

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

LABOUR IN OFFICE

DON'T WAIT: DEMAND!

See Page 2

REBUILD
NHS

TAX THE
RICH

SCRAP
ANTI-STRIKE
LAWS

FUND
LOCAL
COUNCILS

Don't wait on Starmer. Demand!



The new Labour government presents its "King's Speech", its sketch of planned legislation for the coming months, on 17 July.

At the Durham Miners' Gala on 13 July, TUC president Matt Wrack said the unions will insist that Labour's worker-rights promises are all there. Main points include curbing zero-hours contracts and fire-and-rehire; repealing the Minimum Service Law and the Trade Union Act 2016 (with its turnout thresholds); and legalising electronic, not just postal, voting for union ballots.

A "demand, not wait" approach from the unions is essential here. Besides, a mention in the King's Speech does not guarantee that legislation will get done, or will be sound. A "repeal" of the Trade Union Act 2016, for example, might just install lower "thresholds".

Several protest statements and appeals have circulated in the labour movement in the first week or so of the new government. That's a good sign of "demand, not wait" thinking in the local Labour Parties; but, inevitably, protest statements are of less political weight than Labour conference motions to come this September, Labour committee elections, street demonstrations, and industrial action.

The Lairds shipyard workers (page 15) have shown that industrial determination can make even longstanding anti-strike laws inoperable, and build pressure for their repeal. The junior doctors' strike just before the election has won them intensive negotiations with the new government.



There are moves in the big public services Unison for a demonstration this autumn to demand funds for the NHS, which even the new Labour health minister Wes Streeting describes as "broken".

Activity for Labour conference (22-25 September) looks like an uphill battle at present. Labour Left Internationalists is circulating [template motions](#) on taxing the wealthy to fund the NHS and on decriminalisation of abortion; the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, on asylum and migrant rights.

But, for the local Labour Parties' places on Labour's National Executive, to be elected between now and conference, the (incumbent) left candidates have [fewer](#) nominations than the right, even though the right had to swap in new candidates at short notice when many of their previous nominees became MPs. This suggests that groupings like Momentum (which has eleven paid staff) and CLPD (which has a big contact list) have put little energy into the sort of work which their mode of operation suits them for.

The *Observer* has suggested that in September the Labour leaders will seek to use the credit from winning the election to further curb, deplete, and

purge Labour's ranks, as Tony Blair did after winning the election in 1997.

The unions are likely to be less compliant than they were in 1997, but the risk is real.

Some Labour activists (see page 5) may respond by walking away – becoming inactive, dispersing, or looking to the "Gaza independents" in Parliament to represent them politically. That will be destructive. The "Gaza independents" are not all the same (see page 4), and surely not a defined left-wing force, even within parliament, let alone "on the ground".

Walking away is more likely to leave space for right-wing forces like Reform UK to channel discontent with Starmer – as the Rassemblement National in France has channelled discontent with Macron – than to remobilise the left and the labour movement.

Leeds Young Labour has started a protest statement on the two-child benefit cap ([bit.ly/sc-cap](#)), and Momentum has created a "write to your Labour MP" [facility](#) on that.

Health minister Wes Streeting has said he will keep a Tory ban on prescribing "puberty blockers" to transgender youngsters. Labour MPs, including right-winger Stella Creasy,

have protested, and so has the usually-conformist [LGBT+ Labour](#) group.

Labour for Trans Rights has issued a statement and a motion (both at [bit.ly/s-sign](#)). Puberty blockers were used for other issues long before being prescribed to "give time" to gender-questioning youngsters. As with many medications, they may have side effects, but they have been used in many countries. Delayed puberty is also common with teenage ballet dancers, yet no-one proposes to ban teenage ballet. The side-effects of *not* prescribing are known to be distressing and sometimes suicide-prompting.

Streeting's stance is a concession to the anti-trans fear-mongering of recent years both from the Tories and from some in the labour movement. It fits ill with the vague but warm words in the manifesto on trans rights.

The Tory government made a submission to the ICC to delay its deliberations on arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant. The *Guardian* on 8 July reported that Labour would stop the submission, but more recent reports say it may not.

A statement ([bit.ly/s-sign](#)) seeking signatures from Labour Left Internationalists takes up that and other issues where Labour could give practical meaning to its now-on-paper support for a ceasefire and "two states".

There will be many other issues where the "demand, not wait" spirit is needed. □

Summer schedule

After this issue *Solidarity* goes on to a summer schedule. #717 will be dated 7 August (copy date 3-4 August); #718, 4 September (copy date 31 Aug-1 Sep); #719 2 Oct (copy date 28-29 Sep), and then we're back to our usual routine. □

What a workers' government would do



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

Solidarity said "vote Labour but fight for a workers' government". We didn't mean that the Starmer government might be nudged into a workers' government by deft pressure, or that we had some ploy to swap out Starmer's team for a very different sort of "Labour" representatives once elected.

We meant that we work to transform the labour movement to make its outreach, organisation, and democracy

sufficient to generate and sustain a government that will be accountable to the working class and combative against capital. Such a workers' government, elected in times like this, would start by scrapping all anti-strike laws and requiring all employers to negotiate terms and conditions with the unions.

It would rebuild welfare benefits, the NHS, social care, and local services, taxing the wealthy to finance that.

It would end NHS part-privatisation and take the public utilities and high finance into public ownership.

Not just into public ownership – the Post Office is publicly-owned, but its managers'

mandate is just to run it at a profit – but under democratic and workers' control, with elected managers at workers' wages.

It would authorise councils to seize the empty or oversize properties of the rich to make decent housing available to all.

It would work fast to replace fossil-fuel power by renewables and nuclear, and to "electrify everything".

Those measures and a few others would:

- Guarantee the basics of comfortable life to all
- Hugely reduce inequality and cut the root of workplace exploitation, oppression, and overwork

- Curb environmental damage

- Enable democratic planning of economic life in place of the waste and inhumanity of profit-first rule.

All experience suggests that a radical government elected with anything like that plan would face obstruction and sabotage by the House of Lords, the monarchy, the courts, and the top ranks of the civil service, if not from the armed forces and police.

Wide support for that plan would have required much mobilisation and organisation in workplaces and neighbourhoods. That mobilisation and organisation, spurred on by the ruling-class sabotage

of democracy, would have to break up the obstruction, radically rework the machinery of government, and create a more democratic "semi-state".

With interconnections between countries, especially in Europe, as close as they are now, workers' governments would either quickly be forced back, or spread across the continent.

The path from here to there goes through the invigoration, democratisation, and self-education of the labour movement. □

Let Gaza live! Peace, two states

By Ira Berkovic

In early July, renewed Israeli strikes in areas of Gaza which the Israeli military previously claimed to have “conquered” have killed dozens of Palestinians. On 13 July, a strike on an area inside the Al-Mawasi “Humanitarian Zone”, one of the areas to which Gazans have been repeatedly directed to evacuate, killed 70 people. Israel says it was targeting senior Hamas officials.

The basic infrastructure of civilian life, including healthcare and sanitation, along with a huge proportion of housing, has been destroyed in many parts of Gaza. The few hospitals still operating are overwhelmed. Millions of people are homeless and displaced. The ongoing effects of the humanitarian crises triggered by the war could yet claim as many lives as the war itself. The official death toll, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants, stands at nearly 40,000. According to Israel’s own figures for the number of Hamas fighters it has killed, a large majority of these are civilian deaths.

Indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas towards a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement are still, nominally, ongoing. Renewed Israeli assaults will set them back. The tightening of Israel’s rule over the West Bank, effectively a form of military dictatorship, also continues to have grave consequences for Palestinian life. Access

to healthcare and medical supplies has become much more restricted since Israel intensified its checkpoint surveillance regime.

Since 7 October, Israel has prosecuted its war in Gaza with the aim of causing maximum destruction, pursuing knowingly indiscriminate tactics. Evacuation orders have been patchy, confusing, and contradictory, and, as on 13 July, zones designated as “safe” have sometimes been targeted anyway. Israel has failed abjectly in its stated aims of “destroying Hamas”, which evidently remains operable and has regrouped in many locations, and of freeing Israeli hostages, only a handful of whom have been freed through direct military action and over 100 of whom remain in captivity.

Far-right Jewish supremacists such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich and far-right Islamists such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad find in each other their political mirror images: ultra-conservative, militaristic, misogynistic forces whose vision for the future of Israel-Palestine is one in which the “other side” is suppressed or driven out, with religious-fundamentalist rule imposed across the whole territory.

Those who believe in the possibility of a different future, one of equality and freedom, must emphasise practical solidarity with those organising towards it. The fact that such forces as currently a minority is all the more reason to am-



plify their struggles and help them grow.

The perspective dominant across much of the international far left, that Hamas’s opposition to Israel expresses a progressive, anti-colonial struggle that should be supported “unconditionally”, according to groups like the Socialist Workers Party, offers nothing to such struggles. To Israeli Jews, in whose deaths it delights (“Rejoice”, said the SWP’s headline on [11 October](#), responding to the Hamas attacks of 7 October) it has little to say except, implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, “leave”.

To Palestinians, it tells them they should accept the leadership of the most reactionary forces in Palestinian political life, forces whose rule has been and will be violently oppressive for most Palestinians themselves. Political dissidents in Gaza, such as Amin Abed, recently attacked, beaten, and tortured by Hamas fighters, know that only too well.

A perspective which emphasises equal rights and co-resistance towards

a shared future does not offer easy answers. It does not offer the satisfaction of being able to cheer lead for one military party or another. But it is the only one consistent with socialist principles of democracy and equality.

Renewed campaigning to demand a ceasefire is vital. Equally vital is an increase in practical support for humanitarian relief efforts and democratic, internationalist forces on the ground – including charities such as Medical Aid for Palestinians, Palestinian unions’ fundraising efforts, and for political movements such as Standing Together.

Standing Together is right to continually emphasise the basic truth about Israel-Palestine: that there are seven million Jews there and seven million Palestinians. Neither people has any other “home”, neither people can or will go anywhere. Justice is possible only on the basis of a political settlement that guarantees both peoples equal rights.

Workers’ Liberty believes the most important first step to equalise rights and win redress for the long-oppressed Palestinians is the establishment of a genuinely independent Palestinian state, alongside and with the same rights as Israel, in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, with full civil and national equality for the Palestinian minority inside Israel. Wider international recognition of the State of Palestine can add to diplomatic pressure on Israel to concede Palestinian national rights. But, without social upheaval inside Israel itself to overthrow the leadership of the settlers, the effects of external pressure will be limited. That is why we emphasise support for movements such as Standing Together as a key focus for activity. We urge readers of *Solidarity* to join us in that work. □

Making an equal future

“We’re here to support Standing Together. They’re a model of what we want to see in Israel-Palestine in the future. It’s a group of Israelis and Palestinian citizens of Israel working for an end to the occupation, for peace, for a shared society. Unlike the other visions being offered – by Hamas, or by the settlers – which are illusions, and will crumble, I think the vision of a shared society that Standing Together is modelling is what we want to see in the future.” *Magen Inon, Israeli peace activist.* “This is the future. If we don’t make this the future, we have lost. The ideologies of the right wing in Israel and Hamas don’t belong to this time of the world... they might have belonged to the Middle Ages, or World War One or World War Two. The future can only be faced with our common humanity and equality. Coming here today is our commitment to ourselves, our families, and our children.” *Hamze Awawde, Palestinian peace activist.* Magen and Hamze were speaking after a UK Friends of Standing Together rally in London on 7 July. □



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sun 28 July: 8pm on Zoom, [bit.ly/fire-w](#), environment reading group on “Fire Weather”. More events at [workersliberty.org/events](#), or scan QR code.

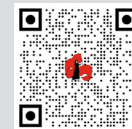
At work or on campus

We organise: among health and local government, school and education workers, on the railway and London Underground, in the civil service, on uni campuses, and more. See [workersliberty.org/work-unions](#),

Insta [@workerslibertystudents](#), and email [awl@workersliberty.org](#) for more.

Template motions

Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties: [bit.ly/mo-pe](#)



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

Socialist-feminist book clubs

[workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs](#)
4 August London, 14 August online

Campaigns

For: UK Friends of Standing Together, Labour Left Internationalists, Workers Against the CCP, Free Our Unions, Solidarity With Iranian Workers, Neurodivergent Labour, India Labour Solidarity, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, Labour Campaign for Free Movement – contact details, activities, template motions, etc. – see [workersliberty.org/agenda](#). For environmental campaigning, including mobilisation for Reclaim the Power at Drax 8-13 August, email [awl@workersliberty.org](#). □

SOCIALIST SUMMER CAMP 2024

23-26 August
Haslemere,
Surrey



Join Workers’ Liberty for our annual Socialist Summer Camp.
Come along for a weekend of fires, partying, nature, good food and socialist education.



Confused right up to election day



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Come election day, the *Morning Star* called on its readers to “get the vote out, prove the polls right and deliver as heavy a defeat for the Tories as we can.”

Most readers will have understood this to mean a Labour vote, though it could equally well have been a call for tactical voting.

Back in September of last year Robert Griffiths, general secretary of the Communist Party of Britain, had written in the paper that “A Labour victory at the next general election would be a better outcome than a Conservative victory, raising working-class morale and demands” though he added: “But this cannot mean voting for those Labour candidates who have played a prominent part in turning the party to the right, purging the left and advocating neoliberal and pro-war policies.”

Since then, of course, we’ve seen the carnage in Gaza and noted Starmer’s wretched response and the failure to call for a ceasefire until February. The MS became tremendously excited by the resignation of Labour councillors (“a movement of striking political potential”) and even more so by the Gaza demonstrations, which the paper clearly thinks or thought embody the potential to become a new political



mass movement, despite the loud presence of Hamas-supporters like the SWP and of Islamists alongside genuine peace campaigners.

Andrew Murray, the paper’s “political reporter” and regular columnist, enthused over George Galloway’s so-called Workers Party and the rag-bag of “independents” Galloway took under his wing, describing them as “left-of-Labour” and calling upon them to forge “a socialist and anti-imperialist network.” Whether the Greens would be included in Murray’s fantasy network was never made clear, but in an uncritical interview with Green peer and former party leader Natalie Bennett, Murray stated: “Across much of the country, voting for a left-of Labour, pro-Gaza candidate ... can only mean voting Green” (MS 2 July).

When the result finally emerged, according to Murray (and several others at the MS) Labour didn’t really win at all: “Starmer’s four-year war on the left now looks like a failure even in the

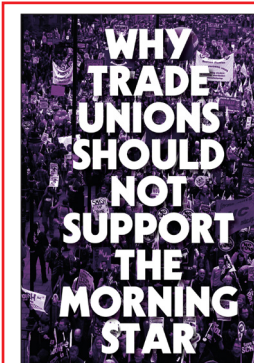
terms by which its progenitors would insist that it be judged – winning votes” (MS 6-7 July). Editor Ben Chacko went so far as to suggest that 2024 was just the latest example of unrepresentative election results and that “Britain’s claim to be a democratic country is seriously undermined by this pattern” (this from the editor of a paper that glorifies the Chinese regime).

The real winner on 4 July in the eyes of all at the MS was, of course, their beloved Jeremy Corbyn. According to Murray: “In an admittedly back-handed and partial way, Thursday’s result was a vindication of Corbynism as well as Corbyn himself.” So Murray, who played such a crucial role in Corbyn’s period of leadership, really ought to be claiming some credit for the belated triumph of the Corbyn project.

Talking of Corbyn, several MS writers made much of his “unwavering dedication to kindness and inclusivity that the voters of Islington North fully and enthusiastically embraced” (Linda Pentz

Gunter (MS 6-7 July). Lovely sentiments to be sure: but how does the MS reconcile that love of “kindness” (etc.) with support for Galloway and his gang of misogynistic thugs harassing and physically intimidating female Labour candidates? In case anyone thinks the Labour women deserved it for not defending Gazans, Galloway’s red-brown thugs targeted two Labour women who’d defied the whip to vote for a ceasefire in November: Jess Phillips (Birmingham Yardley) and Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton). The MS (to date) has had nothing to say about this.

Finally, a voice of sanity, but not from a MS writer or CPB member, but RMT general secretary Mick Lynch, quoted in the paper: “I said I was looking forward to seeing the Conservatives crushed ... to see the back of a corrupt, incompetent and vicious Tory government is good news for working-class people and they will now expect the incoming Labour government to make real quantifiable changes to them and their family’s lives.” □



£3 (inc. post) □
bit.ly/shop-wl

Why was Leicester different on 4 July?

By Colin Foster

Leicester produced two exceptional results in the general election of 4 July.

In Leicester South, Jon Ashworth, a big figure in Keir Starmer’s inner circle, was defeated by a “Gaza independent” with no previous electoral profile. In Leicester East the Tories took a previously safe Labour seat.

The dynamics were different in South and in East.

Leicester South, a local Labour member told us, was mainly about “Muslim communities’ reaction to Keir Starmer on Gaza”.

Green candidate [Sharmen Rahman](#), a Muslim woman of Bangladeshi background and a former Labour councillor deselected by Labour HQ in a purge in 2023 (on which more below) got 9.1%, and “Muslim pro-Gaza” independent



Osman Admani got 0.8%.

Shockat Adam won with 35.3%, apparently by capturing a “Muslim vote” across a wide range of backgrounds – Pakistani, Bangladeshi, East African, Somali, Arab. Ashworth’s campaign has [claimed](#) intimidation on the streets, and anonymous anti-Ashworth leaflets. Shockat Adam

was helped by support from Friends of Al-Aqsa (FoA), a spin-off or loose [affiliate](#) of the Muslim Brotherhood, the world’s oldest political-Islamist group.

