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SOLIDARITY **& WORKERS' LIBERTY**



OPEN UP LABOUR DEMOCRACY



Workers' organisation to beat Reform

Open up Labour democracy

It looks unlikely that Keir Starmer can hang on as Labour leader, even if Andy Burnham loses the Makerfield by-election on 18 June and so cannot become an MP and contest the leadership. Good. Much better that Starmer is replaced by a new Labour leader than by Farage in the next general election.

After almost twenty grinding years (2007-9 crash, Cameron-Osborne austerity, Covid lockdowns, hits from Brexit, 2022-3 inflation, now Trump-tariffs and Trump-Iran-war dislocation), millions of people are fed up with Keir Starmer's grey version of "strong, stable government", as many were with Theresa May's version in 2017. And now we have eight years more of exasperation.

In recent articles we have referred to recent history of the Australian Labor Party (structurally similar to the British) to show that what leadership ousters open up "below" can be more important than personal merits or demerits "above".

In 2012 life-long supposedly-left Labor leader Anna Bligh, in Queensland, was replaced by life-long Labour rightist Annastacia Palaszczuk, and the result was an opening-up and shift to the left — because the leftist Electrical Trades Union was willing and able to push hard when the parliamentarians were in disarray. In 2010 life-long Labor leftist Julia

Gillard ousted life-long Labour rightist Kevin Rudd as federal prime minister. That was a turn to the right — because the replacement was shaped by Labor deference to the demands of the big mining companies.

Andy Burnham is Andy Burnham — once Blairite, once Brownite, once soft-Corbynite, and now signalling his closeness to the right and (so rumour suggests) to a deal with Wes Streeting to take the leadership without much fight as long as Streeting then gets a top job.

Yet we want Andy Burnham to beat Reform in Makerfield. A "protest" there by staying home or voting Green is really a backhanded vote for Reform. If Burnham loses in Makerfield, the case for change in Labour will be even stronger, but demoralisation within Labour will make it harder to shape that change as more than a re-facing of the same old rubbish.

Initiative

The recent Restore Labour Democracy initiative is one of very few such initiatives in Labour's history to be headed up by trade union leaders, rather than passively assented to by them. Its chief problem is vagueness and lack of action. We want the left MPs to try to get a left candidate like Bell Ribeiro-Addy onto the ballot paper, and make a fuss about it. We will push them. In the end they will

or they won't.

Rank and file activists must act whatever the left MPs do or don't do. We can use the affiliated unions' channels, clogged though they are, to push unions to speak out at union conferences and at the National Executive (and in local Labour Parties, through union delegates).

In local Labour Parties, we can draw some young people, and some of those who have become despondent and inactive, into demanding a "reset".

Labour's rulebook needs changing. Straight away, the purge regime needs dropping. High-handed interpretations need quashing (such as "rigging" the priorities ballot at conference by publishing motions only hours before the ballot and not publishing at all the huge numbers "ruled out"). The unions have a majority on the Conference Arrangements Committee and could change that regardless of what Starmer or Streeting or Burnham say.

And CLPs and unions need to use the channels that exist even in today's rules, for challenges and references-back, a hundred times more energetically.

We will work for unions and activists to insist on implementation of Labour conference policies on wealth tax, Indefinite Leave to Remain, housebuilding, green conversion, insourcing in public services, and more. To insist that the

Employment Rights Act is implemented quickly and in full, and followed up by more.

In short, we will work to open up space for sharper left policies to be pushed through, and rebuild an active left in the Labour party capable of pushing and calling to account whomever replaces Starmer.

Uphill

We know it is uphill work. But by doing that, we will also be doing irreplaceable work to push back Reform. That requires united-front labour-movement mobilisation. It will be much stronger if local Labour Parties are revived, and Young Labour groups launched. Trades Councils, these days, are often weak.

And pushing back Reform requires a large-scale political alternative which, at the minimum, shows workers there is life and animation in the labour movement, and the possibility, if we stir ourselves, of winning serious political gains or even of cohering a sizeable revolutionary class-struggle wing in the movement.

That is a long road to travel. But giving up on the labour movement, and scaling ourselves down instead to "vote Green and hope" or to "give up on politics, and just scratch together the best we can for each street counter-mobilisation", is turning off into short-cuts which can't reach the destination. □

16 May: TUFF puts down a marker

On 16 May Trade Unions Fighting the Far Right (TUFF) held a protest in Trafalgar Square in opposition to Tommy Robinson's Unite the Kingdom (UTK) march and rally. TUFF's protest was about laying down a marker about where to be when the far right march — in the same space, confronting them head-on.

Turnout on the UTK event was much smaller than last September's — the police estimate 60,000. Hope not Hate report that it was a lacklustre affair with Robinson's grifting operation on full display — "the official livestream displayed the logos of sponsors... while the big screens also ran an advert for Iron Trinity, a clothing brand run by Lennon's [Robinson's] daughter and one of his old school friends." But it was still a huge display of ugly, dangerous ultra-nationalism with the participation of openly neo-Nazi and fascist elements.

It is very good that the demonstration organised by

Stand Up to Racism (SUTR) and Palestine Solidarity Campaign (a SUTR counter-protest was folded into the annual Nakba Day march), outnumbered the far right on this occasion. However we can be neither satisfied with the tactics nor complacent about the relative sizes of the demonstrations.

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign and others had every right to march on this day free of intimidation either by the far right or the police. But SUTR and our trade union leaders should not have let the far right march through London without a direct confrontation led by the unions, protected by union-organised stewards, with a message offering a political alternative — for jobs and homes, in defence of migrants, against the inequality and poverty caused by capitalism.

We think SUTR and the unions failed to build such a response because they were worried about seeming weak. But that is a self-defeating stance. Only



by organising to take on the far right effectively can we grow stronger. Moreover, in this case, those who oppose the far right had the numbers.

The success of Reform in the local, Welsh and Scottish elections on 7 May only underlines the urgency of our tasks:

On the streets we have to overcome the culture, which SUTR foster, of relying on the police to dictate where we march and to defend us when we march. The police will not keep us safe.

In our communities and workplace we have to campaign

against the organisations of the far right and their divisive, racist and anti-working class politics — against Reform, and also against the further-right Advance UK and Restore Britain, groups which are growing.

TUFF and other trade union initiatives around the country are not trying to reinvent the wheel, they are trying to reorient the labour movement. They want the direction of anti-far right activity to come from the labour movement, not hived off to a yearly or twice yearly SUTR event dominated by "top-table" speakers.

In the coming weeks and months union branches, Labour Party branches, local committees, student groups and others need to work out how to march, how to defend our communities, how to develop a socialist message which can undercut the whole of the far right and underpinning all of this, how to organise in a democratic way. □

Trump and Iran: the workers and poor pay

By Dan Katz

As I write (25 May) the vague outlines of a possible US-Iran agreement, are being leaked.

In return for billions of dollars currently frozen under the US-led sanctions regime on Iran, and an easing of the sanctions themselves, the Strait of Hormuz would be reopened to shipping. A 60-day negotiation period would begin, starting in Pakistan on 5 June, during which restrictions on Iran's nuclear enrichment programme would be finalised, with the US demanding that, minimally, Iran is not able to produce nuclear weapons.

The tentative agreement would also require fighting to cease on all sides, including Israel's war against Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Israel

The Israeli government will certainly oppose such a deal which would limit their ability to use military force, make concessions to Iran on its nuclear policy and seemingly fail to address the threat posed by Iran's ballistic missiles.

According to Lebanon's health ministry Israel has killed 3,111 people in Lebanon and wounded over 9,400 since 2 March. More than one million people, or one fifth of the population, mainly Shia people from southern Lebanon, have been displaced by Israel's bombs and invasion. Despite an Israeli-Lebanon "ceasefire", imposed on Israel's right-wing government by US President, Donald Trump, Israeli military action and house demolitions have continued, as have drone and missile attacks from a scrappy and battered Hezbollah.

On 24 May Israel issued new instructions to the residents of ten more Lebanese villages to abandon their homes. This is despite a new 45-day ceasefire coming into force on 15 May.

Israel has the right to defend itself, but these actions are utterly disproportionate and go far beyond "defence".

UK Friends of Standing Together

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

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

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

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



Women's Strike demonstration, 8 March 2026

The US-Iran deal may or may not happen, and may or may not hold. The two sides are far apart, hate and distrust each other. Despite the vast damage caused by US-Israeli bombing of Iran, the fascistic Iranian Islamists feel they have an advantage, having largely blocked ship passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

What is certain is that Trump has created a bloody mess which due to his imperial arrogance and uncomprehending political stupidity has created worldwide economic chaos. The UN predicts an additional 32mn people across the world could be pushed into extreme poverty as a result of the Iran war. Surging energy costs are fuelling food, petrol and fertiliser inflation, and hit the poor hardest of all.

Iran

Trump's various maximal war aims, issued as his mood swung and as the logic of the war unfolded after 28 February, have not been met. In particular Trump's promise to the people of Iran that the clerical dictatorship would fall has not happened.

Quite the opposite. The Islamic Guards (IRGC) has a firm grip on the Islamic state and they are brutally repressing all forms of opposition inside Iran.

On Sunday 24 May Mojtaba Kian was hung, at least the 37th political prisoner executed in Iran since 17 March. On 17 May Iran's police chief, Ahmadreza Redan, a thug who supervised the murder of perhaps 20,000 democracy protesters in Iran between 8-10 January 2026, claimed that the regime had arrested 6,500 people since the start of March.

The regime-imposed internet shutdown has now lasted for more than 80 days.

A wave of lay-offs have hit Iranian workers caused by the destruction of industrial plant and the shortage of parts and raw materials. Perhaps two million

people are unemployed. Others are owed wages. Inflation is spiking and is now above 100%.

Iran's Health Ministry claims 3,468 people were killed during the bombing campaign and over 26,500 injured. In Israel 26 were killed and 7,791 injured.

The world working class has no interest in this war and plenty of reasons to fight for it to end.

USA

Trump, with typical contempt for truth and facts, and garbling as usual, claimed on Thursday 21 May that his Iran war is, in fact, very popular with Americans: "I think it's very popular when you, when they hear that it's having to do with nuclear weapons, weapons that could take out Los Angeles, could take out major cities very quick."

Fortunately Iran has no nuclear weapons, nor ability to bomb LA (8,000 miles away). US polling shows that 60% oppose the US war on Iran, with only 33% supporting it. 81% of Americans say they are feeling the strain of increased petrol prices, 50% higher than when the war began and averaging more than \$4.50 per gallon.

US workers have spent an estimated extra \$40bn in additional petrol and diesel costs since the end of February.

Trump's net approval rating stands at minus 21%, with 57% of Americans disapproving of his presidency.

On Thursday 21 May the Republican leadership in the US House of Representatives was forced to cancel a vote aimed at ending Trump's Iran war because they thought they would lose, despite the Republican majority.

Trump's Republican party is still expected to lose the House in November's mid-term elections (latest projections give the Democrats a 75% chance of a majority), but a series of Supreme Court decisions in late April and early May have tilted the contest towards the Republicans. By allowing the weakening of

the Voting Rights Act, the far-right majority on the Supreme Court has given US States controlled by Republicans more freedom to dilute the vote of Black Americans by making the redrawing of electoral boundaries easier.

So far the Trump government appears to have spent \$25bn up-front on the military action against Iran, with the long-term costs estimated to be up to \$1tn when broader and long-term economic impacts are factored in.

Trump can find money to kill Iranians but has cut hundreds of millions of dollars in public health funding in the US.

Stopping Trump

But who will stop Trump? That's a good question. Unfortunately *Guardian* columnist Simon Tisdall gives some ridiculous answers to the question he himself posed. Tisdall, without a single word of criticism of the Iranian regime, argues that European states and others should impose sanctions and expel US ambassadors, ban McDonald's and boycott the US-hosted football World Cup.

The strong suspicion is that Tisdall doesn't like football and disapproves of McDonald's. Perhaps he's a cricket and avocado on toast chap. Whatever, a trade war is a stupid thing to advocate: the workers and poor won't gain from deliberately provoking an economic crisis. Workers' Liberty is not for chaos, we are for workers' control and power.

Political sanctions won't stop Trump and a ban on McDonald's and a boycott of the World Cup would not be workable and — imagining it could happen — would create a such a serious domestic backlash that the glib *Guardian* columnist, writing without thought, responsibility or sense that his policy might be implemented, might even drop his latte.

Such are the thin ideas of the liberal left.

The only social force that can overthrow the Iranian regime and make life much better for the people of Iran is the potentially very powerful Iranian working class. Workers' solidarity is not a quick fix. It requires systematic, thoughtful effort in the unions and Labour party. But this is the effective answer, our answer, from our class standpoint.

Those that continue to suffer most are the Iranian workers and those displaced by Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Israeli and US bombing only brings misery.

Our people are the workers. Side with them.

Israel out of Lebanon! Oppose Hezbollah!

For a secular republic and workers' government in Iran!

Back American workers' opposition to Trump. Back Standing Together, the anti-war Palestinian-Jewish social movement in Israel! □

Who will win from decline of FF and FG?

By Micheál MacEoin

The Dublin Central by election on 22 May revealed much about political dynamics in Ireland. More than that, it poses some important strategic issues for Sinn Féin if the party is to form part of the next government.

First of all, the results. The Dublin by election was won by Daniel Ennis of the Social Democrats, a more leftish split from Irish Labour, who picked up 19.7% of first preference votes and now hold two seats in the multi-member seat.

The Social Democrats beat Sinn Féin's Janice Boylan (17.5%) into second place, in a seat the party really need to win if

they are progress. Dublin Central is home to the Sinn Féin leader, Mary Lou McDonald, and if the party had run two candidates there in 2020 they would easily have won.

Sinn Féin

That year, Sinn Féin surged in the polls and were the main beneficiaries of an anti-establishment tide, which was driven by austerity and the housing crisis.

That tide has not receded and, in many ways, it is more powerful. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael received their lowest combined vote ever in this constituency, with the former polling particularly poorly at just over 4%.

The opposition to the two main parties, however, is not coalescing around Sinn Féin.

The "left" candidates — including Sinn Féin — received around 60% of the vote. As noted, the Social Democrats topped the poll. People Before Profit, too, increased their total vote despite lower overall turn-out. Their candidate Eoghan Ó Ceannabháin won 6.8%, beating Labour by a whole per cent.

Sinn Féin's vote, however, dropped again to 17.5%, having already declined by 12 percentage points in 2024.

On the right, anti-migration populist candidates received around a fifth of the vote, divided between an Independent and the gangland boss Gerry Hutch.

It appears that Sinn Féin, who promised to "manage migration" in this election are tacking right to appease anti-migrant and anti-"woke" voters.

They received the most transfers when Hutch was eliminated, but that was at the cost of support from progressive and particularly women voters.

When PBP were eliminated, around 50% of their vote transferred to the Social Democrats and only under a quarter to

ELECTION RESULT			
	Daniel Ennis SD	20%	
	Janice Boylan SF	18%	
	Janet Horner GP	12%	
	Gerry Hutch IND	11%	
	Ray McAdam FG	11%	
	Malachy Steenson IND	9%	
	Eoghan Ó Ceannabháin PBP-SOL	7%	

Sinn Féin.

In a context where all the parties who backed Presidential candidate Catherine Connolly last year have called for voters to "vote left, transfer left", Sinn Féin's strategy of talking out of both sides of its mouth is denting its support amongst left-leaning voters.

Social Democrats

The Social Democrats clearly have momentum, with 12 TDs and national polling at around 10%.

They have the potential to limit the growth of Sinn Féin but they too will soon face a choice. Their membership and electorate is to the left of Labour and the party has never yet been part of a right-wing coalition, making them more attractive to former Labour and Green voters.

Yet, at their last conference there was a willingness on the part of the leadership to "talk to" the two main parties and the party has not voted with the wider left in the Dail in a number of recent issues.

Meanwhile, a by-election on the same

day in Galway West to replace President Connolly was won by Fine Gael.

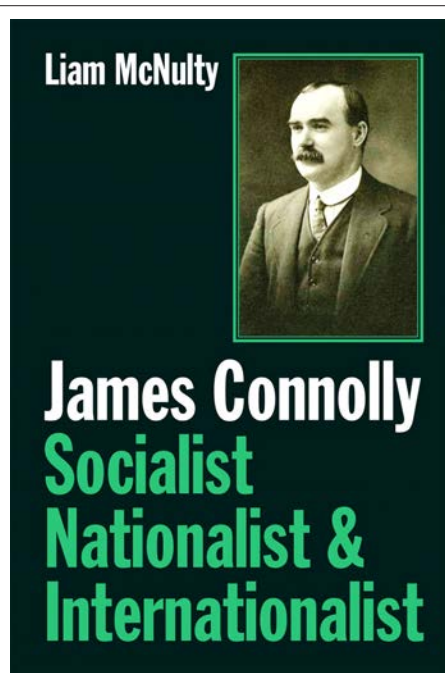
Most worryingly, however, the right-wing Independent Ireland party won the most first preferences (20.9%). Their candidate was Noel Thomas, who left Fianna Fáil after he responded to an arson attack on a hotel earmarked for asylum seekers by saying that the "Inn is Full."

Sinn Féin's 2026 vote halved from 2024 in Galway West, adding more pressure on the party.

As detailed in the last column, the rise of the anti-migrant right in Ireland is worrying. Pandering to prejudice is no answer, as these by-elections show.

The left did better when it opposed the two main parties and combined this with a more principled and progressive stance on issues such as immigration.

□



This book discusses Connolly not just as an Irish hero, but traces how he was shaped by and responded to the international socialist and labour movement of his time. 412 pages £25 □

workersliberty.org/publications

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Workers' Liberty at LO fete

By Colin Foster

About 20 members and friends of Workers' Liberty went to Presles, near Paris, for the annual fete of the French revolutionary socialist group Lutte Ouvrière, 23-25 May.

It was probably our biggest delegation ever. We ran a forum; talked with people and sold literature at our stall; sought out discussions with others there such as Socialisme ou Barbarie, NPA-R, Jinglei, Gauche Révolutionnaire, Yves Coleman of Ni Patrie ni Frontières, etc.

Our forum was on solidarity with the binational left in Israel-Palestine. We explained our

view for self-determination for both nations in Israel-Palestine, Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, i.e., in practice, for Israel backing off and allowing a real independent Palestinian state, but not for overrunning or conquering Israel.

Some, from the floor, said Israeli Jews had "invaded" and had "no place" in the region. Others were not flat-out hostile to self-determination for both people, but said "two states" is not "realistic".

We replied that our advocacy is not about advising diplomats on quick-fix "solutions". Our programme is only ever "re-

alistic" to the extent that the working class, across national divides, takes it up, and self-determination for both is the only consistently-democratic basis for that unity.

The fete has been held every year since the early 1970s (except in 2020 with the Covid lockdown), and regularly brings in 20,000 people (with the sunny weather this year it must have been 30,000). Held in a park, it features hundreds of stalls with political displays, food, and drink; scientific exhibitions; and children's games.

From the start, Lutte Ouvrière has allowed other left groups,



French and international, to run stalls and forums there. For a while, the fete was probably the best place in the world for discussion and argument among the revolutionary left of different countries.

