudents](https://libertystudents.org), and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Template motions

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

Socialist-feminist book clubs

bit.ly/bc-sf

3 May: The New Age of Sexism. Manchester. 2:30pm, Gallery Café, 81 Princess Street, M2 3JL □



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A draft charter for

Taken, with thanks, from Labour Left Internationalists

Labour Left Internationalists has published this draft as a “contribution to the discussion arising from – or which should arise from – the ‘Restore Labour Democracy’ initiative”.

They say: “We discussed this at the Labour Left Internationalists committee on 19 April 2026, and decided to publish it as a first draft. We expect further contributions and amendments”.

The Restore Labour Democracy and Reset Labour statements are both circulating and gaining signatories.

The Restore Labour Democracy statement, backed by several trade union leaders, focuses on CLPs’ right to choose their own candidates and the withdrawal of the whip from members of the PLP.

The Reset Labour statement also refers to “genuinely open parliamentary and other selections” and “ending the suspension of MPs”, but additionally to “local members... engaging in meaningful debate and participation” and “democratic policy-making” which, like Mainstream’s objective of working “to ensure the Labour Party is democratic and that the voices and views of all members are heard, respected and heeded”.

What follows is a proposal for a charter for democratising Labour, spelling out clearly some things that are only implied in these statements.

Two preliminary points are important.

There is no single blueprint for how Labour ought to function. Its functioning is always an outcome of the struggles inside the party at different times, with a changing rule book and relationships of power as those struggles develop. The suggestions here are about what we could fight for now, based on working-class norms of collective decision-making and accountability of “higher” bodies to “lower”.

Also, the wording of rules is not the end of it. Much depends on how rules are used by members, CLPs, and unions, and how members, CLPs, and unions allow party officials to use, or even flout, the rules.

The role of Mandelson and Labour Together in the run-up to the last general election was not to change rules, but to manipulate, rules or no rules.

Equally, even the current rule book offers, on paper anyway, many more opportunities for members’ input than any “alternative” (Greens, Your Party, etc.). At present, all too often the party membership “self-suppresses” by not using avenues that exist in the rulebook, for



example to refer back sections of NPF reports or to challenge rulings-out by the Conference Arrangements Committee.

Making the party mechanisms live and well-used is inseparable from working to improve them.

Labour Left Internationalists stands for “making conference the party’s sovereign decision-making body”, with party conference determining party policy and manifestos. The Campaign for Labour Democracy is as clear, calling for “a real policy-making Annual Conference”.

It is better for party health and democracy that the leadership argue their case before members when they disagree with a motion, than that they suppress it.

To bypass what the Reset statement calls “meaningful debate and participation” on policy, the National Policy Forum (NPF) was established under the Blair leadership. It is increasingly obvious to party members that the NPF “experiment” has failed. There are no minutes, there is no transparency, and those members and party units that have dutifully submitted ideas every year cannot find out what has happened to them.

There is no rule that justifies the motions to party conference being released only at 8am on the day of the priorities ballot at conference. This serves only to allow factions within the party – at present, the leadership faction, “Labour to Win” – to control delegates’ votes in that ballot and to exclude the CLPs and affiliates from any discussion about priorities.

The rules about “ruling out” motions have not changed, but in recent years as many CLP motions have been ruled out as accepted into the ballot. They are

“referred” instead to the NPF or NEC, never to be heard of again.

It was usual at one time for motions to be circulated two months before conference, allowing the membership as a whole (through branches, CLPs and affiliates) to be part of the process. They were issued “forthwith” (as the 1982 rule book put it) after being received 12 weeks before conference, and affiliates could then send in amendments. If that could be done in 1982, it can certainly be done now, with email and electronic text processing).

Motions are grouped for prioritising into “topics”, again released only on the morning of the ballot. The topics are frequently manipulated. In 2025, for example, there was a topic, “water”. But motions calling for public ownership of water were separated out into another “topic”, “corporate structures”.

Even once policy is passed, in recent years the Labour Party has failed to report outcomes of votes. In 2024 the conference resolved that in the October budget Labour would “reverse the introduction of means-testing for the Winter Fuel Allowance” and “commit to public services and infrastructure, ensuring any public expenditure gaps, at a minimum, are restored through taxing wealth and that there are no further cuts to welfare provision for working people and pensioners”.

In 2025 the conference voted for “ensuring that any gaps in public expenditure are remedied through a system of progressive taxation where the wealthy pay their fair share, introducing a wealth tax on the richest to raise revenue for public services and support struggling households.”

It also voted to “retain the five-year route to Indefinite Leave to Remain and halt any moves to retrospectively extend

the qualifying period”, and for “enabling workers to challenge bad employers without the threat of deportation”.

In neither year were motions passed on the final day of conference ever published on Labour’s website or in any other way reported to members.

Reset Labour and Mainstream demand that “The Labour leadership must listen to the views of Labour members and affiliates” and that “the voices and views of all members are heard, respected and heeded”. By a democratic sovereign conference, or how? There is a fudge there. Both statements need discussion and clarification.

The democracy of conference is central. To achieve the aims of the Reset and Restore statements, and Mainstream, sufficient detail must be set out clearly, along with other democratic reforms needed.

One – A democratic and sovereign conference

“There is one thing I would like to say, I think it is about time we said it. As long as I hold any position in the parliamentary party – and I know I can speak for my colleagues also – we are not going to take our instructions from any outside body unless we agree with them” (Ramsey MacDonald, speaking at, and about, the Labour Party Conference, from Labour Party Annual Conference Report 1928, as quoted in Lewis Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference*)

The “outside body”, was, of course, the Labour Party annual conference. Yet even now the rulebook still says:

“The work of the Party shall be under the direction and control of Party conference... Party conference shall decide from time to time what specific proposals of legislative, financial or administrative reform shall be included in the Party programme”.

Labour must respect the democracy and sovereignty of conference.

A charter for Labour democracy should include:

1. Respect for conference as the sovereign policy-making body
2. Abolish the “contemporary” requirement for conference motions
3. Abolish the one-year delay for debating rule-change submissions from CLPs, and the ban on re-raising rule-change proposals within three years. Require the same notice for rule-change submissions from the NEC as from CLPs or unions
4. The motions and proposed rule changes submitted to conference to be released to CLPs and affiliates in good time for them to be able to discuss them
5. Topics for motions either to be announced well in advance of the motions

Labour democracy

deadline, or decided transparently. As the 2018 CLPD "Charter for a Democratic Conference" put it, "the criteria for motions should be flexible and fair".

6. Motions "ruled out" to be circulated too, with reasons given for ruling out.

7. All conference decisions to be published. ("Charter for a Democratic Conference": "Conference decisions and all papers should be available online to party members")

8. Require the PLP and Chief Whip to report to the conference, including on MPs' discipline, with the conference able to confirm or reject PLP disciplinary decisions

9. Establish democratic stand-alone Women's Conference, Young Labour, and Labour Students conferences. Women's conference, and women's posts in the party, to be trans-inclusive.

10. Abolish the National Policy Forum. Whilst the NPF exists there should be transparency for members about its functioning, including reports-back from elected members and minutes. When conference decides to "refer back" a section of an NPF report, the NPF should be obliged to respond in writing to the next conference, and be open to challenge. When CAC refers conference motions to the NPF, the NPF should be obliged to report its responses to the next conference, and be open to challenge on them.

Two – A strong and democratic trade union link

Full Labour Party democracy requires democratic reform in the trade unions. But changes in the Party's own rules are also necessary.

11. Respect for conference, where the trade-union vote is strong, as the sovereign policy-making body

12. Restore adequate trade-union representation on the NEC. Elected representatives of affiliates and of CLPs should have the overwhelming majority on the NEC, as they used to have. At present they have only 22 seats out of 39. The NEC should publish minutes.

13. Restore Labour local government democracy, opening the way to trade-union input into Labour councils' decisions.

Three – Democratic and open selection of parliamentary candidates

The run-up to the 2024 general election saw multiple manipulations of the selection process, with the NEC having prepared a couple of years previously by removing CLP's established long-listing rights.

14. CLPs to have rights of long-listing, shortlisting and selection for parlia-

mentary candidates, with clearly defined rules and processes. We support the rule changes proposed by [Momentum](#) to bring back that right for CLPs whilst protecting the rights of the Co-operative Party and Labour's affiliates

15. Mandatory reselection of MPs, as of council candidates

16. NEC and party offices must respect party rules – protect the integrity of the selection process, remain impartial and intervene only in the circumstances of a demonstrated breach of rules or in the event of a CLP being unable to fulfil the task.

Four – Rights of CLPs and members

The CLP is the basic unit of party organisation, intended to "unite the forces of Labour within the constituency and to ensure the establishment of, and to keep in active operation, an appropriate organisation and structure", as the current rule book puts it.

But the CLP role in the party has been undermined by reducing its role in conference and restricting its rights to select parliamentary candidates (see 6 and 7). In and after October 2023 there were multiple reports of CLPs being told that they could not debate motions properly submitted by party branches or affiliates. There are CLPs that have been told that they cannot invite speakers to meetings without the permission of the NEC. There is nothing like that in the rule book, and local strikers and campaigners speaking at Labour meetings is a practice as old as the party.

Meanwhile there is a lack of due process and natural justice in the party's processes for placing CLPs in "special measures" (and how they get out again) and its disciplinary processes for individual members.

17. NEC and party offices to abide by party rules – CLPs to be able to determine their own business in accordance with the rules and procedural guidelines for CLPs in the party rule book. No interference by party staff in CLP agendas – under the rules only the chair may rule a motion out of order, not a regional office (chapter 9 of the rule book on Regions does not give any regional structure this power).

18. CLPs to have control of campaigns for parliamentary by-elections and in general elections.

19. Labour MPs to be expected to provide reports to their CLPs, attending in person wherever possible. (The section "rights and responsibilities of elected members" in the current rule book gives no mention of this).

20. National and regional conferences to be organised in such a way that CLPs

are fully aware in advance of the agenda and motions for debate, with any motions ruled out are circulated in the motions book with reason given for the ruling out.

21. Transparent reporting of the number of CLPs in special measures (under clause I-1-C of appendix two of the rule book)

22. Due process and natural justice for all member "discipline" matters. No expulsion without an in-person hearing and right to submit a defence. No "bans" or "proscriptions" – expulsions only for support for candidates standing against Labour, or racist or other anti-working class action, abuse of party funds, and the like, not for "liking" left-wing pro-Labour social media posts. No suspension unless basic party functioning is at risk. Every suspended member must have a right to a prompt hearing, and the right to campaign in their own defence.

23. Recognition of Young Labour groups to be decided by CLPs, not by Region

Five – A democratic Labour Party leadership

The threshold for PLP nominations for leader and deputy leader was doubled in 2021 to 20%. In the most recent deputy leadership election the NEC did not even follow the party rulebook. Instead it invented a PLP nominations stage in which candidates had to get 20% before even being considered for CLP and affiliate nominations, rather than nominations in all sections proceeding concurrently.

24. NEC to adhere to party rules. No part of the thresholds under chapter four, II.2.B, comes before any other.

25. Threshold for PLP nominations to be returned to pre-2021. (We support the rule changes proposed by [Momentum](#) for this).

26. A democratic PLP – cabinet and shadow cabinet to be elected by the PLP.

27. Labour in government to legislate for abolition or democratisation of those features of the state that provide for leadership power of patronage over the PLP – honours system, peerages, etc.

Six – Democratic Labour Party Regions

Although the roles and responsibilities of the party's regional structures are set out clearly in chapters 9A and 9B of the rule book, often regional structures either fail to operate or seek to exercise powers they do not have. There have been damaging cases of party regional offices acting with no approval or knowledge of Regional Executive

Committees, such as the Yorkshire and Humberside Reform-style "migration updates" social media posts. More generally there is no oversight of RECs by regional conferences.

