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SOLIDARITY & WORKERS' LIBERTY



REFORM ON BACK FOOT BUT NOT BEATEN



Workers' united front against far right

Reform is on the back foot but not beaten

Since September 2025 polling for Reform has been falling gradually, from around 30% to around 25% now ([Poll-Check](#), based on an average of several polls).

The drop is significant but not so dramatic that we can be sure Reform is on a continuous downward trajectory. Other data indicate, unfortunately, a relatively healthy outlook for the far right party.

For example, 81% of people who support Reform today also voted for them at the last general election. In other words, the big majority of Reform voters are loyal, in spite of Farage's tantrum over his right to be a millionaire MP. Polling for Reform is also higher than 25% in the north of England. It stands at 30% in the north-east. Reform is building a core vote in some parts of the UK.

The data also show the limitations of Reform's appeal — it's high only in specific regions and among a certain demographic, the over-50s. Could Labour could win, or win back, some Reform voters?

Since Burnham began his rise to the leadership, Labour's showing in the polls has risen from around 18% to 26%. Labour has gained at the expense of Reform, as have the Tories, but also from the Greens and the Lib Dems, who have dropped in the polls. This is significant, but could be short-lived.

Burnham [has yet to show](#) his promised dramatic shift away from the priorities of the Starmer government. His promises, the £2 bus fare cap, or scrapping of VAT on electricity bills, are details compared to the needed: a programme of rebuilding public services, especially the NHS. Such a programme could win over disillusioned older working-class voters of all age groups and rebuild core support for Labour.

Moreover, the prospects for Burnham's "business-friendly socialism" — relying on growth to bring increased government income and spending, and only greater state involvement in the running of privatised services rather than reversing privatisation — do not look good. Perpetual and expanding wars in

the Middle East are helping to push the global economy towards a crisis. That will bring rising energy bills and inflation, a slowing down of economic growth, rising costs for government borrowing, and maybe much worse. All will increase political pressure on Burnham to keep to strict "fiscal rules", to be timid on increased taxes on the rich, and not to bring the changes working-class people want to see.

While Burnham and Labour dither on adopting a bolder path, the far right are upping the ante. Since the Clacton by-election Reform has announced welfare policies which would throw millions into deep hardship:

- making non-UK citizens ineligible for almost all benefits (this affects around 1.3 million people on Universal Credit, half of whom are not in employment);
- switching to a lower measure of inflation for uprating benefits each year, reducing the value of benefits forever.
- making the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) a means tested benefit, much tougher to qualify for, and less of a cash payment, more of a payment in kind.

Reform effectively want to introduce something like New Labour's draconian and unjust Work Capability Assessment which caused huge stress and even suicides among disabled and ill people.

These policies are for the better-off who will never need these benefits and the dyed-in-the-wool reactionary base of Reform, a base Farage does not want to lose to the further-right Restore Britain.

Benefits

Labour should not pander to Reform's reactionary stance. That will only help to further normalise hostility to benefit claimants. Burnham should remember the justness of last summer's opposition to disability benefit cuts. Unfortunately he is already talking about making it harder to claim benefits.

The far right's technique of proposing outrageously reactionary policies has successfully ensured mainstream bourgeois acceptance of their narratives. For example, all kinds of distorted information about migration is now casually circulated by almost every politician and media outlet as "received wisdom". In a recent Ipsos poll 67% believed the level of asylum-seeking to be excessive.

Yet asylum seekers are a tiny percentage of inward migration to the UK, the

numbers are decreasing, and the UK is one of the least generous hosts of refugees in Europe.

False received wisdom bolsters the far right racist populist campaigns for mass deportations by Reform and Restore Britain, the hate speech about "invaders" from Tommy Robinson and would-be Tommy Robinsons, and the pogroms against migrants on the streets of Belfast.

The left's responsibility

It is the urgent responsibility of the left to combat these divisive lies — about claimants, migrants, and other hate figures of the far right. We must hold "respectable politicians" who help create these narratives to account. We champion instead the example of the many people in Belfast who stepped in to offer food and shelter to migrants.

There are many difficult practical steps to take. The left needs to mobilise in the trade unions to fight for the policies thousands of union members have voted for — to tax the rich and rebuild public services. Leaders of Labour's trade union affiliates need to stop passively complaining about Labour leaders and start to fight them on clear goals — for a wealth tax, against benefit cuts, for restored public services. Unions should defend migrants by propagating the facts and by organising migrant workers into unions.

We need labour movement-community anti-far right campaigns everywhere which can do these things in local workplaces and on the streets. We need to turn working-class people away from the far right and show that it is possible to fight for our own class interests. □

* All figures in this article are taken from [PollCheck](#) unless otherwise stated.



Left unites against far-right attack on socialist stall

By Kayden Jones

A Socialist Alternative campaign stall in Sheffield was attacked by a far right "auditor" on Saturday 15 August. Socialist Alternative report "An older man using a walking stick was pushed to the ground after signing a petition... The attacker later struck the face of one of the Socialist Alternative members". A man of the same description has harassed campaign stalls and protests before, showing that this was not an isolated incident.

On Saturday 22 August, activists from AWL, CPB, RS21, SCARF and other anti-racist campaigners joined Socialist Alternative in Sheffield in a display of unity against far-right intimidation. An injury to one is an injury to all! □



Solidarity 774

We are on our summer schedule. #774 will be 23 Sep; #775 7 Oct. □

Trump lashes out: oppose sanctions on Iran

By Dan Katz

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on 17 June by the US and Iran expired on Monday 17 August. The MoU was billed as providing for a 60-day period of negotiations to bring an end to the war which began with a US-Israeli attack on Iran on 28 February.

The MoU, a 14-point plan mediated by negotiators from Pakistan was vague and failed to address some of the key issues in the conflict. It was always likely to fail, and it has failed.

Shortly after the US-Israeli bombing campaign began Iran effectively closed the narrow Strait of Hormuz, a shipping chokehold in the Persian Gulf. Iran attacked ships with drones and missiles and mined the usual route ships took through the passageway, declaring the Strait a "danger zone" on 9 April.

As the MoU expired US President Donald Trump, was interviewed by Fox News. Trump claimed that he was now "not in a hurry" to reach an agreement with Iran. He also said that "If Oman gets in the way [of a deal on opening the Hormuz Strait] we'll bomb the shit out of them."

Oman is a US ally and this is not the first time Trump, a foul-mouthed and ignorant bully, has threatened the state. In May Trump said the US would "blow up [Oman if it didn't] behave". Oman has been discussing with Iran how to fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz to shipping.

The normal traffic through the Strait, prior to 28 February, was around 100 ships per day, which included 20 percent of the world's crude oil and liquefied natural gas. Following the signing of the MoU, traffic through the Strait increased somewhat. But just days later Iran's Revolutionary Guards resumed drone strikes on shipping using routes Iran had not authorised.

Iran demanded control over the international waterway and the right to charge tolls for passage.

As of 18 August, CNN reports, 3,456 vessels have crossed through the Strait since the war began, around 20 percent of the normal volume.

Some ships are now taking a "dark" route, switching off their tracking, to avoid attacks. This invalidates the ship's insurance. Insurance rates for passage through the Strait are now between 7.5 and 10 percent of a ship's value (based on a VLCC, Very Large Crude Carrier), or \$10-13mn, up from 0.25 percent, or \$345,000 before the war (Lloyds List).

Lucrative

Iran insists ships must take the northern route through the Strait, close to its coast, and has set up the Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA) to collect fees, reportedly charging \$2mn to tankers. That works out at about \$1 per barrel of oil. Before the war 20mn barrels of oil passed through the Strait each day, so the Iranian tariff, if it becomes established, could be very lucrative for the Iranian regime.

The US has placed sanctions on the PGSA, meaning those who pay Iran for transit may face US sanctions.

Since 17 June at least 17 ships have been attacked by Iran on the southern route through the Strait along the coast of Oman.

With no agreement between Iran and the US, the Strait remains largely shut to shipping and other key issues remain unresolved: there is no agreement on Iranian nuclear plans, or Iranian funding of regional allies and proxies, or Iranian missile production.

Israel continues to occupy southern Lebanon and has recently bombed targets in Syria. The Houthis, a militarised Shia party aligned with Iran which controls most of inhabited Yemen, has begun attacks on Saudi shipping. Iranian attacks have continued against US-aligned Arab states.

The war has resolved nothing, but has killed 9,000 people, injured 50,000 and seriously impacted on the connections and stability of world economic net-



works.

Solidarity opposes renewed open war, and also US plans for sanctions.

We have no sympathy for the anti-worker, misogynistic, fascist clerical regime in Iran which in January shot-down 20,000 Iranian citizens, young pro-democracy street protesters.

Clearly we oppose arms sales to Iran. Many other goods are another matter.

Sanctions appear to offer peaceful, painless alternatives to dealing with unpleasant regimes. That's why many on the broadly-defined left look to sanctions to solve international injustices. But the sanctions Bessent promises will not be painless for Iranian workers and the poor. And they will not "work" either.

Political goals

Yes, sanctions can do damage. But over the last hundred years sanctions have almost never worked in the sense of achieving a stated political goal, the collapse of a regime or the end of a war.

The biggest sanctions package ever assembled has damaged the Russian economy, but has not forced Russia out of Ukraine. And sanctions are not consequence-free. In the case of Russia sanctions have fractured, diminished and reconfigured the world economy and pressed Russia closer to Iran, China and North Korea.

Sanctions on Iraq in the 1990s illustrate the problem.

Saddam Hussein's dictatorship in Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Blanket UN-agreed sanctions were imposed, but it took US-led military action to force Iraq out of Kuwait in 1991. The sanctions on Iraq continued until the regime was overthrown by invasion in 2003, but at serious human cost.

Sanctions on Iraq led to rocketing inflation, economic crisis and shortages of medicines and food. Non-military infrastructure including hospitals, the

electricity grid and water supply were rapidly degraded. While the numbers are disputed, probably tens of thousands of civilians, and especially children, died as a result. The ruling elite subsisted on smuggled goods, and the state's policy did not fundamentally change.

This is the reality of a sanctions regime. Iran has had stifling sanctions in place for years, and especially since Donald Trump pulled out of an agreement negotiated by US President Barack Obama in 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which aimed to prevent Iran developing nuclear weapons in exchange for sanctions relief.

US-led sanctions on Iran have not changed the regime's policies. But they have led to inflation rates of over 50 percent per year and the immiseration of those on fixed incomes, the run-down of services, especially health, lower economic growth and pressure on the currency.

Following the destruction caused by the Israeli-US bombing campaign, Iran's economy is expected to contract by 10 percent this year and those living below the official poverty line are now estimated at 40mn people. The war pushed a further 4mn people into poverty and 2mn workers lost their jobs.

So, we oppose sanctions because of the impact on workers. Unemployment and economic chaos caused by sanctions demoralise and disorganise workers' self-organisation.

Instead we advocate international workers' solidarity. Workers' solidarity is not something union and political leaders can demand of our government. It is difficult, time-consuming and complicated work we must do ourselves.

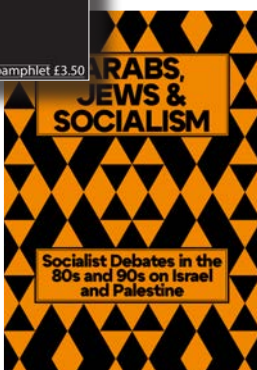
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Resisting Reform in Wakefield

By Ken Worthington

An anti-racist committee to campaign against the new Reform leadership of the local council has now been established as a subcommittee of Wakefield Trades Council, and based on affiliated trade unions.

The committee remains embryonic, but its creation is a significant step forward. Workers' Liberty activists have played a central role in pushing for its establishment.

The committee remit is:

- organising demonstrations and public campaigning
- street stalls and other visible activity
- door-knocking on estates and engaging directly with working-class communities
- building links with community organisations
- working with local political organisations, including Labour and the Greens
- developing a sustained campaign rather than relying solely on occasional demonstrations.

The central political argument must be that Reform cannot be defeated simply by denouncing Reform. We need to build a positive alternative based on working-class organisation and politics. That means connecting opposition to racism, anti-migrant politics and attacks on LGBT+ people with reversal of austerity, cuts and the further deterioration of public services.

The campaign must seek to reach people who voted Reform rather than treating them as politically beyond engagement. The local election result of May 2026 demonstrates that significant numbers of working-class people are

prepared to vote for Reform. Simply telling them that they are wrong, racist, or reactionary will not win them back.

A further positive development is the decision by the regional Labour Party to establish a Local Government Committee to select candidates and organise the campaign for May 2027, when, thanks to a change in procedure, 21 out of 63 seats will come up for election following the all-out election in May 2026. The region had been refusing to do this until August. We have secured a majority for the trade unions on this committee. This provides an important opportunity to influence both candidate selection and the political programme Labour puts forward.

The aim should not simply be to return Labour councillors to the council. Labour needs to present a credible political alternative to Reform based on working-class politics.

Trade union representatives should argue for candidates and policies that:

- oppose cuts to council services and jobs
- defend migrant rights
- oppose anti-trans and anti-LGBT+ politics
- actively oppose racism
- defend public services
- challenge the politics of austerity
- build links between Labour councillors, trade unions and local communities.

There is a danger that Labour's response to Reform becomes purely electoral: telling people to vote Labour without addressing why such a dramatic collapse in Labour support occurred in May 2026. The trade unions have an im-

portant role in pushing Labour towards a more class-conscious and anti-cuts position.

The May 2026 election was a historic defeat for Labour and a major advance for the populist right in Wakefield. The initial response from the labour movement was too slow and too fragmented.

However, we now have two important organisational footholds for climbing back.

The objective cannot simply be to organise some one-off demonstration against Reform. We need to build a sustained campaign that connects anti-racism with the defence of public services, council workers and working-class communities.

Before May 2026, Labour held 48 of the council's 63 seats. Wakefield Council had been under Labour control continuously since its creation in 1974. Then Reform won 58 seats, with Labour reduced to just one councillor. The election has generated considerable fear and anger among minority communities, particularly LGBT+ people and sections of Wakefield's Asian communities. Since taking control, Reform has made a number of interventions, so far mainly symbolic, designed to signal a break with previous council policy. These have included abandoning the council's climate emergency policy, removing Pride flags from council venues, and refusing to formally acknowledge or celebrate Eid.

So far, the practical impact on council workers and services has been relatively limited. There have been some attacks on working from home and on the council's climate-change service, but there has not yet been a wholesale assault on

jobs, pay or services.

The major confrontation is likely to develop around the 2027-8 council budget, particularly towards the end of 2026 and into 2027. The combination of Reform's political agenda and the financial pressures facing local government creates the potential for significant attacks on council workers and services.

The task is therefore to prepare the labour movement before those attacks arrive, rather than attempting to mobilise after decisions have already been made.

The immediate response from the labour movement was characterised by shock, anger and a recognition that something needed to be done. The day after the election, the With Banners Held High trade union festival took place, providing an early opportunity for discussion about the implications of the Reform victory.

Wakefield Trades Council subsequently held an emergency meeting. That meeting failed to agree a coherent strategy, and the discussion became dominated by disagreement over whether to immediately call a demonstration. The SWP argued for an immediate demonstration but did not engage constructively with proposals for establishing an ongoing anti-racist committee capable of coordinating wider activity.

A demonstration was not a bad idea, but on its own it does not constitute a strategy for defeating Reform. The scale of the challenge requires sustained organising: workplace activity, community campaigning, political education, anti-racist campaigning and the rebuilding of confidence among working-class people. □

Housing

Andy Burnham and his building programme

By Robert Bau

Over a series of articles, I am going to examine Andy Burnham's pledge on council house building which alongside devolution, is one of his signature policies so far.

These articles will explore the challenges involved in a major council house building programme, including questions of state capacity, democracy, land availability, building materials, finance, workforce and other related issues.

But let's start with what Burnham has actually said. In a speech on 29 June 2026, he declared:

"Number 10 North will oversee the biggest council house building programme since the post-war era."

This statement does not set a clear annual house-building target. However, from what I can see, the post-war period up to the introduction of Right to Buy in October 1980 saw an average of around 140,000 council homes built each year.

To put that into context, only a few hundred council homes have been built so far this year. Around 10,000 to 12,000 social rent homes are built annually. If so-called "affordable" homes are included, that adds a further 50,000 to 65,000 homes a year.

Taken together, that amounts to fewer than 80,000 homes that might, even very roughly, be compared with traditional council housing. So that leaves a shortfall of more than 60,000 homes compared with the historic average of 140,000 coun-

cil homes a year. No doubt the government will produce a figure well below 140,000 and argue that it still represents the biggest council house building programme since the post-war period. But even if the target is reduced to 100,000 homes a year, it would still require a substantial increase in construction.

So why does Andy Burnham care? Why does he want more council homes to be built when previous Labour Prime Ministers such as Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Keir Starmer showed little interest in expanding council housing?

Well, Burnham argues: "Britain has lost almost 1.5 million council homes since the 1980s and around the same number of people are now on housing

waiting lists and have been there for a very long time." As a result, he says, the country is trapped in a housing crisis. He goes on to argue:

"Britain's housing crisis is having a ruinous impact on its public finances."

And later:

"If you don't give people a good home, what chance have they got of having a good life? What chance is there of making the health service sustainable if people are not living in good accommodation, or of children getting a good education? Everything starts with a good home and this country finally has to put that at the top of its priority list."

Burnham is right to link the shortage of council housing and the pressure on local au-

thority finances. Increasingly, councils are being pushed towards bankruptcy by the rising cost of placing people in temporary accommodation and by the expense of topping up housing benefit.

He is also right to stress the importance of secure housing for health and well-being. But I think you have to go further and say that housing should be seen as a social necessity rather than primarily as a market commodity.

Therefore access to a decent home is not simply an economic issue. It is part of building a better and fairer society. I will come back to that in a future article.

For the next article though, I will look at Right to Buy and the question of state capacity. □

Israeli right plans to bisect West Bank

By Ira Berkovic

The Israeli government has begun a tendering process for construction contracts in the so-called E1 area in the occupied West Bank. E1 is situated to the east of Jerusalem. If an Israeli settlement were established there, it would effectively bisect the West Bank, significantly diminishing any prospect that a future Palestinian state could be established on contiguous territory (i.e. in an undivided West Bank and East Jerusalem, with a corridor to Gaza).

Previous Israeli administrations have held back from actually beginning construction in E1. But the current regime, the most right-wing and pro-settler in Israel's history, has an openly-declared project to "erase" prospects for a Palestinian state, as minister Bezalel Smotrich has put it. The government, and particularly Smotrich's ministry, wants to establish facts-on-the-ground prior to forthcoming elections on 27 October, which could see it ousted from office. The tender closes on 19 October. If construction contracts for E1 have already been awarded, they will be harder for any incoming administration to reverse.

