

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

AFTER THE ELECTION ORGANISE THE LEFT

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Organise for chaotic times



We're glad the Tories are out. Immediately we seek to rally the unions and the Labour Party to force Starmer and Reeves to deliver fast on their promises of improved worker rights, repeal of (some) anti-strike laws, and reduced NHS waiting lists.

But all that demands increased activity by the left, not wishful thinking that we can now float through a new era of stability and without "chaos".

Real wages, though now rising modestly, are still markedly lower than before 2008-9. The NHS and other public services have bigger-than-ever waiting lists and gaps. Profits are buoyant. As of early 2024, median FTSE 100 (big company) CEO pay, excluding pension, was £3.81 million, 109 times the median full time worker's pay, and top pay is still soaring. Yet Starmer and Reeves talk only of what the sober Institute for Fiscal Studies call "tiny" or "trivial" tax rises to fund improvements in services and public-sector pay.

Starmer and Reeves may get some "period of grace" during which anger is staved off by tiny improvements here or there, or thoughts that improvement will take time.

But anger will erupt in time. The big question for the left is how to organise so that the anger takes an organised socialistic form – strikes, demonstrations, votes in the labour movement including at Labour conference 2024 – and does not instead take an openly right-wing form, or a chaotic form apt to be captured politically by the right.

France

Consider France. In April-May 2017 Emmanuel Macron won a majority for president and in the Legislative Assembly with a "centrist" message after a terrible Socialist Party presidency, 2012-7. By the end of 2018 the roads were full of "gilet jaunes" protesters.

Their first demand was not specially left-wing: no increase in fuel tax. That was quickly granted. They went on to agitate for a range of leftish social demands, but mixed with such calls as for a right-wing general to become president.

The party which gained most electorally from the movement was Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National.

Whether Reform UK can be the analogue of the RN in France – or Bolsonaro in Brazil, or Kast in Chile, or Milei in Argentina, or Trump in the USA – we don't know. How much mileage Reform UK, or the Tories with a new leader, can get from demagogic and racist agitation against migrants and



asylum-weeks, we don't know.

But far from "ending Tory chaos", we may well enter much more chaotic times.

Despite what some Tories now say, Labour *did* win the election (as a majority in a strike ballot with less than 50% turnout *is a strike mandate*). But that the Labour campaign on the ground was mostly dismal, and that Labour won this election with fewer votes than in the supposed "unprecedented disaster" of 2019: those facts are of more consequence than in showing that Starmer's backroom people are not the experts on vote-winning they reckon to be.

The Labour vote was 20% of the electorate, little more than 70% of the percentage in 2017 with a leftish manifesto, and only marginally more than in Ed Miliband's crushing defeat in 2015.

As a percentage of turnout, even, the Labour vote declined in many constituencies in England and Wales. Its slight increase overall was entirely down to gains in Scotland. Labour's actual vote as per cent of turnout was markedly lower than its score in opinion polls going back to late 2022. Many people who told pollsters they were Labour in the end voted for miscellaneous "independents" or for Greens.

A further dwindling of Labour's activist base, as happened in the Blair-Brown Labour government years, will mean Labour's councillor base also shrinks, and, worse, that when revolt comes the field will be open to the right to gain politically. When the PT (Workers' Party) ruled Brazil, 2003-2015, it made several much-appreciated reforms. Its approval ratings remained high through to 2013. But the PT's activist base dwindled, partly because the PT leadership

was happy with that dwindling. When, amidst world economic turmoil, street revolt, at first leftish, broke out in 2013, the far-right was able to annex it politically. Thus the contrived impeachment of PT president Dilma Rousseff and the victory of Trump-analogue Jair Bolsonaro as president.

The Tory vote fell drastically on 4 July, mostly to the advantage of Reform UK. Some 2019 Tory voters switched to Labour. Labour lost votes (but fewer) to the Greens; and, in some constituencies to ex-Labour "independents" angry over Gaza.

We are glad to say that George Galloway lost Rochdale, his sidekick Akhmed Yakoob lost in Birmingham Ladywood, and Galloway's "Workers' Party of Britain" (WPB) won nowhere.

Jeremy Corbyn won in Islington North. We didn't campaign for Corbyn because we thought it more important to hold together a fight within the labour movement; but we call for Labour now to reinstate him.

TUSC, the most left-wing of the flurry of "sort-of-left" candidates challenging Labour, did poorly, with about one-third the total vote it got in 2015.

The SWP's Maxine Bowler, with the Palestine rather than the red flag as her campaign colours, got 8% in Sheffield Brightside. The RCP's Fiona Lali, also presented primarily as "pro-Palestine" rather than socialist, got 4% in Stratford and Bow (where the WPB got 7.5% and another "pro-Palestine independent" 0.9%). Michael Lavalette, ex-SWP and once a local councillor, now endorsed by George Galloway, got 21.8% as a "pro-Palestine independent" in Preston. We know less about the scattering of Muslim independents elected on

"pro-Palestine" tickets; they don't look like Yakoob or WPB types, but how left-wing they will be in Parliament, we shall see. (One is recent ex-Lib-Dem).

Will Starmer and Reeves use their victory to ram through a further shift to the right, as Blair did in 1997 by declaring the Bank of England outside political control, and a few months later by rule changes to close off many of the Labour Party's democratic channels? We don't know.

We should beware. But not wait.

In the local Labour Parties and especially in the unions, we will press for speedy delivery on Starmer's promises of scrapping (some) anti-strike laws, of improved workers' rights, and of speedy negotiations to give junior doctors their due.

We will also press for the tax rises on the millionaires – a wealth tax, increased capital-gains taxation, and more – needed to start restoring the NHS and local services and to accelerate green conversion.

More widely, we continue our advocacy of a workers' government – that is, of revitalising the labour movement to create a government accountable to the movement.

Without that, without serious anti-capitalist action in place of endless "pro-business" servility, there will be no way of structuring the inevitable anger and revolt on a working-class axis rather than a nationalist and racist one.

This is not the time for activists to turn away from the unions and Labour, and think they can do better by work in this or that NGO or campaign, or by building up local "independent" politicians. Still less is it the time for relaxing and looking forward to a dull but quiet future of diminishing "chaos".

The election opens opportunities, but also great challenges. It is time for rallying ourselves for regular and energetic activity, week by week and not just sporadically, in our workplaces, our union branches, and our local Labour Parties.

Our call is to all union and Labour activists to step up regular meetings and activities. But also, and specially, to Marxists, to people who see our labour-movement activity as more than a road to piecemeal improvements or damage-limitation – as centrally about building the strength, the democracy, and the lucidity the working-class movement needs in order to win control in society and replace capitalism by socialism.

We need all our efforts, not just from time to time or online, but weekly and in-person, for organising in the workplaces and the labour movement. We must build a Marxist organisation capable of real leverage in the working class. □

Conference rallies growing opposition in Israel

By Ira Berkovic

On 1 July, over 5,000 people gathered for the "It's Time!" conference in Tel Aviv, the largest public gathering against war and occupation in Israel since 7 October. The event was cosponsored by a large number of organisations, including Peace Now, Women Wage Peace, Breaking the Silence, and Standing Together. Activists will now aim to turn the energy generated by the conference outwards, to mobilise action throughout Israel to increase pressure on the government.

Workers' Liberty has argued consistently that direct support for anti-war, anti-occupation forces in Israel is a central, internationalist imperative. An increase in internal domestic pressure is not only vital for stopping the war, but an irreplaceable element in any long-term democratic transformation of the region.