28. Regional offices to abide by party rules – no intervening in CLP agendas or otherwise stepping beyond their remit.

29. Regional Executive Committees must be required to report to Regional Conferences on their work since the last conference, attendance at meetings, and decisions made, with the opportunity for questions and references back. (Some core business, such as hearing appeals against the withdrawal of the whip by a Labour group and appeals against exclusion from the panel of local government candidates should of course be reported as numerical summary, rather than details or names of cases).

Seven – Democratic local government area parties

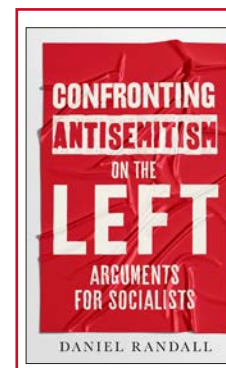
At one time, District Labour Parties were an important part of Labour's campaigning and political life, but the current "Local Government Committee" structure is unworkable in many areas. Worse, the 2024 rule changes removed the LGC responsibility for the local manifesto, and the 2025 rule changes removed CLP observers to Labour Groups. In some areas of the country LGCs are currently not functioning at all, leaving everything to Labour Groups or employed staff.

30. The party's structures in the local government area, LGC or however else named, to have responsibility for the local manifesto. A return to the District Party model.

31. Those structures to manage arrangements for observers to Labour Groups

32. A local electoral college for choosing leaders of Labour Groups

33. LGCs and branches to have control of campaigns for local elections. (A requirement for "sign-off" by regional officials, not even Regional Executive Committees, at best adds damaging delay). □



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The roots of Syria's

By Sam Myerson

The Syrian civil war, from 2012-3 to November 2024, killed over half a million people and resulted in the destruction of towns and cities across the country. It's estimated that 13 million people have been displaced by the conflict, and the majority now rely on humanitarian aid. The country has been torn apart by sectarian violence and the playing out of regional imperialist competition.

The popular uprisings in 2011 against the government of Bashar al-Assad were part of the new "spring of peoples" across the Middle East, started by events in Tunisia, which gave hope to millions in the region, and the confidence to act. Those involved in the early protest movement report joy and fear falling away. The regime's grip on dissent and opposition looked weak for the first time in decades.

Within weeks of the first demonstrations, the government made clear its intention to crush the uprising with force. It was not strong enough to crush opposition fully. But it was strong enough, and the popular uprising uncoordinated enough, that the government was able to convert the conflict into a bloody civil war in which militarised Islamists became dominant on the anti-government side.

The Ba'ath Party had taken power in Syria in a military coup in 1963. Hafez al-Asad waged an internal battle and seized power within the party. When the Ba'athists took control of the country, they placed it in a "state of emergency" which restricted civilian life, rights to free assembly, opposition parties, and trade unions. The barbarity that was to befall Syria in the future was already there. In order to take control after losing out in a special national congress of the Ba'ath Party, Hafez used his power as Defence Minister, and connections that he had been making in the military ranks, to kidnap his Ba'athist opponents, and arrest, disappear and torture others, until all were eliminated or fled.

Syrian society became a prison, and continued in that vein for another 46



years. Under Hafez's leadership and the command of his younger brother, the Syrian army laid siege to the city of Hama, one of the largest cities in the country, where a minor uprising led by the Muslim Brotherhood, a year earlier in 1981, had attempted, near successfully, to assassinate Hafez.

In 1982, the army, looking for the leader of the Brotherhood, Abu Bakr, was ambushed. In response, the Syrian Army bombed the city, pulverising large areas from the air and by artillery fire. Under the guise of rooting out the Muslim Brotherhood, the Syrian army massacred tens of thousands of Sunni Muslims. Hafez's brother Rifaat is also reported to have used barrel bombs and chemical weapons, and dumped diesel fuel into the water supplies.

Opposition

To understand how the civil war broke out, it's important to understand what the [opposition faced in Syria](#) and how the regime operated. The regime had, over decades, under the rule of Hafez and his son Bashar, repeatedly resorted to extreme violence in order to remain in power. Bashar came to power after the deaths of his brother (the previously designated successor) and, then of his father Hafez in 2000.

Quick changes were made to the constitution to hand over power. The appointment was then ratified by the Ba'ath Party. Bashar, not wanting to look a fool, had the nationwide "referendum" return a 97% vote in his favour, allowing his dad to maintain the highest vote recorded, 99%. It was a mockery, a brutal and violent joke of a government.

Yet after 2000 Syria started to become a different country. The patronage and bought support that Hafez relied on were not so strong for Bashar. The cult of personality that existed during his dad's tenure weakened under his reign. The large artworks and placards around the country honouring the first butcher

of Damascus were not, on the whole, replaced with similar imagery of the second. By all accounts, the feckless son was a reluctant leader.

But the basic policy of Hafez continued. Any change was delivered with murder, kidnapping, torture and imprisonment.

The first year of Bashar's reign saw some initial moves for reform. Syrian intellectuals gathered to formulate and raise demands, the Statement of the 99. This called for the end of the permanent state of emergency, the release of political prisoners, the return of exiles, and the restoration of freedom of assembly. These early months of the new Assad were viewed by some as a window of opportunity for reforms.

In the end, the regime used force to shut down the forums which had advocated for change. It imprisoned the leaders and participants for long sentences. They were accused of inciting racial and sectarian violence.

Bashar also built on the protections that were offered to the security services under Legal Decree no.14, which was brought in by Hafez: none of them could be prosecuted in Syria for torture. He widened this to cover all security and police personnel.

Further attempts at reform from above were made during the early 2000s, at points when the regime appeared weak. Nothing would come off. Some small prisoner releases occurred, largely in attempts to bolster the regime.

Islamists

After the bombing of the World Trade Centre in September 2001, and with the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Assad's Syria became a home for Islamist militarists. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad had long been allowed to operate from Syria, revanchism against Israel forming a large part of the national political direction of the Syrian Ba'athist party. Yet the regime, never wanting to

be found to be consistent, allowed for the rendition of suspects captured by the US security services to black sites in the country or to third-country locations.

Bashar had attempted to modernise and liberalise the economy after clearing out the old leadership. Some 60% of military and ministerial leadership changed, creating a new base, loyal to the weakling of Damascus. These economic reforms faltered, and the country, with its staid economy, fell victim to even more corruption by government and military officials.

Unemployment, poverty, and a stripping back of social welfare provisions really meant misery for most Syrians. By the mid-2000s, oil production and export were beginning to collapse. Widespread droughts hit the agricultural sector hard and displaced thousands of rural Syrians, who headed for Damascus and Aleppo. Around one in four Syrians under 25 were unemployed, and one in three of the general population lived in abject poverty, many more barely above that.

Funding

The government cut funding for education, health and welfare. The World Bank reported that around 80% of Syrian businesses expected, as part of normal operations, to pay large bribes and make vast donations to officials to obtain permits or contracts. These businesses were either competing with or reliant on the new monopolies created by Bashar's reforms; most had ended up in the hands of senior military and security services officials and the regime's friends and family.

Bashar's cousin, Syria's richest man at the time, owned the main telecommunications networks, along with banks and oil companies. He typified what "economic liberalisation" had meant in Syria.

For many Syrians, the reforms, droughts, and corruption worsened living conditions. Housing was poor and inadequate, with many of the new urban population living in shanty towns or simply homeless. Estimates indicate that, before the uprisings, Syria had a shortage of over 1.4 million homes.

Some estimates put the number of people living in either informal housing or homelessness as high as 40%.

Whatever democratic life there was, was largely shut down. Some organising persisted on campuses. Although the student unions were formally part of the state, they did hold elections for student representatives. Sometime in 2004 in Aleppo, the Ba'athist candidate in a student election was defeated



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civil war, 2012-2024



Azaz during the civil war

by Mohammed Arab. As a result he was suspended from his studies. After demonstrating with other students about his suspension, he was arrested and sentenced to four years in prison. He was released months later after being severely tortured.

In the early months of 2011 Syrians took to the streets to demand an end to the state of emergency, the opening up of society, the release of political prisoners, and the end of the bloody, dictatorial regime of Asad. Inspired by events around the Arab world, Syrians could see new possibilities. The fear that had kept many inactive was falling away.

In January 2011 Hassan ali Akleh set himself on fire in protest against the government. That did not draw the same attention as Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation had in Tunisia a month previous. But as mass demonstrations developed, in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, many Syrians began to ask: when will it be us.

Facebook and online forums filled with posts seeking to organise demonstrations. One called for a day of rage at the beginning of February. It was shared widely, but when the day came, no one showed. Some small demonstrations happened later in February in the Hareeqa district of Damascus, with slogans like "The Syrian People won't be humiliated", but little else followed.

A month later there were more small scale demonstrations. The slogans had changed. Now they were mocking the regime. "God, Syria and Freedom, that's all" was a play on the al-Asad slogans for Hafez and Bashar.

Some demonstrations were smashed by the security services, with many beaten and arrested, but the demonstrations started to build, particularly after the arrest and torture of a group of fifteen teenagers in Deraa who had been caught spray-painting anti-regime slogans. They had taken what they had seen and heard from Tunisia and Egypt.

Their treatment sparked widespread demonstrations in that city.

Around the same time there were demonstrations outside the security services headquarters in Damascus, demanding the release of political prisoners.

Repression

All the demonstrations that followed were met with brutal repression. That

was the state's go-to tool for dealing with peaceful democratic demands, such as the release of political prisoners, the end to torture, the end of the state of emergency, for the right to organise. The protest against the treatment of the teenagers in Deraa was suppressed with water cannons and live ammunition.

The army opened fire into the crowd. When the funerals were held, these too were targeted by the state with live ammunition.

Such brutal suppression had been an integral part of life in Syria for decades, but this time it was to be a catalyst for further action. The asymmetrical escalation by the state against the demonstrations set off the taper that blew the uprisings into full scale armed warfare.

The opposition to the government went through numerous changes in the following year. It initially solidified into two fronts. The largest, the Syrian National Council, was made up of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, secular oppositionists and Kurds. The other, more secular, more left-wing, but smaller, was

the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change, based on some of the Local Coordinating Committees. The NCCDC was based inside Syria, unlike the SNC which was predominantly operating from Turkey.

As the violence against the demonstrations escalated, the tactics of the demonstrations and street action came under pressure to change and adapt. By the summer of 2011 sections of the army were deserting, coming over to the demonstrations or fleeing the country entirely.

Some of that breakaway began to form the nucleus of the Free Syrian Army. As armed opposition began to be formed around such nuclei, and the path towards all-out war with the state became almost inevitable.

The state would survive for over a decade, thanks to military backing from Iran and Russia, while Islamist militarists, and often anti-Shia sectarian militarists, gained more and more hegemony in the opposition. Then, after Iran and Russia turned to focus elsewhere, the state fell. □

Timeline

The area covered since 1918 by the Syrian state is one of the oldest centres of human civilisation. Damascus, Aleppo, and Antioch (now in Turkey) were important trading and cultural centres. From the 16th century CE to 1918 the area was part of the huge Arab domains of the Ottoman Empire centred in Constantinople (Istanbul). In World War One Britain backed Arab revolt against the German-allied Ottomans. British-supported Arab troops took Damascus in 1918. In the post-war carve-up, France then took Syria, while Britain got Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq.

1941: During World War Two, British and allied French troops occupy Syria. General De Gaulle promises to end French rule.

