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SOLIDARITY

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FASCIST DANGER ON THE STREETS



**Workers' united front
against far right**

Far right danger on the streets

On Saturday 5 September a new Umbrella far-right group, Patriot Platform, signalled its existence by blocking a main road in Dover and stopping traffic, then the next day joining a demonstration in Portsmouth against the arrival of a mega-dinghy of asylum seekers. They helped to form a blockade around coaches which were due to transport asylum seekers to Home Office processing centres.

Since then the RNLI lifeboat station in Portsmouth has been temporarily closed due to online and physical abuse at volunteers. Similar abuse caused the lifeboat museum in Poole to close for several days.

Dressed all in black and wearing balacavas, Patriot Platform men behaved like a vigilante fascist gang. Working with other far right groups, like UKIP, Pink Ladies and followers of Tommy Robinson, they will, if not stopped, travel wherever there is a flashpoint over immigration and places where refugee boats end up. Where people save refugees from drowning and outside the asylum hotels (and increasingly ex-military bases) where the government houses people waiting for results of their asylum claims, they will stir up hatred.

The forces in Dover and Portsmouth were assembled over the summer by Daniel Thomas ("Tommo"), Tommy Robinson's former bodyguard. Both Patriot Platform and Robinson himself have taken to displaying Christianity as the key "value" of their politics – they are not far-right, they say, but ordinary decent Christians. Thomas seems to have unified a number of local "Patriot" groups and they are organised through both public-facing and private social media platforms. They have taken some "inspiration" from the direct-action tactics of the environmental movement and the left.

This branch of the far right turned up to support the Oxfordshire village of Piddington in its "declaration of independence" in protest at a plan to house 1,200 male asylum seekers at a nearby former military base. The villagers say that so many strange men in their midst will be a certain danger to women and children. Piddington represents a miniature extreme outbreak of paranoia which has been created over years by lies and myths told about refugees and migration over years and which could easily spread.

Verifiable, expertly-researched facts about migrants are easy enough to find but many people – from the "nice" middle-class people of Piddington to the far-right thugs who follow Daniel Thomas – have been overwhelmed by fear, hyperbole and whipped up xenophobia and racism.

Evidence

What evidence there is on crime by non-citizens shows it at about the same level as crime by citizens. Besides, the fact that people housed in ex-military bases will have extreme restrictions on their freedom of movement and are unlikely to bother anyone with their foreign ways has also escaped the notice of the people of Piddington.

The real problem here is the terrible conditions for the refugees and asylum seekers in those barracks, and the maybe irreversible impacts on their physical and mental health.

Politicians and the media have signalled plans to arrest and jail the leaders of Patriot Platform as they did with the English Defence League (EDL) in the 2010s. No socialist or anti-racist is going to get upset by that outcome, if it happens. It may provide a breathing space for the very under-organised labour movement and left to do better at confronting the far right.

Yet the politics of the far right will not be defeated by legal crackdowns.

We will need to turn out much larger numbers, with not only a-to-b "unity marches" but also confronting this new wave of anti-migrant action, including at protests outside new asylum accommodation, and being organised to protect our actions and demonstrations.

We need to defend migrants, migration, and the right to claim asylum with clear fact-based arguments. Appeals to people's better nature will not work. We will need to be prepared for a difficult fight for these ideas in our communities and workplaces.

The far right has recently been exploiting an unusual 2022-4 peak in both regular and irregular immigration, the result of a relaxation of Covid-lockdown restrictions, schemes for Ukrainian and Hong Kong migrants, and crucially, because this is what really drives immigration, a labour shortage.

Numbers have been falling rapidly since that peak, yet anti-migrant policies and rhetoric have become more paranoid and hateful and focused on "remigration", i.e. deportation.

The far right will not stop with asylum-seekers.



They will use anti-migrant panic to increase racist hostility to settled migrant communities.

Labour and the Tories before them have pandered to and supported the far right by introducing ever-increasing restrictions on, for example, skilled worker visas, and accelerating the removal of people without legal status in the UK. This has not been good for society; it has, for example, caused a chronic labour shortage in adult social care.

Emboldened

The trend downwards in both regular and irregular immigration – including in the numbers entering via small boats – is what the government is calling success. But that "success" has emboldened, not stopped, the far right.

The policy on using military barracks is wrong and inhumane. Just 16,000 need to be accommodated and just 93,000 people (0.1% of the UK population) are currently receiving some form of asylum support from the Home Office. The UK is not being generous towards huge numbers of people. It should help more people!

Refugees and asylum seekers should have the right to work, and the right to be properly housed and supported in communities. There are enough resources in the UK to provide services for all.

The majority of people coming by boat are fleeing inhuman conditions, and most successfully claim asylum in spite of UK restrictions. The biggest group of asylum seekers entering the UK by boat in 2025 were from Eritrea, a country which scored 3/100 on Freedom House's freedom scale, where open-ended national military service is used as an instrument of totalitarian oppression.

The absolute numbers of migrants to the UK are modest compared to other countries and other points in history. Over time these islands have generated many more migrants than they will ever take in.

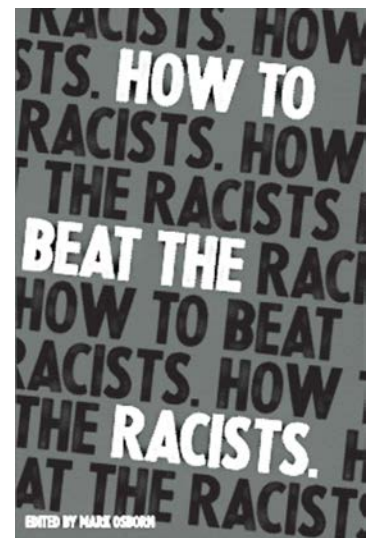
The numbers of refugees and asylum

seekers the UK has offered sanctuary to are also tiny compared to countries like Turkey or Lebanon, which are closer to areas of war and repression.

The left should face down the self-congratulatory story that Britain has always welcomed refugees. The "best" has been no more than a limited, often politicised, acceptance of small numbers of people and grudging acceptance of responsibilities under international law. This miserly culture has helped to create a climate where refugees are labelled "illegal" and laws are being calibrated to institutionalise that.

Our unions need to be committed to turning up the heat on defending migrants, including organising migrant workers and defending them from the new restrictions. A defence of migrants needs to go hand-in-hand with a socialist political alternative that can turn working-class people away from anger and grievance.

Fighting for the Labour government to tax the rich and rebuild and extend public services is also part of that job. □



This publication is – at its core – a long polemic for a set of ideas. Centrally, that racism and fascism will only be defeated by united working-class mobilisations. £5 (inc. post) □ bit.ly/shop-wl

AfD captures discontent with coalition politics

By Dale Street

Elections took place on 20 September in the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Berlin, two of Germany's sixteen regional "states" which wield wide-ranging powers under its federal structure.

In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern the far-right Alliance for Germany (AfD) emerged as the largest party (38% of the vote, an increase of 21% compared with the last election in 2021) and the SPD (roughly: Labour Party) as the second-largest (35%, down by 4%).

For the first time in post-war German history, the CDU (Conservatives, part of the CDU-CSU-SPD coalition at federal level) failed to meet the 5% threshold needed to win seats in a regional state parliament.

The FDP (Liberal-Democrats) and the BSW (a "left-populist" party) likewise failed to meet the 5% threshold. Despite losing a third of its vote since 2021, Die Linke (The Left) met the threshold (6.5%), as did the Greens (5.7%).

The CDU vote collapsed as its voters deserted it in almost equal numbers for the SPD and the AfD. The Die Linke and the FDP votes slumped because of tactical voting for the SPD to keep out the AfD.

The SPD vote largely held up because its lead candidate, Manuela Schwesig, ran a highly personalised campaign: "Die Frau Gegen Blau" ("the woman against blue", the colour of the AfD). A lot of her election material did not even mention that she was a candidate of the SPD. She also distanced herself from the record of the SPD in the federal coalition government.

The most likely outcome of the election will be an SPD-Die Linke-Green coalition government, replacing the outgoing SPD-Die Linke coalition.

In Berlin the clear winner was Die Linke (26% of the vote, an increase of 13% compared with 2021). Its election campaign focused on the exorbitant rents for housing in Berlin, with an election commitment that the Berlin government would take over the housing stock of pri-

vate housing associations.

The CDU, SPD and Green share of the vote all went down (by 9%, 6% and 4% respectively). The BSW failed to meet the 5% threshold. But the AfD share of the vote increased to 16%, compared with 7% in 2021.

Determined

The Berlin election result seems to have been determined by: dissatisfaction with the federal coalition government (result: decline in CDU and SPD vote); no possibility of a major electoral breakthrough by the AfD (result: no need for tactical voting); and the popularity of the housing policies of Die Linke (which won it the support of 75,000 traditional non-voters).

The most likely outcome of the election will be a Die Linke-SPD-Green coalition, although the Die Linke policy of taking over housing association stock could prove a sticking point. Arithmetically and politically, a CDU-SPD-Green coalition is also a possibility.

The results of Sunday's two elections underline the continuing growth in support for the AfD, even if it failed to equal its vote in the Sachsen-Anhalt election held a fortnight earlier, where it emerged with as the biggest party, with 44% of the vote.

The AfD was founded in 2013. The key planks in its political platform are hostility to migrants and, in particular, Muslims, support for mass deportations, Euroscepticism, denial of global warming, hostility to multiculturalism, a revival of German patriotism, an end to arms supplies to Ukraine, and closer ties with Russia.

Like other populist parties, albeit in more extreme forms, the AfD presents itself as the party which stands up for "ordinary" people, in opposition to "the establishment". With 150 seats, it is the official opposition in the German Parliament to the ruling CDU-CSU-SPD coalition.

According to the latest national opinion polls, support for the AfD now stands at 28%, compared with 20% for the CDU and 13% for the SPD.

But there are strong regional variations, with the latest polling showing support for the AfD running at

SPD candidate Manuela Schwesig presents herself as "the woman against blue" i.e. AfD

DIE FRAU
GEGEN
BLAU

35% in the regional states in the former German Democratic Republic (which include Sachsen-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern).

Although there are also regional variations in why people vote AfD, the main reasons are consistently: immigration, dissatisfaction with the record of the national government, and, in the eastern regional states, the belief that inhabitants of the former GDR are treated as second-class citizens.

Dissatisfaction

The results of the regional state elections of the past fortnight were primarily an expression of dissatisfaction with the record — and promises of worse to come — of the federal coalition government: ongoing economic stagnation and high unemployment rates, attacks on public spending, attacks on social welfare, and increasing the retirement age.

Satisfaction with the record of the government has declined from 40% in late 2025 to just 17% now. According to recent opinion polling, 46% of voters cast their vote on the basis of negative reasons (i.e. against parties which they are dissatisfied with, rather than for a party they agree with).

The AfD has been able to capitalise on that dissatisfaction, demagogically scapegoating immigrants, green policies, and Germany's support for Ukraine. Despite the win of the Die Linke in Berlin, and it looking unlikely that the AfD will get allies to form a government in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern or Sachsen-An-

halt, the AfD remains a very real — and growing — threat.

The AfD's score of 44% in the Sachsen-Anhalt election was its highest polling ever, and the first time a party had achieved that level of electoral support in over a decade.

Its election manifesto included promises of:

- a "deportation offensive"
- the creation of an ICE-like "taskforce"
- funding of NGOs to be dependent on their signing a "patriotism and democracy declaration"
- school education "in the spirit of love to one's country and the German people"
- the reintroduction of Russian as a school subject
- the abolition of sex education
- "baby welcome grants" (for German babies)
- scrapping 10% of the jobs in the state administration
- "a 180 degree about-turn" in environmental policies and slashing subsidies for green-energy development.

Polling of AfD voters in Sachsen-Anhalt found that the main reasons given for voting AfD were: immigration (91%); dissatisfaction with the record of the national government (83%) and the previous Sachsen-Anhalt CDU government (66%); and the belief that inhabitants of the former GDR were still being treated as second-class citizens (83%). □



To defeat One Nation, turn round the labour movement

By Janet Burstall

Australia's long-standing far-right party, One Nation, has gone from 6.4% of the vote in the May 2025 federal election to 25% to 30% in opinion polls through most of 2026. One Nation could possibly be in government in the state of Victoria after the November election there.

Why the rise? I suspect it's probably not really any specific issue. It's general pessimism among large sections of the population.

The economic journalist Ross Gittins writes: "The One Nation bloc is.... the mortgaged, asset-stretched, outer-suburban working class of western Sydney and Melbourne's outer north and west. These voters work in trades, transport, freight and what's left of manufacturing. They are mortgage-stressed... households that bought into the dream of asset-based prosperity and are now servicing the debt without the wage growth that was supposed to come with it.

"Many are of Anglo-Celtic descent but with a rapidly rising second-generation migrant component... Their cultural register is anti-elite, not pure ideology. They don't buy into a coherent program and reject the language and assumptions of the educated professional class."

DemosAU found a similar picture:

"Age — strongest among older voters... Location — strongest outside inner metro areas. One Nation's vote is noticeably stronger in regional/rural and outer-metropolitan electorates [in Australia, unlike Britain, outer suburbs of big cities are typically poorer than inner suburbs]... Education — concentrated among non-university voters".

There is probably also a cluster of One Nation support around fossil-fuel industry workers who reject policies to curb greenhouse gas emissions. One Nation's major financial backers are billionaire mining magnate Gina Rinehart, and some of her associates.

One Nation's gains were at first mostly at the expense of Australia's long-standing conservative parties, the Liberals and the Nationals, but One Nation's recent win in Western Australia state by-election showed a 19% swing against Labor in a previously safe Labor seat. The Greens, the third bloc in the May 2025 election, are steady in polls at around 12% of the vote.

Women and One Nation

One Nation has largely closed the gender gap in its support, and very quickly, unlike far-right parties elsewhere which

generally have much lower support among women than men (except the RN now in France, after many years of great effort).

Pauline Hanson, the long-time leader of One Nation, has always been very anti-feminist. She thinks that rape accusations against men are generally unfair; domestic violence is a cooked-up issue, a scam against men. Most Australians still think that domestic violence is a serious issue, and only a handful wouldn't. This supports the hunch that it is not One Nation policies which are attracting voters.

It's also hard to explain why One Nation is more hard-edged against abortion rights than far-right parties elsewhere, for example the RN in France, which explicitly supports existing abortion rights there. I suspect One Nation activists probably see MAGA as more inspiring, and MAGA attacked abortion rights at state level in the USA.

Housing

The rising cost of housing has dominated public discussion for the last five years, since Covid. In Australia the median cost of buying a house is around nine times the annual median household income. In the UK, it's five to six times. In the US, it's under five. In France, it's around five to seven. And Australia has mortgage-rate rises without the long-term fixed-rate mortgages available in the USA (where federal agencies take the risk away from the banks). Australian banks have, maybe more than anywhere else in the world, finessed their risk calculations to maximise what they lend households to the absolute closest edge of default, and the pressure near that edge is intense. Mortgage payments are now on average 35.5% of household income. The proportion of households paying off their mortgage has risen from about 31% in the 1990s to 41%. More households are taking longer to repay their mortgages.

Household financial stress, especially associated with repaying a mortgage, could be a reason for more women being pessimistic enough to support One Nation, because day-to-day budgeting is more often the responsibility of women.

Individualist ideology

Features of the Australian economy generate an individualistic and competitive outlook, and One Nation's rhetoric resonates strongly with it. For example:

Australia, with distributed small landlordism and a historical culture of home ownership, has a different profile on

home ownership from other countries

Around 70% of the construction industry workforce is based on a network of small contractors and subcontractors.

Compulsory employer superannuation contributions of 12% into individual super accounts for retirement income are viewed by many people as their personal money, which they should be able to withdraw when they need it, not have to wait till retirement. One Nation wants to make it easier to withdraw from superannuation accounts. [In Australia pension provision is through "superannuation funds", with each worker legally obliged to pay into a fund].

The world-view this feeds is that success or survival in society is based on individual effort and acquisition of property.

One Nation proposes to "cut immigration by over 570,000 people from current Labor levels by capping visas at 130,000 per year to ease pressure on housing, wages, and infrastructure." This is a worldview that presents the obstacles to survival, particularly to having a home and a job, as being too many others competing for those things.

The other main obstacle to personal success is seen as government intervention, "nonsensical" rules and regulations, and especially policies to address climate change.

The Murdoch press, Sky News, etc. are relentlessly ideological against the "intellectual elites", "inclusion" and anything "woke".

One Nation feeds on and stirs this well of resentment — a rejection of the role of the state in doing anything but repression of "other" people. Keep immigrants out, and crack down on law and order.

The main "law and order" agitation in Australia in the last few years has been about Indigenous youth crime. In Queensland, the Liberal-National government has expanded what it calls its "Adult Crime, Adult Time" policy to bring in longer jail sentences for more offences for "youth offenders" (ages 10 to 17).

The economic conditions that have produced One Nation's surge are structural, not temporary. This is why there is so much pessimism for One Nation to exploit.

As unions have declined in both membership and industrial strength, very few workers experience workplace solidarity. There is no sense of optimism that people can make things better through collective action. The programs and policies from major parties, including the

Greens, are not generating optimism,

It's not so much that the new One Nation voters think One Nation has policies that can solve their problems. It's a bit like many people who voted for Trump, who didn't really think he was going to do many of the things he said and indeed hoped he wouldn't. It's a kind of a protest that expresses pessimism about politics.

Organising against One Nation

During the first rise of One Nation, mainly in Queensland, in the late 1990s, there were big high school walkouts and large street protests against it. *Red Flag* [the paper of Socialist Alternative, the largest Australian far-left group] argues that those helped strip away soft support for One Nation. Maybe so.

But for now, I think, left mobilisation mostly hasn't recovered since the Covid lockdowns, except marginally on the issue of Palestine.

I don't think trying to stick the "fascist" label on One Nation resonates much. One Nation may be potentially fascist, but they are not organising thuggery against the people they demonise.

The left must oppose racism, but in conjunction with left-wing solutions to the problems that people are using racist ideas to explain. The bigger picture is the need to turn round the unions and the labour movement, and to build its commitment to demands and policies for social solidarity, for meeting people's needs, for effective greenhouse emission reduction, and for standing up to capital and finance, while rejecting cuts to immigration and law and order crackdowns.

There needs to be a lot more public housing, and better renter protection. Governments are not budgeting enough for public housing, on the grounds of escalating government debt. In Australia the federal and state governments pay about \$50 billion a year in debt interest. We can't increase public housing on the necessary scale without higher taxes on, or better still public ownership of, high finance, in order to redirect their revenues to public purposes. If governments took on large-scale construction of public housing, they could provide stable and regular employment to the tradies and contractors, which would be a far better future than One Nation is offering them.