Settler terror continues to spread across the West Bank. Armed settlers, abetted by the army, recently conducted a siege of several homes in the Palestinian village of Qusra, preventing residents from leaving. Anti-occupation activists from Israel, from organisations including Standing Together, Rabbis for Human Rights, and Looking the Occupation in the Eye, travelled to Qusra to support the residents and attempt to break the siege. They succeeded in getting food and other essential supplies to the families.

On Friday 21 August, settlers shot and killed 17-year-old Kareem Shalaldeh. Under the guise of "hiking", armed settlers regularly maraud through areas of

the West Bank, sometimes attacking Palestinians they encounter. Standing Together said: "An increasingly common occurrence in the West Bank is settler 'hikes' (aka settler raids) that end in Palestinians being killed or injured. But while the army and the police call them 'hikes', we know that armed Israeli settlers entering Palestinian communities is an intentional provocation. This time, settlers killed 17-year-old Kareem [...]"

"As activists who stand in solidarity with communities in the West Bank and offer protective presence, the difference in how the army treats activists and how it treats violent settlers is clear. While settlers publicly plan and carry out attacks on a regular basis without police or army interference, anti-occupation activists are turned around by the same authorities and watched closely.

"The reality is that Palestinians live in fear of attacks, raids, and of being forced from their homes to escape them. And the government and army encourage it. But every single one of us has a role to play in ending the occupation – and it will end when we, Palestinians and Jews on the ground, get organised and demand a different future."

Condemned

International governments, including the UK, have condemned Israel's plans. There are widespread calls from across civil society for tougher sanctions on the settlement project, including a ban on all settlement produce, and sanctions on businesses operating in or profiting from settlements. Such sanctions may have some positive effect. The more "rational" elements of the Israeli ruling class, including some elements within the military and security establishments, are concerned about Israel becoming a pariah state. They want smooth access to international markets, and sanctions which inhibit trade and diplomacy may induce them to increase political pressure to oust and marginalise the most extreme Jewish-supremacist currents now at the heart of government.

Workers' Liberty, the organisation which publishes *Solidarity*, does not oppose calls for such sanctions on settlement products (as distinct from calls for blanket boycotts, usually "academic and cultural", of Israel). However, we caution against seeing them as the instrument which can fix the problem. The historical and contemporary balance sheet shows sanctions largely ineffective as mechanisms for pressuring oppressive or authoritarian regimes to change their conduct. Extensive sanctions against Russia have indeed damaged the Russian economy, but not at all compelled Russia to abandon its war on Ukraine.

The historic example most frequently



cited as proving the efficacy of boycotts and sanctions is apartheid South Africa. But cultural boycotts and economic sanctions were applied for decades; the decisive factor was when black workers in strategic industries such as mining and steel organised and rose up that the regime ultimately tottered and fell. The conclusion is clear: an internal agency, with meaningful power and leverage within the society in question, is necessary for fundamental democratic change, not merely external pressure.

The black working class in South Africa was powerful because it represented a social majority upon whose labour economic production largely relied. The white population was a 13% minority by the time apartheid fell.

This dynamic does not map neatly onto Israel-Palestine, where the Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab populations are of roughly equal size within the territory between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, sometimes called "historic Palestine". Whilst the Israeli economy does exploit Palestinian labour, it relies principally on the labour of its large Jewish working class.

In Israel, a source of social power equivalent to South Africa's black working class exists only in potential: the 20% Palestinian minority in Israel, overwhelmingly working-class in economic composition, in alliance with as large a section of the Jewish working class as can be won to an internationalist perspective based on support for equal rights between the two peoples, including an equal right to self-determination and statehood.

The Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank, beleaguered by a genocidal war and violent settlement expansion, are constrained in their ability to organise politically. Nevertheless, occasional demonstrations in Gaza around living conditions, which indict both the Israeli military and Hamas authorities, show an embryonic potential for the development of civic resistance there. In the West

Bank, links between Palestinian communities facing dispossession and displacement and anti-occupation activists in Israel indicate the possibilities for constructing a democratic political perspective for the entire territory.

Forms of external pressure can be helpful to the development of such an agency. Sanctions that specifically target the machinery of occupation and militarism, such as arms embargoes, can help movements on the ground amplify their arguments for a turn away from policies of permanent war. But external pressure alone will always be limited without a movement aiming for social transformation from within. It can even be counterproductive, if generalised sanctions end up harming ordinary

people more than the powerful, allowing the existing political regime to use them to whip up nationalist resentment.

Co-resistance

This makes the efforts of movements like Standing Together, which seek to mobilise "co-resistance" between Palestinians and Jews, vital. Such movements stress the inviolability of the Palestinian claim to equality and self-determination, on the basis of universal human rights. But they also stress a shared interest in equality, and seek to convince Jewish Israelis that the occupation regime, which appears to guarantee their safety and privilege, ultimately does the opposite, making them less safe and draining social resources to fund a permanent war against the Palestinians. As Karl Marx once put it, "A nation that oppresses another forges its own chains."

Ahead of October elections for the Israeli Knesset (Parliament), some Standing Together leaders have launched a new political party, A Place for Us All. Avraham Burg, an ex-Labor politician and former Speaker of the Knesset, who has become something of a maverick leftist since his departure from official politics, recently announced his support for the new party, and joined its list as a candidate. Another anti-occupation voice in the election will be provided by the Joint List, a bloc comprising the radical-left party Hadash, linked to the Israeli Communist Party, and two Palestinian nationalist parties, Balad and Ta'al.

Direct links and solidarity with the forces of co-resistance provide a better central focus for international activist efforts. The anti-occupation, binational left in Israel is an embattled minority. That makes support for it more important, not less. By providing political solidarity and material support, we can help make co-resistance movements a greater factor in the balance of forces, one that can eventually transform the political reality. □

UK Friends of Standing Together

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

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

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

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

Eulogising Castro... and re-writing Cuban history

By Jim Denham

Fidel Castro, it is said, opposed personality cults and prohibited naming streets, public squares or institutions after himself. He likewise banned statues and monuments in his likeness.

So we can only wonder what he would have made of the *Morning Star* of 13 August – his centenary – which was pretty much a Fidel fanzine.

Starting with the nonsensical front-page headline ("100 Years Of Solidarity: From Havana To London"), the paper went on to devote an editorial and a further eight pages of breathless adulation to Fidel and Fidelismo – what the paper called "the life and legacy of a revolutionary giant."

Contributors included Her Excellency Ismara Mercedes Vargas Walter, Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba to the United Kingdom, Dr Stephen Wilkinson, editor of the *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, and Kevan Nelson, international secretary of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB).

Then there was a report ("Eyewitness from Cuba") by CPB General Secretary Alex Gordon and party Chair Lorraine Douglas from a very important-sounding conference in Havana (the 24th International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties).

The CPB comrades reported that despite the devastating suffering being inflicted on ordinary Cubans by Trump's blockade, the Cuban Communist Party leadership were "exemplary hosts [who] accommodated us in top class hotels, ensured we were well fed, transported and looked after, and proved that they can and want to provide a fantastic experience for people visiting the Island". CPB bigwigs always relish a good overseas junket, with Gordon's predecessor, Robert Griffiths, hilariously reporting on the splendid lunches, theatre performances, and solemn ceremonies he enjoyed on his freebies to China.

But the most interesting aspect of the Gordon/Douglas report is the account they give of Cuban history since the revolution of 1958/9, claiming Cuba "has given more to the world than any other country, with the possible exception of the Soviet Union which defeated fascism in the 20th century."

Examined

One claim, in particular, needs to be examined in some detail: that none of the social advances that came with the Castroite revolution (notably the mass literacy campaign and the creation of a decent health service) "would have been possible without the Communist Party of Cuba, which has succeeded against

the greatest odds imaginable in creating a proud nation defying the most powerful, imperialist force just 90 miles to the north of Havana."

But the Communist Party of Cuba was not founded until 1965 and did not hold its first congress until 1975.

Castro's July 26 Movement (M26J) did include some individual Stalinists (Raul Castro and Che Guevara). It had some support, at best half-hearted, from a Stalinist party (the Popular Socialist Party) but was overwhelmingly a middle-class nationalist movement. Even the National Association of Cuban industrialists welcomed the new government. Fidel Castro balanced between the different factions.

Coalition

The broad coalition that overthrew the corrupt Batista regime was for a bourgeois-democratic republic. Fidel Castro explicitly rejected nationalisation and made no pretence of being in favour of workers' control. When, in February 1959, Shell oil workers threatened to strike for better wages, Castro argued that strikes were not appropriate and shortly afterwards invoked a six-month no-strike pledge. Castro personally intervened in the Cuban trade union (CTC) Congress in 1959 to impose a new leadership that would be subservient to the

government.

After the US turned against the new regime in late 1959, following the expropriation of US-owned sugar plantations, Castro turned to the USSR and began the process of replacing capitalism with a new form of bureaucratic class society. Now the trade unions would be not just curbed, but integrated into the state.

Castro's group fused with the Cuban Stalinists to form the Integrated Revolutionary Organisations (1961), the United Revolutionary Socialist Party (PURS) in 1963 and – eventually – the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) in 1965.

So to argue that the Cuban Communist Party was crucial to a revolution that happened six years before that party even existed, and sixteen years before it held its first congress, is either profoundly dishonest or profoundly ignorant.

But then, Stalinists do have something of a record when it comes to re-writing history. □

• JD would like to acknowledge the extensive use he has made of articles by Paul Hampton for *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty*, and in particular his piece *Castro and the Cuban Revolution*, bit.ly/c-cuba

Crackdown sharpens in Russia

By Dale Street

In April of this year six members of the anti-war youth movement Vesna ("Spring") were sentenced to between six and twelve years in prison. The charges against them included "disseminating false information about the military", "disrespect for days of military glory," and "incitement to organize mass unrest".

In June Maxim Kruglov, deputy chair of the anti-war Yabloko ("Apple") party was sentenced to seven years in prison for "spreading false information about the Russian military".

The same month OVD-Info, a Russian human rights organisation which reports on the repression of anti-war activists, was officially classified as an "extremist organisation". Virtually any involvement with OVD-Info became illegal overnight.

In July Boris Nadezhdin, a longstanding anti-war campaigner and critic of Putin, was designated as a "foreign agent"

and convicted of displaying "extremist symbols" (a picture of the late Alexei Navalny) on his social media. The conviction meant that Nadezhdin, who has since fled abroad, could not stand in next month's parliamentary election.

The same month Ilya Remeslo, a former pro-Kremlin blogger who switched to opposing Putin and the war in Ukraine, was charged with "spreading false information about the Russian military" and placed in detention pending his trial.

In August 2026:

• A criminal case was opened against Natalya Sindeyeva and Mark Ten, directors of the television channel Dozhd ("Rain"), accusing them of organising the activities of a "foreign agent" and "undesirable organisation". They face between two and six years in prison.

• Yabloko deputy chair Lev Shlosberg, held in detention since last December, was sentenced to eleven years and one

month in a penal colony for "discrediting the Russian military" (by calling for an end to Russia's war against Ukraine) and "spreading false information about the Russian military" (by posting an anti-Putin front page of the *Daily Mirror*).

• Nikolai Bondarenko, a leading member of the very nationalist and very antisemitic Russian Communist Party, was detained and put on trial for displaying "extremist symbols" (a picture of Navalny) on his social media.

• The Russian Supreme Court rejected an appeal against its earlier judgment banning Yabloko from contesting next month's parliamentary election. Yabloko is the only Russian political party which opposes the war: "For a ceasefire agreement, diplomacy and peace!" and "For a Russia free from fear and political repression!"

These recent politically motivated prison sentences, accompanied by further suppression of free speech and political plu-

ralism, continue the crackdown on opposition to Russia's war which began as soon as Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Catch-all laws

Since then a raft of new catch-all laws have been introduced with the aim of stifling any expression of opposition to the war.

These include: "confidential cooperation with a hostile state", "providing financial, material technical or other aid to an enemy", "disseminating false information about the Russian military", "discrediting the Russian military", and "advocacy for sanctions (against Russia)".

The scope of laws already on the statute book has also been broadened in order to make convictions easier. This applies to laws covering "espionage", "treason", "disclosure of state secrets", "undesirable organisations", and – ironically – "hate speech".

Thus, for example, there has been an approximately 35-fold increase in convictions for "espionage" and "treason" since the start of the war. Over the same period of time the average length of prison sentences for anti-war activities has increased from 36 months (2022) to 88 months (2025).

The increasing level of repression underlines the authoritarian nature of the Putin regime. It has also made it too risky to organise public on-the-streets opposition to the war. In 2022 around 19,000 people were detained for taking part in anti-war street protests. By 2025 the figure was down to one.

And it should not be forgotten that even now, over four years since Putin's invasion of February 2022, it remains a crime in Russia to call the war a war rather than use the official expression of "Special Military Operation". □

Support Ukraine; oppose targeting civilians

By Dan Katz

As the battlelines are relatively static, Ukraine and Russia are increasingly locked into a war to destroy economic, civilian targets. It is the wrong fight for Ukraine to choose, and is not one it is well-placed to win.

Ukraine is one of the world's largest exporters of sunflower seeds, wheat and corn. Around 90 percent of its exports go through Black Sea ports around Odessa. However, following Russian attacks on ships from mid-July very few ships are moving.

According to Ukraine's port authority between 1 July and 11 August there were 160 attacks on port infrastructure, 87 attacks on civilian ships in ports and 68 on ships in the maritime export corridor. 169 ships entered the ports in July, but only 7 in the first 11 days of August.

Ukrainian grain exports fell by 75% in the first two weeks of August.

In August Ukraine sunflower and rape-seed oil exports are predicted to halve to 300,000 tons.

The Russians have responded to the

extremely effective mid-range drone attacks launched by Ukraine against oil tankers and vessels containing exports, including grain in the Sea of Azov and Black Sea. The three largest grain terminals at the Russian port of Novorossiysk have suspended operations after being hit by Ukrainian drones and Russian wheat exports are expected to halve in August.

Farm exports account for 60 percent of Ukraine's export earnings. Ukraine provides around 6% of the world's wheat and 11% of corn from a harvest of 60mn tonnes.

Ukraine has facilities to store only 11mn tonnes of grain and is attempting to transport produce by road and rail through Europe. It is being impeded by poor current relations with Poland, new stricter trade rules with the EU, low water levels in the Danube, and Russian attacks on rail infrastructure and bridges.

Road transport is expensive and also inefficient. One large ship can transport the equivalent of 5,000 truck-loads of corn.

Railways can only move about one million tonnes per month out of Ukraine. Transport costs have surged by \$50 per ton.

World wheat prices have increased 35% over the past year. Added to the Black Sea disruption are increased fertiliser and fuel costs resulting from the US-Iran war and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and poor crops due to heat-waves and drought.

According to Oxford Economics



global food prices are set to increase by 11.8 percent this year and that will impact most heavily on the world's poorest people.

Economic damage

The destruction and disruption of grain and transport infrastructure by Ukraine and Russia is only one aspect of the increasing use of economic damage during Ukraine's defence of its territory from Russian attack.

Russia is ramping up the production of ballistic missiles which Ukraine finds difficult to counter. Ukraine is desperate for surface to air Patriot missiles which are being denied by US President Donald Trump. Ukraine has now done a deal with France to buy a new European anti-missile system, but a continuing shortage of defensive missiles means Russian attacks have been effective, hitting warehouses, apartment blocks, transport infrastructure.

On 14 August Ukrainian drones destroyed a hypermarket in Russian-occupied Donetsk; Friday 21 August Russian drones destroyed a shopping centre in

Kyryvi Rih killing 16 people and injuring 130; 24 August two large stores in Odessa were burnt down by Russian drones. All these attacks should stop: they will not alter the course of the war, but they do kill and bring misery to civilians.

For Ukraine this reflects a new ability to use its expanding drone and missile capabilities against oil and commercial targets inside Russia and occupied Ukraine. Ukraine has hit over 20 Wildberries warehouses causing vast damage to both the Wildberries' delivery hubs and the contents, perhaps causing \$5bn of damage. Wildberries is a vast Russian on-line retailer and Ukraine is now moving on to attack Ozon's delivery infrastructure. Ozon is Wildberries' main competitor.

Petrol price rises and rationing is now again widespread across Russia with limits of 50 litres on petrol in Moscow and St Petersburg. Ukraine resumed attacks on Russian oil refineries in late July. The Ukrainian attacks are also causing shortages across central Asia as Russia controls exports and imports petrol.

Ukrainian attack on Russian oil infrastructure have caused Putin political problems, but will not stop his military. In fact Putin has doubled-down.

Solidarity supports Ukraine but believes it should only attack clear military targets. That is the only effective way to defeat Russian imperialism. □

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USA

Trump scrambles to avoid mid-terms setback

By Harold Storey

Donald Trump is afraid of losing in the 3 November midterm elections which replace the whole of the House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate.

At a recent rally he claimed "I'm going to be impeached" should the Republicans lose. Meanwhile some of his close allies are jumping ship ahead of November. Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt, White House Counsel Dave Warrington, and more have already resigned.

Trump is nonetheless doing his best to save himself. He is trying to publicise a report by the US Census Bureau, for instance, claiming that at least 24,000 non-citizens voted il-

legally in the 2020 election, a number Trump has claimed will "explode" when more voting records are analysed. The report is basically rubbish. It was an unauthorised report with no authors taking credit, reliant on dodgy data as no federal database of citizenship status exists, and the report makes no claims as to which party non-citizens supposedly voted for.

However, the Supreme Court has given the go-ahead for the US Postal Service to strict circulation of postal ballots to

people who appear on approved lists of accredited citizens to be compiled in the coming weeks.

Rigging

Successful Republican rigging has only really happened on the state level so far. Republicans are winning a case in Missouri to keep a referendum off the November ballot over their gerrymandering to destroy a Democrat seat. It will be settled on 2 September when the Republican controlled state Supreme Court hears the case.

Especially since, by

the US Constitution, elections, even federal elections, are run by the states, not by any federal agency, it will be difficult for Trump to rig the midterms in his favour in any significant way. He will continue trying to push and justify his SAVE Act, but those close to him may very well get increasingly cold feet and continue to ditch him. He could use the constitutional rule by which each House of Congress decides who has been validly elected to it, but that is high-risk.

Trump's other tack is to create spectacular distractions. Probably he hoped that his Iran war would work that way, but in fact it is turning into a quagmire and losing him support. He has reignited the tariff fire, with new

50% tariffs on many imports from Canada.

Regardless of whether Trump can rig the midterms, his lies and attacks on democracy are serious, and even a majority for the (irresolute and uncombative) Democrats in both houses of Congress will have difficulty stopping him from acting on his "unitary executive" theory, the idea that the President has total control over all executive functions of government.