1946: Syria becomes independent, with a formal parliamentary regime punctuated by military coups, The Syrian Communist (Stalinist) party is a major force, and remains so until the early 1960s.

1947: Michel Aflaq founds the Ba'ath Party. Initially it is a leftish secular pan-Arabist group, and even has discussions with the Third Camp Trotskyists. Over time it becomes essentially a political front for a faction in the military.

1958-61: Syria is formally subsumed into the United Arab Republic led by Egyptian president Nasser, who then has great prestige from his victory over Britain and France in the Suez crisis of 1956.

After 1961: a series of military regimes, in which Ba'athists, and then Hafez al-Asad personally, come to dominate. All large enterprises are nationalised. The oil industry develops on a substantial scale from 1968.

1967 and 1973: Syria, with other Arab states, defeated in

wars with Israel. Syria becomes the patron of more radical-militarist and Maoist-leaning factions among Palestinian militias, as against Fatah.

1971: Russia establishes a major naval base in Syria, at Tartus, where it remains until early 2025.

1976: Syrian army intervenes in the Lebanese civil war to prop up Maronite Christian allies.

1980: After Khomeini's triumph in Iran, Islamist uprisings in Aleppo, Homs, and Hama. Bloody repression, especially in Hama in 1982.

1980-8: Syria backs Iran in Iran-Iraq war.

1990: Iraq invades Kuwait; Syria joins the US-led coalition against Iraq.

2009: "Privatising" and "marketising" reforms, moving from statism to "crony capitalism", reach the stage of trading on a stock exchange.

2011: Start of uprising, at first mostly non-militarised and secular-democratic.

2012-3: Conflict militarised. From about 2015 Russia and Iran intervene heavily.

2012-8: War between Asad regime and Islamists wipes out Yarmouk, the biggest and least impoverished Palestinian refugee camp in the world, in the suburbs of Damascus.

2013-4: Ultra-Islamists of Daesh conquer large areas.

2014-5: Kurdish forces defeat Daesh siege of Kobani. By 2017-9 Daesh has lost almost all its areas of control.

2024: After Iran and Russia retreat, an Islamist group takes power. Asad flees to Russia. □



The modes of capitalism

By Martin Thomas

The world market which frames capitalism is not an organic evolution. It has been restructured several times in the last centuries. In this article I propose that we should define eras of capitalism mainly by successive modes and phases of the world market.

More usual in Marxist discussion has been to define those eras by successive technologies, or successive forms of industrial organisation. Those dimensions are surely important. My argument here is that phases of world-market organisation and technology are, however, the primary determinants.

Some see the 1950-73 "long boom" as defined by the technology (assembly-line production) and associated industrial and social organisation of "Fordism". Ernest Mandel, in his big book [Late Capitalism](#), saw it as defined by new technologies of automation and nuclear power. (Yes, there was much talk of automated industry sweeping all before it even in the early 1950s, and yes, until the late 1970s, "modernist" and most leftist thought saw civilian nuclear power as a great boon). Some writers have seen the neoliberal era (roughly 1980-2008) as shaped by the rise of microelectronics.

Marx

In a flourish in his 1847 *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx declared: "The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist". But it was plainly only a flourish, and not a whole philosophy of history in a single sentence. Who is supposed to "give" society the steam-mill? Although the first steam mill (producing flour) started in London in 1786, that one closed after being gutted by fire in 1791, and generally the industrial capitalists, after first mostly using water-power, "gave us" society with the steam mill, rather than vice versa.

In his more worked-through analysis, in *Capital*, Marx argued that it was



the political and technological changes which created a broad world market, beyond the centuries-old thin strands of long-distance trade routes for special, mostly luxury goods, which spawned capitalism.

"The modern history of capital" – i.e. not the old pre-capitalist-society forms of merchant and usurers' capital – "dates from the creation in the 16th century of a world-embracing commerce and a world-embracing market..."

Or, at greater length: "The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theatre". All that depended, of course, on some technological developments, notably in ocean-going ships.

Capitalist production means, minimally, large-scale cooperation of wage-workforces, then developing into minute division of labour within the factory, and then into large-scale machine industry. These require "trade" (and, historically, plunder) preconditions.

The factories, and the transport, distribution, and other service industries which surround them, require steady supplies of distant inputs for production (historically, for the Industrial Revolution in Britain, cotton) and for markets where the basic workers, and also the managers, accountants, maintenance crafts, etc., can buy for consumption

(think tea, sugar, etc.) They require large-scale, not merely local, markets also to sell their production.

Markets

Capitalist society generates national markets. But those do not come first. The huge countries where industry can find domestically many (not all) of its inputs, and outlets for much (not all) production – USA, China, Russia – were not the first sites of capitalism. Capitalism arose first in small countries (Britain, Netherlands, Belgium...) with small national markets. And in the earlier times of capitalism, trade by sea, or by rivers which might run through several countries, was more expeditious than by land. There were no hard-surfaced roads, no motor vehicles, no railways.

By the time Marx was writing, the world market had evolved beyond its 16th century shape and into the era of the Cutty Sark (fl. 1869-95), large and fast sailing ships able to make long journeys. This was also an era of British

domination of the seaways, and world trade on a gold standard with London as the centre for mediation. Railways were developing and allowing international trade in coal, although in Europe, for example, countries and regions still had different gauges, requiring loads to be transferred from one set of carriages to another at points along their journeys.

In 1847 (*On the Question of Free Trade*), Marx had declared that free trade was the recipe for "the freedom of capital", "the more advantageous application of capital", and generally hastening capitalist development. After the defeat of the 1848 revolutions across Europe, and as governments across Europe sought by bourgeois reforms from above to extinguish the combustibles which flamed up in those revolutions, a phase of a British-centred "imperialism of free trade" did follow, with its high point about 1860.

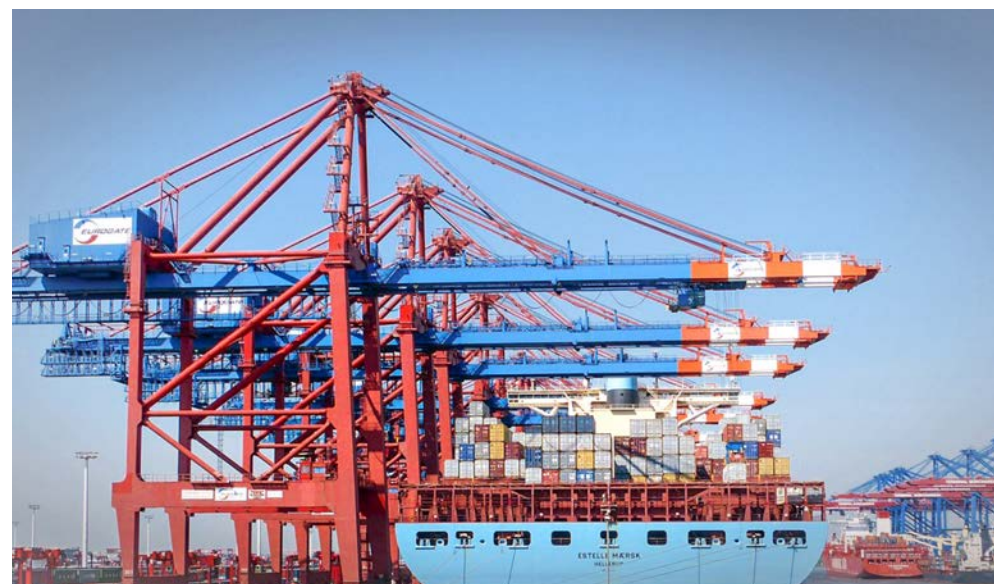
It was not a phase of a single line of development for all countries, when the more industrially-advanced countries generally showed the less-advanced their future (as Marx, in *Capital*, said British industry showed the future for German industry). It was one of a lop-sided division of labour (high industry in a few countries, agricultural and mining output from the rest), which would continue in the next era, of high imperialism from the 1880s to World War 2.

That high-imperialist era was identified by many Marxists as shaped by changes in industrial organisation: large national-market dominating corporations and cartels in place of smaller-scale competitive capitalist firms. Those changes were surely part of the era.

But, as I wrote thirty years ago: "Large concentrations of highly mobile capital can operate under different regimes, as since the mid-1980s. The structure of the world economy, rather than just the growth of big capitalist money-fortunes in a few countries, was the fundamen-



Belloc and Chesterton



tal basis of 'high imperialism'. The later twentieth century proves that 'monopoly capitalism' — a capitalism dominated by huge corporations — tends to divide the world into territories policed and tariff-walled by rival states only under certain conditions. Under other conditions the huge transnational corporations desire free trade".

The division into territories policed and tariff-walled by rival states was impelled more by the drive of rising powers (e.g. Germany, unified only in 1871) to rival the hinterlands held by Britain and the USA (expanding to the West Coast, and with dominance also in Central and parts of South America). This was an era of more trade but also national cartels, tariffs, militarism, colonial expansion.

New technologies of world trade both shaped and were shaped by the new era: steamships (SS Aberdeen, RMS Mauretania); Suez and Panama canals; the telegraph (crossing the Atlantic 1866); some standardisation of rail gauges (Berne 1886). Of national trade, too: hard-top roads (tarmac 1902); motor trucks; more steamships on the Rhine and Danube. And new technologies of conquest, such as the Maxim gun (invented 1884). As the anti-imperialist and Catholic anti-modernist Hilaire Belloc put it: "Whatever happens, we have got/ The Maxim gun, and they have not".

That new era culminated in World War One, a war which was for a redivision of the world among the biggest capitalist powers. And which produced that redivision. France became dominant in Eastern Europe; Britain took Germany's colonies and new territories from the now-destroyed Ottoman Empire. Britain and the USA became the great rivals for world hegemony. That rivalry ended with quiet acceptance by Britain of US superiority.

Germany fought to redivide the world again in World War Two. Again came a redivision, but a different sort of redivision from after World War One.

The USSR acquired a new hinterland, and dominated it militarily in Eastern Europe, less so in China, which came into increasing conflict with the USSR from the early 1960s.

The USA was hugely hegemonic in most of the world after 1945, and remodelled the world market towards a new "imperialism of free trade". After the war, Britain and France did not expand their colonial empires, but gradually, and under pressure of long and often bloody revolts, dismantled them.

Developments in the technology of the world market synergised with political drives

- GATT then WTO
- import-substitution industrialisation in many countries; export-oriented industrialisation, on the basis of establishing adequate infrastructure, in a few, then gradually several more
- much-increased trade in oil and gas (and then LNG), with supertankers and pipelines
- containerisation (on a large scale from the late 1960s, then accelerating)
- air freight.