FoA is headquartered in Leicester, and was founded by Shockat Adam’s brother.

Shockat Adam’s campaign had warm words on the NHS

and housing, but less so than Admani or of course Rahman.

Shockat Adam called for a ceasefire in Gaza and ending British arms sales to Israel (which are small), but proposed no programme for Israel-Palestine. “Gaza independents” are not all the same: Iqbal Mohammed, ex-Labour, who won Dewsbury and Batley, campaigned for “two states”.

The Labour campaign was almost invisible in parts of Leicester South, suggesting that Labour HQ didn’t draft in volunteers from safer seats.

In Leicester East, there was no “Muslim independent”. The previous Labour vote dispersed between the official candidate (a millionaire parachuted in), sitting MP Claudia Webbe (expelled from Labour in October 2021 after being convicted of harassment; she may have got some “Muslim

protest” votes), and [Keith Vaz](#), Labour MP in East from 1987 to 2019. The Tories held enough of the large local Hindu vote to win.

Vaz ran Leicester East mainly through Hindu community connections for a long time. In recent years Muslim-Hindu [tensions](#) have [emerged](#), with support for Modi among Hindu voters.

In 2023 Labour HQ [took over](#) council selections all across Leicester – with some justice in East, but using the intervention to settle other scores, and resulting in many Hindu votes going to the Tories. Labour had 52 or 53 out of 54 seats on the council since 2011, but went [down](#) to 31 in 2023. The Leicester Labour Parties need to be rebuilt on a basis of democracy and working-class rather than communal politics. □

Looking for a new opposition bloc



Eye on the Left

By Simon Nelson

For the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP, formerly Socialist Appeal), 4 July showed that dissatisfaction with the Tories and lack of enthusiasm for Labour means that only the RCP now provides the revolutionary pole for disaffected workers and youth.

While getting rid of the Tories was high on most voters' agenda, the big thing for the RCP was their "independent" candidate Fiona Lali polling 1,791 votes in Stratford and Bow. They lost their deposit but did markedly better than their former comrades of the Socialist Party (SP) standing as the Trade Union and Socialist and Coalition (TUSC), whose best result was 2.1% and 797 votes in Coventry East. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) stood a candidate in Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough as a "pro-Gaza independent", getting 2,537 votes, or 8%.

The evidence suggests that the Palestine flags and Palestine colours prominent in both SWP and RCP campaigns, and their end-Israel tilts ("Re-joice!", "Intifada Until Victory"), plus energetic campaigning, scooped the votes, rather than anything socialist or communist. TUSC tried for a more working-class and socialist profile, and got only one-third as many votes as in 2015. "Modest," as *The Socialist* of 11 July puts it. The SP continues to push TUSC as the start of an alternative to the Labour Party, but this time round its votes in many places were comparable to those of the much smaller Socialist Equality Party, Workers Revolutionary Party, and Communist League. It has lost the nominal support it had from the RMT rail union.

The RCP calls on all to "join Fiona's party", but has little to say about what the labour movement might do to take on the Labour government. Like the SWP, they hail the victory of the "Gaza independents" in four constituencies and of Jeremy Corbyn in Islington North. Although those "Gaza independents" are not all the same,

and Shockat Adam in Leicester South was the candidate of Friends of Al Aqsa more than of any left force, the SWP and SP see those "independents", rather than anything within the labour movement, as the left opposition to the government. The SP hope the Greens can be a part of the bloc. The SWP is more cautious. The Green campaign in North Herefordshire, for example, which overturned a 25,000 Tory majority, attracted former Tory voters by being "localist" and not discernibly left.

The SWP did not back the Workers Party (WPB) on 4 July, and mentions it since only to note that WPB candidates generally did worse than the "Gaza independents". The SP regrets that Galloway did not retain Rochdale. The RCP mentions the WPB only when referring to the smear campaign the RCP faced in Stratford and Bow that competing with the WPB (which got 7.5% there) showed them to be "Zionist agents".

Socialist Worker of 10 July says that socialists have to speak to two audiences: people they can work with who believe that Labour will not go far enough on economic issues and others

ready to fight over "Palestine, pay, public services and climate catastrophe." It isn't clear why these are separate groups. They want to build the SWP to be the "bigger revolutionary socialist core in all these struggles."

Presumably bruised by their recent failure in arguing in the labour movement against support for Ukraine, SW dedicates an article to attacking Labour as lackeys of US imperialism. Support for Ukraine apparently shows Labour as "following Tony Blair's imperialist policies in even more accelerated fashion".

SW claims that Labour left MPs and remaining left-wing Labour members are unlikely to do anything to challenge the Starmer government. In fact the first MPs' rebellion in the new parliament is by left Labour MPs on the two-child benefit cap, a policy which the majority of Labour members want to see lifted.

That doesn't guarantee that opposition from within the labour movement will be effective. But it does tell against giving up now and imagining that "the alternative" will come from aggregating communalist and anti-Israel votes left or right. □

Which way will Jeremy Corbyn turn?

By Martin Thomas

According to the Financial Times (15 July), Jeremy Corbyn, the 2015-20 Labour leader elected on 4 July as an "independent" in Islington North, now plans to work in Parliament not with Labour left MPs or even with the Greens, but with the four "Gaza independents" elected on 4 July with the help of "The Muslim Vote", a group advising Muslims to vote on the basis of religious identity rather than politics or class.

Those "Gaza independents" are not all the same. None seems to be as bad as George Galloway or Akhmed Yakoob (the most prominent "Gaza independent" before 4 July, who nonetheless lost). However, there is no indication that they are specially left-wing. One of them, Shockat Adam (Leicester South: see page 4), had his main visible organised political backing from Friends of Al Aqsa, a spin-off or loose affiliation of the Muslim Brotherhood, the world's oldest political-Islamist group.

If Corbyn's choice is as reported, then it is a bad one, and undercuts the Labour activists who were going to use Corbyn's election victory as a



lever to demand Labour reinstate him.

What the parliamentary choice means on the ground is obscure. In the *Guardian* (12 July) Corbyn says that he will start "a new way of doing politics" by organising constituency "People's Forums".

No indication that this "Forum" will do anything much but applaud the MP, but the article declares for "community power in every corner of the country. Once our grassroots model has been replicated elsewhere, this can be the genesis of a new movement capable of challenging the stale two-party system... I have no doubt that this movement

will eventually run in elections".

The axis here seems to be similar to Corbyn's campaign for 4 July, which highlighted him as a local champion. The slogan was "an independent voice for all of us", even further from working-class politics than the old Blairite formula, "for the many, not the few".

A Corbyn campaign website gives an option to "join up". It does not say what those who click on the link are joining.

Islington North used to be a large and active local Labour Party. It had declined, by members quitting and dispersing, before Corbyn's decision to stand against Labour.

It then called no meeting

to endorse Corbyn as an unofficial Labour candidate. Activists still in the party stayed silent about the election online, as if their plan was to give backroom help to Corbyn but evade expulsion and keep their Labour organisation going. According to a Corbyn organiser speaking to the (pro-Corbyn) *Islington Tribune*: "We weren't happy with the number of volunteers at the start of the campaign". The *Tribune*: "James Schneider, director of strategic communications for the Labour Party when Mr Corbyn was leader [now 'doing comms' for Yanis Varoufakis's Progressive International] was drafted in as the campaign director after 12 days". Schneider out-gunned the poor "official" Labour campaign. Labour HQ made no real push to get people from Islington South (a relatively safe Labour seat) to go to the North for election work.

Then, only a few days before the poll, 72 local Labour members or ex-members made an online call for a Corbyn vote. Most then resigned; a few had been excluded by the Labour Party e.g. for signing Corbyn's parliamentary nomination papers.

As we understand it, this ex-Labour group has not yet decided what to do. They fear that the (weak) local Labour right will purge remaining leftists and left councillors in Islington North (all of whom kept quiet in the election). If so, the group may plan to stand council candidates against Labour in 2026. But if not...?

One Labour councillor from Islington South came out for Corbyn in advance and was suspended; another, also from South, resigned from Labour on 3 July.

In brief, this doesn't look comparable to the "excluded" local Labour Parties of which some dozens existed, alongside "official" local Parties, in the 1920s.

Sadly, it looks more like the worst of the Corbyn of 2004-15 (when he wrote a weekly column for the *Morning Star*) or of 2017-19 than the best of the Corbyn of 2015-17. □

Eric Lee

No column from Eric Lee in this issue, because he is working to tight book deadlines. □

Putin wars against Ukraine's civilians

By Dan Katz

On 8 July, probably as a political statement aimed at the leaders of NATO who were meeting in Washington the next day, Russia launched a massive drone and missile attack on major Ukrainian cities. At least 42 civilians were killed and 190 injured.

The country's largest children's hospital, the Okhmatdyt in Kyiv, was deliberately hit.

Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, 250,000 buildings, 426 hospitals, 48 social centres and 31 shopping centres have been destroyed or damaged.

3,500 Ukrainian educational institutions have been damaged, including 400 which have been destroyed. Almost one million Ukrainian school students are now forced to study entirely on-line. Another million study in a mixed format, occasionally attending school.

Since 22 March 2024 Russian rocket and drone attacks have targeted electricity generation facilities. On that day 63 attack drones and 88 missiles were fired at Ukraine's energy generation facilities, including on the Dnipro Hydroelectric station. In June this hydroelectric plant was attacked again and put completely out of action. Repairs will take years.

An EU official said that Russia had deprived Ukraine of more than nine gigawatts (GW) of power production in the last three months. For context, one GW will power 750,000 American homes simultaneously.



Ukraine began implementing rolling electricity blackouts on 15 May. The situation got even worse following a vast Russian missile attack on 31 May. On 6 July Russian drone attacks on the northern Ukrainian city of Sumy cut power lines and knocked out the water supply; 100,000 homes were also left without electricity.

Putin's attacks aim to demoralise Ukraine's civilian population.

At the June Ukraine Recovery Conference in Berlin Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said that the country's peak winter-time energy consumption was 18GW. A local energy official recently added that Ukraine typically uses 40-45% less energy in summer. However, Ukraine probably has less actual generating capacity now than 18GW.

Ukraine's state energy company, Naftogaz, has increased gas production and now has 9.5bn cubic metres of gas in underground storage, in preparation for the bitter Ukrainian winter. They plan to store 13bn cubic metres before freezing weather kicks in.

Recent major losses were the Tryp-

ilska thermal power plant (TPP), 40km south of Kyiv which served much of the energy needs for the entire Kyiv region, and, in March, the TPPs at Zmiivka (Kharkiv) and Burshtynska (Ivano-Frankivsk).

Zelenskyy said that 11 Russian missiles had been launched at Trypilska TPP on 11 April. Air defence had intercepted seven but ran out of munitions and was unable to defend the plant which was destroyed in a massive fire.

In addition to knocked-out power generation facilities Ukraine has also lost access to plants in Russian-occupied areas. The Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, and major TPPs in Vuhlehirsk (Donetsk) and Luhansk are in occupied areas.

According to Dmytro Sakharuk, boss of the largest private energy company in Ukraine, DTEK, the worst-case possibility is 20 hours of blackouts a day. He said his company's immediate intention was to restore up to 50% of the power capacity lost since March but that this would only be possible if adequate air defence systems are in place.

Looming in the background is the possibility of a Trump victory and an end to US military aid. The first victims would be Ukrainian civilians.

Ukraine's policy is now to diversify its energy generation and encourage companies and residential users to install back-up generators. Some companies are installing their own mini-power plants (combined heat and power plants) which cost around \$1mn and take three to nine months to build.

Ukraine is hampered by its relative poverty and its government's free-market capitalist policies which will not ensure energy equally and for all. A workers' government in Ukraine would have nationalised, amalgamated and rationalised all energy companies to plan for a victory in the war against Russia and for the needs of the working class.

Zelenskyy intends to decentralise the electricity generation network, to decrease the risk from Russian attacks, and base it on gas fuel. In May the city authorities in Kyiv announced plans to create six small TPPs generating between 20MW and 324MW. These would still be big enough to be Russian target and therefore would depend on adequate air defence.

Ukraine also intends to increase energy imports from Europe, from 1.7GW at peak hours, to 2.2GW. However greater energy-import levels would require the building of new transmission lines, which would probably take many years to complete. □

There is a "Magic Money Tree"

By Liam Conway

Labour is likely to enjoy a certain leeway from the labour movement in its first weeks of office. However, given the perilous state of local council services in cities like Nottingham and Birmingham, we don't have the luxury of waiting and hoping.

The list already being implemented in Nottingham includes cuts to the youth justice service, the welfare rights service, and the cultural sector and the ending of funding to lunch clubs for combatting loneliness amongst the elderly. Cuts to come include the closure of four community libraries.

The Nottingham Save Our Services campaign (SOS24) has held public meetings for all the libraries threatened with closure, and public meeting on 29 July will plan our next



steps.

On Monday 8 July we lobbied the first post-General Election meeting of the Labour controlled City Council. Prior to the meeting, Des Conway had submitted three questions regarding the cuts, the most important of which was asking

if council leader Neghat Khan would be approaching the new Labour Government for emergency funding to protect services.

I was in the council chamber to hear the response. It was underwhelming to say the least.

Immediately after her

re-election as Nottingham East MP Nadia Whittome said she would "fight tooth and nail to make sure Nottingham gets the funding it deserves." In contrast councillor Khan claimed, in the teeth of such evidence as that in 2024 the richest 350 people in the UK had a combined wealth of £795 billion, that there is "no magic money tree". She would "not be asking for emergency funding". "Throwing more money at the problem is not the answer".

Throwing money at four libraries threatened with closure is in fact the only answer and the SOS24 campaign will continue to fight "tooth and nail to ensure Nottingham gets the funding it deserves" for all our services. We will be seeking support for our ongoing campaign from all three Nottingham Labour MPs and

as many councillors as possible.

It is evident already that a number of councillors are extremely uneasy about the position of the council leader. Watch this space! □

THE EASTER RISING AND IRISH HISTORY



An attempt at a Marxist account. £4 (inc. post) □
bit.ly/shop-wl

DSA discredits itself by nixing AOC

By Ira Berkovic

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) have publicly attacked Congresswoman Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez (known as AOC), whose background is in the DSA, for hosting a discussion panel on antisemitism where some speakers promoted the [IHRA definition](#) of antisemitism and argued that some forms of anti-Zionism are antisemitic.

The DSA says it is [withdrawing](#) its endorsement of AOC for failing to publicly oppose the IHRA definition (which DSA falsely claims “conflates criticism of Israel with antisemitism”), for failing to promote boycotts of Israel, and for failing to recant her support for US funding for Israel’s Iron Dome missile defence system, which it uses to shoot down rockets fired by Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and others.

DSA has made no equivalent political demands of AOC in respect of any other global conflict, or indeed any domestic issue. Their political support hinges entirely on her failure to subscribe to a perspective on Israel-Palestine that is shrilly, maximally “anti-Israel”.

There are legitimate criticisms to be made of the limitations of the IHRA definition, and of the way it has sometimes been cynically weaponised to restrict free speech in a way unfaithful to the intent of its originators. That is a different matter from making absolute opposition to it a matter of principle.



AOC is right to host discussions on antisemitism, and the ways in which antisemitic ideas are sometimes presented simply as “anti-Zionism” or “opposition to Israel”. If speakers in such discussions attempt to delegitimise or censor all criticism of Israel or support for the Palestinians, they should be responded to and criticised. The DSA’s outrage at the mere fact the discussion took place betrays a boneheaded hostility to critical discourse and debate.

AOC has also been right to promote engagement with Palestinians and Israelis fighting for equality on the ground, rather than going along with the “boycott Israel” maximalism of the BDS movement, which calls for even left-wing forces like Standing Together, whose activity AOC has supported, to be boycotted and no-platformed.

AOC has, rightly, been an outspoken

opponent of Israel’s war on Gaza and its wider oppression of the Palestinian people. She has, rightly, called consistently for a ceasefire and spoken in support of Palestinian self-determination. She has rightly opposed the provision of US military aid to Israel for offensive use in war and occupation. For the DSA, none of this is good enough. Only public genuflection before a circumscribed form of totalising hostility to all things “Israel” is acceptable.

A serious debate over the mechanisms of democratic accountability to which DSA-endorsed elected officials are subject is long overdue. A healthy discussion about that is unlikely to result from an act of political censure over issues where, broadly, AOC has been far more on the right lines than the DSA leadership. □



Buy “Two Nations Two States” and “Arabs, Jews & Socialism” discounted together for £ 6.50. Individual prices online. □

• workersliberty.org/2-i-p



For socialists to understand and confront left antisemitism from primitive or Stalinist roots to the “anti-imperialism of fools”. 265 pages, **£9.99** □ bit.ly/shop-wl

Sickness at work: think “collective” first

By Matt Sanderson

As a support worker, I spend the vast majority of my contracted hours spent directly with vulnerable elderly patients. Most of this time is spent within arm’s length when delivering personal or supportive care.

So when they’re ill or if I’m ill, we’re likely to transmit germs.

The Covid-19 pandemic should have made us all a bit more aware of how flus and other diseases deadly for the elderly are spread from staff to patients. But now, with the hasty scrapping of monitoring and precautions, all practice of PPE, sickness absence and isolation when ill has been forcibly forgotten.

Managers ask us to come in “as long as you don’t feel too ill”, and there’s personal pressure to earn your wage (especially during probation periods without any sick pay) or to keep your hours up for



your visa conditions.

But when staff are ill, if it’s not Covid, the decision on whether to come into work is solely based on the question: “do you, as a member of staff, feel capable of performing your job?”. There is no policy which advises staff against coming into work when they’re infectious. It’s the individual choice of the staff to choose whether to get paid and ex-

pose others or to feel guilty for letting the team down amidst chronic understaffing.