Although the fete itself has thrived, for some years now

fewer and fewer left groups have taken up the invitation. But the fete remains well worthwhile as a chance to learn something about the culture, activities, and debates of the left and the labour movements of other countries. And fun. □

Standing Together helps Palestinian defence

By Ira Berkovic

On 14 May, a Solidarity Guard organised by Standing Together, a binational (Palestinian-Jewish) left-wing social movement active in Israel, mobilised to defend Palestinian residents, homes, and businesses from the Jerusalem Day "Flag March". The event is organised annually by far-right settlers to terrorise Palestinians and celebrate the occupation of East Jerusalem.

Asya Adar, a Solidarity Guard organiser, spoke about the mobilisation. This speech is transcribed from Instagram:

"My name is Asya Adar, and this land is my home. For the last two years, I've been an activist with Standing Together. In the past year, I've led the movement's Solidarity Guard, which organises protective presence in the face of extremist violence within Israel and the West Bank.

"This week, we were in the Old City in Jerusalem during the Flag March, a celebration that is essentially organised far-right violence in the Muslim Quarter, with the backing and support of the authorities. Two years ago we were roughly 20 activists on Jerusalem Day, a year ago we were 50 activists, and this year, we were more than 200 activists — in a massive action of solidarity and protective presence.

"Nothing inspires more hope than solidarity. And because of that, nothing scares Kahanists, Jewish supremacists, and settler terrorists — including those who are in the government — more than Jewish-Palestinian solidarity. The only way we can continue living on this land, without terror, without a forever war, the only way to create a reality of prosperity, of functioning public services, of safe streets... the only way to move forward is together."

Standing Together is also campaigning to demand increased social provision for Palestinian communities. Underfunding of services, a result of successive Israeli administrations treating Palestinians as second-class citizens, has allowed organised crime groups to grow, leading to a violent crime wave. Standing Together wrote:



"Palestinians citizens of Israel are being killed by organised Palestinian crime groups at an average of nearly one a day. One human being is killed almost every single day due to this epidemic.

"We were in Jadeidi Makr to protest this unbearable and terrifying reality as part of our Resilience campaign against violence in Palestinian communities. Crime groups feel comfortable murdering citizens across the country because they believe they won't face consequences.

"Palestinian communities across Israel have been denied police protection and state services, while being subjected to oppression and aggressive political persecution. The situation cannot go on like this. We demand protection for Palestinian communities and an end to this bloody reality."

Gaza

In Gaza, the situation for residents remains bleak. Israeli military violence continues, with the Israeli army currently occupying around 60% of the territory. The enclave's two million residents are crowded into the remaining 40%. A former national security advisor to Netanyahu, quoted in the *Financial Times*, said he expected Israel to maintain a permanent presence in Gaza, in order to occupy a "buffer zone" of between one and two kilometres within the border. 828 people have been killed since the October 2025 ceasefire.

The so-called "Board of Peace", established as part of the deal brokered by the US that nominally ended Israel's war, says it faces a vast funding shortfall and cannot deliver its commitments to reconstruction. Not a single temporary home has been built inside Gaza for the millions of displaced people, many of whom remain in tent camps. Only 30% of basic emergency relief needs are being met.

Commentators suggest the Board's funding shortfall stems in part from Arab and European states' reluctance to provide finance, concerned about the Board's lack of a viable plan for governance or development towards a Palestinian state, a supposed aim of the peace plan. Nine countries promised £5bn in aid at the Board's first meeting. Only around £17 million has actually been received, plus an additional £74 million ringfenced to fund the police force. According to figures in the *Guardian*, the

funding amounts to roughly £1.30 for every £75 pledged.

Recent municipal elections in the West Bank and Gaza were swept by candidates loyal to the Fatah leadership, the secular-nationalist political party which leads the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Elections took place only in one district in Gaza, the first elections of any kind held anywhere in Gaza since 2007. 13 out of 15 seats were won by Fatah-backed candidates, with two seats won by independent candidates widely seen as aligned with Hamas. Turnout was low, at 23%. Turnout in the West Bank was 56%.

Occupation

A study by the *Financial Times* has shown that Israel has occupied new territory equivalent to around 5% of its 1949 borders since 7 October 2023. This amounts to around 1,000 sq km, around half of which is in Lebanon. A vocal faction within the Israeli government wants Israel to permanently occupy more Lebanese territory, establishing a new border along the Litani River, which runs up to 30km further north than the current frontline. Israel has also militarily occupied territory within Syria.

Advocates of aggressive territorial expansion have a variety of political motivations. Some claim the policy is necessary to protect Israel from para-

military opponents such as Hamas and Hezbollah. Others see seizures of land, along with the campaign of settlement expansion and state-backed terror in the West Bank, as part of a political project to establish a "Greater Israel". Within this latter group, some leading figures have explicitly messianic-eschatological motivations.

Knesset elections

Elections for the Knesset (Israeli parliament) are due to take place by 27 October at the latest. There are indications they may take place considerably earlier; on 20 May, the Knesset approved a bill to dissolve the parliament, normally a precursor to an election being called. Parliamentarians will now have to agree on an election date.

Opinion polls indicate Netanyahu's current governing coalition will not win a majority in the elections. The main opposition bloc will be "Together", an alliance between the liberal Yesh Atid party led by Yair Lapid, and a far-right pro-settler party led by Naftali Bennett. The two leaders were the co-heads of Israel's last anti-Netanyahu coalition government, which was in office from June 2021 to December 2022.

"Together" may not be able to form its own coalition. Even if it does, it will probably bring no significant easing in the oppression of the Palestinians. Bennett, who comes from a Religious Zionist background, is politically committed to the current regime's existential hostility to Palestinian sovereignty and statehood.

Following an internal primary, the electoral slate of Hadash, a left-wing party led by the Israeli Communist Party, will be headed by Yousef Jabareen, a Palestinian academic who previously sat in the Knesset from 2015-2021. □

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Fri 5 June: Can councils defeat the government? AWL London forum. 7pm, The Electric Elephant Cafe, 186A Crampton St, SE17 3AE

Sun 7 June: "Unequal ecological exchange". AWL eco reading group. 8pm. Zoomlink bit.ly/eco-rg

Fri 19 to Mon 22 June: Residential study course on Marx's *Capital*. Heighington Village, DL5 6RG. Booking and details at bit.ly/cap-j26

At work or on campus

We organise: among health and local government, school and education workers, on the railway and London Underground, in the civil service, on uni campuses, and more. See workersliberty.org/work-unions, Insta @work-sliberty

erslibertystudents, and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Template motions

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

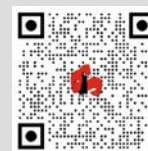
Socialist-feminist book clubs

See bit.ly/bc-sf

1 June: Mother State. Sheffield. 6pm, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill S3 7HG.

Campaigns

See workersliberty.org/agenda. □



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Make unions go beyond “expressing concern”

By Simon Nelson

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)'s new Code of Practice (CoP) will now be considered by the UK government and is likely to be in place by the summer, unless MPs move in Parliament to reject it. Published a day before the Parliamentary recess, it will apply across England, Scotland and Wales.

Unite, GMB, Unison and the TUC have all issued statements expressing concern with the CoP. Now is the time for unions to go beyond statements of concern and be a part of leading the fight against the authoritarian right and their demonisation of trans people.

The CoP largely enshrines the worst aspects of the now-withdrawn guidance issued in May 2025 following the April 2025 Supreme Court decision.

An effective bathroom ban, unless gender-neutral facilities are provided, is the starkest outcome. While the CoP recognises that everyone needs access to toilets, and says that the matter of provision should be dealt with sensi-

tively, in black and white, the CoP says that people should use the toilets of the sex assigned to them at birth.

Some limited provision is made so that organisations that want to include trans people can, but those can no longer be women-only associations or organisations.

Opposition from within the government seems non-existent, with Bridget Phillipson, the Women and Equalities Minister, confirming that this is the next step in implementing the Supreme Court's April 2025 decision. Perhaps inevitably, Andy Burnham, the likely future Prime Minister if he can win in Makerfield, has said the Supreme Court ruling must be implemented, while doing some hand-wringing about how divisive the issue has become.

Exclude

As well as toilets, sports, including for children, and hospital wards will now exclude trans people from single-sex spaces. Such rules are likely to prevent trans people from playing much role in public life, seeking life-saving medical

treatment and exclude them almost entirely from sport.

While the CoP is at pains to say it would usually be disproportionate to leave a trans person with no facility they are allowed to use, smaller venues and facilities are unlikely to rush to change all their toilets so that they are gender-neutral.

And while it says that asking someone's sex should be done as sensitively as possible, it provides no protection against vigilante-type harassment of people, trans or cis, who may appear to depart from gender norms.

The Trans Solidarity Alliance has drawn parallels with the Trumpist “bathroom bans” in the USA, the same bans that a Tory government in 2016 condemned.

Labour should now be pressured to legislate to protect trans people. The minority of Labour MPs who have spoken out for trans rights must become



more vocal, and the labour movement must step up the fight for trans equality. Labour was not put into power on the hope of rolling back the limited gains made for trans rights.

There is a danger that the very right to be recognised as your chosen identity is under threat. In 2004-2010, the limited openings of the Gender Recognition Act and the

Equality Act began to make it easier for trans people to live in their identities. The fight for gender-affirming healthcare and other support is pushed even further back by the changing attitude of the Labour Party to trans inclusion.

Local Labour parties should pass motions calling on the government to reject the CoP. Trade unions should continue to pressure the government to change course. They should be prepared to stand up for trans workers, and those who will be at the frontline of becoming the new “gender police”. □

Housing

Abolish the Duchy of Lancaster!

By Robert Bau

In the last article I argued that Crown Estate holdings in Wales, such as the seabed around the Welsh coast, should be transferred to Welsh Government control. Not claiming cause and effect, that demand appeared in Plaid Cymru's election manifesto and has since been raised by the Plaid-led government with Westminster. Labour should agree this as

Antidoto

No Antidoto column this week because Jim Denham is away. Eric Lee's column is due back when he completes the book he's working on, but he tells us that'll be longer than first thought. □

part of a wider package of devolving power and income to Wales.

I also said I would discuss the Duchy of Lancaster. The Duchy's main purpose is to provide the monarch with an independent income, and it certainly is a nice earner for him (annual surplus of around £24-27 million).

One of the most striking features of the Duchy is its legal structure. It is inalienable, meaning the monarch cannot sell off its core assets for personal gain. Instead, it operates as a permanent trust that must be preserved for future monarchs. At the same time, it functions as a commercial estate, generating a substantial private income.

It is not a corporation and does not pay corporation tax, although the monarch has vol-

untarily paid income and capital gains tax since 1993. Even so, the detailed use of its income is not fully disclosed, which continues to raise questions about transparency.

The Duchy also has some unusual legal features. In most of England and Wales, ownerless property, known as bona vacantia, passes to the Crown via the Treasury. In Lancashire and certain associated areas, however, it goes instead to the Duchy of Lancaster. This can include assets from dissolved companies or estates where someone dies without a will or identifiable heirs.

Within the Duchy, decisions on land use, leasing and management are taken by the Duchy Council and professional estate managers rather than local government. However, this does not create a separate jurisdic-

tion. Normal planning rules, environmental protections and wider UK law still apply. The Duchy is not a “state within a state”, but it does exercise a degree of autonomy over a large and valuable portfolio of land and property.

Parliament's role reflects this hybrid status. MPs can ask questions, scrutinise issues and review published accounts. However, Parliament cannot direct how the Duchy is managed, treat its revenues as public funds, or exercise the same financial control as it does over government departments. This limited oversight is one reason the Duchy continues to attract debate.

In recent years that debate has grown. Campaign groups have called for the Duchy to be abolished, and its assets brought into public owner-

ship, although this has not been taken up by major political parties. There has also been wider scrutiny following investigations into Duchy income, including rental arrangements with public bodies such as the NHS and the armed forces. These developments have prompted calls for greater transparency and accountability.

The Duchy of Lancaster, along with the Duchy of Cornwall, are feudal left overs and should be abolished. Lands, assets and rights should be brought into public ownership so that potentially they can be used for the common good.

In the next article, I will look more closely at the issue of ownerless property and how it is currently handled. □

The RCP: what about the unions?

By Matt Cooper

The Revolutionary Communist Party (formerly Socialist Appeal) imagines itself to be building “the instrument that can lead the working class to power.” In reality, it fails even to meet the low bar of being a passive propaganda organisation. The political problems with the RCP run far deeper than that.

Politically, the RCP has a clear lineage from the Militant tendency through Socialist Appeal, before its emergence as the RCP in early 2024. Militant’s former deep implantation in the Labour Party has disappeared (a reader from afar relying on the RCP paper *The Communist* might be unaware that a Labour Party even exists in Britain, and scarcely aware that unions do). A lot of the old core politics has been sidelined in favour of SWP-on-a-bad-day rah-rah-revolutionary declamation. But some remains, notably the belief that state-owned property is necessarily socialist.

Socialist Appeal grew on campuses in the 2010s, apparently to about 400 members. Now the RCP claims 1,400. The growth has not come through prop-



agandising for the remaining old core politics, still less through any serious orientation to working-class struggle.

Sloganeering

Its use, from 2023, of the slogan “Are you a Communist?” was neither propaganda nor agitation: it did not educate or convince. Its 2026 summer slogan is worse: “Wipe out the Epstein class.” This exaggerates Epstein’s circle out of all proportion and miseducates people about the nature of capitalism, presenting it as a conspiracy by particularly corrupt individuals, rather than as structural class power and exploitation.

The slogan is a sorting device, aimed not at clarifying class politics but at recruiting those already half-radicalised by the conspiratorial dross of social media. It follows the logic of a social-media meme desperately seeking likes.

The corrupting impact of this can be seen in the RCP’s 2026 congress documents. The organisational resolution talks about branch meetings, paper sales and performative student work, but in relation to recruitment mentions workplaces only as a “social setting”. “Comrades should make their own contacts wherever possible — in their

workplaces, on their university courses, among friends and family, on social media, and in various other social settings.” Of course. But here workplaces are thus treated only as “social settings”, not as sites of working-class struggle.

The congress documents contain only general observations on the unions. The RCP says only 300 of its members are students, meaning it may have around 1,000 workers. Those workers are largely invisible in the labour movement. Where RCP members are active in unions, they appear as individuals, not as part of any collective political intervention.

Social life

Retention is clearly a problem: the RCP’s own figures suggest the majority of recruits leave within a year. Their answer is not about integrating recruits in activity in unions, or even in broad campaigns, but only about branch educationals (good, if you abstract from the often-added ideas those must transit) and social integration. “Attention should be paid to the social life,” it argues, and “a key aspect of integration” is consciously developing a good social atmosphere. Not wrong as far as it goes: new young recruits need to find political life which

is friendly and where they can feel doors are open for uncensorious discussion. But not enough.

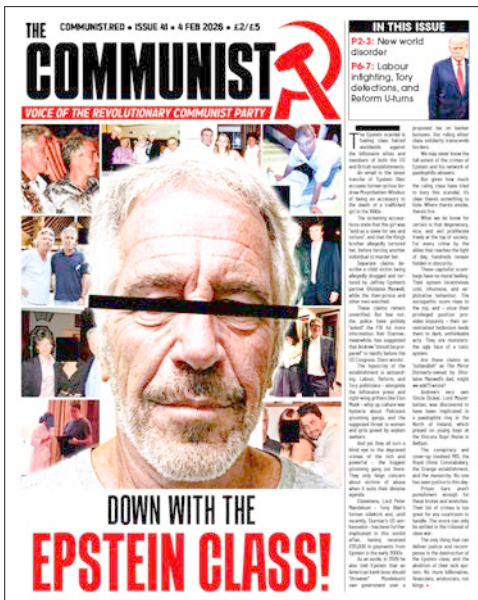
This is not a class-struggle organisation. It is a (low-powered) left-wing book club with (occasional) paper sales.

The RCP is occasionally seen on demonstrations or picket lines, but only occasionally. The documents give little evidence of serious involvement in the world beyond its own organisation. This is consciously theorised.

Its organisational resolution says the party is “still at the stage of assembling our core cadre base” and that “it is through young people and students that we will eventually reach the working class.” This the old “Mandelite” late-1960s/early-1970s “primitive accumulation of cadre”, except that the “Mandelites” then were very active in broad student struggles and quickly made efforts (even if inept ones) to turn out to worker battles and broader campaigns.

That idea is kludged together with the view that the current political fragmentation of the working class, even among those who vote for Reform, shows that workers will rally to revolutionary leadership once the RCP has finished creating it. The RCP has not even raised itself to the level of Trotsky’s criticism that “the sectarian looks upon the life of society as a great school, with himself as a teacher there,” since its garbled teachings are not even directed at the working class, but developed in a cocoon isolated from it.

Rather than seeing revolutionary politics as developing through the interaction between a Marxist minority and the working class, each learning from the other through struggle, the RCP fails even to reach the low bar of a serious propaganda organisation. □



“Fiscal rules” row is a sidetrack

By Rhodri Evans

That debate is warming up about Labour government policy is good. That some of it is focused on “fiscal rules” is bad.

Public services and public-sector pay cannot be fixed by tweaking fiscal rules. They require taxing the rich: wealth tax, capital gains tax, higher income tax on very high incomes, higher corporation tax.

If world capitalism lurches into a full-scale crash over the next year — and it could — it will require more: public ownership and democratic control of high

finance.

Since the late 1980s, as world financial markets have accelerated, almost all even minimally capitalistically-developed countries in the world have devised “fiscal rules” of [some sort](#). Every Britain government since 1997 has had (varied) “fiscal rules”. When John McDonnell was Shadow Chancellor, he proposed “fiscal rules”.

Truth to tell, all the versions are shoddy. They all depend on notional predictions of economic conditions in some years’ time.

They are a gesture designed,

and to some degree effective, to convince the non-UK wealthy who hold one third of UK government IOUs that the pound will retain some buying power and they’d better not sell off those IOUs or refuse to buy new ones.

In the short term, even a workers’ government would have to make such gestures. The Bolshevik government in Russia adopted the gold standard — another gesture — in 1922, to halt huge inflation.

In previous eras, and in Germany more recently, some capitalist governments have had “hyper” fiscal rules, such

as balancing the government’s budget each year. One of John Maynard Keynes’s achievements was to convince economists, and then most bourgeois politicians, that that was irrational even in bourgeois terms.

However wretched Rachel Reeves’s economics, she is not on that “hyper” track. The UK budget has a deficit of 5.1%, greater than any other rich country except notoriously troubled France and the USA (which is also troubled, but has more leeway to run continual deficits because of the dominant role of the dollar in world

trade).

The UK is paying interest on its IOUs at 5.0%, higher than the USA, France, or any other rich country.

In the abstract, defter “fiscal rules” than Reeves’s can surely be designed (and they may work — as long as they are not seen to come in through working-class pressure!) To see our role as expert advisers on that front is wrong.

Our slogan should not be “change the fiscal rules”, but “seize the loot of the ultra-rich”. □

The checkered history of CODIR

By Dale Street

The Committee for Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR) — once called the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian Revolution — has a checkered history. That history is, in turn, rooted in the history of the Tudeh Party.