The solution has to come from working-class fightback, organised by the unions and the left, such as we have seen the beginnings of this year with the Minneapolis general strike, mass May Day rallies, and smaller workers' assemblies in the wake of ICE killings. □



How close are the “tipping points”?

By Vicki Morris

“Climate tipping points” (CTPs) are a key way to frame the dangers that human activity presents to the stability of the climate. Climatological and ecological earth systems that humanity relies on for liveable temperatures, agriculture, etc — for life! — are being destabilised by rising temperatures resulting from carbon emissions, putting them under strain.

Changes in one sphere have effects in others, and risk creating runaway feedback loops (existing imbalances generating further imbalances) that can push the systems we rely on beyond the point of no return, where they can’t be mended in any short term, threatening the lives of countless millions.

Changes in one tipping point can cascade, adding to the pressure in others, and even a global CTP has been posited.

Cooperate

To avoid tipping these systems over, humanity must cooperate to reduce new carbon emissions and the greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere, monitor changes and effects, manage environments, and so on.

The usage of “tipping point” in this context became current in the early 2000s (see “We may be near tipping points”, [Solidarity 702](#)).

What systems are involved? Commonly [cited](#) are “nine global ‘core’ tipping elements which contribute substantially to Earth system functioning

and seven regional “impact” tipping elements which contribute substantially to human welfare or have great value as unique features of the Earth system”.

CTPs are found

- in the cryosphere, including Arctic Sea Ice; Greenland Ice Sheet; West Antarctic Ice Sheet; East Antarctic Subglacial Basins; East Antarctic Ice Sheet; Boreal Permafrost; Mountain Glaciers
- in ocean-atmosphere (circulation) — North Atlantic subpolar gyre/Labrador-Irminger Sea convection; Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC)
- and biosphere (Amazon Rainforest; Boreal Forest; Sahel Vegetation and the West African Monsoon; Low-Latitude Coral Reefs).

The research article from 2002 [cited above](#) suggests that:

“The Earth may have left a safe climate state beyond 1°C global warming. A significant likelihood of passing multiple climate tipping points exists above ~1.5°C, particularly in major ice sheets. Tipping point likeli-

hood increases further in the Paris [2015 Paris Agreement] range of 1.5 to <2°C warming. Current policies leading to ~2 to 3°C warming are unsafe because they would likely trigger multiple climate tipping points”.

AMOC

In “A drastic tipping point may be close” ([Solidarity 766](#)) Stuart Jordan describes the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC):

“Warm surface water from the tropics flows northwards, warming Europe and the Arctic, where it cools and descends, returning to the tropics along the ocean floor. This ‘oceanic conveyor belt’ moves at a rate of one cycle every 1,000 years, and has played a key role in creating the stable climatic conditions necessary for settled agriculture and the past 11,000 years of human development”.

He reports that scientists believe the AMOC could collapse or at least slow, and sooner than feared.

In May 2026 the UK Government [examined](#) the tipping points likely to most impact the UK, and warned: “tipping points’ precise thresholds, likelihoods and timescales remain unclear”.

Based on its [survey](#) of current science, it concluded: “It is possible that we have crossed the tipping point threshold for warm-water coral reefs...”

“...widespread abrupt permafrost thaw, disintegration of the Greenland Ice Sheet and the West Antarctic Ice Sheet, and potentially the collapse of subpolar gyre convection are

possible at current global warming levels [and] likely beyond 1.5°C of sustained global warming...”

“...the complete collapse of the AMOC during this century is unlikely. However... expect the AMOC to weaken substantially, and a tipping point threshold committing the AMOC to later collapse may be crossed within decades.

“...dieback in the Amazon has been localised, but passing 1.5°C of sustained global warming, along with intensified deforestation, could lead to regional dieback.

“As a system loses resilience, it takes longer to recover from disturbances, and its fluctuations often become larger and more persistent. For example, more than 75% of the Amazon rainforest was assessed as having lost resilience since the early 2000s”.

The [Guardian](#) reports Professor Gustaf Hugelius from the Bolin Centre of Climate Research at Stockholm University, Sweden, warning of the danger of permafrost thawing as a result of increasingly frequent wildfires. Permafrost currently acts as an enormous carbon sink but begins to release greenhouse gases as it melts. While there is only a small likelihood of large-scale melting, even small thaws add to the difficulty of keeping global warming within the required bounds, and could have marked localised impacts.

For socialists, the purpose of monitoring what the scientists are telling us is to fuel and renew our commitment to changing the social and economic structures that threaten runaway climate change and, with them, human civilisation. □



Arday: from questions to vilification

By Black Leaders in Higher Education

The row about Cambridge professor Jason Arday moved fast from reasonable questions to reckless vilification. “[Black Leaders in Higher Education](#)”, a group of Black professors, university managers, etc., has produced a measured statement, pointedly avoiding implied calls for new state controls on the media.

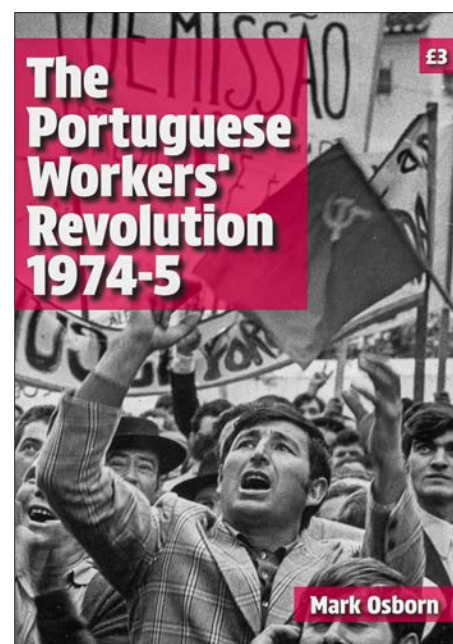
Black Leaders in Higher Education extend our deepest condolences to Professor Jason Arday’s family, friends, colleagues and all those who knew and loved him. We are deeply saddened by the loss of a Black academic and colleague and we recognise that this feeling will be shared across our community.

We have been deeply concerned by the scale and intensely personal nature of some of the public scrutiny directed at Professor Arday, including commentary that moved beyond legitimate questions of academic integrity into personal ridicule and vilification. As Black academics and professional services

staff we recognise aspects of this experience and what they raise about how Black academics are represented, judged and discussed within and outside academia. As the appropriate next steps are taken, we reaffirm the importance of integrity, equity, fairness, transparency and consistency in how Black staff are treated across our institutions, today and in the future. Specifically, we affirm that there is undoubted public interest in academic integrity and scrutiny, but this must apply equally to all academics.

We urge universities to recognise the impact events of this nature can have beyond those directly involved. Institutions should ensure that active support and appropriate assurances are available to their communities, particularly to Black students, academics and professional services staff who may be affected by the debates surrounding this case.

We will ask the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) to consider the nature and extent of reporting concerning Professor Arday’s private life and whether relevant editorial standards were upheld. □



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Afghan women suffer from both Taliban and Trump

By Ruth Cashman

A new UNICEF [analysis](#), *The Cost of Inaction on Girls' Education and Women's Labour Force Participation in Afghanistan*, has found that female representation in the civil service fell from 21 per cent to 17.7 per cent between 2023 and 2025.

Taliban authorities banned girls from secondary education in September 2021. The report says that Afghanistan faces a dual crisis: losing trained female professionals while preventing the next generation from replacing them. By 2030, the country could lose up to 20,000 women teachers and 5,400 healthcare workers, according to the analysis. The number of female teachers in basic education fell by more than nine per cent, from nearly 73,000 in 2022 to around 66,000 in 2024. Restrictions on

girls' and women's education and work are also costing Afghanistan \$84 million each year in lost economic output, with losses expected to grow as women and girls remain blocked from classrooms and jobs. Some regions now have no doctors allowed to treat women for regular health issues.

Simultaneous effects

The effects of the Taliban's restrictions on women and girls' education is being felt at the same time as Donald Trump's suspension of USAID, which has halted major health programmes and forced hundreds of facilities to close. The United States was the greatest contributor to aid in Afghanistan providing 40 per cent of all aid in 2024. Donald Trump cut all of it with almost no warning.

Particularly important for expectant mothers have been the cuts to the UNFPA-run Family Health Houses, which provide reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health services in the country's remotest areas. In 2025, the UNFPA lost approximately US\$330 million in US funding worldwide, of which about a third, or US\$102 million, directly affected its work in Afghanistan.

The loss in health options is a death sentence to many Afghan women. Women in Afghanistan are prevented from being treated or cared for by male workers. As women disappear from the health workforce, the choice available to most women will be the black market or no treatment.

Maternity care has been particularly hit. The World Health Organisation estimated that 521 mothers died for every 100,000 live births in 2023, more than double the global average. This was estimated to have risen to 638 deaths per 100,000 births in 2024. Following the suspension of USAID there are no longer surveys to give estimates of infant or maternal mortality.

Women's mental health has been hit by increasing lack of freedoms. The loss of rights and opportunities has triggered a mental health crisis among women and girls, who report rising levels of anxiety, hopelessness and despair. Seven in ten women now describe their mental health as "bad" or "very bad". Nearly two-thirds say their lives have turned out worse than they had expected before the Taliban takeover. □



Eye on the Left

More money for prisons is no answer

By Matt Cooper

Writing about the crimes of a sex offender like Simon Levy, jailed on 13 August for killing two women and raping a third while on bail for sexual assault offences is difficult, but the Socialist Party's response exposes a number of political problems with their approach.

In a pair of articles in *The Socialist* #1378, the SP starts reasonably enough by saying that the "numerous failings expose the lack of seriousness given by the criminal justice system to tackling violence against women". True. But it then descends into proposing, as a cure-all, more money for prisons, probation, and council housing.

Levy entered prison in 2021 as a sex offender and was released in 2023. To conclude, as the SP does, that "prisons and probation need serious funding in the short term" misses the central problem. Britain spends a lot of money on prisons, much more than other European countries. But it spends it

by locking up too many people for petty offences, for too long, while doing little to rehabilitate or even assess those who pose a genuine danger. The problem with the £4.5 billion annual prison budget is not that it is too little, but that it warehouses too many people, and makes many dangerous people more dangerous.

Structural

There is a case that probation needs more than its current £1.4 billion, particularly to deal with offenders' housing, employment, education, mental-health and drug-dependency problems. But there is also a structural problem: the service has both rehabilitative and punitive functions. These should, as far as possible, be separated, with offender welfare and public protection handled by different agencies. The SP's reliance on more money alone is misguided; it is also who gets the money and what they do with it.

The SP also edges towards

treating more money for police as part of the answer, stressing for example that: "women have died while waiting months for the police to release details of whether their partners have prior convictions for domestic abuse." The Met's problem is not its £5 billion a year funding but its priorities and prejudices. More resources might well mean more stop and search of young black men and heavier policing of protests. More money will not cure institutional misogyny.

British Transport Police failed to handle ten sexual assaults by Levy on public transport, the first of which should have seen him recalled to prison. This shows shocking disregard for women's safety, combined with a level of incompetence for which the BTP is renowned.

The Met's failings were different. Levy's two murder victims and the woman he raped were street-based sex workers with drug dependencies. Levy targeted women he thought he could attack with impunity. The

perfunctory police response tells you that they shared Levy's disregard for the value of those women's lives.

Decriminalisation

The SP struggles to understand this. It half-heartedly supports decriminalisation of street sex work, but then lurches into economic reductionism. It claims that a £15 minimum wage and council housing would have meant that Levy's first victim Carmenza Valencia-Trujillo "would never [have] crossed paths with Levy".

Poverty and insecure housing certainly push some people into street sex work. But that is not the whole of it. And drug dependency, homelessness, and trafficking also demand treatment, housing and support from organisations trusted by sex workers, not the police. A murderous misogynist like Levy will

seek out the most vulnerable, including those whom police misogyny regards as unworthy of protection.

The SP proposes "democratic community control of policing" as a cure-all. Yes, the police should be subject to more controls and accountability. But the idea that "communities" can completely control the existing police is fantasy. Moreover, communities can share police prejudices, including hostility to homeless drug users and street sex workers. Socialists should champion the marginalised, whose lives have the same value as anyone else's. □



Free Lee, Chow and all political prisoners!

By Chan Ying

Two former leaders of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, Lee Cheuk-yan and Chow Hang-tung, were found guilty by the Hong Kong High Court on 21 August of "inciting others to subvert state power".

After 1997, Hong Kong became the only part of China where it was possible to commemorate the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen Massacre, discuss political reforms, or organise autonomous trade unions and political parties, until Beijing imposed a National Security Law (NSL) on Hong Kong in 2020. The Alliance had organised 30 consecutive annual 4 June candlelight vigils from 1990, but political pressure led to it disbanding in 2021.

Evidence

No evidence was presented in court that Lee and Chow had planned a violent coup or any unconstitutional plot to seize state power. Instead, the prosecution focussed on one key demand of the Alliance, "ending one-party dictatorship", and public statements made by the Alliance over the years.

After his escape from Tiananmen, Lee became the founding General Secretary of the autonomous Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, until the HKCTU too was forced by the NSL into disbandment in 2021; by that time Lee had al-



20th anniversary Hong Kong vigil for the Tiananmen Massacre

ready been convicted of "organising and participating in unlawful assemblies" for his leading role in the 2019 protests against the extradition Bill in Hong Kong. While serving a 14 month sentence he was charged under the NSL, denied bail, and held in remand for over 1,500 days. The HKCTU Chief Executive Chris Mung escaped to the UK with a \$1million bounty on his head.

As a human rights barrister, Chow had been defending Hong Kong pro-democracy activists and advocating for labour rights lawyers persecuted in China. She stepped up in 2021 to become the Alliance's public leader when Lee and others were arrested. She was arrested on 4 June 2021, defied police orders to hand over the Alliance's membership list and defended herself in court, famously ask-

ing if typing an article or shouting the slogan "end one party rule" is now a criminal offence in Hong Kong.

The court's verdict answered Yes to her question. During her prolonged pre-trial detention, Chow was subjected to frequent spells of solitary confinement, triggered by her exercising her freedom of expression while in prison – drafting an acceptance speech for a European human rights award, writing a reflection on her Nobel Peace Prize nomination, and holding a hunger strike to commemorate Tiananmen.

Conscience and truth

Christopher Mung, now Executive Director of Hong Kong Labour Rights Monitor, has said: "Today's verdict is not simply a conviction of Lee Cheuk-yan and Chow Hang-tung. It is also a blatant conviction of conscience and truth. For more than three decades, the Hong Kong Alliance promoted democratic ideals through peaceful and non-violent means. To now characterise such advocacy as incitement to subvert state power sends a deeply disturbing message to the world: that there is no longer room in Hong Kong for peaceful dissent or political expression..."

"This verdict is therefore about more than the Hong Kong Alliance. It is a further example of the criminalisation of civil society in Hong Kong and the shrinking space for peaceful political

and civic participation. History must not become a forbidden subject, and peaceful political advocacy must not be treated as a crime."

The ITUC, the TUC, Amnesty International, the EU and many other organisations across the world have condemned the verdict and demanded their immediate release. The Labour government must also do so. Free Lee, Chow and all political prisoners in Hong Kong! □

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Self-determination for Western Sahara

By Matt Cooper

Western Sahara remains Africa's last major unresolved colonial question. When Spain relinquished control of the territory in 1975, it handed the territory to Morocco and Mauritania despite an International Court of Justice ruling supporting self-determination for the Sahrawis.

The pro-independence Polisario Front fought both states, forcing Mauritania to withdraw in 1979. Morocco then occupied most of the territory, building the Berm, a 2,700-kilometre fortification of sand walls and minefields, separating the 80 per cent of Western Sahara it occupies from Polisario-held territory. By then, a large proportion of the Sahrawi population had fled to refugee camps in neighbouring Algeria. Today,

170,000 live in these camps. A substantial number of Sahrawis remain in Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara.

Ceasefire

A UN-brokered ceasefire in 1991 promised a referendum on self-determination. Polisario has accepted peace plans based on this, but these have been consistently blocked by Morocco, which instead insisted on an "autonomy plan", a fig leaf for Moroccan rule. Morocco has never produced a credible plan for autonomy since this is incompatible with the current autocratic monarchy. Since 1975, the US has paid lip service to the Sahrawis' right to self-determination but has continued to support and arm Morocco as an ally in the region.

Morocco's motives are often misleadingly presented as economic. Western Sahara's Bou Craa phosphate mine mattered greatly to Spain, but Morocco possesses vastly larger phosphate reserves and production. Economic development primarily serves a political purpose, encouraging migration from Morocco and helping to alter the territory's demographic balance to make the Sahrawis a minority. Annexation of the territory serves both a geopolitical purpose, strengthening Morocco against its larger regional rival Algeria, and an ideological one, as a remnant of the nationalist project of "Greater Morocco", based on the imperial past of Morocco's Alaouite monarchy.

The ceasefire broke down in 2020, but fighting has remained

low-level, with little prospect of a Polisario breakthrough. Diplomatically, the balance has moved against the Sahrawis. In 2020, Donald Trump recognised Moroccan sovereignty in return for Morocco normalising relations with Israel. In his second term, Trump now treats Morocco's "autonomy plan" as the only acceptable basis for a settlement, increasingly sidelining the UN and encouraging US investment in Western Sahara. More European and African states have followed.

Impasse

The Sahrawis face an impasse. But Moroccan settlement does not make Sahrawi independence impossible. Economic development is creating a larger working class, including Moroccan workers whose

loyalty to the monarchy cannot be assumed. Sahrawi-led demonstrations in 1999 began around economic demands but developed pro-referendum and pro-independence demands. Significantly, some poor Moroccan settlers also joined the protests.

One potential source is Morocco's workers' movement. A movement against the monarchy should take up the issue of the Sahrawis, although much of the Moroccan left currently has poor politics on the issue, with only the revolutionary left supporting self-determination. The decisive task is for the Moroccan workers' movement to take up the cause of Sahrawi self-determination, linking opposition to the occupation with the struggle to overthrow the monarchy that sustains it. □

Burnham is still “Labour right”. How will the left respond?

By David Axon

As I write, Andy Burnham has been Labour Leader and Prime Minister for just over a month, and it is one month now until Labour's 2026 annual conference on 27-30 September in Liverpool.

There is certainly a shift in mood within the Labour Party. Not having faced a leadership election, Burnham has not put forward any policy platform to party members as Starmer did famously with his rapidly abandoned “ten pledges” in the 2020 leader contest. Burnham is, instead, straight into government.

Small-scale as they might be, measures such as removing VAT on domestic electricity bills, restoring the £2 bus fare, free 24-hour bus travel for disabled people, present Burnham as having different priorities to Starmer, with his focus on “growth” and “small boat crossings” (and indeed, his relegation to embarrassed obscurity of positive actions by the Starmer government, like the Employment Relations Act, the Renters’ Reform Act, the scrapping of the two-child benefit cap, rail renationalisation, etc.).