Technologies

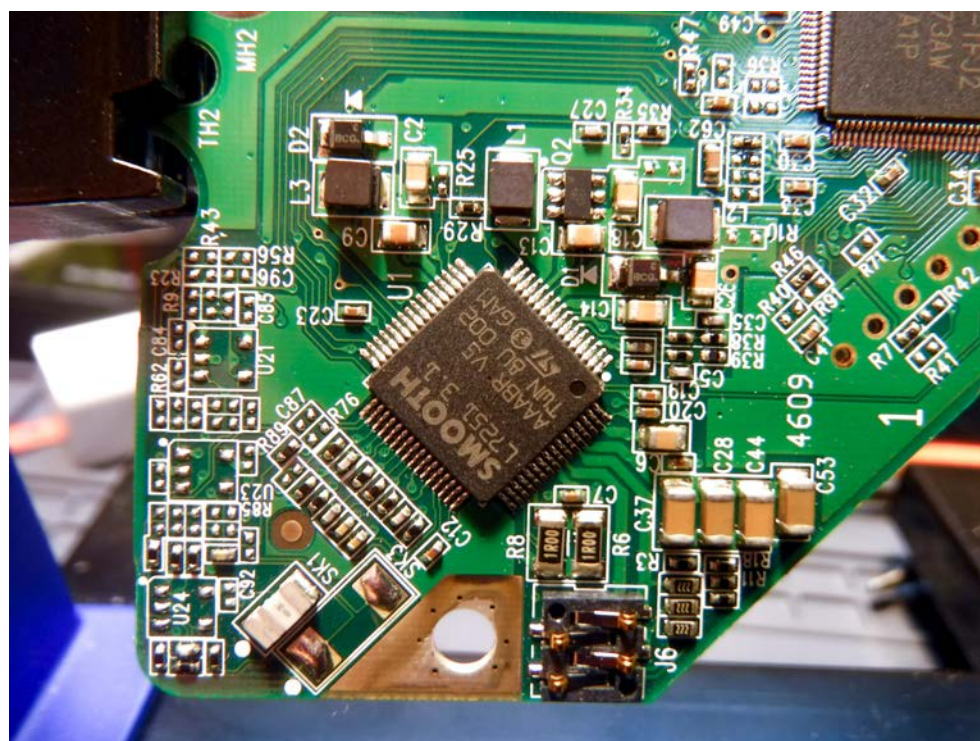
Technologies of national markets developed too (motorways in Europe, the Interstate Highway System constructed 1956-92 in the USA), but these were national markets increasingly immersed in world markets. World trade grew much faster than output.

From the early 1970s, West German and Japanese manufacturers were out-competing US firms. South Korean industry rose fast. A "New International Division of Labour" was developing. Oil-producing states gained stronger bargaining positions and pushed up oil prices in the 1970s. The US was unable to sustain its gold guarantee of the dollar.

This generated a period of high class struggle, from 1968 through the 1970s, and as those struggles moved towards eventual widespread defeat (such as in the British miners' strike, 1984-5), the construction of a new era.

Nearly thirty years ago, I identified that new era as defined primarily by changes in world-market structure, with changes in technology embedded within them. Discussing Robert Brenner's work on *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (1998) I wrote:

"All the 1970s theories [of the end of the 'long boom', late 1940s to early 70s, in leading capitalist economies] fundamentalist [based on the supposedly scriptural tendency of the rate of profit to fall], wage-push, and Regulationist [a school of thought based mainly in France], focused on contradictions burgeoning in an 'average' or 'typical' leading capitalist economy, each national economy being that average type written small, and the world economy being it written large. Brenner criticises that approach and explains the turning-point in capitalism around 1965-73, from 'Golden Age' to trouble, from a change in the interactions between national economies: specifically,



sharpened international competition in manufacturing".

The new era was not a new one of rival colonial-empire blocs: in fact, in a process beginning with extensive East European borrowing from "Western" finance in the 1970s, it led to the collapse in 1989-91 of the USSR's imperial bloc.

The US managed to reshape for the new its hegemony operated not through direct political domination, but by economic supremacy (supplemented by many military operations, but subsisting even when those military operations were defeated, as in Vietnam).

The US was still central. The dollar even without a gold link was the chief medium of world trade and credit. But US hegemony now operated through finance and selected industries. From the early 1980s the USA imported more manufactured goods than it exported. World financial markets grew explosively. A "New International Division of Labour" (in the words of the German Marxists Fröbel, Heinrichs, and Kreye) saw many more ex-colonial countries developing the basic bourgeois infrastructure for world-market industrial production. China has been the biggest and most spectacular, by far, but there are others. They did this using a new technology of world trade: micro-electronics, the internet, international electricity grids, the multinational manufacturing corporations from the post-1950 era (and new similars) now developing complex global supply chains.

Neoliberalism

The whole world system now ran on US trade deficits, budget deficits, ballooning debt, and non-US capitalists buying up that debt.

This was neoliberalism, financialisation, and globalisation, from the early 1980s to 2008-9, with its heyday after 1989-91 and the fall of European Stalinism.

Like all the previous eras, it was inherently limited. Its limits were even more straightforward than of previous eras. No-one knew how far the ballooning

US deficits and debt could expand, but everyone knew they could not expand forever.

It was an era of widespread economic growth, but also of many more financial crises than previous eras, and culminated in the great crisis of 2008-9.

That crisis sparked workers' industrial struggles, and left-wing political rebellions, but on a smaller scale, and with less socialist-internationalist programme, than those of the years after 1968. In short, we, the socialist-internationalist left, had not done a good enough job of maintaining our forces and clarity through the adverse times (for us) of the neoliberal era. Right-wing, nationalist, and authoritarian forces have seized the initiative.

Most stridently with Trump 2.0, the world is being driven into an era of "new nationalism". This is not an era of relatively-fixed colonial-empire-like blocs, nor an era of retreat into national markets. Almost every national capitalist class today is heavily integrated into world trade, and cannot even envisage a viable form of withdrawal from it.

Rather, trade is being restructured in a network of overlapping and more improvised trade deals rather than the "rules" of the WTO order, and with states which are "entrepreneurial" in at least two senses, in promoting firms based in their own country and in going out to make their own trade deals.

So far this new period seems to have none of the big innovations in world trade technology which were developed by, and helped develop, each previous period. But there is no law that eras of world-market structure must tally neatly with eras of world-market technology.

Whether this transitional period can develop into a full-scale new era, we don't yet know. It may all be overtaken by the effects of ecological damage and the imperatives of "adaptation".

Every transitional period so far has been shaped by working-class defeats, but also involves capitalist crises and openings for the left and the working class. □



Cromford Mill water wheel, 1775.
The Mill was home to the first water-powered cotton spinning wheel



Unruly schools, part two

By David Axon

The first instalment of this article (*Solidarity* 765) looked back at the Poundswick High School (Manchester) strike of 1985, from which several lessons stand out to me for today.

Firstly, considering the dynamics of strikes about “behaviour” — not just how a dispute starts, but what it *becomes*. Had the Poundswick strike remained solely on the issues of teachers sent home, with demands arising from that, it would have been a very different thing. But it didn't. It was about “behaviour”.

Secondly, these dynamics can be affected by outside forces, as well as the strikers and their employers. Increasingly aligning with right wing outside forces, the Nasuwt and local headteachers held out for the permanent exclusion from school of five named boys, guilty or not — as a stance about ‘standards’. It is not difficult to imagine an organisation like Reform UK playing in a dispute today the sort of role played in 1985 by the Manchester Tories and the Freedom Association — but with social media reach, not just funding.

Thirdly, the way in which the 1986 local elections formed part of the backdrop to the Poundswick dispute would also be replicated today; even with local councils no longer directly involved in these decisions, candidates and others could easily become associated with

Panics about unruly schools are recurrent: still from the film *Blackboard Jungle*, 1955



one or other “side”, and the children and staff exploited for that purpose.

The Poundswick case shows that the specific demands raised in the dispute, the way in which it is prepared for, and the sort of publicity is given — everything debated at the NEU conference — can have an effect on those dynamics. Not only the demands, but what the demands *appear to be*, makes a difference — the union press releases and social media, the leaflets handed out to parents, the picture of it given to students.

There are differences. The locally accountable role of the council's Education Committee no longer exists today, and there are currently no local councils

that even the Tory media would refer to as “left-wing”.

Poundswick High School is now the “Manchester Enterprise Academy”, part of the “Prosper Learning Trust”, a multi-academy trust (MAT) of 11 schools, mostly in South Manchester. The way in which MATs manage their students (sometimes effectively “off-rolling” to another school in the trust) and the different dynamics of disputes within them are new factors for school trades unions today.

And seven years after the Poundswick dispute came Ofsted, formed in 1992. The “unannounced behaviour inspection” of today has replaced the role of the local-authority inspection and ad-

vice service — accountable in those days to that same Education Committee that overturned the expulsions.

It would be useful for left activists in the NEU to reflect on experiences like Poundswick, and the changes since, and draw up a better motion for debate in 2027 than the confused choices conference was presented with this year — under the title of “tackling the violence and behaviour crisis in schools”, itself misleading in my view.

Unhappiest

One thing all those activists will agree on is that there is no “simple fix”, and that “behaviour” is likely to keep being talked about over the next months and years. And almost all would agree too that the fundamental issues are about making schools positive and welcoming places to be for students — which, going by recent research, too many are not. UK 10-15 year olds are reported as the unhappiest in Europe, and school a strong factor in that.

Later instalments will look both at that research and at attempts at democratic schooling, and put forward an alternative view of what socialists in schools could be saying about “behaviour”, suggesting ideas that could be campaigned for in the education unions. What are the things that the unions can push for that support staff in schools without “demonising” the students? □

St Cuthbert's strikes to save jobs

By David Axon

National Education Union (NEU) teachers and support staff at St Cuthbert's High School in Rochdale are to start strike action on 21 April. The local NEU say the strikes are being taken in response to plans by management to cut posts, which will have a damaging impact on education provision, SEND provision, pupil support, and staff wellbeing.

The school was taken over by St Teresa's multi-academy trust (MAT) in October 2023. Eight of the MAT's centrally employed staff now earn more than £100,000 a year, but in the school, there are not enough staff to manage pastoral systems or “behaviour policies”. The trust that is supposed to be responsible is focusing on

building up its “reserves” (and the income of its top managers) rather than having the school properly staffed.

Two local Labour councillors, Philip Massey and Daniel Meredith, are demanding that the MAT hold an open meeting with parents at the school to answer for their management of the school. They say that they wrote to the MAT in March and were promised a response, and that a month later they are still waiting.

Now the MAT wants to lose even more staff, and has already pushed out good and experienced people through its mismanagement and its “at risk of redundancy” letters sent out at the end of last term.

Pressure

The pressure the MAT is al-

ready feeling from the NEU's strike ballot means that there has been a small amount of movement from them since. They are now claiming that compulsory redundancies of teachers will be avoided by some people teaching different subjects — though no details are yet known, and they have not withdrawn the “at risk” letters. They claim that similar resignations of non-teaching staff mean that the redundancies in this group can be kept very low.

To their credit, NEU members at St Cuthbert's have held firm. Following the movement from the MAT, a further indicative ballot decided to continue with the strike action, despite a union recommendation to suspend. Teaching staff and non-teaching staff have held

together solidly, despite what appears to be a “divide and rule” approach from the MAT. Staff know that every lost job will mean increased workload and less capacity in the school to support students.

Mismanagement

In fact, the MAT could settle the dispute at the stroke of a pen. Cancelling the remaining redundancies would cost less than the school is already losing through the falling pupil numbers caused by the MAT's mismanagement. It would probably cost only what the MAT's central management team earns in a single week of the school year.

NEU strikes are planned for 21, 29 and 30 April, and 5, 6 and 7 May. Members at the school hope that the second week of

their action will be joined by the Nasuwt, which had previously suspended its action over “behaviour” reported on in previous issues of *Solidarity*.

Simultaneous action by both unions would be an important step forward, and increase the pressure on the increasingly dysfunctional “St Theresa” multi-academy trust (MAT) that lies at the root of many of the school's problems.

This is only the second Rochdale NEU strike other than national strikes since the union formed, and the first in school. (The first strike was among local authority staff in 2024).

Messages of support can be sent via nick.wigmore@neu.org.uk. Updates on the strike will be on the Rochdale NEU Facebook page. □

How to limit social-media harm

Matt Cooper opens a debate on social media and youth mental health

Proposals to restrict or ban young people from social media and algorithmically driven media platforms are becoming increasingly common around the world. The most far-reaching example is Australia, which has legislated to prevent under-16s from holding accounts on many social-media platforms.