We focus in particular on left-wing forces like Standing Together, which seek to fuse action against war and occupation with a class-based programme for reshaping Israeli society itself.

Currents on the international left which not only oppose the policies of the Israeli state, as Workers' Liberty does, but see the entire Israeli Jewish national community as a historical illegitimacy, dismiss the potential for transformative struggle within Israel. Some even argue for groups like Standing Together to be boycotted and no-platformed, because they do not go along with the idea that the misdeeds of the Israeli state mean that Israeli Jews are undeserving of any collective rights. This is a dead-end politics of counter-chauvinism, not international solidarity.

Needed instead is a global anti-war movement which is both a movement of direct solidarity with the Palestinians, including around material humanitarian efforts, and a movement of direct support for forces within Israeli society that seek to transform it.

Comments on the 1 July gathering



include:

"I want to endorse the July 1st meeting that Israeli peacemakers are having in Tel Aviv. These meetings are very important, this gathering of thousands of Israelis who want to say there is an alternative, that the language of bombs doesn't work, the language of violence only leads to death, and that we need a language of life. This meeting is about creating an alternative, and showing us that there is a language of life, that Israelis and Palestinians can be united in creating a better future than what we have today." Aziz Abu Sarah, *Palestinian writer and activist*

"We Palestinians and Israelis have been trapped in a vicious cycle of violence and intergenerational trauma. The reality and insecurity of occupation are no longer tolerable. As the war rages in Gaza, with a humanitarian catastrophe unfolding, the hostages have not been brought home. It's time for us to unite for a different kind of future, on the basis of principles of mutual recognition, and acknowledgment of the right of both peoples to self-determination, statehood, and independence; the right of both peoples to security and safety, dignity and justice, equality and agency. That's why we're building a broad coalition for the future around these principles. The status quo is not delivering security to the Israelis, nor dignity to the Palestinians. It's time." Hiba Qasas, *Executive Director, Principles for Peace Foundation*

"Despite the pain and sorrow, the thousands of martyrs, the wounded,

the prisoners, the missing, the immense destruction, the collective punishment, we continue to hold onto the belief that the only solution is a political one that will ensure our security. We remain committed to the necessary work for a better life that will guarantee us freedom, security, and peace. We, the mothers, cry out and call to stop the cycle of bloodshed, and demand that the Palestinian and Israeli leaders get to the negotiating table to find a non-violent solution that will protect us and our children from inevitable death. Despite the tension and anxiety, and loss of the will to live, we will illuminate our journey and our path with hope. All we want is a safe and stable life for our children and future generations." Reem Hajajreh, *founder of the Palestinian women's organisation Women of the Sun*

"Greetings to the Israeli peace activists gathering on July 1st. I would like to acknowledge and appreciate you going out of your comfort zone to play a role in shaping what's happening now, and in the future. Please keep going, enlarge the movement,

reach out to every peace-loving Israeli. I know they exist, and they can be mobilised. It's your responsibility to mobilise them. This is what's important for you, your children, for us, for everybody. You have partners in Palestine, in the Middle East, in the whole world." Hamze Awade, *Palestinian activist*

Writing after the conference, Manar Abu Shakra Qaedan, a Palestinian leader of Standing Together, said: "I'm thrilled beyond words to have spoken at a massive peace rally in Tel Aviv last night. Together with some amazing organizations like Women Wage Peace, the New Israel Fund, and Zazim, we convened the biggest peace conference in Israel since the beginning of the war with over 5,000 Jewish and Palestinian attendees calling for an end to the war, an end to the occupation, and for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

"We are so proud of the members of Standing Together who spoke on the stage about their experiences of being Palestinians, their connection to their peoples, their hopes for the war to come to an end, and why solidarity is crucial for the future of everyone on this land. We are so proud of our members and partners that worked tirelessly for the success of this rally.

"But with this hope, we are still extremely worried. Last week, we placed an advertisement in *Yediot Ahronot*, the biggest Israeli newspaper, warning the Israeli public on the dangers of entering an all-out war with Hezbollah that would lead to more death and destruction for all people in the region. We need a deal to release the hostages, to stop the horrific war on Gaza, and to ensure that a full-on war does not break out with Hezbollah. In the end – this war will end through a deal – and we can reach this deal now." □



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sat 13 July: Workers' Liberty will be at the [Durham Miners' Gala](#). More events at [workersliberty.org/events](#), or scan QR code.

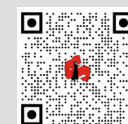
At work or on campus

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



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

and Labour Parties: bit.ly/mo-pe

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.

Incoherence with a dash of Lenin



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star's* coverage of the UK election (mirroring its Communist Party of Britain controllers) continued in total incoherence right up to the vote itself.

Naturally, the CPB supported their old friend Jeremy Corbyn in Islington North (he wrote a regular column for the *Morning Star* for years before 2015), despite noting that "his campaign has focused heavily on the local" (i.e., it was not very political).

We knew they supported George Galloway in Rochdale, but which other of his rag-bag, mostly cranks, antisemites, racists, climate-change deniers, misogynists, and homophobes, did they support?

We knew they backed some Labour candidates (Zahra Sultana, Richard Burdon, Andy McDonald and Apsana Begum) because they voted for a Gaza ceasefire last November. But what happened when a Labour candidate who voted in November for a ceasefire was being challenged by a pro-Gaza

"independent" or a Galloway-backed candidate (the situation in Birmingham Yardley)?

Galloway's most enthusiastic cheerleader in the CPB, Andrew Murray, backtracked, having realised that his hero's party did not advocate a vote for any Labour candidate, regardless of their record on Gaza. Murray issued a warning: "it is vital that as many strong voices of opposition to imperialism, war and genocide are nevertheless heard in Parliament ... Where there is more than one such candidate in a constituency, then vote for the one best placed ... Evidently that will be the sitting Labour MP when he or she broke the Labour whip to vote for a ceasefire last November ..." (*Eyes Left* column 26 June)

However, Murray then went on to oppose a vote for Labour MP's who abstained in November because: "A bench-mark of internationalism is subordination to domestic political strategies, a perennial hall-mark of opportunism."

Murray, who considers himself a leading Leninist within the CPB, seems to have forgotten that just a couple of years after Labour Party leaders had supported the mass slaughter of the

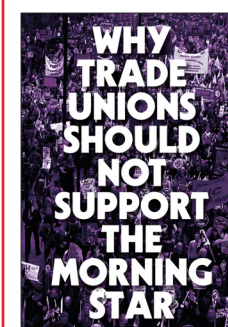
First World War, Lenin had advocated not just a Labour vote but Communist affiliation to the Labour Party.

Lenin was again evoked by a leading CPBer in the pages of the paper when, on 28 June, a letter from Nick Wright was published in response to someone who'd left the CPB to join Galloway's party, accusing the CPB of harbouring illusions in Labour (i.e., preferring a Labour government to a Tory one).

Comrade Wright sternly lectured the ex-comrade: his stance "betrays a profound failure to understand the constantly evolving position of British communists in relation to Labour, which is based on the principles Lenin outlined in the foundation years of the party and which flowed from his recognition of the special character of Labour – in distinction from many other social democratic formations – in that the trade unions are an integral and affiliated part of the federal party."