None of this process even acknowledges that staff coming in ill will make other staff ill and further understaff the service.

The responsibility of weighing up the consequences falls on the individual staff: who might get exposed to infection by me coming in, what about

the effect on patients, what about knock-on staff illness? Even if I feel competent to start the day’s work, will I be able to complete my demanding job? What about fatigue and confusion affecting the day?

There seems to be little learnt in practice about the collective dimensions of disease which we started to talk about during the pandemic.

Individual staff take the blame. We are asked only about our ability to perform our job (not what the consequences are for others, or for our own recovery). The short term consequences for one shift are prioritised over the effects from illness spreading.

What could a collective-first approach to sickness look like? First, massive funding increases for frontline staff pay are necessary to increase the number in the workforce, creating extra capacity that can cope with illness fluctuations.

Secondly, all staff regardless

of contracts should have sick pay from day one at full wages above the living wage. Thirdly, we need improvements to the built environment such as ventilation and airflow and convenient access to cleaning facilities.

Fourthly, provision for alterations in the type of work done as someone gently transitions back into their workplace (more admin duties over patient interactions). Fifthly, further understanding of the collective burden of health through workplace and societal education based on principles of public health planning.

We must remember what we all went through during the global pandemic, learn from the lessons and use them to transform our workplaces in the best interests of the workers and their patients. Those interests coincide in a broad overview. □

The legacy of “anti-vax”



Science

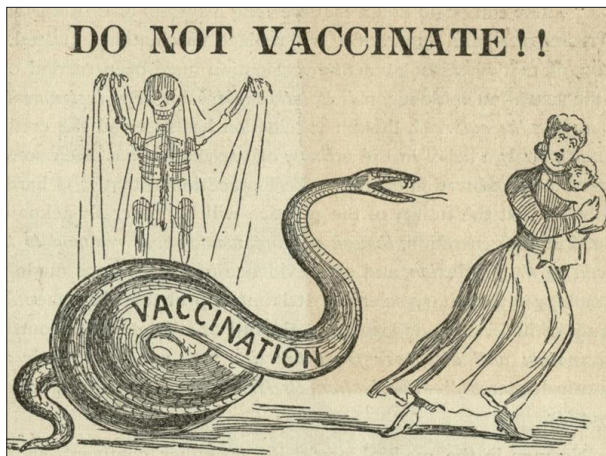
By Les Hearn

Vaccines have saved billions of lives over the past 230 years. However, in the UK, for the thirteen diseases for which vaccinations are routinely offered, uptake has fallen to levels where “herd immunity” fails, so outbreaks of polio, whooping cough etc. may not necessarily die out for lack of susceptible individuals. In the last six months, for example, nine babies have died from whooping cough.

The worst problem is with measles, a highly contagious viral infection usually caught during childhood. Symptoms include high fever, cough, runny nose and a whole-body rash. It can lead to severe complications, including blindness, encephalitis (brain swelling), premature births, or death.

Before measles vaccines were introduced in 1963, the WHO estimates that 2.5 million deaths occurred yearly, mainly of children under five. Despite the availability of a safe and cost-effective vaccine, there were still an estimated 136,000 deaths in 2022, with many cases of permanent damage.

Because of its ease of transmission, a high vaccination rate is needed to prevent outbreaks of measles. Herd immunity requires 95% uptake but latest UK figures are only 89% for the MMR



[1] first dose, with the second, for maximum protection, at only 85%.

For individual boroughs, the ten lowest measles vaccine uptakes are all in London, the worst at around 60% for the two doses (Hackney, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster). Only 74% of London children are fully protected.

Deaths or serious damage to health from measles are less common in more developed countries, where cases were rare thanks to vaccination programmes. However, the UK had an outbreak of 900 cases in 2018, and over 2,000 reported in winter 2023-4, over a third in London. [2]

What has caused the drop in vaccination rates? Misinformation has played a large role, starting with Wakefield's fraudulent research that implicated the MMR vaccine in the development of autism. [3] This led to many parents refusing to allow their children to be vaccinated. Wakefield was struck off

the medical register, but his lies still influence people 25 years later.

During the Covid pandemic, anti-vaccine lies and misinformation, including by Wakefield, led to a fall in uptake of all vaccines. One of the greatest achievements of modern science, developing and mass-producing Covid vaccines within a year of the virus's discovery, was viewed with suspicion, whipped up by conspiracy theorists. The result is a considerably reduced confidence in vaccines post- compared to pre-Covid, affecting all demographic groups. [4] In both pre- and post-Covid surveys, Asian-origin and Black people had significantly less confidence in vaccines.

Many of the vaccine hesitant are influenced by poor experiences with health services; others by religious or spiritual beliefs about the sanctity of the body (though all religions officially support or do not oppose vaccination); others by distrust of authority, seeing conspiracies behind mass public health initiatives. Many reject conventional science in favour of their own “truth”, favouring poor quality studies that support their preconceptions to studies using vast cohorts of subjects that draw statistically sound conclusions. Some Christian denominations, Muslim and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities have lower rates of vaccination but the reasons are unclear. One doctor in Stamford Hill, referring to an MMR uptake of just 25% in his ultra-orthodox patients, blames “urban myths,

misinformation, parental views and peer ignorance”. [5] One form of MMR vaccine contains porcine gelatine, unacceptable to many Muslims and Jews (though accepted by the Kashrus and Medicines Information Service and the British Fatwa Council). The other form does not.

Overcoming vaccine hesitancy is not a simple matter. Providing scientific facts to people who believe in conspiracy theories seems to have the opposite effect to that desired. Community-based initiatives, such as that by the orthodox-based Jewish Community Council or the British Islamic Medical Association, are more likely to succeed. Providing more information to people who know very little about what are now very uncommon illnesses, thanks paradoxically to the success of previous vaccination campaigns, may also help. □

[1] MMR: the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. Combining several vaccines in one dose reduces the risk of infants missing vaccinations. Rubella, usually mild, can cause serious birth defects. Mumps has many unpleasant symptoms and serious side effects.

[2] Deaths can occur after a delay: this child died of encephalitis 5 years after catching measles while unvaccinated: [bbc.in/4cZrLSm](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-56444444)

[3] [bbc.in/3W4aEI3](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-56444444)

[4] bit.ly/cv-vax

[5] bit.ly/j-jab; bit.ly/m-jab

The man with a thousand kids



Women's Fightback

By Wilson Gibbons

Contains spoilers

Netflix's new true crime documentary *The Man with 1000 Kids* follows Jonathan Meijer, a Dutch man who has fathered hundreds – possibly thousands – of children as a serial sperm donor, through the lens of the women and families he has donated for.

The documentary initially treats the subject matter with some degree of humour – one woman lost on her way home and inseminating herself in a lay-by – but it quickly becomes clear that Meijer has a sinister pattern of

behaviour. On unregulated private donor websites, Meijer seemed like the perfect choice: tall, well built, long curly blonde hair, bright blue eyes and straight teeth – a travel youtuber with an outgoing, hippyish personality.

A little odd, but who could hold that against him when he wants to help a few families have kids? John and Joyce's baby was Meijer's third. As was Suzanne and Natalie's. And Laura and Kate's. And Vanessa, and Nicolette and, seemingly, dozens of others.

A support group was set up after it became clear that Meijer has children all over the Netherlands and that he had misled the families he was donating to. A couple of women were even convinced to “naturally conceive”.

With every travel vlog in another country, the other shoe drops – Meijer was donating all over the world. Exploiting loopholes in regulations

to make donations in multiple clinics in multiple countries. Most countries have donation quotas but once that's filled some international sperm banks may sell a donor's sperm to the next country, and then the next.

As the documentary goes on, it becomes clear that Meijer isn't the only serial donor, and that a community of self-styled “donor+” men has sprung up complete with online forums competing amongst one another.

Bleach

They're planning a conference in Kenya where they intend to “bleach Africa” in the words of one forum user.

The women in the documentary band together with an activist and victim of donor fraud to attempt to prosecute Meijer and eventually get him on human rights grounds – that the possibility of accidental incest and psycho-

logical damage that having thousands of siblings may cause – and he was banned from donating in Holland. It's posed as the happy ending, but it comes across like a drop in the ocean.

The documentary leaves important questions about the global management and regulation of sperm donation under a capitalist system and the implications that has for informed consent, especially in the private donor sector where regulations may be sparse to non-existent, or appropriate loopholes may be available.

The series leaves open ended why Meijer is a serial donor – Is it fetish? Far-right crusade? Power trip?

His youtube channel decries woke-ness and pedals conspiracy theories and exults the benefits of traditional family roles, linking him more closely to the resurgent far right online. □



Air pollution causes early deaths



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

According to the 2024 [State of the Air report](#), 99% of the world population is exposed to unhealthy levels of air pollution. After high blood pressure, air pollution is the second leading cause of early death worldwide.

Each year an estimated 8.1 million people die of air-pollution related diseases and many more suffer from chronic disabilities. 90% of these deaths are from non-communicable diseases in older adults, such as ischaemic heart disease, lung cancer and chronic respiratory disease. The remaining 10% are deaths of babies and young children, including half a million linked to household air pollution, a disease of poverty.

The toxic air we breathe is thought to cost the world economy \$4.4 trillion a year in lost productivity and healthcare costs.

The State of the Air report involves over 10,000 researchers compiling data sets from almost every country in the world. The scale of the problem is increasing even as government action

is curbing some of the worst effects.

In general, the poorest nations of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have the highest disease burden from air pollution. In large part this is due to the widespread use of solid fuels for cooking and heating. Over half the world's population has no access to clean cooking appliances and so their homes fill up with toxic air. Since 2000 there has been a 61% reduction in age-standardised death rate from household air pollution with the introduction of cleaner cooking technologies in China and South Asia. However, indoor air pollution still accounts for 3.1 million deaths each year.

In more industrially developed countries, increased road traffic, coal fired power stations and other industrial processes tend to increase air pollution. Government action to regulate polluters has been effective in limiting the harm.

There are many toxic chemicals that pollute our air but the report focuses on the most harmful: particulate matter, nitrous dioxide and ground level ozone. Particulate matter or PM2.5 describes a wide range of microscopic solid or liquid particles measuring 2.5 microns or less. These particles are small enough to pass from the lungs into the blood



stream and from there to the rest of the body. Common anthropogenic sources of PM2.5 include car exhausts, coal fired power stations and burning solid fuels but PM2.5 is also generated from dust storms and wildfires, which are increasing with climate change. There is some evidence that PM2.5 pollution increases the risk of infectious diseases, including Covid-19.

Nitrous dioxide pollution is a problem for more industrially developed countries as a waste product of burning fossil fuels. It is particularly associated with urban traffic. NO2 pollution is a driver of childhood asthma, lung cancer and lower respiratory infections. In 2013, nitrous oxide emitted from cars on London's South Circular caused the death of nine-year old Ella Roberta Kissi. She was the first person to have air pollution listed as a cause of death on her birth certificate.

Ground level ozone pollution is associated with a range of poor health outcomes including COPD, a progressive disease that renders breathing increasingly difficult. COPD is a major global cause of death and ozone-related COPD accounts for around half a million deaths worldwide. Ozone pollution is on the increase, especially in South Asia, as industrial processes produce ever greater volumes of ozone precursors, chemical emissions that react to form ozone. Hotter temperatures make such reactions more likely. Ozone pollution has increased 30-70% within the last one hundred years. Ozone is also harmful for plant growth and one

study predicts the 16.8 million tonnes of wheat will be lost from the European yield by 2050 on current trends.

Long-term exposure to air pollution accounts for 48% of deaths from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), 28% of deaths from heart attacks, 27% deaths from stroke and 19% of deaths from lung cancer and 18% of deaths from type 2 diabetes.

Hotter temperatures increase air pollution adding to the already substantial risks that people with non-communicable diseases endure during heatwaves. Climate change will make the problems of air pollution worse.

Echoing similar reports on other planetary crises, the authors explain that the drivers of air pollution and solutions to solve the problem are well understood, whilst complaining of a lack of coordinated governmental action.

But coordinated government action is only necessary because capitalist businesses are hardwired to dump waste as cheaply as possible. They seek to maximise profit by socialising the human and ecological costs of their operations. They will continue to do this as long as society allows them to get away with it.

All efforts to force our bosses to bear the costs of their polluting behaviour should be supported. But ultimately we need to take productive wealth into common ownership so that our productive forces can be directed democratically to rational social and ecological ends rather than despoiling the Earth and stunting working-class lives. □



Our videos

Watch Workers' Liberty's videos and playlists, and subscribe to our youtube channel! Many have subtitles. **Playlists include:**

- ABCs of Marxism, an introductory series
- Black Lives Matter
- The State, Crime, Prisons, and Police
- Socialist Feminism
- The struggle for LGBTIQ rights in the labour movement
- An introduction to Marx's Capital, in 19 parts, with Martin Thomas
- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

Watch, subscribe, like, comment and share: youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK

Anti-gay laws in Burkina Faso

By Will Roberts

In Burkina Faso, the ruling military junta has announced new laws criminalising homosexuality.

The Justice Minister announced the news on 11 July. The law still has to be approved by the parliament and then signed by junta leader Captain Ibrahim Traore, but as the parliament is controlled by the junta and Traore leads the cabinet that made the initial decision, the law is certain to pass.

Two different military coups

occurred in 2022. The second put the current leader, Traore, in charge. As with other countries in the Sahel region, up to two million people have been displaced in Burkina Faso by around a decade of conflict with Islamist forces.

In June, Russia announced a new round of investments and military support to Burkina Faso, as part of its wider project of building links across Africa. The country will receive Russian military training, arms and some military presence.

Burkina Faso is taking a

broader shift away from its former colonial power, France, which had troops there until 2023 and a dominant influence during much of the period since independence. The country still uses the French-created "CFA franc" as its currency. Its new geopolitical orientation is towards Russia, which has encouraged anti-LGBT policy in countries throughout Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Africa. Uganda, which introduced anti-gay laws in May, has also increased links with Russia. □



Our audio

Listen, download or subscribe to Workers' Liberty audio recordings of our paper, other publications, and many meetings. **Playlists include:**

- Public meetings – recordings of introductory speeches on topics from Ukraine to "Geoengineering" to trans rights and beyond. Campaigns, history, theory, current affairs, and more.
- Fighting racism: pamphlets, meetings, and more
- Environmental pamphlets and meetings
- *Solidarity* Newspaper and *Women's Fightback*
- Effective Trade Unionism, Sylvia, Corbyism, and many other pamphlets and short books

See workersliberty.org/audio for episodes, and for information on subscribing and using podcasts. All recent episodes can be found through most podcast providers: search "Workers' Liberty" or "Solidarity & More". □

Why the battle of ideas is central

16th in a series of articles around the 100th anniversary of the death of Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin). This article continues an analysis of Ulyanov's famous 1902 pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?*, depicted by both Stalinists and mainstream academics as a blueprint for bureaucracy, but in truth far from that. Ulyanov started the pamphlet with a call to stand firm against right-wing drifts in the Russian and world socialist movements at that time – "Economism", Bernsteinism, Millerandism.

By Sean Matgamna

Ulyanov contrasts the neglect of theoretical questions by the champions of "freedom of criticism" with the attitude and the work of the publishers of *Iskra* and *Zarya*, which "demands 'vigilant attention to the theoretical aspect of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat', and calls for 'ruthless criticism of the Bernsteinian and other anti-revolutionary tendencies' in our movement. The issues of *Zarya* to date show how this programme has been carried out". (Four issues of *Zarya*, a theoretical journal, were published in 1901-2 alongside the fortnightly-in-aspiration newspaper *Iskra* by a team, working in exile, including Ulyanov).

Marxists had to be able to deal from a working-class point of view with all the questions thrown by society, whether they related directly to the economics of working-class life or not. [1]

"High-sounding phrases against the ossification of thought, etc.", wrote Uly-

anov, "conceal unconcern and helplessness with regard to the development of theoretical thought. The case of the Russian Social-Democrats manifestly illustrates the general European phenomenon (long ago noted also by the German Marxists) that the much vaunted 'freedom of criticism' does not imply substitution of one theory for another, but freedom from all integral and pondered theory; it implies eclecticism and lack of principle. Those who have the slightest acquaintance with the actual state of our movement cannot but see that the wide spread of Marxism [in Russia in the 1890s] was accompanied by a certain lowering of the theoretical level. Quite a number of people with very little, and even a total lack of theoretical training joined the movement because of its practical significance and its practical successes..."

The 'Economist'-leaning paper *Rabocheye Dyelo* had quoted Marx's statement:

"A single step of the real movement is more important than a dozen programmes."

Ulyanov: "To repeat these words in a period of theoretical disorder is like wishing mourners at a funeral many happy returns of the day. Moreover, these words of Marx are taken from his letter on the [German Marxists' 1875] Gotha Programme, in which he sharply condemns eclecticism in the formulation of principles. If you must unite, Marx wrote to the party leaders, then enter into agreements to satisfy the practical aims of the movement, but do not allow any bargaining over principles, do not make theoretical 'concessions'. This was Marx's idea, and yet there are people among us who seek in his name to belittle the significance of theory!"

Revolutionary theory

Ulyanov now repeats the words written by George Plekhanov in the early 1880s at the start of the Russian movement:

"Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity."

Ulyanov adds: "For Russian Social-Democrats the importance of theory is enhanced by three other circumstances, which are often forgotten:

"First, by the fact that our Party is only in process of formation, its features are only just becoming defined, and it has as yet far from settled accounts with the other [Populist] trends of revolutionary thought that threaten to divert the movement from the correct path. On the contrary, precisely the very recent past was marked by a revival of non-Social-Democratic [non-Marxist]



In its heyday, a thick theoretical journal, *Die Neue Zeit* – published from 1883, but weekly from 1890 – was central to the German socialist movement

revolutionary trends..." The Social-Revolutionary Party, the populist heir to the Narodniks whose high point of activity was the 1870s and 1880s, was formed in 1902.