The left needs to work on developing these kinds of policies, and going where the soft support for One Nation is, to talk to people in the street about the positive alternative of solidarity. □

Sanctions on settlements, yes, but “on the ground” needed

By Ira Berkovic

The UK government's imposition of sanctions on Israel's settlement project in the occupied West Bank is a positive step. The sanctions prevent the import of goods produced in settlements, ban organisations from advertising settlement real estate in the UK, and impose financial penalties on businesses involved in settlements.

The measures were implemented in coordination with policies adopted by France and Canada, and follow the implementation of similar sanctions by Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands, and Norway.

Settlement construction is accelerating, including in the E1 area, where extensive Jewish settlement would make a Palestinian state in contiguous territory unviable. And armed settlers are rampaging through the West Bank, expelling Palestinians and besieging them in their homes, with the occupation military either ignoring or directly abetting their violence. UK Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband was right to describe Israel's policy as “ethnic cleansing”, and to call settler violence terroristic.

The Labour Party has undergone a dramatic shift in the tone, and to some extent the substance, of its policy on Israel-Palestine since October 2023. The contrast between then-leader Keir Starmer's faltering implication that cutting off water and electricity to Gaza might be justified by Israel's right to self-defence and Miliband's speech could hardly be sharper.

Pressure

This is driven partly by revulsion (even “at the top”) at the horrors in Gaza and the West Bank, but also by action from below, from the party grassroots (the 2025 conference passed a much sharper policy on Israel-Palestine than the leadership had wanted), from affiliated unions, and from a protest movement in wider society.

That action from below has been politically contradictory, shaped by humanitarian and internationalist concern for Palestinian rights, but also often by a prevalent left common-sense that often subsumes such concern into hostility not only to the Israeli regime, but to anything and everything Israeli.

But we now know that our action can force a governing Labour Party to do things its leadership would not necessarily otherwise have done.

There is more to say about the sanctions themselves than to simply cheer them on. Whilst welcome, they are not without potential pitfalls. We live in a historical moment where mass collective action to win fundamental democratic change seems a distant prospect. Many left-minded people have fallen back on the idea that the thing to do, when faced with authoritarian or warmongering re-

gimes, is to demand “our” government impose sanctions of some kind.

It is an impulse of internationalist solidarity strangely refracted through a nationalist prism: rather than focusing on seeking direct links with, and building material support for, those living under such regimes who share our political aims, we see action by “our” government as the agency for change.

Workers' sanctions

Looking to “workers' sanctions”, such as dockers refusing to load munitions bound for Israel and other warmongering states, is a better starting point. Such actions will be most effective if they dovetail and coordinate with internal resistance, such as movements like Standing Together which seek to mobilise Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel against occupation and war. That, in turn, requires much of the left to break from the idea that there is no progressive potential for struggles within Israeli society.

Some have expressed concerns that increased economic pressure on Israel may be counterproductive, and end up boosting the autarkic-nationalist siege-state narratives of Netanyahu's wing of the Israeli right. Leading Israeli political commentators and pollsters such as Dahlia Scheindlin have refuted such claims, arguing that the UK's sanctions have so far had little cut-through with an Israeli public more focused on domestic political concerns.

The targeted nature of the sanctions is also designed to sharpen the distinction between the state of Israel in pre-1967 borders and occupied Palestinian territories.

There is no chance the UK government itself will move from its current sanctions policy to anything like the totalising, root-and-branch-boycott, cut-all-ties-with-Israel approach advocated by some in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. In fact generalised economic sanctions (and still more “boycott”) would hurt ordinary people more than the powerful, who have ways of protecting their financial interests. Whilst that may be of no concern to those on the left who see Israeli Jews as a single, reactionary bloc, those who see co-resistance between Jews and Palestinians as key to change should not support measures likely to drive Israeli Jews to the right.

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis's response to the sanctions, which warned that they will further stoke antisemitism, is informed by his own politics: generally conservative and pro-Israel. He is the head of the United Synagogue, the mainstream-Orthodox synagogue federation to which the British state gives ceremonial primacy, but to which only 36,000 of Britain's approximately 275,000 Jews formally belong. Whilst remaining crit-

THE SITUATION IN THE WEST BANK IS DIRE
Palestinian farmers are facing restricted access, harassment, and violence trying to reach their own trees.



ical of Mirvis — including on the secularist grounds that clerics should not intervene in politics — it is important to think for ourselves about how policies towards Israel may impact on Jews in Britain.

Research from 2024 indicates a huge majority of British Jews, nearly 80%, disapprove of Benjamin Netanyahu. Research from 2025 shows a slight majority, 51%, of all British Jews believe the war in Gaza “clashes with their Jewish values”. Older research showed large majorities amongst British Jews for opposition to settlement expansion.

The same studies consistently show that some form of attachment to Israel remains central to the identity of most Jews. This is hardly surprising: 70% of British Jews have a relative in Israel. For many, the emergence of a Jewish state is a product of historic Jewish experiences of persecution and oppression.

This shows that Jewish ties to Israel can take a variety of forms, and by no means necessarily imply political endorsement of the Israeli regime. An undifferentiated “boycott Israel” politics, hunting down and targeting any points of linkage with Israel, risks targeting Jewish communal life.

Absolutist

It is important to defend the targeted nature of current sanctions, and oppose more absolutist approaches.

Not only do such approaches carry a risk of antisemitism, they are highly unlikely to help the Palestinians. International sanctions which target the structural machinery of militarism and occupation may have some effect. External pressure may help movements like Standing Together build anti-occupation sentiment within Israel, by highlighting the economic irrationality of occupation, as well as its moral obscenity.

But as the extensive sanctions regime applied to Putin's Russia shows, even very far-reaching generalised sanctions rarely succeed in restraining a highly ideologically-driven regime. Western sanctions against Saddam Hussein's Iraq led to no advances in democratic rights for ordinary Iraqis, and the brunt

of their economically-damaging effects were borne by the mass of the population rather than the Ba'athist rulers.

The case of apartheid South Africa is especially instructive. It is often cited as the key example that proves sanctions “work”. A closer examination of the history reveals a different story. International economic and cultural sanctions, as well as consumer boycotts, were applied to South Africa for decades. They did not threaten the foundations of the regime. What ultimately did was an uprising of black workers in key strategic industries such as mining.

Pressure and agency are not the same thing. Sanctions can help movements on the ground highlight the costs of a particular policy, but sanctions, or other forms of external pressure, cannot by themselves create an agency capable of forcing a change in that policy, or of replacing the political regime driving it.

The nearest analogue in Israel-Palestine today to the black workers' movement whose struggles brought down apartheid is Israel's 20% Palestinian minority, in alliance with as large a section of the Israeli Jewish working-class as can be won to a democratic-internationalist perspective. That movement currently exists mostly in potential.

Standing Together, the nearest thing it has to an organisational expression, is growing, but still has fewer than 10,000 members. Israel has a powerful labour movement, which includes Palestinian workers, but its political leadership is wretched. Of the parties standing in Israel's forthcoming elections, only the Palestinian parties and the far-left Hadash will talk openly about ending the occupation and national equality. But that such forces are embattled minorities makes support and solidarity even more important.

The conditions of military occupation and settlement expansion in the West Bank, and physical annihilation in Gaza, make it difficult for civil-society, let alone working-class and socialist, politics to develop. Nevertheless, a Palestinian labour movement does exist, and there are even embryonic forces of democratic civil society in Gaza which seek to challenge both Israeli control and the re-establishment of Hamas power.

The socialist left and labour movement can contribute most to the struggle for peace and equality by doing whatever we can to help these forces develop and grow. The horizon we aim for — equal rights for all peoples, and workers' unity in the struggle against capitalism — cannot be reached by any other means. □

- Abridged. More at bit.ly/wbs-sanc
- Uri Weltmann on “building the purple current in Israel”: bit.ly/c-purple
- “Protect the Harvest” campaign: bit.ly/p-harvest

A skilful but shameful balancing act

By Jim Denham

You can almost admire the skilful balancing act carried out by the *Morning Star* in its coverage of the TUC Congress (13-16 Sep). Pages of worthy articles by bureaucrats and uncritical interviews with general secretaries, often full of high hopes of Andy Burnham, were interspersed with occasional diplomatic beatings of editorial dissent, mainly over the EU.

The editorial of 17 September (the day after Congress closed) summed up the paper's dilemma: headed "The TUC's bold vision is undermined by facing both ways on the EU." After enthusing over motions calling for public ownership of the utilities, higher taxes on the

rich, an end to the Iran war, "welfare not warfare", and the RMT's motion calling for "respect [for] the result of the 2016 referendum", the column went on to lament the passing of a motion calling for "the deepest possible partnership with the EU", noting with horror, that it was moved by "a speaker explicitly saying Britain should rejoin the EU."

This sort of thing, the editorial claimed, "risks a return to the cul-de-sac of 'progressive' (as opposed to hard-headed, class-conscious) politics pitting cosmopolitan against nativist identities rather than workers against the rich."

You have to wonder what the author of that oddly-worded warning makes of the 19th century "cosmopolitan" who declared that the workers "have no country"?

But then comes an even more important difference between the *Morning Star*'s editorial 'line' (i.e. that of its political masters at the Communist Party of Britain) and the vast majority of British trade unionists: the war in Ukraine.

On 16 September the paper published a powerful piece by Chris Kitchen of the NUM backing Ukrainian workers and opposing the invasion. He closed his piece with a call to support for the NUM's

motion: "Stand with Ukrainian workers. Demand freedom for the imprisoned [by Russia] trade unionists of Zaporizhzhia" (the power plant seized by Russian forces in 2022).

To the best of my recollection, this is only the second article in support of Ukrainian resistance to have been published by the paper since the invasion. Unfortunately, it was placed alongside a more prominently displayed piece by Lindsey German of the Stop the War Coalition, calling in effect for Ukraine's capitulation.

German's piece (entirely in accord with the MS/CPB "line" on Ukraine) contained serious inaccuracies, misrepresenting both the situation of Ukrainian trade unions and the democratic decisions of the British trade union movement.

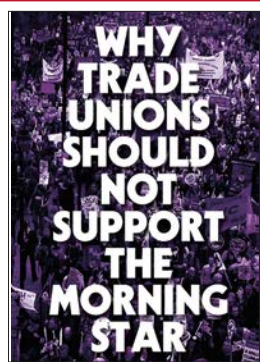
According to German "anti-union laws have effectively banned independent unions" in Ukraine and that "only unions whose leaders are prepared to speak out in support of Zelensky... are still functioning." This is simply untrue. Despite some serious martial law restrictions, not a single trade union has been banned, except in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, where unions have been banned since 2015 – by pro-Rus-

sian separatist forces.

Ukrainian unions organised in the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, the Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and independent unions such as postal and rail workers continue to operate fully and openly. They have repeatedly criticised government policies, engaged in negotiations and campaigns, and defended workers throughout the war. Miners have taken strike action, health workers have protested, and teachers have won pay justice. These are not the actions of organisations that have been silenced. They demonstrate consistent public dissent.

German also misrepresented the position of the British trade union movement, as if only some support Ukraine. Since 2023, the TUC policy has been solidarity with Ukrainian workers facing Russian aggression, support for their right to self determination, and defence of trade unionists under occupation.

That policy was reaffirmed last week when the NUM's motion was passed almost unanimously. That vote was not reported in the *Morning Star*. So much for the paper's claim to be the voice of British trade unionism. □



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Eye on the Left

The RCP and "shallow optimism"

By Matt Cooper

The current edition of *The Communist* (#55), paper of the self-declared Revolutionary Communist Party, is firmly aimed at students. In fact, the paper's first seven pages are almost entirely dedicated to telling young college and university students why they should join the RCP. Yet for any thoughtful student, these pages are a dizzying kaleidoscope of deeply and fundamentally flawed politics.

At the centre of the RCP's pitch is that they, and they alone, are "revolutionary optimists", and that only by joining can young people "overcome the cynicism and despair that holds us back." The opening words on the paper's front page are Marx's: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." After this, the RCP evangelise that "the opening lines of the Communist Manifesto, once you understand them, can change your life." This prom-

ises personal redemption, not serious consideration of how to build a movement to win socialism.

The Italian Communist leader Antonio Gramsci wrote in April 1920 that revolutionaries need "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will" – a sober analysis, combined with energy: "Only they who can keep their hearts strong and their will as sharp as a sword when the general disillusionment is at its worst can be regarded as fighters for the working class, or called revolutionaries". Gramsci was writing barely two years after the successful Russian Revolution and only months before a huge wave of factory occupations in which his then party (Socialist Party) and his left faction had a leading part.

His criticism was pointed at Italian anarchists who refused to take into account the possibility of defeats and thus to prepare real ways for victory.

"The ideologues of anarchism ... offer nothing but shallow and empty pseudo-revolutionary

phraseology interwoven with tired slogans professing a foolish and vulgar optimism. The Socialists, meanwhile, counter it with vigorous organisational activity led by the best and most conscious elements of the working class. Through these vanguard elements, Socialists make every effort to prepare the broader masses to conquer their freedom..."

This socialist perspective laid out by Gramsci is not what the RCP wish to do. Gramsci saw the revolutionary party as something built out of "the best and most conscious elements of the working class". By that definition the student-dominated RCP is clearly not the revolutionary party.

In fact the RCP seeks to build itself outside the struggle of the working class. The RCP sees itself as something outside the working class, not part of it: "we can build a revolutionary leadership that can provide the movement with a theoretical compass". As if in due course the workers, perplexed, will seek

out the RCP and say: please tell us the way. And as if the RCP, with often very bad policies (like effective siding with Putin in Ukraine), could provide that compass.

The RCP seems to think that the working class can develop a revolutionary consciousness, or something close to it, without an organised revolutionary sub-section within our class organising, developing and spreading the ideas of working-class socialism, as patiently as necessary, as urgently as we can, in workplaces and communities.

The RCP tell us that "events" are doing the work for them. "Consciousness is being transformed by the hammer blow of events". They continue: "Trotsky... described this as the 'molecular process' of revolution: the gradual change that takes place inside people's minds, which eventually makes itself felt – on a social scale – when workers and youth take to the streets in their thousands and millions."

But this is the opposite of what Trotsky meant when he wrote of the "molecular process of revolution" in *The History of the Russian Revolution*. He meant that class consciousness does not emerge just from pressure of "events". Rather, you have to look at the millions of conversations and arguments among individual workers, the molecules of the working class.

So, Trotsky, writing of the 1917 revolution, argues: "The mystic doctrine of spontaneity explains nothing". He points to "the molecular agitation carried on by nameless workers, sailors, soldiers, winning converts one by one, breaking down the last doubts, overcoming the last hesitations."

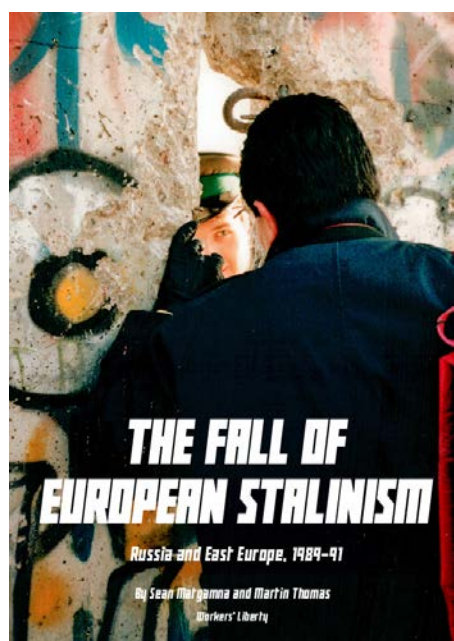
Only with the patient work of revolutionaries inside the working class will the working-class become revolutionary. Students should look to organisations that attempt that, not to the charlatans of the RCP who rely on "events". □

Putin targets Ukraine's infrastructure

By Dan Katz

Despite spectacular drone and missile strikes on oil, retail and military targets inside Russia, Ukraine is being out-gunned by Putin's Russia. According to Ukraine's Economy Minister, Oleksandr Kravchenko, air strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure has cost \$10bn this year.

Kravchenko added, "We anticipate a very difficult winter in terms of both critical infrastructure, which is being destroyed every day by Russian attacks, but also in terms of overall economic conditions in the country."



This book surveys socialist responses during the fall of European Stalinism. £6

workersliberty.org/publications

For the last three weeks Russia has conducted daily attacks on the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, using waves of new jet-powered drones travelling at 400-600 km/h and hitting retail sites, warehouses, apartment blocks as well as military targets.

War crime

Attacking civilian infrastructure is a war crime. Ukraine accuses Russian of committing 250,000 war crimes since the full-scale invasion of February 2022 including murder, rape, torture, abduction, and the deliberate destruction of energy, hospitals, schools and transport.

Following the rigged elections for the Russian parliament of 18-20 September Ukraine is expecting a new mobilisation into the Russian army. Putin is intensifying Russia's war, not backing down.

This is despite Russia suffering 1.5mn war casualties since 2022, including 500,000 dead. Russia is currently losing a staggering 40,000 killed, wounded or missing each month.

The Russian population is 4.4 times the size of the Ukrainian and the Russian economy is 12 times the size of Ukraine's. Although Russia's economy is not in good shape, with a budget deficit of 2.5 percent of GDP and inflation at 6.3 percent, with Chinese help they will not be forced out of the war by economic crisis or sanctions.

Trade between Russia and China is now \$280bn per year and China currently buys half of Russia's crude oil exports, 37 percent of its coal exports, and 31 percent of pipeline gas.

Russia now has a \$169bn debt to

China.

China also supplies Russia with 90 percent of its technology imports. Chinese imports now make up 57 percent of all Russian imports, up from 13 percent before 2022 (*The Times*, 19 September).

By contrast the US ended aid to Ukraine when Trump came to power. An effective Russian blockade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports is jeopardising \$40bn in agricultural and metals exports.

Ukraine's inflation rate is 8 percent and unemployment is around 15 percent despite labour shortages in key industries. There are currently 5.4mn Ukrainian refugees in Europe.

According to Donald Tusk, the Polish Prime Minister, recent Ukrainian casualties are running at 27,000 per month. In July Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated that 50,000 Ukrainian troops had been killed and 400,000 wounded since February 2022.

Reuters quote Roksolana Pidlasa, head of the Ukrainian parliament's budget committee, as saying, "The daily cost of the war grew to about \$190mn this year compared with \$140mn in 2024 due to inflation, expanded troop numbers, mounting social payments for families of fallen soldiers, and higher ammunition consumption."

Ramping up

Russia is ramping up its campaign to destroy Ukraine's important rail network. In unoccupied Ukraine tracks are 20,000 km long and the industry employs 160,000 workers, the largest civilian employer.