It would seem that Murray and Wright (both veterans of the ultra-Stalinist Straight Left group of the 1980s) belatedly realised that the anti-Labour hysteria to be found in the paper most days was getting out of hand: a dose of "Leninism" is required in the face of this "infantile disorder".

The *Morning Star* of 29-30 June carried an interview with former Aslef president and Labour councillor Tosh McDonald, one of the few of Galloway's "Workers Party" candidates with a respect-worthy labour movement record. As far as can be judged, Tosh doesn't subscribe to the divisive communalism, racism, misogyny, anti-semitism and other foul attitudes and views espoused by many candidates standing for, or backed by, Galloway's party, exposed by the anti-fascist magazine [Searchlight](#), [Hope Not Hate](#), and the campaigner [Steve Cooke](#). But the Northern reporter Peter Lazenby doesn't even mention any of that in the course of an uncritical interview that notably puts a "left-wing" gloss on the Workers Party's regressive policies on immigration and the environment. □



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The soldier and the woman beaten unconscious



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Natasha O'Brien, aged 24, had been walking home from work in 2022 when she witnessed a young man shouting homophobic abuse on a Limerick street. She asked him to stop.

He punched her until she fell to the ground. Once she'd fallen he continued punching her until she was unconscious. We do not know how long he would have continued because he was chased away by someone who witnessed him beating her on the ground. We do know his response later. He posted to Snapchat: "Two to put her down, two to put her out."

Her attacker, Cathal Crotty, was arrested after his public assault and cyber-boasting. Given huge evidence against him, he pled guilty.

On 20 June he got a suspended three-year sentence, not jail – in part because the Judge felt that a harsher sentence for beating a woman

unconscious for trying to stop him committing a hate crime in the town centre might affect his military career.

Following Natasha's campaign, on 1 July the Director of Public Prosecutions lodged an appeal against the sentence, and Crotty has been discharged from the Irish Defence Forces with effect 10 July. During the case, however, the Forces described him as an "exemplary", "courteous", "professional" and "disciplined" soldier.

O'Brien left the courtroom on 20 June saying that the system had abandoned her and committing herself to fight on. A total of 68 members of the Irish Defence Forces have been convicted or are before the courts charged with criminal offences. They include public order, drink driving, drugs, physical assault and sexual offences.

In 2020, David O'Gorman, a serving Irish Naval Officer, beat his on-off girlfriend so violently that he left one of her eyes permanently displaced, and she feared for her life. He pleaded guilty to assault causing harm. At the time of writing, he was still serving in the

army but the Defence Forces have begun an investigation into why he was not dismissed after the assault conviction.

A campaign is starting to force the Irish state to take violence by soldiers more seriously. Thousands of men and women marched through Irish cities on 22 June.

O'Brien was cheered by attendees as she spoke through a megaphone in Limerick city: "I'd like to say I'm absolutely overwhelmed by your solidarity and your support and without your rage, your outrage, your fear, your horror, this would not have been looked at".



WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

Women's Fightback.

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Ruth Coppinger, former Socialist Party TD, spoke at the Dublin march from the ISA Socialist Feminist organisation:

"His career was placed above the impact on her of the violence and that just says it all about the misogynistic rulings that we're seeing in courts, to be honest, every day of the week. This is not unusual. We actually have to get that out there. These type of cases are a daily occurrence in the court."

"One in three rape cases ends in a partial or full suspended sentence. So this is not unusual".

Organisers of Dublin's Pride parade (29 June) withdrew

the defence forces' invitation. When O'Brien was invited to visit Dáil Éireann (25 June), TDs gave her a minute-long standing ovation.

In 2022 in an interview in the *Irish Times*, Praveen Halappanavar, an Indian man living in Ireland, described the death from sepsis of his 31-year-old wife, Savita, in a Galway hospital after she was refused an abortion. His refusal to stay quiet sparked a national movement for abortion rights.

Natasha O'Brien, by speaking out, may be unleashing another movement to push back misogyny and structural oppression in Ireland. □

Police make pre-emptive JSO arrests

On 28 June, police swoops arrested 27 [Just Stop Oil](#) people under the Tories' recent Public Order Act, for allegedly "conspiring to disrupt national infrastructure" because, cops claim, they may have planned protests at airports this summer (like the recent one at Stansted, where private jets were painted orange). Some have been released on bail on condition they do not go within one kilometre of an airport. Daniel Shaw, Cressie Gethin, Lucia De-Abreu-Whittaker, Louise Lancaster and Roger Hallam are [on trial](#) at Southwark Crown Court, charged with conspiracy to cause a public nuisance in connection with the Just Stop Oil M25 gantry actions in November 2022. □

Labour's Scottish gains are fragile

By Ann Field

Scotland was the only part of Britain where Labour's share of votes on 4 July was up in 2023 compared to 2019. In England, Labour won seats because of Tory voters staying home or switching to Reform, but had no overall rise in vote-share.

In Scotland, Labour won 37 seats (up from one in 2019), the SNP won nine seats (down from 48), the Lib-Dems won six seats (up from four), and the Tories won five seats (down from six).

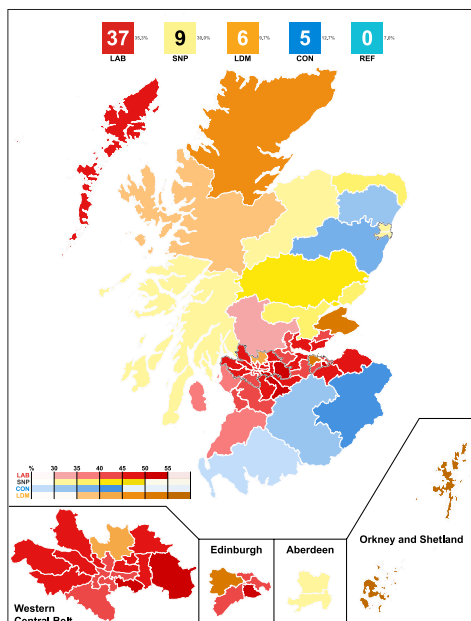
The Greens (until recently allied with the SNP in government) contested most Scottish seats, generally winning between one and two thousand votes. In some Glasgow and Edinburgh constituencies, they polled between 4,000 and 5,000 votes. Reform UK contested all Scottish constituencies and usually won 3,000 plus votes.

The Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (led by the Socialist Party) stood in four seats, winning just over 1,500 votes in total. The Scottish Socialist Party (led by Richie Vinton) stood two candidates, picking up a thousand votes in total.

Labour won 36% of the popular vote (up from 19% in 2019), the SNP won 30% (down from 45%), the Tories won 13% (down from 25%), and the Lib-Dem popular vote remained virtually unchanged. Turnout was 8.5% lower than in 2019.

The headline figures correspond to canvassers' experiences on the doorstep.

Previous SNP voters are demoralised. The "true believers" see the SNP as having gone soft on independence. Pragmatic SNP voters are disillusioned with the SNP's record in Holy-



rood. Many SNP voters simply stayed at home.

Some of the growth in the Green vote is probably accounted for by switching by one-time SNP voters.

A substantial number of one-time SNP voters switched to Labour. Tactical voting by Tory voters in some constituencies added to the Labour vote. The first-past-the-post system translated that in to an election landslide for Labour.

Inevitably Scottish Labour is focussing on its tally of 37 MPs. But the headline figure conceals a variety of problems.

Scottish Labour is not, and was not even in the Corbyn years, a mass-membership party with a large activist base. Its membership is probably well under 20,000, about a quarter that of the SNP. Its election campaign relied on a lot of effort by few activists.