Elsewhere, governments are moving in a similar direction. France and Denmark are considering under-15 restrictions. Greece has announced a ban for under-15s from 2027. Indonesia has imposed under-16 restrictions on designated high-risk platforms. Malaysia has signalled comparable plans.

The UK government is consulting on minimum age limits and restrictions on “addictive” design features such as infinite scroll and autoplay. The European Union is developing a common age-verification system.

This amounts to a patchwork of different approaches, but they are united by a common concern: that the current social media model may be damaging to young people.

Concerns

Much of the left has largely rejected such moves. Almost all left commentators emphasise the social context shaping young people's lives: economic precarity, educational pressure, anxiety about climate change, and the long-term effects of austerity on youth services and mental-health provision. Some argue that the focus on social media exaggerates its role, masking deeper structural causes of distress. Others go further, suggesting that moral panic about social media risks becoming a vehicle for an authoritarian suppression of young people's access to information and channels of political communication.

These are valid concerns, but in my view they tend to be a substitute for asking further questions. First, is the current ubiquity of largely unregulated social media contributing to the deterioration of young people's mental health? Second, if so, can state intervention reduce those harms without imposing disproportionate costs on young people's freedom and agency?

There is now substantial evidence of a problem. The expansion of smartphones and social media from the early 2010s coincides with a marked rise in reported mental-health difficulties among young people. In England, the proportion of 17–19-year-olds with a probable mental disorder rose from 10.1% in 2017 to 17.7% in 2020, and

higher still by 2022. The deterioration accelerated through the Covid-19 pandemic, but only by intensifying existing trends. Sweden, where there was no Covid lockdown and where schooling continued, had less of a Covid spike in youth mental ill-health, but there too young people's mental health has continued to decline longer-term.

Social Environment

Of course the broader social environment matters. In England, local authority spending on youth services has fallen dramatically since 2010, by around 70% in real terms, with the closure of more than 1,000 youth centres. These cuts have reduced access to in-person spaces where young people can meet, organise and find support. However, similar declines in adolescent mental health are seen in European states where youth services have not been so drastically cut, suggesting that austerity alone is unlikely to be the complete explanation. Economic and social pressures are relevant, but cannot carry the full explanatory weight.

What has changed most clearly is the structure of young people's social lives. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok do not simply host communication; they actively organise it. Social interaction becomes continuous, public and quantified. Status is measured in likes, shares and followers. Content is filtered not chronologically but by engagement. It is plausible that the effects of the pandemic were amplified by this shift: in-person interaction was replaced by online interaction, and those patterns have persisted.

The potential consequences are well documented. For many girls, the tendency is for social media can intensify comparison and body-image anxiety. For boys, it leans toward creating pathways toward misogynistic or extreme content through recommendation systems. More broadly, high levels of use are associated with poor sleep, anxiety and depression, and may displace other activities linked to wellbeing.

These effects are not accidental. The dominant social-media model is built around maximising engagement. Features such as infinite scroll, autoplay and persistent notifications are designed to retain attention. This does not mean that social media is the sole cause of the current mental-health crisis. But it is strong evidence that it forms part of the problem. And not a trivial part.

If that is the case, then the question becomes one of response. Market self-regulation has so far proved limited. Parental control is difficult where social media are embedded in peer

culture and technology is so widely available. Individual self-discipline is constrained in environments explicitly designed to capture attention. In practice, the only actor capable of imposing system-wide constraints on large platforms is the state.

That does not mean that all forms of regulation are equally desirable. An outright ban on younger teenagers using social media is a blunt instrument. Critics argue that such bans will be widely circumvented, and that they risk creating a false sense of security. The Molly Rose Foundation have warned that parents may assume children are safe simply because formal restrictions exist, while harmful content remains accessible through other channels.

However, the fact that regulation is imperfect does not mean it is ineffective. Age limits on alcohol and tobacco are routinely bypassed, yet they still shape behaviour and establish social norms. The same may be true of digital regulation. Even partial enforcement can alter expectations and reduce exposure at scale.

Platforms

At the same time, regulation needs to address the behaviour of platforms themselves. Age restrictions are of limited value if companies do not take meaningful steps to enforce them. There is also growing concern about the ways in which recommendation systems can direct users, including minors, toward increasingly harmful content once initial engagement is established.

Elon Musk's X is the worse offender here. A recent study has shown that a simulated 13 year user making a few curious sex-related searches is algorithmically fed prompts to lead them to hard-core, bestial, and under-age pornography. But other platforms are little better. Data Protection regulation has created a de-facto “digital age of consent” of 13 years old, but the majority of young people have social media accounts before that age. The platforms do not age-verify. They have the ability to spot age-related use and block it. They don't.

The UK's Online Safety Act 2023 was intended to address some of these issues by imposing duties of care on platforms. However, its impact so far has been limited and public willingness to challenge big tech companies weak.

Pressure for change may also come through the courts. In 2026, a California jury found Meta Platforms and Google liable for harm, awarding \$6 million in damages after finding that their conduct contributed to a young woman's mental-health deterioration. There are thousands more cases in the pipeline



and this may push platforms toward reform. But state action would be preferable to the big tech companies balancing their profits against legal claims of harm.

It would be wrong, however, to treat social media as purely harmful. For many isolated or marginalised young people, particularly as those questioning their sexuality and gender identity, it provides meaningful forms of connection and support. Any regulatory approach must take these benefits into account. Of course, we should campaign for liberatory spaces in schools and local neighbourhoods, but we should not casually allow existing support mechanisms to be disrupted.

A socialist agenda for change most include serious response to the issue must include rebuilding youth services, expanding public space and creating environments in which young people can meet and organise offline. It should also involve engaging young people directly in the development of policy, rather than imposing top-down solutions that risk being experienced as, at best, paternalistic.

The challenge, then, is not whether to regulate social media, but how to do so in a way that addresses genuine harms while preserving the positive aspects of digital life. That requires moving beyond both uncritical acceptance of the status quo and reflex opposition to state intervention. The scale of the issue demands a serious and balanced response. □



Before Ukraine there was Finland

By Bas Hardy

A Russian dictator intends to conquer his smaller neighbour. He mistakenly believes his invading army will meet little resistance — welcomed with open arms even — and any fighting over in a week or two. A puppet government will then be installed and a glorious victory celebrated.

Yet things don't turn out as they are supposed to. The nation being invaded puts up an unexpectedly determined fightback inflicting far greater casualties on the invading army than its own forces suffer.

Though that sounds like a description of Vladimir Putin's "special military operation" against Ukraine, it would also be a pretty apt when applied to USSR dictator Joseph Stalin's 1939-40 assault on Finland, which became known as the Winter War.

Winter Warriors

The Winter Warriors, a critically acclaimed novel by French writer Olivier Norek, bases its narrative on events that occurred in the four months of war after Stalin invaded Finland on 30 November 1939. Stalin's High Command expected a walkover against a poorly armed neighbour whose population numbered only 3.7 million. So confident were they that a brass band formed part of the invasion force, expecting to play in the Red Army victory when it reached the sea half way up the Finnish coast. By February, though, Stalin's soldiers had only managed a 10km advance into Finland.

Simo Hayha, who became famous for his skills as a sniper, is the main protagonist in Norek's book. By following the actions and tactics of Simo and his companions, we get an idea of what it was like fighting in temperatures rarely

Finnish troops in the war



hovering above -35°C. We also learn how hopelessly unprepared the invading army was when coping with such conditions and the challenging terrain the Finnish countryside presented.

The invasion took place at the tail end of the notorious purge of the "Red Army", part of the Great Terror Stalin unleashed from 1936. The military lost swathes of capable officers to bullets in the back of their heads, courtesy of Stalin's secret police executioners, the NKVD.

On paper the Red Army had monumental advantages over the Finns. 2,500 tanks to the Finns' 30. 2,800 guns to their opponents' 500. 2,000 aircraft against 114. The Finns had as many artillery shells in total as the Russians could fire in a single day. Then Russia had inexhaustible manpower. Its invading force of 425,000 was drawn from an army of 4.5 million.

Basics

The Russians lacked some important basics necessary for fighting in heavily forested countryside in deepest winter, things like skis and white coats to camouflage themselves against the snow. The many anti-tank guns they brought were useless against an enemy with no tanks. In short order, those weapons were captured and put to use against their own tanks.

The Red Army advanced in convoys on roads with forests on either side. It was an ideal opportunity for the unseen enemy to ambush them. Soviet soldiers wearing dark brown uniforms presented easy targets in what was a classic example of asymmetric warfare.

The Stalinist regime's historical ne-

glect of the needs of ordinary soldiers was another factor. No proper clothing. Lack of food and fuel. Countless troops simply froze to death. Among the most tragic episodes in Norek's book is a description of Soviet soldiers sent across ice-bound lakes, only to have the ice give way from under them. In the days that followed Finnish soldiers would come across their corpses sticking up out of the ice like frozen statues.

Limitless

Just like Putin today, Stalin didn't care about their plight when he could draw upon a limitless supply of cannon fodder. If they retreated, station a firing squad behind the lines to mow them down. If the Finns beat some units in battle, shoot some of the units' commanders.

When hostilities ended in March 1940, there were 400,000 Russian dead or wounded, with Finnish numbers put at 70,000. Finland's manpower was far from limitless, so their government reluctantly accepted dictated peace terms. 6,000 Russian PoWs were handed over, and in true Stalin fashion 400 were executed and most of the rest

sent to the Gulags.

The Finns got very little outside help in their struggle — some planes gifted by Sweden and 12,000 foreign volunteers. A charity concert in Paris, with Edith Piaf the headlining act. Donations from celebs of the day like Greta Garbo, who stumped up \$5,000 — a gift not a loan!

Britain and France promised to send troops, but were already at war with Nazi Germany and found it logistically impossible to get to Finland.

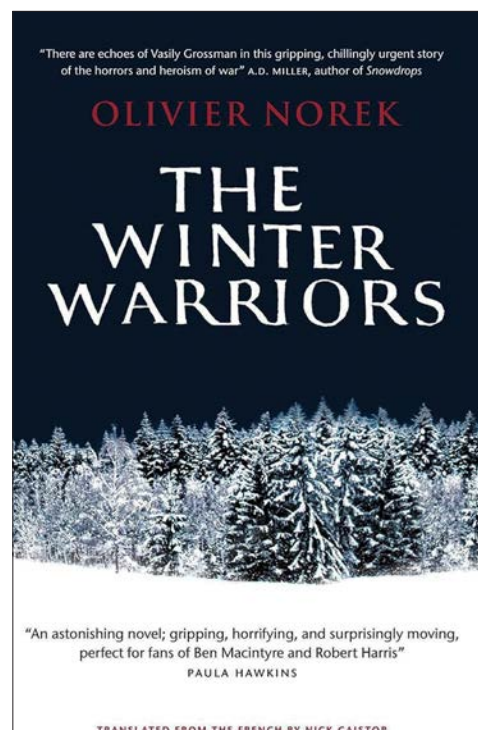
Hitler was of course Stalin's ally at the time — a fact that today's tankies don't like to be reminded of — and had joined the Führer in dismembering Poland. The disastrous performance of the Red Army in Finland confirmed Hitler's belief that the purges had been so damaging that he could mount a successful invasion and destroy the Soviet Union.

Leon Trotsky was a few months away being murdered by one of Stalin's assassins. Despite his belief that the USSR was a "degenerated workers' state", and his arguments that "defence of the USSR" should guide Marxists, he opposed the invasion of Finland, arguing that it alienated Finnish workers and workers worldwide.