Since February 2022 Russia has de-



stroyed 400 locomotives, and over half of those losses have taken place this year. At least 52 workers of the state railway, Ukrzaliznytsia, have been killed on duty, and 317 others injured. This year 20 rail workers have been killed, along with many passengers.

Currently, Politico reports, Ukraine is losing 37-40 locomotives each month. Replacing trains is made harder because Ukraine's railways run on 1.520m tracks, rather than the normal European 1.435m gauge. Only the Baltic states and Finland use Ukraine-compatible rail tracks.

According to Ukraine's government there have been 1,534 attacks on rail infrastructure so far in 2026.

Despite the hardships a recent Kyiv International Institute of Sociology poll showed that 77% of Ukrainians believe Ukraine should continue to fight Russian aggression even if Russia attacks water, electricity and heating this winter.

Arm Ukraine! For Ukraine against Russian imperialism and Ukraine's workers against Ukraine's capitalists! □

ELFT workers prepare for strikes against cuts

By Todd Hamer

According to a recent investigation by the Unison public service union, over 21,600 jobs are at risk across the NHS as the government seeks to cut £1.1 billion from frontline services.

The jobs cull comes at a time when there is an urgent need to radically expand the NHS to meet population need: 7.3 million cases remain on NHS waiting lists for physical health conditions and a further 1.7 million for mental health conditions.

Labour's claims to have reduced waiting lists have been shown to be largely fictitious. NHS England paid trusts over £18.8 million – £33 per patient removed – for "validation" exercises between April and September 2025, during which

more than half a million people were deleted from waiting lists. Analysis from The Lowdown suggests most of these patients remained untreated.

When life-saving health services are cut, the suffering does not magically go away. It manifests in frustrated patients and frontline staff being tied up in time-consuming re-referrals and triaging exercises. This culture of fiddling the data rather than meeting clinical need is now endemic among NHS managers and sustains a fantasy that it's possible to both cut and improve services.

Every person on the waiting list is enduring avoidable suffering. Every day that assessment and

treatment is delayed, the risk of rapid deterioration increase. Patients are dropping out of the waiting list in crisis and joining the long queue at the front door of A&E. There they find hospitals full to overflowing.

Research from the Royal College of Emergency Medicine has found that over-12-hour waits in A&E have increased 100-fold since before the pandemic. Since 2024, around 16,000 people a year have died avoidable deaths on trolleys. Nearly 3,000 patients a day being nursed in corridors. And that in August, the "easy" time for the NHS.



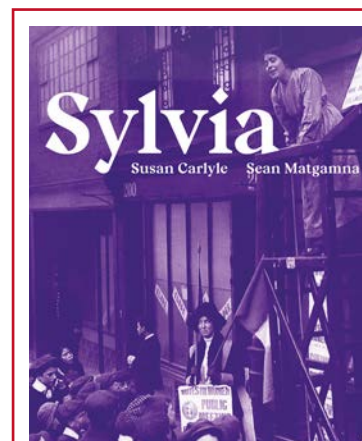
The distress and stress in the system is taking its toll on the workforce. 43% of NHS staff felt ill with stress in 2025/6 (NHS staff survey). Nearly one in four has experienced physical violence.

Investment

Instead of desperately needed investment to expand capacity, NHS management are making year-on-year cuts and with no end in sight. Instead of planning to meet population need, new finance rules punish the under-resourced services that fail to make cuts with harsher financial penalties in the future.

Healthcare workers in East London NHS Foundation Trust are preparing for strikes against the cuts and demanding the resources they need to provide safe and effective patient care. Spreading these strikes

and building the political campaign to defend the NHS is now a basic question of working-class self defence. □



The story of Sylvia Pankhurst including her working-class organising in the East End of London. £4 (inc. post) □ bit.ly/shop-wl

Super El Niño will bring heatwaves and droughts

By Sam Myerson

According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, there is an above 90% chance of a super El Niño event in the autumn-winter of this year.

Two weather events make up the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), El Niño and La Niña. El Niño is a quasi-periodic abnormal warming of surface waters in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, and La Niña is the quasi-periodic abnormal cooling of surface waters in the same region. The terms originated from Peruvian and Ecuadorian fishermen.

The changes in the Pacific Ocean, where pressure drops, cause a rise in the pressure over the Australian and Indian Oceans. That can cause droughts in Africa and Oceania, and the collapse of

the monsoon season in the Indian sub-continent.

The Indian summer monsoon in August was already showing abnormally low rainfall levels. In the Northern Hemisphere, in Western Europe, wetter, colder and stormier conditions are likely. In Australia, parts of Africa, and south Asia, prolonged droughts are likely.

Because of the increased heat released from the ocean now, 2027 is likely to be hotter and drier, over 1.5°C above the pre-industrial average.

Heatwave

Already, this summer, the UK had recorded its longest and hottest heatwave ever. Drought was declared across most of the UK, and 50% of Europe's total land mass, with around 10% in the most extreme drought. River levels have

dropped, disrupting energy production and water supplies. August 2026 saw the highest-ever daily global surface sea temperature outside the poles, at 21.11°C

The ENSO typically happen every three to five years, and each phase lasts between 12 months and (the known maximum) four years. The recording of the ENSO, done since the 1920s, is contentious work, relies on a series of buoys across the Pacific, coupled with satellite monitoring networks; the causes of its fluctuations.

The warming effect of this El Niño is starting from a high baseline driven by human-made climate change, so heatwaves are becoming both more far reaching and more enduring.

The immediate impacts are already being felt, with food price rises,

There is an ever-growing imperative to halt fossil-fuel expansion and curb use. Stop Rosebank and Jackdaw! The Labour government is delaying the decision on the Jackdaw gas field in the North Sea (and on the Rosebank oil field), but the delay may only to get Burnham past the Holborn and St Pancras by-election and Labour conference.

In July, following much pressure from Trump's USA, the World Bank abandoned a target for 45% of its funding to poorer countries to be "climate finance".

A United Nations plan, set by COP29, to mobilise at least \$1.3 trillion per year by 2035 for climate action is also under threat. In 2025 the UK cut its total aid programme from 0.5% to 0.3% of GDP, and in May 2026 it halved its planned contribution to the UN Green Climate Fund. □

Women's Fightback

Unions pledge to fight for trans rights. But now?

By Vicki Morris

At TUC Congress, 13-16 September, unions agreed to fight back against the interpretation now current of the April 2025 Supreme Court judgement which excludes trans people from facilities and activities (such as union women's conferences) for their gender. But it's not clear that union leaders are in any mood to carry out the policy.

The situation is particularly difficult in the wake of the Certification Officer ruling on Flaherty v Unison (the big public service union). Unison member Stephen Flaherty had brought a complaint that Unison had breached rules when it let Ellie Waple, a trans woman, run for

a women's seat in its National Executive Council elections in May 2025. (Waple did not win.)

Flaherty's lawyer was Paul Conrathe, a right-wing Christian lawyer who has spearheaded legal cases against abortion and trans rights. Conrathe has now written to the TUC asking them to police their affiliates in the light of Flaherty v Unison. The TUC is unlikely to do this – it's not how the TUC works – but the unions have already begun policing themselves.

Response

Unison's response to the Flaherty ruling is to regret it, say they'll campaign to change the law, and in the meantime they'll comply with it. The union

has decided not to allow trans women to attend its women's conference. Trans women no longer count as women for the purposes of determining delegations to conferences. That was confirmed by an email from general secretary Andrea Egan on 21 Sep, and the union's rules are being examined to conform to the ruling.

The union's LGBT+ committee decided not to call for a boycott of women's conference. That could be the right call, but the effect is to lean heavily on trans activists and their allies to accept the LGBT+ committee as the only voice that counts, and not to rock the boat.

Meantime, there are attempts to console with reassurances

that the union's "Change the Law" campaign is doing lots of good work. The aim is to persuade the Labour government to change the law in trans people's favour.

Convincing

This is not remotely convincing. Trans members and their allies beyond the LGBT+ committee have the right and duty to discuss how to respond now to Flaherty v Unison, not hope that after the Code of Practice has settled in over years Andy Burnham will save us. Minimally we could organise a protest against the Certification Officer interfering in our union in this way.

The TUC congress motion was brought by the TUC's LGBT+ Conference, "Oppose the EHRC Code of Practice (Services, Public Functions and Associations)". It called on the TUC to campaign to introduce a process of gender self-declaration in the UK and for trans people to have equal civil rights in the workplace, and called on TUC-affiliated unions to challenge exclusionary guidance.

The TUC General Council supported the motion "with explanation", saying they must campaign "within the law", so managing expectations, but the motion passed without opposition.

The TUC LGBT+ conference

also hosted a packed official fringe meeting with guest speaker Nadia Whittome MP explaining her [Early Day Motion](#) against the EHRC Code of Practice. 170 MPs backed that EDM, but were still unable to get parliamentary debate before the Code was nodded through.

Three trans/bigender speakers reflected on the campaign for trans rights in the past and now. The meeting warned that the EHRC is due next to issue a Code of Practice for employers and workplaces, and unions should be getting ready now to defend the rights of trans workers.

Fringe

The Bodily Autonomy and Dignity (B.A.D.) Coalition, a left-wing trans-rights campaign group, held an unofficial fringe meeting, where members of Unison and the civil service union PCS, among others, reflected on the fight within their own unions for trans rights.

The meeting warned that the threat to trans people is part of a strategy by the far-right to drive a wedge into the left and unions and that the same people behind these attacks are often also anti-abortion.

The tide is running strongly against trans rights. The unions must harden themselves to resist or we will never turn this tide! □

Trans people in Wales fight back

By a socialist trans rights activist in Cardiff

The NWJCC (NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee) decision in August to suspend all gender affirming surgeries, with no evidence to justify their intervention, is unprecedented. With their bodily autonomy denied, the entire Welsh trans community is in crisis. A review is yet to begin and the community has been left in limbo.

With only three days' notice, a demonstration attracting 300 people was held. Mutual aid networks have organised to raise funds to support those whose surgeries had been cancelled. Writing campaigns have started. Grassroots movements have begun to take form.

However, the trade unions continue their long and disappointing history of dragging their feet on solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community. As of writing this, only the NUS has submitted a statement of solidarity. A draft has been submitted to PCS Wales, but the Welsh Executive Committee objected to it due to the political nature of the proposed action points. □

• Abridged. More online: bit.ly/wales-tr

Houthi advance, conflict spirals

By Dan Katz

On 10 September Houthi armed forces took the Yemeni Red Sea port of Mokha, and the next day were reported to have forced Yemen's internationally-recognised government troops from Mayyun island (often named in the Western media as Perim island) in the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

Mayyun divides the Bab al-Mandab strait at the south of the Red Sea into two passages. The eastern channel is only 3km wide, and the distance from Mayyun to Djibouti is around 25km. At this point tanker traffic is limited to a 3km-wide channel. This area is a highly vulnerable chokepoint.

The Houthis have also taken control of Greater and Lesser Hanish, islands in the Red Sea 160km north of the Bab al-Mandab.

Twelve percent of the world's trade normally passes through the Strait, and consolidated Houthi control over a long stretch of Red Sea is a major problem for Saudi Arabia and those who buy oil from the Saudis, especially customers in Asia.

If Saudi oil cannot pass through Bab al-Mandab tankers have to travel north from the Saudi port of Yanbu through the Suez Canal. If the oil is destined for Asia, tankers must then travel round Africa to reach their destinations. Additionally, the Suez Canal is not able to take the huge Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCC) and so smaller tankers need to be used.

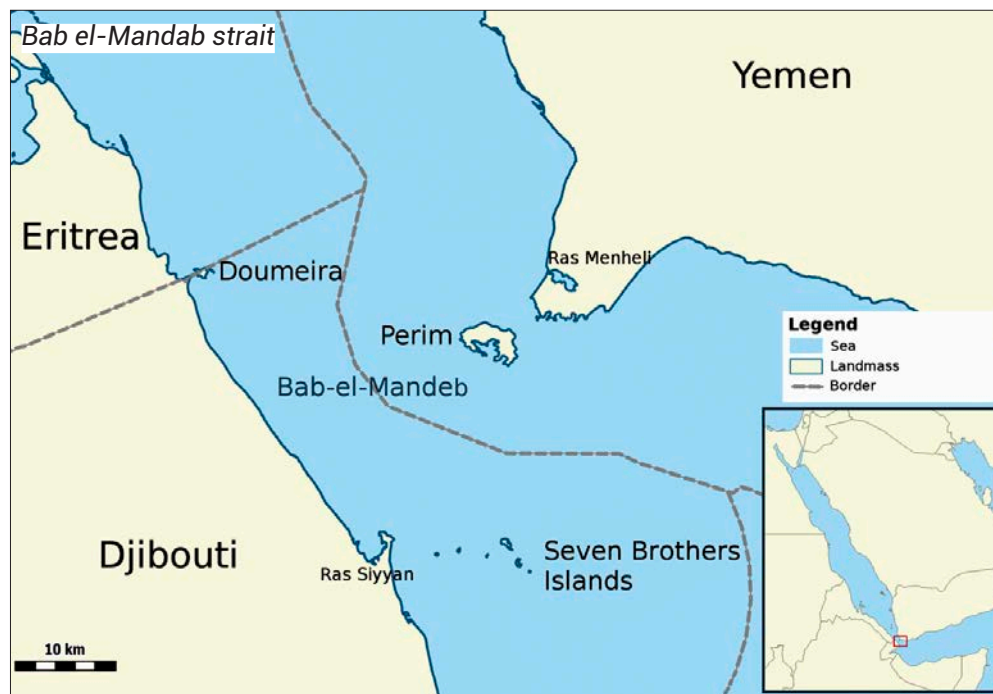
Although the newly-seized areas appear not to be fully under Houthi control their militias routed and scattered the pro-government National Resistance Forces led by the warlord Tareq Saleh, nephew of former Yemeni dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh. Saleh seems to have fled across the Red Sea, possibly to Djibouti or Somaliland.

Defeated

More than 15 brigades were defeated, hundreds of Saleh's and pro-government troops were killed and more than 30,000 Saudi-armed troops retreated. Apparently their defeat had more to do with fractured command structures and poor morale as overwhelming Houthi power.

The Houthi advance has been greeted ecstatically by the media of Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah. The price of Brent Crude oil has risen beyond \$100 a barrel for the first time since July.

Higher oil and gas prices, together with associated products such as fertilisers will feed into global



inflation and create shortages in poorer countries.

The Iranian backed Houthis, with support from military advisors from Iran's Islamic Guards (IRGC), advanced 130km south from the direction of the Houthi controlled port of Hudaydah. The UN reports that the fighting has displaced 112,000 people, including 3,000 crossing the Red Sea to Africa. Over 20mn people in Yemen, or half the population, are in dire need of humanitarian aid.

Shipping

The Houthis have stated that all shipping except for Saudi ships is free to pass their positions. Despite Saudi lobbying for additional help, the US President, Donald Trump, has said the US will not become directly involved. Trump has a similar problem in the Persian Gulf where tankers are backed up and only a fraction of oil and gas which would normally pass through the Strait of Hormuz being able to sneak through on tankers shielded by US navy ships close to the Oman coast.

The Houthis have learned the lessons from the US-Iran war and are expanding and leveraging their power over Red Sea traffic. The Houthis' ultimate aim is to conquer the whole of Yemen and win international recognition.

The Saudis, recently sceptical of US policy and alarmed at the impact of the US-Israeli bombing of Iran, have forged an alliance with Turkey and Pakistan, the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement. The Saudis seem to have not

yet invoked that agreement and asked the other states for help.

The Houthis are a Shia Muslim movement, centred on a large clan, who are based in the northern Yemen province of Saada. They form about 35 percent of Yemen's 43mn people. Also known as Ansar Allah, or Party of God, their slogan is, "God is great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Damn the Jews, Victory to Islam," marking them out as one of the most reactionary forces on the planet. The Houthis ran Yemen for 1,000 years prior to 1962 when their state was overthrown.

The Houthis are from the Zaydi branch of Shia, or Fivers, as distinct from the Iranians who are generally from the majority wing of Shia, the Twelvers. That means the Iranians and Houthis do not have a straightforward fit. But they both have an enemy in Saudi Arabia.

The Houthi-Saudi conflict is partly rooted in the first Gulf war of 1990-1 when Yemen's government backed Saddam Hussein's Iraq following the invasion of Kuwait. Saudi Arabia sealed the border, cut funding to Yemen and expelled migrant workers. The Houthis who were often involved in smuggling across the border and suffered when it was closed.

The Houthis came to power in most of populated Yemen in 2014 when their army overran the capital, Sanaa. The Saudis formed an anti-Houthi coalition and started a blockade, bombing war and backing proxy forces in southern Yemen, which only ended with a ceasefire in 2022. The Saudis and their allies had carried out 25,000 air strikes, with UK and US help, causing 19,000 civilian casualties and vast damage to a very poor country.

GDP per capita is \$380 and the median age of the population is only 18.

The UN estimates the Houthis have

350,000 troops. They also have Iranian anti-ship and ballistic missiles and are producing their own missiles with Chinese components. On 14 September Houthi forces launched dozens of ballistic missiles at targets in Saudi Arabia.

The Houthis are aligned with Iran rather than being simply Iranian proxies.

Oil supply

On 16 September the Houthis shot down a Saudi F-15 fighter with a surface to air missile and the day before drones launched in Iraq struck pumping stations. The East-West Saudi pipeline which had been used to capacity following the blockages in the Persian Gulf was shut down. Officials believe it will take three weeks to fix the damage, putting at risk 4 percent of the world's oil supply. Saudi oil production is now at a 30-year low and it has cancelled some oil deliveries to Europe.

Poland and Lithuania, which switched to Saudi oil following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, have been badly hit and are searching for new suppliers.

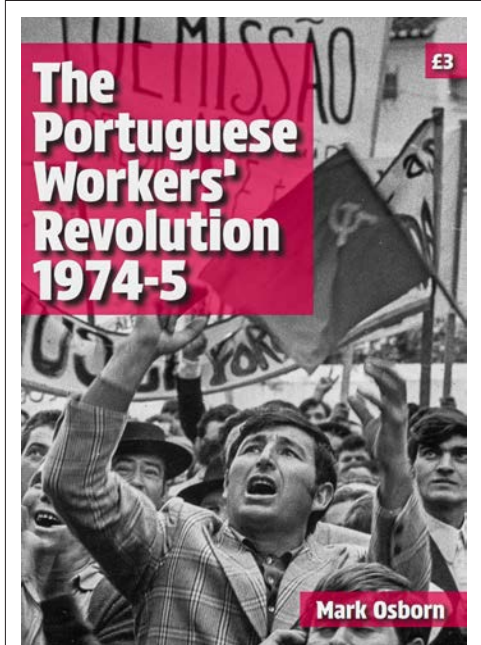
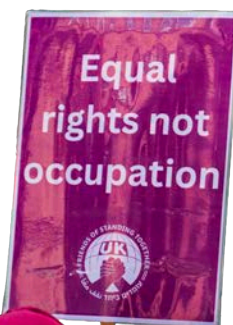
It is possible the very accurate strikes from the Iranian allies in the Popular Mobilisation Forces in Iraq have been guided with Russian technical help.