"Under these circumstances, what at first sight appears to be an 'unimportant' error may lead to most deplorable consequences, and only short-sighted people can consider factional disputes and a strict differentiation between shades of opinion inopportune or superfluous. The fate of Russian Social-Democracy for very many years to come may depend on the strengthening of one or the other 'shade'."

There is no such thing as a national Social-Democratic [Marxist] movement, says Ulyanov.

"The Social-Democratic movement is in its very essence an international movement. This means, not only that we must combat national chauvinism, but that an incipient movement in a young country can be successful only if it makes use of the experiences of other countries. In order to make use of these experiences it is not enough merely to be acquainted with them, or simply to copy out the latest resolutions. What is required is the ability to treat these experiences critically and to test them independently..."

Specifically: Russia, so Ulyanov and all Russian Marxists believe, faces a bourgeois-democratic revolution against Tsarism – something like the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century. The question of what role the working class and the Russian Marxist movement will play in that revolution will dominate Russian Marxism up to 1917. Groupings, factions, and parties will group and regroup around different conceptions of the Russian revolu-

tion and the role of Marxists in it. Lenin will argue that the Marxists should put themselves at the head of a great national workers' and peasant revolution. This will be led by the workers and peasants and directed not only against the Tsar and the landlords but also in part also against the big bourgeoisie. It can only achieve bourgeois democratic transformation of Russia, but it can make that transformation profound and radical, with wide rights for the workers.

"The national tasks of Russian Social-Democracy are such as have never confronted any other socialist party in the world. We shall have occasion further on to deal with the political and organisational duties which the task of emancipating the whole people from the yoke of [Tsarist] autocracy imposes upon us. At this point, we wish to state only that the role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory..."

Ulyanov will later on in the book discuss the views of those who argue that ideas, "ideology", can not shape and reshape the workers' movement produced by a particular environment. Here, quoting Friedrich Engels, he outlines the key Marxist idea that the class struggle also takes place on the level of ideas. This view about "three fronts of the class struggle" is central to Marxism. There is nothing capricious, or "just Russian", about it.

Germany

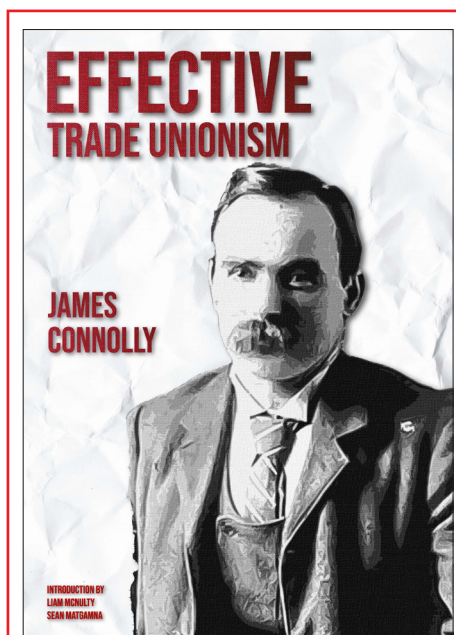
"Let us quote what Engels said in 1874 concerning the significance of theory in the Social-Democratic movement. Engels recognises, not two forms of the great struggle of Social Democracy (political and economic), as is the fashion among us, but three, placing the theoretical struggle on a par with the first two. His recommendations to the German working-class movement, which had become strong, practically and politically, are... instructive from the standpoint of present-day problems and controversies:

"The German workers have two important advantages over those of the rest of Europe. First, they belong to the most theoretical people of Europe; and they have retained that sense of theory which the so-called 'educated' classes of Germany have almost completely lost. Without German philosophy, which preceded it, particularly that of Hegel, German scientific socialism – the only scientific socialism that has ever existed – would never have come into being.

"Without a sense of theory among the workers, this scientific socialism would never have entered their flesh and blood as much as is the case.

"What an immeasurable advantage this is may be seen, on the one hand, from the indifference towards all theory,

continued on page 12 →



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

workersliberty.org/publications



Battle of ideas continued

which is one of the main reasons why the English working-class movement crawls along so slowly in spite of the splendid organisation of the individual unions; on the other hand, from the mischief and confusion wrought by Proudhonism [proto-anarchism], in its original form, among the French and Belgians, and, in the form further caricatured by Bakunin, among the Spaniards and Italians.

"The second advantage is that, chronologically speaking, the Germans were about the last [of the big European nations] to come into the workers' movement. Just as German theoretical socialism will never forget that it rests on the shoulders of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen – three men who, in spite of all their fantastic notions and all their utopianism, have their place among the most eminent thinkers of all times, and whose genius anticipated innumerable things, the correctness of which is now being scientifically proved by us – so the practical workers' movement in Germany ought never to forget that it has developed on the shoulders of the English and French movements, that it was able simply to utilise their dearly bought experience, and could now avoid their mistakes, which in their time were mostly unavoidable.

"Without the precedent of the English trade unions and French workers' political struggles, without the gigantic impulse given especially by the Paris Commune [of 1871], where would we be now?

"It must be said to the credit of the German workers that they have exploited the advantages of their situation with rare understanding. For the first time since a workers' movement has existed, the struggle is being conducted pursuant to its three sides – the theoretical, the political, and the practical-economic (resistance to the capitalists) – in harmony and in its interconnections,

Konstantin Takhtarev was the main mover in the Economist paper Rabochaya Mysl



and in a systematic way.

"It is precisely in this, as it were, concentric attack, that the strength and invincibility of the German movement lies.

"Due to this advantageous situation, on the one hand, and to the insular peculiarities of the English and the forcible suppression [after 1871] of the French movement, on the other, the German workers have for the moment been placed in the vanguard of the proletarian struggle. How long events will allow them to occupy this post of honour cannot be foretold. But let us hope that as long as they occupy it, they will fill it fittingly.

"This demands redoubled efforts in every field of struggle and agitation. In particular, it will be the duty of the leaders to gain an ever clearer insight into all theoretical questions, to free themselves more and more from the influence of traditional phrases inherited from the old world outlook, and constantly to keep in mind that socialism, since it has become a science, demands that it be pursued as a science, i.e., that it be studied.

"The task will be to spread with increased zeal among the masses of the workers the ever more clarified understanding thus acquired, to knit together ever more firmly the organisation both of the party and of the trade unions..."

Ulyanov has learned from the German workers' movement – he wrote *What Is To Be Done?* in Munich – but he quotes Engels expressing clearly the idea that having the workers of any nation seen as "at the head" of the movement is undesirable. The German workers' movement was in fact "at the head", and its turning chauvinist in 1914, its complicity in Germany invading Belgium and France, was central to the collapse of the Socialist International then.

Engels: "If the German workers progress in this way, they will not be marching exactly at the head of the movement – it is not at all in the interest of this movement that the workers of any particular country should march at its head – but they will occupy an honourable place in the battle line; and they will stand armed for battle when either unexpectedly grave trials or momentous events demand of them increased courage, increased determination and energy."

And so, writes Ulyanov, it proved. "Within a few years the German workers were subjected to unexpectedly grave trials in the form of the Exceptional Law Against the Socialists [a law which made their party illegal, from 1878 to 1890]. And they met those trials armed for battle and succeeded in emerging from them victorious.

"The Russian proletariat will have to undergo trials immeasurably graver; it will have to fight a monster compared with which an anti-socialist law in a constitutional country seems but a dwarf.



Marx discussed much with worker-socialists in Paris in 1843-4. But his theory came not just from what he picked up, but from intensive study of the best of bourgeois science

"History has now confronted us with an immediate task which is the most revolutionary of all the immediate tasks confronting the proletariat of any country. The fulfilment of this task, the destruction of the most powerful bulwark, not only of European, but (it may now be said) of Asiatic reaction, would make the Russian proletariat the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat.

"And we have the right to count upon acquiring this honourable title, already earned by our predecessors, the revolutionaries [agrarian socialists and political 'terrorists'] of the seventies, if we succeed in inspiring our movement, which is a thousand times broader and deeper, with the same devoted determination and vigour".

Spontaneity

Ulyanov takes up one of the central questions of Marxist politics – the relationship between Marxism, and Marxists, and the "spontaneous" working class movement – to explain why he thinks Russian revolutionaries must strive so hard to be determined, vigorous, studious, and theoretically clear. He does not upbraid workers for being unaware; he urges revolutionaries to increased energy in educating themselves and enabling themselves to educate to workers anxious to hear. [2]

On one level Marxism is nothing but the theoretical summing up of the experience of the working class. The experience of the first mass working class movement, Chartism in Britain in the 1830s and 40s, played a great part in shaping the Marxism which Marx and Engels created in the 1840s and afterwards. But it was not the only element in it. James Connolly, in an obituary of Keir Hardie in 1915, asserted that Hardie's life was "a living proof of the truth of the idea that labour could furnish in its own ranks all that was needed to achieve its own emancipation". But in fact Marxism also grew out of the highest learning of the bourgeoisie – German philosophy and English political economy. It grew out of the work of "utopian socialists" such as Robert Owen.

The utopian socialists responded to the horrors which industrial capitalism inflicted on the proletariat by creating

imaginary alternative social systems and then trying to build them from scratch as socialist colonies in some wilderness or other (in Texas, for example).

Marx and Engels brought many elements together to create a new outlook on the world.

Though this outlook subsumed the social experience of the proletariat and what could be learned from its attempt to build a labour movement, and though it expressed the historic interests of the working class, the fact that Marxism also embodied the highest learning of bourgeois society necessarily meant that it began divorced from the living working class. For the learning on which Marxism was erected was, in general, not the possession of capitalism's exploited wage-slaves. [3]

Even when they accepted the socialist conclusions that Marx and Engels had established out of their learning, workers could not "spontaneously" arrive at Marxism for themselves. By definition, it had to come to them from "outside", brought by representatives of the educated classes, in the first instance, Marx and Engels, or by workers who had made or gained special scope to educate themselves.

If not at Marxism, what exactly does the working class "spontaneously" arrive at when it tries to generalise its experience and elaborate its own distinct outlook? Ulyanov's answer was that the working class arrives spontaneously only at trade union consciousness.

The proletariat also threw up men like Wilhelm Weitling and Pierre Joseph Proudhon, who created their own variants of utopian socialism, or – Proudhon – an outlook that corresponded to the interests of the petty bourgeois, the small producer, rather than those of the proletariat. With both of these famous socialists Marx clashed bitterly, counterposing his own ideas to theirs.

It is with this complex network of interlinked questions that Ulyanov deals in the section of *What Is To Be Done* entitled: "The Spontaneity of the Masses and the Consciousness of the [Marxist] Social-Democrats."

He invokes the spirit of the great revolutionary populist movement of the past, the lone fighters who had killed the Tsar in 1881 and died on the scaffold.

fold, in jails and in bleak exile: the new, working class movement must recreate the splendid dedication and ardent revolutionary spirit of the old movement, but on a higher level.

"Our movement, much wider and deeper than the movement of the seventies, must be inspired with the same devoted determination and energy that inspired the movement of that time... No one, we think, has up to now doubted that the strength of the modern movement lies in the awakening of the masses (principally, the industrial proletariat);... its weakness [in contrast to the seventies] lies in the lack of consciousness and initiative among the revolutionary leaders.

"[The 'Economist'-leaning paper] Rabochye Dyelo... in its polemic with Iskra and Zarya... tried to ascribe [its] 'general disagreements' [with Iskra] to a more profound cause – to the 'different appraisals of the relative importance of the spontaneous and consciously "methodical" element' [in the development of labour movements]. Rabochye Dyelo's indictment reads: a 'belittling of the significance of the objective, or the spontaneous, element of development'... [This thesis] illuminate[s] the quintessence of the present-day theoretical and political differences that exist among Russian Social-Democrats...

"We [have] pointed out how universally absorbed the educated youth of Russia was in the theories of Marxism in the middle of the nineties [when for a while thinly disguised Marxist books could be published legally because they presented the evolution of capitalism as opening new possibilities]. In the same period the strikes that followed the famous St. Petersburg industrial war of 1896 assumed a similar general character. Their spread over the whole of Russia clearly showed the

depth of the newly awakening popular movement, and if we are to speak of the 'spontaneous element' then, of course, it is this strike movement which, first and foremost, must be regarded as spontaneous. But there is spontaneity and spontaneity.

Strikes

"Strikes occurred in Russia in the 1860s and 70s (and even in the first half of the nineteenth century), and they were accompanied by the 'spontaneous' destruction of machinery, etc. Compared with these 'revolts', the strikes of the 90s might even be described as 'conscious', to such an extent do they mark the progress which the working-class movement made in that period. This shows that the 'spontaneous element', in essence, represents nothing more nor less than consciousness in an embryonic form.

"Even the primitive revolts expressed the awakening of consciousness to a certain extent. The workers were losing their age-long faith in the permanence of the system which oppressed them and began... I shall not say to understand, but to sense the necessity for collective resistance, definitely abandoning their slavish submission to the authorities. But this was, nevertheless, more in the nature of outbursts of desperation and vengeance than of struggle.

"The strikes of the nineties revealed far greater flashes of consciousness; definite demands were advanced, the strike was carefully timed, known cases and instances in other places were discussed, etc.

"The revolts were simply the resistance of the oppressed, whereas the systematic strikes represented the class struggle in embryo, but only in embryo.

"Taken by themselves, these strikes

were simply trade

union struggles, not yet Social

Democratic

[class-conscious

socialist] struggles.

They marked the

awakening antagonisms

between workers and employers;

but the workers, were not, and could

not be, conscious of the irreconcilable

antagonism of their interests to the

whole of the modern political and social

system [our emphasis], i.e., theirs was

not yet Social-Democratic consciousness.

"In this sense, the

strikes of the nineties, despite the

enormous progress they represented as

compared with the 'revolts', remained a

purely spontaneous movement.

"We have said that there could not have been Social-Democratic [Marxist] consciousness among the workers. This consciousness could only be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.

"Trade unionism does not exclude "politics" altogether, as some imagine. Trade unions have always conducted political (but not Social-Democratic) agitation and struggle...

"The theory of [Marxist] socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia.

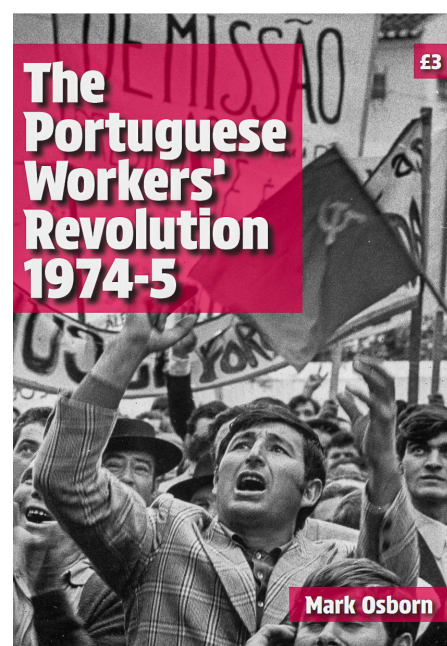
"In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy [Marxism] arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.

"In the time of which we are speaking, the middle [eighteen] nineties, [Marxism] not only represented the completely formulated programme of the Emancipation of Labour group [of Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich and others] but had already won over to its side the majority of the revolutionary youth in Russia.

"Hence, we had both the spontaneous awakening of the working masses, their awakening to conscious life and conscious struggle, and a revolutionary youth, armed with Social-Democratic theory and straining towards the workers. In this connection it is particularly important to state the oft-forgotten (and comparatively little-known) fact that, although the early Social-Democrats of that period zealously carried on economic agitation (being guided in this activity by the truly useful indications contained in the pamphlet [of Kremer and Martov] On Agitation, then still in manuscript), they did not regard this as their sole task.

"On the contrary, from the very beginning they set for Russian Social-Democracy the most far-reaching historical tasks, in general, and the task of overthrowing the [Tsarist] autocracy, in particular...

"A part (perhaps even a majority) of the Social-Democrats, active in the period of 1895-98, justly considered it possible even then, at the very beginning of the 'spontaneous' movement, to come forward with a most extensive programme and a militant tactical line. Lack of training of the majority of the revolutionaries, an entirely natural phenomenon, could not have roused any particular fears.



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

workersliberty.org/publications

"Since the tasks were properly defined, since the energy existed for repeated attempts to fulfil them, temporary failures represented only part misfortune. Revolutionary experience and organisational skill are things that can be acquired, provided the desire is there to acquire them, provided the shortcomings are recognised, which in revolutionary activity is more than half-way towards removing them.

"But what was only part misfortune became full misfortune when this consciousness began to grow dim... when there appeared people – and even Social-Democratic organs – that were prepared to regard shortcomings as virtues, that even tried to invent a theoretical basis for their slavish cringing before spontaneity. It is time to draw conclusions from this trend, the content of which is incorrectly and too narrowly characterised as Economism...

Leaders

"The founding of [the newspaper] Rabochaya Mysl [in 1897] brought Economism to the light of day... [The] leading article [of the first issue of Rabochaya Mysl brings out in bold relief the entire spirit of Rabochaya Mysl and Economism generally..."

The article said: "The virility of the working-class movement is due to the fact that the workers themselves are at last taking their fate into their own hands, and out of the hands of the leaders".