Its newly elected MPs include those responsible for the debacle of Better Together in 2014 (when Labour allied



with the Tories in that year's independence referendum) and the electoral disaster of 2015 (when Labour lost 40 of its 41 Scottish MPs). These people have learnt nothing in the meantime.

Added to them are a new generation of thought-through right-wing ideologues – and a further layer of MPs who just faithfully repeat the party line.

If Starmer faces backbench rebellions at Westminster, they will certainly not be spearheaded by Scottish Labour MPs.

Scottish Labour portrays its gains last week as the basis for further gains in the next Holyrood election. Although there is some substance to that belief, it also contains an element of wishful thinking.

Holyrood elections are based on proportional representation, not first-past-the-post. And the next election will take place during the mid-term of the Westminster Labour government, when governments tend to be at their least popular.

The election result in Scotland should give the left – inside and outside of the Labour Party – cause to reflect on what strategy it should now pursue.

The Labour left in Scotland has long

been much weaker than in England. Unlike in England and Wales, there was only a minimal influx of new members under Corbyn (and by now those have now virtually all left anyway). The Scottish Labour left's politics are largely those of the Communist Party's *Morning Star* newspaper.

Labour left activists will have to challenge the "common sense" view of last week's election: that Labour loses elections when it moves to the left, but wins elections when it moves to the right.

We will probably also face further isolation as – in the best traditions of Scottish Labour – the family, friends and employees of newly elected MPs join the Labour Party and provide the right-wing parliamentarians with a social base within the party itself.

If the "tough decisions" promised by Starmer trigger opposition from the trade unions, the Labour left will need to prioritise supporting that opposition and attempting to take it into the party itself.

For the left outside the Labour Party, the time to take stock is also well overdue.

In 2014 virtually the entire left backed a Yes vote in the independence referendum. In 2016 it largely supported Brexit (even though Scotland overall went 62-38 Remain). Now it has adopted Gaza as its cause célèbre – and, in practice, that has meant concessions to various forms of antisemitism.

Scottish independence, Brexit, and Israel-annihilationism have all been expressions of a fantasy anti-imperialism. Wrong in principle, it has also been an abject failure in practice. In electoral terms it has yielded just 2,500 votes and half a dozen lost deposits. □

Crash council-house programme needed

By Tam Hill

Now the Labour Party is in government. What will change for the tens of thousands sleeping rough on the streets? Or the more than 130,000 households currently living in temporary accommodation across Britain (including more than 150,000 children)? Or the millions on social housing waiting lists?

If you look at Labour's manifesto and National Policy Forum programme, the answer is *not much*. The manifesto promises 1.5 million new homes built over the next 5 years, but frames this as a plan to "save the dream of home ownership" – not provide social housing. The devil will be

in the detail; there is a danger this could well dramatically increase the bargaining power of private housing developers, ensuring that local councils cannot say "no" to developments or leverage more social or affordable housing as they will be desperate to meet mandatory housing targets.

The manifesto does mention the "biggest boost to affordable housing in a generation", but it should be noted that this is a remarkably unambitious target. Firstly, "affordable housing" is not the same as social housing, it is simply housing at up to 80% of market rents, which if you live somewhere like London is still unaffordable for most.



Secondly, there has been a net loss of social housing nearly every year since 1981 through demolition and Right to Buy, so by promising the "biggest boost in a generation" Labour is only actually promising to slightly slow the decline in social housing stock.

Housing is not treated as a social necessity, but as a prof-

itable asset. Labour's plans promise to create ever more profitable assets, while Britain's homeless wander the erstwhile greenbelt surrounded by new homes they can't afford.

So how should the labour movement respond to a Labour government that is shutting its eyes to the scale and nature of the crisis?

The key solution has been known for decades: mass building of council housing. In the 1960s alone 1.24 million new social homes were built, a programme of investment that created useful work, brought tens of thousands of empty homes back into use and improved living standards for millions. This programme was

imperfect but showed what was achievable. Right to Buy needs to end and the Blair government's privatisation of council housing into increasingly corporate housing associations must be reversed. No fault evictions must be truly abolished and rent controls introduced.

Tenants unions, trade unions representing housing workers, and grassroots homelessness campaigners have forced many councils to build council housing for the first time in decades. Housing is a profit-making machine, but by building rent strikes and mass campaigns we can make housing unprofitable, and open the door to alternatives. □

Did Labour win on 4 July?



Eric Lee

American astronauts did not set foot on the Moon in July 1969. In 2001, the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City were brought down by a controlled explosion, and not by hijacked airliners that flew into them. Russia did not invade Ukraine but merely launched a “special military operation” in self-defence against the threat of a Nazi regime in Kyiv. Climate change is not real. The earth is flat.

Let’s add one more to that list: the Labour Party did not win the general election last week.

In the US, the last President to lose an election, Donald Trump, insisted that it never happened. He won the election and the vote was rigged.

Thankfully here, no one is saying that. Even Rishi Sunak conceded that Keir Starmer and the Labour Party had won in a fair fight.

And yet, there is a kind of “election denialism” happening here now in the UK, and among some observers abroad. In their view, as opposed to that of the British Conservatives who actually lost the election, Labour did not win.

Here is how the argument goes, more or less: The actual vote share for Labour was up just 1.7% compared to the disastrous result of 2019, when the party was still headed up by Jeremy Corbyn. And that result was a historic low for the party. That was a big part of the reason why Corbyn was ousted as

party leader. A gain of less than 2% can hardly be called a landslide, can it?

The election deniers are not unaware of the fact that Labour did win an astonishing 412 seats, a gain of 214. For observers from outside the UK, this must seem like a kind of mystery. How did a vote gain of 1.7% translate into a near-doubling of the party’s representation in Parliament?

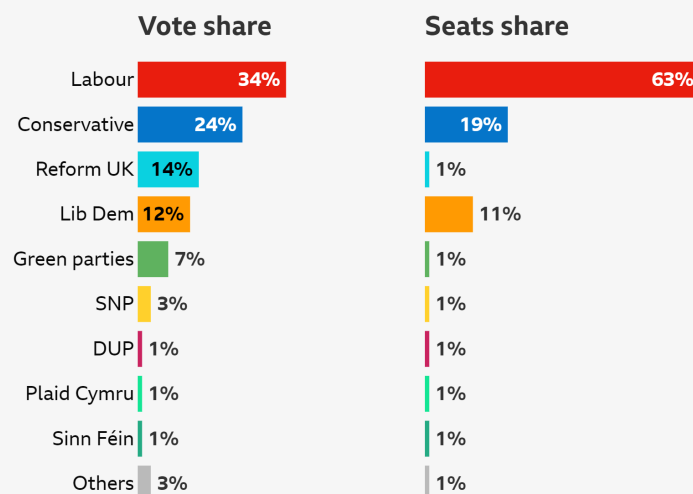
And their answer is that while Labour did rather poorly under the uninspiring leadership of the bland Keir Starmer, the Conservatives imploded due to the rise of Reform UK, headed by the charismatic Nigel Farage. Reform UK won over four million votes but gained only a handful of seats in the House of Commons. Farage, who finally won a seat after many attempts over the years, leads the chorus of outrage. Labour didn’t win, but the Tories most certainly lost.

But here is how the system actually works: Sinn Féin and George Gallo-way’s party got the same number of votes (210,000). This translated into 7 seats in the Commons for the former and none for the latter. And for that, we can thank the first past the post system.