The Houthi offensive will help strengthen Iran's position in possible negotiations to end the US-Iran war. Trump and Saudi are weakened.

End the US-Iran and Houthi-Saudi wars!

Israel out of Lebanon and a Palestinian state alongside Israel!

For workers' solidarity and workers' power! □



The story from the 25 April 1974 overturn to the 25 Nov 1975 restabilising coup. £3 □

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Labour conference, Burnham, and the left

By Colin Foster

Just four days before Labour's women's conference and general conference (26-30 September in Liverpool), the outlook is still opaque.

Andy Burnham, as he ousted Keir Starmer, promised a more open regime for Labour MPs, and he has reinstated Diane Abbott. He was pointedly silent on broader party democracy. We shall see.

Since 2021 the conference has become more opaque, mostly "administratively" rather than by rule changes (though there have been some of those).

Physically, the conference security "cordon" is now more heavily policed and has expanded to include the open area outside the conference centre and the neighbouring hotels. In 2025, additionally, there were lots of far-right protests at or near the "cordon" entrances. Those meant few of the 20,000 delegates and visitors wanting to go in and out of the cordon, or to hang around outside and talk with leafleters and stallholders.

The far right is stronger now. However, the core of the far-right presence in 2025 was farmers agitated about inheritance tax. We don't know how many far right will be there this time.

Labour conference still has, and even in 2025, lots of fringe meetings, often big and lively, "outside the cordon". There are also lots "inside the cordon": the biggest in 2025 was for trans rights (but with no active follow-up).

The Conference Arrangements Committee is controlled by the unions, not the parliamentary leadership. But it seems largely to act as a rubber-stamp for Party HQ officials.

In recent years the CAC has ruled out of order masses of motions from local Labour Parties (CLPs) (as it did in the Miliband years). It doesn't publish those motions or say why. CLP delegates can challenge rulings-out at the start of conference. But they can never reverse them at that stage, because the unions always vote to endorse the CAC. In recent years, many "ruled-out" CLPs have not even protested.

The motions ruled in order go to a "priorities ballot" (six topics chosen for debate). But the motions are published so late that most CLP conference delegates vote between "priorities" without even reading the motions. Some years, the topics are artificially manipulated to keep spiky motions off conference floor (as, one year, the NHS motions were divided into three separate topics).



Union motions do not get ruled out of order. It is thanks to those that even the 2025 conference, the most docile for many years, voted against the platform on Palestine, wealth-tax, and migrant work visas. It may be that this year too union motions will make most sparks fly. But no-one outside the top union leaders knows what the union motions will be until very close to conference.

There seem to be few and minor rule changes on the agenda this year, whether from CLPs (have to be submitted a year in advance) or from the National Executive (NEC, which can submit only hours before conference starts).

The Labour Campaign for Council Housing and Labour Left Internationalists have been pushing motions this year calling for definite steps to make reality of Andy Burnham's talk of big new council-house building.

Mainstream

Mainstream, the new soft-left caucus promoted by Neal Lawson and Compass, which now has a few local groups, is pushing on water renationalisation.

Momentum, a shadow of its former self but still with paid staff, has focused on Palestine. I doubt whether that's useful, because its template motion adds little to the motion passed in 2025, and doesn't include repeal of the ban on Palestine Action as "terrorist".

Defend Our Juries is organising another of the protests to defy the ban which have brought on over 3,500 arrests so far. It is outside the conference at 1pm on Sunday 27th.

Oddly, Momentum has organised its major fringe meeting to clash directly with Mainstream's (on Tuesday 29th). There is also a big left fringe meeting organised under the banner of "Arise" on Monday 28th, just after the Labour Left Internationalists fringe meeting that same evening.

The LLI fringe meeting focuses on "a plan for Labour democracy", whereas all the other left meetings focus on wishes for a policy "reset" by Labour without indicating how, other than by words in the ear of Andy Burnham, that "reset" can be done.

Trans rights

Labour for Trans Rights, now working closely with Momentum, has pushed a weak template motion on trans rights. There is talk of an emergency motion from the GMB union at the Labour women's conference on 26 September, which has been organised this year (for the first time) as trans-exclusionary. The lobby group Translucent is planning a protest outside the event (no details available yet). A Labour Women United slate is standing for National Women's Committee on a pro-trans-rights platform.

In a bad augury, London Labour region has just told Islington South CLP that its resolution for a trans-inclusive Labour women's conference, passed in March 2026, is null and void because it supposedly contradicts the law.

Labour for a New Democracy has made another push with motions for proportional representation. Andy Burnham told the 8 September NEC that he wants to see what conference thinks about electoral reform and that he personally agrees with it.

Labour Party membership has upticked a little since Burnham replaced Starmer, but only a little.

2025 had the most docile contingent of CLP delegates for many years. According to the best analysis, that was not because of there being more hard-bitten right-wing delegates, but because of fewer determined left-wing delegates, and more "go with the flow" delegates, the sort who tell their CLP that they love to go to conference to benefit from the "networking" and the chance to talk with MPs or even (wow!) ministers.

Will that balance shift back in 2026? We don't know. Soberly, it has to be said that the results of this year's elections for the NEC (low turnout, only four out of nine seats won by a Momentum-Mainstream alliance) do not promise well.

Still, there will be 20,000 there. Many of the most important unions will be there. Many fringe meetings will be lively. It's important for the left to be there. □

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sun 27 Sept: Reading group: The War And The International, Sam Bornstein, Al Richardson. North London AWL. 11am, Unit 20e Tower Workshops, SE1 3DG

Thurs 1 Oct: Climate, Class and Socialism. Lewisham AWL. Deptford Lounge, SE8 4RJ

Wed 7 Oct: How to beat the racists. Sheffield AWL. University Arms, S3 7HG

At work or on campus

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Roman Rosdolsky's dissection of Marx's and Engels's errors on national questions in 1848-9

By Simon Nelson

Roman Rosdolsky, a Ukrainian Marxist who had been chief theoretician of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine in the 1920s, wrote the monograph *Engels and the Non-Historic Peoples* in 1948.

He had become a Trotskyist in the early 1930s, and remained a Trotskyist to his death in 1967, although in his later years, exiled in the USA (1947-67) he was not active day-to-day. He was close to the Orthodox Trotskyist Ernest Mandel, although Rosdolsky came to reject the Orthodox Trotskyist scheme naming the Stalinist countries "degenerated and deformed workers' states". He is best known for *The Making of Marx's Capital*, his monumental analysis of Marx's 1857-8 *Grundrisse* (only a few copies of which existed in the world when Rosdolsky did his work on it), published in 1968 in German, 1976 in French, 1977 in English.

Rosdolsky survived Auschwitz, when he was sent for aiding Jews, and witnessed Stalin's secret police liquidate his comrades. The book is dedicated "to the memory of Mykola Skrypnyk, Oleksander Shumsky and Karlo Maksymovych, victims of Stalin's terror in Ukraine."

During the revolution of 1848-49, Marx and Engels, then the editor-in-chief and a leading writer of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (NRZ), had characterised most of the Slavic peoples of the Habsburg monarchy – Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Ukrainians (Ruthenians), etc. – together with the Austrian and Hungarian Romanians, as "nonhistoric": peoples who, in Rosdolsky's summary of Engels's usage, "were unable to form a strong state of their own in the past and therefore lacked... the power to achieve national independence in the future."

Only the Poles escaped this verdict. (The Poles had had a sizeable state for centuries before it was carved up by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in three partitions, starting in 1772). The rhetoric deployed against the rest was frequently savage. In his January 1849 article, *The Magyar Struggle*, he wrote:

"But at the first victorious uprising of the French proletariat... the Austrian Germans and the Magyars will gain their freedom and take a bloody revenge on the Slav barbarians. The general war which will then break out will scatter this Slav Sonderbund [alliance, named after a federation of reactionary Catholic



cantons defeated in a civil war in Switzerland in 1847], and annihilate all these small pig-headed nations even to their very names. The next world war will not only cause reactionary classes and dynasties to disappear from the face of the earth, but also entire reactionary peoples. And that too is an advance."

Rosdolsky points out that by "annihilation" of nations Engels did not mean what that would come to mean in the 20th century, but the thorough political defeat of their nationalist leaders and the subsequent assimilation of the mass of the people into the dominant (German, Magyar, Polish, etc.) nations. Even so, the brutal language is out of tune with the basic ideas of Marx and Engels, and the "false prognosis" of inevitable assimilation has been, as Rosdolsky says, "ruthlessly denied by the subsequent course of history".

The work finally appeared in 1964 in German, in the *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*. Its English translation by John-Paul Himka came out only in 1986, and in French (by Gérard Billy) only in 2018, though Ernest Mandel (in *Quatrième Internationale*, translated in *Intercontinental Press*) had given an appreciative summary of the work at the time of Rosdolsky's death in 1968.

One correspondent, writing in 1980 to discourage the translation, warned that

"the work as it stands could (and certainly would) be used by the opportunists to attack Marx-Engels... [and] can serve only to create confusion in the anti-imperialist movement."

Engagement

Rosdolsky's 1948 text was not his first engagement with this material. In 1929, he submitted a doctoral dissertation titled *The Problem of the Nonhistoric Peoples in K. Marx and Fr. Engels*. That dissertation had defended Engels's position as materialist and historically vindicated. Its "whole sense," Rosdolsky said, rested on the claim that even though the prognosis of the Austrian Slavs' "inevitable national demise... was not confirmed by history," this did not mean Marx and Engels's 1848-49 politics "rested on an error."

That dissertation excluded the entire question of peasant class conflict from consideration, a central theme of this work.

In Himka's introduction, the 1948 monograph functions as a deliberate "antithesis" to that earlier "thesis". Whole passages from the 1929 text reappear in 1948 "with Rosdolsky's appraisal almost completely reversed." What produced this reversal? Through the 1930s, Rosdolsky "rummaged daily" in Viennese archives and later worked under Fran-

ciszek Bujak on Galician serfdom, gaining a deeper appreciation of the class antagonisms that dogged the Austrian revolution. Rosdolsky's own experience was also crucial. Between 1929 and 1948, Rosdolsky had survived both Stalinism and Fascism, and become a Trotskyist. The dedication to Stalin's Ukrainian victims and the book's closing appendix on the NRZ's antisemitism underscore the text's context of racist brutality.

Rosdolsky's argument unfolds on two interlocking tracks. Empirically, he demonstrates that the standard defence of Engels – that his hostility to the Austrian Slavs merely tracked their observably counter-revolutionary conduct – is false, or at best what he calls "only a legend."

The NRZ condemned peoples such as the Ukrainians as reactionary "wreckage of peoples" from the very outset of the revolution, well before any counter-revolutionary behaviour had occurred, and did so largely by uncritical reporting supplied by Polish and Hungarian noble correspondents.

Rosdolsky argues that this reflects something more than sloppy journalism: it reflects Marx and Engels's abandonment, at that time and on this subject, of a class analysis. They were confronted with the awkward fact that their sole practical revolutionary allies in East Central Europe – the Polish and Hungarian nobilities – were themselves the oppressors of peasants belonging to the "non-historic" nationalities. These "noble" classes were relatively large, included both magnates and people who were economically scarcely well-off farmers, and were the main "national" class, with connections and collective awareness uniting them in a common language and culture. The wage-working class scarcely existed in the region at that time.

Materialism

Marx and Engels drew on their Hegelian intellectual formation and revived Hegel's category of "nonhistoric peoples" (*geschichtslose Völker*) to resolve the contradiction. As Rosdolsky puts it, this was something "exoteric" to their materialist method. This resulted in a skewed approach to the question of national self-determination – a skewed approach that abandoned historical materialism. If they had applied their now-established

continued on page 12 →

method, it would have produced politically inconvenient conclusions about their allies.

Rosdolsky opens with the Czechs, the most economically and culturally developed of the “nonhistoric” nations. He quotes from Engels’s article of 17 June 1848 on the Prague uprising:

“A new Poznań bloodbath is being prepared in Bohemia... However the rising may end, a war of annihilation of the Germans against the Czechs is now the only possible solution.”

That same article insists that “a nation which has allowed itself to be used throughout its history as an instrument for oppressing all other nations must first prove that it has really become revolutionary,” and asks: “are the Czechs at fault for their unwillingness to attach themselves to a nation which oppresses and ill-treats other nations while freeing itself?”

Rosdolsky calls this “a remarkable, curious article,” one containing “on the one hand, a glowing confession of internationalism... but on the other hand... the conviction that the victory of the revolution itself will end with the oppression of the Czechs.”

“[W]hat sort of ‘freedom’ was being proclaimed for the Czech people when they were only allowed the choice of going under or living together with the Germans in a German state? Are not these glaring contradictions?”

Incoherence

Rosdolsky traces this incoherence to the region’s class structure: the German bourgeoisie of Prague and Brno was economically integrated into the life of the area to the point that “losing ‘national proprietorship’ in the Slavic provinces was absolutely unthinkable to this bourgeoisie.” Although Prague may have been majority Czech-speaking by 1848 (the city’s “official language” was still German), Rosdolsky holds that the Czech nation was not yet strong and de-

veloped enough for its own nation-state. If such a state had somehow been formed it “could all too easily fall prey to Tsarism and become its ‘outpost’.” The wise democratic policy was “guaranteeing wide national autonomy and granting the Slavs full linguistic, cultural, and political rights”.

As things were, however, a genuine compromise on the model of František Palacký’s [Czech revolutionary] autonomist programme was “just as utopian” as later federalist schemes. Rosdolsky cannot see that Engels could identify a force that “could have moved the German bourgeoisie to abandon voluntarily its monopolistic position”

Rather than tackle the class dynamics, and although in its earlier issues it supported Czech agitation, the NRZ came to defer to realpolitik and wrote off the Czechs as having no history and destined for inevitable defeat or even suppression.

The paper’s tone shifted when Czech leaders sided with Habsburg absolutism following the October 1848 uprising in Vienna. Its Viennese correspondent, Eduard Müller-Telling — introduced by Rosdolsky as a figure we will “later get to know... also as an obtuse and repulsive anti-Semite” — was an Austrian chauvinist: “the base Czech and Ruthenian dogs,” “the stupidest Slavic asses,” “You Czech dogs! The tricky Gypsies [i.e., Czechs].” Rosdolsky does not excuse this language: “The mode of expression of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* interests us not on account of its ‘strong language,’ but rather on account of the intellectual and emotional confusion revealed in this strong language.”

“Hussitism”, an insult that the Nazis had levelled at the Czechs, was part of the vocabulary of German Catholic feudal reaction. It is against the principles of consistent democracy to proclaim a “war of annihilation” against ‘entire reactionary peoples’ (as such).”

Also damning, for Rosdolsky, is the

NRZ’s conduct during the Vienna Reichstag’s language debate of September 1848. When Czech deputy František Rieger demanded that non-German deputies be permitted to speak and receive translations in their own language(s), the paper mocked the proposal: “The Reichstag will become a translating institution, a Babel-mixing of tongues, which will result in the Reichstag’s dissolution. Finis Austriae.”

Parallel

Rosdolsky draws a parallel to the French Jacobins’ campaign against regional patois, quoting Barère’s 1794 declaration that “federalism and superstition speak Breton; emigration and hatred of the Republic speak German... Let us break these instruments of harm and error” — and observes that “every time, unfortunately, [the ‘language of freedom’] reveals itself as a counterfeit ‘language of freedom.’” Against this he sets the actual voice of the Ukrainian peasant deputy Iosyf Savka, who pleaded in broken German: “Who is to blame that in Galicia the peasant does not speak German? Just the lords... I beg that the high chamber itself understand why we [peasants] have no one who knows the German language.” Savka was, Rosdolsky notes, soon removed from the chamber “as the Polish democratic deputies urged” and “that the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*... did not take the side of Savka... can certainly not be entered as a ‘plus’ in its record of revolutionary activity.”

Those peasants had not set out to find themselves in the counter-revolutionary camp. The condition of their support for the revolution was land reform. That the revolutionary aristocracy refused the demand saw those same peasants driven, even reluctantly, back into the emperor’s camp.

The South Slav nationalities, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, received harsher treatment than the Czechs, even though

the Croats had their own compact area where they were the clear majority, and Zagreb was Croat-speaking. They were dismissed as reactionary before any of their conduct could be demonstrably proved to be counter-revolutionary. Rosdolsky argues the NRZ here functioned largely as “the mouthpiece of its allies, Hungarian and Polish aristocratic-bourgeois democracy, whose prejudices and illusions it shared.”

Marx’s own judgment after the fall of Vienna captures the pattern: “Croats, pandours, Czechs, serežani and similar rabble throttled German liberty in Vienna, and the tsar is now omnipresent in Europe.”

The Slovaks and Romanians reveal a further inconsistency: the same nationality could be praised or condemned depending on which neighbouring nobility it opposed. “Since the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* considered a people’s counter-revolutionary behaviour to be proof of its incapacity to exist,” Rosdolsky writes, “the one and the same people — the Romanians — figured in the paper’s columns, depending on habitat, now as a long-decayed nation, entirely lacking in active historical forces, and then as a nationality whose freedom and independence had to be defended.” Transylvanian Romanians, opposing the Hungarians, were reactionary; Romanians of the Danubian Principalities, opposing Russia, were revolutionary allies — an inconsistency explicable only by which side’s nobility the NRZ happened to be allied with.

Engels’s treatment of the Slovaks shows similar problems: in one 1849 article they are “impervious to any national fanaticism” and pro-Hungarian; another report claims they were being incited toward “pan-Slavic hatred for the Magyars.” Rosdolsky notes this “corresponded as little to the truth” as other fabricated Galician reporting.

Rosdolsky devotes his longest chapter to the Ukrainian (Ruthenian) case.

He describes the Galician Ruthenians of 1848 by quoting Maximilian Bach: “millions of rural proletarians, economically and culturally oppressed for centuries, without even the rudiments of a class formation... without its own culture, removed from any culture whatsoever.” Their nascent national consciousness rested almost entirely on the Greek Catholic clergy, since the peasant masses “felt Ruthenian... only because the landlords and their creatures were Poles.” Rosdolsky invokes Otto Bauer approvingly here: the national contradiction was “merely a phenomenal form of the social contradiction; national hatred was only class hatred transformed.”

But the centrepiece of this chapter is Rosdolsky’s dismantling of what he calls “the Polish nobility’s version of the origins of the Galician butchery of 1846”.