Burnham’s talk is to some extent a revival of mainstream “Labourism”, and provides opportunities for members of Labour and of affiliated unions to push for a change in policy.

Right-wing

But Burnham’s is still a right-wing version of “Labourism”, and relative to polls of partly members opinion and Labour conference votes, Burnham himself remains firmly to the right of the Labour Party membership and structures, and of active union members.

Polls suggest that 85% to 95% of Labour members are for public ownership of water, a policy passed also at at least one Labour regional conference. Burnham explicitly speaks only of “public control” (which already exists) and reforming that control through measures such as regional franchising.

Where even Labour’s 2025 annual conference, the most right-wing conference for many years, called for wealth tax, reversing Tory cuts, defence of leave to remain, and expanding collec-

tive rights and sectoral bargaining, Burnham makes no reference to such specifics. He has apologised on behalf of the party for its previous handling of the Gaza situation, but in unspecific terms. He has said nothing about the 2025 Labour annual conference’s call for suspension of all arms trade to Israel, or bans on trade with the illegal settlements in the West Bank.

Some of these issues are coming to the fore within the party in the run-up to conference. Affiliated unions have raised concerns about the continued weakness of the Employment Rights Act, especially on zero-hours contracts, though whether they will put anything hard-hitting to conference on the issue remains to be seen.

Motions

A number of CLPs have already passed motions for conference calling for public ownership of water or for a massive council housing programme including the rebuilding of council Direct Labour Organisations, or (promoted by Momentum) repeating last year’s policy on Gaza and the West Bank. CLPs’ deadline to submit motions is 17 September, and those motions have to be “contemporary” (criteria are slippery, but are usually understood to include at least reference to events in August), so many CLPs will decide their submissions in September.

They will also decide then on proposals for “reference back” of sections of this year’s (studiedly bland and non-committal) National Policy Forum report. Each CLP can submit up to four references back, and those are subject to no “priorities ballot”, but that opening has been little used by CLPs in recent years.

A template motion originating from the Labour Campaign for Council Housing and adapted by Labour Left Internationalists calls for the Labour Government to commit to measures such as repealing Right to Buy, ending above inflation rent increases for council and housing association tenants, and investing in a council house programme of 100,000 homes a year.

A motion originating from Mainstream and the Socialist Environment and Resources Association is calling for “the Government to urgently return water in

A FORK IN THE ROAD MOMENT:

FOR AN IRREVERSIBLE SHIFT IN THE BALANCE OF POWER & WEALTH

- Rebecca-Long Bailey MP
- Richard Burgon MP
- Nadia Whittome MP
- John McDonnell MP.
- Andrea Egan, UNISON GS
- Fran Heathcote, PCS GS
- Dr. Jo Grady, UCU GS & Wages Not Weapons campaign
- Steve Wright, FBU GS
- David Wilson, NEU Deputy GS
- Asad Rehman, Friends of the Earth Chief Executive
- Simon Fletcher, Political analyst & campaigner
- Cat Hobbs, We Own It

A major public Left event in Liverpool during Labour Conference 2026



Monday 28 September | 6.30PM

The Racquet Club Hotel & Ziba Restaurant, 5 Chapel Street, Liverpool L3 9AG

Register at: bit.ly/shiftpowerliverpool

England into public ownership”, calling this “the first step toward ending neoliberalism”.

Similar motions have been sent to conference by CLPs in recent years, but failed to win in the “priorities ballot” that takes place among delegates on the first morning of conference. The LCCH, Mainstream, and Labour Left Internationalists campaigns for CLPs to pass their motions need to extend to efforts to win delegates to voting for them in that ballot this year. It is not easy. The right of the party always organises to keep such motions off the priority list, and the Conference Arrangement Committee helps by carving such motions into separate policy areas and keeping the actual text of motions from delegates until the very last minute. In 2025 even the motion on repealing the two-child benefit cap failed to win “priority” to get to conference floor, despite much publicity about it. (It looks like the Labour leaders had already decided to scrap the cap, but did not want it to look as if they had been pushed into that by a conference vote).

Rule change proposals from CLPs, under long-established procedure, come up for debate only the year after they have submitted. It looks like there will be only one such rule change for debate in 2026, a bland and uncontroversial one. The National Executive retains the right to “spring” rule changes on conference

only days or hours before the event. There is no report yet of plans to do that this year, but vigilance is necessary.

Labour women’s conference is in the same Liverpool venue on 26 September, the day before the general conference. In 2025 Labour women’s conference was cancelled because party officials said they weren’t sure how to respond to the April 2025 Supreme Court decision reinterpreting the term “women” in the Equality Act. This year the conference excludes trans delegates. Most unions will boycott it in protest, but as of yet no union is making a fight of it. Rather, Unison is complying with the trans-exclusionary “Flaherty judgement”, and no union has said it will defy it (although the City of London Corporation is de facto defying it with its decision to keep the Hampstead Women’s Ponds trans-inclusive).

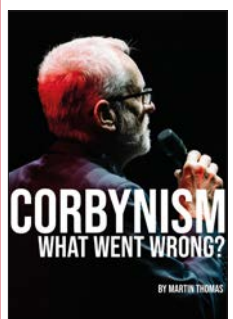
In 2025, both Mainstream and Momentum had little

activity around the conference, though the Tuesday-evening CLPD-Momentum fringe meeting drew large numbers. CLPD produced its regular bulletin, but with weaker distribution than in early years. Labour Left Internationalists was the only Labour left group to organise a continuous agitational effort at the conference entrances.

National Executive

By the time of conference, the new Labour National Executive will have been elected. Polls published by Labour List (based on small samples) suggest that this year the CLP seats could be won in majority by candidates of the left or soft left – gaining six of the nine seats, with recently re-admitted member Jess Barnard topping the poll.

It remains to be seen what the composition of CLP delegates will be at conference. Last year, left members had either been out-organised in their CLPs or had not put themselves forward. There was an increase, not much in the hard-bitten right-wing contingent, as in the “go with the flow” contingent. It also remains to be seen what the affiliated unions will push for conference, and how hard. Unions generally reveal their motions to conference (even to their own activists) only days before. □



This booklet offers an attempt to analyse the setbacks, learn lessons, and sketch a way to renewed efforts after the defeat of Corbynism. £4 ☐ bit.ly/shop-wl

How British Tro

Wilson Gibbons tells the story of the Balham Group of 1932

In August 1932 Reg Groves, Harry Wicks and Henry Sara were summoned to the regional office of the Communist Party of Great Britain. They were there to answer charges. The three, along with other CPGB members in South London, had been producing and circulating a paper of the Left Opposition in Britain, *The Communist* (no relation to today's). What followed was a show trial led by Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the CPGB and a diehard Stalinist. Sara refused to take part and was suspended in absentia; Groves and Wicks were expelled. The Balham Group, the Left Opposition in the CPGB, was "liquidated".

Years before, during the General Strike of 1926, Groves was seventeen, not an organised socialist but swept up in the fervour after Red Friday (July 1925). As calls grew for a general strike against the government's next attack, Groves and his comrades read Trotsky's *Where is Britain Going?* and later *Lessons of October*, finding an analysis for the political moment they inhabited, though they were not propelled to the Left Opposition until much later. With an increasingly Stalinised party, they knew little of the controversies surrounding Trotsky.

After 1917 Trotsky had been widely regarded as one of foremost leaders of the Russian Revolution, including in the nascent CPGB. From 1923, however, as Trotsky spoke up for the working class and Bolshevism against Stalin, he was increasingly vilified from Moscow.

The British Party remained relatively insulated from that struggle until Moscow's control over the Comintern had tightened. *Where is Britain Going?* was Trotsky's analysis of the revolutionary potential in Britain and quickly became a counter to the official slogan "all power to the [TUC] General Council". Trotsky described the TUC leadership as "the most counter-revolutionary force in Britain" and argued for a revolutionary party.

The TUC's capitulation and abandonment of the miners in May 1926 left the labour movement reeling. Union bureaucrats accepted deals cutting jobs and wages in the pursuit of "industrial competitiveness". Groves and his comrades became convinced of the need to organise and for a revolutionary party. They joined the CPGB in 1927, as the only show in town for organised communists. Groves recalled early meetings where members were asked to condemn the Russian Left Opposition. Opposition material was available but only sandwiched between official "correctives".

Some level of debate and disagree-

ment still operated in the British Party, though or perhaps because the theoretical level of the party was lower than many of its European counterparts. Groves and his comrades could abstain or vote against the official line without rebuke.

By 1927 the Party was in ill health: membership and sales were down in the wake of the crushing defeat of the miners' strike which continued for months after the General Strike.

The CP had, on Lenin's advice, sought affiliation to Labour, but especially from 1925 Labour expelled communists, barred them as delegates and expelled constituency parties which refused to exclude them. The CP organised a National Left Wing Movement which drew communist activists into sustaining local Labour organisations, though the CPGB remained deeply confused over electoral strategy.

Encountered

In August 1928 Comintern delegates James P Cannon and Maurice Spector encountered Trotsky's critique of the Communist International's draft programme, with George Weston smuggling a copy out of the Soviet Union in a teddy bear. It was an important breach in the censorship surrounding the Russian Opposition, though several years passed before the Balham Group encountered it.

Groves met Henry Sara in 1929. Sara was an industrial unionist, Marxist and early party member, who had been conscripted during the First World War following an arrest for anti-militarist campaigning, had visited revolutionary Russia, and had become a communist. Also in 1929, the CPGB completed another sharp turn, adopting the Comintern's so-called "class against class" "Third Period" line. Labour was now a "third capitalist party". The CP tried to create new "Red Unions" as rivals established trade unions, further isolating the CPGB from the workers' movement.

Groves was invited to the Lenin School in Moscow, and to work at the Marx-Engels-institute. He declined. Those who went, he later recalled, returned with their "critical faculty atrophied rapidly", dependable servants through every lurch and contortion of the Comintern line.

The new line did little to settle the Party. After its poor showing in the 1929 election, dissent reached even the Central Committee, with some advocating a vote for Labour. When Moscow demanded a purge of "right wingers and conciliators", the London Regional Committee, on which Groves sat, challenged the secrecy surrounding debate in Russia and the Comintern. Moscow



The CPGB in the 1930s

responded by demanding that the CPGB "submit implicitly" to its decisions. The leadership duly fell into line.

Groves, Wicks and Sara grew increasingly sceptical of the Comintern and Stalin, but still hoped a new leadership might right the Party. Meanwhile the world economy slid towards the Great Depression.

Overhauled

At the 10th Congress in January 1929, the leadership was overhauled. Only twelve old Central Committee members remained, while twenty-three replacements were selected through the Party apparatus. The old "social democratic methods of election" gave way to selecting those best able to fulfil the CPGB's "obligations" as a section of the Communist International. The Congress was ill-tempered. Old leaders publicly confessed their errors, while London delegates were hauled before Comintern representative Walter Ulbricht to explain their opposition to a Central Committee member.

Yet Groves and his comrades stopped short of confronting what this meant. By his own admission they avoided looking too closely at Stalinisation, rationalising events in Russia while distrusting the capitalist press. Instead they buried themselves in Party work. Groves hoped that "in struggle and action differences could be resolved, errors in all [their] parts corrected, experience and understanding enlarged."

Groves wrote a "Workers' Notebook" column for the *Daily Worker* in 1930, but abandoned it after repeated editorial interference. Later that year Wicks returned from three years at the Lenin School and joined the circle around Groves and Sara. Having witnessed the struggle against the Left Opposition in Russia, he sharpened their criticism of the leadership.

The CPGB's isolation was exposed further by its 1931 "Workers' Charter" campaign. Of 316 organisa-

tions at its conference, around 240 were the Party or its fronts and only some sixty trade unions and cooperatives. As Groves put it, "the freedom of thought and action required by a revolutionary party to change its points of emphasis and adapt to the swiftly moving events no longer existed."

Meanwhile the Depression deepened. The Labour government turned to cuts and collapsed in August 1931. Labour prime minister Ramsay MacDonald seceded to lead a mostly-Tory National Government. That same month Groves wrote to the *Daily Worker* calling for wider Party discussion. Two of his three letters went unpublished and he was censured by the Political Bureau.

Unable to influence the militancy around them through the increasingly isolated CPGB, Groves and the CPGB South West London Branch linked up with other socialists and workplace militants including branches of the Independent Labour Party (previously a component part of the Labour Party, the ILP formed a separate parliamentary group in October 1931 and disaffiliated from Labour in 1932). Public meetings across Brixton, Clapham, Battersea and Tooting formed the nucleus of the Balham Group.

In late 1931 Groves encountered the Trotskyist paper *The Militant*, and other literature from the USA. Drawn to *The Militant*, he circulated copies among the Balham Group. They discovered communists arguing much as they had begun to themselves: against the strangling of Party democracy and Moscow's command over the Comintern, and for internationalism against "socialism in one country".

Correspondence with the American Left Opposition followed. The Balham Group resisted forming a British Left Opposition, fearing immediate expulsion. They recognised themselves increasingly in the Trotskyists' politics, particularly Trotsky's opposition to the

Trotskyism began

Stalinist claim that social democracy and fascism were “not opposite poles but neighbours”, and his call for a united front against Hitler. Yet they remained determined to fight inside the CPGB.

US Trotskyist Arne Swabeck agreed they should avoid a split but recommended “organisation in a preliminary sense”. The Balham comrades feared expulsion before making their case to the membership, leaving the Party machine free to bury their arguments beneath charges of deviation and disloyalty. They were also politically and personally embedded in the CPGB.

Trotsky pressed them further: “the British Left Opposition must begin systematic work.” He urged them to establish a centre of operations, set up their own publications and organise supporters. Albert Glotzer and Max Shachtman came from the USA to reiterate the message in person, Shachtman telling them: “Someone has to go to the altar, someone has to be sacrificed.” The Balham Group remained unconvinced about going public.

Reversal

In January 1932 the CPGB performed yet another reversal, turning back to unions it had recently dismissed as dead ends. The Balham Group’s response was refused publication in the *Daily Worker* for “incorrect and unhelpful opinions”. They formalised their criticisms in an April resolution challenging the latest union line, the silence over the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and over Germany, and the continued delay of the Party Congress. The Secretariat responded with the confidence of a leadership pretending its previous line had never existed: the Balham comrades were chastised for “underestimating the unions” and their substantive arguments ignored.

On 3 May the Balham Group again confronted Party officials. Sara, Wicks and Groves were charged with accusing the leadership of “trickery”, “cowardice” and opposition to criticism. They disputed the quotations but demanded open discussion on the state of the Party. The Secretariat answered not with discussion but denunciation: their resolutions were the work of “well-known sectarians”.

The Balham Group battled on for the long-delayed Congress and pre-congress discussion. But their conflict with the leadership increasingly centred on the catastrophe developing in Germany. In May 1932 they published the first *The Communist*, containing Trotsky’s *Germany, the Key to the International Situation*, and publicly constituted

themselves as the British Section of the Left Opposition.

Ordered to oppose an unemployed organisation established by Wandsworth Trades Council, the Balham Group instead worked within it. They were castigated for a policy the CPGB would later adopt itself. Cooperation with the ILP brought further hostility. Yet they still regarded Moscow’s zigzags and departures from Marxism as temporary aberrations. The Party, they believed, might still be put right.

Their final campaign inside the CPGB centred on Germany. With the Clapham ILP they organised meetings across South London arguing for a united front of Communists and Social Democrats against Hitler. The *Daily Worker* reported their warnings about fascism while carefully omitting the demand for a united front. Party officials publicly rebuked them. Eleven days later (31 July 1932) the Nazis polled more than thirteen million votes, roughly equalling the combined Social Democrat and Communist vote.

On 9 August the Balham Group wrote to the Central Committee condemning its paralysis: “We would ask that... the Party fulfils its duty to the world revolution.” They also attacked the Comintern-backed World Congress Against War for resting on “non revolutionaries”, pacifists and “social patriots”.

The leadership had heard enough. Sara, Wicks and Groves were summoned. Sara refused to participate and was suspended in absentia; Groves and Wicks were expelled. The following day the CPGB finally opened the pre-congress discussion they had spent months demanding. Other Balham members were summoned to “comradely discussion”, denounced, and interviewed individually in an attempt to break the opposition.

The Balham Group was “liquidated” but refused to disappear quietly. 13 members were ultimately expelled. The group’s appeal to “state its case openly before the party membership” went unanswered. They instead circulated *To Our Comrades in the Party from the ‘Liquidated’ Balham Group*, published another *Communist* containing Trotsky’s *Letter to a German Worker*, and regrouped as the Communist League.

The CPGB’s 12th Congress in November demonstrated what remained of the Party democracy they had fought for; delegates rubber-stamped resolutions already settled by the leadership and Comintern. Outside the Battersea conference hall, the oppositionists painted “Not National Socialism, but world revolution”, “Reinstate the expelled left” and

“Release Rakovsky and Return Trotsky” on walls facing the entrance. Groves and Wicks distributed their Appeal to Congress Delegates from the Balham Group while Party loyalists snatched copies from delegates’ hands.

Pollitt closed the Congress with all pretence of comradely disagreement discarded. He demanded “contempt, hatred and loathing” for the “miserable gang of counter-revolutionaries” outside and warned sympathisers who dared “raise their heads inside our movement”: “We will smash and destroy them.” Some comrades later apologised privately and conceded the Balham Group’s criticisms were correct. Publicly, opposition had been silenced.

Independent

Outside the CPGB, the Communist League struggled to find its footing as an independent organisation, though the members remained individually active and influential in the labour movement. Cut loose from the Party which had shaped both its politics and opposition, and subjected to Stalinist attempts to isolate it, the group nevertheless retained support among London trade unionists and the unemployed.

Groves attended the International Secretariat of the Left Opposition in February 1933, days after Hitler became Chancellor. On 27 February the CPGB tried to expel the former Balham comrades from a local anti-war committee for advocating a united front with the Social Democrats. The motion was defeated. That night the Reichstag burned. Hitler gained emergency powers and the German Communist Party was driven underground.

As Groves put it, “Consumed in flames, too, was the disastrous policy imposed by Stalin’s men and the Comintern on the German party.” Over the next year or so, the line changed again and everywhere Stalinist parties moved towards the Popular Front policy, until of course, the line changed again with the advent of Stalin’s blood drenched deal with Hitler, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939.

But vindication did not solve the problems facing the British Trotskyists. What was a small revolutionary organisation actually for: propaganda, intervention in the labour movement, or both? The CPGB’s belated turn towards what looked like united-front work further narrowed the space in which the Communist League hoped to grow.