I got an insight into what is actually going on when I looked into volunteering for a few hours on election day to help out my local Labour candidate. As the Labour website made clear, my help was not needed as my local MP was very popular and would easily win re-election (which she did). Labour

General election results 2024

Share of the UK vote and share of seats in Parliament



The green parties for England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are separate. Their combined vote share is shown

BBC

votes your party wins nationally. Even Nigel Farage understands this. No one cares that you won four million votes. We don’t have a national election. We have 650 local elections. You have to win as many of those as possible.

Those are the rules and everyone understands them. Maybe they’re not good rules. Maybe we should switch over to proportional representation. But until we do so, every party plays according to those rules.

If there had been a national election where the vote totals across the country mattered, maybe Labour would have fought harder to get more of those votes. But that’s not how

it works, and Labour played according to the rules. Labour had just one job to do this year, and that was to defeat the Tories and win the election. And that did they spectacularly well.

The victory Labour won is historic and expectations are high. No one can take away from its triumph by playing with imaginary election results. The election denialists should take a deep breath and repeat after me, “Labour won.” □

Eric Lee writes here in a personal opinion column. He is the founder editor of Labour Start.

Tata: unions must stay on alert

By Matt Dunn

The Unite union postponed strikes at Tata Steel, due to start on 8 July, after the company withdrew its threat to bring forward its closure plans and agreed to negotiate on investment. Until then they were only willing to negotiate on the shape of the redundancy plans.

Soon after, Labour won the general election, and Starmer and the new business secretary Jonny Reynolds have made Tata a high priority, traveling to Port Talbot to negotiate with the company, promising new money for investment, and seeking job guarantees. We will see; but there are a number of issues for socialists.

1. Public money should not be handed out to private capitalists to bolster profits. The previous Tory deal gave £500m to Tata, with no guarantees on jobs. Tata Group is the largest

company in India, with a market capitalisation of US\$382 billion.

2. If public money is to be put into an asset it should become a public asset. There is a compelling and popular case for this with a critical industry like steel.

3. Relying on outside parties to act on your behalf is a dangerous game. The Labour leadership may negotiate a better deal than the Tories, but it is far from a reliable ally of workers. It is much better to rely on our own collective strength to win.

4. Steel is a major test of just transition. The collective voice of workers must be at the centre of this change. Jobs, incomes and communities must be protected. The interests of working class communities should trump those of big business.

Marxists can play a vital role in the fight to rebuild industrial and political confidence within our unions. □

A Very English Scandal



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

If you think the 4 July general election was a seedy, miserable affair, check out the BBC1 drama *A Very English Scandal*, broadcast in mid-2018, to see something far worse.

Written by Russell T Davies and directed by Stephen Frears from the book by John Preston published in 2016, *A Very English Scandal* exposes a particularly dirty episode in English political life. Jeremy Thorpe (Hugh Grant) the leader of the Liberal Party in the general elections of February and October 1974, is a closet homosexual. A law legalising gay sex has been passed in 1967, but Thorpe is anxious that his past relationship with Norman Scott (Ben Wishaw) is not revealed. Scott pressures him for money and the increasingly worried Thorpe arranges, through a middleman, to hire Andrew Newton to “silence”



Scott. There is an apparent murder attempt, but only Scott’s dog is killed (October 1975). Thorpe is tried for conspiracy and incitement to murder (1979) but the establishment closes ranks behind him; there are even allegations that many Labour MPs knew about Thorpe but kept quiet. The proceedings are really turned into a trial about Norman Scott, whose character is destroyed in court.

The judge was so biased that his summary was famously lampooned by satirist Peter Cook. Thorpe is found innocent, but this is the end of his political career. □

• Available on BBC iPlayer

The far right in Germany: the AfD

By Dale Street

In the recent European Parliament election, 16% of young German voters (16-24 age bracket) voted for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), thereby helping it to emerge as the second-strongest party in the election – just one percentage point behind the CDU, the German Conservatives.

AfD was founded in 2013 as a Euro-sceptic, free-market, and conservative splinter from the CDU. As it has grown, it has radicalised, so that France's RN now shuns it as too extreme.

Since the 2019 European election and the 2021 German Parliament election, the AfD has more than doubled its support among voters aged 16-24: from 5% in 2019 and 7% in 2021 to 16% now.

The comparisons are only partially qualified by the fact that 16/17 year-olds did not have a vote in 2019 and 2021. This year's European election was the first election in which 16/17 year-olds in Germany, and Belgium, were enfranchised.

The AfD is anti-immigration, anti-refugee, anti-EU, Islamophobic, identitarian (i.e. ethnic-nationalist) and climate-change-denialist. Some of its leading figures have voiced Holocaust revisionism and maintained links with neo-Nazi organisations.

In late 2023 a number of prominent AfD members met with representatives of the Austrian far right to discuss a "remigration" plan to deport asylum-seekers, foreigners with the right

to live in Germany, and "non-assimilated" German citizens. Up to two million people would be "moved" to a special economic zone in North Africa.

The AfD picks up more votes than any other party in what was formerly the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany) and among manual-working-class voters. In some East German regions one in five voters born after the demise of the GDR in 1991 regularly vote AfD. Although large public spending has lifted eastern areas since the collapse of Stalinism – gross hourly earnings in the east [rose](#) between 2000 and 2022 from 73% to over 90% of western levels – inequalities remain hurtful. Real wages across Germany have declined over the last ten years, and fell especially sharply in the 2022 consumer-prices spike. Unemployment in eastern areas is 7.4%, and 5.4% in western.

Like its counterparts in other countries, the AfD feeds off a mixture of real and imagined grievances, fear-mongering, denunciations of an out-of-touch "elite", appeals to vote on ethno-nationalist lines, and simplistic sloganising in place of actual political solutions.

As David Bergrich of the German anti-racist campaign Miteinander (Together) puts it:

"All you have to do is look at the AfD's campaign posters. They were just four red arrows pointing at the other parties' names, with the slogan 'You had 30 years time'. That isn't any kind of a political programme. It's just the expression of an emotion."

The party's success in June's European election was therefore part of a longer-term pattern in Germany. It is also part of a geographically wider pattern in European countries.

The far-right National Rally party in France, for example, was the most popular party among under-34 voters in the European election, and 30% of under-30 voters in Poland backed the far-right Confederation party. Far-right parties in other European countries also saw significant, but less dramatic, increases in support among young voters.

Just as far-right parties have tapped into the discontent of geographical regions which feel "left behind" by globalisation, national governments and social change, so too the AfD has proved adept at tapping into the discontent of a generation which likewise feels "left behind".

Young people now reaching voting age have lived through a succession of crises and social dislocations – the 2008 financial crash, the subsequent Eurozone debt crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, soaring inflation, rocketing rents, and the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine.



Fears for the future open the door to the attraction of a demagogic right-wing populism which scapegoats migrants for social and economic problems. According to the Green politician Marina Weisband:

"It is a generation which does not have any prospect of enjoying a better life than their parents but which has pronounced fears about descending the social ladder. Through its populism the AfD has managed to jump on this bandwagon and claim that it supposedly wants to tackle these concerns."

In 2019 the environment was the major issue for many young voters, with Greens winning 34% of the youth vote. But now other issues have emerged as more important in determining voting patterns and the Green vote among youth has slumped to 11%.

In a survey of 16-26 year-olds carried out by TUI Foundation shortly before the European election, 46% cited migration and asylum as their main concern, and only 26% climate change.