In that notorious massacre, peasants attacked and killed Polish landlords who had been organising an insurrection against Austria. The nobility’s own explanation blamed Austrian intrigue: Metternich [German statesman in the Austrian Empire], they claimed, had “set the unsuspecting peasants against their

Timeline

22-24 Feb 1848: Protests in Paris. King Louis Philippe flees; Second Republic declared

13 March: Uprisings in Vienna force Metternich, the conservative Chancellor of the Habsburg (Austrian) empire to flee

17 March: Autonomous Hungarian government created, within which nationalist leader Kossuth becomes prominent

18 March: Street fighting in Berlin forces Frederick William IV, king of Prussia, largest of the then-many German states, to accept a liberal ministry and promise a constitution

May: “Frankfurt Parliament” convened, of representatives of the then-many German lands which they hope to unify

1 June: Marx launches *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne (which is under Prussian rule, but being in the western part of Prussia’s dispersed territories has a looser regime)

12-17 June: Uprising suppressed in (then Habsburg-ruled) Prague

23-26 June: Socialist “June Days” worker insurrection, against closure of National Workshops, suppressed by the French military

25 June: Liberal Camphausen replaced as head of Prussian government

31 October: Habsburg troops take Vienna

20 December: Bonaparte wins election as president of the French Second Republic.

5 January 1849: Habsburg troops occupy Budapest

March 1849: The Frankfurt Parliament offers the German imperial crown to Prussia’s King Frederick William IV, who refuses it

19 May: *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* succumbs to repression

June: Frankfurt Parliament finally disbands, after its Austrian and Prussian delegates largely withdraw and it flees to Stuttgart

July: French troops crush the Roman Republic and restore power to the Pope

August: Austrian and Russian troops defeat the remaining Hungarian and Italian nationalist fighters. □



landlords." But since the massacre occurred in West Galicia, the ethnically Polish part of the province, this "spontaneously generated legend" gained a new explanation for the ears of foreign democrats. They were told the killers were not Polish peasants at all but "nationally and religiously fanaticised Ruthenian peasants," even though the Ruthenians inhabited the east, not the west of the territory.

Yet when foreign democrats asked whether Poland contained "several nationalities," the reply was that Ruthenians were "when you examine the matter closely — Poles as much as we are". Not only their revolt, but their very nationality, was merely a demagogic invention of Metternich in line with his divide-and-rule policy.

Engels parroted this fabrication. In *The Magyar Struggle* he wrote that "Metternich suppressed the democratic Polish movement, which had begun in the interests of the peasants, by using the religious and national fanaticism of the Ruthenian peasants themselves," and elsewhere claimed the Ruthenians "first learned by the agency of Metternich that the Poles were their oppressors... as if the Poles themselves had not been oppressed just as much as the Ruthenians."

Rosdolsky calls both arguments "the most unadulterated sophistry," and traces how the legend passed from Engels to Kautsky, Otto Bauer, and the Stalinist historian Steklov. That chain of transmission shows how a single piece of noble propaganda could become the dominant narrative through decades of subsequent understanding.

Rosdolsky also challenges a fabricated NRZ anecdote about the peasant leader Jakub Szela, who had actually led the 1846 killings. A report claimed Szela had petitioned for a Reichstag seat, jealous of the elected Ukrainian peasant deputy Lukiian Kobylitsia — whom the same report falsely accused of having tortured and mutilated local officials. Rosdolsky establishes from Habsburg archival records that "not a single word... except for the names of the two peasants, is true": Szela never ran for the Reichstag, and Kobylitsia's alleged crimes are wholly invented. "The fiction," Rosdolsky concludes, "had an extremely transparent purpose: to compromise the

peasant deputies to the Reichstag... and thus to create a favourable atmosphere for their expulsion from parliament."

The genuinely radical voice of Ukrainian peasant deputies survives in the record Rosdolsky recovers, as in Ivan Kapushchak's Reichstag speech insisting landlords, not peasants, owed compensation for feudal servitude: "The whips they used on our bent bodies — yes! this we can leave them as compensation."

Rosdolsky closes the chapter by quoting Engels's own later self-criticism, in an 1853 letter to Joseph Weydemeyer: "As to the former Polish provinces on this side of the Dvina and Dnieper [Engels seems to mean the eastern part of what was then Poland], I want to hear nothing more of them, knowing as I do that the peasants there are all Ukrainians, only the aristocracy and some of the people in the towns being Polish, and that to the peasant there, as in Ukrainian Galicia [area under Habsburg rule] in 1846, the restoration of Poland is synonymous with the restoration of the old ruling aristocracy, its powers unimpaired." Rosdolsky asks: "Could one wish for a more cogent critique of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*'s Ukrainian-Polish politics than this self-criticism from Engels's own pen?"

Consistent democracy

The second part of Rosdolsky's work asks how and why Engels could reject a consistent democracy for all peoples.

Rosdolsky starts with Hegel. World history is the progressive self-realisation of Spirit through peoples capable of forming great independent states; peoples lacking this capacity are destined for absorption by more "historic" neighbours. Hegel's scheme surely had a large element of national conceit, because he saw the "Germanic world", expressed in the Prussian state and Lutheran Christianity, as the acme of progressive development (which, he says, started in Asia).

For Engels, the idea is that the development of the productive forces is driven by class struggle, not by a World Spirit which expressed itself through some peoples but not others. Yet Rosdolsky demonstrates that Engels, in his 1848–49 journalism, relies on something like a version of Hegel's scheme, whereas a materialist class analysis would explode

it.

Rosdolsky argues that this was not sloppiness by Engels but reflected bias toward the allies of the German revolution. Opposition to Habsburg and Tsarist absolutism came from the Polish and Hungarian nobilities, the direct oppressors of Ukrainian, Slovak, Croatian, Serbian, and Romanian peasants.

Engels wants to ignore the fact that the reactionary peasant nationalism represented a legitimate protest against their own exploitation by the revolution's allies.

Engels does not want to abandon the alliance, with no political alternative available, or subject that alliance or the journalistic contributions of others to uncomfortable scrutiny.

A second factor is the impasse of Marx's and Engels's programme in 1848. They aimed for a Europe-wide democratic revolution, summed up in the last issue of the NRZ. "If Hungary were independent, Poland restored, German Austria turned into the revolutionary focus of Germany, with Lombardy and Italy winning independence — these plans, if carried out, would wreck the entire East European political system: Austria would disappear, Prussia would disintegrate and Russia would be forced back to the borders of Asia."

The "programme ran up against the anemia and class bigotry of the ruling classes of the 'historic' [and in any case, most active in 1848] nations, the German bourgeoisie and the Hungarian and Polish nobility". Later (as Rosdolsky records) Marx would write that "the whole thing in Germany [which then still meant: all the more-or-less German lands] will depend on the possibility of backing the proletarian revolution by some second edition of the Peasant War".

But the NRZ had neither a clear programme for the full liberation of the central and East European peasants from the feudal oppression which they still suffered, sometimes at medieval levels, nor an agency to lead on any such programme. Worse, it sometimes deceived itself by saying that the Hungarian and Polish nobility had already emancipated the peasants. Engels wrote that "Hungary is the only country in which... feudal burdens on the peasants have legally and in fact totally ceased to exist". He was, Rosdolsky says, "simply in error". In "all of Austria" (i.e. the Habsburg empire, including Hungary but also e.g. Croatia) "medieval feudal duties" (vanished centuries before in e.g. England, and already scarcely remunerative in the east) "had factually ended in 1848 and... legally... in September of that year", but much remained "burdening the peasantry... with an onerous compensation for the landlord, being mortally afraid of any change in landed property, and leaving the very important question of the peasants' right to use forests and pastures to the discretion of absolutism and the feudal nobility..."

So, the 1848 revolutions were defeated, and would have been defeated whatever the NRZ had said and done. But Marx and Engels, as revolutionaries, would refuse to admit defeat until

late 1850. When the NRZ was forced to cease publication, its last issue declared the coming agenda as: "Revolutionary rising of the French working class, world war... And in the East, a revolutionary army made up of fighters of all nationalities already confronts the alliance of the old Europe represented by the Russian army, while from Paris comes the threat of a 'red republic'."

Hardly "all nationalities", as we have seen: the supposedly "counter-revolutionary peoples" could be dismissed because they were too weak, and had to be dismissed because they could not possibly be rallied to the hoped-for leaders of the anti-Tsarist, anti-Habsburg revolutionary cause, "the German bourgeoisie and the Hungarian and Polish nobility".

Sidestep

Rosdolsky does not accuse Marx and Engels of an individual moral failing. He insists that "the immense difficulties that stood in the way of the solution of the national question in the revolution of 1848" were real and severe: the class position of the German bourgeoisie in Austria's lands made a compromise with the oppressed nationalities extraordinarily difficult, since national privilege and class privilege were fused for that bourgeoisie in ways that made voluntary renunciation nearly unthinkable. His argument is not that Marx and Engels faced a simple problem that they got wrong because they were unthinking, but that they faced a genuinely intractable contradiction and attempted to sidestep it rather than answer it. And that meant abandoning materialism rather than seeking clarity in the limits of what their analysis, as then constituted, could resolve.

Rosdolsky closes with an examination of the NRZ's troubling relationship to antisemitism, embodied above all in Müller-Telling's repeated conflation of "Germans and Jews" into a single reactionary economic bloc of "profit-mad" exploiters in Prague and Poznań. His articles mark a definite low point in the NRZ. He described "the Germans and the Jews" as having "assumed the same role in Bohemia that their comrades have already played with such success in Poznań," a "swarm of locusts" whose "peaceable existence of usury" the March revolution had disturbed.

Rosdolsky says, as with the "nonhistoric peoples", that the same underlying failure of class analysis is here directed at Jews rather than Slavs and composed in the shadow of, in his own words, "the death of millions of Jews in the German gas chambers," and by an author who had himself been imprisoned in Auschwitz for aiding Jews.

In his introduction, Himka says that Rosdolsky aimed "to clear the way for a correct Marxist understanding of the national question by correcting errors in the Marxist tradition, indeed at the very source of that tradition." Marxists should read and learn from Rosdolsky. □

Postscript to Rosdolsky

By Colin Foster

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx ad-
duced, as part of the “revolutionary”
activity of the bourgeoisie which set
the groundwork for socialism, that “in-
dependent, or but loosely connected
provinces, with separate interests, laws,
governments, and systems of taxation,
became lumped together into one na-
tion, with one government, one code of
laws, one national class-interest, one
frontier, and one customs-tariff”.

That creation of nation-states made
openings for democracy, i.e. for the idea,
inconceivable before outside perhaps
compact city-states, that government
should at least in some way reflect the
will of “the people”, considered as a col-
lective aware of a collective identity and
able to communicate across the whole
collective.

That was all relative, and to be sur-
passed by the motto “workers of all
countries, unite”, but was an advance on
the petty principedoms and ramshackle
empires of the past.

In the early years of the 20th cen-
tury, Marxists including Karl Kautsky,
Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, and Leon Trotsky
codified this thinking into a programme
of consistent democracy on the national
question – the right of all nations to
self-determination, autonomy for anom-
alous minority areas, individual equal
rights for different languages – as a
necessary element in uniting the work-
ing class across borders.

They drew on Marx’s and Engels’s co-
pious writings backing Polish and Irish
national revolt.

Straightforward

But in the early years of the political ac-
tivity of Marx and Engels, notably 1848-9,
the issues were not so straightforward.
In fact Marx and Engels got some things
wrong in 1848-9, and in fact Lenin and
the rest were (rightly) discarding part
of the legacy they could have got from
Marx and Engels.

What was the background in 1848-9?
Except maybe with the Spanish-colon-
ist nations in South America (seen by
Benedict Anderson in his classic book
Imagined Communities as the pioneer
cases of democratic-tending national-
ism), until well into the 19th century “na-
tions” often did not exist as clear units
on which nation-states could be based.

Most people were peasants with lit-
tle national identity, or even none. Their
identity was defined primarily by their
extended family, their village, and their
religion.

Often villages spoke languages or
dialects different even from nearby vil-
lages, and quite different from the city
and “official” languages. After 1066, the
language of the ruling class of England,
and of the royal court and of the law, was

*A skirmish during the Hungarian
Revolution, 1848-1849*



French for three hundred years.

Similar patterns continued much later
in Eastern Europe. Buda, Pest, Lviv, Brno,
Wroclaw, Gdansk, Königsberg (Kalinin-
grad), Riga, were all German-speaking
for centuries. The official administra-
tive language of Hungary until 1844 was
Latin. Bratislava, now the capital of Slo-
vakia, had been the capital of Hungary
for hundreds of years and was even in
1848 the seat of Hungary’s parliament,
though it had a largely German-speak-
ing population (and a German name:
Pressburg).

Nations in Europe, except perhaps
the English, the Irish, and a few others,
were formed in the process of welding
nation-states, rather than being tidily
demarcated in advance.

The great French revolution of 1789-
94 created a nation mobilised for the
revolutionary wars under the slogan “la
patrie en danger” (“our country in dan-
ger”). But its France was not quite yet
“French”. In 1789 only one in eight of
the population spoke “Paris-French” as
a first language, and about half had not
even a few faltering words of French to
help them deal with the institutions of
the French monarchy.

To win, the revolution had to suppress
regional “church and king” risings such
as the Breton-speaking Chouannerie in
Brittany or the Poitevin-speaking revolt
in the Vendée. Those were often organ-
ised by local landowners and priests, but
also animated by a reluctance to accept
what came from “France” and an under-
standable reaction against the Jacobins’
efforts to impose Paris-French every-
where in France as the only language.

In 1848-9 a wave of revolutions called
“the Springtime of the Peoples” swept
Europe. National unity (e.g. in Germany)
or self-determination was a major goal.

Hungary fought for liberation from the
huge Habsburg empire ruled from Vi-

enna. But what was “Hungary”? Its lead-
ers’ claims covered vast areas where
non-Hungarians were the majority.

The anti-imperial insurgencies were
often led by the aristocratic classes of
their areas. In some areas the nobil-
ity was a large class, including many
“minor” nobles who were scarcely even
well-off farmers, but also the main class
with a “national” identity. City merchants
and workshop-operators were a smaller
class, and anyway often German or Jew-
ish. The modern wage-working class
scarcely existed there.

Sometimes peasants sided with the
Habsburg imperial power against the
insurgents. They saw little “national”
affinity with the insurgents, and (prob-
ably realistically) thought their chances
of escaping feudal remnants better with
the Empire than with the local nobility.
Notoriously, a (Croatian) imperial gen-
eral, Josip Jelačić, was able to mobilise
a large Croatian army to defeat insur-
gents in Vienna and Hungary.

Marx and Engels, in 1848, came to
respond by siding with the “big” na-
tions (Germany, Hungary, Poland) and
dismissing the “smaller” nations (Cro-
ats, Czechs, etc.) as Chouan-type reac-
tionaries and susceptible to capture by
Habsburg-imperialist or Russian-impe-
rialist (“pan-Slavist”) interests.

Template

That heat-of-the-moment response
has become a template for a variety of
supposedly-Marxist approach on the
national question, based on a sort of
anti-big-power or national-development
“instrumentalisation” of the national
question rather than (as with Lenin) on
principles that can unite the working
class across national divisions.

The approach tells us to look in each
national conflict for the “good” nation
with capacity to form a strong state

which opens paths of historic devel-
opment, or at least one opposed to the
dominant big power. We then back that
“good” nation against the “bad” nations
which do not have that capacity and
which are supposedly fated just to be
catspaws for rival big powers.

A variant, from the Italian revolution-
ary socialist group Lotta Comunista (LC),
sees all “historic” nation-state building
which opens roads of progress as hav-
ing been completed in the mid-1970s,
with the defeat of the USA in Vietnam
and the end of the Portuguese empire
in Africa. Effectively LC categorises all
national battles now as “non-historic”.
They do not use the term, but they say
the battles of the Ukrainians or the Pal-
estinians, for example, have no capacity
to go beyond being catspaws for one big
power, or alliance of big powers, against
another.

The famous “revisionist” controversy
in the German Social Democratic Party
(SPD) spun out of a dispute in 1896 in
which the great revolutionary Marxist
Rosa Luxemburg and the “revisionist”
Eduard Bernstein were on the same side
against Wilhelm Liebknecht, editor of the
SPD paper. Both Luxemburg and Bern-
stein (though with different nuances)
backed the Armenian nationalists
against the Ottoman Empire. Liebkne-
cht thought the Armenians incapable of
being more than a catspaw for the Rus-
sian Empire avid to eat up the Ottomans’
domains.

As late as 1918, Rosa Luxemburg dis-
missed Ukrainian nationalism as “a mere
whim, a folly of a few dozen petty-bour-
geois intellectuals” and scorned “Lenin’s
hobby of an ‘independent Ukraine’.” She
had not much more time for Irish nation-
alism. (Though she famously denounced
as impossible the idea of restoring an in-
dependent and united Polish state, she
had more respect for Polish national-
ism).

This classic text, by the Ukrainian
Trotskyist Roman Rosdolsky, shows
that Marx and Engels were wrong even in
1848-9. The good nations/ bad nations
line is even more wrong today, when
wage-working classes are numerous al-
most everywhere, and national identity
is a major fact almost everywhere in the
world. □



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The Civil War in France

By Martin Thomas

“Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine [conventional middle-class person] has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat”.

In his 1891 Postscript to *The Civil War in France*, Marx's defence of the workers' rule in Paris for nine weeks, 18 March to 21 May 1871, Frederick Engels explained that “dictatorship of the proletariat” means “a new and really democratic state” allowing the workers to rule after “shatter[ing] the former state power” (military, police, bureaucratic hierarchies).

In a besieged city, the Commune could do little economic reconstruction. Marx argued: “The great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence”.

- There was no standing army, but a people's militia
- The (elected) members of the Commune were subject to recall at any time
- All public officials were on no more than skilled workers' wages. The Commune was “a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time”, while in parliamentary systems the “executive”, working with unelected upper-class officials, has great control over parliament – can obstruct it, or can decide on many laws and regulations without reference to it
- The police was under the control of the Commune
- Schools were made free of charge and “cleared of all interference of church and state”.

There was much fumbling and indeed bungling, but those things were done. The background was France's defeat in a war with Prussia (then the biggest of many German states). The war was initiated in July 1870 by the French emperor who had taken power in 1852 after quelling the democratic revolution of 1848. In September the emperor conceded defeat. The elected assembly then declared a republic.

Four months of Prussian siege of Paris ended with the republic conceding defeat, and the Prussian army briefly occupying part of Paris.

But the plebeian National Guard remained in Paris. The republican government in Versailles tried to disarm it. The National Guard resisted, took power in Paris, and called elections for the Commune.