In August 1933 Trotsky urged the Communist League to enter the ILP and fight for its members. Much of the old Balham Group resisted. The dispute split the

organisation, with supporters of entry forming the Marxist Group inside the ILP. British Trotskyism had barely been born before confronting what would become a persistent problem: how a small revolutionary minority should relate to the wider workers’ movement.

Nor did the founders remain together. Groves, increasingly disillusioned with Trotskyist infighting, gravitated towards Labour and Christian socialism and later declined James P Cannon’s invitation to join the leadership of the Revolutionary Socialist League formed as a regroupment of Trotskyist splinters in 1938. Purkis likewise returned to Christian socialism. Sara passed through several Trotskyist groups, serving on the RSL executive in 1938 before drifting away in the 1940s. Wicks also became disillusioned, but returned to revolutionary politics through the International Socialists in the 1970s and later helped form the Workers’ League. Trotsky himself observed that the early British movement had fallen into “a state of constant strife”. The leaders of British Trotskyism when it became a more sizeable (still small) group around the end of World War Two were mid-1930s immigrants from South Africa (Ted Grant, Millie Lee) and their associate Jock Haston.

The early opposition by Groves and his friends was often reactive: they recognised what was wrong with the lines imposed upon them before developing a coherent alternative, and realised too late that Stalinist control could not be dislodged through patient internal criticism. As Wicks later put it in those early days, “They were not left oppositionists; in the circumstances of that time, the insularity of party politics, it could not be otherwise.”

He was right. Even as they struck out further, they were smaller, and further behind, the American and European Left Oppositions, at times they resisted the guidance and counsel of those movements and Trotsky himself. They did not enter the CPGB as Trotskyists, nor become Trotskyists through methodical instruction of outside influence. They arrived there through fighting their own leadership, bureaucratic command, Moscow’s political zigzags and the suppression of criticism. In that struggle lay the beginnings of organised British Trotskyism and in those people the kernel of a revolutionary spirit; the conviction that, “when the struggle is one for great principles, the revolutionary can only follow one rule: Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra” — do what you have to, come what may. [Trotsky, *My Life*, 1930]. □

Apologetics ride out

By Rhodri Evans

The SWP, publishers of *Socialist Worker* (SW), have published a new book on imperialism, *Death Rides Out*, by Tomáš Tengely-Evans, editor of SW.

It is billed as the first in a new series, "Concepts in Marxism", whose aim seems to be to get younger SWP leaders to learn to write at "theoretical" length.

The idea of the project is good. This first book contains a good section (if factually accurate, which I have no reason to doubt) on rare-earth refining and how its global centre shifted from the USA to China. But mostly it is poor.

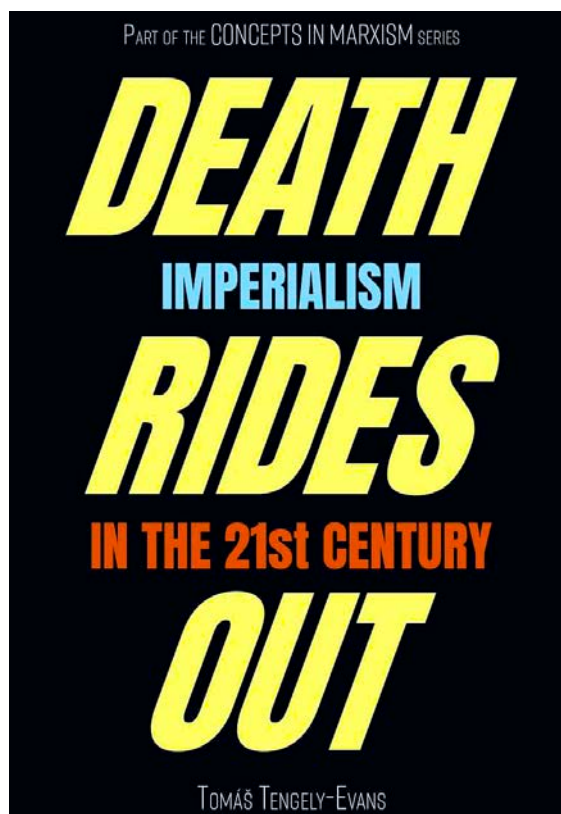
In general theory it is a rehash of writings by John Rees and Alex Callinicos for the SWP's "anti-imperialist turn" after 1986-7 on Israel-Palestine and the 1980-8 Iran-Iraq war. The SWP had not been pro-imperialist, or indifferent, or unwilling to support Palestinian rights, before 1986-7. But in those years it came positively to celebrate almost any political force in conflict with the USA.

The prime purpose of Evans (if he will forgive me shortening his name) is "to restate... the Marxist theory... for 'Generation Palestine'" (i.e. to present a version of "Marxism" rationalising their existing prejudices) and to rationalise the SWP's "rejoicing" at Hamas's 7 October 2023. He also covers SWP's refusal to back Ukraine against Putin (it's a proxy war between the USA and Russia); and its positive backing for Iran in the current Trump war.

His arguments have a looser relation to the stated general theory than those by Rees and Callinicos back in the day.

7 October 2023, writes Evans, was "the Palestinian resistance re[taking] land that Zionist settlers had stolen". So full liberation would be the atrocity enlarged to killings and hostage-taking all across Israel? Evans does not say so, but he does use "Hamas" and "Palestinian resistance" as synonyms.

Evans repeatedly prefers "the Israeli settler colony" as a term for Israel. He leaves unexplained why the remedy for the "Israeli settler colony" is to "retake the land" at the expense of the nation which lives there now mostly because it was born there. And, unlike some other writers, he makes no claim that settler colonialism is central to the general mechanics of imperialism today. He does not prefer "the US settler colony" for the USA, or "the Argentine settler colony" for Argentina, or even "the Lviv settler colony" for Ukrainian Lviv, though it was long a Polish city before Stalin evicted its Polish population of the city in two



bouts, 1939-40 and 1945.

Aside from that, his argument is the old one, off-beam if you consider the facts, that Israel is the enforcer for the USA in the Middle East, so that every defeat for Israel is good as a weakening for "Western imperialism".

Ukraine

On Ukraine, Evans instructs us that we must not start from empirical facts, but "following a dialectical approach... start with the analysis of imperialist competition between the West and Russia".

Abstractly, an independent Ukraine would be within the sphere of influence of the USA and EU, and a crushed Ukraine within the sphere of influence of Russia. The dominance involved is very different in the two cases. No country in the world today can be fully self-sufficient and "independent" economically. Whether a country is politically independent, though in a world where big banks and corporations outside it control the flows of credit and technology, or whether it is crushed militarily, makes a difference. The actual war is about that difference.

Evans concedes that almost every small nation battling for self-determination will seek aid from the imperialist rivals of its oppressor. That does not automatically make the small nation a "proxy" of those who aid it.

He mentions Vietnam, which defeated the USA only thanks to aid from Russia and China. But he dismisses that as only a matter of "a few weapons". Actually it included large amounts of (then) high

tech, plus some "boots on the ground". If we backed Vietnam against the USA, as we rightly did, it wasn't because all it got from the USSR was maybe a few spare old AK47s.

Evans also cites the Serbian socialists' vote against war credits in 1914, though in principle Serbia had a national-rights case then. Yet he also cites Lenin saying at the time that Serbia's national issue was "one per cent" of World War One. Ukraine's national rights are not "one per cent" of a war already raging between the USA and Russia. (Besides, Evans misstates some of his facts here, as often in the book. No space here for detail).

On Iran, Evans argues US vs Iran is one of the six (he says) global imperialist powers vs a regional-only imperialist power, and in such cases we must back the smaller imperialism.

That would be right if the war were about the US conquering Iran and installing a viceroy or a client regime. But it is not. As Lenin put it in 1915: "With reference to wars, the main thesis of dialectics... is that 'war is simply the continuation of politics by other [i.e., violent] means'. Such is the formula of Clausewitz". We base our stand on what the war is about, the politics which it "continues", and how that relates to our positive programme.

Back in the day, Alex Callinicos argued explicitly against general backing for regional imperialist powers if in war with global imperialist powers. He was justifying the SWP's refusal (sound in my view) positively to back Argentina against Britain in the South Atlantic war of 1982, rather than denouncing the war on both sides.

Evans makes no effort to square this

circle. He wants his pro-Iran stance to be critical, but on grounds that "Iran has repeatedly held back from attacking Israel".

Connects

None of this connects much with the claimed general theory, which is that "imperialism is a global system of competing capitalist states marked by the fusion of economic and geopolitical competition", or, less pompously put, that imperialism is big military powers waging wars to serve the interests of big capitalist outfits based in them.

The description fits some US "banana wars" and US-organised coups in Central America which served the United Fruit Company, but is much too crude to cover the whole history.

Evans claims it is "the Marxist theory", developed by "Lenin, Bukharin, and Luxemburg". He does not acknowledge that Luxemburg had a different take on the economics from Lenin and Bukharin.

Rees and Callinicos, back in the day, argued that the 1914 system had been seriously modified for a whole era, but that "the new imperialism" was returning in the 1980s, reprising the patterns of pre-1914. Evans sometimes suggests that this "new imperialism" is arriving now; sometimes that it has been in force ever since 1898-1914.

Although he reasonably describes Steve Bannon as fascist (while saying it is "ridiculous" to describe Putin that way), Evans notes no real difference between Trump and Biden in geopolitics. □

• Abridged. More on the Callinicos-Rees writings after 1987, on previous IS-SWP politics, and on the wider debate on Marxism and imperialism, at bit.ly/t-evans

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Tue 1 Sept: Insource Now! RMT-Unison campaign launch. 6:30pm, Unison, 130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY

Fri 4 Sep: Are we getting poorer? AWL London Forum. 7pm, Electric Elephant Cafe, 186A Crampton St SE17 3AE

Tue 22 Sep: The war in Ukraine. Manchester AWL. 6:30pm, Methodist Central Hall, Central Buildings, Oldham St M1 1JQ

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 [workers-](https://workersliberty.org)

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

Template motions

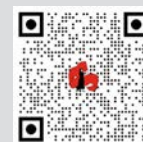
Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties: bit.ly/mo-pe

Socialist-feminist book clubs

bit.ly/bc-sf

London: The "male gaze". Sun 6 Sep, Effra Social, 89 Effra Road, SW2 1DF.

See workersliberty.org/agenda. □



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

Capital, chapters six and seven

By Martin Thomas

By 1867 Karl Marx was fairly well-known in the European and US workers' movements, through his activity in the First International, founded in September 1864. His Communist Manifesto of 1848 had been republished and translated. He was impelled to finalise at least part of his long economic studies.

We now have as *Capital* (volume 1) just one volume out of six eventually published from Marx's drafts. Those drafts in turn covered only parts of Marx's study-scheme. Nevertheless, Marx shaped it as a book which could stand on its own, probably knowing even in 1867 he would never complete his scheme.

It is an essential reference point. It is, as Marx himself commented, mostly not hard to read. But it is a large book. In this run-through of reference points we cover chapters 6 and 7, where Marx lays out his theory of capitalist exploitation. In future run-throughs we will cover others.

Capital appeared first in a German edition. For the first few months, Marx and Engels exchanged exasperated comments about how slow responses to it. A French translation, which Marx supervised closely, came in 1872; the English translation, only in 1887, so early English Marxists like William Morris and Harry Quelch had to learn French and study the French edition, Quelch after leaving school at age ten.

With the growth and spread of working-class socialist parties in all the developed capitalist countries after the foundation of the Second International in 1889, the book was translated and read more and more widely. As early as 1886, Engels called it "the Bible of the working class". All across the world, workers (many with only a few years of formal education) and students gathered in groups to study and discuss the book, chapter by chapter, sentence by sentence.

Even in the bourgeois academic and literary world, *Capital* has won Marx a place as a reference figure, respected if not applauded, in historical studies, sociology, politics, and philosophy.

Profit appears in pre-capitalist societies, via large market anomalies and via cheating and usury. In a capitalist society, where commodity-exchange is universal, uniform, and fluid, those continue. But they cannot explain the systematic, "sober", regular self-expansion of capital which is the heartbeat of this society.

To explain that, Marx goes into "the hidden abode of production".

How can the self-expansion of value originate in production? And if it originates in production, how can it then ap-

pear in circulation, in the market-place? The explanation must lie in some process which slides across the boundary between market-place and production, between the world of commodities and the world of labour.

Evolves

To find the answer, Marx looks at the ways in which labour evolves in capitalist society. He had commented in his unpublished "Introduction" of 1857 that: "Labour seems a quite simple category. The conception of labour in this general form – as labour as such – is also immeasurably old. Nevertheless, when it is economically conceived in this simplicity, 'labour' is as modern a category as are the relations which create this simple abstraction... In the most modern form of existence of bourgeois society – in the United States... for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category 'labour', 'labour as such', labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice..."

Social labour is both concrete labour – a particular useful activity – and abstract labour, a using-up of a quota of social labour-power. Labour-power and labour are not the same thing. Workers do not sell labour to capitalists. We sell labour-power. We cannot labour until we sell our labour-power. Once we have sold our labour-power, its use (our labour) is not ours to sell, but is controlled, and its product owned, by the capitalists.

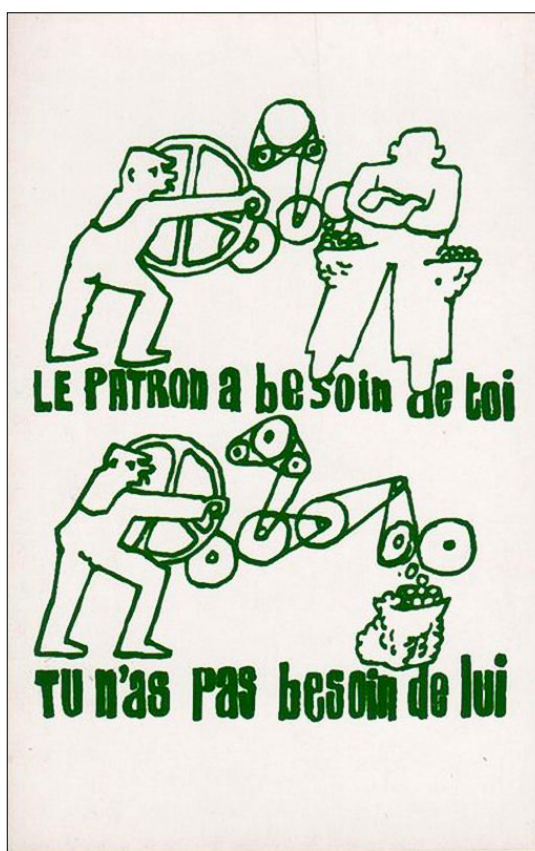
That labour-power takes the form of a commodity to sell "has no basis in natural history, nor does it have a social basis common to all periods of human history. It is the result of a past historical development, the product of many economic revolutions..."

Capitalist society is both the becoming-universal of the commodity-form of the products of labour, and labour-power becoming a commodity. Wage-labour defines capitalist society.

Labour-power is a commodity, subject to the same laws of the world of commodities as other commodities. It has a value, defined by the social labour-time crystallised in it, i.e. the social labour-time necessary to produce the commodities which embody a "living wage". That "living wage" has a "moral and historical element", unlike the values of other commodities. Nevertheless, in a particular society and era, it is defined.

At the same time, the using-up of labour-power – the "consumption" by the capitalist of the commodity, labour-power, which he has purchased – is nothing other than the creation of new value.

These two amounts, the value of labour-power, as reflected in the market rates at which it is bought and sold, and



the new value created by the using-up of labour-power, as reflected in the capitalists' revenues from sales, are distinct, and therefore potentially different. Here there is a potential for an inequality from the world of production to slide over into a lopsided exchange ($M - M + \Delta M$) in the world of commodities.

At the end of chapter 6, Marx sums up the "sphere" which the analysis is leaving, the capitalist market-place, as the domain of "Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham".

This summary is ironic. It is not just ironic. Capitalist society does put freedom and equality on the map, if in many ways at a distance, compared to previous societies.

Chapter 7 opens Marx's analysis of the labour process, and expounds "the secret of profit-making".

Profits are not "wages of management".

They are not a reward for the "abstinence" which the capitalists show by investing in factories and equipment rather than blowing all their wealth on big dinners. In the first place, how could the whole capitalist class, collectively, sell off their factories and spend all the proceeds on big dinners? Whom would they sell them to? In the second place, virtue may be rewarded by an easy conscience, but what economic law says virtue will be rewarded by profit?

Profits arise because the new value pocketed through the capitalists' "consumption" of the labour power they buy – i.e., the average socially-necessary labour-time equivalent of the hours which the capitalists make us labour – is a different quantity from the value paid

out by the capitalists to buy the labour power (this difference is established in chapter 6); and because then the capitalists make us work longer than the labour-time necessary to cover our wages, 12 hours rather than six in the example which Marx gives.

Or, at least, as a first approximation profits arise that way. The later chapters of *Capital* refine the answer beyond that first approximation.

In these chapters of *Capital*, Marx tried to simplify his exposition, and so it can read as if Marx is saying that exploitation arises simply from the working-time necessary to produce our subsistence being shorter than a full active day. If that were so, then all societies beyond the least productive (where gruelling labour can produce no more than bare physical subsistence for us or our households) would see exploitation.

But the gist of Marx's argument, I think, is that exploitation is not a static comparison (more is produced than workers consume), but an ongoing class struggle. It is continual struggle by capitalists to increase the quantity produced (by recruiting more workers, lengthening the working day, "filling in gaps" within that day, making us work faster, improving technology) while restraining the growth of workers' subsistence or even reducing its quantity as measured by hours of social labour required to produce the equivalent of "a living wage".

Fight back

Labour, and hours of labour, are not eternal given facts. Most of *Capital* is about how they are incrementally transformed in the capitalists' continual struggle and our fight back. The transformation makes the working class into something more an aggregate of individuals each subject to a law under which payment for their labour-power is less than the revenue their employer gets from "consuming" the labour-power which the employer has produced.

It makes us into a collective, shaped by working together in cooperation, pushed to develop more diverse skills and capabilities, and constantly pulled, to one degree or another, into battles over the length of the working day, over protecting our health and safety from the employer's drives, over whether wages actually cover the value of labour-power ("a living wage"), over the "moral and historical" determination of that value, and over control of the labour process.

Workers' Liberty study notes at bit.ly/25-cap. Marx's text at bit.ly/c-ch6 and bit.ly/c-ch7. Otto Rühle's abridged version at workersliberty.org/capital-abridgement. Audio version at bit.ly/ptref-audio. □

A new “philosophical move

By Colin Waugh

My article *Rosa Luxemburg on renewing Marxism* ([Solidarity 769](#)) mentioned at the end the interest shown by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) in Rosa Luxemburg's 1903 *Vorwärts* article *Stillstand und Fortschritt im Marxismus*.