The Tudeh Party (Iranian Communist Party) was founded in 1941 during the British-Soviet occupation of Iran. From the outset, it was a slavishly Moscow-loyal party.

The Soviet Union, it claimed, was “the world's most progressive nation”. While nominally demanding total nationalisation of the Iranian oil industry, the Tudeh Party also called for extraction rights in Northern Iran to be granted to the Soviet Union — in the name of “socialist solidarity” and “anti-imperialism”.

After the 1953 coup which deposed Prime Minister Mosaddegh the Tudeh Party was brutally repressed. Its underground organisation was crushed, and many of its most prominent members were imprisoned and executed.

After the overthrow of the Shah in the February Revolution of 1979 the Tudeh Party re-emerged from illegality. In line with Soviet foreign policy, it backed the thoroughly reactionary regime established by the Ayatollah Khomeini. And then it was crushed by that regime, too.

According to its website, CODIR was “established in 1981 by a group of British labour and trade union activists in collaboration with Iranian democrats living in exile in the UK.” That is only half-true.

Inception

At the time of its inception, in line with Tudeh Party policy, the initials CODIR stood for: Committee for the Defence of the Iranian Revolution. And the “Iranian democrats living in exile in the UK” who helped create it were Tudeh Party members who had fled Iran under the Shah.

CODIR operated as the UK mouthpiece of the Tudeh Party and its support for the crimes of the Islamist regime.

As Rowena Abdul Razak puts in her (often factually accurate, but consistently politically illiterate) article *Activism in Isolation: The Tudeh Party of Iran in British Left Discourse During the Long 1980s*:

“The establishment of the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian Revolution (CODIR) in 1981 was another significant cornerstone for solidarity for Iran in Britain. Established by British labour and trade union activists in coordination with the Tudeh and other Iranians in exile in the United Kingdom, CODIR was instrumental in supporting the Iranian revolution's socialist cause (sic).”

When the regime turned on the Tudeh Party in 1983, CODIR flipped. While the name of its magazine remained the

IRANIAN WORKERS ARE THE MAIN DEFENDERS OF THE REVOLUTION



MEETING ON IRAN

Wed., 8th. Sep. 1982 _ Royal Albion Hotel. 6.30

Chair person: Jack Dunn, former General Secretary of NUM, Kent.

Speakers: Peter Duffy, Tobacco Workers Union. Representative of the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian Revolution.

same (*Iran Today*), the initials CODIR changed overnight to: Committee for Defence of the Iranian People's Rights.

Attempts to cover up the origins of CODIR have necessarily resulted in some bold attempts to rewrite history.

In a 2006 interview, a leading member of CODIR claimed: “We have worked hard to expose the reactionary nature of the regime ruling Iran and have argued against the idea that the current regime has any kind of progressive potential.”

In fact, for the earliest years of its existence, and in line with Tudeh Party policy, CODIR did attribute a progressive potential to the regime: It was anti-imperialist, and it had set Iran on the road of non-capitalist development.

Opposed

According to an article published in the *Morning Star* (paper of the Communist Party of Britain) in 2017: “CODIR has vehemently opposed the Iranian theocratic regime for over 30 years. It has consistently opposed the imprisonment, torture and execution of political activists, women and trade unionists over that period.”

CODIR had certainly condemned the Iranian regime “for over thirty years” prior to 2017. The problem is that prior to those “over thirty years” it had been the mouthpiece of a political party which collaborated with the regime in imprisonment, torture and execution.

The same criticism applies to a later article about CODIR, published by the *Morning Star* in 2023: “Since its founding more than 40 years ago, CODIR has campaigned for peace and human and democratic rights in Iran, and for the release of all political prisoners.”

The Tudeh Party today is only a shadow of its former self. And Moscow Stalinism, of which it was always just a mouthpiece, has collapsed.

But pointing to the record of the Tudeh Party and CODIR as apologists for the Iranian clerical regime is not just a matter of putting the record straight about something that happened over forty years ago (on which the Tudeh Party has yet to be called to account).

Despite the demise of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Tudeh Party, their sham “anti-imperialism” has continued to influence and shape what sections of the left say today — including about Islamism and Iran.

Consistent with his overall Stalinist politics, Ehsan Taban had argued in 1982 that Islam was “the ideology of the anti-imperialist revolution”. By 1994, a variation of the same argument had been taken up by the would-be Trotskyists of the Socialist Workers Party. According to the late Chris Harman:

“Far from being direct agents of imperialism, Islamist mass movements have taken up anti-imperialist slogans and some anti-imperialist actions which have embarrassed very important national and international capitalist interests (e.g. in Algeria over the second Gulf War, in Egypt against ‘peace’ with Israel, in Iran against the American presence in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Shah).”

As Eva Illouz puts it in *8th October: Genealogy of a Virtuous Hatred*:

“Islam and the left have begun to develop strategic and intellectual affinities which have been described as ‘Islammo-leftism’ and as ‘Islamist left radicalism’ [although Illouz herself rejects those terms]. ... This new interpretation of Islam succeeds in concealing the fact that Islamism can simultaneously be a reaction to imperialism and a murderous ideology.”

This pseudo-anti-imperialism also skews how sections of the left — and CODIR itself — approach the current situation in Iran. CODIR calls for solidarity with the workers and women of Iran. But, in practice, this is blanded out by a (justified) hostility to US intervention.

CODIR's initial statement on the war in Iran, endorsed by a dozen British trade union general secretaries, for example, made no mention of solidarity with Iranian workers and the key role which Iranian workers have to play in bringing down the regime (although the statement did find space to claim that Israel was behind the US bombing of Iran).

Existential threat

A more recent CODIR article, written by John Ross (formerly of the International Marxist Group, but now, after a detour through the carnage of post-Soviet Russia, resident in Chinese academia) argues that the real issue of the moment is that Iran allegedly faces an existential threat from Israel:

“Israel's policy has been, where it is unable to help create governments favourable to itself, to attempt to disintegrate and weaken them — as shown in Iraq and Syria. Israel, judging it unlikely there will be a compliant Iranian government, has long sought to disintegrate that country. Therefore, Iran faces an existential threat from Israel.”

It seems that Ross does not view the Iranian regime's installation of a Countdown Clock in central Tehran — counting down the days to the destruction of Israel on 21 September 2040 — as a sign that Iran might have some existential-eliminatory leanings of its own. Ross would also benefit from speaking to Iranian Kurds about existential threats.

Russia and Ukraine

CODIR's criticisms of the Iranian regime are further limited by its curious silence about Iran's support for Russia in the Ukraine war.

Since the Russian full-scale invasion of 2022, Russia has fired over 59,000 Shahed drones at Ukraine. The drones were initially exported to Russia and then assembled there. But supply could not keep up with demand. An Iranian-Russian \$1.7 billion joint venture was then established in Tatarstan, for mass production of Shahed drones in Russia itself.

Given CODIR's opposition to “illegal and unjustified military attacks” on Iran and its “vocal (opposition) against any form of foreign intervention in the internal affairs” of Iran, one would expect CODIR to condemn the regime for collaborating in Russia's imperialist war against Ukraine.

But it refrains from doing so. And it is easy to see why. CODIR operates in tandem with the Putin-apologist Stop the War Coalition: “In recent years CODIR has worked closely with the Stop the War Coalition (STW).”

Swapping the Kremlin and the Tudeh Party for STW is hardly much of an advance. (Especially given the fact that when the current leaders of STW were still in the Socialist Workers Party, they backed Iran, in the name of “anti-imperialism”, in the latter stages of the Iran-Iraq war.)

CODIR began life as the British mouthpiece for collaborators with the Iranian clerical-fascist regime. Today, it is no longer guilty of that. But the sham anti-imperialism which “justified” the line taken by the Tudeh Party between 1979 and 1983 continues to shape and distort CODIR's politics and campaigning. □

• Abridged. Full text at bit.ly/ncodir

Putin blunders on

By Dan Katz

Russia's war against Ukraine appears to be stalling.

For the past several months Russia has lost 35,000 soldiers every month attempting to break through Ukrainian defensive lines. In total Russia's casualties run to a staggering 1.4mn dead or seriously wounded since the full-scale invasion began in February 2022.

Russia has also lost 12,000 tanks, 42,000 artillery systems, 800 aircraft and helicopters and much of its Black Sea fleet.

By comparison the Soviet armed forces lost 15,000 dead and 50,000 wounded over ten years (1979-89) in Afghanistan. At the time that was regarded as a catastrophic loss of life and a political-military disaster for the USSR.

And Russia's problems in occupied eastern Ukraine are getting worse. Ukraine has ramped up drone production, developed new systems, increased payloads and changed the management structures of its drone war. Video now shows Ukrainian drones patrolling main roads in occupied Ukraine – for example on the dual carriageway that skirts Donetsk city – looking for military targets.

In Donetsk Russia now has imposed a ban on large military convoys, and only two lorries are allowed to move together.

Arms dumps, control centres, radar and missiles are being attacked many kilometres behind the front lines.

Until last year the ratio of killed to wounded Russian troops was 1 : 2 or 1 : 3. It is now 2 : 1, killed to wounded, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

And all these losses are for very little territorial gain. In April the *Economist* estimated that Ukraine, overall, even retrieved a small amount of land. Russia is also missing recruitment targets and failing to recruit enough to cover its losses.

New Ukrainian drones are now able to reach up to 2,000km into Russian territory, including to parts of Russia which have been relatively unaffected by the invasion of Ukraine. Apart from the ability to destroy military hardware – especially ships, planes and air defence – and war-related infrastructure, Ukraine continues to burn down oil storage and refining facilities inside Russia.

In the first two years of war the Russian army had an advantage in drones allowing them to accurately target the Ukrainian military far behind the front lines. The Ukrainians responded by developing defensive drones and more recently a new wave of attack drones. The Russians have failed to keep up, and the



Ukrainians are hitting targets 20km or 30km in the Russian rear areas that were previously beyond them.

Russia has also suffered, after February, from being cut off from using Starlink in Ukraine. This radically disorganised its communications systems.

The Starlink ban was compounded by restrictions on the use of the Telegram app, used by 60mn Russians each day. After 10 February the Russian state began to restrict Telegram use. That also had an impact on Russian armed forces which used the app to organise logistics, share information and even

communicate between units on the frontline.

It seems likely that in the medium term Ukraine aims to cut off the land route to Crimea and Russian troops south of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson city by stopping military road traffic along the M14 through Mariupol and Melitopol.

The Russians had built a rail link to supply their troops occupying the south of Ukraine. The Ukrainians waited until the rail track was completed and then bombed – spectacularly – military supply trains moving along it.

There seems to be growing disquiet in Russia. The fact that Putin's military

Victory Day (against the Nazis in World War Two) parade, held in Moscow on 9 May, had to be radically scaled back was a humiliating and very public recognition that Moscow was no longer safe from Ukrainian long-range attacks.

The Russian economy contracted 0.3% from January to March, inflation seems to be running at around 6%, interest rates are 14.5%, sanctions have locked down \$300bn, military spending is the equivalent of \$190bn or 7.5% of GDP.

Despite the economic consequences, Russia seems unlikely to stop its war any time soon. Zelensky is now publicly warning against the possibility of a new Russian offensive into the north of Ukraine, perhaps from Belarus or involving Belarussian forces and heading towards Kyiv. The aim would be to extend the frontline, now standing at 1,250km, and stretch Ukraine's beleaguered army further.

Ukraine itself continues to be the victim of Russia's grinding war which has killed 15,800 civilians, including 800 children (UN figures. The actual numbers are probably considerably higher). In mid-May, over three days, Russia launched a massive attack on Ukraine, firing 1500 drones and dozens of missiles.

24 people died following a strike on a block of flats in Kyiv.

Russia's war against Ukraine is outrageous. Defend Ukraine! □

Organise the left for reversing Brexit

By Chris Reynolds

Keir Starmer and two of his likely rivals for Labour leader, Wes Streeting and Andy Burnham, have talked of reducing barriers between the UK and the EU.

Streeting and Burnham have both talked of the UK rejoining the EU, though both, especially Burnham now that he is vying with Reform in a pro-Leave constituency, put that in a distant future.

Keir Starmer's appointment of the wretched Peter Mandelson as ambassador to the USA must have been motivated by a hope to do a deal with Trump which would allow the UK to escape tariff blasts aimed at the EU. By now, Labour leaders know that won't work. Reducing economic barriers with the EU is about the only way they see to get a quick boost as eco-



omic gloom deepens. True, but they will almost certainly do it too slowly and timidly to make a noticeable difference.

There are now many Brexit-regretters, and there is a sizeable majority in UK opinion surveys for the general idea of rejoining the EU. But it is passive ("rejoin the EU" demon-

strations have dwindled to nothingness). It seems more a majority of people who wish for a time-machine to take them back into the EU than a majority up for a big fight with Reform and the Tories about opening borders.

To map a sharp and clear course to reverse Brexit and re-

join the EU will require people able to deal with people turning to Reform or Tommy Robinson or not voting with clear and honest argument rather than shamefaced shuffling. Our interests as workers lie in unity across the borders with workers elsewhere, against all the different national varieties of

bosses.

Immigrant workers bring economic and cultural improvement to the country and to the labour movement. Europe is too small, with current levels of technology, to be cut up into walled-off national economies. Freedom of movement is a great freedom, whether for conservative older British people retiring to Spain or for sparky, energetic young East European workers coming to Britain.

If Streeting or Burnham can be pushed to make even one-quarter of that argument, good. But we cannot rely on them, and they will do nothing unless they are pushed. It is down to the rank and file left in the labour movement to take the initiative and make the arguments loud and clear. This paper, *Solidarity*, will lead the way. □

The conceit of the “safe seat”

By Bas Hardy

We live in a time where there is no such thing as a “safe seat” for the two main parties that have dominated British politics for the past century.

Labour's 15,000 majority in Run-corn was narrowly lost to Reform last year after its MP there had assaulted one of his constituents following a late night drinking session. Then there was the debacle in Gorton and Denton, with the resignation of another reprobate caught out slagging off his constituents on WhatsApp. A 13,000 Labour majority turned into a 2,000 majority for the Greens.

It is doubtful that the misbehaviour of those two MPs compelled to resign was decisive. The main responsibility for that lays squarely at door of 10 and 11 Downing Street. The ‘technocratic’ approach of Starmer and Reeves, particularly around the issues of pensioner Winter Fuel Payments and proposed cuts in disability benefits were the main reasons behind the subsequent haemorrhaging of votes.

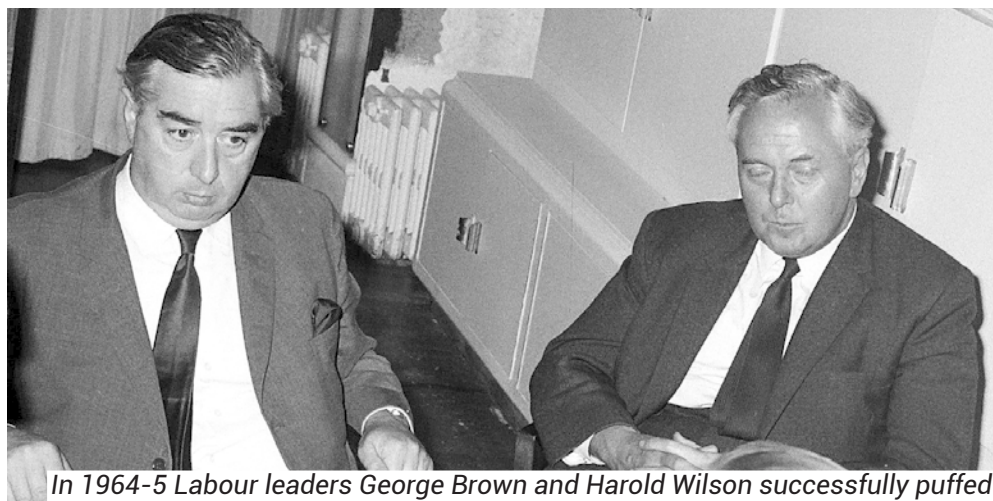
Labour now faces a by-election in Makerfield. Andy Burnham has a tough challenge to prevent it falling into the grasp of Farage's crypto-fascist-in-more-ways-than-one Reform outfit. The idea of the seat being “safe” for Labour is strictly for the birds given the loss of all its councillors in the area at the local council elections plus the fact the town had a two to one majority in favour of Brexit ten years ago.

Gone are the days when Labour enjoyed stonking majorities like the impressive 26,177 Ian McCartney got in 1997. In the last two General Elections Labour's majority was a couple of hundred either side of 5,000 making Makerfield anything but safe. It will be a real struggle for Burnham to win.

Working-class

Talk of “safe seats” recalls the fate of Patrick Gordon Walker, a leading member of Harold Wilson's shadow cabinet in the run up to the 1964 General Election. It's become something of a misconception that most leading Labour figures in the two decades after 1945 were from working-class origins. Much of the membership of the party certainly was (at least of the passive members, mostly via Labour Clubs), and so were Aneurin Bevan and Ernest Bevin, but most of the main leaders were from privately educated and privileged backgrounds.

Thus Attlee himself (Haileybury College and Oxford), Hugh Dalton (Eton and Cambridge), Stafford Cripps (Winchester College and UCL), Hugh Gaitskell (Winchester and Oxford)... Gordon Walker was of the same sort (Wellington College and Oxford). He was the son of a Scottish judge who'd done his bit for imperial



In 1964-5 Labour leaders George Brown and Harold Wilson successfully puffed themselves as the champions of middle-class modernisation. But a leading Labour MP still lost two “safe seats”

Britain in the Indian Civil Service.

Gordon Walker became an MP in October 1945 after winning a by-election for the Birmingham seat of Smethwick, which he would hold for a subsequent 19 years. He joined the Attlee government cabinet in 1950 as Commonwealth Secretary. His most notable act in that office was the despicable one of preventing the return of Seretse Khama to Bechuanaland (modern day Botswana).

Gordon Walker tricked Khama to Britain ostensibly to discuss the future of the country, but then banned him returning there for five years. Khama had married a white English woman and “mixed marriages” didn't go down well with the apartheid regime in South Africa. Banning Khama from going back to his homeland to appease a white supremacist government is one of many long-forgotten stains on the Attlee government's record.

Labour was voted out of office in 1951. Gordon Walker's Smethwick majority declined in subsequent General Elections. Yet in 1964 it was expected he'd keep his seat with the predicted return of Labour to government after “thirteen years of Tory misrule”. The Tories were deeply discredited after scandals and a decline in prestige of Britain's “Establishment” (the term was first coined in 1955, and gained wide and unfavourable currency). Harold Wilson projected Labour as the pro-science, modernising party.

Racist agitation

Labour won in 1964 with an unexpectedly low majority of four. In Smethwick, Gordon Walker was defeated in a contest where racism was the dominant factor.

A significant immigrant community, particularly Sikhs from Punjab, had made their homes in Smethwick by that time. That, combined with local factory closures, provided grist to the mill of racist agitation.

The notorious slogan “If you want a n***** neighbour vote Liberal or Labour” insinuated itself into the campaign. Tory candidate Peter Griffiths refused to con-

demn it. Instead he denied the slogan was racist, and claimed instead it was “a manifestation of popular feeling... exasperation, not fascism.” An echo of Reform leader Richard Tice's recent refusal to condemn the remark by one of his councillors that “Nigerians should be melted down”.