Women defending barricades during the Paris Commune



The Prussians left the suppression of the Commune to the Versailles government, which eventually (21-28 May) slaughtered tens of thousands and exiled many thousands.

Ripe

Many of the upper and middle classes had fled Paris before 18 March, and it was ripe for revolution because it was then the only city in the world with decades of socialist organisation.

The majority of the Commune were left Jacobins, “Proudhonists” (advocating worker cooperatives with “fair” market coordination), or “Blanquists” (advocating armed uprising and socialist “educational dictatorship”).

But by then there had been seven years of the First International, in which Marx played a leading role. Proudhon had died in 1865. Both Proudhonists and Blanquists had evolved.

The Commune cancelled rents, banned night-work for bakers, decided for equal pay for women teachers, and resolved

that enterprises abandoned by their owners fleeing Paris should be run as worker cooperatives, and then a union of cooperatives. As Marx declared: “what else would it be but communism?” After the Commune, the Proudhonist movement largely dissolved into the Marxist and anarchist parties formed after amnesty for the Communard exiles in 1880.

Blanqui was in jail during the Commune (and until shortly before his death in 1881). The chief Blanquist in the Commune, Edouard Vaillant, would read *Capital*, and later merge most Blanquists into the united broadly-Marxist Socialist Party of France.

“Marxist”

The word “Marxist” did not become current until the 1880s, and then first as a curse-word used by another wing of the new socialist movement then against the associates of Karl Marx's daughter Laura. But, as *Capital* volume 1 and *Wages, Price, and Profit* are reference points for “Marxism” in economic and historical studies, *The Civil War in France* is the reference point for all subsequent “Marxist” politics. It was also the last sizeable text finished for publication that Marx wrote.

Marx summed up his worker-organising, building-on-capitalism perspective. “The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce par décret du peuple. They know that... they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and people. They have no ideals to realise, but

to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant”.

Marx also refuted those who saw socialism as something to be achieved gradually or quietly by waiting for conditions to mature. He thought that workers' rule in the circumstances could only be short-lived. But when the Versailles government “presented the Parisians with the alternative of taking up the fight or succumbing without a struggle”, then he rejoiced that the workers had taken up the fight. “Whatever the immediate results may be, a new point of departure of world-historic importance has been gained”.

“Workingmen's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them”.

Workers' Liberty study notes at bit.ly/m-cwf. Audio version at bit.ly/ptref-audio. Text at bit.ly/cwf-m (read especially the Third Address and Engels's Postscript). The “classic” history by a Communard is by P-O Lissagaray; you may also like Rupert Christiansen's *Paris Babylon* or *Tales of the New Babylon* (same book, different title), which gives a lively if suave account of both the Second Empire and the Commune (including the activity of Elisabeth Dmitriev, who was along with Léo Frankel the nearest thing to “a Marxist” in the Commune, and organised the Women's Union during it). □



Monument “to the dead of the Commune”, at the Communards Wall, Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris

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The Communist Manifesto and working-class self-education

By Colin Waugh

In *Solidarity* 751 I aimed to show that activists of Chartism and its predecessor struggles were strongly geared towards collective class-struggle self-education. In *Solidarity* 760 I discussed how the activities of James (Bronterre) O'Brien related to this impulse.

Chartism was the world's first national-level working-class mass movement, in the world's first heavily industrialised country. It aimed to transform the parliamentary electoral system in Britain so fundamentally that workers could use it to meet their real needs, thereby destroying the dominance exercised by landowners and the capitalist owners of large-scale industry.

O'Brien was a central activist of this movement. Of such leaders, he alone tried consistently to put forward a theoretical model of what Chartism was about. This model centred on a distinction between "direct slavery", as in the Greco-Roman ancient world, and its continuation, "indirect slavery", of which contemporary waged labour was the key example.

Karl Marx wrote the Manifesto of the Communist Party in German in late January 1848, for publication by the Communist League, a group made up mostly of artisans expelled by continental governments for their political activities. These groups assumed, rightly, that revolutions were about to break out in their home countries, that these revolutions would introduce bourgeois democratic electoral systems of the same broad type as the one in Britain, and that they themselves would shortly return to join in struggles to make this happen.

Battle of democracy

In this context Marx set out through the Manifesto to convince activists like these that they should try to do in their own countries what the Chartists were trying to do in Britain. He argued that "the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy". This would involve them, first, in creating mass pressure to make whatever electoral systems emerged as democratic as possible. Secondly they should try to make the biggest gains they could in any elections that took place. And thirdly they should use any power gained in this way to put through pro-working class measures.

But Marx went further than this, predicting that: "The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest by degrees all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e. the proletar-

iat organised as the ruling class..." In the beginning this would entail "despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures... which appear economically insufficient and untenable but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of revolutionising the mode of production".

In other words, he connected a political approach derived from Chartism to a longer term strategy aimed at socio-economic as well as political revolution.

In 1838 the then prominent Chartist orator Joseph Rayner Stephens, at a mass meeting on Kersal Moor near Salford, memorably said that Chartism was "a knife and fork question". These words were powerful because many of Stephens's hearers had become factory workers in England to escape starvation in Ireland, and now faced it again here because of factory lay-offs. Much the same threat hung over many workers when Marx wrote the Manifesto ten years later. In the Manifesto, however, he set out to integrate the fully justified Chartist focus on consumption with a longer-term conception of how "proletarians" could take control of production.

Also in the Manifesto he wrote: "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air".

What does this formulation imply?

Marx of course knew that even in Britain the "proletarians", i.e. the industrial workers, did not form a majority of the working class as a whole, because this also included large numbers of agricultural labourers, domestic servants and declassed artisans in fields like tailoring and shoemaking. Because he knew this, he looked upon industrial workers dynamically — that is, not statically as a sociological group but as the only people with the capacity to bring about fundamental societal change. He thought they could and would do this by leading wider and wider circles of workers more generally in action which neither the landed class nor the capitalists would be able to control.

Marx expressed this idea in the Manifesto, but he had developed it earlier in the 1840s in disputes with other German intellectuals who, like him, had under-

gone a training in academic philosophy.

A philosophical tradition existed in Germany which did not exist here. In this tradition, academic philosophers regularly investigated the history and social role of religion. Marx was trained to PhD level in this tradition. Drawing on this training, he then took part in a number of often heated exchanges with others from the same background. Through doing so, and in opposition to most of them, he worked out his own highly distinctive conception of ideological struggle, which already included a belief about how working-class activists and traditional intellectuals like himself should interact.

Emancipation

This found expression in, among other writings, Marx's *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, published in Paris early in 1844. Here, focusing on the situation and prospects in Germany, he described the emergence of "a class with radical chains, a class that is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society having a universal character because of its universal suffering and claiming no particular right because no particular wrong but unqualified wrong is perpetrated on it... a sphere which does not partially oppose the consequences but totally opposes the premises of the German political system; a sphere, finally, that cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society, thereby emancipating them; a sphere, in short, that is the complete loss of humanity and can only redeem itself through the total redemption of humanity.

"This dissolution of society as a particular class is the proletariat".

He went on from this to say that: "As philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy" — in other words he visualised a form of interaction between people who, like him, had undergone a formal education in academic philosophy, with industrial workers, in which the workers actively appropriate to themselves a capacity for philosophical thinking. He adds that: "...once the lightning of thought has deeply struck this unsophisticated soil of the people, the Germans will emancipate themselves..."

When Marx wrote this he already knew a certain amount about Chartism from articles about Britain that Frederick Engels wrote for the *Rheinische Zeitung* paper that Marx was editing. Then in June 1844 weavers in Silesia rose up in revolt. Marx wrote an article about this, which began by referring to a song that was popular amongst the weavers at the



start of this uprising, which he described as "a bold call to action", pointing out that in it: "there is not even a mention of hearth and home, factory or district, but in [it] the proletariat at once, in a striking, sharp, unrestrained and powerful manner, proclaims its opposition to the society of private property".

Further: "The Silesian uprising begins precisely with what the French and English workers' end, with consciousness of the nature of the proletariat. The action itself bears the stamp of this superior character. Not only machines, these rivals of the workers, are destroyed, but also ledgers, the titles to property. And while all other movements were aimed primarily only against the owner of the individual enterprise, the visible enemy, this movement is at the same time directed against the banker, the hidden enemy".

Between 1844 and January 1848 Marx visited England, and through Engels met and discussed with Chartist activists, including George Julian Harney. During the same period he also met and exchanged ideas with workers in Paris and in Brussels.

The Manifesto made several predictions about the likely course of events, many of which did not come true in the timescale it implies. Marx and Engels addressed this in their 1872 preface to a new German edition, saying that although "conditions may have changed in the twenty-five years since the Manifesto was written, yet the general principles expounded in the document are on the whole as correct to-day as ever". They did not spell out in this preface what they thought those general principles were, but the philosophical model sketched out above must surely have been one of them. □

It is for the Irish people to decide unity, and how

By Micheál MacEoin

The issues of Irish self-determination and Irish unity have unexpectedly been to the fore in recent weeks.

First of all, new British Prime Minister Andy Burnham visited the North for the first time on 27 August.

Prompted by a question on the prospects for a unity referendum, Burnham replied: "Well obviously I'm here as I said earlier to listen and I will take a collaborative approach, but some issues will be off the table and that is one issue that will be off the table."

Expanding, he said that the referendum on Scottish independence and Brexit had been divisive distractions for issues such as the cost of living.

Predictably this prompted outrage from Irish nationalists, including Sinn Féin.

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It also led to solemn assurances from Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Chris Bryant, that Burnham was referring only to whether a border poll would be discussed "now" and confirmed that both he and Burnham remained committed to every part of the Good Friday Agreement, including the provisions for a border-poll.

It is worth clarifying, however, what those provisions are. They do not, as is sometimes assumed, guarantee unfettered Irish self-determination.

First, the vote is not on an all-island basis but two votes, North and South. That gives the existing Northern Ireland, shaped at its creation to produce a permanent Unionist majority (now eroded), something of a veto.

Second, it is up to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, i.e. the British government, to determine when a poll is held.

Schedule 1 to the 1998 Northern Ireland Act provides the legal mechanism.

As the Constitution Society neatly explain: "Paragraph 1 provides that the Secretary of State may direct the holding of a poll. Paragraph 2 states that the Secretary of State must exercise that power if, at any time, it appears likely that a majority of those voting would favour Northern Ireland leaving the UK and forming part of a united Ireland."

Clarified

As clarified by Re McCord [2020] in the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal, "paragraph 2 duty arises even if the Secretary of State does not consider a referendum to be in the public interest. Concerns about division, pressure on public services or distraction from day-to-day government may legitimately inform the

discretionary decision" but they "cannot displace the mandatory obligation once the likelihood test is satisfied."

However, the British Government refuses to commit to any clear or objective criteria with which to measure the likelihood of a successful referendum. Therefore, they maintain maximum freedom of manoeuvre, which could effectively frustrate the calling of a vote without campaigning and pressure.

In other words, legally and morally it is not for Burnham to say that a vote is "off the table". Practically, at the current juncture, and under the existing provisions of the Good Friday Agreement, his view reflects a certain reality and underscores the very limits of that Agreement.

Trump

The second prompt for discussions in Irish unity has, of course, been the comments from Trump.

Asked during a visit to Ireland about his view on Irish unity, on 12 September Trump said he would "love" to see a united Ireland and "it may as well happen now".

Doubling down the following day, Trump added: "It seems to me that one of the naturals of all time is to put them together."

It should not even need to be said that Trump has no concern for national self-determination, as his actions over Venezuela or Palestine, or his bullying of smaller states with punitive tariffs, make clear.

Trump's remarks may just be of a piece with his characteristically capricious and unpredictable public utterances. With the risk of giving them deeper credence, they may also reflect an electoral calculation with Irish-American voters in the



mid-terms. They may even be an example of using British weakspots to cause disruption and apply pressure, as the Israeli right have been supporting Argentina's claim on the Falklands in response to Miliband's sanctions move.

In any case, the answers to Burnham's dismissal of a referendum and Trump's incoherent support for unity are similar.

The settlement of the Irish national question should not be down to the British or US government or reduced to a facet of geopolitics.

Rather, if the issue is not simply to cause more division and strife between Irish workers, its resolution must be up to the Irish people, in all their diversity, and without external impediment, to come to a mutually satisfactory democratic arrangement.

As we have consistently argued, the workers' movement must intervene with its own programme to resolve the national question, one which foregrounds the issue of rights and protections for national minorities and connects democratic demands to jobs, homes, social ownership and the ultimate creation of a Workers' Republic. ☐

Housing: Burnham fails at first hurdle

By Robert Bau

The Labour Government has announced what it claims to be the biggest increase in social and affordable house building in a generation. At the heart of this is the £39 billion, 10-year Social and Affordable Homes Programme, announced in June 2025, aimed at supporting councils, housing associations and other providers to build supposedly genuinely affordable homes. The Government claims that at least 60% of homes delivered through the programme will be for social rent, with a renewed focus on council house building.

As part of the first phase of the programme, almost £10 billion has been allocated to

housing providers outside London to support the delivery of more than 70,000 new so-called social and affordable homes. Ministers have linked the investment to wider efforts to tackle housing waiting lists, reduce the use of temporary accommodation and address the growing housing crisis facing working-class families.

Whilst the Affordable Homes Programme is undoubtedly a significant increase in housing investment, it falls far short of the radical vision put forward by Andy Burnham shortly before he became PM.

Little of the funding will go to councils. 60% of the homes funded under the programme are guaranteed to be for social rent. The remaining 40% are to

be other forms of "affordable" housing, many of which remain unaffordable to low-paid workers and families on waiting lists.

Council house building

Burnham has consistently argued that the housing crisis requires a return to large-scale council house building, with councils once again becoming the primary providers of genuinely affordable homes. When Mayor of Manchester, he called for 10,000 new council homes in Greater Manchester, the suspension of Right to Buy on new council properties, and greater powers for local authorities to build and retain housing stock.

Yet as Prime Minister, his plan (in any case inherited from the

Starmer government) spreads funding across councils, housing associations and other providers, while leaving intact the right to buy. This "right" has historically reduced the stock of council housing faster than it can be replaced.

The real question is not just how much money has been announced but whether it will lead to a renaissance in publicly-owned housing. Burnham's challenge to government had been clear: if public money is being invested, why not make council housing the priority and ensure new homes remain a public asset for generations? Yet when he had the chance to meet his own challenge he failed and fell at the hurdle that he himself had set up.

Now to semi rescue himself, he could have said that the Affordable Homes Programme was but step one and that step two would be a fully blown programme of council house building; he could have ended the right to buy as a sort of a down payment towards step two. But he didn't. On the face of it, the Affordable Homes Programme is it!

Until the Government is prepared to back councils fully, protect new and existing homes from future sell-offs, and move beyond the diluted language of "affordable housing" towards a genuine mass council house building programme, then Burnham and Labour will have failed in changing the status quo. ☐

Misfortune again for Germany?

By Bas Hardy

The first anti-fascist demonstration I went on was at the Schadowplatz, Düsseldorf, where the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NDP) were holding a conference. It was April 1967, I was a month shy of my sixteen birthday and on a school exchange trip, so going to the demo was strictly extra-curricular!

I got pictured in one of the newspapers in the front rank of those protesting, looking quite cool in my Levi cord jacket. Sadly both jacket and newspaper edition have long since vanished into the mists of time.

I still remember the heading on one of the anti fascist leaflets, "Deutschland Eingluck Noch Einmal?", sarcastically signifying "Germany Misfortunate Yet Again?"

Hoping that enough time had passed since the end of World War Two, the NDP expected electoral gains. But it failed miserably. Prior to reunification it never managed to reach the 5% mark which qualified for entry into the Bundestag. Generally it polled at around one percent nationally.

Since its founding in 1949, the Federal Republic in West Germany had been governed by the "centre right" Christian Democrats (CDU), their two decades in office only ending in 1969. German nationalism was still present in their refusal to accept post-1945 borders. Maps displayed outside official buildings and at train stations showed Germany's pre-war borders, with large areas labelled "under Polish or Soviet occupation" and East Germany referred to as the "so-called" (sogenannte) German Democratic Republic.

Many Nazi war criminals who'd es-

caped a date with the hangman at Nuremberg by getting off with prison time had been let out early, only serving a fraction of their sentences. It was an open secret that numerous Nazi functionaries occupied important positions in the new regime in the west, as they certainly did in the GDR. Yet Nazism wasn't a political force at the time, in large part due to the much-vaunted "economic miracle" through which West Germany had moved from ruins in 1945 to being maybe the world's technological leader in 1967.

Germany being better off despite having lost the war was a common gripe heard in Britain then. The family home of the exchange student I stayed at, whose father worked as a postman, certainly had a higher housing standard than my Bermondsey abode. On the official school itinerary this time was a trip to the Ford factory in Cologne and going there gave a good idea of who contributed the manual labour to said "miracle".

The impression I got from that factory visit was Germans held the managerial and clerical jobs. The factory floor, our factory guide told us, comprised workers from southern Europe and Turkey. He even bragged that these workers were assigned certain positions in the production process according to their supposed ethnic characteristics. Italians were "inclined to be lazy", so were put in such and such a section, whilst "Turks are hard workers", so were in another part of the plant.

The status of the Turkish Gastarbeiter ("guest worker") population in Germany has been particularly controversial throughout the decades. Many generations living in Germany were denied German citizenship.

Fashionable

Eight decades have now passed for fascism to become fashionable again. Now one in four Germans say they'll be voting AfD. Beatrix von Storch, deputy leader of the AfD, is not only an ideological but a genealogical descendant of Nazism. Her granddad was sentenced to ten years at Nuremberg for financing concentration camps, but was one of the many who got an early release.

A number of factors explain the advance of the AfD, which has taken over from the NDP as the main force on the "far right". The influx of refugees from war-torn countries such as Syria and Ukraine (far more than in the UK) provided convenient scapegoats for various economic and social woes. The stagnation of the German economy and the cost of living crisis are grist to the mill.

The fact that the AfD is making its most significant advances in East Germany also has a lot to do with the neo-liberal economic policies applied to



Protest against the NDP, 1968

the area in the aftermath of reunification in 1990.

The Treuhand organisation, which privatised the GDR's state industries, succeeded in eliminating around two million jobs. Once it had done its work 94% of East German companies were owned by West German or international investors. Deindustrialisation also led to many young people leaving for jobs in West Germany, no longer having to worry about getting through barbed wire or over walls in order to get there. In Sachsen-Anhalt, for instance, the population has dropped by 25% since reunification, making it the German state with the oldest population.

The AfD have played on "Ostalgie" as if life in the former GDR was some kind of golden age. That people in the East go along with this shows disillusionment with their lives in united Germany. Many East Germans learnt Russian as their second language at school, and restoring Russian teaching is an AfD policy plank. AfD being Russophile is only to be expected given that the Kremlin is a major driving force promoting the far right throughout Europe.