Another survey, carried out by Infratest dimap, found that 69% of German 18-34 year-olds identified criminality as a concern, and 60% "major changes in German life" (i.e. migration).

Crime and migration are political issues more vulnerable to exploitation by a right-populist political agenda. That shifting focus of younger voters from climate change to crime and migration has been ruthlessly exploited by the AfD and helps explain its ballot box successes. (While violent crime has fallen recently in, say, England, and the USA, it has risen in Germany. But desire for "clampdowns" on crime correlates only loosely with actual crime).

The AfD is helped by its use of social media. No other German political party comes anywhere near matching the following which the AfD has built on social media platforms.

The AfD TikTok account has 400,000 followers. Its TikTok posts can trigger over six million likes. The AfD Facebook page has over half a million followers.

The YouTube channel of its parliamentary fraction has over 300,000 followers.

According to Kilian Hampel, co-author of a recent "Youth in Germany" survey which predicted a surge in support for the AfD: "The AfD has brought political content closer to young people through social media, who otherwise don't feel safe or heard on the internet from the traditional parties."

By contrast, the CDU did not even have a TikTok account until December of last year.

The surge in support for the AfD among young German voters on 9 June was also a vote of no confidence in the German coalition

government of the SPD (roughly, German Labour Party), the Greens, and the FDP (German Liberal-Democrats).

But it would be wrong to define the surge in support for the AfD as no more than a protest vote. A post-election survey carried out by Infratest dimap found that 51% of AfD voters did so "out of conviction", compared with 44% "because of disappointment with other parties". (The survey does not appear to have been broken down by age cohort.)

Anti-AfD demonstrations have regularly mobilised tens of thousands, especially after the revelation of its members' involvement in last year's meeting to discuss "remigration". It is important to maintain and step up such mobilisations.

But what will ultimately turn the tide against growing support for the AfD – in all age groups, not just young voters – are politics which provide democratic and socialist answers to the grievances off which the AfD feeds, and marginalise the other grievances it often invents. □



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What Is To Be Done: a vital text,

15th in a series of articles around the 100th anniversary of the death of Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin). Previous articles have traced the pre-Marxist Russian revolutionary movement from the 1860s, and the emergence of a workers' movement and of many Marxist circles and local groups in the 1890s. This and the next few articles deal with Ulyanov's arguments on how those circles and groups could be cohered into an effective party.

By Sean Matgamna

Vladimir Ulyanov's (Lenin's) *What Is To Be Done?*, written in late 1901 and early 1902, is one of the most important books ever written. Certainly it is one of the most important socialist texts.

Yet it is often seen, even by people who are not antagonistic to Ulyanov and his work, in the grim retrospective shadow thrown by Stalinism. This, we are told, is the book in which Lenin expounded his notion of a highly centralised party of "professional revolutionaries", and therefore, whatever Ulyanov's intentions, it was the seed of what, over the next three decades, developed into the totalitarian dictatorship of the state bureaucracy over the working class and all the peoples of the USSR, that is, Stalinism.

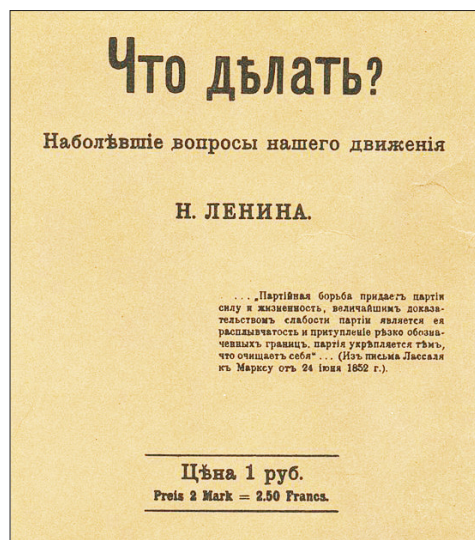
The root of Stalinism lay in Ulyanov-Lenin's ideas, and the root of Ulyanov's distinctive approach lay in *What Is To Be Done?* [1]

The most relentless advocates of this idea were the Stalinist ruling class in the USSR and the Communist Parties all over the world who repeated whatever Moscow said. "Stalin is the Lenin of today", was one of their key slogans. And Ulyanov-Lenin was the Stalin of yesterday...

Although when published in 1902 *What Is To Be Done?* was greeted warmly by many in Russia's Marxist movement, including the future Mensheviks, some later attitudes were prefigured in the year or so of dispute between Bolsheviks (congress majority in the most contentious vote) and Mensheviks (minority) between the July-August 1903 Marxist congress and the outbreak of revolution in Russia in January 1905. Some of Ulyanov's opponents then – Pavel Axelrod, for instance – said he was the reincarnation of the Russian Blanquist populists.

The lie that Stalinism and Bolshevism were one, or at least, that Bolshevism was the seed and nutriment of Stalinism, has been lovingly sustained and preserved by the bourgeoisie and its academics. Adapted, preserved, and sustained too by quite a few socialists who should know better.

A reading of *What Is To Be Done?* in



its real context demolishes the myths.

At the time, a great network of independent Marxist circles, doing valuable work such as the production of factory bulletins and leaflets, existed all across Russia. Police repression had smashed the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party set up in 1898. The illegal newspaper *Iskra* (Spark), published abroad from December 1900, was trying to reforge the RSDLP, the newspaper acting as both Marxist propagandist and organisational network.

Ulyanov-Lenin wrote *What Is To Be Done?* as an exposition of what *Iskra* (and the journal *Zarya* (Dawn), of which four issues were published in 1901-2) were doing and wished to do, and what was wrong with those Marxists who opposed them.

Some of those opponents took guidance from the "revisionists" of Marxism in the West, whose initiator, Eduard Bernstein, was a prominent member of the German Social Democratic Party. Ulyanov starts *What Is To Be Done?* by discussing the demand for the "freedom of criticism" of Marxism within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party:

"At first sight, nothing would appear to be more strange than the solemn appeals to freedom of criticism made by one of the parties to the dispute. Have voices been raised in the advanced parties against the constitutional law of... European countries which guarantees freedom to science and scientific investigation?", he asks.

Of course not. But Ulyanov sees in the claim for "freedom of criticism" the demand for "freedom" to revise Marxism from a doctrine of revolution into one of piecemeal reform.

"It is no secret... that two trends have taken form in present-day international Social-Democracy... The essence of the 'new' trend, which adopts a 'critical' attitude towards 'obsolete dogmatic' Marxism, has been clearly enough presented by Bernstein and demonstrated by Millerand".

Eduard Bernstein had proposed to change the German party from a

movement preparing to overthrow and supplant capitalism into a movement for open-ended reform. Bernstein had defined his attitude in this aphorism about the labour movement in history: "The movement is everything, the goal, nothing".

Millerand, in France, had become a minister in a bourgeois government, and moreover, in one which also contained General Gallifet, one of those who had butchered 10,000 workers after the suppression of the Paris Commune, in 1871.

Ulyanov charged such people with saying: "Social-Democracy must change from a party of social revolution into a democratic party of social reforms. [Bernstein] denied... the possibility of putting socialism on a scientific basis and of demonstrating its necessity and inevitability from the point of view of the materialist conception of history..."

"The very concept, 'ultimate aim', was declared to be unsound, and the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat was completely rejected. Denied was the antithesis in principle between liberalism and socialism."