Stalinist expectations that the workers and peasants of Finland would welcome the Red Army as "liberators" assumed that they were unaware of the Finnish Operation of the NKVD (1937-38) — a mass arrest, execution and deportation of ethnic Finns, which resulted in the killing or disappearance of anything between 8,000 and 25,000 of them. Not wishing to meet a similar fate, Finnish workers, including leftists such as Olavi Siippainen, sided with their own bourgeoisie.

Although the way the economy is organised in Russia has changed since Stalin's time, some things remain the same. It is once again ruled by a ruthless dictator who represses dissent and murders political opponents. And Great Russian Chauvinism directs its foreign policy.

Engels, Lenin, and others described Russia as the prison house of nations. Ukraine today doesn't want to be in that prison house any more than Finland did back then or does now. □



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Health conference ducks pay fight

By two Unison members

The recent health sector conference of the public services union Unison, 13-15 April in Edinburgh, took place just ahead of the implementation of a 3.3% pay increase in April.

That rise, recommended by the Pay Review Body (PRB), was imposed by the government following a period of informal discussions earlier in the year.

An emergency motion on pay, submitted by the Health Service Group Executive (HSGE), formally opposed the 3.3% figure. Another emergency motion calling for pay restoration was ruled out of order, citing "legal jeopardy".

However, the opposition to the 3.3% figure lacked any sense of urgency. Rather than committing to action, the speaker proposing the motion outlined plans for a consultative ballot only if negotiations with the government were to break down (and even those plans weren't written in the motion). If the leadership had been serious about challenging the pay offer, a campaign and ballot process would already be underway and strike action being called for.

This motion in particular demonstrated the damaging impact of the Labour right's control of Unison's health Service Group Executive. They organise little outside of rebanding campaigns (though there have been some large such campaigns recently), and stifle any proposals for generalised campaigns of political or industrial action on pay, NHS funding, or staffing levels.

Supporters of the left caucus in Unison, Time For Real Change (TFRC), made speeches on a range of motions including pay restoration, campaigns on LGBT+ rights, and opposition to privatisation. Speakers also argued that the union's link with Labour is not being used effectively, including on the issue of trans rights.

Andrea Egan, recently elected general secretary on a TFRC platform, addressed the conference and was well received.

Candidates

TFRC is standing candidates in the upcoming Health Service Group Executive elections. Those candidates winning would make an important difference, particularly in relation to pay. Socialists and left activists should call for a vote for them. But at conferences like health conference, TFRC needs to explain what is happening behind the scenes and how the current HSGE stop effective campaigning. TFRC needs to organise active campaigns on pay, staffing levels and privatisation in-between conferences and elections.

Motions were passed against PFI deals, calling for a programme of improvements to buildings, calling for campaigning on migrant rights, and against the far right. Those were all positive.

Doreen Lawrence, mother of Stephen Lawrence, who was murdered in a racist attack in 1993, and now a baroness in the house of Lords, also addressed the conference. She spoke about the im-



Unison members at the April 18 national housing demo, London

pact of the growth of the far right. After some progress being made on tackling racism, there is now a shift backwards. She talked about the need to prioritise the education of young people and the recent campaign launched in Steven's name.

Whilst the Labour peer was in conference for a tabletop discussion, a notable omission from conference was health minister Wes Streeting. At the previous conference he attended and promised early pay negotiations and a vision to rebuild the NHS. In the year since, no progress has been made on his promises, as there have been no negotiations and the government opted to use the Pay Body recommendation.

Despite overall increases in the NHS budget, most NHS trusts start the new fiscal year in a deficit and plan to cut up to 10% of their workforces.

Streeting's absence from conference means that Unison members did not have the chance to engage and hold the minister to his broken promises. The current health sector executive seem to let him off the hook.

Campaigns are needed outside of conferences on pay, staff shortages and privatisation to improve the working conditions of NHS workers and to improve health care for everyone. Winning on these issues would also be the most effective counter to the growth of the far right. □

Conference

TUC region backs police boost

By Peter Raistrick

London, East and South East (LESE) TUC, a collection of trade union and trades council delegates covering a region of two million members, held its AGM on Saturday 18 April 2026. Upon arrival, I was greeted by the large *Morning Star* stall which had set itself up at the back of the conference hall and was enthusiastically handing out papers about Starmer's imminent resignation...

A set of colourful ballot papers presented candidates for the Executive (EC), who had all submitted statements ahead of time. The ballot was tech-

nically competitive, in that 17 candidates had run for the 16 available TU seats, 4 for 3 black member reserved seats etc.

TUFF

The general secretary's speech was fairly solid, lots on beating Reform through union activity. When pushed on the Trade Unionists Fighting the Far Right (TUFF) letter though, he said that it was up to individual unions to decide whether to arrange for 16 May but that the TUC would not tell them what to do.

A presentation on the benefits of the Employment Relations Act was heard, although there was little mention of fu-

ture steps. The general mood from the staffers seemed fairly positive towards the Labour government; the delegates largely steered away from the topic.

Three motions were moved at conference, one on ending outsourcing and supporting nationalisation, and one on the economic and compassionate benefits of supporting asylum seekers – both good.

Police

The third, a motion from the RMT calling for TUC support of their action against assaults campaign, seemed similarly promising. Five or six speakers spoke in favour of the proposal,

raising real issues of staff safety with some lived experiences. Each point in the demands list was talked through, apart from this small bullet point: "Increases, not cuts, to the British Transport Police".

The conference had elected all officers (including president and two vice-presidents) unopposed, so a challenge to this motion was quite the shock to the delegates. Regardless, I raised concerns about the role of the police in strikebreaking, arresting protestors and the well documented misogyny and racism in law-enforcement. The more helpful solution of increased staff presence, an end to ex-

tra-long shifts and reduced/removed lone work was also proposed.

In response, I was told that the BTP is different from the regular police force as 1. it is primarily funded by the employer (as if this is a positive?), 2. BTP workers are unionised (so the institution is good?) and 3. that they were sorry the meeting was being held up (five minutes of a four hour meeting?). In the end, a seventy-odd to one vote left me defeated. I was surprised that a room full of socialists would support the police, but clearly there is work to be done. □



Lessons from a new account of French Trotskyism

By Rhodri Evans

The researcher Jean Hentzgen has made available two university theses on the majority French avowedly-Trotskyist current in the 1950s and early 1960s, the “Lambertists”.

He studied thousands of documents. He gives meticulous accounts of the membership of the group at different times and of their week-to-week activity.

His detailed work upturns many “conventional facts” previously copied from one history to another, and puts well-known facts in new lights.

For decades now most other avowed Trotskyists have seen the Lambertists as an odd side-story of the socialist left. From 1967 they carried through a series of show-expulsions of once-central members. Their politics have long been bizarre, too, focusing for decades now, for example, on an over-the-top demonisation of the European Union.

It is tempting to read all that backwards and see the whole history as a matter of “revolutionary” shop-keeping (doing whatever seems to “work” organisationally) by Lambert personally. Hentzgen's account shows more light and shade.

Disunited

The French Trotskyists, reduced to disunited groups under the Nazi occupation and the Vichy regime, reunited and grew to about 700 members in 1947. Lambert was a second-rank leader then. From a poor working-class background, he had joined the Communist Party youth at age 14 in 1935, been expelled for opposing the Laval-Stalin pact, and come to the Trotskyists in 1938-9 via the Socialist Party youth.

The whole “orthodox” Trotskyist movement was in political disarray during and after World War Two, for reasons documented in books published by Workers' Liberty, *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* and *The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism*.

The disarray hit the French group dramatically in 1948. It lost about half its members in a matter of weeks. Its paper appeared only rarely for months, and frankly registered disorientation and perplexity.

A split in 1952 is often considered the beginning of “Lambertism”. The secretariat, run by Michel Pablo and sited in Paris, of the international network of “Orthodox Trotskyists”, demanded the French Trotskyists join the high-Stalinist French Communist Party (CP) for surreptitious activity there as the only way to be in tune with “the world revolution”. But, said the group's main trade unionists, we are already known in our factories as Trotskyists. We could join the CP only by pretending to disavow ourselves. Then do that, replied Pablo.

After a messy split, the “Lambertist” majority had scarcely more than 80

members (and the Pablo-loyal group maybe 20 or 30). Remember, the movement was 700 only five years earlier.

Whatever else about them, those 80 or so were tenacious and devoted to the socialist cause. They were mostly factory, postal, or Métro workers around their late 20s. Most had joined the movement as teenagers or near-teenagers. The big majority were in Paris. Most were men, but some women played leading roles. They were fiercely anti-Stalinist, though incoherently so (they saw Tito and Mao as not Stalinist, and in 1967 the group would back Mao's “Cultural Revolution”).

Floundered

Their main writer then was not Lambert but Marcel Bleibtreu, a doctor in his 30s (notorious, apparently, for turning up late to meetings and talking down to comrades). He tried to reorient in world politics, but floundered: he denounced Pablo for being too critical of Tito's Yugoslavia, after Tito sided with the USA in the Korean war, and he speculated on unstoppable reform and a rapid break-up of the bureaucracy in the USSR after Stalin's death.

Lambert was sceptical of Bleibtreu's enthusiasms, and focused on retrenchment around trade-union activity, though this was retrenchment threaded with quasi-syndicalist year-in-year-out agitation for a general strike and “the workers' united front” (i.e., then, united action of France's divided “TUCs”). Bleibtreu and his friend Michel Lequenne did the group's fortnightly paper, until they were expelled in a row over Algeria in 1955, while Lambert focused on organising. They had no paid staff. Lambert operated through trade-union facility time from his white-collar job, Lequenne through having an office job in publishing more flexible than factory shifts. Everything was hand-to-mouth, with constant financial crises, but they kept going.

They won workplace trade-union positions. Their office in central Paris was always busy with people running stencil duplicators or collecting papers. They published both union newsletters and their own political bulletins in their workplaces. In the early 1960s they would do bulletins jointly with the forerunners of Lutte Ouvrière, with, by agreement, LO always writing the “political editorials”.

They sold their paper, in the workplaces, and, where strong enough to resist CP moves to beat them up, on the streets.

They organised regular public meetings in Paris, inviting outside speakers, and, even in their lowest days, sometimes getting a few hundred there. They educated themselves on basic Marxist texts. The group was never a place of rich debate anywhere near sufficient to work through the lessons of the 1952 split and its roots in the Trotskyists'



theoretical disarray over Stalinism; but in that period it was not monocultural. Claude Bernard and his friends were unconvinced that the USSR was even a “degenerated workers' state”; Boris Fraenkel was the translator into French of Reich and Marcuse; Pierre Broué wrote historical books of wide repute.

Lambert's special skill was at making contacts and deals and alliances. That would come in time to swallow up the politics. But such skills, in their place, are an essential part of trade-union work.

The basic trade-union and “propaganda” work apparently brought the group almost no direct recruits: “settled” factory workers might sympathise, but had already set their lives on other lines than revolutionary activism. I suspect that the work was an essential backdrop to what did give them recruits (from about 1958, when, paradoxically, in reality and even more in the group's assessment, the general political situation had turned for the worse). It showed interested young people a “perspective” of purposeful, steady, class-struggle-oriented activity they could do with the group. In 1968 “Lambertist” influence in Sud-Aviation Nantes helped make it the first factory occupied.

Recruitment

They recruited mainly through “enterprises”. In 1958 they recruited, by chance, Boris Fraenkel, who was an instructor in an official [youth-education association](#). He steadily recruited maybe half a dozen people a year, by offering them discussions and study groups. Before then the group had practically no students.

They recruited more young people, teenagers and near-teenagers, by agitating within the Youth Hostels Federation for it to retain political life as well as offer cheap beds.