Gramsci knew about this because David Riazanov had reprinted it in his 1927 book (English title: *Karl Marx. Man, Thinker and Revolutionist*). In the English translation of this, by Eden and Cedar Paul, Luxemburg's article is titled *Stagnation and Progress of Marxism*. To my knowledge this is still the only English translation of her article. However, “standstill” would be a better translation of “Stillstand”, and when Gramsci referred to it in Italian he used the phrase *arresti nello sviluppo* (arrested development).

In his *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci referred several times to Luxemburg's article, each time using this as a starting point for a wider and deeper analysis. I will try here to relate Gramsci's interest in it to the broader development of his thinking, especially with regard to the collective socialist self-education of working-class adults.

In 1913, without graduating, Gramsci dropped his studies at the University of Turin to become an activist of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). He rapidly gathered round himself a group of working-class young people whose evenings were spent talking passionately about socialism. This group included some who would later become activists in their own right.

Within a short time Gramsci became a prolific journalist writing in the PSI national paper *Avanti!*, and later for the Turin-based *Il Grido nel Popolo* (The People's Cry). In the 29 December 1916 issue of *Avanti!* he wrote a substantial unsigned critique of the Popular University (Universita Popolare) in Turin.

The first popular university was set up by leftwingers in Paris in 1898. Similar institutions spread rapidly through France and Spain. In November 1900, Turin became the first city in Italy to have one, followed within a year by fourteen other centres, including Rome, Milan, Bologna, Genoa, Venice, Naples and Palermo.

In his *Avanti!* article, Gramsci claimed that the Turin Popular University was “neither a university nor popular”. Drawing on his experience of what was best in his own degree-level studies, he claimed that, like Popular Universities elsewhere, the one in Turin was run by people who failed to consider the needs of people who went to it, i.e. working-class people excluded from mainstream higher education. As a result, it offered shallow courses that failed to satisfy workers' thirst for knowledge and understanding.

A year later (December 1917) Gramsci wrote in *Avanti!* an article supporting a proposal by other PSI members to set up a “Cultural Association” in Turin. He dismissed the Popular University as “bourgeois in origin” whereas what was needed was “an institution of the proletariat” which, starting in Turin, “would become, along with the Party and Confederazione del Lavoro [equivalent to a trades council], the third organ in the Italian working class's drive to assert its rights”. He argued, that in this activists should be able to “discuss everything which regards the proletarian movement, or which might regard it in future”, particularly “problems — philosophical, religious and moral — which underlie political and economic action, but which economic and political organisms are not equipped to discuss or to promote solutions for”.

In line with this idea, Gramsci also organised something that he hoped would offer in a small way a better setup for young workers wishing to study. He called this the Club of the Moral Life. In March 1918 he wrote to the prominent educationist G. Lombardo Radice, seeking his support for this project. He described the Club's procedure as follows. Each of the young workers involved would be assigned a text to read and required to give a presentation about this at the next meeting, leading to a discussion “which ideally continues until all those present have been enabled to understand and absorb the most important results of this collective work”. Examples of the assigned texts Gramsci gives in his letter include writings by Benedetto Croce (then still regarded as on the left), by Gaetano Salvemini (an intellectual spokesperson for peasant struggles) and the Manifesto of the Communist Party. (Radice's reply dismissed the proposal as insufficiently patriotic.)

Central role

In May 1919, Gramsci was involved in setting up the publication *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Financed by Angelo Tasca from union contacts, this rapidly built up 3,000 paying subscribers and a readership of industrial workers across Turin, many of whom were women. (The secretary of *Ordine Nuovo* was Pia Carena.) It played a central organising role in the near-insurrectionary strikes and factory occupations of the 1919-20 biennio rosso (“two red years”). In his *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci would later describe practice in the *Ordine Nuovo* editorial board in this way:

“The group criticises as a body, and thus helps to define the tasks of the individual editors, whose activity is organised according to a plan and division of labour arranged in advance. By means of collective discussion and criticism (made up of suggestions, advice, com-

ments on method, and criticism which is constructive and aimed at mutual education) in which each individual functions as a specialist in his [sic] own field and helps to complete the expertise of the collectivity, the average level of the individual editors is in fact successfully raised so that it reaches the altitude or capacity of the most highly-skilled — thus not merely ensuring an ever more select and organic collaboration for the review, but also creating the conditions for the emergence of a homogeneous group of intellectuals, trained to produce a regular and methodical ‘writing’ activity...”

In December 1919, the *Ordine Nuovo* editors also set up a School of Propaganda in Turin.

Aftermath

In January 1921 in the aftermath of the biennio rosso, which was demobilised and basically betrayed by the C.G.L. (Italian equivalent of the TUC), Gramsci and other *Ordine Nuovo* board members, along with the Neapolitan activist Amadeo Bordiga, a main figure in the “maximalist” (i.e. left) faction of the PSI, combined in the setting up, under Comintern supervision, of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I). With the 1922 fascist takeover in Italy, this required him to spend much of his time in Moscow. In 1923 the Comintern imposed him as general secretary of the PCd'I, displacing Bordiga.

While in Russia, Gramsci was impressed by the way in which Bolshevik party schools had led to “Marx's doctrine” becoming “incarnated in the consciousness” of “simple workers” who he now saw heading “sections and divisions of the Commissariats” (i.e. government ministries). With this in mind, in 1925, when he moved first to Vienna and then to Italy itself to take responsibility for the anti-fascist struggle, Gramsci attempted to organise a party school there, to be conducted by clandestine correspondence. The intention was to use Nikolai Bukharin's 1921 book, *Historical Materialism. A System of Sociology* as a central text for this school. However, the whole scheme was undermined by Gramsci's arrest and imprisonment.

When first convicted, Gramsci was exiled to a prison on the island of Ustica (off the coast of Sicily). During the year that he was there he and Bordiga cooperated to run a political school for the other prisoners. But then in 1926 Gramsci was given a 20-year prison sentence, to be served on the mainland.

In 1930, the Comintern dictated the exclusion of three out of the eight members from the PCd'I executive on the grounds that they opposed the “Third Period” Stalinist denunciation of PSI members as social fascists. (This policy was to lead in Germany to the failure to



oppose the Nazis' 1933 assumption of state power.) Gramsci was made aware of this exclusion soon afterwards by his brother Gennaro, and declared his opposition to it. He argued that the replacement of fascism in Italy would entail joint work by Communists and democratic forces to the right of them. This standpoint led to him being victimised by some other prisoners who were loyal to the Stalinist line.

It was in this context that Gramsci now came to devote a long section of what would become his *Prison Notebooks* to a critique of Bukharin's book, on the grounds that it was a positivistic falsification of Marxism. In the same context he also began to think about Luxemburg's 1903 “standstill” argument. He praised Luxemburg for drawing attention to the possibility of standstill, but maintained that “to a large extent” all her article had done was to “present an abstract formulation of the fact to be explained as an explanation of the fact itself”.

He developed the idea that after Marx's death his ideas had, on the one hand, been adopted in a diluted form by some prominent non-Marxist thinkers (for example, in France, Henri Bergson and Georges Sorel, in Italy Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile) and that on the other hand the Comintern was spreading to workers as Marxism a form of crude, pre-dialectical materialism. He now saw Bukharin's book as a version of this, and hence as a symptom of “standstill”.

By this time, Gramsci was much more knowledgeable about Marx's thinking than he had been in 1917 or 1918. For example he was aware of the 1844 critique of the Young Hegelians in *The Holy Family*, of Marx's 1845 “theses” on Feuerbach, and of Marx's 1859 *Preface to his Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In the last of these, he was particularly struck by the reference to “the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic — in short, ideological

A wealth tax? A Zucman tax

By Martin Thomas

In France, the talk is of a “Zucman tax”, not of a “wealth tax”. France already has a wealth tax of sorts (but only on real estate). More to the point, it had a wider wealth tax from 1981 to 2017, and it was a sham.

In his very short and excellently clear new book, *We need to tax billionaires*, the French economist Gabriel Zucman writes: “In 2016, on the eve of its abolition, the effective wealth tax rate for billionaires was just 0.005%”.

They had most of their wealth in “holding companies”, and so-called “professional assets” in those companies were exempted from the tax.

Zucman proposes a minimum tax of 2% of wealth on all fortunes of \$100

million or more, which in France would hit about 1,800 households.

It would raise €20 billion a year, in France. The essence for Zucman is to stop the super-rich escaping income tax as they largely do at present.

They escape because only a small part of their huge actual incomes appears as income. “You can only spend so much on luxury cars and Swiss watches”, and the rest is paid into “holding companies” and appears as unrealised “capital gains” and so untaxed.

Zucman's plan

In Zucman's plan, those super-rich who already pay over 2% of their wealth would incur no extra tax. For the huge majority, his plan would lift the tax they pay relative total income to around the same level as ordinary workers.

Would they flee? The simple answer is to copy the USA, which taxes its citizens wherever in the world they live. Zucman points out that international reforms since 2008 make it possible for tax authorities to assess worldwide assets.

Doctors, lawyers, local authority CEOs, smaller capitalists, and others well-off but not super-rich, pay higher tax rates than ordinary workers. In the UK, there is a specially high marginal tax rate for pay between £100,000 and £125,000 a year.

The super-rich use moans about the

£100,000 workers to cover themselves. But the super-rich are different. They pay much lower rates.

Zucman's plan will not bring socialism or equality or fairness. €20 billion a year is maybe 0.6% of total income. Even to refloat public services needs more taxation, including of the rich but not super-rich.

The plan would leave the super-rich holding their wealth, only contributing a portion of the 6% or so gain they get each year on each million in their stashes. The mechanism would remain by which already-accumulated wealth multiplies itself “automatically” by employing us as workers and paying us only the value of our labour-power, not the new value created by our labour.

Socialism

But wage rises do not bring socialism either. We fight for them both to build working-class organisation and to gain more leeway in our lives for class-struggle activity and self-education. Without that fight, we will not even get started on battling for socialism.

Winning a Zucman tax is good for similar reasons: both to assert ourselves against the super-rich, and to get resources to refloat public services. □



Musk and feral Trumpism

By Martin Thomas

Quinn Slobodian's and Ben Tarnoff's book *Muskism* tells well the life so far of Elon Musk.

He was born in 1971 into a wealthy but mildly liberal, and very dysfunctional, white family in South Africa. At age 18 he moved to Canada, immediately to escape conscription. “Who wants to serve in a fascist army?” he later commented.

In his earlier years as a tech capitalist in the USA, working up to his status now as the world's richest person, he was erratically liberal. He backed Obama, Clinton, Biden in 2008-20.

Since about 2022, he has been clearly right-wing, and since mid-2024 pro-Trump and far-right. In early 2025 Trump appointed Musk “senior adviser to the President” and licensed his “DOGE” operation, smashing up large

parts of the US administrative machine supposedly to eliminate “woke” influence, get full carry-through of Trump's edicts, and save money.

Clashed

In mid-2025, after quitting DOGE, he clashed with Trump for a while. Then he reconciled. For now he functions more as an international outrider for Trump than as an associate in government.

The book claims to do more than chronicle, and sees an ideology of “Muskism”, “found in the feedback loop between man and moment”, which (alarmingly) could be the “playbook for our new postliberal age”.

“Musk... sees the matrix [i.e. the electronic networks around us] not as the problem, but as part of the solution. Muskism, in the end, means building a better matrix”.

“The perils of superintelligence could be neutralised by dissolving ourselves into data... become AI”.

“The real bugs in the code [are] people, especially the non-white illegal immigrants”.

Musk's life story, however, suggests more an off-beam

series of personal vagaries. He went feral politically around the time when his daughter Vivian gender-transitioned in 2020-2. He raged that she had been “killed by the woke mind virus”.

Musk is, like say Henry Ford, talented in some areas, but mostly unstable. Like Ford, he has huge economic power; and, unlike Ford, he has had and may regain personal political power, as an attack-dog for Trumpism. □



Public service broadcasting and us

By Bas Hardy

The only time I appeared on television was way back in 1976, as a representative of the Merseyside Anti-Fascist Committee. I helped to organise a programme on "racialism", as racism was termed then, which purported to ask the question: "has the existence over 50 years of black communities in Liverpool led to a decline in racial conflict?"

Whatever the opinions of those taking part, the question was answered with a resounding no by the civil unrest in Toxteth five years later, provoked by long standing tensions between the police and the local black community.

Our programme was an episode in the *Open Door* series produced by the BBC's Community Programme Unit. *Open Door* was designed to encourage "participatory democracy" and was initiated by David Attenborough, then BBC Director of Programmes, and TV producer Rowan Ayers.

The idea was for community groups to make their own programmes voicing their concerns, activities, achievements, etc. Many of its broadcasts met with critical acclaim and the *Open Door* series lasted for a decade. Budget cuts would lead to the winding up of the CPU in 2002.

I am not aware of any other big broadcasting organisation on planet earth that has facilitated community organisations making their own programmes and voicing their concerns. It certainly would never happen under dictatorial regimes, and neither would it have been done by commercially-driven media outlets like those in the USA. So is there something in the concept of public service broadcasting, the much touted *raison d'être* of the BBC, that socialists should find commendable?

I tend to go by the idea that if the right wing hate something, then maybe it's worth defending. Norman Tebbit's denunciation of the BBC as the Bolshevik Broadcasting Corporation was one of many examples of a veritable hatred of the organisation. This is prevalent today in the rage against BBC presenters who have the nerve to question people like Rupert Lowe and Lee Anderson.

A return of the Tories will probably see a further weakening of the BBC similar to the death by a thousand cuts approach adopted when they were last in office, such as the freezing of the license fee imposed by the far from cultured Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries in 2022. Should ever Faragists get a role in government then it's certainly game over for the BBC.

The attack on the BBC comes not only from within these shores. The dastardly Trump is out to sue them for \$10 billion. The Trump regime has almost stripped the last vestiges of public service broad-



casting from the US media landscape. The right on this side of the Atlantic hope TV and radio in Britain will resemble what they now have in America.

Irony

Right-wing hatred of the BBC is ironic since it was originally set up as a very conservative institution. John Reith, a Scottish Presbyterian, established it as a broadcasting monopoly in the mid 1920s, claiming it would operate as an independent public service broadcaster. Reith's concept of this ruled out the organisation acting as a direct propaganda instrument of the state as in Stalin's Russia. Reith had also visited the USA and was appalled by the inane output the plethora of commercial stations churned out there.

It was decreed the BBC would operate to "inform, educate and entertain", which meant essentially imparting conservative bourgeois cultural values with little regard to the tastes of the mass of the population. Two of its three stations – the Home Service (current affairs and drama) and The Third Programme (classical music) – catered for the upper and middle classes, whilst the Light Programme was what was deemed suitable for the plebs. If the audience didn't like it, they could turn their sets off. Indeed actually not listening for a time was encouraged! No need to worry about ratings if you were a monopoly.

The notion of independence from government quickly fell by the wayside during the 1926 General Strike. With no newspapers being printed, radio was the main source of information. Airtime was denied for representatives of the TUC and Labour Party, because Reith knew that if he didn't toe the government line the BBC would be taken over directly by the state.

During the following thirty years the BBC was deferential towards governments of the day, which were mostly Conservative ones. The advent of com-

mercial television in the mid 1950s, ending the BBC monopoly in that medium, started to change that.

ITV companies were also obliged to operate under a "public service" remit, though. If the BBC was showing a current affairs programme like *Panorama*, for instance, then ITV had to do something similar instead of a comedy or drama. So the 8pm alternative on Monday night was *World in Action*, a hard hitting investigative programme which lasted for 35 years and was particularly instrumental in exposing travesties in the criminal justice system such as the case of the Birmingham Six.

Competition

Competition from ITV forced the BBC to up its game, with big changes initiated by a new Director General, Hugh Greene, who headed the organisation throughout the sixties. Under Greene programming was encouraged to reflect the social changes and attitudes of the sixties. There was "anti-establishment" satire like *That Was The Week That Was*, gritty dramas like *Z Cars* and plays tackling social issues, the most famous being "Cathy Come Home", dealing with homelessness.

Here we can mark the start of the BBC becoming the pet hate of the right in British politics. Leading this early charge was Mary Whitehouse, self appointed leader of the National Viewers and Listeners Association. An "evangelical Christian and moral crusader", Whitehouse was particularly incensed by sexual content and "bad language" in BBC content and regarded Greene as "the devil incarnate". For his part, Greene had a painting of her in his office which he threw darts at.

Particularly notable in this period was "The Big Flame", a play by Jim Allen, which imagined the takeover of the Liverpool docks by its workforce. Whitehouse denounced the play as "a blueprint for the communist takeover of

the docks" and demanded the government review the BBC charter.

Autocratic regimes have unsurprisingly had difficulty understanding why the British state can't control the media. In 1980, ATV broadcast the drama documentary *Death of a Princess* about a Saudi royal and her lover, both executed for "adultery". (She was shot, he got beheaded.) The Thatcher government condemned the programme because it upset their cosy relationship with the Saudi regime. Coincidentally, ATV lost its ITV licence two years later.

Separately, the Thatcher government was to take issue with the BBC on numerous occasions, such as its reporting of the Falklands and Northern Ireland. Thatcher even contemplated privately suing the BBC over a satirical item on the *Today* programme.

Independence

It is therefore quite inaccurate to regard the BBC as a broadcasting organisation totally subservient to the British government of the day. It has a degree of independence which can challenge government actions regardless of which government is in office. The "dodgy dossier" in the Blair years is another case in point.

Attacks on the BBC have blunted the questioning edge of its journalistic endeavours. Recent exposures of the Post Office and privatised water industry scandals have come from ITV and Channel 4 respectively. Yet all these organisations have varying degrees of journalistic integrity.

The direction the right wing want to take the media instead is signposted by the presence of GB News and Talk TV, blatant right wing propaganda channels. We also have the ironically termed social media, awash as it is with fascist and racist sewage and so a significant cause of the growth of the far right in the last decade.

Socialist have justifiable criticisms of public service broadcasting (BBC, ITV, and Channel 4), but they are more likely to prove reliable sources of information than their alternatives.

There's zero discussion on the left of how the media would function in a socialist society. The right naturally paint a picture of total state censorship and control and that would certainly be the case in the unlikely eventuality of the likes of George Galloway coming to power. It is therefore up to us to counter that conception and argue that media under socialism would represent genuine freedom of expression.

Participatory democracy ought to be part of that, with working-class organisations and communities enabled to make their own programmes and have their voices heard. □

The “Right Side of History”?

By Daniel Randall

“Be on the right side of history” is an aphorism that has become all but meaningless through overuse. But even if it had not had its meaning wrung from it by social-media saturation, it ought to be retired.

The notion of a “right side of history” implies a singular, teleological process called “history”, automatically carrying itself out. In this perspective, human moral judgement consists of positioning ourselves appropriately on the “right side”.