Ulyanov: "Actually, the leaders (i.e. the Social-Democrats, the organisers of the League of Struggle) were, one might say, torn out of the hands of the workers by the police; yet it is made to appear that the workers were fighting against the leaders and liberated themselves from their yoke!" He means the leaders of the St Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class – himself, Martov, Potresov, and others – who, like many revolutionaries then, were arrested (in 1895 and 1896)

continued on page 14 →



Ulyanov's companion Nadezhda Krupskaya played a central role in the circulation of Iskra

→ from page 13

after only some months of activity.

"Instead of sounding the call to go forward towards the consolidation of the revolutionary organisation and the expansion of political activity, the call was issued [by Rabochaya Mysl] for a retreat to the purely trade union struggle. They announced that 'the economic basis of the movement is eclipsed by the effort never to forget the political ideal', and that the watchword for the working-class movement was 'Struggle for economic conditions' (!) or, better still, 'The workers for the workers'."

That is, the reduction of Marxist work to exclusive concentration on direct and immediate economic questions that affected workers. What had been a big step forward earlier in the 1890s, with the Marxists expanding from secret discussion circles to leafleting which reached workers on "economic" issues, was made exclusive and became one-sided and false.

"It was declared that strike funds 'are more valuable to the movement than a hundred other organisations'... etc. Catchwords like 'We must concentrate, not on the "cream" of the workers, but on the "average", mass worker'; 'Politics always obediently follows economics', etc., etc., became the fashion, exercising an irresistible influence upon the masses of the youth who were attracted to the movement but who, in the majority of cases, were acquainted only with such fragments of Marxism as were expounded in legally appearing publications.

"Political consciousness was completely overwhelmed by spontaneity – the spontaneity of the 'Social-Democrats'..." The Marxist socialists became illegal trade unionists.

"Phrases like these have always been a favourite weapon of the West-European bourgeois, who, in their hatred for socialism, strove... to transplant English trade-unionism to their native soil and to preach to the workers that by engaging in the purely trade union struggle

they would be fighting for themselves and for their children, and not for some future generations with some future socialism. And now [some Russian Social-Democrats] have set about repeating these bourgeois phrases."

Consciousness

"The overwhelming of political consciousness by spontaneity, to which we referred above, also took place spontaneously. This may sound like a pun, but, alas, it is the bitter truth. It did not take place as a result of an open struggle between two diametrically opposed points of view, in which one triumphed over the other; it occurred because of the fact that an increasing number of 'old' revolutionaries were 'torn away' by the gendarmes and... increasing numbers of 'young'... Social Democrats appeared on the scene..."

"Secondly, in the very first literary expression of Economism we observe the exceedingly curious phenomenon – highly characteristic for an understanding of all the differences prevailing among present day Social Democrats – that the adherents of the 'labour movement pure and simple', worshippers of the closest 'organic' contacts (Rabochye Dyelo's term) with the proletarian struggle, opponents of any non-worker intelligentsia (even a socialist intelligentsia), are compelled, in order to defend their positions, to resort to the arguments of the bourgeois 'pure trade-unionists'..."

"All worship of the spontaneity of the working class movement, all belittling of the role of 'the conscious element', of the role of Social-Democracy, means, quite independently of whether he who belittles that role desires it or not, a strengthening of the influence of bourgeois ideology upon the workers. All those who talk about 'overrating the importance of ideology', about exaggerating the role of the conscious element, etc., imagine that the labour movement pure and simple can elaborate, and will elaborate, an independent ideology for itself, if only the workers 'wrest their fate from the hands of the leaders'. But this is a profound mistake". It ignores the fact that workers live amidst a constant downpour of bourgeois ideologies. Those will prevail unless the Marxists are energetic and sharp enough with alternatives.

Ulyanov quotes Karl Kautsky, then the main theoretician of German Social Democracy, on a new draft programme of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party.

"Many of our revisionist critics believe that Marx asserted that economic development and the class struggle create, not only the conditions for socialist production, but also, and directly, the consciousness [KK's emphasis] of its necessity. Judging by the draft, one might assume that this... view... was shared by the committee that drafted the Austrian programme".

Kautsky quotes: "The more capitalist development increases the numbers of the proletariat, the more the proletariat is compelled and becomes fit to fight against capitalism. The proletariat



Ulyanov, like Marx before him, studied in the British Museum Reading Room while in London

becomes conscious of the possibility and of the necessity for socialism. In this connection socialist consciousness appears to be a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle".

Not so, writes Kautsky. "Of course, socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships just as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and, like the latter, emerges from the struggle against the capitalist-created poverty and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions.

"Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia [KK's italics]: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously. Accordingly, the old Hainfeld programme quite rightly stated that the task of Social-Democracy is to imbue the proletariat (literally: saturate the proletariat) with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its task. There would be no need for this if consciousness arose of itself from the class struggle. The new draft copied this proposition from the old programme, and attached it to the proposition mentioned above. But this completely broke the line of thought..."

Socialist theoreticians

Of course, Ulyanov adds, this does not mean that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology. "They take part, however, not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able, and to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and develop that knowledge.

"In order that workers may succeed

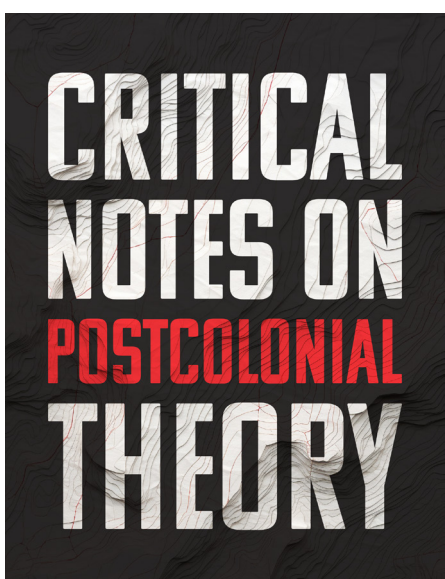
in this more often, every effort must be made to raise the level of the consciousness of the workers in general; it is necessary that the workers do not confine themselves to the artificially restricted limits of 'literature for workers' but that they learn to an increasing degree to master general literature.

"It would be even truer to say 'are not confined', instead of 'do not confine themselves', because the workers themselves wish to read and do read all that is written for the intelligentsia, and only a few (bad) intellectuals believe that it is enough 'for workers' to be told a few things about factory conditions and to have repeated to them over and over again what has long been known". □

[1] For an example from recent times: Northern Ireland, which was and is very complicated, with an all-Ireland minority, the Protestant Unionists, becoming a majority in an artificially-delineated Six Counties state with an artificial Catholic-nationalist minority a bigger proportion of the Six Counties population than all the Protestants were in all Ireland. The pretence – that's all it could be – that Protestants and Catholics in the Six Counties would unite around trade-union questions, and that was enough to answer the "constitutional question", flew in the face of all history and was an evasion. Though ultra-leftism is the last thing one thinks of when Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal, is considered, they were "ultra-left" on Northern Ireland with their "workers' trade-union unity is the answer" line when the Catholic revolt was on.

[2] Lars Lih's big book *Lenin Rediscovered* stresses that the Russian word translated into English versions of *What Is To Be Done?* as "spontaneous" means something more like "elemental", constrained by lack of developed awareness, than unconstrained.

[3] Socialism in a vague and incoherent sense could be created by some workers instinctively, but socialism meaning Marxist socialism could not. That is the sense in which "socialism", meaning Marxist socialism, has to be brought in from "outside" the working-class movement. Joseph Dietzgen, a German artisan and a member of the German Social Democracy, worked out a variant of what history has called Marxism, but that was a freak, rather than typical or representative.



A critical look at theories now dominant in leftist academia.

£3 □

workersliberty.org/publications

Electoral challenges part of the mix



By John Bloxam

I agree with Jim Denham's [dissection](#) of the CPB's "total incoherence right up to the vote itself" in the General Election – "incoherence with a dash of Lenin". Jim rightly pointed out the CPB's support for a range of candidates whom working-class socialists did not support for various reasons.

However, in his criticism of the approach of the CPB and Andrew Murray to the Labour leadership, Labour MPs and the Gaza votes, I thought Jim left out a critical part of Lenin's approach to the 1918 newly established Labour Party organisation. Jim wrote: "Murray, who considers himself a leading Leninist with the CPB, seems to have forgotten that just a couple of years after Labour Party leaders had supported the mass slaughter of the First World War, Lenin had advocated not just a Labour vote but Communist affiliation to the Labour Party."

Lenin, of course, was well aware of the history of the Labour leadership and their support of British imperialism in World War One. He correctly described the then Labour Party as a "bourgeois workers' party" and, as the 1920s revolutionary CP described it: "...even before the war, the Labour Party had become quite distinctly a class organisation of the proletariat which was dominated by that section of the middle class whose profession it was to organise trade unions".

At the time Lenin favoured a sharp turn against the sectarianism that had developed in the many newly established communist parties following the October 1917 revolution. In 1920, after much discussion and Lenin's urging, the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920) came out for CP affiliation to the Labour Party, and it is worth repeating from the relevant resolution.

"The Second Congress of the Third International should express itself in favour of Communist groups, or groups and organisations sympathising with Communism in England, affiliating to the Labour Party... For as long as this party permits the organisations affiliated to it to enjoy their present freedom of criticism and freedom of propaganda, agitational and organisational activity for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Soviet form of government, as long as the Party preserves its character as a federation of all the trade union organisations of the working class, the Communists should without fail take all measures and agree to certain compromises in order



to have the opportunity of influencing the broadest masses of workers, of exposing the opportunist leaders from a platform that is higher and more visible to the masses and of accelerating the transition of political power from the direct representatives of the bourgeoisie to the 'labour lieutenants of the capitalist class' [the Labour Party] in order that the masses may be more quickly weaned from their last illusions on this score..."

Although a major part of the new CP (the British Socialist Party) was already affiliated to the Labour Party, the whole CP's approach for affiliation was rejected by the Labour leadership – such rejection assisted by the sectarian way in which it was couched.

In fact, Labour then was no closed-off, tightly controlled Party. Between 1922-24, there was even a Communist Labour MP for Battersea North, Saklatvala, who was sponsored by the united Battersea labour movement. The question of CP affiliation remained open for years. Until the Labour Party conference of 1925, Communists could be trade union delegates to Labour constituency committees and to Labour Party conference. After 1925, three dozen Constituency Labour Parties let themselves be disaffiliated rather than expel Communists, and formed an organisation of disaffiliated Labour Parties, the National Left Wing Movement, which also embraced left-wing groups in other constituencies. This paralleled the substantial rank-and-file "Minority Movement" that the CP had built in the unions after 1922.

It was the rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union, and its direct effect on the CP, that had as much to do with the defeat of revolutionary perspectives in the developing British labour movement as the work of the reformist leaders. Firstly the defeat of the 1926 General Strike, and the role of the CP which was summed up with their slogan "All Power to the TUC General Council"

when that same body was selling out the strikers. This was followed by the ultra-left Stalinist sectarian turn ("Third Period") hoisted onto the Communist Party, resulting in the closing down of the National Left Wing Movement and "Minority Movement" amongst other things.

But this reformist labour movement, including the LP, still retained structures within which revolutionaries could operate, even if without the freedoms described by the Communist International in 1920. This remained true but radically changed sixty-plus years later, following the defeat of the miners in 1984-85 and other Thatcher victories, the growing consolidation of the right-wing in the labour movement and finishing with the victory of the Blairites in the 1990s and afterwards. "Old Labour" was transformed into "New Labour" by the Blairites in their counter-revolution – both politically and organisationally – and that is still the legacy today under the present Starmerite-Blairite leadership, and supported by them.

The Blairite counter-revolution meant that the special features which persuaded Lenin to argue in 1920 that British communists should seek to affiliate to the Labour Party – the open, federal structure; the channels that allowed trade-union rank-and-file sentiment to flow into the party relatively easily, at a series of levels – have all been abolished.

However, the Blairite counter-revolution was not complete, and did not carry over into the abolition of the trade union link. This link still exists, if significantly curtailed and now more closely resembling the relationship between donkey and cart. The big unions still have a great potential weight even in Labour's changed structures should they choose to use it. That possibility exists because trade-union money remains an important part of the Labour Party's financial support, and the docility of the trade union leadership

allowed the Blairites to retain that without the fear of a political cost.

If the conditions under which Lenin argued in 1920 have substantially changed for working class socialists now, the basic rationale for his approach has not – sharply opposing sectarianism; proposals and perspectives for working-class socialists to fight for the transformation of the working class movement as it exists and within that movement.

Solidarity was right to call for a Labour vote everywhere in this year's election; Labour, still a bourgeois-workers party (even with the axis heavily shifted towards the bourgeois end), was the only governmental alternative to kicking out the hated Tories. The Starmer-Blairite leadership are intent on functioning as a junior Tory government in practice, but whether they get away with it will depend on working-class and trade-union reaction, and helping to generate and focus that must be our priority, and providing perspectives for creating or building a real Labour Party – a trade-union based party, with independent working class politics, that can fight for a workers' government and act as one.

As part of shaking things up, transforming the movement, that will likely include working class socialists helping to organise independent working-class electoral challenges to "New Labour", if the Party remains dominated politically and organisationally by the anti-working-class Blairites-Starmerites. However, both in approach and practice, such moves will be very different to the present CPB's incoherent, sectarian approach, taken apart in Jim's article. □

Our pamphlets

Browse, download, buy, or listen to [our pamphlets](#) including:

- China and Trotskyism
- Women's Fightback
- The German Revolution: selected writings of Rosa Luxemburg
- For Workers' Climate Action
- Two Nations, Two States
- Workers Against Slavery
- How to Beat the Racists
- Shapurji Saklatvala: Socialist Rebel in Parliament
- Stalinism in the International Brigades
- The story of Sylvia Pankhurst
- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine
- The Occupation of the Cammell Laird Shipyard, Birkenhead 1984
- When workers beat the fascists
- Automation and the working class □

workersliberty.org/publications/

The New York teach

By Dan Katz

The confrontation between black and Puerto Rican communities and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn, New York, 1968, was a bitter and unfortunate struggle and a setback for workers' unity and the fight against racism.

The teachers' union organised three militant strikes in 1968, eventually decisively winning, and so putting an end to an experiment in community control of local schooling.

The teachers' union struggle was right, broadly, but there is no denying that the conflict produced lasting damage, dividing workers along communal lines, between teachers, the majority of whom were Jewish, and a disadvantaged black community.

In the early 1960s education in New York was effectively segregated along race lines. One of the consequences was that at the age of twelve black and Puerto Rican students were, on average, two years behind white kids in reading tests.

Bayard Rustin, a socialist and a key organiser of the March on Washington and the broader civil rights movement, together with a local Presbyterian minister, Milton Galamison, organised and led a mass protest to demand integration.

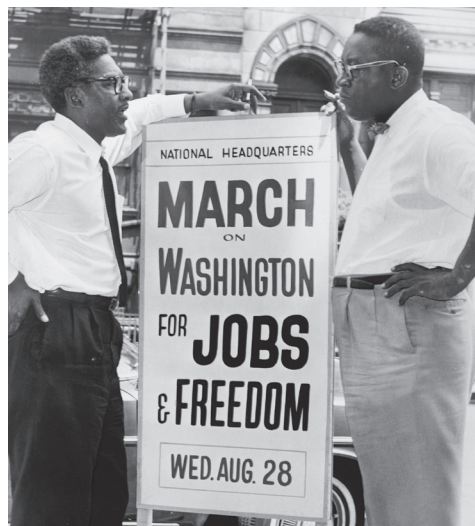
On 3 February 1964 400,000 people joined a school boycott in New York. Similar protests took place across the US, but New York was the biggest by far.

The UFT refused to back the boycott, only agreeing to protect individual teachers who decided to participate.

The attempt to end racist segregation in schools eventually failed from lack of political will to force changes through at city-level, and the stubborn opposition of white parents in other areas of New York, whose hostility was a mix of outright racism and class hostility to poor communities. The demand for "community control" was originally heard from middle-class white parents who wanted to maintain the segregated status quo and their relative privilege.

From this vantage point it is possible to see the beginnings of a socialist critique of black "community control" as the demand became foregrounded after the stalling of the movement for integration, and meant, in reality, attempting to take responsibility for managing badly-funded, overcrowded, poorly functioning schools, as an alternative to integration.

By the mid-1960s some of the formal, legal barriers to black equality in the US had been pulled down, but staggering



inequalities remained, and persisted. This impasse and the frustrations it created, plus increased confidence inside the black communities fuelled the rise of militant black communalism.

However, minority black communities (black people made up 11% of the population across the entire country), on their own, could not adequately deal with questions which required political action (and so a majority) to solve: slum housing, poverty, unequal access to jobs and education provision.

In contrast to the union, which was compact, militant, well-organised and resourced, and consequently capable of pushing back against the highly centralised Board of Education, parents were not well-organised and had no substantial, coherent organisation. That's the nature, generally, of such movements.

The attempt at "community control" of education in three pilot areas – East Harlem, Two Bridges and Ocean Hill-Brownsville – in New York, in 1968, produced a chaotic, highly politicised form of "community control" which actively looked for a confrontation with the UFT in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. "Community control" became the control of relatively small numbers of black activists, who had considerable, general, support in the local black community, but without direct mechanisms of accountability.

Until the 1960s Brownsville was a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood. The area had a reputation as being pro-union and radical.

In 1940 black people were only 6% of the population of Brownsville. That proportion changed significantly after 1960, and by 1970 Brownsville was 77% black and 19% Puerto Rican, (although the proportion of black and Puerto Rican people across the whole city was less, at around 27%).

Martin Mayer, a former chair of a local NY school board, and writing at the time stated, "Ocean Hill is a

border area between the slum districts of Brownsville... less than a fifth of its adult population was born in NYC; less than a third completed high school... more than half the households subsist on less than \$5,000... all the well-known social problems are present. It is a highly discouraging place in which to live and to bring up one's children."