They went, simultaneously, into two short-lived left splinters from the Socialist Party, UGS and PSA, and came out of them with modest recruitment.

Ann Field, in [Solidarity 729](#), classifies all those enterprises with later operations which came to centre the group's life on winning union full-timer posts, doing deals with the top leaders in Force Ouvrière, one of France's less-militant “TUCs”, and cultivating “submarine” sympathisers elsewhere.

Hentzgen's details, however, convince me that Vincent Prémey is right that the earlier tactics were different, “a real

‘entrism’.” Reformists and officials generally read “entrism” as meaning unsavoury, cynical “raiding” or manipulation, but it is an honest move where small groups of revolutionaries engage in broader movements to do the positive activity of those movements but also to win a hearing for their ideas. According to Prémey and Hentzgen, also, the various enterprises which won recruits were not at all closely controlled by Lambert, who after all had much else to do.

Whether the “broad” enterprises “worked” was not determined by whether they fitted into “grand strategy”. The two most “strategic” ones didn't “work”. From late 1952 the group, through Bleibtreu, made links with André Marty, the “number three” of the CP whom the CP had just expelled for obscure reasons, and used those links to build “Committees of Communist Rectification” drawing in ex-CPers and dissident CPers. Lambert was always sceptical about that tack. It yielded nothing. From 1956 they worked with the USTA, the then-mass trade-union organisation of Algerian workers in France, and it was to Algerian workers in France that they mostly sold their paper (which bravely condemned France's colonial war in Algeria, and was frequently seized by the police for its pains). Yet the USTA declined after many of its leaders were assassinated in 1957 by a rival Algerian group, the FLN, which came to rule Algeria after independence in 1962, and the “Lambertists” came out of it with nothing.

The history of the Heterodox Trotskyists in the USA, the Independent Socialist League, shows similar. In the early 1950s, when they were generally in decline and facing an adverse environment, their tiny few young members went into the Student League for Industrial Democracy and Students for Democratic Action, student groups loosely in the orbit of the Democratic Party, and argued there against the USA's war in Korea. They recruited many people through the political fight. If they left those groups shattered, that is down to the incoherence of the pro-US-imperialist wings of the groups, not to dirty deeds of the Trotskyists.

Combining core, steady labour-movement orientation, and equally steady educational work, with a spirit of enterprise and intervention, especially with teenagers or near-teenagers, is a positive lesson to learn. □

Samuel Beckett: 120 years and still waiting

By John Cunningham

Playwright Samuel Beckett was born 120 years ago, on 13 April 2026. Renowned for, amongst many other works, *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett was a key figure in the modernist movement of the twentieth century and challenged many of our ideas about what theatre actually was or could be.

Although born in Ireland, Beckett established himself in Paris, where he spent most of his life. It was in the City of Light that he met James Joyce and the two became good friends. There is a suggestion that Beckett got the idea for the title of his most famous play from prostitutes working the back streets of the district of Paris where he lived. "Waiting for Godot" was their standard reply to queries such as "How's business?"

Godillot is also French slang for a boot (boots feature in the play). As far as I know Beckett never explained why he chose the name.

The play was first performed in 1953 in Paris, with the subtitle *A Tragi-Comedy in Two Acts*, and created a sensation (there was a radio broadcast in the previous year of a shortened version).



Krapp's Last Tape

At one level *WfG* is easy to summarise: Two men, Estragon and Vladimir, who appear to be down and outs, are waiting for someone called Godot who never turns up. That's it.

It is never clear who Godot is, nor why they are waiting for him. At the end of the play they are still waiting. Audiences tended to respond enthusiastically to the play. Not everyone was bowled over; one critic wrote that he'd "rather be waiting for Lefty than waiting for Godot", referring to the 1935 agit-prop play about a New York taxi drivers' strike by Clifford Odets (but Lefty doesn't turn up either!)

In a National Theatre poll in 1998, *WfG* was voted the most significant English language play of the twentieth century. There was a notable performance in 1953 in a prison near Remscheid in Germany. The inmates loved the play; the idea of waiting... and waiting was not exactly an alien concept for them. It was later, as is well-known, performed in San Quentin.

For reasons I can only guess at, Beckett never approved of women playing the roles of Estragon and Vladimir, although a number of productions have featured female actors.

Beckett may appear to be the epitome of the detached "avant-gardist", but his plays often show a deep concern for the underdog, those on the margins of society. During the Nazi occupation of Paris Beckett could have played safe and kept his head down. As a citizen of a neutral nation he would have been left alone.

He chose otherwise. He helped the French Resistance and, in danger of being arrested by the Gestapo, he had to flee Paris to the very relative safety of Vichy.

Other works by Beckett include *Krapp's Last Tape*. When I was student in the Drama Department at Bristol University in the mid-1980s I contemplated performing this one-man play. On reading the script several times I was struck by its intensity. An old man plays tapes from his youth and talks to himself. He is alone onstage for about fifty minutes with his old-fashioned reel to reel tape recorder. Although I was what was euphemistically called a "mature" student (older than some of the lecturers), the play called for someone much older who had accumulated more baggage, often painful, in his life than I had. In the end I balked at the prospect, feeling that I couldn't do the play justice. Look-

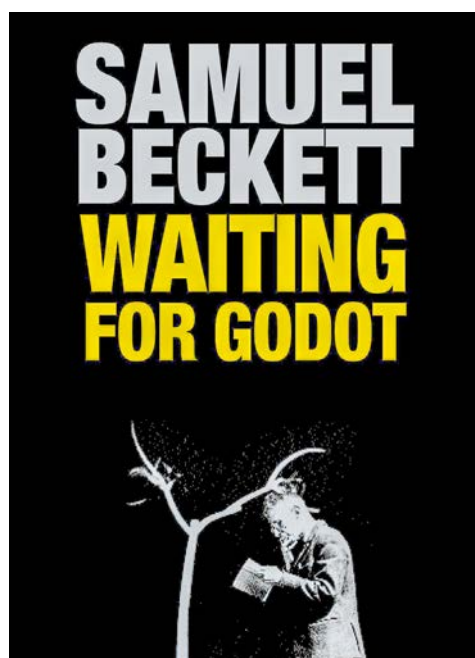
ing back I now regret that choice.

Notable performances of this sad and moving play are easily accessed online but I would recommend having a good stiff drink, or two, ready at the end. Currently the Royal Court is putting on *Krapp's Last Tape*, featuring Gary Oldman, but I understand all tickets are sold out.

In 1936 Beckett applied to attend the Moscow Film School, at that time headed by Sergei Eisenstein. Unfortunately, Eisenstein never received the application as an outbreak of smallpox in Moscow disrupted the postal service, and the letter was lost.

Beckett's one venture into film-making was a short screenplay, *Film*, in 1965 featuring the former star of silent film comedy Buster Keaton who utters only one word in the film's thirty minutes running time. It was directed by Alan Schneider and the cameraman was Boris Kaufman (younger brother of Dziga Vertov, the original Kino Eye).

Recordings of *Film* and Beckett's many plays are available online and there are some excellent performances to choose from. Whether or not Beckett had quite the influence on modern drama that he is often credited with, is something I don't feel qualified to judge. There is no doubt however that he was a ground-breaking writer of prodigious imagination and talent and still worthy of our attention today. □



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Letter

Why bother with Greens?

The question and answer piece on the Greens and Labour (*Solidarity* 765) doesn't really explain why working and discussing with young Greens requires joining and voting for their party. It is constructed as a dialogue with an imaginary opponent who doesn't see the point of still bothering with Labour now that the Greens are doing well electorally and have a new, left-wing leader. It

might also ask why we should bother with the Greens when Labour still exists as a relatively open trade union based party on much the same political ground.

I don't think it's stretching things too far to compare the Greens now with the Lib Dems of the early to mid noughties, when they had a new, progressive leader who opposed tuition fees and the Iraq War, and

attracted votes from young, left-leaning people, especially in constituencies with a large student and/or Muslim population (the parallel also extends to how they face different ways in different parts of the country and their largely apolitical tactics in by-election campaigns). □

Matthew Thompson,
Greater Manchester

• See more on this, page 3



Events and campaigns: workersliberty.org/events



youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK



workersliberty.org/audio

What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Diary of a tubeworker

Union needs to explain to its members

By P Ennar

Most station staff in my Tube station know very little about the upcoming train crew strike. The union's messaging clearly hasn't made much headway, and 48 hours before it starts, lots of them are none the wiser about why it's happening. "Something to do with them having a four-day week? But I don't see why you'd strike over that".

In conversation, this isn't hard to iron out. When I explain that the proposal includes things like changing start times and locations at short notice, nobody is hostile, and most agree that the RMT

union is right to strike.

But their information has largely come from the bourgeois press, not the union that most of them are also members of. We're about to spend a week having to explain to angry customers why they can't get to work, or go sightseeing in London for the day.

Routinely, our station-staff interactions with drivers themselves are minimal: a few seconds when putting a vulnerable customer on a train, or if they've broken down on the platform. This means drivers can hardly explain the strike to us themselves, unless station staff go to their union branch meeting. That's not always easy with shift work, and most don't get into the habit. We generally use separate mess rooms.

If our own side isn't prepping us with reasons for the strike, the other side will be more than happy to step in with stories about greedy drivers always wanting more. Conversations on the gateline are no substitute for properly coordinated solidarity. □



Kino Eye

26 April 1986: Chernobyl

By John Cunningham

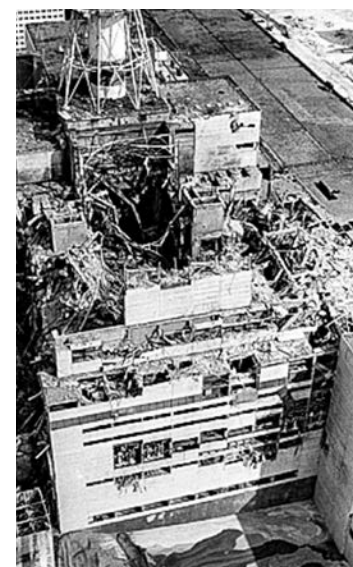
Another anniversary. Forty years ago there was an explosion at the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, Ukraine, at the time part of the Soviet Union, sending

clouds of radioactive dust into the atmosphere. There are a number of documentaries of varying quality about the disaster but I have chosen to look at a related film made seven years before Chernobyl, *The China Syndrome*, directed by James Bridges in 1979.

The China Syndrome anticipates Chernobyl in a number of ways, mainly in the attempt at a cover up by the plant management. TV journalist Kimberley Wells (Jane Fonda) along with cameraman Richard Adams (Michael Douglas) are on a routine assignment at the Ventana nuclear power plant outside Los Angeles. As they are filming a malfunction occurs and Adams is told to stop filming, an instruction he ignores.

Water levels, used as a coolant, are dangerously low and a core meltdown is only just avoided. Further investigations, which include the shift supervisor Jack Godell (Jack Lemmon), reveal that management has faked X-rays to hide faulty welding in key pipelines, giving rise to serious leakages. Management attempt to suppress the journalists' investigations, claiming that Godell is mentally ill, but they are only partially successful.

The nuclear industry dismissed the film as nonsense. However, twelve days later there was an emergency at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania which suffered a partial meltdown in one of its reactors. The film derives its title from a catastrophic meltdown that



destroys the reactor's protective shield and encasement and eats into the earth, metaphorically, all the way to China. □

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

MHCLG now needs solid action

By a PCS member

The industrial action [ballot](#) of PCS union members in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) has resulted in a clear mandate for action over office closures and the management's attacks on workers' control of where they work from.