Griffiths won Smethwick with a majority of close to 2,000 against the national trend towards Labour. Wilson still had Gordon Walker as Foreign Secretary for the next four months despite him not having a seat in parliament (quite unprecedented in modern times). The expectation was Gordon Walker would get safely onto the government front bench after he was returned to Westminster via a by-election in a “safe” Labour seat.

In January 1965 he was put up in Leyton, in London's East End. The previous year Labour had a majority there close to 8,000. Gordon Walker, in a close contest, however, lost.

A number of factors explained the defeat. First was the local popularity of Reginald Sorensen, who'd been Leyton's MP for the previous 30 years. Sorensen, on the left of the party, was the first MP to present a private members' bill to outlaw racial discrimination in 1950. Gordon Walker was firmly on the right, and had decried “socialist policies” in the party for “a working class that no longer exists.”

There was a justifiable feeling among some voters that Gordon Walker had been “parachuted” into the constituency, with no real local connection. Many felt their previous MP had been bundled upstairs to the Lords against his will, “for the good of the party”, to make way for a “carpetbagger”.

The Tories didn't campaign in an overtly racist way like they'd done in Smethwick, but there was a subtext of anti-immigrant feeling. Fascist groups were active, with Colin Jordan's Nazis daubing the Labour HQ with swastikas, but the consensus was that Gordon Walker's defeat was down to him being imposed rather than something like a

“Smethwick effect”.

The winning Tory candidate was Richard Buxton, chair of a construction company with business in British colonies in Africa and strong links with British settlers there. His only real connection with Leyton was as the loser in the previous three general elections.

This time the good cockneys of Leyton grasped this old Etonian and Trinity College Cambridge graduate as one of their own! Gordon Walker went on to win Leyton in the 1966 General Election, had a short stint as Education Secretary, proved useless at that, and in turn got kicked up to the Lords himself.

Reform UK

Sixty years on, of course, two-party politics no longer dominates. In many areas the Farageists have replaced the Tories as the right wing challengers to Labour. And potential Labour voters have become more likely to hive off to the Greens or not voting.

Reform aren't putting up an Old Etonian as their candidate in Makerfield. They've learnt their lesson from Gorton and have taken a leaf out of the Greens' book, standing a plumber who is “a local lad”. His family says Farage, in true “blood and soil” manner, have been living in the constituency for 200 years. Burnham “isn't from round here” as if Merseyside and Manchester were worlds away from Wigan and Leigh.

Parochialism and little Englandism, with an unhealthy dose of racism, will be the prime ingredients of Reform's campaign. Its coffer are full of billionaires' largesse, enough to outspend all of their rivals combined. Yet if the people of Makerfield expect a party led by a charlatan and bankrolled by crypto billionaires will do anything to improve their lives they are going to be severely disappointed.

Makerfield cannot be considered a “safe seat” anymore and a real struggle is needed to keep Reform out. Should Farage triumph there and get into government then the future of the people living there and in the rest the country will be at the mercy of a set of policies that will make the deprivations of the Thatcher years seem mild by comparison. □



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How the labour movement can change agriculture

By Rhodri Evans

World agriculture has become dominated, in many countries, by mega-capital from one angle, micro-capital from another. It is becoming more so. Later in this article I will review the "classic" Marxist discussions on the issue. But from the start we have to register that things have not turned out as Engels, Lenin, Kautsky, and others expected, i.e. tending towards the 19th century British model, of fully capitalist farmers hiring wage-labour, or, after socialist revolutions, towards agricultural cooperatives.

The industries surrounding agriculture are mega-capitalised. Four companies control 90% of the global grain trade. Another four control 66% of the agri-chemical trade, and an overlapping four 53% of global seed trade. Three sell almost half the farm machinery. Four run 75% of the world's corporate abattoirs and packing plants for beef, four others 70% of ditto for pork. In Britain the large supermarket chains have 90-odd % of the grocery market.

The USA, the EU, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay between them do 62% of the world's agricultural exports, from 4% of the world's agricultural workforce. In the USA, UK, and western Europe, only about 2% of the workforce is in agriculture.

Unlike in other economic sectors, labour productivity varies vastly from place to place. The figures are illustrative only (because of exchange-rate difficulties and more), but the USA is estimated to get \$100,000 value-added per unit labour input in agriculture, the UK \$55,000, China \$5,600, Tanzania \$870. The gap in yields per hectare is smaller, but France and the UK produce about six times as much wheat, maize, or potatoes per hectare as Tanzania.

Yields in some countries have since World War Two risen faster than in industry, thanks to machinery, agri-chemicals, irrigation, and improved techniques. Without that increased productivity the world would have had acute food shortages for decades, or many more ecosystems destroyed for expanded agricultural land, or both. We must criticise the way the productivity has been shaped, but to reverse out of it, back to more traditional food production or an idealised version of it, is hopeless. In other countries productivity has stagnated, food wastage on the way between farms and consumers is high (37% in sub-Saharan Africa, because of poor transport and lack of cold storage), and



Anna Creek, South Australia, the world's biggest farm by area, with cattle grazing on sparse vegetation over a vast area. But, using light planes, it has only eleven workers

nutrition remains poor.

The countries most dependent on food imports are often the most "agricultural". Most African countries depend heavily on food imports, though some 70% of their workforce is in agriculture. The UK now produces about 60% of the food it consumes, up from 30 to 40% in the 1930s, though the land area given to agriculture is a bit smaller now than then.

Workforce

There are some farms in the high-productivity areas which are large not only in land-area but in workforce. Some farms hire lots of workers for a short time for picking fruit and vegetables. Automated picking is in its infancy.

But mostly the farms run on family labour, and often even the main farmer has a substantial non-farm job or business on the side. The average depreciated value of the machinery and equipment in use on a US farm is not huge, at \$164,000, and 72% of EU farmers have no formal training for their job. But US and EU farmers are able to produce high volumes with tiny workforces.

In the UK, there were 1.7 million hired farm workers in 1851, on maybe 300,000 farms. Now there are fewer than 200,000, on more than 200,000 farms. The average net worth of a farm is £2.2 million: £1.9 million land, £0.7 million structures and equipment, minus £0.3 million debt.

86% of the European Union's 9.1 million farms have no regular workers other than family. In the USA, the 1.9 million farms have greater average land area, but only 3.5% spend more than \$100,000 a year on hired labour, and only 1.3% have more than four people working on them.

In Ireland, all but 400 of 138,000 farms are "family farms", and only 7% of the workforce is non-family.

Even farms with large land areas are usually small businesses as measured

by labour, comparable to the smallest shops. In Brazil, which has many large holdings, 12.8 million of the 16.6 million people working on the five million farms are family.

Australia has huge farms (average 2,850 ha), but an average of only about two staff per farm, of whom 27% are part-time. The world's biggest farm, Anna Creek cattle station in South Australia, with a land area bigger than the whole country of Israel, has just eleven workers including the manager and the cook, and most of those are jackaroos and jillaroos (apprentices who will later run their own farms).

China

China had its agriculture reorganised from 1958 into "communes", each with thousands of people, in order to facilitate economic extraction by the state. Supplementary individual plots, as in the Stalinist USSR, were licensed in 1961, after a retreat from the "Great Leap Forward" in which maybe 30 million starved to death.

Since 1978 the land, still owned by the state, has been redivided into family-tilled plots. There are now about 150 million holdings. The number is 63 million down on 2012, but the average is still tiny (0.8 ha, about one football field), and hired labour is only about 4% of the agricultural workforce. All use chemical fertiliser, in fact over-use it, the smaller farmers more per hectare than larger-scale. Use of machinery quadrupled between the 1980s and 2007. Most small farms pay contractors to operate machinery onto their plots when they need it, rather than owning machines themselves. Unlike in the higher-productivity countries, seed and chemical supply, produce marketing, and machinery-contracting is dominated by smaller capitalist farms.

Productivity in China has risen sharply

since 1978, but by a move mainly from larger units to smaller. The main other economic function of the small farms is looking after children whose parents have gone to the coastal cities for wage-labour: China has some 67 million such "left-behind" children, mostly on farms but some in small inland cities.

The world picture is complex. Some ex-Stalinist states still have sizeable parts of agriculture in multi-worker holdings, now capitalist: Ukraine, Russia, Czech Republic, Slovakia. Agricultural cooperatives (ejidos) survive in Mexico, though in decline.

Broadly, though, farming on small plots mostly for the farm family's subsistence remains widespread in large areas of the world, usually at a very low rate of labour productivity. Where farming has moved to higher productivity, it is mostly not to fully-capitalist farms with substantial hired labour, as in 19th century Britain, or to "plantations" with many workers, but to micro-capitalism: farms using more equipment and inputs, maybe of sizeable area, but with little non-family labour.

The productivity of that micro-capitalism has greatly increased, per worker and per hectare, especially since World War Two. The world is able to produce about 50% more food than it needs to feed the human population. With world population likely to peak in the 2080s around nine billion, on one level feeding the world is much less of a problem than previously in human history. The world land area used for agriculture rose gradually from 1400 CE to 1870, then faster from 1870 to the early 1960s (about 130% over a century), but has now levelled off and started to decrease slowly. If agricultural productivity increases across more of the world, less land will be needed.

The reliance of many poor countries on food imports is double-edged. There is no good reason for crops to be grown in so many areas unsuitable for them as well in a variety of suitable areas. Starvation due to local harvest failure has become less common. Malnutrition among children has declined, though now more and more slowly. But diets often remain poor. Egypt, now heavily dependent on food imports, has one of the world's highest obesity rates, including among poor people. Competition from imports often impoverishes peasants in poorer countries, meaning they cannot sell whatever surplus they produce.

Diet is often poor in richer countries, too; particularly among people with lower incomes. A healthy diet is often

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considerably more expensive than unhealthy alternatives, and the most deprived areas often have more unhealthy and less healthy foods available.

We want to reorganise economic life to win comfort and dignity for all, social control, and sustainability (at least to a sufficient approximation that unsustainable trends can be detected and checked in good time). In that optic, agriculture poses many other issues.

Soil fertility is at risk in many areas. Soil erosion is running at unsustainable levels. According to the FAO, 41% of land in South Asia, 24% in south-east Asia, 20% in West Asia, 16% in South America, and 14% in sub-Saharan Africa, is degraded. Levels in high-input agricultural areas are somewhat lower (8% in North America), but still bad.

Agriculture as presently run is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and thus to global warming. Global warming in turn will damage agriculture in many areas, especially nearer the Equator. Agriculture is the major contributor to loss of biodiversity, with unpredictable consequences, and to deforestation. It is also the major contributor, via run-off of nutrients and waste, to pollution of oceans and water generally. Water supplies for agriculture are running short in many areas.

All these trends are worsened by a sharply rising trend of meat and dairy consumption. Meat production, especially beef, causes much more environmental damage than production of other foods, both directly and via the vast areas used for growing animal feed (soybeans and other), sometimes, as in Brazil, got by clearing forest valuable for the whole global environment.

The lever the working class has for change in this sphere is in the giant concentrations of wage-worked agriculture-linked industries: processing, distribution, seeds, agri-chemicals, machinery. Public ownership and democratic and workers' control of those sectors can swivel farm work towards crops; towards restoration of biodiversity and reforestation (already the EU pays subsidies to farmers for land area, including that not used for agriculture); towards better rotations, no-till methods, and "precision agriculture" limiting agri-chemical use; towards better waste management. Both in the USA and in China, excess fertiliser use has been reduced a lot in recent years without harming productivity, though it remains

very high in China and 40% higher in the USA than in France.

Workers' Government

A workers' government would have to use market mechanisms for a long time, as Trotsky explained in *The Revolution Betrayed*. Generally there is an advantage in the market prices being "real" prices which sway with supply and demand: otherwise the information which prices give to the economic planning procedure is garbled, and black markets and shortages emerge. A researcher into the Brezhnevite USSR, where official prices were administered though with a close eye to international markets, found five grades of unofficial markets there: pink, white, grey, brown, black.

However, some manipulation of prices is entirely workable. Taxes on tobacco have brought revenue and reduced consumption. VAT exemption on food works smoothly. Food is already subsidised in capitalist countries, for example by payments to farmers in the UK and the EU. It would be entirely workable for a publicly-owned, democratically controlled industry to redirect the subsidies to foods whose production and processing causes least environmental damage and provides best nutrition. And to additionally redirect subsidies and funding towards afforestation and "rewilding" to sequester carbon and improve biodiversity.

Livestock farming generally draws more state subsidies than food crops. In other words, states subsidise increased meat-eating.

The current UK row over inheritance tax confirms that. Agricultural property has been exempt from inheritance tax. The government wants to limit the exemption so that family-inherited farms are subject to 20% tax (2% per year over ten years) on value above £1.5 million (if owned by one person) or above £3 million (if owned by two). Agricultural property passed to non-family will be similarly taxed on value above £2.7 million or £1.3 million.

According to the government, the largest beneficiaries from the exemption have been people showing no income from agriculture, i.e. rich people transferring wealth into big landholdings to avoid tax. The tax change will reduce such transfers and so tend to reduce agricultural land prices.

The Labour Land Campaign, while not backing the farmers' protests, has said that Land Value Tax would work better than the inheritance-tax change. We are not tax experts. Nevertheless, it is clear that the exemption has been a subsidy to larger agricultural properties, which are mostly livestock, more than to pulse, vegetable, and fruit farming.

Of UK agricultural land, 57% is used for livestock; 18% wheat, barley, and other cereals; 2% rapeseed and similar; 1.5% potatoes, other vegetables, and fruit; around the same for pulses; the rest fallow or used for non-agriculture. There is no good environmental or socialist reason to subsidise livestock farming above other modes.

Public ownership and democratic con-



The UK has about 200,000 farms, but fewer than 200,000 farm wage-workers

trol can shift the balance. It can push livestock farmers to shift to crops or to reforestation and restoring land. It can make beef scarcer and more expensive for consumers; pulses, fruit, and vegetables cheaper and more plentiful. It can reduce fertiliser and pesticide use in the richer countries and China, and prudently increase that (together with irrigation and "designer seeds" and cold-storage facilities to reduce waste) in countries, for example in Africa, where agriculture still has low productivity and is already suffering a lot from climate change.

Chief Task

How fast a workers' government can push, how fast it will need to push, and indeed exactly how and where it will push, are matters for experience and expert calculation for which that government will have wider resources than we can possibly have now. As socialists, our chief task is to win the public ownership and democratic control of the big industries which shape and structure agriculture, and thus open the way for informed democratic deliberation to decide, rather than profit-maximisation.

Socialists have debated how much continuing use of land for livestock and for animal feeds is compatible with environmental sustainability. The decision will have to be taken by a future workers' government with much more expertise than we have, and with continuously-updated knowledge of the success or failure of previous policies, and how fast environmental emergencies will have developed in the meantime.

For sure, though, we must work to stop the current escalation of meat-production agriculture and disproportionate government subsidies for it.

Abattoir workers have sometimes been well-organised, for example in Australia. But there they then suffered an era-defining defeat in the 1983-5 Mudginberri dispute. Conditions in meat-processing are now usually bad for workers, let alone for the animals slaughtered, even in countries with better than average worker conditions. The Covid outbreaks in 2020 in meat factories in Germany showed that. Public ownership and democratic control will offer those workers paths to retraining for better jobs elsewhere in food industries, and better conditions for those who remain.

The public food industry will also launch new projects, including farm-free food (using solar energy to produce protein without photosynthesis), nutritious and ecologically sound free school meals, cheap and healthy workplace and public canteens which take over the assets of the giant capitalist fast-food chains, and socialised public supermarkets making healthy diets affordable and

accessible.

It will bring electricity, water supplies, machinery, agri-chemicals, new seeds, and agricultural education to countries and areas where farm populations are stuck in low-productivity work.

All that can be achieved by turning big agri-industry to the goals of sustainability and nutrition, rather than to those of maximum profit for its corporations. Unlike in some other economic sectors, in agriculture socialists do not face the difficulty that winning the "generalised abundance" of the basics of life which is a precondition for socialism requires considerable growth. The world already produces enough food for the predicted peak human population of the globe. We can manage while using less land. The problem is distribution, composition, and processing — who gets what food?

In Britain landownership and ground rent are smaller issues in agriculture than for housing. The majority of farmers are owner-occupiers for all or most of their land, and the total rent paid in 2021 was £714 million, or an average of about £3,500 per farm. In other countries rent may still be a big issue; in some, advocacy of expropriation of the landlords and of moderate rents may be essential for workers to win the support or at least the cautious assent of large classes of peasants or small farmers.

To write a detailed agrarian programme today, with no large socialist implantation in agri-industry and agriculture, would be foolish. But we can see a road for working-class political and industrial action along some lines, and not along others. The "traditional" socialist recipe of public ownership and workers' control can be applied in big agri-industry, but not in farming.

To attempt to take the world's over 500 million small or tiny farms into public ownership would be foolish. "Workers' control" is no answer, since on most farms the workers are the farm family who already control them.

Other common left-wing answers on agriculture also have problems. Their general tendency is to seek to boost small-scale, local, and traditional agriculture.

But that approach would leave low-input peasant agriculture mired in poverty.

Even in regions dominated by micro-capitalist agriculture, the larger farms (by area: their workforces are usually still small) are much more efficient. Romania and Greece between them have 40% of the EU's farms (some peasant rather than micro-capitalist) but only 5% of the output. France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark have 9% of the farms and 40% of the output. To seek to approximate agriculture to Romania and Greece would starve Europe and help no-one.

Egypt has a large farming population, but imports much of its food



Small micro-capitalist farmers often overuse agri-chemicals more than larger ones.

Some micro-capitalist farmers in richer countries seek to farm with very few agri-chemicals. They have lower yields (per land area and even more per labour input) but can get by economically, by charging higher prices, selling produce directly in nearby prosperous areas, running seminars and tourist visits, attracting volunteer labour, and so on. Some deserve to be cherished as experimenters. A socialised, worker-controlled para-agricultural industry would surely develop many experimental farms, of different sorts (including GM).

But, with its lower yields, in the foreseeable future on a wider scale "organic" farming would use much more land with concomitant ecosystem destruction, emit as much or more greenhouse gas through requiring more transport as some of the expanded farmland would be considerably further away, and may be no better or worse on nitrogen pollution. Widespread pesticide and fertiliser use in farming today cause significant ecological harm, damaging biodiversity and polluting water respectively. Many pesticides in use today are very harmful to human health, particularly to agricultural workers and to those exposed to high levels, with wider impacts insufficiently known. But these impacts are not the only ecological and human considerations; and (current) "organic" alternatives aren't always better. Enforced "organic" farming in poor countries where peasants can't afford agri-chemicals should not be cherished.

Genetically-modified organisms in agriculture need to be vetted carefully, but to reject them would reduce production and reduce options for adaptation to changed climate conditions. Seeking to make food production more local would increase emissions and pollution via the consequent increased output of products in areas unsuited to them. The saving in emissions from less transport would be small in comparison. "Food sovereignty" is defined loosely enough to gain endorsement from the United Nations and the World Bank, but in some interpretations at least "prioritise local and national economies and markets... peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal-fishing, pastoralist-led grazing..."