The slogan usually carries the implication that, whilst a particular cause may be unpopular or controversial now, it will eventually come to be seen as having been right – and those who opposed it will be regarded, in retrospect, as having been on the “wrong side of history”. That can be an important form of galvanisation and encouragement for those engaged in struggles against the odds. But that very notion indicates the flaw in the formulation. A cause or idea moves from being widely regarded as wrong to being widely regarded as right not because of the teleological unfolding of history, but because people fight against prevailing consciousness and common sense to establish a new common sense, and make concrete, material gains in struggle.

Religious

The idea of history as an inevitable dualistic struggle between “right” and “wrong” – or, put another way, good and evil – is a fundamentally religious one. These ideas jar with politics that stress the centrality of human agency. As Frederick Engels put it: “History does nothing, it ‘possesses no immense wealth’, it ‘wages no battles’. It is humanity, real, living humanity that does all that, who possesses and fights; ‘history’ is not, as it were, a person apart, using human-

ity as a means to achieve its own aims; history is nothing but the activity of humanity pursuing its aims.”

As well as implicitly de-emphasising human agency, the “right side of history” formulation has another flaw. It is a reductive simplification, flattening all of history into a binary conflict between “right” and “wrong”.

During the furore around antisemitism in the Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, supporters of Corbyn would regularly circulate a photo of Corbyn being arrested on an anti-apartheid protest in the 1980s, accompanied by the assertion that Corbyn had “always been on the right side of history”. The implication was: he was right then, despite facing arrest, and he’s right now. Quite why having been active in the struggle against apartheid in the 1980s provided inoculation against antisemitism in the 2010s was not clear. The suggestion seemed to be that being on the “right side of history” is an innate moral condition, carried in the soul of an individual. Therefore, whichever side such a person is on necessarily is the “right side”, simply by virtue of them being on it.

In fact, even causes now overwhelm-

ingly regarded as having been morally right were not flat, but characterised by internal contestation. Within the anti-apartheid struggle, the militant black workers’ movement in South Africa struggled for class independence, and political and ideological conflict took place between the Stalinists of the South African Communist Party, who had significant influence in the movement, and non- and anti-Stalinist leftist currents. Contending political forces promoted differing visions for what a post-apartheid society should look like.

Or, to take another example, the women’s suffrage movement. Working-class suffrage fighters who saw the demand for the vote as part of a wider struggle for social equality, including against class exploitation, clashed with middle and upper-class advocates, who wanted to limit the movement’s horizons to demanding “Votes for Ladies”.

Dismiss

One can, if one chooses, dismiss these conflicts as pettifogging in-fighting that distract from the struggle of the movement as a whole for a singular aim – the end of apartheid, women’s suffrage, or whatever. But to do so cannot but imply endorsement of whichever faction happened to have hegemony in a given movement, a hegemony often stemming from class privilege, and sometimes enforced by suppression of internal critique and dissent.

It might be countered that class-struggle historical materialism, which can also be named using the imperfect shorthand “Marxism”, has its own binary, which provides a grand narrative of history: labour versus capital, or, in the pre-capitalist world, exploited versus exploiter. When the Communist Manifesto proclaims that “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”, is it not simply substituting the religious binary of good and evil for a binary of boss and worker?

It is certainly the case that Marxism argues class is the constitutive social relation in human history, and that a struggle between classes exists. But that is a structural analysis (“scientific”, in Marx and Engels’ terms), not a moral one. Marxists do not advocate siding with the workers because we believe the working class’s social position as an exploited class automatically imbues it with a higher morality. Rather, we see workers’ struggle as the social force that can dismantle a society built on exploitation and inequality, and construct in its place a society built around the pursuit of human and ecological need.

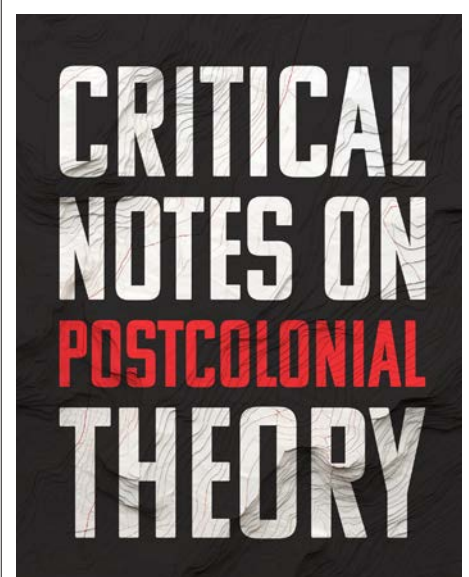
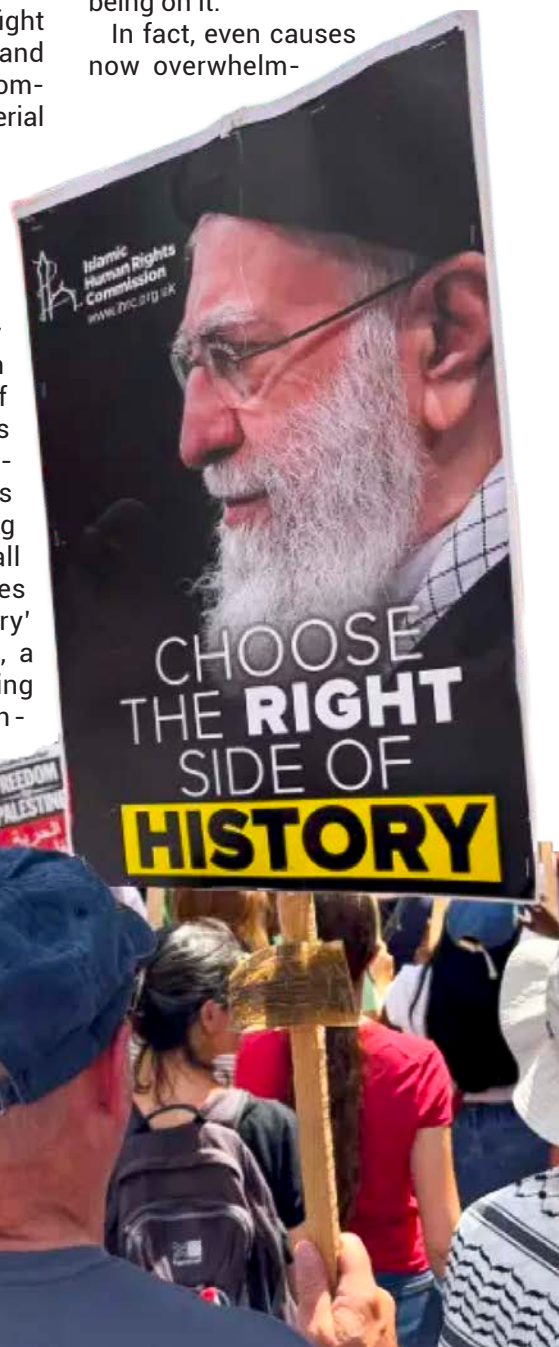
The belief that our society should be built around human and ecological need, rather than around a drive for profit, is an ideological claim, one that must be fought for and won, and then re-won whenever it is driven back, rather than



something impelled into the universe by the divinity of “history”.

Attendees at anti-war and pro-Palestine protests in recent years may have seen placards, produced by the Islamic Human Rights Commission, bearing the slogan “Choose The Right Side of History” emblazoned over a photo of the deceased Ayatollah Khamenei, the “Supreme Leader” of a brutally oppressive regime. Days before this placard was widely seen on a Palestine Solidarity Campaign demonstration in January 2026, the Ayatollah’s regime had slaughtered thousands of protesters. If that is “the right side of history”, we have lost.

“History” does not have divinely ordained “right” and “wrong” “sides”. Rather, history is the struggle to determine what is right and what is wrong. Our morality is embodied not in the passive performance of where we stand, but in the conscious choices we make about what is right and wrong and, vitally, what we do, in relation to those struggles. □



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workersliberty.org/publications

Poor choice for Scottish Labour leader

By Ann Field

Ballot papers for the Scottish Labour Party leadership election will be issued from 28 August. The ballot will close on 17 September. There will be two names on the ballot paper: North East MSP Michael Marra, and South Scotland MSP Joe Fagan.

Monica Lennon got more than enough nominations from CLPs, trade unions and Labour MSPs to make it onto the ballot paper. But she was unable to get a third Scottish Labour MP to nominate her.

This means that, in 2026, the contest for the Scottish Labour leadership will be a run-off between two men. And, whichever one of them wins, it also means that, in 2026, the Scottish, Welsh and UK Labour Parties will all be led by men.

As LabourList has commented: "That should prompt some uncomfortable questions of its own. Why is it that, time and time again, women are struggling to

get onto the ballot — and what barriers are they encountering that their male colleagues are not?"

Lennon was the (would-be) candidate with the clearest analysis of where Scottish Labour currently finds itself, and what needs to be done:

"A bigger inclusive tent: Build a welcoming party that debates big ideas, ditching the petty squabbles that divide us. Empowered grassroots: Put campaign leadership back into the hands of members, trade unions, and local communities."

Deprives

Lennon's absence from the ballot paper deprives the Scottish Labour left of an opportunity around which to organise an intervention into the leadership contest. But, to be frank, Lennon would have provided only a limited opportunity.

Lennon is not a member of the Campaign for Socialism (CfS, the organisation of the Scottish Labour left).

Of the three MSPs who are CfS members, one unenthusiastically nominated Lennon ("to help her get on the ballot paper"), one nominated Lennon, equally unenthusiastically, with just fifteen minutes to go to close of nominations, and one nominated Fagan.

Lennon makes great play of her green credentials. She has introduced a bill in Holyrood to create a new criminal offence of "ecocide". She has also opposed the issuing of new licences to drill for North Sea oil and gas.

But at the Glasgow hustings, Lennon ducked out:

"This is a very timely question. The UK government has just finished collecting information about this question, and I think we should wait to see what they have to say. We should also listen to what people who work in the oil and gas industry have to say, and listen to their union. And I'm very proud to have been nominated by their union, Unite."

Unite policy is to support the issuing of new licences.

After failing to get on the ballot paper Lennon issued a statement attacking Scottish Labour as "the nasty party" and claiming that her failure to get on the ballot paper was all down to her line on trans rights.

Vehement

This was despite the fact that nothing in her campaign material even mentioned trans rights, and some of the most pro-trans-rights elements in Scottish Labour were vehement in their opposition to Lennon.

With only Fagan and Marra left on the ballot paper, a case could be made out for a vote for Fagan. But if there is such a case for voting for Fagan against Marra, the argument is certainly not a hill worth dying on. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/marra-fa

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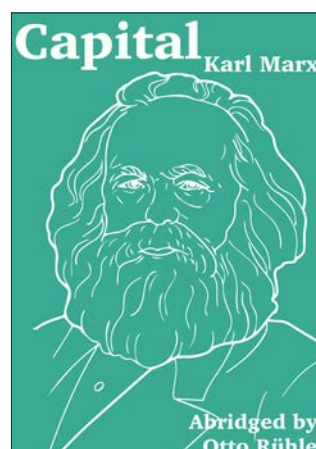
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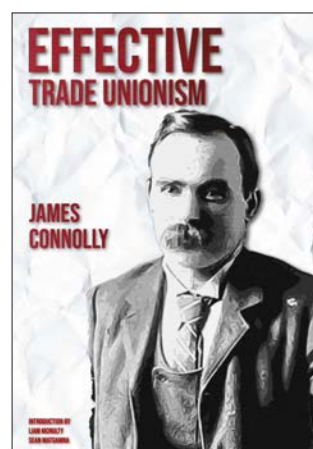
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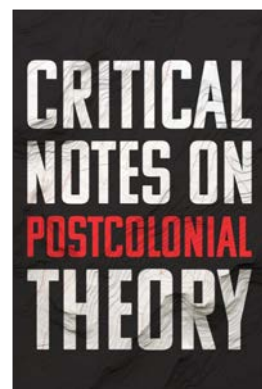
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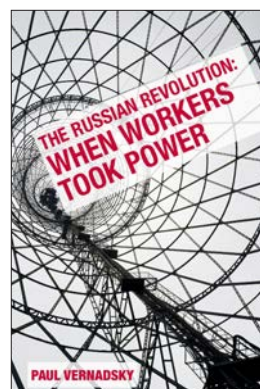
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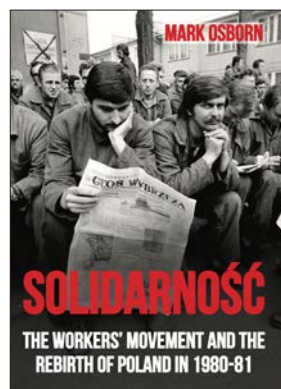
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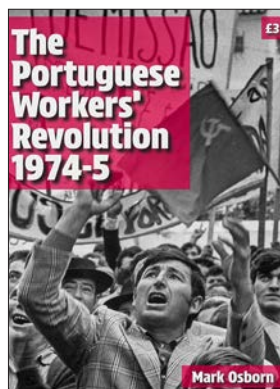
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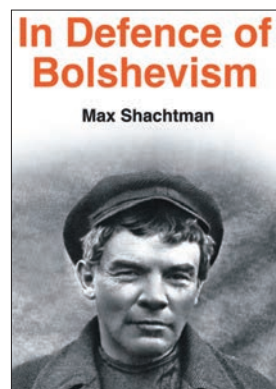
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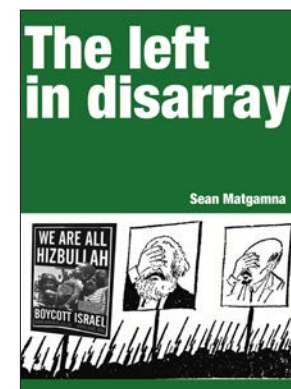
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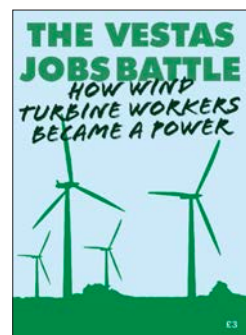
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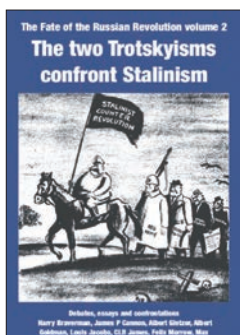
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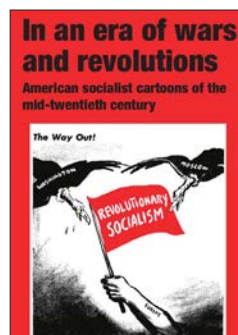
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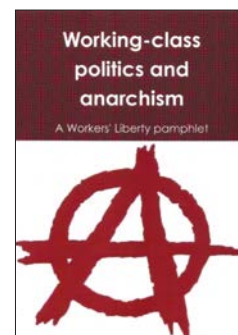
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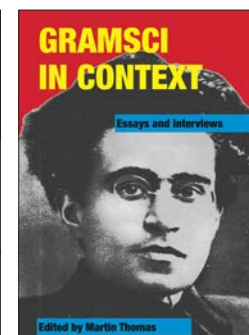
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Rebuilding union strength in local government

By Ruth Cashman

Unison members in local government will receive a pay increase of 3.3%, against a claim for £3,000 or 10%, whichever was the greater. Pay in local government has gone down by 25% since 2009, in the same period Councils in England have shed approximately a third of their total workforce, increasing workloads.

The union targeted branches that had previously got within 10% of the threshold in two previous national member ballots for strike action. As with the last ballot, some branches received targeted support from their regions. The yes vote for strikes was convincing, with 81.8%, but only 28.4% of members voted. The union has not released the ballot results but *The Socialist* reports that no large employer (defined as over 1,000 members) met the anti-union-law 50% turnout threshold and only one employer with over 500 members reached 50%.

For previous whole-sector Unison industrial action ballots, overall national turnouts have always ranged low, typically between 25% and 34%, with the 2011 public service pension ballot at 29% and the 2022 NHS pay dispute national average at 34%. The 2011 and 2022 disputes were far from successful, but not primarily because of lack of member engagement or enthusiasm.

Since the 2016 anti-union legislation, people have learned to interpret low turnouts as a sign of weakness. Union

activists have internalised the anti-union laws. This result will demoralise an already demoralised activist layer in the union.

There were a number of particular issues in this ballot. Members were balloted over a four-week period in the school holidays when a third of the workforce would not be at work. The timing also meant the ballot ended just as electronic balloting came into force. The member contact system was only open for two of the four weeks and branches were told this was the only mapping tool which could be used. The Movement system used for Get The Vote Out has greater functionality than Unison activists are offered. Five branches in London offered to pay from Branch funds to have the option to see workplace data but were refused permission by the national union.

Pay rise

The pay rise is enacted from 1 April, but as usual the union allowed the employer to set the timetable. The local government unions had no political campaigning around May elections or the Labour leadership nomination period and did not start balloting in April when the employer failed to provide a good enough offer. Reps report that increasing numbers of members don't want to vote in the ballot because they want the backdated rise without delay.

Each of these mistakes of the bureau-

cracy is a real factor, but a bigger one is the structural weakness of the unions in the sector. Rep coverage is big weakness. In line with the rest of the movement Unison has had a decline in its activist base. Job losses in the sector have exacerbated this trend in local government. The union members and activists in local government are older than average local government workers. Unless we can recruit more reps we face an existential crisis. Branch life is lower than it has been, though there have been notable counter-trends in branches with strong local activity including disputes.

Local disputes

Whilst we try to wrestle control of the national machinery, activists must also build local disputes to bring in a new activist layer and build confidence and combativity amongst workers. Unison has recruited many new reps since the 2023 Organising to Win agenda was launched but many new reps, particular young members, find it difficult to stay active in inactive or even hostile branches. Honoraria paid in many branches incentivises keeping new leaders out. The union's left must focus on providing some scaffolding for new reps trying to break into activity.

Time For Real Change London is holding a training event in September for activists struggling to become active in their workplace.

At national level we must ensure next year's union local government conference takes pay seriously. We must move toward a bargaining machinery that people can understand and engage with. The "NJC" apparatus is opaque and baffling, and the union local government Service Group Executive rarely asserts itself between meetings.

We must also push for political campaigning which attempts to mobilise members alongside industrial disputes. For those branch activists and lay leaders who want to turn around Unison fortunes in local government, the road to the next pay campaign must start now. □



Sharon Graham re-elected in Unite

By Owen Flood

Sharon Graham has been re-elected as general secretary of Unite the union. She received more than double the votes (68,694) of her rival Simon Dubbins (31,130). The turnout was 10.31%. In previous elections it was 15.8% (2010), 15.2% (2013), 12.2% (2017), and probably around 10.3% in 2021 (the union published no figures then for ballot papers issued, and some say 12%).