The MHCLG Branch exceeded the still legally required 50% minimum postal ballot turnout, with over 59% of members voting. This is a higher turnout than was achieved in the Branch's 2025 ballot. 75.2% of those voting members voted for strikes, and 88.7% voted for action short of a strike.

As the Branch Executive Committee (BEC) noted in its report to members: "This is a hugely significant result. A higher percentage of you voted than last time, and more of you said you'd be willing to take action. And, under the Employment Rights Act, our mandate will last for 12 months rather than six."

Open online membership meetings are taking place on Tuesday 20 April and Thursday 22 April, to discuss, in

broad terms, next steps. Plainly the Branch must build pressure on management to settle the dispute more meaningfully than was apparent in the bosses' offer last December, which was shrouded in vagaries, caveats, and pseudo-proposals.

The BEC has already notified members that it will be seeking national PCS agreement to members taking action short of a strike by non-compliance with the attendance policy.

Options for action also include strike action across the Department, selective action, overtime ban, and other action short of strike. The BEC will need to ensure that whatever action is selected has solid membership support and applies real pressure. Ongoing mass membership meetings will therefore be vital, including as launch pads for building recruitment amongst non-members.

In its Our Work Our Way campaign, MHCLG PCS has rightly focussed on staff controlling their working lives, being trusted to make decisions about how and where they work from on the basis of their circumstances, preferences, and understanding of their jobs. □

Save this daycare centre!

By Ruth Cashman

Unison union members are fighting to save jobs and local services at Lambeth Council's specialist dementia day care centre on Central Hill. Local demonstrations and campaign meetings are being organised and a strike ballot for workers UNISON members at the centre closes on 28 April. The Council is proposing to close the day centre and delete 10 posts and reallocate remaining staff to an unsuitable room in a building elsewhere.

The day care centre on Central Hill Estate is run by the council to provide dementia care for residents in the borough. There are around 2,000 people living with dementia in Lambeth and that figure is set to rise as the elderly population increases over the coming years.

Now Lambeth Council are proposing to close the adult day care centre on Central Hill Estate. This would lead to the loss of ten posts and a much reduced "bespoke" service nearby. This is a short-sighted move driven by financial considerations, not residents' needs.

Council management claim that the number of people using the service has declined by 50% since 2020, showing reduced need. Unison says it has been run down by Lambeth Council advising social workers against referring people to the centre, whilst the number of people diagnosed with dementia in the borough is increasing.

The Alzheimer's Society reports there are currently estimated to be 982,000 people with dementia in the UK, but more than a third of people with the condition do not have a di-

agnosis. The number is expected to rise to 1.4 million by 2040. □



Workers still optimistic

By Ken Worthington

Talks aimed at resolving the ongoing pay dispute at the National Coal Mining Museum for England resumed on 17 April, in what marked the second round of negotiations in less than three

weeks.

No formal statement has been issued by either museum management or Unison following the discussions. However, workers on the picket line said they remain cautiously optimistic, with a formal pay offer from management

expected within days.

The latest talks come amid continued strike action and growing scrutiny of the museum's conduct. Denise Jeffery, leader of Wakefield Council, visited striking workers on Thursday to provide an update on an ongoing investigation by the Charity Commission. She said the inquiry is progressing and is examining a number of regulatory concerns.

While the commission has not publicly outlined the scope of its investigation, some workers believe it may relate to the museum's use of financial and organisational resources during the dispute, including efforts to undermine the strike. □



NEU needs clear demands

By David Pendleton

The National Education Union's (NEU) parallel indicative ballots of support staff and teachers working in schools closed on Friday 17 April. The ballot question for teachers was over the government's proposed unfunded 6.5% pay increase over three years. 96% rejected that proposal, with only 4% accepting it. 90.5% said they were prepared to take industrial action. The turnout was 48.6 per cent.

For support staff the ballot question was over defence of support staff jobs. 99.5% agreed, with 86.1% willing to take industrial action to win sufficient funding to secure an above-inflation pay increase, reduce workload and prevent redundancies. The turnout was 55.5 per cent.

These results show a number of things. Firstly, a significant anger amongst members over funding, pay and workload. Also, however, as things stand there is work to do before we can proceed to a formal ballot and win.

The union needs to develop clear demands. Solidarity school workers, who are organised in Educators' Fightback, would propose:

- A pay rise of two percent above RPI or £3,000, whichever is greater
- Maintain 1265 hours directed time.
- A minimum of 20% PPA (Planning, Preparation and Assessment time) for all teachers.
- A national reappraisal of all support staff roles and re-banding on the basis of the work actually being done.
- All fully funded.
- Restore education spending to 2010 levels 5.7% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) (it is 4.1% now).

To fight for those demands the union needs to develop a dynamic strategy of escalating industrial action. In summary, we should tell the members clearly what we are fighting for and how we will win it. □

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solidarity@workersliberty.org



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



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





Rally the left against Starmer

By Colin Foster

Keir Starmer will go. Being both sanctimonious and untrustworthy, ineffectual and control-freaky, has discredited him beyond repair. The Mandelson vetting scandal and the likely 7 May election results are compounding this.

We want to rally the left and the unions to get Starmer out. But more. We want a replacement at least more open to and subject to pressure from the labour movement.

That is not a certainty. Starmer has long been hugely unpopular with Labour members, but now a lot of the Labour right want rid of him too.

They could use the undemocratic rules (nominations of 20% MPs needed to get into the ballot) to set up a quick contest between two right-wingers, or a right-winger and a soft-soft-left so feeble as to lose. In the October 2025 deputy leader election, right-wing unions campaigned actively for Bridget Phillipson, while the left-wing unions shrugged and did nothing for Lucy Powell, so Phillipson ran Powell close.

A new right-wing leader, who will look more competent than Starmer at least for a while, may boost Labour in the polls a bit, but will also be better able to smother the unions and the left.

A challenge may be delayed anyway, because Wes Streeting has reasons for waiting as Andy

Burnham or Angela Rayner do.

Whatever about that, the left needs to start reasserting itself, in the CLPs and in the unions. If activists retreat to their sofas and their social media after 7 May, instead of firing up angry meetings which demand accountability, then we will end up further back.

There has to be a left challenger for leader (Bell Ribeiro-Addy again?), even if they don't get the MPs' 20%. A soft-soft-left candidate who can get the 20% has to feel a hot breath of revolt at their back.

Starmer now says he was wrong to appoint Mandelson ambassador, vetting or no vetting. The politics there are that Starmer wanted a special deal with Trump.

Less than three weeks after Mandelson took the British embassy in the USA, he praised Donald Trump 100% and demanded Ukraine's "President Zelensky give his unequivocal backing to the initiative that President Trump is taking..." The Starmer-government Armed Forces minister quietly dissociated, but Starmer made no complaint.

Starmer now sees that wooing Trump won't work. Scant virtue there: Italy's far-right president Giorgia Meloni has seen it too.

Labour needs a break not only from Starmer, but from the whole policy of currying favour with the world's and Britain's top wealth, and allowing drips of reform only when compatible with that.

As a statement signed by many union leaders has it, we must "restore Labour democracy". That requires changing the rulebook, plus getting unions and CLPs to use the scope of existing rules, and to stop letting the party tops' machinery break those rules with impunity when it wants. □

• More: page 10-11

Solidarity 767 is 13 May

Our usual fortnightly schedule is modified around the Workers' Liberty annual conference on 25-26 April. #767 will be 13 May (not 6 May as we said last week), #768, 27 May. □

May Day USA

No work, no school, no shopping

By Harold Storey

May Day as "the workers' day" started in the USA. On 4 May 1886, workers gathered in Haymarket Square, Chicago, to protest for an eight hour work day. An unknown person threw a bomb towards police as they encroached on the demonstration. 11 people, including seven police officers, were killed by either the bomb or retaliatory violence.

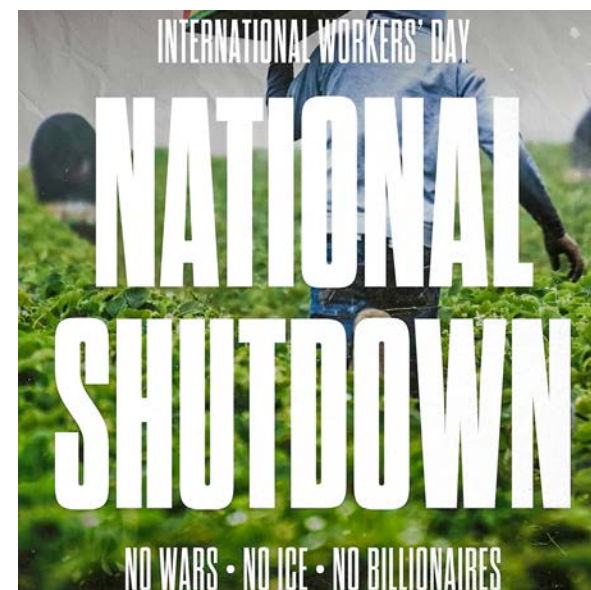
May Day, in the years that followed, became the day on which the massacre and the unfair trial that followed were commemorated, and more broadly the day on which working class organising and history is celebrated.

May Day is still celebrated by workers and trade unions internationally, including in the US.

A 15 February workers' assembly in Minneapolis, organised by left-wing groups and trade unions, with over 300 workers attending, and voted for a "no work, no school, no shopping" day against Trump this 1 May.

A second Minneapolis workers' assembly, on 4 April, debated and passed several resolutions, and pledged to organise a workers' assembly contingent on the regular Minneapolis May Day demo, with a "No ICE, No War, No Billionaires" slogan.

The May Day Strong coalition is also pushing for "no work, no school, no shopping", and currently reports over 4,000 planned demonstrations nationwide. Many trade unions, including the NEA, AFT, and SEIU, as well as left wing organisations such as the DSA and Socialist Alternative, are supporting these demos and organising to get workers on them.



While trade unions or workers' organisations are yet at the forefront of May Day organising in the US, it is good and right that many are getting workers ready to participate on May Day demos and doing so with overt, anti-Trump political messages.

May Day will not see a real general strike happen across the US. But if the unions and the left are able to get a sizeable amount of workers engaged in fighting for their class, and against Trump, it will be a great step in the right direction, building from the massive 28 March No Kings demonstrations. □

The sands shift on Brexit

By Chris Reynolds

The sands are shifting on Brexit. As the Mandelson scandal shows, even Starmer now sees that the "alternative" of a special deal with Trump's USA is unworkable.

A recent [survey](#) found that by 2025 Brexit had reduced UK GDP by 6% to 8%; investment by between 12% and 18%; jobs, 3% to 4%; productivity, 3% to 4%.

That hasn't stopped the top 100 bosses (FTSE 100 CEOs) getting an [18% pay rise](#) in the last year. But it has hit workers.

Workers also lose out because of:

- the loss of free movement across Europe
- increased barriers to cross-border solidarity
- the sharpening of communal divides in

Northern Ireland by successive "fudges" to avoid Brexit creating a hard border within Ireland

- the threat of the UK dropping out of "levelled-up" EU environmental, safety, and worker-protection regulations.

The Starmer government is still paralysed by its desire to appease possible Reform voters and pro-Brexit business people. At recent Labour Party conferences, the issue has not even got to the agenda. The first "Rejoin the EU" march, in October 2022, was sizeable, but the most recent ([September 2024](#)) was tiny and dispersed.

But basic realities are pushing the issue back up again. Reverse Brexit! Rejoin the EU! □

• With thanks to [Labour Left Internationalists](#) for background.

For a workers' government

SOLIDARITY **& WORKERS' LIBERTY**



ISRAEL OUT OF LEBANON



Tel Aviv anti-war protest

Pic: Resistance Solidarity Network/X