Historically, small-scale farmers, peasant or micro-capitalist, are not an ecological class. In 2024 we saw the European Union's efforts to increase crop rotation and fallow land, and to reduce pesticide use, defeated by farmers' mobilisations. Farmers have often defeated attempts to increase fuel taxes, too.

Peasants and small farmers have sometimes been a bourgeois-democratic revolutionary force, breaking up lords' estates and ending tribute-exaction by lords and clerics. Never a socialist force. In UK and European politics, they have become a sizeable political force on the right since the 1930s and especially since the 1950s. They are a very small part of the working population, but have managed to win import

curbs, price guarantees, and subsidies. They are characteristically very tied to (their own) private property and to maintaining old ways.

Since 1993 there has been an international left-wing peasant and small farmer movement, Via Campesina, of which the British wing is the Landworkers' Alliance. It is however small compared to groups like the National Farmers' Union, and still oriented to seeing the small farmer or even peasant as the source of virtue rather than large-scale industry and its working class.

Marxist Discussions

The classical Marxist discussions of peasants and small farmers mostly concluded that the best the socialist working class could hope for was to persuade them to accept a socialist regime rather than get them to help introduce it. That aspect of the conclusions still seems sound today. It will be easier to carry through, because in advanced capitalist countries the small-farmer class is now only a small minority, and the working class can offer them economic security and alternative jobs as stewards of ecologically-restored land.

Marx and Engels (and socialists before them) looked to the urban working class. They saw socialist society as organised in middle-sized cooperative settlements combining agriculture and industry which would avoid both the squalor, pollution, human atomisation, and hived-off household drudgery of cities, and the poverty and isolation of rural life. That regime would be brought to the countryside by the workers who had won power in the cities, rather than sprouting first by rural initiative and then being joined by migrants from the cities.

The Communist Manifesto's demands were more a summary of what Marx and Engels found best in previous socialist agitation than a theoretical prescription by them. They included: "abolition of property in land... abolition of all right to inheritance... improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan... industrial armies, especially for agriculture... gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country".

In the *March Address* of 1850 Marx and Engels opposed division of the large feudal and landed estates among the peasants. "They must demand that the confiscated feudal property remain state property and be used for workers' colonies, cultivated collectively by the rural proletariat".

In *The 18th Brumaire*, Marx concluded that the peasantry was characteristically conservative and had provided Napoleon III with his social base. He looked forward to the time when "disappointed in the Napoleonic Restoration, the French peasant will part with his belief in his smallholding".

British agriculture then had gone through a technical revolution starting before the Industrial Revolution. It was run by capitalist farmers with a fairly large number of wage-workers (1.7 million in 1851) and larger holdings than in France. For decades to come, and despite the number of wage-workers in

British agriculture decreasing from that point, Marxists would see that model as destined to replace peasant agriculture everywhere.

"In the sphere of agriculture", predicted Marx in *Capital*, "large-scale industry... annihilates the bulwark of the old society, the 'peasant', and substitutes for him the wage-labourer".

He saw capitalist agriculture as unsound because of its concentration of the population in cities, and consequent removal of human wastes as fertiliser from the countryside, as disturbing the cyclical relations between humanity and the rest of nature. He took that from the best scientific advice of his time, but it was a misdiagnosis: human wastes have never been primary as fertiliser, and in any case are returned to the soil more efficiently (and after some, only inadequate, filtering for harmful matter) by modern sewage systems. Despite seeing soil fertility problems, he evidently thought that capitalist agriculture employing numerous workers would continue to outstrip tiny-scale, mostly-for-subsistence, tradition-bound peasant agriculture until both could be replaced by middle-sized cooperatives combining industry and agriculture, urban and rural.

In *The Civil War in France*, Marx argued that the Paris Commune could have got support from the peasants by offering them tax reductions from suppression of bureaucratic privilege; "enlightenment by the schoolmaster in place of stultification by the priest"; and relief from debt, as well as giving hope to the rural wage-workers.

He proposed no transformation of property relations in the countryside. Within the First International, Marx and Engels opposed the old demand for abolishing all inheritance, now pushed forward by Bakunin. That, they said, would only antagonise the French peasants intent on handing down plots from generation to generation. The 1880 programme of the French Workers' Party, written by Jules Guesde but in discussion with Marx, proposed abolishing inheritance above 20,000 francs (about £100,000 today: French peasant plots then were considerably smaller than French family farms are now).

Kautsky

Both that 1880 programme and the German Marxists' Erfurt Programme of 1891, largely endorsed by Engels, included no "peasant" or "rural" demands. Soon after, both French and German socialists started to discuss how they could reach the peasantry. In the late 19th century, the agricultural population was nearly 40% in Germany, nearly 50% in France, while only 10% in Britain.

Some socialists devised programmes to safeguard small farms. Engels said that was promising the impossible. In the short term peasants would gravitate to the right. In the longer term, socialists should support and organise the rural wage-workers, and offer the peasants friendly assistance to reorganise in co-operatives.

Following that discussion, Karl Kaut-

sky wrote a big book on *The Agrarian Question* (1899).

Agriculture is different from any other sector, he noted, in that the main means of production, the land, can be divided into small units and cannot be concentrated in one place. Tiny farmers stayed attached to their land and survived by providing a pool of wage-labour to nearby large farmers. They might survive for a long time yet. Socialists should not seek to make the survival longer. The tiny-farm households lived in worse misery than workers, and, argued Kautsky, were more apt to exhaust the soil than the more productive farmers.

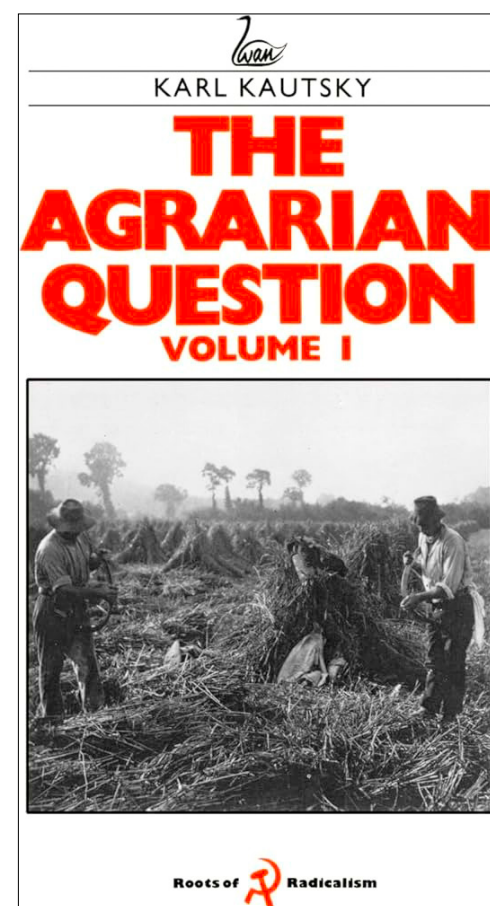
He offered no great prospects for better than neutralising the rural population. The driving force for advance was industry. "Should industry turn towards socialism", he wrote, "then agriculture must follow suit". Socialist industry could offer agriculture better ways of organising, but he was not prescriptive about them. He was hesitant about wholesale nationalisation of land, but insisted on public ownership of forestry and water resources.

In the Russian empire, where peasants were the big majority, Marxists first organised themselves round the idea that the urban working class was the main force for change, but then discussed the "agrarian question" intensely.

There was much dispute about detail. They advocated nationalisation of all the land, while stressing that this was a bourgeois-democratic demand, not a socialist one. In 1913, half the land was still owned by big landlords, and only half by peasants. Peasants accepted that. The peasants who had come to own land suffered under "redemption payments" to the former landlords until 1907, and after that under debt.

Even the populist Socialist-Revolutionaries advocated "socialisation of all privately owned lands; that is, their

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transfer from private property of individual owners to public domain and administration by democratically organised communes and territorial associations of communes on the basis of equalised utilisation".

The Marxists wanted big farms to remain intact and be farmed collectively. In 1917 and in 1918, the Bolsheviks strove to organise "poor peasants" separately, partly with that in mind. In the October Revolution, however, they concluded that they had to let the SR programme pass – by abstaining in the vote, Lenin wrote, though I'm not clear whether he meant that literally – because it had overwhelming support among the peasants.

Despite the Bolsheviks' reservations, in fact the revolution produced redistribution of the land, by the land committees set up by the Soviets and Provisional Government in June 1917. On that basis the Bolsheviks won the mass support which enabled them to win the civil war. The result, so Lenin would concede by 1921, was to make almost all "middle peasants". "The land experienced the so-called Black Redistribution", commented one Bolshevik at the 1922 Fourth Congress of the Comintern: the Marxists had perforce come back, full circle, to the programme which Plekhanov and his comrades first advocated on splitting from the main populist current and then rejected on becoming consistent Marxists.

The "middle peasants" were consolidated in their status by the New Economic Policy, introducing taxation and trade to feed the cities instead of requisitioning. Inevitably differentiation followed. Some peasants became richer, some poorer.

The Left Opposition advocated judicious taxation of the richer peasants to help industry revive sufficiently to offer equipment and goods to the peasants at affordable prices. Until 1928 Stalin dismissed that as fanciful. In 1928-9 he made a turn to forced collectivisation and forced-march industrialisation. That

"A no-till seeder". No-till farming is growing in Australia, South America, USA

Pic: CIMMYT



enabled the state to extract products from the countryside, but devastated rural productivity.

In the Spartacus Programme of December 1918, Rosa Luxemburg warned the new and impatient Communist Party: "If socialist reconstruction is to be undertaken in real earnest, we must direct attention just as much to the open country as to the industrial centres, and yet as regards the former we have not even taken the first steps... The peasants are still untouched by socialism, they constitute an additional reserve for the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie..." She was right about that.

The programme offered expropriation of large landholdings (not nationalisation of all land), encouragement to agricultural cooperatives, and a guarantee that "small peasant holdings remain in the possession of their occupants" until they voluntarily join the cooperatives.

Distinction

The Communist International discussed the agrarian question at its Second (1920) and Fourth (1922) Congresses. The old idea of abolishing the distinction between town and country was fading. Rightly so: in the decades since the economic, and cultural advantages of large, dense cities and the possibility of making them safer and healthier than rural areas have become clearer. The disadvantages of low-density "suburban sprawl" (the capitalist approximation to merger of town and country) have be-

come more evident. The environmental case for a sharper division between denser cities and rural areas with more ecological restoration and reforestation has become stronger.

The Communist International backed small peasants' bourgeois-democratic fight for land against the big landlords. Smallholders could be promised relief from rent and mortgage payments, and improved access to machinery. Even "rich" peasants should not be expropriated. But with many peasants the best that could be hoped for was to "neutralise" them. It was desirable that socialist revolutions should keep the big estates intact as units to be cultivated collectively, but that had not been possible in Russia, and might not be possible elsewhere where there was acute land-hunger.

In the Transitional Programme of 1938 Trotsky largely limited himself to a call to work out a programme for peasants. The answer was difficult and would differ from country to country. In the meantime the programme advocated workers' and small farmers' committees to "open the books" and regulate transport costs, credit, and marketing, thus closing the gap between low prices for farmers and high prices for workers at the expense of the big capitalist concerns coming between them.

The small farmers, warned the programme, must remain the owner of their plots as long as they want, and Marxists would "expose mercilessly the Stalinist

methods of collectivisation, which are dictated... by the interests of the bureaucracy".

The agricultural cooperatives which Marxists proposed have developed in some places and sometimes, notably in Italy after World War One, but mostly in the form of consumer, supply, and marketing cooperatives. Generally the advances available from applying machinery, from more scientific crop and soil management, and especially after World War Two from agri-chemicals, have proved accessible even to small farmers in more capitalistically-developed countries. Without them, the world would already have huge food shortages. In richer countries farmers own farm machinery; in China, where most are too poor to do that, they deal individually with machinery-contracting firms.

If socialist revolution had spread more widely after 1917, the idea of pooling resources for production in larger units better able to use machinery and negotiate trade might have gained mass support. But there was always a powerful pull the other way. In agriculture, the small farmers' means of production are divisible, i.e. capable of being worked in small units. And more: each small farmer shapes their own land. It is as it is because of the work they have done on it. It is their home as well as their workplace.

In Europe, bourgeois states intervened from the 1930s with policies of quasi-socialism for micro-capital: marketing boards, price guarantees, import controls, export subsidies, debt relief, income subsidies. That has been enough to manage the transition from peasants to micro-capitalists, and to secure their adherence to bourgeois politics, almost always to the right wing.

An environmentalist-socialist programme must reckon with those facts, but, doing so, we can propose policies which can win support from part of the farming population and gradual acceptance by most of the rest. □

More issues to discuss

By Rhodri Evans

This article was approved at the Workers' Liberty conference this year after some months of discussions.

It does not try to give comprehensive surveys of world agriculture, or of agricultural policies which a world workers' government could carry through to combat the two plagues of eco-degradation and of much of the world's rural population being still trapped in impoverished low-productivity farming. Those surveys required expertise which we do not have, but a workers' government will be able to command and develop.

Essentially, the article sur-

veys the ideas for workers'-movement policy on agriculture of the Marxists of the era of Marx, Trotsky, and others; discusses how agriculture has developed differently from what they expected; and suggests some ideas on how we can take that different development into account politically.

Inadequate

Two issues, in particular, were mentioned in the conference discussion as inadequately covered in the article.

One is no-till agriculture. The article talks of a drive to "swivel farm work... towards better rotations, no-till methods...", but deliberately attempts no more

detail, for the reasons already mentioned.

No-till methods, i.e. farming without ploughing the land, break with the norms of thousands of years, but have been developed recently in some areas of advanced capitalist agriculture (US, South America, Australia...)

They can allow the soil to absorb more carbon from the atmosphere; limit or even reverse soil erosion; sustain the diversity of the soil biome; and, done right, reduce agri-chemical usage. They are not always easy, and require specialised equipment.

The second is landownership. There are certainly many large landowners in the world,

and taking their land under public ownership can reduce rents for farmers or channel the rent money to social purposes. In many areas it is also important to enable social housing development.

Trend

However, the big trend of the last 200 years or more is of farmers owning more of the land they farm, having more security on it, and having relatively smaller burdens of rent, repayments for purchase, or feudal-type dues. David Canadine described this process for Britain in his book *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*.

Moreover, ownership of the

land is a different matter from ownership of farms. Public ownership of the land on which a farm operates does not give public control of the farm's production any more than public ownership of the land on which a factory stands gives public control of the factory's production.

Very large farms (by area) are mostly livestock farms as against cropland, and may have fewer workers than small cropland farms.

On these and other questions, of course, *Solidarity's* columns are always open to contributions challenging our ideas. □

Unruly schools, part four

By David Axon

Fourth and last in a series of articles

The recent trend towards more authoritarianism in schools has been accelerated by the approach of many multi-academy trusts (MATs). Child psychologist Naomi Fisher writes regularly about the ways in which the drive for compliance and an appearance of learning in some of these MATs are harmful to children:

"I visited a school recently which had posters with SLANT [Sit up, Listen, Ask and answer questions, Nod, Track the speaker] on their walls. I asked about it. The teacher was casual. 'It's just behaviours to help their learning' he said. That's what the internet says too. Behaviours to help students say engaged, says one school website. Another school says that using SLANT helps students to ensure they are focused on their learning...

"Most of these are behaviours for compliance. Nodding your head, sitting up straight and tracking the teacher all make a class look more attentive, but it's a facade. These are behaviours for a passive audience, acting out the role of an actively engaged one. It's a front. A mask, if you like. Even listening carefully will only lead to learning if what is being said is relevant and comprehensible to you, and asking questions — well, I doubt if they mean the sorts of questions I might have in mind.

"Secondly, these are not a tool that students are using to help them learn. They are a set of rules which they are being made to follow, or else be punished. Their bodies are being controlled, so that they give the impression that they are engaged. It's high control, justified as being necessary for learning.

"People learn in different ways. Sitting still and tracking the teacher is so hard for some children that it takes up all of their capacity, and there's little left for Maths or English...

"How lucky I was that I attended school before SLANT. I wasn't breaking the rules because the rules weren't there to break yet."

Any serious policy on "behaviour" has to address this trend against students' "participation, contribution and influence" — a trend towards authoritarianism, compliance and the "facade" of learning. We cannot effectively focus just on "behaviour" in isolation.

Many many teachers and others in education still adopt democratic approaches wherever they can. And in the face of the rise of Reform, proposing a more authoritarian form of schooling, it is important to defend those elements seen in many schools like student LGBT+ groups, equalities groups, voice in the curriculum, Rights Respecting Schools, Schools of Sanctuary, and so on. Talk of students' sense of "belonging" to their

school is not just management-speak, and is directly opposed to the Reform approach to behaviour: "Permanent Exclusions for Violent and Disruptive Students — We will double the number of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) so schools can function safely".

Waters and Brighouse note the huge disparity in exclusions from school in England compared to Scotland. "England (with a total population of c.47 million) had 7,894 permanent exclusions, Wales (with a population of c.3.5 million) had just 165 and Northern Ireland (with the equivalent of half the Welsh population) just 33. What, you may ask, are Northern Ireland and Wales doing differently? Well, it would be worth finding out the answer, but first go to Scotland with a population of c.4.7 million because in that year Scottish schools permanently excluded just five — yes, five! — pupils (in the following year it was three)." (Figures for absence from school are instructive too).

They comment that "the rise in so-called 'zero tolerance' behaviour policies is creating school environments where pupils are punished, and ultimately excluded, for incidents that could and should be managed within the mainstream".

Report

The Children's Society's 2024 Good Childhood Report notes that "in 2022, the UK was once again the country where 15-year-olds had the lowest overall average life satisfaction (among 27 European countries)". It itemises some of the reported reasons, as is, again essential reading to any plan for "behaviour". A regular school-based version of a similar thing has been taking place for a few years in Greater Manchester, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton, providing secondary schools with comparative measure of students' happiness, trust in their school, health, sleep, and other measures.

So does all this mean that our only response to education workers injured or distressed by incidents in their school is "wait"? Are we just saying "don't strike against bad behaviour, fight instead for better funding and kinder schools"? This was the criticism made at the National Education Union (NEU) conference of amendment 36.1 — "it deletes the actions".

No. Firstly we are saying that an approach that boils down to workers at each school demanding that individual children get sent to other schools is obviously not going to work. Do we keep striking as those children get sent from school to school? (Or endorse the Reform approach of doubling the number of PRUs?)

And an approach that focuses on 'behaviour' rather than the roots of the problem will have less positive effect,



English schools in the 1960s: the good old days?

as well as making it hard to win wider support. At St Cuthbert's in Rochdale, for example, the Nasuwt and NEU are now striking together, but the Nasuwt are still foregrounding "behaviour" as the issue. The NEU are foregrounding the poor management by the MAT, and the shortage of staff. By doing so they are building more support among parents, students, and in the wider community.

Secondly, there genuinely are issues of how school managements manage behaviour that either make the situation worse, or undermine the staff in the schools. We should be clear on these and fight on them too.

Educators' Fightback is discussing the idea of a "charter of demands" for workers in education to reframe the behaviour discussion at the last NEU conference. Such a charter would in all likelihood cover two areas: how to make schools better places with less conflict (prevention), and what to do when things go wrong.