In the New York school system less than 10% of the 57,000 teachers were black, in contrast to many other American cities where the proportion was around 30%, or Washington DC at 80%.

In 1966 a black caucus, the African-American Teachers' Association (ATA), began campaigning for "community control" over schools. They demanded black children be taught within a "black value system".

The UFT's alternative to "community control" was the More Effective Schools (MES) levelling-up programme. MES attracted substantial additional money (\$600 per child) to cut class sizes and provide additional school support services. MES was extremely popular where it had been tried.

Albert Shanker had become the UFT President in 1964 and built a formidable union organisation. Shanker was an old-style Social Democrat broadly aligned to the socialism of Michael Harrington and Max Shachtman. Shachtman's partner, Yetta Barsh, was Shanker's secretary. The UFT was the largest union local in the US.

Shanker had gone to jail for 15 days in 1967 for leading a three-week-long strike which won smaller class sizes and more funding for education. The union had broken the state law prohibiting strikes in the public sector.

The issue in the background of the 1967 strike was the union's intention to force the Republican mayor, John V Lindsay, to negotiate with the union. When the union struck the parents running Ocean Hill tried, energetically, to keep the schools open and break the strike, using parents and black activists to run classes. After the strike won, many teachers did not want to return to Ocean Hill.

Over the summer of 1967, with the



agreement of the Board of Education and money from the charitable Ford Foundation preparations began to set up the pilot community control scheme with an election for parent reps to a governing board in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, via ballot boxes placed in schools (the turnout was low at around 25% of those eligible to vote).

Later in the school year, following the assassination of Martin Luther King, on 4 April 1968, some white teachers were assaulted at Junior High School 271 (J-271).

The governing board at this point was a shadow-organisation, without formal power. However, it was able to run an almost complete boycott of the local schools, for two days, demanding the governing board's recognition and control over staffing and the budget.

The Ford money ran out, and as it did so the governing body's tone become more strident and militant.

On 7 May 1968 the elected governing board then issued dismissal notices against 13 teachers and other staff, 19 in total. This was particularly gratuitous for several reasons:

Almost all those dismissed were Jewish – one black teacher, apparently included by mistake, was soon reinstated. Antisemitism was to be a feature of some of those opposed to the UFT.

One shocking example was when a black history teacher, Leslie Campbell, read a poem on the WBAI radio station (26 December 1968) written by one of his students entitled "Antisemitism: Dedicated to Albert Shanker" that began with the words "Hey, Jew boy, with that yarmulke on your head / You pale-faced Jew boy – I wish you were dead."

(Campbell read this unpleasant poem on Julius Lester's radio show. Lester was a black militant who later discovered he had Jewish ancestors. He eventually identified as Jewish, and taught in college, joining a Jewish studies department, after being rejected by an African-American studies department).

- The governing board was still unrecognised and did not employ anyone, and therefore had no formal ability to sack anyone. Teachers, support staff and the officials of the governing board itself were all employed by the Board of Education.

- Informally, prior to the dismissal notices being sent, the union had offered to facilitate re-assignment of teachers the governing board objected to. It is not true that the union was inflexible, and that confrontation was inevitable. Confrontation was something that the governing board sought out.

- The actions of the governing

ers' strike of 1968

board broke agreements the union had negotiated on how dismissals should be handled.

- The governing board made no charges against the teachers, nor provided any evidence that any of them had done anything wrong. However, there were several important UFT activists, including the local leader, Fred Nauman, who was the UFT's chapter chairman, on the list of those to be fired. Nauman and some of the other teachers on the list were also known to be very good at their jobs. This was a direct attack on the union.

In response 350 of the 500 UFT teachers in Ocean Hill-Brownsville struck in solidarity, only returning after an agreement was made following the intervention of the New York Superintendent of schools, Bernard E Donovan, who pressed the governing body to provide evidence of wrong-doing against the teachers.

The US leftist organisations, including the Communist Party and most other left groups (the exceptions were the Socialist Party and Young Peoples Socialist League) opposed the union in the name of opposing racism, accommodating to black communalism in the hope of getting a hearing. They scabbed on the strike and subsequent strikes and subsisted by largely ignoring the details of the conflict and going along with the idea that the very justifiable need to fight racism and segregation would be boosted through an avoidable, major and disastrous conflict with a militant trade union.

Pressure was exerted on the staff to accept reassignment. All the admin staff agreed to go, but ten teachers refused. An attempt to broker a compromise was mostly agreed, before being stymied by some of the leaders among the governing board.

When the UFT members tried to return to J-271, they were blocked by hundreds of community members and teachers who had worked during the strike.

212 parents in Ocean Hill were surveyed at the end of the school year, in June 1968. 61% thought their schools had got worse; 69% were hostile to the Board of Education. Opinion about the local governing board was also negative (47 – 31%), as were attitudes towards the teachers (58 – 38%). 29% supported the governing board's attempts to remove the teachers, 24% supported the teachers, and 47% were unsure.

Rhody McCoy, a former school leader and now the central official fronting for the governing board, had "hired" replacement teachers (he was not authorised to do so) and refused to have the



strikers back as teachers.

In response the union struck for a second time.

On the eve of the new school year, as it became clear the teachers who had struck and wanted to return to their jobs (perhaps 200 teachers) would not be accepted back into Ocean Hill schools in their old roles Shanker advocated a strike. A meeting of union delegates agreed with their leadership and voted 12,021 to 1,716 to strike.

The strike was illegal under the New York anti-strike Taylor law which the Republican mayor was certain to invoke. Apparently, the delegates did not even bother to discuss this matter.

On the first day of the new school year, 54,000 of the 57,000 teachers in New York struck. Principals closed 80% of schools on safety grounds. However, in Ocean Hill a full complement of scab teachers, almost all non-union, reported to work.

On the second day of the strike an agreement was reached between the UFT and the Board of Education. The Board agreed that the Ocean Hill teachers should resume their teaching duties, the Board agreed to pay for their time out on strike during the May strike, and the Board extended the grievance procedure with the union to force all local boards to submit evidence against teachers they might wish to dismiss and to protect UFT leaders from being transferred out of their jobs without their consent.

Shanker was also demanding a closed shop, which would force all New York teachers to pay union dues. He did not win that demand, but the union clearly had won this second round.

Nevertheless, Shanker was not certain the dispute with the Ocean Hill-Brownsville board was over and he was authorised to call a further strike, with two days' notice, if the agreement was not fulfilled in the local area. When the Ocean Hill teachers returned to work they were mistreated. On 11 September, as a large group of teachers assembled in the auditorium of school

I-55 they were confronted by about 50 activists, some wearing crash helmets, others carrying sticks, who shouted at the teachers. The 83 teachers were terrified; nevertheless, they caucused and decided to go back to their various schools and to work. However, when they arrived, they found they had not been scheduled classes. In J-271 the teachers were locked in a room for their own safety. (Information from Martin Mayer's book, *The Teachers' Strike*).

The union argued that the agreement had been broken and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville board should be suspended. On 16 September 15,000 teachers – overwhelmingly white – attended a mass meeting at City Hall. The only prominent black supporters of the union were Bayard Rustin and the important veteran trade unionist A Philip Randolph, organiser and leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The remaining ten dismissed teachers demanding reinstatement were all Jewish.

Charges of racism were made against the union. However Albert Shanker had marched in Selma with Martin Luther King, and the local union was led by Sandra Feldman, who was sympathetic to the experiment in community control and a Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) activist. Shanker and Feldman eventually became aligned with the right-wing of the labour movement as Henry Jackson-type cold war warriors, but in the 1960s they were left-wingers and not racists.

On Tuesday 1 October there was a riot outside and inside J-271, and those injured included ten policemen. On Sunday 6 October the local governing board ordered the UFT teachers out of the classrooms. The NY Board of Education suspended the school principals in Ocean Hill-Brownsville for taking orders from the local governing body. The school principals were told they would be reinstated only if they guaranteed that UFT teachers would be assigned teaching roles and they would not be harassed in school.

The schools were now in chaos and there was no effective executive body that was able to make union-management agreements stick inside the Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools.

On 14 October 50,000 teachers struck, this time demanding the abolition of the local governing board in Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

At this point the union had little choice but to try to deal with the core of the problem: the governing body in Ocean Hill. However, the dispute had shifted from a defensive battle to defend victimised teachers to what became an assault on community control.

1,150,000 children were off school. And the third strike was long and bitter. The union lost a lot of the sympathy it originally had.

The strike ended on November 17, when the New York State Education Commissioner asserted state control over the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district. The dismissed teachers were reinstated, and the area was run under a trusteeship for four months.

Returning teachers were met with hostility and there were serious disturbances inside many NY schools in the first weeks of December 1968.

Shanker would be jailed again in February 1969, for a further 15 days, for leading the 1968 strikes.

A final footnote: the union was involved in an important initiative to unionise paraprofessionals (teaching assistants, hired from local communities). Led by the brave and resolute African-American trade union activist, Velma Hill, and actively supported by Albert Shanker, the UFT created a Paraprofessionals Chapter.

In 1969 3,800 paras voted to join the UFT.

Under union pressure, the Board of Education had hired paraprofessional educators to work in the city's public schools. In total half-a-million working-class educators, primarily black and Latino women began to work in local schools between 1965 and 1975.

Many then became teachers themselves, helping to integrate the profession.

The first NYC contract for paraprofessionals was signed in 1970, nearly doubling salaries.

A 1971 study showed that 93% of paras were women, 80% were mothers, 50% were African-American and 80% lived within 10 blocks of the school in which they worked.

Randolph and Rustin saw the organisation of the paraprofessionals as a positive, job-creating, poverty reducing way towards equality and integration. They were right. □

The decade of the conundrum



Book review

By Martin Thomas

In Vincent Bevins's book *If We Burn*, a strategic question of great concern for the Marxist left is tackled seriously – oddly, not by a political activist or theorist, but by a mainstream journalist, though a left-leaning one.

Bevins has worked for the *Financial Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, and more recently as a freelancer for similar publications. Yet he has been earnest after truth. He read a lot, sought out active leaders of left street movements in what he calls “the mass protest decade” from 2010 in many countries, asked good questions, and listened carefully. One of those he interviewed is an activist who works politically with Workers' Liberty in London right now.

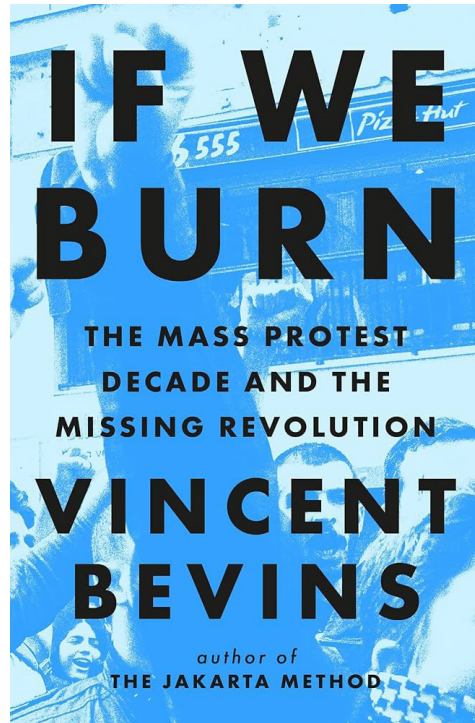
He addresses a great conundrum. The sequels of the 2008-9 economic crash made 2010-20 the biggest decade of street demonstrations in all of history. Pretty much everywhere, from the Arab Spring onwards, the street movement started out leftish, desiring more democracy, more equality. Yet the end of the process, almost everywhere, was a shift to the right, not the left.

In some countries the sequence followed a well-known pattern. The street movement was not big and strong enough to win; it failed to spread to heavier action such as mass strike waves and workplace occupations; it lacked decisive leadership; and it eventually subsided. Established conservative forces, alarmed but also confident after seeing off the movement, responded by reinforcing state power.

Even in those cases, there was little (not nothing, but little) of what had been seen after previous defeated upsurges – the reconsolidated conservative power coupling its reassertion with top-down social reforms, of one sort or another, aimed at securing future acquiescence, making the system less brittle, and forestalling future street explosions.

And there were patterns not seen before. In Brazil, a street movement from 2013 started off left-wing, against a public transport fare rise. It moved on to demand better public services, and won noticeable gains on those demands. Then it mutated into openly right-wing demonstrations in 2015 and a sort of right-wing coup in 2016, the impeachment of PT (Workers' Party) president Dilma Rousseff.

By 2018 the far-rightist Jair Bolsonaro, who had little previous political base, could win the presidency. The damage Bolsonaro could do was lim-



ited by his narrow organised base – his party had only a tiny group in Congress – but he won the election.

After Bolsonaro lost the 2022 election, only narrowly, his supporters tried to storm government buildings to trigger a military coup to annul the election. (The military wanted nothing so risky, not then, anyway).

The turn of events cannot just be explained, as it often is on the left, by saying that the PT presidencies from 2003 to 2013 had been neoliberal. That is true, but much less weighty in explanation than the fact that the PT's activist cadre had eroded while the PT presidents “succeeded”.

PT presidents Lula and Rousseff carried through major reforms – increased social benefits, bringing many more jobs into the “formal” rather than “informal” economy, expanding access to education and jobs for Black Brazilians – and for most of their time a big majority approved. Lula left office in 2011 with an 80% approval rating. We may regret that Brazilian workers so much approved mere reforms, rather than pushing for revolution. But they did.

There was a left alternative to the PT, PSOL, formed by a 2004 split from the PT. Yet when discontent with the PT rose in a severe slump in 2014-5, PSOL failed to win people.

Something comparable happened with the Arab Spring from 2011. The movement started off democratic and social-reforming. In Egypt, a leftist movement brought down Mubarak's military-based dictatorship.

Then elections returned the Muslim Brotherhood, an authoritarian political-Islamist movement with a little, but only a little, social demagoguery. Another leftist street movement brought down the Muslim Brotherhood – to replace it by Sisi's military regime, similar to and if anything harsher than Mubarak's.



In France now we see the far-right Rassemblement National able to figure as the main representative of plebeian discontent. The RN gained most politically from the “gilets jaunes” street movement, although it took no real part in organising it.

It is true but not enough to blame the neo-liberal policies of Hollande (Socialist Party president 2012-7) and Macron (from 2017). Something similar happened in Brazil with PT governments which, unlike Hollande and Macron, brought in widely-welcomed social reforms.

And, in any case, what did we expect Hollande and Macron would do? Marxists have never believed that far-right movements will be quelled by bourgeois social-democratic or liberal politicians magically acquiring an ability to tackle capitalist economic turmoil.

Bevins's diagnosis is simple, but, I think, true as far as it goes. “It was the groups that were already there, prepared, who did the best when the explosion came”.

The rise of social media, instant messaging, and smartphones, more or less in the same decade (2010-20), has been a factor. I discussed this “technological” shift in my book [Corbynism: what went wrong?](#) It has tilted the terrain in favour of loose, ad hoc politics, either supposedly “leaderless” (i.e. led by what Mikhail Bakunin approvingly called “invisible pilots”) or trailing behind individuals like Corbyn or Mélenchon – and against structure, regularity, serious debate and polemic, even serious conversation.

For the far-right (and for the demagogic left) having well-known, well-resourced “leaders” in place is sufficient to make them “prepared”. To be capable, the working-class left needs structured, regular, democratic organisation.

But many of the leftist street protesters, coming into politics in the era of the backwash from Stalinism, have been uninterested in pushing against the “technological” tilt towards the sporadic and ad hoc. Or even hostile to explicit politics. In France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France Insoumise deliberately has no regular membership

structures. In Brazil, leftist street organisers “would encourage kids to go rip down any flags that anyone brought to the streets because of their fundamental opposition to parties”.

“With this kind of protest movement” – Bevins quotes the Hong Kong socialist Au Loong-Yu – “diffuse, formless... and ‘leaderless’ (Brazilians might say horizontalist) – outside forces would end up imposing meaning on the revolt”. Especially so, if, as often, the movement looks to “cause maximum disruption and hope that this will force a positive outcome”.

Instead – Bevins quotes an Egyptian activist – “organise. Create an organised movement. And don't be afraid of representation. We thought representation was elitist, but actually it is the essence of democracy”.

A Ukrainian activist puts it more sharply: “any revolution with no organised labour party will just give more power to economic elites, who are already very well-organised”.

Bevins refers to Jo Freeman's classic polemic, [The Tyranny of Structurelessness](#). Now structurelessness on our side leads not just to petty tyranny and inefficacy among us, but sometimes to actual right-wing tyrants gaining hegemony in society.

The answer is organising in advance. And organising for big and clear aims.

As Trotsky [wrote](#): “Dear friends, we are not a party as other parties. Our ambition is not only to have more members, more papers, more money in the treasury, more deputies. All that is necessary, but only as a means. Our aim is the full material and spiritual liberation of the workers and exploited”. If we do not rally the discontented round our “big ideas”, then the right can rally them around nationalism, racism, and xenophobia, which are “default” axes in a world of capitalist competition.

Some on the left, in the wake of Stalinism, have succumbed to “horizontalism”. It used to be axiomatic that being an active leftist meant regular, reliable, weekly intervention: now many see sporadic, occasional, or “social-media” activism as adequate or even better.

Others have [drifted](#) into being much more negatively “anti-capitalist” or just “anti-imperialist”, and seekers for short-term slogans which may “fit the mood”, than positive advocates of a new world of social ownership of wealth, economic democracy, and cooperative commonwealths.

On the debris left by Stalinism, which still poisons the terrain, we have to build new working-class political organisations able to spread the word and inspiration of comprehensive emancipation. We missed chances in the “mass protest decade”. We cannot afford to miss more. □

What is the MAGA revolution?