"Denied was the theory of the class struggle, on the alleged grounds that it could not be applied to a strictly democratic society governed according to the will of the majority, etc."

Ulyanov explains a mystery – the fact that the criticism of Marxism by Bernstein and his friends, including his Russian friends, had sprung up suddenly so ready-made:

"This criticism of Marxism has long been proclaimed from political platforms, from university chairs, in numerous pamphlets and in a series of learned treatises.... The entire younger generation of the educated classes has been systematically reared for decades on this criticism, [so] it is not surprising that the 'new critical' trend in Social-Democracy should spring up, all complete... The content of this new trend did not have to grow and take shape: it was transferred bodily from bourgeois to socialist literature".

Ulyanov explains the relationship which he sees between the theorising of the German Bernstein and the practice of the French "socialist" minister Millerand:

"The French socialists have begun, not to theorise, but to act. The democratically more highly developed political conditions in France have permitted them to put 'Bernsteinism into practice' immediately, with all its consequences. Millerand has furnished an excellent example of practical Bernsteinism... If democracy, in essence, means the abolition of class domination, then why should not a socialist minister charm the whole bourgeois world by orations on class collaboration? Why should he

not remain in the cabinet even after the shooting-down of workers by gendarmes has exposed, for the hundredth and thousandth time, the real nature of the democratic collaboration of classes?..."

"And what did the French socialists achieve? The reward for... this corruption of the socialist consciousness of the working masses – the only basis that can guarantee our victory – the reward for this is... miserable reforms, so miserable in fact that much more has been obtained from bourgeois governments!"

For Ulyanov the truth of anything is always concrete – it is discernible only in the whole context and framework which defines and qualifies what any part or aspect of a thing means. That people have the right to scientific investigation, goes, he has said, almost without saying. But what does the slogan of "freedom of criticism" mean here and now, at this stage of the development of the Russian movement?

"Freedom of criticism" means... freedom to convert Social-Democracy into a democratic party of reform, freedom to introduce bourgeois ideas and bourgeois elements into socialism. [2]

"Freedom" is a grand word, but under the banner of freedom for industry the most predatory wars were waged, under the banner of freedom of labour [non-union], the working people were robbed. The modern use of the term 'freedom of criticism' contains the same inherent falsehood. Those who are really convinced that they have made progress in science would not demand freedom for the new views to continue side by side with the old, but the substitution of the new views for the old..."

The Marxist movement is a voluntary association of people who need not a "live and let live" indifference to truth and falsehood, but a rigorous attempt to separate truth from falsehood, and a no less rigorous selection of those



The State Library in Munich

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admitted to their ranks on the basis of adhering to certain ideas and perspectives. He uses a famous image for what a revolutionary organisation is:

"We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and we have to advance almost constantly under their fire. We have combined, by a freely adopted decision, for the purpose of fighting the enemy, and not of retreating into the neighbouring marsh, the inhabitants of which, from the very outset, have reproached us with having separated ourselves into an exclusive group and with having chosen the path of struggle instead of the path of conciliation.

"The 'marsh' is the realm of eclecticism, theoretical scepticism and recoil from intellectual and political rigour.

"And now some among us begin to cry out: Let us go into the marsh! And when we begin to shame them, they retort: What backward people you are! Are you not ashamed to deny us the liberty to invite you to take a better road! Oh, yes, gentlemen! You are free not only to invite us, but to go yourselves wherever you will, even into the marsh. In fact, we think that the marsh is your proper place, and we are prepared to render you every assistance to get there. Only let go of our hands, don't clutch at us and don't besmirch the grand word freedom, for we too are 'free' to go where we please, free to fight not only against the marsh, but also against those who are turning towards the marsh!"

The Marxists are concerned to hammer out the political basis for a consistently revolutionary Russian working class movement. He recalls that the German Marxist movement, to which he, like all Russian Marxists and most Marxists everywhere at the time, looks as the great example to follow, has been built by way of a rigorous attitude

to principles, politics and theory...

"At the time Engels dealt his blows at [Eugen] Dühring [a university professor who propounded new systems of economics, philosophy, etc], many representatives of German Social-Democracy inclined towards the latter's views, and accusations of acerbity, intolerance, uncomradely polemics, etc., were hurled at Engels even publicly at a Party Congress. At the Congress of 1877... a resolution [was introduced] to prohibit the publication of Engels's articles in [the party paper] Vorwärts [Forward] because 'they do not interest the overwhelming majority of the readers', and...their publication had caused great damage to the Party, that Dühring too had rendered services to Social-Democracy".

Lenin now turns to the peculiarities of Russia, where in the mid-1890s the "curious phenomenon" of Legal Marxism had appeared

"In a country ruled by an autocracy, with a completely enslaved press, in a period of desperate political reaction in which even the tiniest outgrowth of political discontent and protest is persecuted, the theory of revolutionary Marxism suddenly forces its way into the censored literature and, though expounded in Aesopian language, is understood by all the 'interested'."

The government had regarded only the ideas of the populist terrorists as dangerous and at first welcomed any criticism of them. Then the Government caught on and set its censors on the legal Marxists.

"Meanwhile, Marxist books were published one after another, Marxist journals and newspapers were founded, nearly everyone became a Marxist, Marxists were flattered, Marxists were courted, and the book publishers rejoiced at the extraordinary, ready sale of Marxist literature...It is no secret that the brief period in which Marxism blossomed on the surface of our literature was called forth by an alliance between people of [both] extreme and of very moderate, bourgeois democratic [politics]..."

Then was it not an error for revolutionary and consistent Marxists to ally with people who, thinking they were Marxists, were in fact bourgeois democrats? No, it was not, says Ulyanov.

"Only those who are not sure of themselves can fear to enter into temporary alliances even with unreliable people ... Thanks to this alliance, an astonishingly rapid victory was obtained over Narodism [the populist agrarian socialist terrorists] and Marxist ideas (even though in a vulgarised form) became very widespread..."

"But an essential condition for such an alliance must be the full opportunity for the socialists to reveal to the working



The core of the 2nd Congress of the Russian Marxists in 1903 was the "Iskra agents" who had organised circulation of the paper. Rosalia Zemlyachka was one of those.

class that its interests are diametrically opposed to the interests of the bourgeoisie.

"However, the Bernsteinian and 'critical' trend, to which the majority of the legal Marxists turned, deprived the socialists of this opportunity and demoralised the socialist consciousness by vulgarising Marxism, by advocating the theory of the blunting of social contradictions, by declaring the idea of the social revolution and of the dictatorship of the proletariat to be absurd, by reducing the working-class movement and the class struggle to narrow trade-unionism and to a 'realistic' struggle for petty, gradual reforms...['Economism'] in practice... meant a striving to convert the nascent working-class movement into an appendage of the liberals.

"The 'ex-Marxists', who took up the flag of 'criticism'... entrenched themselves in this literature. Catchwords like 'Against orthodoxy' and 'Long live freedom of criticism'... forthwith became the vogue... This trend did not confine itself to the sphere of literature. The turn towards 'criticism' was accompanied by an infatuation for Economism among Social-Democratic practical workers.

"Let the workers carry on the economic struggle.. and let the Marxist intelligentsia merge with the liberals for the political 'struggle'..."