Rejected

The rejected amendment 36.1 at conference called for the NEU to campaign for "guidance on trauma-informed practices", and "funding for early intervention, pastoral care, mental health support and behaviour intervention teams". Amendment 36.2 — passed by conference — called for "enforceable maximum class sizes and appropriate staffing ratios, particularly in high need settings, recognising that overcrowding and insufficient levels of support staff contribute directly to unsafe environments". It also committed the union to "commission research into the link between funding cuts, SEND provision gaps, and rising violence, using findings to strengthen national bargaining and public campaigning". Amendment 36.4 has committed the union to "campaign and lobby for initial teacher training routes to include training on how to tackle sexism and misogyny in education settings".

It would make sense to expand these demands with those arising from the reflections above to create a part one of such a charter.

For a part two on "when things go wrong", amendment 36.2 commits the union to campaign for measures such as "immediate and continuing after-care... where a staff member has been subject to an altercation", "model risk assessments", "model workplace safety charters for schools, jointly agreed with health and safety representatives, setting minimum standards for incident reporting, follow-up support, and recovery time for affected staff", and for "the existing health and safety reporting mechanisms to be used and for them to include all types of violent incident".

In addition, many workers in schools complain that when they have had to deal with a difficult issue, they have then felt undermined by their school management. (This is not to say that the way all staff respond to those incidents is necessarily right — aside from the fact that there are some reactionary authoritarian teachers in our schools, everyone can respond wrongly in the moment, for all sorts of reasons). Some schools fail to tell staff the outcome of an incident, meaning that the next time they mean the students involved it is with no knowledge of what has or hasn't happened. Many schools fail to provide the time or space for any sort of restorative conversations.

And one of the most common concerns I have heard raised is school managements simply being inconsistent — workers being undermined not by the behaviour of the child, but by the failure of the employer to follow their own policies.

A positive charter on these issues could be helpful to addressing the drift of this discussion in a reactionary direction, and into one that education workers, students and other workers (parents) could unite around. □

Debate on Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, China

By Martin Thomas

Some 40 revolutionary socialist groups, mostly from Europe, South America, the USA, and western Asia, sent delegates, written submissions, or videos to the fourth "internationalist conference" in Paris, 15-17 May 2026, following previous similar events in Milan (2023, 2024) and Paris (2025).

The main organisers were Lotta Comunista, the biggest left group in Italy, and NPA-R, a French group with major components of which Workers' Liberty had had comradely relations for many years now.

The chief items of controversy were:

- **Ukraine.** Most groups agreed on supporting Ukraine's resistance as a fight for national self-determination against Russian imperialism. A few dismissed Ukraine as a catspaw of the USA and NATO against Russia. Lotta Comunista have a settled view that national questions are anachronistic since the mid-1970s, and so where they come forward can only do so as tactical devices for rival imperialist ambitions.

China

- **China.** Most agreed that China is now a major imperialist power. A few (Spartacist, ISA-R, IBT) claimed that it is (still) a "deformed workers' state". Delegates from the Jinglei Chinese Marxist group denounced that claim vehemently. Jinglei has members active in France (with the NPA-R) and (online only) in Hong Kong and mainland China. Its documents circulated at the conference cited the main 1980s and 90s of the "Mandelite" Fourth International and the 2017 "opposition" within that network. That 2017 [opposition](#) was also represented in Paris by OKDE-Spartakos of Greece, Izar of Spain, and the A&R strand within the NPA-R, though they didn't seem to coordinate tightly. When I talked with a comrade from Jinglei, he said he thought China had become a "deformed workers' state" in the mid-1950s (not 1949), because of nationalisations, and until 1983, but he was not anxious to stick to that view when I put it to him that the Chinese state had become more viciously anti-working-class (and anti-peasant) from the mid 1950s and especially in 1958-62. Lotta Comunista said, rightly in our view, that post-1949 China has always been an exploiting-class state, if in different modes at different times.



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- **Israel-Palestine.** Workers' Liberty were on our own in arguing for equal rights for both nations (Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs), i.e. for the right of the Palestinian Arabs to a real independent state and recognition that the Israeli Jews must be stopped from oppressing the Palestinians but not suppressed themselves. Lotta Comunista is as hostile as we are to talk of "destroying the Zionist entity", from their special viewpoint that all national questions are obsolete. Some groups vehemently posed that "destroying" (however unrealistic) as the answer, and sided positively with Iran in the current war with the USA. A video from the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency called for a workers' "third front" in the war. The RSO (Germany), linked to NPA-R, said they recognise the Israeli Jews as "a people with national rights", but insisted that "two states" is not "viable".

A subsidiary strand of difference was on "entrism", i.e. the tactic of small Marxist groups joining broader political movements in order to collaborate honestly but also promote our own ideas, in contest with blander ideas hegemonic in those movements. The RSO (Germany) insisted on blanket opposition to such "entrism", as "diverting from the class struggle", even though in their presentation they said it was a "tactical question".

"Tactical question" means do it sometimes, not other times, no? The RSO seemed chiefly concerned to censure other left groups in Germany who have joined Die Linke. Workers' Power (Britain) and Gruppe Arbeiterinnenmacht (Germany) replied soberly, and we expressed our agreement with their replies.

No consensus was reached at the conference, and there were no votes. It was still valuable. As the telecom ad from 1995 had it, "it's good to talk". The revolutionary left internationally will not get beyond its current fragmentation just by talking, but it certainly cannot get beyond without talking and without first getting out of the pattern of each different group ploughing its own little furrow without even exchange of views.

Efficiency

The fifth conference will be in spring 2027, in Paris again. The NPA-R deserve many thanks for their efficiency in organising the meeting place, accommodation, food, and simultaneous translations into five languages.

The Workers' Liberty delegation were also able to get discussions on the fringes of the conference with Arguments pour La Lutte Sociale (France), on which we will report in later issues.

The first day was supposed to be about practical discussions on youth work. Really, as far as we could make out, it was mostly rehearsals of windy generalities about youth polarising and



mobilising, and the need to take "a programme" to them.

In particular, there was little or no discussion about our failure now to get no big counter-mobilisations of high-school students against the far right, such as there were in relatively recent times. We don't have a ready answer to that problem. Or not yet, anyway.

The main groups represented, apart from Workers' Liberty, were:

- Lotta Comunista (as above), and their French offshoot, L'Internationaliste.

- The International Socialist League (LIS). This is based round some of the spectrum of groups which have emerged from the "Orthodox Trotskyist" current led by Nahuel Moreno, in Argentina and in Latin America, since Moreno's death in 1987. There are also four other "post-Morenist" international networks, but the LIS has recently managed to draw non-Morenist groups into its ambit, such as Workers' Power and Franco Grisolia's PCL (Italy). Izar and Okde-Spartakos, on one hand, and the RCIT of Michael Pröbsting (developed since he split from Workers' Power in 2011), are not quite in that ambit, but somewhere near on the main issues controversial on 15-17 May.

Fragmentation

- **Internationalist Standpoint (ISp).** This is one of the currents coming from the fragmentation of the International Socialist Alternative network formed in 2019-20 when the majority of the groups in the Socialist Party (E&W)'s international network, CWI, split from the SP. ISp is centred round Xekinima in Greece, but was represented in Paris by a comrade from Türkiye. The CWI was also in Paris: Bob Labi made speeches on its behalf, reasonable and nuanced, but not engaging much with the controversies, e.g. on Ukraine.

- And of course the NPA-R and their co-thinkers RSO.

There were a good few groups outside any of those networks; and, sadly for the confused activist, there are many other international networks of the revolutionary left which didn't come. Neither the SWP-UK's international network; nor its dissident offshoots Socialist Alternative (Australia, apparently thriving) or DEA (Greece, apparently in trouble); nor either of the two "Lambertist" networks centred in France; nor any of the four "post-Morenist" networks outside LIS; nor the CRCI network centred on PO in Argentina; nor the international network

of the RCP (former Socialist Appeal); nor the NPA-A/ACR "Mandelite Fourth International" were there. Let's hope for more next time.

Two theoretical issues, in my view, were latent in the conference debates, though time was too limited to explore them.

The first was repeated use of "crisis" as description of the condition of world capitalism now, and more or less perennially, at least for many years past.

Maybe in everyday talk "crisis" has been so worn down into a shorthand for "in trouble" that there is no point arguing much about usage. But even if so, there is a substantive point.

It is highly possible, though far from certain, that world capitalism will enter a new "crisis" (in the old sense, i.e. sharp break, slump, mass unemployment, etc.) within the next year. If we are to use the word "crisis" to describe conditions now and for many years past, then we need another word (or explicit signalling about using "crisis" in a different sense) to describe that prospect.

Second, all the discussions on "imperialism" (in relation to Ukraine, Russia, China, Israel, Iran, etc. etc.) were conducted as if assuming that Lenin's pamphlet on that question of 1916, and other writings of his around then, are, for all time, the full and adequate theoretical framework on the issue.

There was real discussion on adjustments within that framework. Have Russia and China become imperialist? Is the USA still supreme globally, or is it now in decline (and consequently lashing out)? Etc.

Imperialism

Lenin's pamphlet, in my view, was a valuable and vivid summing-up (a "popular outline", as he put it) of many Marxist discussions in the years before 1916 (Kautsky, Hilferding, etc.), shaped and honed for immediate debates in that year. Lenin didn't write as a framework for Marxists to assess the world economy 110 years later, and it unfair to Lenin to read it that way (often taking bits and scraps from his text and reading them as preliminary versions of the "dependency theory" of the 1950s and 60s).

I wrote about this back in 1983, and a tweaked version of that article is available on our website at bit.ly/ma-imp. Further discussion of the need to update ideas on imperialism is in Sean Matgamna's book *The Left in Disarray*. □

Internationalism. Capital as a social relation

By Rhodri Evans

This fortnight we refer to two texts (originally speeches, or draft speeches) by Karl Marx from 1847: *On the Question of Free Trade*, and *Wage Labour and Capital*.

Both date from Marx's period in Brussels, between February 1845, when he was expelled from Paris, and March 1848, when he went to a Germany in the midst of revolution. He moved to London in August 1849, after that revolution receded.

1845-7 was when Marx moved from being a radical-minded philosopher to being a worker-oriented activist and social-economic analyst.

In his chief work, *Capital* volume 1, Marx referred back to just four of his early writings.

Those four texts were *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which we cited as an earlier "reference point"; the Communist Manifesto of 1848, which we will cite as our next instalment; *Wage Labour and Capital* (discussed here), and *The 18th Brumaire* (to be discussed soon).

In an 1859 book which was a first version of the first three chapters of *Capital*, Marx had a different list: *Poverty of Philosophy*, Communist Manifesto, and *Wage Labour and Capital*, but *On the Question of Free Trade* in place of *18th Brumaire*.

On the Question of Free Trade

In 1847 British capitalism dominated world industry. Its Corn Laws, which had kept the price of food high (and the land-owners rich) were repealed, after a big bourgeois-led campaign, in 1846. Free trade would expand to a temporary high point in the 1860s, and then be pushed back for a whole era until it expanded again after 1945.

Discussing free trade, Marx declared himself, in a "revolutionary sense", for it and against tariff barriers. Simultaneously he railed against the "sudden philanthropy of the factory owners", who argued that free trade benefited the working class. The bosses' opposition to a shorter working day revealed their hypocrisy.

Really, free trade was about the British bourgeoisie dominating the world market: "England would form one huge factory town, with the whole of the rest of Europe for its agricultural districts." And worse outside Europe, with the destitution of the handloom weavers in India, undercut by factory imports, and the slave labour in the Americas producing cotton and sugar for Britain.

The free traders failed to understand that "one country can grow rich at the expense of another". "Free trade under the present condition of society" was "the freedom which capital has to crush the worker."

"When you have overthrown the few national barriers which still restrict the



progress of capital, you will merely have given it complete freedom of action. So long as you let the relation of wage labour to capital exist, it does not matter how favourable the conditions under which the exchange of commodities takes place, there will always be a class which will exploit and a class which will be exploited."

He added: "All the destructive phenomena which unlimited competition gives rise to within one country are reproduced in more gigantic proportions on the world market."

But the workers, rather than seeking shelter in national enclaves, would push through the turmoil of expanded capitalism to a better society.

"In general, the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favour of free trade."

And, yes: "To burden foreign corn with protective duties is infamous, it is to speculate on the hunger of the people". "If they [the protectionists] speak consciously and openly to the working class, then they summarise their philanthropy in the following words: It is better to be exploited by one's fellow-countrymen than by foreigners."

In short: the working class is an international class. It can change the world only by basing itself on and in the real developments of capitalism, not by trying to reverse out of them to idealised (or real) pre-capitalist or early-capitalist conditions.

Marx had already, in a December 1843 article, identified the working class as the agent of emancipation. As yet, it was only in what Engels would ruefully, later on, call "German-philosophical" terms. Those terms gave little steer for organising.

"Where, then, is the positive possibility of a German emancipation? Answer: In the formulation of a class with radical chains, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate

which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which... in a word, is the complete loss of humanity and hence can win itself only through the complete re-winning of humanity".

That went no further than Auguste Blanqui, who, required in court in 1832 to state his profession, declared: "Proletarian". The Blanquists would, late in the century, be drawn much closer to Marx's worker-organising outlook, but in the 1830s and 40s their work was organising secret societies with which they planned to seize power and then implement communistic measures over the heads of the actual workers.

Marx moved beyond that in his section on Strikes and Combinations of Workers in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. That drove him to examine more closely the conditions of wage-labour (as distinct from e.g. peasant poverty) and how the working class would develop as a positive human force rather than a philosophical negation ("the complete loss of humanity").

Wage Labour and Capital

Wage Labour and Capital took that further. It was a series of talks in 1847, and was printed by Marx in 1849.

In it he established clearly, indeed more vividly than in later writings, that capital is not just machines, buildings, etc.

"A cotton-spinning machine is a machine for spinning cotton. Only under certain conditions does it become capital. Torn away from these conditions, it is as little capital as gold is itself money, or sugar is the price of sugar..."

"Capital is a social relation of production... As the power of a part of society — it preserves itself and multiplies by exchange with direct, living labour-power".

In 1847, he did not write quite that. The version we have of *Wage Labour and Capital* is one produced in 1891 by Frederick Engels, explicitly amended to introduce the keystone of Marx's theory of wage-labour exploitation, the disparity between labour-power (the capacity we sell to the employer) and labour (what we do under the direction of the capitalist who now owns our capacity). The 1891 preface by Engels gives a good short exposition of that disparity.

In *Wage Labour and Capital* Marx also registered that workers are not just a "loss of humanity". We have positive capacities to organise and improve our lot under capitalism, at least in favourable conditions.

"Rapid growth of productive capital calls forth just as rapid a growth of wealth, of luxury, of social needs and social pleasures. Therefore, although the pleasures of the labourer have increased [by higher wages], the social gratification which they afford has fallen in comparison with the increased pleasures of the capitalist, which are inaccessible to the worker, in comparison with the stage of development of society in general. Our wants and pleasures have their origin in society; we therefore measure them in relation to society".

In other words, in periods of capitalist growth workers can both improve our conditions and improve our collective social ambitions.

Engels' amendment (as he himself recognised, but understated) did not really bring *Wage Labour and Capital* up to the level of Marx's later theory as in *Capital*.

Marx subscribed to a labour theory of value in 1847, as did most bourgeois economists then. But he had not really got beyond David Ricardo's version. He would later develop much more.

I would recommend only skim-reading the whole section under the sub-heading "By what is the price of a commodity determined?" From the point of view of Marx's later theory, its references to "cost of production" are confused and confusing.

Marx's later theory showed that "not all labour which is apparently, or even really, necessary to the production of a commodity, imparts under all circumstances to this commodity a magnitude of value corresponding to the quantity of labour used up" (Engels). And it unpicked the "form of value" (a complex of social relations) as well as just the "magnitude of value".

Note also, with *Wage Labour and Capital*, that it has no conclusion. The text breaks off in mid-stride. Marx would formulate conclusions later in *Wages, Price, and Profit*, and in *Capital*.

Discussion points for sessions on *Wage Labour and Capital* are at bit.ly/wlc-d. The text is online at bit.ly/w-lc and in ebook and audio and pdf format at bit.ly/e-audio.

On the Question of Free Trade is at bit.ly/q-ft. Discussion points at Week One of bit.ly/m-imp. An audiobook containing *Free Trade* and many other texts is at bit.ly/audio-m.

For future reference points, you may find it good to search online secondhand book stores for cheap copies of *Selected Works of Marx* (there are several selections, all useful). □

Why did you miss these?

"The resilience of Ukraine and its workers", said the editorial in *Solidarity* 761 (18 February), "continues apace. It is our duty to fight their battle too: by making the British labour movement stand for a Ukrainian victory, by building what links we can between workers and trade unions in both countries, and by opposing those on the left who campaign against Ukraine."

Well said. But I thought it was in striking contrast to those sentiments that, three months on, six issues of *Solidarity* and the AWL website have not even mentioned:

- The [statement](#) in solidarity with Ukraine and its workers issued on 23 February – for the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion – by the General Secretaries of the TUC and ten UK trade unions representing around four million workers.

- The Ukraine solidarity [rally](#) at Parliament on 4 March, hosted and chaired by John McDonnell MP, which heard from an impressive platform of labour movement speakers – including the new Unison General Secretary, Andrea Egan. (I couldn't make it down to London, but I have been told by one of the organisers

that no one from the AWL attended.)

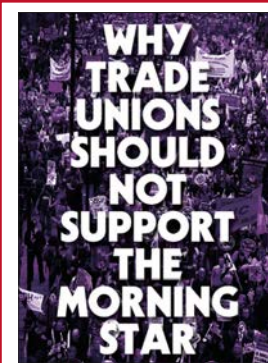
- The Communication Workers Union conference overwhelmingly passing conference policy in solidarity with Ukraine and its workers' movement for the first time.

There are of course other recent examples of UK labour movement Ukraine solidarity activity I could have cited, but those three seem particularly significant and report-worthy.

The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign was centrally involved in all these initiatives.

I also realise that AWL disaffiliated from USC last year, but I thought at the time AWL said it would continue to cooperate practically with the campaign. As a Canadian with Ukrainian ancestry, relatively new to UK leftist movements, I didn't think the reasons provided for disaffiliation sounded logical, especially given the lack of engagement in decision-making when affiliated. But whatever AWL's formal relationship with USC, I can see no reason to not publicise significant labour movement campaigning in support of Ukraine. □

Natalie Kopytko, Leeds
(Ukraine Solidarity Campaign chair, personal capacity)



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Reply: why we focus as we do

Natalie's letter has a similar theme to an exchange I ended with another member of Ukraine Solidarity a few months back: why don't you recognise all the good work we do?

The short answer is: we don't

think the work you do is as important as you do.

And I'm not impressed that Natalie doesn't make a political case, either. So, for example, she writes that the General Secretaries of various unions have issued a statement to condemn Russia's invasion, and seems to expect us to note this as an important step in solidarity simply on the basis that some general secretaries have signed a letter. But what's it led to?

We're less impressed with General Secretaries than you are. A lot less.