Debate

By Barry Finger

The Left is in a deep state of confusion and denial about the serious nature of the MAGA threat ("Make America Great Again", the main slogan of the Trump movement). It is understood in a variety of ways, many of which downplay the immanent danger it poses to American democracy and to those emerging democracies in Eastern Europe that, for better or worse, rely upon the exercise of American democracy for their defense against Putin.

The Left has grappled with the threat in a variety of contradictory ways. MAGA has been soft-pedalled as a particularly virulent variant of familiar nativist reaction; a flame that will diminish to embers if allowed to consume itself. That is, it is appreciated for having vestigial roots in the cultural fabric of American history, and which, like other challenges, will, should it assume power, be housebroken by the demands of advanced capitalism. Hyping the MAGA movement has been dismissed, often from the same quarters, as a "scare tactic" employed by the liberals to corral wayward voters (see for instance Daniel Bessner and Ben Burgis's Jacobin article, 15 January 2021), <https://jacobin.com/2021/01/trump-capitol-riot-fascist-coup-attempt> who might otherwise be inclined to vote for an independent third party. Its mass base has been written off as hopeless reactionaries, bumpkins, red-necks, racists and deplorables; in short, as social anachronisms, unfit material, if not obstacles, to a progressive social order.

Along different but parallel tracks, socialists have questioned whether MAGA can be understood as a fascist or neo-fascist movement insofar as capitalism is not threatened by a revolutionary working class and therefore

capitalists have no need to concede their political power in a desperate attempt to preserve their social power. Again, for falling short of 20th-century fascism, the MAGA threat to democracy is rejected as overblown.

Either way MAGA is dismissed, in effect, as a distraction: an overhyped "emergency." Socialists, it is argued, should concentrate on doing what we always favour: building independent poles of working class power. Redouble drives to organise the unorganised, create rank-and-file movements, bring social movements into alliances with labour and advocate for an independent class party. The best way to fight MAGA is to fight capitalism.

This, I would argue, combines equal parts boilerplate militancy with a whistling-past-the-graveyard complacency.

Trump is unique in his refusal to accept the outcome of a legitimate election, allies himself with Putin and inspired a would-be insurrection, with the subsequent promise to pardon those who answered his call. His allies in the Heritage Foundation declared their intention in Project 2025 to create paramilitary forces and purge the US bureaucracy of anyone not committed to his radical right agenda. Christian nationalists will replace them. The Departments of Education and Commerce will be eliminated. There will be a roll-back of all LGBTQ+ rights (including national prohibitions on same-sex marriage), national bans on abortion, contraception and concentration camps for "illegal" immigrants rounded up for deportation. He intends to end the semi-independence of the Department of Justice and to absorb it into the executive branch to do Trump's political and personal bidding.

(Those wishing to take a deep dive into "Project 2025" are urged to consult Thomas Zimmer's invaluable and comprehensive [Substack](#).)

It will be, according to Kevin Roberts, a leader of the Project 2025, a "second American Revolution, which will remain bloodless, if the left allows it to be."

And all this will be reliably abetted by a Trump-stacked Supreme Court, which all but rewarded him with carte blanche authority.

Fascist or not, what a second Trump term portends is truly chilling, a despotic turn, shorn of institutional checks on power, that is utterly without an American precedent. This is not the typical refrain of small government conservatism. It is big government authoritarianism. The clown show that was the first Trump administration was just a dress rehearsal. Now the missteps have been ironed out and the proper personnel have been duly vetted.

What is the social basis of MAGA? It is the revolt of small business and a vast swath of workers, often, but not exclusively, rural and concentrated in sparsely populated states, who rely upon small business for their livelihoods.

Unlike the mega and transnational corporations that dominate the economy, often unionised, and with hefty margins of profits needed to reluctantly grant concessions, under sufficient duress, to their employees, the MAGA sector is hard pressed. Swamped by global competition, by a mass of costly environmental regulations, licensing fees and government mandated overhead health and safety restrictions that they cannot absorb, it lives in mortal fear of an expansion of what Steve Bannon, Trump's public ideologue, calls, without a hint of irony, the "administrative state."

Whatever threatens the viability of this sector, threatens as well the viability of those employed by small business. And as small business seeks relief by turning to undocumented immigrants, restrictions on imports and deregulation, the material conditions in which American-born workers find themselves combines two parts sympathy with their employers with one part chauvinist and nativist reaction to the competition their employers ruthlessly impose upon them from undocumented immigration.

The skill of MAGA has been to align the demands of both classes in its movement by promising levels of protectionism and deregulation sufficient to restore profitability without relying on cheap immigrant labor. First solidify a mass base for reaction, then provide that base with a ready-made Christian nationalist stewardship.

What can the labour movement offer these MAGA sector workers? Unionisation of these small business enterprises per se is a dead end. Raising wage costs and worker benefits here will quite simply kill jobs. Increasing minimum wages will drive out American-born workers in favor of the undocumented, who will desperately accept illegally low wages. And if wages at the bottom have now begun to outpace inflation this is entirely due to a tight labour market, which will unravel at the first sign of retrenchment. Running fast to stand still is the situation many MAGA workers find themselves in today.

The labour movement needs to make the case that the private economy cannot be relied upon to address the plight of MAGA sector workers and, must instead, offer a broad social program of remediation targeting the specific plight of these workers. In other words, the organised working class, to which socialists have always looked to as having a unique historical role to play in the creation of a new society, must make it their priority to build an alliance with the unorganised by concretely addressing their particular grievances.

In the 1960s, the American labour movement, civil rights organisations and labour-leaning liberals proposed a Freedom Budget, which provided a pathway out of poverty. It depended in large part on a peace dividend that the war in Vietnam squandered. And, in its specifics, it was a product of its time. Nevertheless, the labour movement can still draw inspiration from it.

Today a broad program of uplift with mass appeal might include: a guaran-

continued on page 20 →

The mass protest decade

December 2010: Arab Spring street protests start in Tunisia

Early 2011: presidents of Egypt and Tunisia resign

March 2011: democracy protests erupt in Syria

May 2011: Indignados movement starts in Spain

August 2011: Fall of Gaddafi regime in Libya – leading to de facto civil war between military factions to this day

September 2011: "Occupy" movement has large camps in many big cities

February 2012: president of Yemen resigns

May-June 2012: after many street protests, presidential election in Egypt: Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood wins

May-July 2013: street protests in Brazil against fare rises and for better social provision

July 2013: after protests against Morsi assuming special powers, a military coup overthrows him, leading to the current Sisi regime

January 2015: after many strikes and protests, Syriza wins election in Greece on an anti-austerity platform

August 2015: Syriza signs an austerity "bail-out" deal

August 2016: after big right-wing protests, Brazil's president Dilma Rousseff is impeached and replaced by a right-

winger

October 2018: Gilets jaunes movement begins in France

June 2019: Mass protests erupt in Hong Kong

October 2019: Mass protests in Chile, starting with public transport fares

From June 2020: Black Lives Matter protests in USA draw 15 million to 26 million people, maybe the largest street movement in the country's history □



→ from page 19

teed basic income, meaning federal subsidies to bridge the gap between substandard wages and a dignified level of existence; jobs on demand scaled, say, to twice the poverty level, paid for by the federal government, but administered by localities, who keep a running catalogue of infrastructure deficiencies; converting Medicare into universal health care; transforming Social Security into a national pension plan; a federally guaranteed working class housing program; medically-incurred debt relief; and the assumption by federal government of the overhead costs that it imposes on small businesses in pursuit of the general welfare and employee safety.

The point is to assemble a coalition of social forces with a social program that look beyond the private sector to effectively challenge the Trumpists for

the loyalty of its base.

Does the organised far left have a role to play in this? Probably not. The labour movement itself must take the lead. And if the labour movement chooses to take the lead, and assumes its leadership responsibilities, it will take it under the umbrella of the Democratic Party, not the Green Party and not under whatever the Cornel West thing is. And that is where, for the time being, independent socialists will have to ally with them. We will not build ties by standing aloof.

A true labour party can only grow organically in struggle as the labour movement gains confidence and awakens to its ability to transform society. It cannot be wished into existence. Our job is to push them forward, to raise an independent class perspective and we cannot do so if we are seen as political scabs. We have to march with our class, not ten leagues ahead of it. When

and if a breakaway vanguard of the labour movement asserts itself, and the sooner the better, outside of the Democratic Party, it will be our job to march with them and to agitate for a socialist direction.

Irving Howe once said, or is reported to have said, that "where there is no genuine radicalism, there will be ultra-radicalism." And this seems appropriate today. The pro-Hamas antics of the American far left, principally the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), have won them neither the respect nor the loyalty of any significant sector of workers. Their sole purpose seems to be purging Jews from the ranks of progressive movements, academia, including student body and professional unions, and cultural institutions and purging itself of the likes of one of its most significant politicians, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, for insufficient loyalty to Palestinian irredentism.

The organised American far left offers no democratic alternative to the MAGA right any more than Third Period Communists did for the ascendant KKK of the 1920s. Worse actually. The Stalinists-in-the-making at least retained a class perspective, a warped and delusional class perspective, but a class perspective nonetheless. Today's far left's orientation is rooted in "decolonising" Western cultural institutions, queering all facets of life, defunding the police and abolishing prisons, and providing unquestioning support to every third world dictator that stands in opposition to western capitalism. And it combines all this with an overriding suspicion of white working class privilege and its "immutable" racism, while scapegoating Israel for all of the manifold injustices plaguing the world.

It is not fit for purpose. □



he's no friend of labour.

I certainly can understand why leftists would not want to vote for Biden, who is basically a centre-left politician. After all, what is the point of being a committed revolutionary while taking the same actions as mainstream supporters of a capitalist liberal democracy? It seems like one could simply cut to the chase there.

That said, abstaining from the election will not improve anything. A Trump victory will usher in the most reactionary government the US has seen in living memory. So on a purely practical level, yes, leftists should vote for Biden. On the other hand, it's a slippery slope into reformism and I can see why leftists don't want to give up their values. So I can respect whatever choice people make. □

The Trump threat



Debate

By Frank Green

Frank Green, a US-based anti-fascist activist and writer, spoke to Workers' Liberty about the threat posed by a second Trump presidency.

While Trump was running for his first term, ideological fascists saw him as one of their own. But they were quickly disabused of this notion, as he was more interested in the sound of his own voice, or tweets, than in making his policies law. His most important political action was not passing legislation, but making the Supreme Court appointments which led to the overturn of federal guarantees of the right to an abortion.

This time it's different. He's struck deals with more focused and ideological political actors; in return for their support, he will enact their plans. He has no fidelity to liberal democracy, and his promises of taking chunks out of it should be taken seriously. How far he can go of course depends on the resistance to him. He's indicated his desire to free the January 6 arrestees, take control of the Justice Department, and even prosecute Joe Biden.

The Democratic Party doesn't seem to have much of a plan to resist this. They tend to believe that they will win out of moral superiority, and that democratic institutions will hold on their own. They are naïve.

Trump is, of course, the major figure on the far right. He's generally the same political temperature as many of the xenophobic far-right parties in Europe. The difference is that, instead of holding 20 or 30% of seats in a parliament, a victory in the US two-party system will give him far more power than these parties have. He's also more dictatorial than many of these parties are on the surface.

Trump has precious few national-level elected officials who are ideologically in his camp. But the rest of the Republicans, including those who should know better, have made their peace with him and will go along with his plans.

The ideological white supremacist movement isn't tied to Trump. Many of them see him as a milquetoast sell-out. But the vast bulk of the slightly more "moderate" far right backs him, although they have developed their own structures and can function independently of him.

US President Ronald Reagan, who, along with Margaret Thatcher in Britain, presided over the smashing of the Keynesian state, drew a curious level of support from organised labour. So [Trump's feting of Teamsters' union leader Sean O'Brien] isn't a surprise.

Trump talks more about economic populism than he actually implemented it. His term was not noted for its pro-union policies, although there were crumbs thrown in that direction. Another term would not be a disaster for unions to the same extent it would be for trans people or immigrants, but

Junior doctors still need solidarity

By Sacha Ismail

Junior doctors' leaders in the British Medical Association (BMA) have made cautiously positive comments about their initial talks with the new government in the week starting 8 July. They are meeting again in the week starting 15 July. Negotiations are likely to go on for some time.

The BMA demands a significant real-terms pay rise and a commitment to "pay restoration" (to 2008 real levels) in a reasonable timeframe.

The more the BMA can extract from the Labour government in terms of an improved pay deal and funding for it, the stronger the position of all pub-

lic-sector unions in coming pay disputes. The junior doctors have had 48 strike days since March last year.

So far right-wing Labour Health Secretary Wes Streeting has combined friendly noises towards the BMA with publicly committing to nothing, vocally attacking the overall pay restoration figure of 35% as unaffordable (but no-one suggests an instant 35%), and suggesting a deal can be done on the basis of "other issues" rather than a decent pay rise.

There are also reports that Streeting intends any improved deal to be funded by moving money within the NHS budget, i.e. through cuts to already desperately overstretched NHS

services.

Unions at every level, trades councils, Labour Parties and so on should make or renew contact with their local junior doctors and BMA reps, ask them about how best we can support them, invite them to speak, and organise solidarity.

It may be that we will have to use TUC Congress (8-11 September, Brighton) and Labour Party conference (22-25 September, Liverpool) to push the junior doctors' cause. □

• Support the statement of solidarity with the junior doctors initiated by Merseyside FBU: bit.ly/fbu-m

More online

RtP vs XR? Not really

Have strategies really shifted?

bit.ly/rtp-xr

Ismail Kadare 1936-2024

A literary beacon under Hoxha dictatorship: bit.ly/i-kadare



A debate on “patriotism”

Patriotism and the left’s knee-jerk reaction

By Liam Fields

Is it possible for a Communist or an Internationalist to embrace patriotism? This question has long been debated within our movement. We often associate patriotism with an aggressive nationalism of imperial nations and rightly reject its proto-fascist nature. Given this, it’s unsurprising that much of the left now rejects patriotism altogether to prevent the ceding of ground to the nationalist right.

However, we must recognise that the patriotism of the coloniser and the colonised are distinct historical forces. On a basic level, patriotism should be understood as the consciousness of and affinity with a cultural heritage. Various patriotisms have emerged across history and have been realised as the products of diverse lineages and cultures.

As leftists, we cannot deny that relationship with land is an inevitable outcome of our historical consciousness.

Our task, then, is to construct a new mythology, one that is distinct from the narratives of “Kings” and empires. It should be a mythology that celebrates the Diggers, the Luddites, and the Chartists. A narrative that includes the 1926 general strike, Cable Street, and the Winter of Discontent. This is our connection to the land of these isles. We should not just reflect on this lineage, but take pride in it!

This patriotism is not just compatible with “internationalism” but inherently

intertwined with it. When we recognise the international nature of our movements and the oppression they faced, the fight for land justice and against enclosure in the UK becomes inseparable from the resistance to colonial borders. In short, we need to put forward a patriotism that does not seek affinity with an imperial past but forms a class-conscious patriotism on our lineages of resistance. □

Why patriotism can’t be saved

By Ian Meadows

Patriotism: nationalism’s moderate, sophisticated sibling. While still viewed with suspicion by the left, it isn’t outright rejected – unlike the way nationalism tends to be.

Rejecting nationalism is reasonable. It’s aggressive, exclusive, easily corrupt – and its historical links to imperialism and colonialism certainly don’t help. Patriotism, on the other hand, boils down to a “love for one’s country”, or a special concern for its well-being and citizens. This concern doesn’t need to be exclusive, and can be invoked in much less controversial ways, like rooting for your country in a sport or in canonising a national literature.

But patriotism doesn’t simply emerge. It’s constructed, negotiated and reactionary. What makes some-

thing “truly” patriotic is often a product of circumstances on top of mythologisation. Think of terrorist attacks, or a war. Suddenly, patriotism can be ascribed to fairly aggressive demands for security and ultimately justify imperialist exploits or, equally, the source of moral scrutiny and protest.

Ultimately, patriotism puts us in conversation with our compatriots and our state – which is important! National interest needs to feel both personal and collective if the state can evoke certain duties and sacrifice from us. It’s easier to accept my day-to-day rations if I know both my neighbour and the citizen farthest from me have to make sacrifices too – all in the name of my country.

While patriotism certainly can and has been used as a tool by the left (e.g. Podemos in Spain), it’s naive to try to

reform it.

In embracing new mythologies, we may accidentally stabilise corruptable platforms. For example, we might want to celebrate resistance and mass mobilisation as part of our new patriotism. Whenever the French pull a classic French riot, people celebrate it as part of the unique French identity, inspiring pride. But you can imagine that spirit being easily appropriated by January-6th-style insurrectionists to justify violence in the name of reactionary politics.

Patriotism is performative as much as it is emotional. Expressing love or pride for one’s country, history and/or fellow people really can come in any form. And “true” patriotism will always be a matter of discourse.

This isn’t just true of the imperial core. Fanon warns us of the kind of nation-

alism that allows colonised elites to replace oppressors with indigenous ones.

Nation-states were European imports to African colonies, and the same historical force used to legitimise and mobilise resistance upholds the borders and states established by colonisers.

We live in a world where the working class have no nation but are divided by borders. Patriotism legitimises nation-states, who uphold capitalism, and reinforces these oppressive borders barring us from uniting.

In such a world, class-conscious patriotism is an oxymoron. The fact that it’s viewed so positively is precisely what makes it insidious. Patriotism is not the path to internationalism, but an obstacle, and we must continue to challenge it. □

About being a Swifty



Debate

By Tim Cooper

So, I’m a Swifty Dad. I know that many readers will read no further; but for those that do, thanks for reading or “listening without prejudice”, as another contradictory but wonderful artist, the late George Michael, put it.