An effort is being made in the right wing media — *The Telegraph*, *Spectator*, *Spiked!*, etc — to paint the AfD as "a broad coalition of the right". The neo-Nazis "only form a minority", so no need to panic.

Fascism, however, doesn't come these days dressed up in the same clothes as the 1930's. AfD members don't wear brown shirts. Ulrich Siegmund, the AfD leader in Sachsen-Anhalt, doesn't drive around in a huge Mercedes Benz like Adolf Hitler, but gads about on a motor scooter the better to enhance his "populist" appeal. Nevertheless, AfD policies provide enough evidence they want to establish some kind of fascist regime.

Priority

The AfD priority is to kick as many "foreigners" out of Sachsen-Anhalt as possible. Children who do not have permanent residency will be barred from regular school, as will all disabled children regardless of nationality (a par-

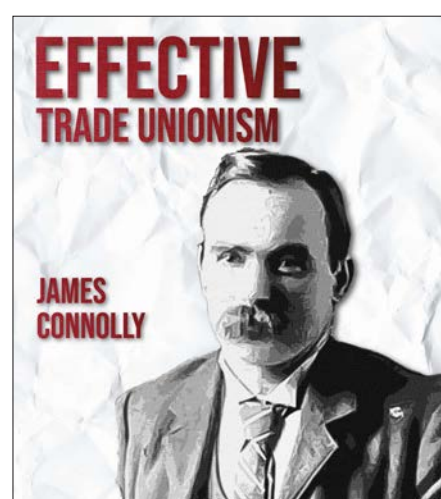
ticularly nasty measure which echoes attitudes to children with mental and physical disabilities in the Third Reich). The state government would set up a "Remigration Task Force" with the aim of carrying out deportations — all this in line with plans for mass deportations proposed at the notorious conference of right wing extremists held in Potsdam in 2023.

Ulrich Siegmund was one of the attendees and the meeting recommended the deportation of "non-assimilated" German citizens as well as recent immigrants. It doesn't take a genius to work out who of Germany's citizens the AfD regards as "non-assimilated." Just as worrying is the AfD call for a auxiliary police force, in the form of "citizen patrols", which we can be pretty sure will be acting as vigilantes attacking anyone the AfD doesn't like.

The AfD might not form a state government this time unless they get support from the BSW, a red-brown grouping led by Sahra Wagenknecht. Should they get to run the state, then there is doubt about how much they can do constitutionally. Additionally the mass removal of the migrant population would result in a collapse in the state health system. More than one in four doctors working in Sachsen-Anhalt hospitals do not hold a German passport.

But the electoral advance of AfD should set alarm bells ringing. This is the most fascist-inspired of the big European right-wing populist parties — too extreme even for Marine Le Pen to stomach! We cannot regard their advance will be just confined to the East either. Volkswagen announcing 50,000 car workers being made redundant is likely to increase AfD support in the West. The austerity policies of the CDU and SPD government have failed, and if they are offering more of the same they are effectively finished.

A fightback is clearly needed which defends democratic rights, safeguards ethnic minorities and advances socialist policies. Things have got beyond adjectives like "misfortunate". □



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

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Good questions, but short on answers

By Simon Nelson

Around 200 people attended the Green-run Hackney Council's "ant-austerity summit" on 9 September, mostly councillors and trade unionists, and a smaller number of party members, mainly Greens. Holding the meeting Wednesday daytime was always going to limit those who could attend.

The initiative's political direction remains unclear, but if it can help build local labour movement-focused anti-cuts committees, it may play a useful role. That it was addressed by the Chief Executive of Hackney Council was not a good start. The central issue was whether councils, particularly those controlled by the Greens, should refuse to set cuts budgets in spring 2027 and instead prepare for a confrontation with the government with some variant of a "no-cuts" or "no social-cuts" budget.

Zoë Garbett, Mayor of Hackney, made it clear that her administration would not put itself in a position where government commissioners could be appointed. This appeared to set an important limit on how far Hackney, and potentially other councils, would be prepared to challenge central government. If everyone waits for another to put their head above the parapet, and to get the "critical mass" we heard from a number of participants, then very little will happen.

The campaign has five principal "asks". These were "agreed" in a messy consensus process, "consensus" meaning how supportive Zoë Garbett was to any proposal from the floor. Intervention on the campaign demands achieved some useful changes. The demand for "social housing" was sharpened to a demand for council housing, and "improvements" in pay was replaced with a demand for full restoration of what workers have lost. The attempt to take a stronger position against council tax was less successful.

1. More government funding: Restore and replace Local Government Financial Settlements to at least pre-2010 levels, with guaranteed funding for both statutory and non-statutory service delivery. This should be determined primarily on the basis of need, with structural changes made to meet that need.

2. Cancel local authority debt: Break the cycle of local authorities scrambling to get back on their feet, and let them start a new chapter that ensures residents benefit first.

3. More funding for council homes: Provide capital funding to significantly increase the number of council homes built and put to use every year, and ensure a long-term financial commitment to high-quality, accessible and sustainable provision. This must entail ending right-to-buy as it has functioned, and ending the developer-led model.

4. New, fairer ways to raise money: Re-

form council tax and introduce new ways for councils to raise funds, that ensures wealthier property and land owners pay a fairer share

5. Strengthening our public sector: From increasing powers to local councils, bringing in national regulations to systematically end outsourcing and privatisation practices, funding new models of work such as four-day working weeks, and restoration to public sector pay, disparity and conditions.

It was not clear how these demands would be presented, pursued or translated into a coordinated campaign. The immediate proposals included:

- Supporting an anti-austerity protest called by Hackney trade unions on the eve of the national Budget on 27 October.
- Supporting a protest against Palantir.
- Holding an expanded anti-austerity summit later in the year.
- Organising a national demonstration early in 2027.
- Building local organisations involving supportive councillors, trade union branches or trades councils, and wider communities.

Unresolved

The eve-of-Budget demonstration was supported, although several people questioned whether a protest held so close to the Budget would have much influence over its contents. The proposals for a further summit and national demonstration remained unresolved.

There was agreement that local groups should be developed, along with some mechanism through which trade union branches could affiliate. The Socialist Party proposed holding another conference before February, involving councils committed to no-cuts budgets, trade union branches and members of union executives or national committees.

A number of Green councillors, especially those from Haringey, said they wanted to refuse to set cuts budgets in spring 2027, provided several councils could be lined up to act together. One councillor warned against the Greens becoming "Labour 2.0" by repeating Labour councils' role in implementing austerity.

Some councillors appeared to believe that a sufficiently large group of councils could collectively refuse cuts budgets and force the government to respond.

However, the discussion did not establish what would happen if the government responded with intervention, financial restrictions or the appointment of commissioners. Garbett's position in Hackney suggested that avoiding this outcome would be a priority: refusing cuts budgets may be politically attractive, but unless councils are prepared to confront the consequences, the threat may remain largely symbolic.

The Socialist Party's presentation of no-cuts budgets also came across as somewhat mechanical, and as Workers' Liberty bulletin for the event said "any 'unbalanced' budget is now, by law, invalid, and an unelected council Financial Officer is legally required to refuse it". Even so, the proposal was treated as though passing a budget itself would be the central act of resistance. What is needed is organisation outside council chambers to defend councillors who refused to implement cuts and to be part of a coordinated campaign with the local unions, tenants and community that could fight the government for greater funding.

The financial position of councils further complicates the strategy. Workers' Liberty has argued that councils could buy time by using reserves and other available resources to delay cuts while building a campaign. Some councillors responded that many authorities are already so financially depleted that this may be difficult or impossible. The key question is therefore not simply whether councils can pass no-cuts budgets, but whether they can use the budget process to build the wider power required to sustain resistance.

Michael Chessum, a cabinet member in Lambeth, introduced the campaigning session with an assessment of the anti-austerity movement of the 2010s. He argued that the current situation should not be treated as a simple continuation of that earlier movement. The present campaign lacks some of the previous movement's strengths, notably a major student revolt, but may possess a political expression that was absent 15 years ago: councils that are at least nominally prepared to challenge austerity.

Confrontation

The fact is that local government unions will not be striking over pay, and we do not yet have a radicalised labour movement prepared to fight cuts but not being held back by right-wing or over-cautious councillors. Unions will need to do a huge amount of work to prepare for a serious confrontation. At the same time, successful local disputes and forthcoming changes to balloting legislation suggest the situation has potential.

One unresolved issue concerns the balance between demanding increased central government funding and demanding greater powers for councils to raise revenue locally. The case for additional local revenue-raising powers is understandable, particularly where a narrow and regressive funding system prevents councils from meeting social needs. However, relying too heavily on local revenue would place the greatest burden on deprived areas. Councils serving poorer communities would have to raise taxes more aggressively to ob-



tain the same resources as wealthier authorities, while still facing much greater levels of need.

The demand to tax wealth and big business should therefore be much more prominent. Tax the rich to pay for our services!

The campaign needs to make clear that the resources required to repair public services cannot be obtained principally by squeezing local residents, even through a reformed council-tax system.

This question was partly obscured by the economic presentation being given by Labour councillor Simon Ripton, an enthusiast for "Modern Monetary Theory". To be sure, Ripton was right to reject the simplistic claim that the state budget must be managed like a household budget. A government that issues its own currency is not financially equivalent to a household, and austerity cannot be justified through that analogy. But for many decades now no economist, however right-wing, has believed the household analogy. Rachel Reeves was running a 5.5% deficit. The Tories ran large deficits from 2010, and huge ones in 2020-1. And actually MMTers also believe that there is a limit to deficits, set, they say, by controlling inflation. MMT seems to offer a technical "quick fix" avoiding class conflict — just print more money — but does not even do that.

The weakness of MMT was evident when Councillor Simon Ripton claimed that "government debt is our wealth", as though UK government bonds were held equally across the population rather than being disproportionately owned by financial institutions and some wealthy households.

A similar problem appeared when the same councillor described children being held back by education cuts as representing "millions of hours of productive labour lost". The material consequences of cuts should be understood primarily in terms of damage to people's lives, capabilities and communities, rather than only as lost economic productivity.

If local groups get off the ground then Workers' Liberty supporters will seek to be involved and to build these into broad labour-movement anti-cuts committees. □

Fidel Castro: a modest caudillo?

It may be "said" that Fidel Castro "opposed personality cults" (*Solidarity* 773, 26 August 2026), but that may be Castro-cult myth-making more than reality.

Castro talked after seizing power of "revolutionary modesty" (often in exhortation to others). And even – without irony – he celebrated his own modesty [*]. "Fidel" champions the world over have echoed such claims.

Yet, in Cuba, his image has long been ubiquitous in paintings, posters, and artwork; newspapers – front covers, titles, headers; graffiti and murals; other art and more. This is not a reluctant celebrity against overenthusiastic fans. This is in a police state which tightly regulates and censors all such output. Castro summed up his attitude to ideological freedom in 1961: "inside the revolution everything; outside the revolution, nothing."

Even with some loosening in recent years, the Cuban dictatorship's prevented a planned Black Lives Matter protest in 2020 after Cuban police killed an unarmed black man through preemptive arrests of potential attendees, swarming the location, and even taking down the island's internet overnight.

Distinguished

It is true that Castro, in power from 1959, distinguished himself from many Stalinist dictators who took power in the first half of that century with a lack of big public statues and streets named after him. Smaller ego? Perhaps. Or perhaps, in the wake of Khrushchev's 1956 speech denouncing personality cults, and following the infamous 1956 toppling of Stalin's statue in Budapest he decided to eschew such outdated and tarnished forms of idolisation – and easy targets – in favour of more colourful and modern means?

Castro's inflation of and capitalisation upon the international cult of Che Guevara – once martyred – was much more brazen. (Incidentally, Guevara denounced Khrushchev's speech, idolised Stalin, and with the KGB's help set up Cuba's secret police, the G2.)

It takes and creates a certain type of megalomaniac to be the leader of dictatorship for half a century. Even his champions affectionately talk of his love of extremely lengthy speechifying. Not within a culture of debate, but in a context where dissidents were repressed and written out of history.

Castro was known too, for his habit of wearing in public green military fatigues, well into his old age. This served both to remind people of his celebrated role in guerilla warfare in the 1959 revolution, and to suggest financial modesty. Meanwhile, the workers' upsurge which helped weaken the pre-1959 regime and was then crushed by Castro's new

regime was written out of history; and Castro's subsequent immense wealth and life of luxury was conveniently ignored.

Zack Muddle, Bristol

[*] In the book *My life: Fidel Castro*, Castro talks about his early post-revolutionary years, after purging Anibal Escalante (p. 219): "As far as I was concerned, I was able to overlook that political disloyalty. There was no vanity in me whatsoever – what should and always did prevail was modesty and unity in the conduct of those who aspire to change society and the world. I employed calm and equanimity in seeking unity in very difficult circumstances." He got, he recounts, *more* modest still as years went by.

• For references and sources, see online bit.ly/castrol

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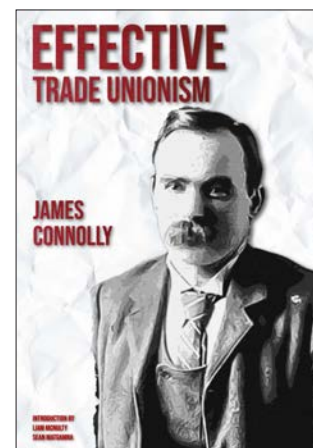
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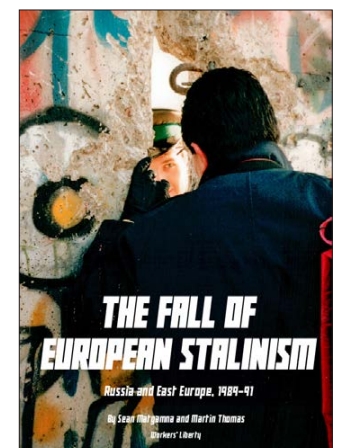
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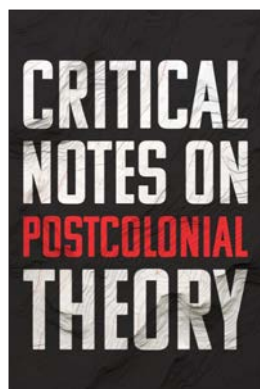
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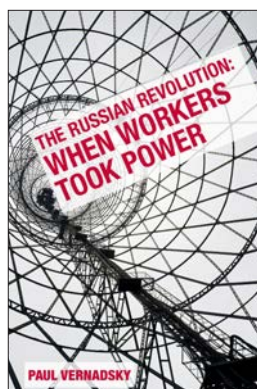
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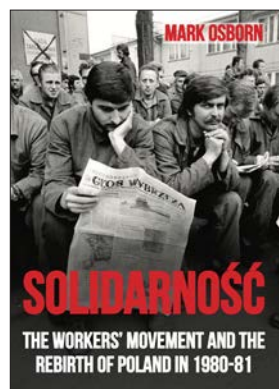
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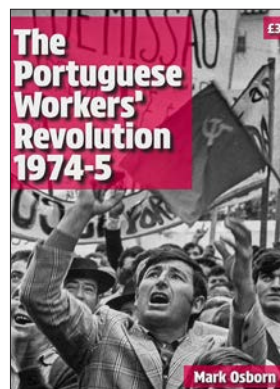
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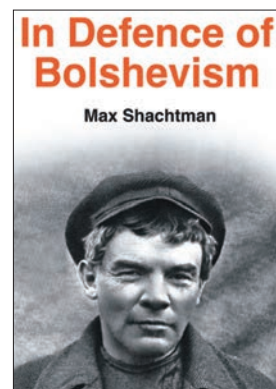
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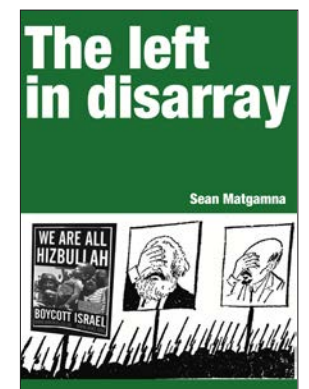
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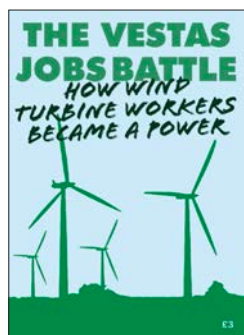
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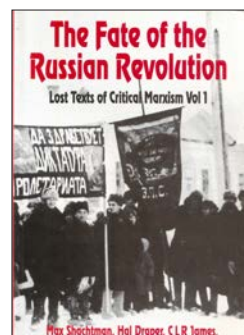
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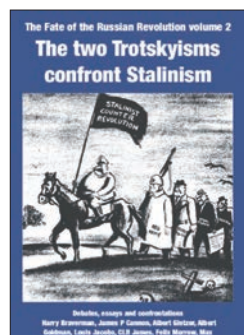
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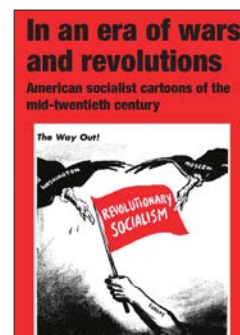
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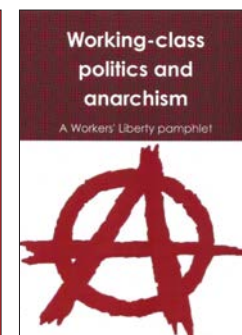
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MHCLG moves to strikes

By Gerry Bates

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) at the Ministry of Housing, Community, and Local Government (MHCLG) will launch selective strikes from 24 September, as they continue their fight to resist office-attendance mandates, and to oppose office closures. This is in addition to their "Action Short Of Strike", which is work in the office (rather than home) only when they want to.

The first wave of strikes involves workers in the department's finance directorate, who will strike from 24 September to 6 October. Workers in the resilience, emergencies and recovery directorate strike from 1 to 8 October. The strikes are designed to effectively utilise the power of workers with immediate leverage over critical procedures.

Wants

PCS says it wants the employer to:

- re-enter talks on the fundamental decision to close offices, with the aim of saving as many offices as possible, and ensuring no staff member loses pay or personal time travelling to work due to

office closures.

- implement a progressive and flexible office attendance policy, placing staff choice at its heart, by re-engaging with PCS proposals to prevent detriment or disciplinary action to staff. Management must also consider removing individual compliance monitoring in favour of an organisational-wide approach.

- formalise a fair recruitment policy that prevents the decline and deterioration of regional offices, stops unjustified unequal treatment between locations and provides future assurances to members that current policy about where

they can be based will not be unilaterally eroded.