These people probably sign ten boilerplate letters in support of worthy causes every week. It costs them nothing, but boosts their profile.

Political usefulness

Our measure of political usefulness is not signatures or affiliations but: to what extent is the culture and practice of workers' solidarity, organisation, self-confidence, socialist consciousness and interna-

tionism of the labour movement been transformed by an action? We aim to transform the labour movement.

The USC is a soft-left NGO which does not aim to transform the labour movement. It mainly aims to get money and resources from it. We have political disagreements with USC (sanctions, Levchenko, your charter, the orientation of the organisation) previously detailed by me, but not replied to.

On top of that, and as Natalie

knows very well, a couple of people who run the USC have been hostile to AWL in a destructive and tiresome way.

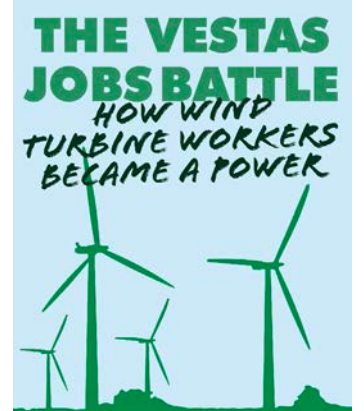
We yawned rather than burst into tears. No hard feelings, but we're busy and we'll use our resources in exactly the way we see fit and as determined by us.

We attend events we think are useful. I and others were at the USC Piccadilly Circus protest you organised in February. We have people in Kyiv this week [beginning 25 May] talking to

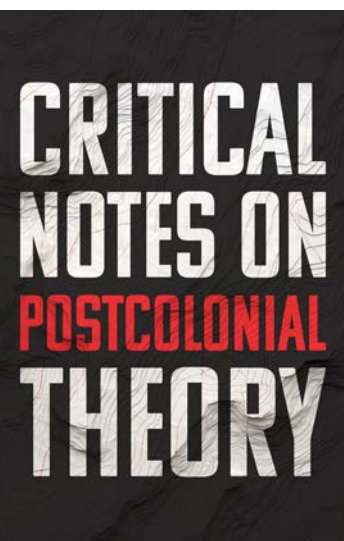
the unions and left. We will participate in the up-coming European union solidarity convoy to Ukraine. We're active, but in our own way.

This reply to Natalie is not an invitation or excuse to reopen the pointless previous discussion. □

Mark Osborn, London



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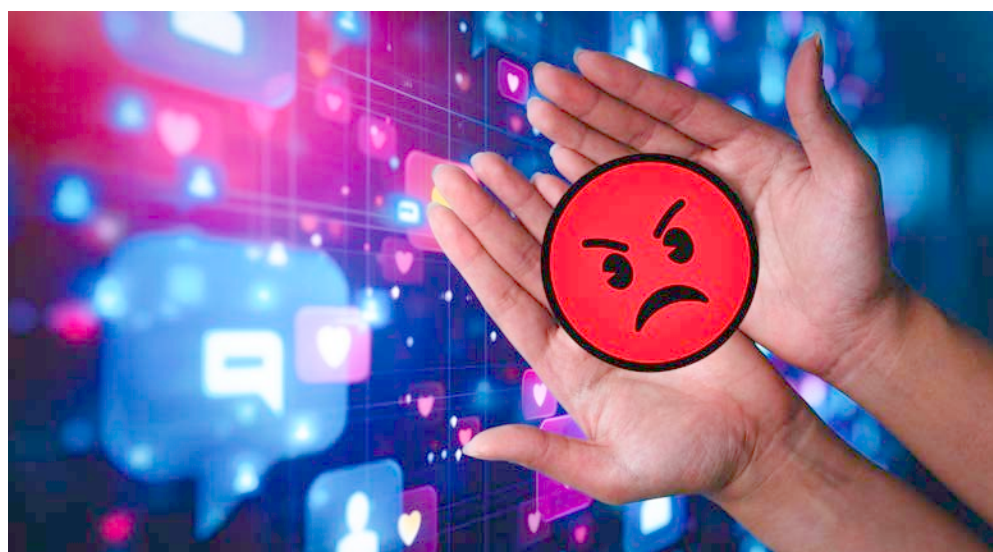
To curb social media, boost real life

Zack Muddle (*Solidarity* 767) is right that public ownership and workers' control offers greater ability to stem the harms of social media, centring social wellbeing rather than profit. The drive for profit is central to the addictive, isolating nature of social media. High use drives profit for the platform and harm for the user.

It is clear that the trend in social media is from your online life complementing your real life towards it replacing it. Facebook initially had "friends" based around a real-life university campus life. Now Instagram has followers and TikTok has viewers and creators.

MySpace asked you to rank your real-world top friends, causing playground negotiations and recriminations. Facebook was created with the creepy but real-life use of finding and rating women in students' Harvard University classes. When I was in my first year of uni the most popular Facebook page for Newcastle University was "Let's have sex in the library", a page that gave out a weekly instruction to indicate you wanted to have sex in the library e.g. wear one of your trouser legs up, wear a paper crown, etc.

Now, more and more, social media situates your real-life friends amidst a car-



ousel of celebrities and influencers.

In explaining the spike in mental health issues through the 2010s and 2020s Matt Cooper says that austerity alone is unlikely to be the complete explanation. It is hard to measure the mental health of a society. Diagnosis is one of the few sources of data, but is not the whole story. Have diagnoses increased because we are now more scientifically literate and have greater access to information? Are differences more medicalised with things considered mental health problems that were not before?

Certainly, it feels to those who have lived through the 2010s and 2020s that people are getting more anxious and lonelier. It would be reductive to argue that youth clubs closed so young people got depressed and lonely, especially given that a minority of young people ever used state youth provision. The loss of formal youth provision has been accompanied (and probably dwarfed by) the loss of informal youth spaces.

I did not go to a youth centre for the entire of my secondary school years. I did go to Wandsworth Common every

Friday along with hundreds of other south London teens looking to drink alcohol, smoke and get off with each other. We can't argue that this was a particularly healthy pursuit, like going to a youth club, but it did constitute face to face social interaction. Park drinking, parties, sleepovers, playing on the street, playing across housing estates, hanging round shopping centres have all become less common.

This is not just the pull of phones sucking children into the online world; it is also the overprotective and overpoliced offline world. Children are under-protected from the harms of social media, but this goes hand in hand with them being given too little freedom to roam in the real world because of policing of public space and parental anxiety about safety.

Adults obviously do have a lot more freedom for real life social experience, though they too have lost free social spaces with the loss of social infrastructure and libraries and other privatisation of the public realm. Social media that centres social wellbeing rather than profit must go hand in hand with the rebuilding of IRL social life. □

Ruth Cashman, London

Only replacing profit will do it

A key danger for small Marxist organisations, beleaguered by many decades of working class defeat, is that we can slip into a mode of abstract thinking and ready made formulae and we neglect to orient to our changing reality. Workers Liberty has long rejected "one solution, revolution" as empty posturing on most social questions. Luke Hardy (*Solidarity* 767) uncritically applies the same formula to the climate and ecological emergency. But we should start with reality and tell the truth: short of another catastrophe like nuclear war, global temperatures will continue to rise so long as the capitalist class remains in power.

Luke thinks that social control of the means of production is unnecessary to halt the escalation of environmental catastrophe. He argues that raising this demand will "breed paralysing fear". Instead he suggests that "tomorrow the EU...UK, Canada, Australia, and the ruling oligarchy of China" (not USA!?) could choose "a crash course of decarbonisation". On the basis of this slim hope, Luke argues we should avoid the question of

property relations.

The implication of his argument is that capitalist governments have just made some bad choices and with a bit of pressure from below they could make better choices.

Demands

Luke wants us to organise around demands on government to "take action". But does not specify what action we should demand. How would government organise a "crash course of decarbonisation" without taking social control of capitalist property? The main barrier to such action is private ownership and control.

Luke claims to be standing in the tradition of Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci but all the great transitional programmes of our movement from the Communist Manifesto onwards call for social control of the means of production. As Marx writes in the Manifesto: "the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political movement order of things. In all these movements they bring to the front, as the leading ques-



tion in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time." If we do not argue for common ownership and social control, no one else will.

Luke's letter falls into the trap Lenin warns against in the April Theses. Instead of exposing capitalist governments for their inability to resolve the crisis, he raises the "demand" that capitalist governments cease to be capitalist.

There is no capitalist way out of escalating climate change because capital accumulation is a physical process of rising material throughput and energy demand; because the interna-

tional order of competing capitalist states cannot coordinate the necessary action; because the capitalist class will not voluntarily abandon its assets; because the capitalist class will always try to privatise the gains and socialise the losses.

The idea that Luke propagates, that capitalist governments could choose to stop climate change, is a capitalist idea. It is the dominant idea of bourgeois Earth scientists like Johan Rockstrom and prominent environmentalists like David Attenborough. It is an idea that breeds passivity.

There are critical adaptations that could be won short of so-

cial revolution. For example, unbearable workplace heat impacts billions of workers each summer. Struggle to win adaptations for reasonable workplace temperatures could lead to very large mobilisations. We should be alive to the possibility of such struggles and do what we can to foment them. But global temperatures will continue to rise until a social force emerges to replace the rule of profit with ecologically conscious economic planning. Moreover, to maximise the resources available for largescale adaptation (up to and including various forms of geoengineering) will require social control of the means of production and a level of international cooperation that only the international workers' movement can provide.

We should not sow illusions that capitalist governments will suddenly cease to be capitalist. Our bosses are not coming to save us. We must rely on our own resources and our own power. □

Stuart Jordan, London

Musicians against the far right

By Peter Ridge

The far-right creates a serious problem for musicians as well as, of course, for almost everyone else. Throughout history, art has been used to inspire, to control or to resist. Fascist governments have aggressively curbed the creative freedom of musicians by way of censorship and threats. Musicians have been punished for speaking out. Arts funding is cut, music education is cut, art is destroyed. Musicians are more likely to be members of the LGBTQ+ and neuro-divergent communities, both of which are heavily targeted by the far-right. We have members in every oppressed group in society. Therefore, we have a duty as musicians to stand in the way of the far-right, inspiring people through our art, using our platform to spread positivity and being actively engaged in politics.

Far-right politics seeks to suppress workers and remove both our individual and collective rights. We can see this

in Nigel Farage's plans to curb unions, cut ED&I initiatives, and lower the minimum wage. This will leave us significantly worse off, with no organisation to defend us. We must proudly champion the power of trade unions and affirm the strength of the workers: without us, the world would not function. Simultaneously, we must build our unions to be the best versions of themselves — anti-capitalist, politically coherent and utterly democratic. We need a strong drive in grassroots engagement, where members feel confident that their involvement will be meaningful.

Musicians' Union

Musicians' Union (MU) members need to be part of an active resistance to the far-right. It is not effective for the TUC to outsource campaigning and organising. We need a large-scale, coordinated, working-class resistance. The Together Alliance demonstration on 28 March was a good step. 16 May confirms that

more must be done to organise large and effective counter-mobilisation to Tommy Robinson. We need our own stewards, trained by trade unions to be more effective and tactical. We need the TUC to call its own demonstrations. We need our own grassroots initiatives, created by rank-and-file union members. The newly formed Trade Unions Fighting the Far Right (TUFF) network shows us a practical model for this, and we should get involved in it as a union.

Labour Party

The MU must also use its position within the Labour Party to fight for a clear, socialist future where workers have respect and agency. We cannot allow Keir Starmer and others to move our party towards the right, making jabs at Reform UK whilst curbing the right to protest, attacking trans rights and increasing deportations. There are some who see this morally bankrupt Labour party as irredeemable and they are right to be angry.

But we must not lose sight of our position. We must step up our political activity and push for a Labour Party that truly represents the interests of the working class. This is no small task — it requires a concerted effort from all on the left to present a clear and positive vision for the future. We need a Labour Party that we are proud to campaign for.

The MU should continue to push for music education, streaming rights, AI music regulations etc., and also for the liberties of all workers: freedom of movement, freedom from exploitation, freedom of expression etc. We must use our influence within the TUC and the Labour party to push for a socialist future, where the workers are in control, where musicians run the music industry, not companies, managers, or labels. Where everyone can live in peace and security. That is what it takes to beat the far-right. □

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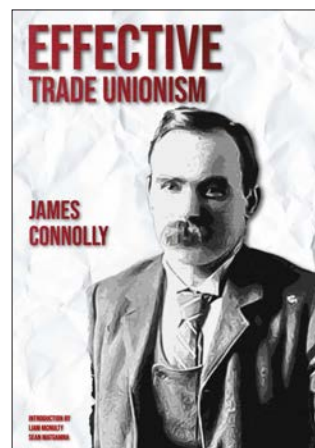
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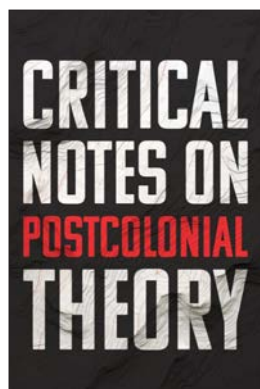
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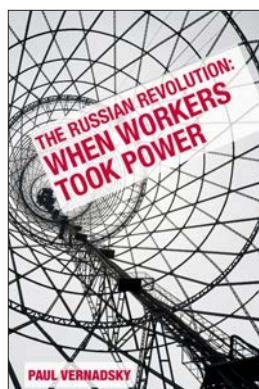
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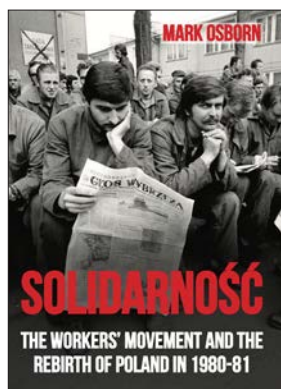
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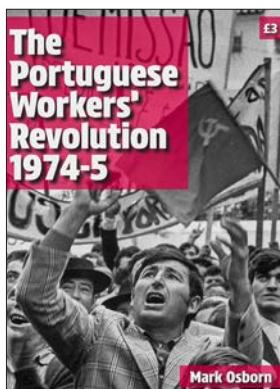
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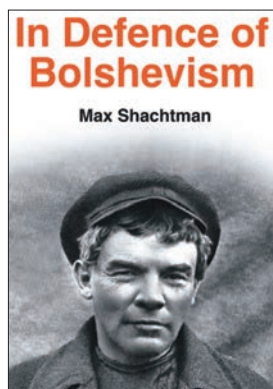
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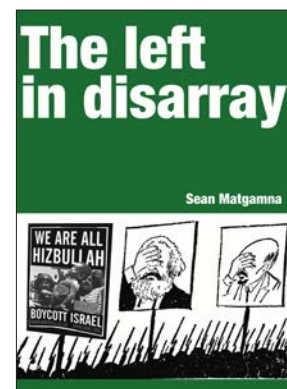
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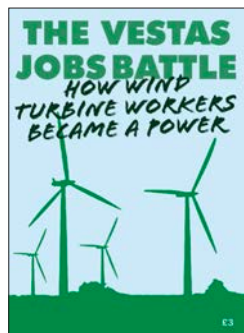
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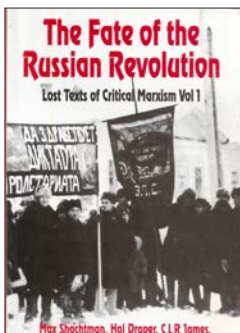
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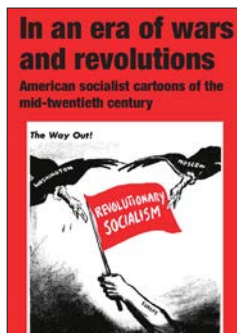
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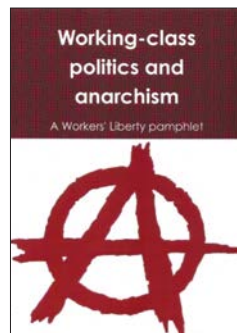
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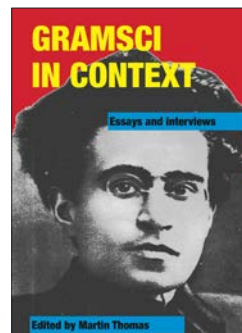
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Chernobyl: the botched emergency response

By Neil Roberts

Part one of this article was in *Solidarity* 767

The accident at Chernobyl nuclear power station on 26 April 1986 was generated by extreme bureaucratic mismanagement and lack of accountability at design and operational level. The response after the accident was shaped the same way.

The first radiation readings from Chernobyl after the accident reported to Moscow were the figure at which low-level dosimeters maxed out: 3.6 roentgens per hour.

Iodine pills were not immediately issued. It would take a week before they were. Then it was only to around 25% of the population in the areas affected by radiation.

The city of Pripyat, specially constructed to serve the power station, had a hospital, but it was completely unprepared and quickly overwhelmed. The most severe cases began to be airlifted by military helicopter to Moscow.

Local authorities were unwilling to take initiative. As more senior officials arrived the magnitude of the disaster began to be grasped by the leadership. The first evacuation of the city of Pripyat finally began on 27 April. The whole city would eventually be abandoned.

Nuclear disasters

Disasters were not new to the USSR's nuclear power industry. They included:

- A partial meltdown of Reactor 1 at the Leningrad nuclear power plant in 1975. The subsequent investigation made safety recommendations about the AZ-5 emergency button increasing reactivity. They were never widely circulated. The Chernobyl operatives were unaware of them.
- A similar incident at Chernobyl Reactor 1 in 1982, which had gone unnoticed for hours.
- Incidents at Chernobyl 3 and 4 in 1984 which were only declassified in 2021. These showed the KGB already regarded Chernobyl as a dangerous liability.
- An explosion in 1985 during the refuelling of submarine K-431 in Vladivostok which killed 10 people.

Even including Chernobyl, these civilian-nuclear-power accidents were dwarfed by devastation from the USSR nuclear weapons programme. There were "closed cities" across the Soviet Union which were not shown on maps. In areas in Kazakhstan (now independent) close to testing grounds, populations have only now begun to be seriously studied for the long term effects.

Even within the senior bureaucracy of the nuclear in-

dustry, there had been a minority opinion that it was unwise to roll out nuclear power beyond sparsely-populated parts of the USSR and into more densely populated Eastern Europe.

The management of the industry was characterised by reckless technical ambition, disregard for safety, and extreme secrecy.

With Chernobyl, unlike with previous accidents, the magnitude of the disaster made it impossible to hush up. Staff at Forsmark Nuclear Power Plant in Sweden detected elevated levels of radiation on 28 April. Having ruled out a breach in their own facility, they deduced that there must have been a serious nuclear incident in Eastern Europe. The Soviet government was forced to publicly acknowledge the disaster to the world.

Even then, the scale of the disaster was played down. This official optimism can be seen in the fact that the May Day demonstration in Kyiv went ahead, albeit curtailed to two hours.

It would take 20 days to put the initial fire out. A continuous rotation of helicopter sorties dropped some 5,000 tonnes of sand, Boron, clay and lead onto the burning reactor. This, however, was only the first step in mitigation.

Passive Safety is the concept in modern design, particularly of nuclear reactors, that systems, if disrupted, should tend towards a safer state as a result of natural processes. Left alone, they should naturally become more stable.