You might think Taylor Swift’s songs are just girl-meets-boy bubblegum pop aimed at girls and young women, but you can’t deny she is a phenomenal force. There are millions of Swifty fans, and us Swifty Dads are millions strong.

I wasn’t interested, but my Swifty daughter, a working-class feminist, and suc-

cessful music video and film producer, has patiently explained and turned me to having my first tattoo (Red from Taylor Swift’s greatest album, IMHO, until the amazing and dark latest album Tortured Poets’ Society). I’m a socialist and a wannabe feminist.

Consider her 200 million sales, and her biggest tour at over £2 billion (no other artist or band has broken £1 billion).

She is the first musician to become a billionaire from just her music. Others, like Kanye West, who famously bullied her as she collected an early award, turn to endorsements of crap products as well as developing serious complexes like thinking they are Jesus etc.

The Dublin gig in June, on her Eras tour, was the best gig of my life and I’ve seen a lot of

bands (over 100 this year). My daughter said it was her best-ever too.

Taylor Swift has come from a teenage country and western star to the biggest star in the world of any genre. But why should feminists or socialists be interested?

She deliberately avoided making any political statements until recently after seeing what happened to the biggest country act of the time, the Dixie Chicks, in 2003, when she was 14.

Backlash

Days before the 2003 invasion of Iraq one of them told a London audience they did not endorse the war and were ashamed of US president George W Bush being from Texas. The remarks triggered boycotts in the US and a backlash from fans. They couldn’t tour and faced death threats. They fought back and won 13 Grammys.

In 2018 Taylor said she couldn’t stand by and have a hard-right Tennessee Christian Values candidate speak for her. She, Swift, was a Tennessee Christian but those weren’t her values.

She then opposed Trump. She received serious death threats. She didn’t back down and her fans backed her. She told everyone to go out and vote in the mid term elections.

When her mum, her greatest supporter, told her not to, she said: “I’m the one who’s buying the armoured cars”

She’s carried on being outspoken on dangerous issues like support for LGBTQ+ causes.

She does much philanthropy not publicised (such as paying for every food bank in every city she goes to). She pays good wages – £55 million in bonuses to the workers on her tour.

Yes, charity from billionaires is not the way to socialism. But

as far it goes, she is using her power for good.

It’s her simple honest music that chimes most with her fans. From teenage love to being treated differently as a woman. In “The Man” she sings of being “sick of running as fast as I can”, while “if I was a man I’d be the man”.

Yes, we should study Marie Curie, Rosa Luxembourg, Clara Zetkin, Sylvia Pankhurst, but to understand this contradictory woman is educational too: “I’m just a girl trying to find my place in this world”

She is part of the most famous couple in the USA but singlehandedly made American football more watched than ever when she turned up to watch Travis Kelce, the most famous American footballer.

I expect pushback for this article but as Tay says, “the haters are gonna hate. But I’m gonna shake it off, shake it off”. Bring it on! □



“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 green 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

Help us raise £15,000 by 21 July!

A slow week has brought our total up by only £4! We need to have a big push at Ideas for Freedom to reach our target. If you can't make the weekend then

please donate now.
Total so far £14,114. □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/fund

Showing who's boss



Diary of a Railworker

By Steve Allan

There's football fever at my Elizabeth Line station, despite a lack of interest in my sweepstake. I put up the compulsory wall chart to track results

through the tournament.

We have a moment of downtime in the control room and the duty manager is looking for something to do. His eyes fix on Harry Kane and he asks if I was responsible for the poster, to which I reply yes.

"We shouldn't use Blu Tak on this wall, it can cause damage when it gets repainted."

I didn't question his expertise, but I'm not aware of any plans to re-decorate

a 24/7 office that's been open for just over two years. Looking around the room, there are plenty of other posters affixed to the wall. I decided not to die on this hill and re-locate my chart to the mess room.

Maybe it's nothing, maybe it's just the actions of a man looking to show who's boss, or maybe he's still bitter about Kane leaving his beloved Spurs and he can't bear being reminded. □

Tina Roe

The long-standing socialist and NUT (then NEU) activist Tina Roe died on 8 July following a long and bravely-fought battle with cancer. Her husband Peter told me she was fully aware of the election result and overjoyed at the defeat of the Tories.

Tina was for many years either a member or a close associate of the SWP but during the 1984-5 miners' strike she ignored the SWP's initial boycott of miners' solidarity activity and threw herself, heart and soul, into

the Birmingham Miners' Support Committee.

She was a well-known militant in the NUT (NEU) and continued to work for the union in a voluntary capacity after her retirement.

Though always retaining a certain relationship with the SWP and never joining any other socialist group, for some years there were signs that Tina was becoming increasingly critical of that organisation. During the last political discussion I had with her (around

Christmas last year) she expressed horror at the SWP's celebratory reaction to the 7 October massacre and its support for Hamas. She also expressed disappointment with the SWP's lack of support for Ukraine.

Tina was, personally, enormous fun to be with: she loved a party and a drink, and had a wicked sense of humour. A lot of us on the Birmingham left are already missing her terribly. □

Jim Denham

Requiem for the 1930s Popular Front



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

In the 1930s, a number of French filmmakers supported the Popular Front. *La Règle du Jeu* (The Rules of the Game), directed by the brilliant Jean



Renoir, is considered by most historians to be a lament for that period of political struggle which raised high hopes but ultimately delivered little.

A group of French aristos and bourgeois gather at a chateau for an annual weekend of partying and killing animals. They are a nauseating, motley crew: riven by massive egos, jealousies and petty rivalries. The servants – in classic "upstairs, downstairs" fashion – look on aghast but also, sometimes, display similar tendencies.

Matters come to a head on the last night with an impromptu "cabaret" by the guests, where more goes on behind the scenes than on the improvised stage. Quickly shifting from farce to tragedy, the film shows one of the guests accidentally shot by the chateau's gamekeeper. He is dismissed and the debacle is hushed up.

Contemporary critics saw a distinct parallel between the sordid events on-screen with the real life situation rapidly developing in France. The collapse of the Popular Front and the rise of the far right precipitates a social and political crisis. The outbreak of World War Two

was only two months away when the film was released in July 1939.

The film was banned in October 1939. In the following year Renoir fled to the USA after France was conquered by the Nazis. □

• Watch online: bit.ly/rd-jeu

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 □

Reignite the Justine campaign!



Tata: keep unions on alert

The Tata Steel dispute, in which Tata plans to scale down operations and cut thousands of jobs, continues.

The incoming Labour government has rushed to seek talks with Tata, and the Unite union has paused a strike scheduled for 8 July, but, with no pressure from strikes, it seems unlikely that Labour will offer a very much different deal from the Tories.

Using public money to bail out a private company is not a sustainable option. Nor is waiting for the Labour ministers to come up with a deal that prioritises workers' interests.

The workers at Port Talbot should use their collective power to pressure the government, call for public ownership of their industry, and centre workers' demands for a just transition. □

By Will Roberts

The campaign against the victimisation of Justine Canady, branch secretary of Lewisham Unison, had a major blow on 10 July.

After campaigning and a petition with over 700 signatures, Lewisham Council had announced that Justine's notice period would be extended until March 2025. That would give her time to find a new job at the council and retain her position as branch secretary.

On 10 July, without warning, Justine was informed in a meeting that the notice period was no longer "tenable", and was asked how quickly the branch could elect a replacement secretary.

This was a direct reversal of the council's previous promise, and the case is once again a blatant example of trade unionist victimisation. Justine is chair of the Unison Greater London Young



Members' Forum, and took over her branch from a previous secretary who had been in post for decades. Her leadership has brought increased turnout in national consultations, a net increase in membership, recruitment of new reps and activists, and a new branch focus on equalities work.

The other joint branch secretary, Jay Kidd-Morton, was invited to a meeting the day before, and told that the council would be proceeding with a hearing with a view to dismissal. Jay, who

has been on a period of Special Leave for almost nine months, was told in advance that the meeting would discuss "return to work arrangements". When pushed, the council admitted that it did not have explicit policy to justify the dismissal hearing.

The campaign for Justine and Jay has ramped up its activity. There will be a protest outside a council meeting on Wednesday 17 July. Everyone, especially trade unionists and activists from the local area, should sign the petition at bit.ly/letter-jc and come out in full support for Justine and Jay. An attack against one is an attack against all. □

GMB battle at Amazon

By Will Roberts

On Wednesday 17 July, workers at the BHX4 Amazon "fulfilment centre" in Coventry will learn the outcome of their seven-day ballot for union recognition. The GMB has been mobilising as many of the 3,000 workers as possible to seek victory, through factory-gate leafleting, adverts throughout Coventry city centre, and meetings both inside and outside BHX4.

On Monday 8 July, a small rally was held jointly by the TUC and the GMB

GMB

at Amazon headquarters in London. GMB General Secretary Gary Smith delivered a petition with 30,000 signatures, calling on Amazon to stop using strikebreaking tactics at its warehouses.

The union battle will continue whatever the ballot outcome. □



WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

Women's Fightback.

36 pages, £3.00 □

bit.ly/shop-wl

Get Solidarity every week

Trial sub (6 issues) £7; Six months (22 issues) £29 waged, £15 unwaged, €33 European rate.

Visit workersliberty.org/sub

Or, email awl@workersliberty.org with your name and address, or phone [020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923). Standing order from £5 a month: more to support our work. Forms online. □

Contact us



[020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923)

solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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

Shipyard workers win

By Ollie Moore

Seven workers, including two union reps, at Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead, Merseyside, have been reinstated to their jobs. The seven were suspended after around 450 Cammell Laird workers, members of the Unite and GMB unions, refused to cross an RMT picket line of striking seafarers in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Bosses may have been hoping that, by victimising perceived "ringleaders", they would force the workers to back-down from their stand of solidarity. The move had the opposite effect, with Unite immediately declaring a formal dispute and ballot for strike action.

The outcome is a testament to the power of solidarity. Under Britain's anti-strike laws, it is illegal for workers to strike in solidarity with other workers.



More actions of this type – mass refusals to cross other workers' picket lines – are needed, as part of a wider push

that combines active defiance with political campaigning, to win the abolition of those laws. □

Iran: regime retrenches

By Dan Katz

Iran elected a new president on Friday 5 July following the death of the last president, Ebrahim Raisi, an Islamist bigot, in a helicopter crash on 19 May. Masoud Pezeshkian, a relatively “moderate” Islamist, but also a regime loyalist, was elected. Pezeshkian will be inaugurated on 30 July.

Raisi was aligned with the hard-line clerical faction currently dominant in Iran and diligently acted on behalf of Iran’s dictator and so-called Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

The crash itself might serve as a metaphor for some of the acute problems faced by the regime. Raisi died in bad weather as his old, second-hand, American-made Bell helicopter came down in the hills near the north-western village of Uzi. The western sanctions imposed on Iran makes it difficult to get parts for US equipment.

As deputy prosecutor general of Tehran, Raisi was a member of Tehran’s “death commission” during the state-orchestrated mass executions of leftist Iranian political prisoners in 1988. Thousands were slaughtered. Raisi believed that these killings were “one of the proud achievements of the system” and he became known as one of the “hanging judges”, nicknamed “The Butcher of Tehran”.

Raisi described homosexuality as “savagery” and tightened the compulsory hijab laws that penalise women in Iran. Like many of the leaders in Iran he was also a Holocaust denier. No tears for Raisi.

The heavily manipulated election saw the ultra-conservative Islamist, Saeed Jalili, face-off in a second round against Masoud Pezeshkian. Pezeshkian won 55% of the ballot on a low-turn-out. Most prominent oppositionists had advocate a boycott of the poll.

Over 60% of the population did not vote in the election first round, alienated and disgusted by the misogynist, corrupt, capitalist regime and the poor choice of candidates on offer: five ultra-conservatives plus Pezeshkian.

Pezeshkian has often criticised the Iranian regime’s brutal treatment of dissent, although since being elected he has pledged to continue support for the “resistance forces” aligned with Iran such as Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas. Pezeshkian said, “The Islamic Republic of Iran has always supported the resistance of the people in the region against the illegitimate Zionist regime.”

Ultra-hardliners have, it seems, been counter-attacking since Pezeshkian’s victory, issuing harsh sentences in courts and shoring-up their posi-

tions in state institutions and government-owned enterprises.

Meanwhile Iran’s workers suffer. Inflation has run at over 50% for over five years, destroying pensions and wages. Unions and strikes are heavily repressed.

As the presidential election was playing out, 30,000 precariously employed contract oil workers were striking. The workers were demanding a 35% salary increase and 14 work-days followed by 14 days of rest, an end to the contract labour system and improved working conditions.

The private contracting companies have tried to break the strike using scab labour, but seem to have been largely unsuccessful. These skilled workers are difficult to replace and have often worked in the same roles for many years alongside their co-workers, billeted in the same work-camps and building up a sense of collective solidarity.

The oil and gas workers also advocated a boycott of the Presidential election, following a call made by many oppositionists. Apparently the boycott call was widely supported by the striking workers.

As of 13 July the strike continues, now involving 24,000 workers and having run for more than three weeks, coordinated by the rank-and-file committee the Council for Organising Oil Contract-Workers’ Protests. The workers are particularly angry that a promise that jobs would be re-classified by May, according to regulations set out by the Job Classification Act, has been broken by the employers.

Also on 12 July workers at the Iranian Offshore Oil Company on Lavan Island in the Persian Gulf staged a protest. The permanent workers at the Continental Plateau Company in Lavan demanding the removal of corrupt managers, removal of a salary cap and payment of wage arrears also staged a rally.

The permanent staff of the Aghajari Oil and Gas Exploitation complex went on strike.

The situation for workers in Iran is dire and the possibility of widespread strikes and protests is ever present.

It is the same across the world: the rich do well, the poor are made to pay. The difference is that in Iran there is a terrible additional burden: a highly motivated, violent, religious dictatorship is in power and ruthlessly represses the workers’ movement.

Victory to the Iranian workers! For a secular republic in Iran! For workers’ power! □

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 20-21 JULY 2024

A weekend of socialist discussion, debate, and education hosted by Workers’ Liberty: bit.ly/ideas24



French left debates options after 7 July

By Martin Thomas

On 16 July, France’s president Macron accepted the resignation of his chosen prime minister Gabriel Attal, but Attal’s government will remain as “caretakers” for an unknown interim.

The largest bloc in the National Assembly after the 7 July second-round elections is the NFP (New Popular Front). It is not really a Popular Front like the 1930s one (where the biggest party, determining the programme, was the Radicals, the main bourgeois party of the time), but rather a loose alliance of sort-of-left parties (Socialist Party, Communist Party), a semi-party (Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s France Insoumise, which has no ordinary party structure), and the Greens.

On 16 July Olivier Faure of the SP said that the NFP had agreed on a candidate for president of the Assembly (like the Speaker in Parliament), but the NFP still seemed far from agreeing a candidate for prime minister. The SP, CP, and Greens have proposed Laurence Tubiana, an academic and diplomat, but France Insoumise dissents.

Then if they do agree on a candidate, how can their prime minister win a vote of confidence in the Assembly?

Some like Marine Tondelier of the Greens want a “centre-left” coalition drawing in some Macronists. France Insoumise see Tubiana as likely to veer that way.

France Insoumise, and others on the left such as the NPA (A) and APlutSoc, call for a government of the NFP to carry out the full reform programme of the NFP. How that can prevail against the non-



left Assembly majority and a reluctant president Macron is unclear.

Meanwhile, the Rassemblement National (RN) denounces the centre and the parliamentary left for unprincipled haggling, and hopes to build a base to win the next election.

The French Marxist left is in no position to sort out the political impasse. It can put pressure for implementing NFP reform promises, it can fight for solidarity against the RN threat, and it can seek to mobilise in strikes and on the streets to show a better way for social improvements than the RN’s nationalist and racist demagoguery.

That is the essence of the [policy](#) decided by the NPA(R) at a 13-14 July meeting. Moving beyond previous statements which posed the left alternative only as “our struggles and our strikes”, the policy comes out for “a workers’ government”, but pretty much in passing and without explication.

The idea of local “committees of action” of the left and the unions has had some reception on the French left, but seems now faded. However, the left and the unions will be on the streets again, demonstrating, on 18 July. France’s unions remain stronger than pretty much anywhere else in Europe. □

Trump picks hardline VP

By Will Roberts

The assassination attempt against Donald Trump at a rally on Saturday 13 July has led to a flurry of speculation and political turmoil.

Conspiracy theories abound. Many from the Trumpist right claim that the secret service “must” have had a role in allowing Trump’s shooter to get so close to assassinating the former President.

On Monday 15, Trump was formally announced as the Republican presidential candidate, and announced his running partner as

Ohio senator J D Vance.

Formerly a never-Trumper, Vance has now become a staunch supporter. He has been explicit (which Trump has not) about backing right-wing think-tank plans to replace trade unions in the USA with joint worker-boss organisations. His priorities on foreign policy include blanket opposition to any support for Ukraine. He is against allowing abortion even in cases of rape or incest (again, Trump has hedged his bets on the issue).

Vance is aged just 39, so his appointment suggests plans in the Trumpist movement beyond the next presidential term. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

LET GAZA LIVE!
PEACE!
TWO STATES!



**Back anti-war
action in Israel**

Ceasefire and aid
still urgent demands

Page 3

**Opposition to
Starmer**

The "Gaza indepen-
dents" are no answer

Pages 4-5

**Putin's war on
Ukraine**

Russia steps up the
attacks

Page 7

**Lenin's What Is
To Be Done**

Why the battle of
ideas is central

Page 11-14