The PCS branch at MHCLG describes its dispute as an "Our Work, Our Way" campaign, fighting not only over office-attendance mandates but for greater worker control over how work is organised.

We reported in *Solidarity* 773 that Angela Rayner, the Secretary of State for Housing, had agreed to meet union representatives. At the time of writing, Rayner was yet to act on this commitment. □

Defend Risa Tan, suspended Prospect rep

By Democratic Prospects Steering Group

Over the past year, Risa Tan has been fighting to transform their branch and Prospect more widely. In their workplace, they have held mass meetings with hundreds of workers and significantly grown their branch's membership since their election to the Branch Executive. They have led an unprecedented dispute, winning gains for members on compulsory office attendance.

On a national level, they have been central to setting up Democratic Prospects, a network of Prospect members which wants Prospect to become a democratic, fighting union —

one that supports trans rights, migrants rights and struggles for national self-determination.

Investigation

On the day that their branch AGM was announced at a members' meeting and members were invited to submit nominations for the Branch Executive (BEC), Risa was notified of an investigation into their conduct and issued with a "precautionary suspension" from office.

Risa was, at that point, already being investigated for a complaint relating to their distribution of literature at Prospect's conference.

At this year's national conference, Risa argued for a more

combative approach to employers. They also argued unequivocally in favour of trans rights — in contrast to the NEC's position. They distributed a paper with a headline "End the Iran War."

When Risa objected to being told by union officials that they were not allowed to distribute literature, a complaint was made accusing them of being aggressive. Risa gave evidence which, in our view, strongly undermined the allegations.

Not long after this evidence was given, they were notified of a second complaint. Their precautionary suspension was issued on the basis of this complaint.

The allegations in the second complaint include that Risa is a socialist; that they speak to PCS union; that they expressed a minority view against a pay offer which the BEC supported; and that they are rude in branch discussions. The reason precautionary suspension was deemed necessary in this case has not, in our view, been clearly articulated.

Earnest

Those who have met Risa or who have seen them speak will know that they are a clear political communicator. Their conduct does not stray beyond earnestly engaging in debate. The power to suspend

an elected representative from office should be used sparingly.

Members and reps have a basic right to organise and express their views to each other. Characterising Risa as "rude" and "aggressive" invokes social norms that can operate in gendered, racialised and ableist ways.

Branches and BECs should support Risa. They should send messages to Prospect's leadership, asking questions and challenging Risa's suspension. Rank-and-file activists must rally to fight back against this attack and defend their democratic right to organise within the union. An injury to one is an injury to all. □

Scotland: thin promises from Marra

By Ann Field

North East Scotland MSP Michael Marra was announced as the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) leader on 19 September. Marra won 4,266 votes in the leadership ballot, compared with 2,485 for South Scotland MSP Joe Fagan.

Glasgow Region MSP Monica Lennon failed to get the third nomination from a Scottish Labour MP needed to get into the leadership ballot.

The voting figures sum up the current state of Scottish Labour. Slightly fewer than half the SLP membership — now down to around 11,000, from 30,000 in 1997 — bothered to cast a vote. And just 5% of affiliated trade unionists voted.

Marra was once a member of the Campaign for Socialism (the left organisation in the SLP), but then underwent a kind of Damascene conversion in reverse on his road to higher office.

Although there was little to choose politically between Marra and Fagan, and

despite his promises of a total transformation of the SLP and its fortunes, Marra was very much the continuity candidate and the candidate of (what is left of) the SLP establishment.

In every Holyrood election since the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the SLP has won less votes than in the preceding election. It now has 17 MSPs in Holyrood, level-pegging with Reform, and just two more than the Scottish Greens.

Lifespan

Marra is the eleventh SLP leader since devolution. Scottish Labour leaders tend to have a short lifespan.

In his less-than-overwhelming-victory speech Marra promised: "In my first 100 days, I will take Scottish Labour out of the bubble of parliament and back into the country. We will work with people in their communities."

Given the number of Constituency Labour Parties which are currently defunct

or meet only occasionally and if they manage to get a quorum, this is a particularly challenging goal which Marra has set himself.

Irrelevance

As pollster Mark Diffley put it in his analysis of the leadership election result: "The SLP has become a bit of an irrelevance; that is the biggest hurdle that they face going forward." Or, in the words of *Times* journalist Alex Massie: "The leader is not the problem. The party is the problem."

Meeting in Glasgow the same day as Marra's inauguration as SLP leader, members of the Campaign for Socialism discussed their campaigning priorities following Marra's election. If real change is to come to the SLP, it can come only from the left reorganising and rebuilding at the grassroots. □

More online



PCS ballot from 20 Oct

For action on pay and more
bit.ly/pcs20Oct

The "PMC"

It's not a social class
bit.ly/pmc-n

Cancer research

68-day strike wins
bit.ly/icr-s

The 1956 speech

When Khrushchev denounced Stalin
bit.ly/70-y-k

TUC congress

Behind the consensus
bit.ly/tuc-26

Fascism, neoliberalism

Aso Kamal puts his views
bit.ly/f-neo

What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Diary of a Tubeworker

After the heatwaves, the big events

By P Ennar

Summer on London Underground is defined by two things: overheating and big events.

As work and school dies down, the calendar is overrun with festivals, concerts, parades, protests, all packing stations with unusually loud and busy footfall. As station staff, you might assume that this is a particularly difficult period. Yes and no.

Undeniably, more people means more work. With big events, the questions asked all tend to match one another which simplifies things a little, but rowdy sport and music fans and higher traffic than usual bring the usual challenges.

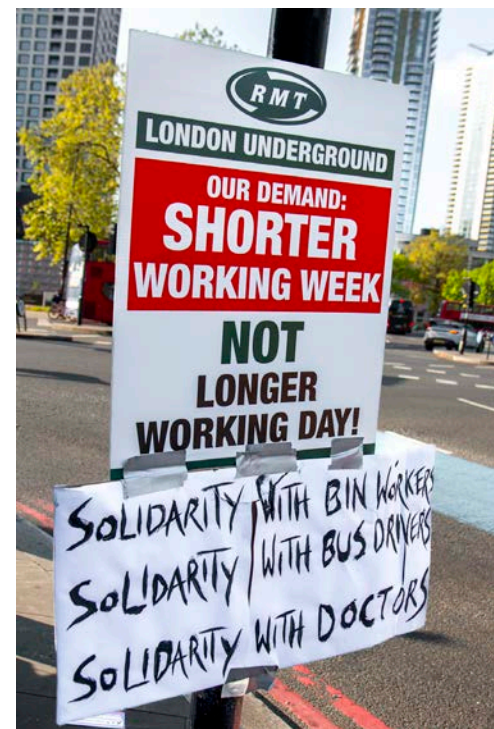
For the really big events – Notting Hill Carnival, for example, which took place at the end of August – we're often given an extra helping hand or two that can smooth the day and make the madness a little less difficult to deal with. Other teams of trained station staff get brought in to cover special events, alleviating the

workload for us.

Among them are "ambassadors" – a role created by the company a few years ago to populate stations with much needed staff during big events. Usually the ambassadors come from TfL office jobs, and they see it as a form of "overtime" for their 9-to-5. A project manager and someone from the lifts and escalators department may have been given a tour of the station and some instructions on the basics, but that's poor substitute for a trained member of station staff who can respond in case of an emergency.

The RMT union opposed the introduction of this role altogether. It's not hard to see why. That said, a station filled with ambassadors is a much safer and easier work day than the average football match, where thousands of people descend on the station within a few minutes of each other, and no extra staff are allocated to deal with drunk and rowdy football fans. Understaffing is a bet being taken by the company: that nothing too serious will happen when there aren't

enough staff there to properly evacuate the station, or deal with aggressive or dangerous behaviour. □



£5,000 down, £10,000 to go

A bigger gap between this column and the last has given us a bit more time to build up donations than our usual fortnightly schedule. Thanks to Jill, Paul, Rose, Jake, and a few others, we have currently raised £5,426 towards our £15,000 target. We have both Labour Party

and Green Party conferences in the life of this current paper. Both are a good opportunity to sell our literature, make new contacts, and expand our reach. Both are also times of expenses for travel, accommodation, and printing. Later on, two of our activists will join the Protect the Harvest

initiative. If you want to help support the work we and they will be doing (bit.ly/p-harvest), please donate! workersliberty.org/donate □



Kino Eye

The death of cinema?

By John Cunningham

With this article Kino Eye is six years old. Time to call it a day.

I have only ever written about films I



have seen (I think there are three exceptions to this) and options are running out despite the fact that I have seen more films than I care to think about partly due to my last job, before I retired, being as a lecturer in Film Studies.

I want to finish with some general observations about film, past and present. My heading "The death of cinema?" is deliberately provocative but also ambiguous, note the question mark. It's

not that I actually think cinema is dead. Clearly it isn't, there are films released all the time and people still go and see them, but – and here is the complication – I think a certain kind of cinema is dead.

I have written about this at greater length than this column allows: please read it online at bit.ly/d-cine.

Konec, Fin, Vége, Slut, El Final, al-nihayah... The End. □

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 □

London bus workers score climate win

By Sam Myerson

Arriva North London bus drivers who struck against dangerous working conditions have won a victory for all London bus drivers, with a Transport for London (TfL) commitment to ensure that all buses have working air-conditioning by May 2027. We know from workers and from a Unite official that the suspended reps have been reinstated, though the Unite press release does not mention that.

Yet drivers in the dispute have expressed disquiet about the way the union was handled it. May 2027 may prove to be too late. 2027 is set to be the hottest year ever, with the super El Niño on top of wider trends. Drivers must be prepared to take early and effective action

should conditions become dangerous.

The deal stipulates that if a bus is unsafe owing to temperature, the maximum time a driver can spend in the cab is 35 minutes, and that the bus must be repaired before being put back into service. This will apply in the cold as well as the heat. In addition to the air conditioning, cabs will be adapted to reduce exposure to harmful UV light.

Spreading the militancy that won these concessions in London across bus services in Britain is vital. The dispute has taught workers that they can fight, and that they can win. With pay discussions coming up, we hope London busworkers take this lesson into that



fight.

The Mayor has also made plans to bring all London buses back in-house, as before 1985. At present TfL franchises out groups of routes to private operators. The outcome, and the pay and conditions of the workers in the bus service, will be determined by the balance of forces.

Across the country the terms

and conditions of bus workers have fallen way behind those on rail and light rail. Years of outsourcing and weaker union organising on the buses have brought us to this place.

Unite has not cancelled its strike mandate, which has 11 months still to run, so if conditions fail to improve, worker will be able to use their power to pick up the fight where it has been left. In a recent session at City Hall, mayor Sadiq Khan said that meeting the target of May next year would be "hard, but they are determined to get the work complete by May". With around 8,000 buses needing to be retrofitted, workers need to be ready for renewed action to force the pace. □

Fourteen more strike days at GCU

By Dale Street

At Glasgow Caledonian University, EIS-ULA are on strike 21-23 September. UCU, the other union at GCU covering teaching staff, is on strike on 22 and 23 February. Unison will strike again on Thursday 1 October, alongside EIS-ULA and the UCU. This will be the first time all three unions strike on the same day.

Discontinuous strike action by the three unions will then continue into October, and doubtless even longer in the absence of GCU management backing down.

GCU has over £90 million in cash reserves, more than enough to cover the "savings" which GCU is proposing to make through cutting 100 jobs. Cutting staff numbers will also inevitably mean worse provision.

But the focus of the unions' demands is that there should not be any compulsory redundancies.

Picket lines will be held every strike day, from 8am to 11am, at the Cowcaddens Road entrance to GCU. □

Brighton uni to derecognise unions

By Vicki Morris

The University of Brighton has given its UNISON and UCU branches nine months' notice of derecognition. It has said it wants to renegotiate all the major agreements it has concerning terms and conditions. In effect the University is blackmailing the unions into accepting what it wants to do to their jobs.

The University is citing the HE funding crisis as the reason to blow up its industrial relations. HE is in trouble but institutions still have choices and this is a disastrous one.

The unions must defend effective trade

unionism at University of Brighton and force the University to withdraw the derecognition threat!

Crisis

With strikes now against job cuts at several universities including Glasgow Caledonian University and Essex University, the Government must meet urgently with the Higher Education unions to discuss how they will tackle the HE funding crisis which is threatening pay levels, jobs, and now our right to effective trade unionism.

Meanwhile, the five HE unions have de-

clared a dispute with the employers over this year's dire 2% pay offer. It's unclear whether UCU will agree to ballot over pay. Their Higher Education Committee is not due to meet until October.

The other unions are unlikely to ballot over pay if UCU doesn't.

At the same time talks aimed at reforming the pay spine to deal with the problem of compression are now underway and due to end in mid-December. If successful a new pay spine could be implemented from August 2027 and would represent a small remedy to years of pay erosion. □

New wave of uni cuts

By Sam Myerson

Late September sees the main return of students in England and Wales, with students in Scotland already returned in mid-September to find the sector once again in crisis.

At the University of Edinburgh, management have set out plans to close 90 degree programs with hundreds of jobs at risk. In Dundee a student housing company has gone bust at the start of term, when it will have just received thousands of pounds in upfront rent, leaving hundreds of students in limbo.

The "HE is Shrinking" webpage maintained by QMUL UCU, as of 16 September, had six universities on its most recent update, with almost 1,000 jobs at risk, and since then more announcements have come. At Nottingham University UCU members are starting 67 days of continuous strikes. At Dundee and Edinburgh workers will walk out for 25 days. At Exeter strikes will soon be announced after a successful ballot, with a 91% yes vote for industrial action. At Glasgow all management could come up with during negotiations was to extend the notice period for staff being made redundant. The Scottish government appears unwilling to make any further emergency payments to bail out universities.

The academic staff union UCU is set to hold a extraordinary conference (14 October, online) after branches passed mo-

tions calling for a "special Higher education sector conference". The conference will discuss seeking to open a dispute with the Secretary of State for Education, and coordination with other education unions. There is no mention of coordination with other campus unions in the papers that I have seen so far.

Freshers

Workers' Liberty activists and supporters have already been out on campus in the early part of freshers, to talk with students arriving. We are active in the new Campaign Against Cuts, Fees, and Debt (CACFD). The campaign has produced a bulletin.

The campaign will hold a demonstration at Labour Party conference on Sunday 27 September (Keel Wharf, 1:30pm). We will leaflet.

Plans are afoot for a coordinated day of action in the first term. The campaign is making links with students on campuses where we currently have no presence, and will be out across nearby universities in the weeks after freshers.

Workers' Liberty students will be meeting nationally online every two weeks. Get in touch for meeting details and follow up on Instagram [@workerslibertystudents](#). □

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Is Trump running out of time?

By Chris Reynolds

As of 20 September, polls give Trump's Democrat opponents a 69% chance of a Senate majority after the 3 November mid-term elections, and an average expectation of a 52-48 majority. They show an 84% chance of a majority in the House of Representatives vote, where all seats are up for contest: only one-third in the Senate are. Average expectation: 232-to-202.

Trump's approval ratings slide, and he is running out of time to attempt a stunt to mend that before 3 November. Many dislike his Iran war and the consumer-price inflation (3.4% pa, higher than it has been since 2009 except in the 2022 Russian-gas shock). His attempts to impair mail-in voting have largely failed.

He remains dangerous. His Department of Justice says it will deploy 1,000 monitors to polling stations. Current Homeland Security chief Markwayne Mullin has raised ICE arrests to 50,000 a month (they ran at about 10,000 a month before Trump took office), but less showily than his forerunners. He says he does not plan to send ICE cops to polling stations (where they would deter citizens of migrant background from voting), but we don't know.

Constitutionally each house of Congress decides on whether to accept new elected members. If the Congress outcomes are close, Trump could use

that to disbar a few chosen Democrat victors, as he tried to use Mike Pence to deny Biden's election win in 2020.

Even if the Democrats win both Houses of Congress, and even if they become more resolute (which is doubtful), Trump's assertion of sole executive power means they can do little to block him short of blocking public finances or impeaching him.

Elon Musk's attempt to get the USA's basic union-rights law, the Wagner Act of 1935, ruled unconstitutional, is shelved for now after the National Labor Relations Board dropped proceedings against him for sacking SpaceX engineers who criticised him. J D Vance's scheme of worker-boss forums in businesses to supplant unions is also in limbo.

US unions remain active, and at least no weaker. The organising drive sponsored by the SEIU in Starbucks stores has now won 12,000 union members, and union recognition in 700 stores.

Yet union opposition to Trump, other than the Minneapolis general strike against ICE on 23 January 2026, remains mostly a matter of gestures, and often skirts round issues like immigration, tariffs, and transgender rights.

The next "No Kings" day of protest is 17 October, themed as "vote early". In most states the opening dates for voting early, in-person or by mail, cluster round mid-October. □

Unions pledge to fight for trans rights

The TUC congress on 13-16 September passed a motion for transgender rights, but for now it looks like unions will comply with the EHRC Code of Practice and take it to ban union women's conference being trans-inclusive, while they hope for a change in the law in future. See page 8. □



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

Scrap the Palestine Action ban!

By Colin Foster

"Defend Our Juries" will organise another of its protests against the ban on the Palestine Action group outside Labour Party conference at 1pm on Sunday 27th.

In July 2025 the government banned Palestine Action as a "terrorist organisation", without giving evidence of any collective action by the group which goes beyond the sort of damage to property (mostly at arms firms) done by many protest groups in the past at various places.

Whether or not you think that damage to property a good tactic in this case, and whether or not you approve the "boycott Israel" tone of many PA supporters, the ban is an outrage.



In February 2026 the High Court ruled the ban illegal. In June 2026 the Court of Appeal reversed that ruling. The case will now go to the Supreme Court, in some months' time — unless of course the government, under new leadership, extricates itself by reversing the ban.

Over 3,500 people have been arrested so far at the anti-ban protests, which consist solely of people sitting quietly with placards saying "I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action".

Hundreds have been charged, and all the 3,500, many of them elderly and very "respectable" people, could theoretically face up to six months' jail if and when the cases come to court. □

Will Andy Burnham allow a more open Labour conference?

Labour has seen an uptick in the polls and Leven (slightly) in membership since Andy Burnham replaced Keir Starmer. But will the trend since 2021 for Labour conference to become more and more opaque be reversed? The answer depends largely on the unions. See page 10. □

For a workers' government

SOLIDARITY **& WORKERS' LIBERTY**



USA-IRAN: STOP THE WAR!



Both Iran and the USA are stepping up their warlike talk, the war is spreading with new moves by the Houthis based in Yemen, and for now peace is further away than ever.

Seaborne trade remains half-paralysed, pointing to shortages and big price rises to come for oil, gas, and all products which use them or derivatives like fertiliser as inputs.

This war is reactionary on both sides. Campaign to stop it now! See inside, page 9. □