Chernobyl's design meant that it did not benefit from that principle. It was only through massive active intervention that a far wider disaster was averted.

A combination of the uranium fuel and the materials present in the reactor had melted to form a highly dense and radioactive lava-like substance. It is the formation of that "corium" that defines a nuclear meltdown.

At Chernobyl, that corium, a mixture of uranium dioxide, zirconium, steel, and melted concrete, began to sink into and destroy the concrete pad on which the plant had been built. Engineers were concerned that this posed the risk of another, more powerful steam explosion, generated by the superheating of water in the basement, flooded by the firefighting effort and the "bubbler pools" — large



Chernobyl "liquidators"

water tanks below the reactor.

That would further damage Reactor 4 and possibly the other three, and a far greater radioactive fallout could be released.

Emergency workers

Three workers, Oleksiy Ananenko, Valeri Beshpalov, and Boris Baranov volunteered to enter the basement in diving gear and manually open the sluice gates to release this water. They did so in the knowledge of the massive radiation they would be exposed to. Amazingly, all three survived for many years after. Ananenko seems even to have survived a recent Russian drone attack on the block of flats in Kyiv where he now lives.

Draining the water did not totally avert the risk of a "China Syndrome" ultra-meltdown. Engineers hastily put together a plan to tunnel under the plant and to procure virtually all the liquid nitrogen available in the Soviet Union to install a heat exchange that would refrigerate the plant from beneath.

Tunnelling workers from the Kyiv metro and then coal miners were deployed to excavate the necessary space for this massive equipment. In doing so workers were unable to use heavy machinery to reduce the risk of collapse and were exposed to huge radiation.

In the end the worst case scenario possible within the modelled predictions did not occur. The pad largely held and the heat exchange was never put into operation.

In order to construct a containment over the top of the plant, it was essential to clear the radioactive rubble from the roof. Mine-clearing remote-controlled robots, adapted from those used to clear mines in the war in Afghanistan, from the space program, and some brought in from West Germany, were useful up to a point. But eventually, all had their electronics scrambled by radiation. The efficacy of those sent from West Germany was not helped by the fact that the design brief greatly understated the radiation levels they were to endure. In the end the solution found

was the euphemistically named "bio robots", human conscripts in improvised protective gear using hand tools sent up for extremely short stints manually throwing rubble back into the reactor building. These missions, some lasting only a couple of minutes, were often enough to exceed the guidelines for lifetime radiation exposure.

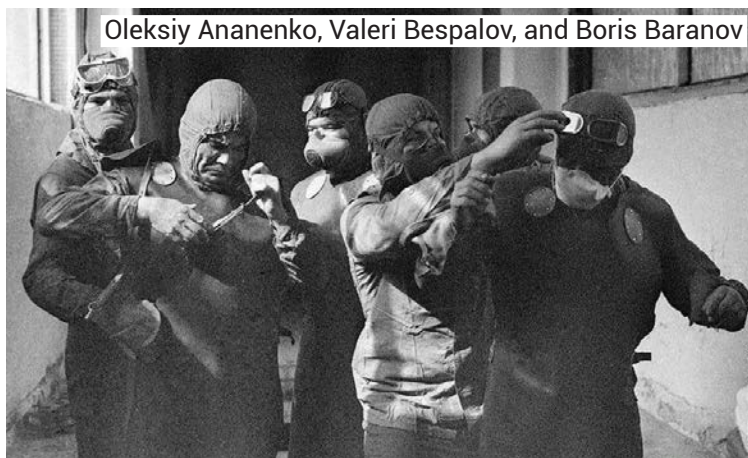
Eventually it was possible to begin the construction of the first "sarcophagus", a reinforced concrete building that had to be built incrementally to enable the completed sections to provide some radiation shielding to workers who could then progress in erecting further.

That provided containment to the site that lasted until its replacement in 2016 by the "Chernobyl New Safe Confinement", a stainless steel arch that was designed to last 100 years.

"Liquidators"

The sarcophagus and the wider clean-up would eventually require the drafting of between 600,000 and 800,000 "liquidators", workers from across the Soviet Union. Safety precautions, mostly in the form of time limits on radiation exposure, were routinely violated. Much of the debate around the number of casualties from the disaster relates to how the impact on those workers can be measured. A common joke became that this generation faced the choice between "years in Afghanistan or minutes in Chernobyl". The evacuation came in three successive waves of a 10km radius circle, a 30km circle, and then a wider, more irregular area, home to some 350,000 people, which was condemned as indefinitely uninhabitable.

As an "atomgrad", a purpose-built nuclear town, Pripyat had enjoyed a standard of living higher than most USSR cities with better housing and better availability of consumer goods. Residents now found themselves refugees within Ukraine. A replacement city for Pripyat, Slavutych, was built, and people moved there from 1988. It too has had better facilities than other Ukrainian cities, but has suffered an outflow of people seeking jobs elsewhere, and then, since 2022, fleeing Russian invaders. □



Oleksiy Ananenko, Valeri Beshpalov, and Boris Baranov

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! □

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Diary of a Tubeworker

How can so many be racists?

By P Ennar

Working on the day of Tommy Robinson's Unite the Kingdom rally (16 May) is naturally going to bring some politics to the fore among co-workers. It's not hard to kick up conversation when every trainload brings a few dozen boisterous customers draped in union jacks and St George flags, many of them unpleasant to deal with from a day of drinking. Some coworkers know that I was at a counter-protest in Trafalgar Square earlier in the day, and are curious to hear how it went.

With a few exceptions, it's a widely held view that the march is racist, and should be opposed. The question of actually opposing it themselves doesn't occur to most – everyday life provides enough distraction to leave that to someone else.

H asks for my opinion on the UTK attendees a few days later. "So what, are they just all racists then?" He finds the scale of it somewhat hard to wrap his



head around. The short answer is "yes", but, stood together for three hours on the Tube station, you have time for a longer answer too. Racism is the easy answer to people's lives getting harder. For lack of a better option, they listen to figureheads like Farage, whose racist bilge is wrong, but easy to swallow.

Explaining these origins doesn't make the racist march any nicer to contemplate. But knowing the root cause is the first step to fighting back, and workplaces across the country will need to see far more conversations like this if we want the workers' movement to beat the racists. □

Kino Eye

Political careerists on film

By John Cunningham

Given the Labour Party's political shitscape, currently on full view, it seems appropriate to look at a couple of films which reflect this, although both are from an earlier period and concern different aspects of political wheeling and dealing.

Fame is the Spur (1947), directed by Roy Boulting, is based on Howard Spring's novel of the same name and focuses on the rise of Labour Party member Hamer Radshaw (Michael Redgrave), a working class Mancunian who rises through the ranks, is elected as an MP and finally takes a seat in the Cabinet. Unsurprisingly, while climbing this greasy pole he loses most, if not all, of his socialist convictions.

The same political territory is revisited, for example, in the TV dramas *Stand up Nigel Barton* and *Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton* (both in 1965, scripts by Dennis Potter, see *Solidarity* 565). It was widely seen as an allegory of the career of Ramsay MacDonald.

Spin doctors

From a different perspective, *The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer* (1970) is one of the earliest films to depict the role of what later became known as spin doctors. Played by the brilliant Peter Cook, Rimmer is a precursor of such political

manipulators as Morgan McSweeney or Dominic Cummings, but despite its contemporary relevance the film is rarely seen nowadays. For Rimmer, who takes over an ailing public relations company, politics is a form of advertising and his speciality, at which he excels, is gauging and manipulating public opinion. He doesn't care who he works for and adroitly uses his deceit and cunning for self-promotion and building his own empire. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

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



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Dementia care workers can win

By Ruth Cashman

The first strike day for adult social care workers at the Central Hill Dementia Day Centre, on Thursday 14 May, was rock solid, with not a single person crossing the picket line. Unison expects the same for the week of strike action starting 28 May.

The strike will come the day after the Lambeth Council Leader is to be elected at Full Council AGM. The Council went to No Overall Control on 7 May, with the Greens holding most seats.

At the time of writing it is unclear whether there will be a motion to move from the current Executive Leader and cabinet system to committees. There are broadly three types of council structure: 1. Executive Leader and cabinet;

2. Executive Mayor and cabinet (which cannot be brought in for this term); 3. Committee system where the constitutional leader has no power other than those of the Committees they sit on.

The most common form, and the one which currently governs Lambeth Cabinet, is a cabinet chosen by a leader who is elected by full council for a term determined by the council itself or on a four yearly basis. That will usually be the leader of the largest party on the council.

This system allows direct decision making by the Leader and favours a



majority party. Where there is no majority, sometimes councils are considering a committee system, the better to negotiate compromises. Under the committee system decisions are made by a series of committees covering the council's different functions and made up of councillors from different political parties reflecting the political balance of the council.

A motion to Lambeth Greens on 20 May called on the Green Party to save the Dementia Centre. If Greens chief Martin Abrams is elected executive Leader at the 27 May Full Council, then the pressure will be on him to act immediately on this policy. □

Tube strikes postponed

From Tubeworker

Strikes by London Underground (LUL) drivers in the RMT union due to take place 19-20 and 21-22 May were called off, with rearranged dates named for 2 and 4 June.

The dispute is about LUL bosses' plans for longer working days, negotiated with a driver-only union, Aslef, as allowing a standard four-day work week. The strikes were called off because the union said that a new letter from LUL bosses showed more scope for negotiation. Train reps are meeting on Wednesday 27 May to discuss whether these negotiations have gone anywhere.

Tubeworker argues that cancelling and rearranging strikes isn't "cost-neutral" (one of LUL's favourite phrases). It is demobilising and often demoralising, especially when we haven't won any material concessions.

Advocates of suspension point to the firmer commitments in LUL's latest letter about their scheme being voluntary. That's progress of a sort, but did we get into this fight merely to haggle over the method of implementation? Getting the employer to allow us to volunteer to smash up our terms and conditions doesn't feel like a win.

We need to keep fighting for the full withdrawal of the company's plan, or, at the least, substantial changes to it. The requires escalating our action, not cancelling and rearranging strikes.

We now have two 24-hour strikes scheduled, with nothing further planned after that. Having shown us last month that they're prepared to ride out two 24-hour strikes, is it likely LUL will budge after two more? The only way to win is to make it clear to the employer that, if they don't make concessions, strikes will increase. □

PCS conference sets a new course

By Charlie George

The civil service union PCS held its annual conference on 18-21 May in Brighton. First, representatives in each of the "employer" groups (e.g. Home Office or Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)) met to discuss the issues which matter in their workplaces, then delegates from across the Civil Service came together to set their strategy and priorities for the year ahead.

Typically, Group conferences take place with relatively little controversy. But this year, however, delegates in DWP narrowly voted to demand that the Government remove benefit rights from claimants in receipt of or seeking benefits while using OnlyFans and similar platforms as a form of self-employment.

This moralistic and financial attack on women was brought by the ironically-named right wing "Left Unity" (LU) faction organised around General Secretary Fran Heathcote and outgoing National President Martin Cavanagh.

Active

Fortunately, the national conference represented a turning away from their faction, following the PCS national elections which returned a PCS Independent Left (IL) President and a majority for "Coalition for Change" in the union's National Executive. Workers' Liberty members are active in the IL, a group organising for a rank-and-file controlled fighting union, which is part of the Coalition for Change.

IL were essential in drafting the core demands of the overwhelmingly agreed national campaign motion, breaking from recent years of inactivity. This motion called for:

- A fully consolidated 10% pay increase, pay restoration to 2008 levels, a return to pay progression, an £18 per hour minimum wage within the Civil Service.
- Upwards harmonisation on sick pay and annual leave, a four-day week, and a job security agreement.
- The insourcing of all outsourced

work.

• "Our Work, Our Way" campaign material, including opposition to the civil service bosses' office attendance mandates, to show members what maximum control over their working lives could look like and why we should fight hard for it.

Workers' Liberty members will be working to coordinate and join up their branches, regional committees, and employer groups with these demands.

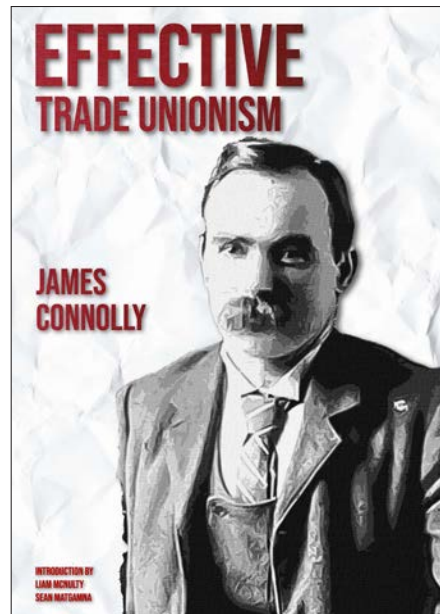
Insourcing

A range of motions on terms and conditions were passed including in support of insourcing contracted out or privatised services (a Labour Party election commitment that has still to be acted upon) and improving the services of Capita, the new and failure ridden Civil Service pension provider. But in the light of LU's disgraceful hostility to trans rights and sex workers, we highlight decisions in support of trans liberation and affiliation to Decrim Now (a pro-sex worker group).

There will no doubt be a fight in the year ahead for the very soul of PCS. The new, left-wing majority National Executive Committee will face constant attacks from the well entrenched LU affiliated bureaucracy as we attempt to deliver power back in the hands of rank-and-file members. LU is deeply hostile to the democracy of PCS and the LU General Secretary lost no time in making propaganda for the Government's 2026-27 civil service pay remit despite it coming nowhere near the demands of PCS, the decisions of conference, and the entirely predictable views of the incoming NEC majority.

Mandate

However, the mandate handed to them by the members in their election and the instructions given them by this years' conference will enable IL and other Coalition for Change NEC members to begin to deliver a much needed programme to refund PCS, give it back to its members, and take the fight to the employer. □



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Make unions go beyond “concern”

By Simon Nelson

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)’s new Code of Practice (CoP) is now open for scrutiny by Parliament

Unite, GMB, Unison and the TUC have all issued statements expressing concern with the CoP. Now is the time for unions to go beyond statements of concern and be a part of leading the fight against the authoritarian right and their demonisation of trans people. The CoP largely enshrines the worst aspects of the now-withdrawn guidance issued in May 2025 following the April 2025 Supreme Court decision. □

• More: page 6



One-euro meals for all students

From the NPA-R paper *Révolutionnaires*

Since Monday 4 May, all students in France with an Izly account [available on request from the government] have been able to eat at university canteens for one euro. This measure will enable many students to eat better at a time of widespread price rises.

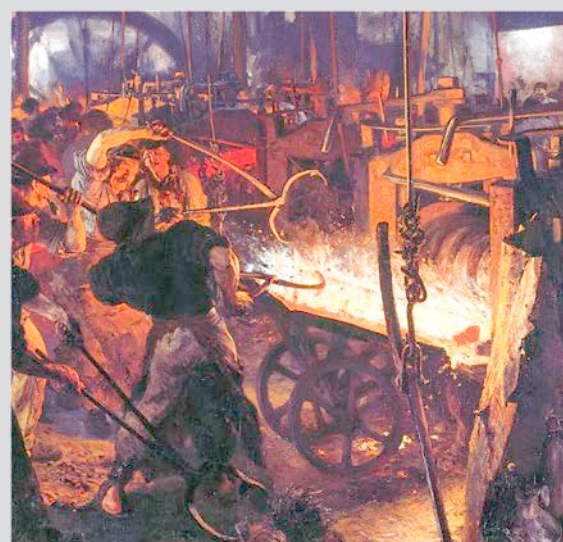
The university canteens of Crous [public organisations providing student bursaries, university halls of residence, etc.] already [since Covid lockdown time] offered meals for one euro, but since 2021, this measure has been restricted to students receiving grants and those able to provide evidence of financial hardship.

Behind the veneer of the “great victory for the Socialists” (according to [Socialist Party leader] Olivier Faure), this is a way of making us swallow the bitter pill of Macron’s anti-social and militarist budget. The higher education budget is shrinking in real terms [almost all French universities are public, and directly publicly-funded, with low fees, unlike British universities, which are legally “charities”] and [the government] is cutting housing benefit (APL) and increasing tuition fees for international students.

Crous staff explain that university canteens cannot accommodate more people and that their working conditions, already appalling, are set to worsen. The unions already estimate that there is currently a shortfall of 800 full-time positions.

University canteens have already reduced the portions on plates and trays since inflation picked up again, and this is unlikely to improve. □

Capital Residential



PENGUIN CLASSICS

KARL MARX

CAPITAL
VOLUME I

Workers’ Liberty will be hosting a residential study course on Marx’s *Capital*. The course is about reading the whole of Marx’s book and discussing it, equipping activists with an understanding of capitalism and Marxism.

19-22 June, Heighington Village DL5 6RG
Bookings and details: bit.ly/cap-j26 □

Prepare for Heat Strike!

By Gerry Bates

In 2025, the Unite union policy conference (7-11 July) heard of bus cab temperatures over 40°C, and at least three drivers who were hospitalised from heat exhaustion.

Strengthening trade union organisation so workers are empowered to exercise our rights to refuse unsafe work is our main line of defence and the most effective way to force employers to act. Working in excessive heat, poses a serious and imminent danger to health and workers can refuse such work without detriment under section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

The Eco-Socialism Conference on 30 May at



extreme heat, and there is no maximum working temperature in the UK.

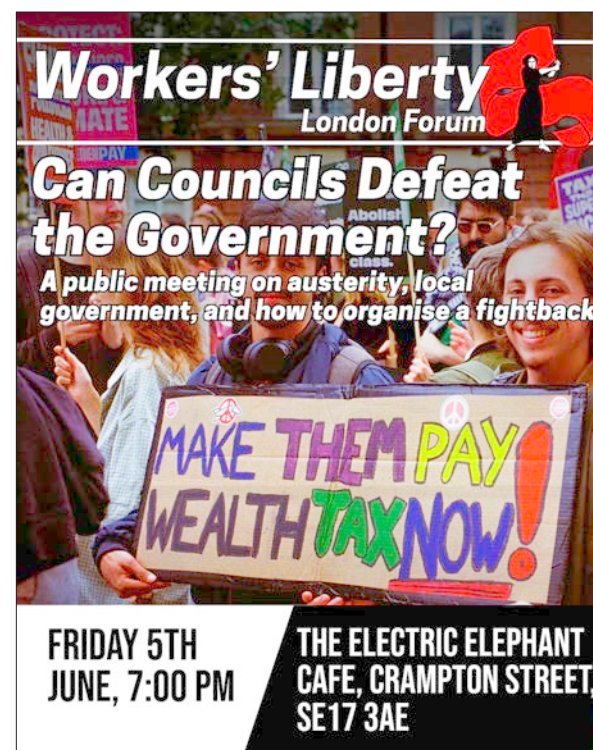
“Reasonable”

Even in the UK, employers have a legal duty to provide a “reasonable” temperature.

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

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

As a stop-gap, many employers may offer air conditioning. It would be foolish to reject the offer on environmental grounds, though with better building design air conditioning should not be needed in the UK and similar latitudes except in specific workplaces (kitchens and bakeries, road and rail passenger transport etc.) □



For a workers' government

SOLIDARITY

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IRAN WAR