Sharon Graham has pitched herself as the "back to workplace" candidate. There has been more industrial success under her leadership, but of late that has declined somewhat. As the turnout for the election shows, this has not translated into more rank and file activity in the union. Under Sharon Graham union democracy has not substantially improved. In some cases (e.g. on publishing Executive Committee minutes) it has become worse.

Most of those who had been

aligned to the McCluskey/United Left faction jumped ship to Sharon Graham. Simon Dubbins pitched himself as the "left-wing" candidate, backed by Members United (a rebranding of the now discredited UL).

He is for keeping Unite affiliation to the Labour Party. He pitches himself as being better on Palestine. He is worse industrially than Graham and has been reported as saying that Unite is too quick to take strike action.

Critical vote

Neither candidate came from the rank and file. Workers' Liberty called for a critical vote for Sharon Graham.

Sharon Graham promised in her manifesto to hold a referendum on Unite's affiliation to the Labour Party. The threat of disaffiliation has been slightly blunted by the appointment of Burnham as Labour leader and Prime Minister. However, it is not off the table. With Rules Conference next year it will take

only one branch putting forward a motion on disaffiliation to raise the issue once again.

Workers' Liberty opposes disaffiliation from the Labour Party. Disaffiliation would make Unite less politically relevant not more.

On the environment the union has contradictory policy, endorsing net-zero on the one hand but also calling for more investment in the oil refinery industry on the other. On oil and gas licenses, the official line of the union is to call for "No Ban Without a Plan". However, Sharon Graham has been more vocal on opposing a ban than suggesting any plan.

On military spending, Unite is now vocally campaigning for an increase in the defence budget. Again the union has contradictory policy on this, and the Unite leadership is selective in what it campaigns on.

On Israel-Palestine much of the left, particularly those who supported Simon Dubbins,

have painted Sharon Graham as being insufficiently supportive of the Palestinians. She instructed staff not to support actions outside arms factories, Unite banners were not officially sanctioned on pro-Palestinian demos, and the union has used bureaucratic manoeuvres to avoid a debate on opposing the proscription of Palestine Action.

Nevertheless much of the left, including the left in Unite, is mired in a politics that myopically focuses on boycotts and cutting ties with anything to do with Israel.

Workers' Liberty supports and encourages workers to refuse to handle arms or carry out work that facilitates the Israeli government's military aims. But we also we advocate building links with the left, workers' and labour organisations in Israel and Palestine, rather than supporting "boycott, divestment and sanctions".

The reelection of Graham

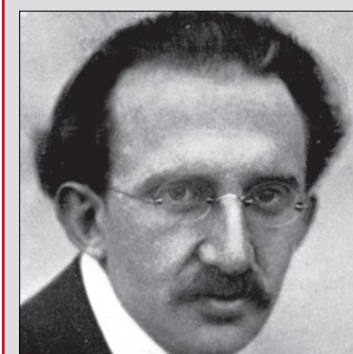
provides somewhat better terrain to fight for a more militant and democratic Unite than if Dubbins had been elected. Workers' Liberty is for building a real rank and file movement within Unite. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/s-g-u. See also Unite union finances: bit.ly/unite-f

More online

Lukacs on reification

A sceptical survey
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What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Raising £15,000 by November

With this paper, we are launching a three-month campaign to raise £15,000, ending at Ideas for Freedom on the weekend of 21-22 November. We have no big money backers or crypto-billionaires to help fund our work. The money we are raising will go directly to help us organise in the run-up to the new student term and for our interventions into the Labour and Green Party conferences as well as the continued pro-

duction of our newspaper, books, and pamphlets.

We're asking comrades, readers and supporters, to stump up whatever



they can and to encourage others to do so. Every branch collection, every workplace whip-round, every standing order set up this week brings us closer to the target – and helps to make our voice louder against the tyrants, bosses, and bureaucrats who would benefit from a weaker and smaller organised socialist left.

From this issue, every fortnight, this column will tell you how that fundrais-

ing is going: how much has come in, the kinds of activities our supporters have organised to drive up our funds and what the money is funding.

£15,000 in twelve weeks means roughly £1,250 a fortnight. That's ambitious, but a pittance on the scale of our political project! □

• workersliberty.org/donate

Diary of a...

All down to service control

By Jay Dawkey

The radio goes off, and you glance at it, wondering what they want from you. You are already out of service, running into the depot. This almost certainly means they're finding more work for you. The luxury of a slow stroll back to your home depot seems to evaporate. "Change of plan. You'll get a good train and run that out of service back to the Sidings". The same sidings you have just been asked to collect the bad train from. The joys of being spare...

"That's all received, but you know I need to be back on the westbound for 1832. Will I have enough time?" "You'll

be turned straight round. There will be no issue with that pickup". You look at your watch. You've got about 90 minutes. In theory they aren't wrong, but that doesn't take into account that once you prep that new train, another one might be in front of you, something else could be reversing in the Sidings another 10 minutes away, and even out of service it's another 20 minutes, then walking back out of those Sidings and waiting for a train to take you back, plus crossing over the platform.

Sure enough, at 1829 you find yourself on the phone to the Trains Manager: "I am just outside; this train is being held. I did say at the time this was pushing it,

but I won't take being booked for being out of position". You eventually get round to relieving the driver, who is already ringing up to find out where you are. "This is all down to service control, I'm afraid". "It always is," they say, just glad to be able to go on grub only three minutes late.

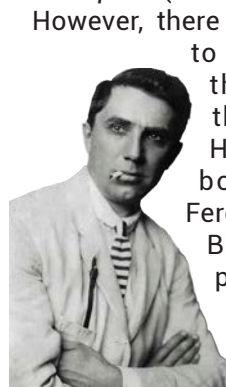
Later you find yourself back in the sidings waiting to take a train onto the platform. It is now just about time you should be on the platform. You call the signaller, "Are you in position driver?" The temptation to reply with "What do you think?" is resisted, and you simply confirm you are and get told you'll be let out next. So only another five minutes late, then... □

Kino Eye

Béla Lugosi, 1882-1956, trade union organiser

By John Cunningham

It is the 70th anniversary of Béla Lugosi's death. Ask just about anyone what Béla Lugosi is famous for, and you will probably get one or two replies: his performance as Dracula and his appearance in possibly the worst film ever made: Ed Wood's *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1957).



However, there was more to his life than just the films. He was born Béla Ferenc Dezső Blaskó, appropriately enough in Transylvania,

then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire (today his birthplace, Lugoj, is in Romania). Adopting the stage and screen name Lugosi, he established his reputation in Hungary's theatre-land and also appeared in a number of films. At the time workers in theatre were unorganised. He played a key role in building up the Free Organisation of Theatre Employees in Hungary.

Screen Actors' Guild

Lugosi's union grew and on 17 March 1919 the National Trade Union of Actors was created. Lugosi was a supporter of the Hungarian Workers' Council Revolution of 1919. It lasted only 133 days and Lugosi had to flee

across the border into Austria, eventually settling in Hollywood. In 1933 he – and Boris Karloff – helped to establish the Screen Actors' Guild and Lugosi served on the advisory board of the SAG.

As president of the Hungarian-American Council for Democracy, he became a vigorous campaigner against fascism in both Germany and his native Hungary. Many Jewish refugees benefitted from his activities. His career as Dracula, and his decline into drug addiction and alcoholism, have tended to overshadow his anti-fascist and trade union activity. He deserves recognition for that activity as much as any other aspect of his life. □

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 □

Students get ready for the term

By Sam Myerson

The new student Campaign against Fees, Cuts, and Debt is making plans for the coming term. A conference on 31 July and 1 August brought together activists from around the country. That campaign is planning for days of action over the coming months. We need to be organised and ready for them.

Labour Party conference is coming up on 27-30 September, and gives us an opportunity to demonstrate that we are up for the fight. There has been a welcome change in tone from the government since Andy Burnham took over as leader, with Lucy Powell as Education Secretary saying

that fees and funding are a priority issue, but no positive action.

Famous charlatan Nick Clegg, an architect of the trebling of tuition fees, recently said that he would take any criticism "on the chin", but thinks the situation on student debt is untenable. What is untenable is a conman like Clegg rearing his head. He should scurry back into the hole he disappeared into, drop his involvement in AI, and hope for a peaceful life.

There is growing pressure in society around the levels of student

debt and high repayment rates for graduates. Many bourgeois journalists now were students during or after the fee increases Cameron and Clegg brought in. Now they are willing and able to make noise about the issues from prominent media positions.

New term

The term starts in Scotland early in September ("welcome weeks" at Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Dundee from 14 September), and the campaign will need to be ready with new issues of its student worker bulletin. Across Britain, at the start of term, there will be around 500,000 new students on campuses, many at universities where the courses and campuses are remarkably different from what was first offered to them a year ago when they applied. Universities have spent hundreds of millions of pounds on redundancies to get rid of staff under the guise of "cutting costs". At A-Level results time, Exeter University announced that it was closing the geography course at its Penrhyn campus which students were in the process of accepting offers for.

Workers' Liberty activists on cam-

puses will be organising stalls and bulletin distributions with other activists from the campaign, alongside our own Workers' Liberty Students activities. Get in touch and work with us to build the campaign against cuts, fees, and debt on campus. □

RNLI strikers increase pressure on bosses

David Pendleton

Union members at the RNLI lifeboat manufacturing site in East Cowes remain in dispute over the closing of the site and redundancies. Following [our report](#) in *Solidarity* 772 there have been two more strikes on Wednesday 19 August and Tuesday 25 August, both with similarly strong picket lines. On Tuesday 25th the strikers to decide to split their forces to send a presence to the Poole RNLI site. The intention is to increase the pressure on the bosses, who are not even entering meaningful negotiations.

The next planned action is a week of strikes from 18 September to coincide with the Southampton International Boat Show, of which the RNLI is a main sponsor. □

Rayner agrees to meet MHCLG PCS

By a PCS member

The long running dispute of the PCS civil service union with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) continues. The dispute is focussed on office closures and their consequences, defence of the location-neutral recruitment and promotion policy, and enforced individual office attendance requirements.

Management could now easily address the first two issues and talks have taken place in recent weeks, albeit without any breakthrough being reported by PCS representatives. The emphasis of the dispute has swung towards the last issue – the right of staff to be trusted to make decisions about how and where they work from. Members who do not wish to meet the attendance requirement are standing firm on non-compliance.

Labour's Secretary of State for Housing (SoS), Angela Rayner, now has an opportunity to resolve the dispute, proving that she can lis-

ten to workers rather than just make speeches about workers' rights. Rayner recently told an all-MHCLG staff meeting that she is no Rees-Mogg, the former Tory MP who made cheap propaganda against flexible working for civil servants while defending or being indifferent to the outrageous privileges of MPs.

Opening

Not being Rees-Mogg is a very low bar, even as humour. But Rayner's statement could have provided an opening for management to move from their hardline position.

Revealingly however, the MHCLG Interim Permanent Secretary sought to qualify or improve Rayner's statement by saying that while "she's [Rayner] not Jacob Rees Mogg... that doesn't mean you can not do your 50%, 60% or whatever [of office attendance]."

To the pleasure of many staff, a PCS representative insisted on asking Rayner if she would meet with the Union to discuss office closures and office attendance mandates. She consented. We will see if Rayner meets with PCS with a meaningful intention to resolve the dispute. But she should do – and we can say that without building illusions in her or Labour Ministers. At the time

Solidarity went to press, PCS had not informed members of any date for the proposed meeting with Rayner.

On 19 August Rayner robustly insisted on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme that home working did not affect productivity in her department, saying again that she is no Rees-Mogg, that she did not need to see people in the office to know that they are working, and working very hard. Rayner's argument chimes in with key messages of PCS MHCLG's "Our Work Our Way" campaign.

Example

Across Whitehall, since the election of the (then Starmer) Labour Government in July 2024, civil service bosses have acted as if it is business as usual, no different to having the Tories in charge. In her first period as SoS for Housing under Keir Starmer, Rayner avoided meeting PCS during the onset of the current dispute. She can now set an example to other Labour Ministers by hearing the voice of MHCLG workers. □





Ideas for Freedom is an annual festival of socialist debate, discussion, and education hosted by Workers' Liberty. We invite you to join us to discuss the past, present, and future of working-class, socialist political ideas, and to become active in making those ideas a living reality. The event takes place on 21-22 November at Camden School for Girls, Sandall Road, NW5 2DB, with an additional event on the evening of Friday 20 November in Central London. □ Tickets and more info at: workersliberty.org/iff26

Iran: against war, against sanctions

By Dan Katz

Donald Trump is still threatening renewed open war in the Gulf, most lately against Oman, a US ally.

The US, however, is now talking more about economic sanctions. Vice President J D Vance is remarkably clear about the US's pared-down aims: "Ensure the Gulf countries continue to send oil and gas to the world economy so we have energy price stability. That's goal number one: keep oil and gas cheap for Americans... goal number two is to ensure Iran never gets a nuclear weapon."

How could these goals be achieved? US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent,

20 August, stated that the US planned the "most crushing economic operation every taken against any country." Bessent then threatened economic penalties against any organisation or state doing business with Iran, "the US Treasury and government will put [their] full might and force towards enforcing [the US sanctions]." He added, "You're either for us or against us."

Bessent seems to believe that more sanctions are a good alternative to full-scale war against Iran, belatedly having worked out that such war is not likely to work. But they aren't. □

• More: page 3



Stop Rosebank and Jackdaw

By Rhodri Evans

Public consultations on updated plans for the Jackdaw gas field east of Aberdeen and the bigger Rosebank oil and gas field north of Shetland closed on 10 August 2026 (Jackdaw) and 17 August (Rosebank).

Those updated plans were written in response to a January 2025 court judgement that, though licenses for the areas had been given long ago, the Tory government's consent for actual development was unlawful because of not heeding climate impacts enough. They now go to the Offshore Petroleum Regulator.

But new Prime Minister Andy Burnham and his sidekick Energy Secretary Miatta Fahnbulleh have let hints drop that they will renew consent.

On 14 May, ten trade unions, including Unison, NEU, FBU, PCS, and CWU, rightly called on the government to refuse consent.

• This summer's heatwaves, mild compared to what happens in much of the world, show the deadly effects of climate change.

• Climate change is coming faster, not slower, than expert predictions.

• Keeping it within manageable limits, let alone reversing it, demands stopping fossil-fuel development now. So far expansion of renewables and nuclear has gone alongside continued fossil-fuel burning, not replaced it.

• Rosebank and Jackdaw are small in world terms, but then most individual developments are. Stopping them all means stopping them all.



• They will not reduce world oil and gas costs, and will not reduce UK energy costs.

• North Sea oil and gas jobs have been declining drastically for a long time, and will continue to decline overall come what may. Upgrading the electricity grid, improving building insulation, increasing energy efficiency, electrifying everything, expanding renewables and nuclear will generate many more good useful jobs than the 880 jobs at Rosebank and Jackdaw over their lifetimes, or even the thousands in their construction phases.

• So indeed will proper decommissioning of North Sea rigs, as discussed in the union-backed [Our Power](#) report. Around 500 North Sea wells are already overdue for final dismantling.

Stop Jackdaw and Rosebank! For public ownership of the whole energy industry! For a worker-controlled energy transition! □

Fight this bid to ban union trans-inclusivity!

By Simon Nelson

Paul Conrathe, the right-wing Christian lawyer who has spearheaded legal cases against both abortion and trans rights, and whose firm acted for Stephen Flaherty, has written to the TUC following the Flaherty vs Unison decision by the Certification Officer, calling on the TUC to ensure that all affiliated Unions uphold "sex-based rights" in their elections.

The decision found Unison out of order for allowing a trans woman to stand for a "women's" position (which she didn't win), and implies banning all trans-inclusive women's con-

ferences or committees.

Unison's own response is not to challenge the judgment. "We will take the time to work through the implications with our democratic structures, consult with relevant members and groups, and determine the most appropriate way forward. Unison remains committed to campaigning to change the law to reflect our policy and understanding that trans women are women, trans men are men, and non-binary identities exist."

Conrathe's letter to the TUC says "This should not be left to individual disputes. A movement-wide review would promote legal certainty, good

governance and confidence that unions are applying the law as it now clearly stands."

The TUC have said that they "will give careful consideration to the ruling of the Certification Officer and its implication for our affiliate unions, and we will continue to engage with our unions on this matter."

Hardly a combative approach to a hard-right campaign to disrupt the self-organisation of women in the trade union movement! Urgent pressure should be put on the TUC to defend women's self-organisation and to fight to defend trans rights in the labour movement. □

SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



By Sam Myerson

Bus workers in Arriva North London have rejected a first management offer and are continuing their strikes.

Their main demand is that all buses are fitted with sufficient and effective air conditioning units. Temperatures in cabs have soared into the high 40s during the heatwaves.

The rejected offer was to fit the units by some time in 2027. But it was brought to the table after only two days of action. There are many more planned, and the mandate runs for another 12 months. Drivers are in a good position to use their power to force the employers' hand. The upcoming Piccadilly Line Tube closures for engineering upgrades mean the workers are able to apply even more pressure.

The strike has been strong. Drivers have reported that only four out of 200 have crossed the picket lines at Wood Green, and the dispute is strong elsewhere too.

What remains to be seen, certainly from the official communications from the drivers'

union, Unite, is what is happening to the reps and drivers who were suspended and sacked during unofficial action. A driver has told us that if they refuse to take unsafe buses out, or take more than the 15 minutes allowed for heat breaks, they face being signed out as sick by management, with the attendance policy being used later. That is one of the issues that is being negotiated on during the dispute.

Maintenance

Workers' Liberty activists have visited picket lines and talked through the issues with drivers. There are still measures in place from the Covid pandemic, less effective cooling supposedly better for minimising virus transmission but unable to cope with the higher temperatures.

One driver told *Solidarity*: "It is not a matter of retrofitting. The oldest of the buses is from 2015. It's that the buses have not been properly maintained". This is repeated from discussions with drivers at different depots.

Arriva is making enormous profits, yet spend little on

maintenance and upgrades, while workers' pay and conditions have worsened. Drivers already are well aware of this, with some calling for the buses to be directly operated by Transport for London, giving them the ability for collective action on the whole network, for all drivers.

Workers on the network are all to aware of the issues. "We have drivers from Bangladesh, where the buses have air-conditioning. London is the financial capital, and we cannot make buses safe and comfortable", said one driver at Palmers Green, adding that "management don't care about passenger safety or driver comfort – it's insulting".

If the union is not going to spread the dispute, rank and file activists can. Long range forecasts are for another heat wave in September. Organising around these issues doesn't have to wait until the hot weather arrives. Workers can and should be taking pre-emptive action to win mitigations. The lessons learned in struggle can and will develop workers to think about fighting for pay and better conditions. □