Dealing with that "Economism" – the scaling-down of Marxist activity to trade-union-type agitation – is a major theme of *What Is To Be Done?*

There was a fundamental difference, Ulyanov argued, between mere "Economists" concerned only or mainly with working-class economic agitation, and "party people" concerned with all the issues of politics whatever their relationship to the economic questions that affected the working class. The "party people" had a societal range to their politics, in distinction from the narrowness of the Economists, even though the Economists' activity concerned workers in a narrow trade-union-type sense.

"The majority of the Economists look

with sincere resentment (as by the very nature of Economism they must) upon all theoretical controversies, factional disagreements, broad political questions, plans for organising revolutionaries, etc. 'Leave all that to the people abroad!' said a fairly consistent Economist to me one day, thereby expressing a very widespread (and again purely trade-unionist) view; our concern is the working-class movement, the workers, organisations here, in our localities; all the rest is merely the invention of doctrinaires, 'the overrating of ideology'..."

"The Economists want the revolutionaries to recognise the sovereign character of the present movement"... i.e., to recognise the 'legitimacy' of that which exists; they want the 'ideologists' not to try to 'divert' the movement from the path that 'is determined by the interaction of material elements and material environment'.... they want to have that struggle recognised as desirable 'which it is possible for the workers to wage under the present conditions', and as the only possible struggle..."

"Dogmatism, doctrinairism', 'ossification of the party – the inevitable retribution that follows the violent strait-lacing of thought' – these are the enemies against which the knightly champions of 'freedom of criticism' rise up in arms..." □

[1] Before the *What Is To Be Done?* of 1902 there was Nikolai Chernyshevsky's famous 1863 novel of the same name.

[2] Plekhanov wanted to expel Bernstein and Bernsteinians from the movement, even though Russian Social Democracy was only starting.

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h, where Ulyanov wrote *What Is To Be Done?*



Right-wing judges license Trump coups

By Tom Harrison

Two and a half centuries ago (on 9 July 1776 to be exact) New Yorkers toppled a statue of George III – a symbolic episode in a rebellion against autocratic rule. The latest ruling of the Supreme Court on presidential immunity has metaphorically put that statue back up again.

The court has abandoned all pretence at judicial impartiality and its MAGA majority now blatantly goes the full nine yards to aid their man who would be king. They have granted him absolute immunity from prosecution for “official acts” committed in office, though apparently not for “personal acts”.

The move has been carefully cooked up by the six thoroughly corrupt right

wing judges over the past few months, and its immediate aim is to derail the three serious criminal cases Trump still faces. These have virtually no chance of coming to trial before the November election and should Trump win they will be magicked away with a quick “pardon me!”

Delay! Delay! Delay! has been Trump’s approach to legal challenges throughout his entire criminal career. Judges now have to determine what Trump can be prosecuted for, given the immunity ruling, by separating “official” from “personal” acts.

Already we have the New York “hush money” convictions being challenged on the grounds that although the crimes took place before Trump became president, he may have signed cheques for Michael Cohen whilst in

office, thus giving Trump immunity.

Other aspects of the judgement are immensely serious because they grant immunity to a candidate with authoritarian intentions who has already declared he wants to be a dictator. Telling the Vice President to overturn the election results. Conspiring to present slates of fake electors. Soliciting state officials to “find” votes. Promoting a coup to overthrow the constitution. All of these things can be construed as “official acts”.

Trump’s admiration for authoritarian rulers Kim Jong Un, Xi and Putin is common knowledge to all worried by it. He admires their ability to do whatever they want with total lack of accountability. Trump’s current talk of military tribunals for political opponents is the latest indication of his

dictatorial intentions and mental derangement.

Now that the courts won’t hold Trump to account, will the American electorate? Things currently look pretty bleak here too, as they face a choice between two candidates both in various stages of old-age mental decay. If Biden decides to stay in the presidential race, then, given his lack of performance holding Trump to account in debate, a second Trump term look inevitable.

It will be the task of the American labour movement, grass roots movements, and the US left to build resistance to Project 2025 and make a better job of fighting the drift to dictatorship than the Democratic leadership have done. □

Downplaying the “evil” in “lesser evil”



Debate

By Ben Tautz

In our debate on the US election, Katy Dollar, [Simon Nelson](#) and co. have argued that advocating a Biden vote, as the least-bad option open to US workers on 5 November, must inevitably result in political illusions and disorientation. I did not and do not believe that is inevitable. But Claireen Ryan and [Wesley Harding](#) for the “vote Biden” camp seem to be doing their damndest to furnish Dollar and Nelson with evidence.

It is a criminal failure by the left that there will not be even a half-decent challenger for working-class politics on the ballot, as Howie Hawkins was in 2020. Given that failure on the electoral front, the main focus of socialists must be to urge organisation and struggles on the other fronts available to workers now, and building an independent working-class force for future contests. These will be necessary whoever wins this election, to confront both the next presidency and the underlying politics of Trumpism.

Within that context, and as a strictly secondary priority, it is honest and realistic for socialists to acknowledge openly that voting Biden, in hopes of holding off Trump, is the least-

bad option available to workers on 5 November.

But that does not permit underplaying or resisting a frank assessment of the Democratic Party and the condition and norms of Democrat-Republican bourgeois politics beyond and before Trump. Yet that is what Ryan and Harding’s recent contributions do (*Solidarity* [710](#), [712](#), [713](#), [714](#)).

Take, for example, Ryan’s warning that “the Republican Party, where it has local power, is changing voting laws to make it more difficult for Black people to vote”. This will hardly come as news to Black (and Latino, poorer, etc) people in the US. Trump-era attacks on their ability to vote, and to have that vote matter, are not novel. They stepped up a pre-existing wave of disenfranchisement, suppression and gerrymandering.

Attacks on voting rights, especially against Black people, never completely went away in the US, but it is true that there has been a renewed onslaught. But accounts of this history, such as David Daley’s in the *New Republic*, show that this new assault on voting power (via gerrymandering) and voting rights (suppression measures including skewed ID requirements, electoral roll purges, closing polling stations, obstructions to registration, poll taxes etc) preceded both Trump and the influx of Tea Party politicians that teed him up.

Their more “respectable” Republican antecedents – Harding’s “normal bourgeois politicians” – consciously cooked up and committed to a strategy for anti-democratic minority rule (e.g. the 2010 REDMAP gerrymandering initiative). Daley shows – including via admissions by Republican officials from the period who have turned against Trump – that the Trumpists did not invent this but in some ways the opposite: it let the proto-Trumpists in, who then embraced and escalated it.

Similarly, [Dollar](#) is correct to argue that many of Ryan’s other warnings about Trump are not new or unique. She shows clearly that, for example, winning elections via sheer spending power and against the popular vote are not preserves of Trump and his Trumpified party. Nelson highlights the fact that Obama oversaw more deportations of undocumented migrants in 2012 than Trump did in his entire presidency. At our conference, some comrades spoke as if they thought armed police presence on US university campuses and even in schools was a new development associated with Trumpism, rather than the long-standing violent norm it is.

Meanwhile, Ryan gives a skewed picture of Biden’s labour credentials by highlighting his visit to a car factory workers’ picket line, while omitting his suppression of

the rail workers’ strike over sick pay.

Clarity on all this matters not only for accurate understanding and maintaining a wider perspective, but also our basic credibility. If, as Ryan does, socialists speak as if we have only just woken up to anti-democratic, racist and reactionary trends and frame them as so exceptional to Trump and Trumpism – if for the sake of putting Trump into contrast, we downplay or recoil from applying critiques more broadly – then socialists can only appear detached, ill-informed and unpersuasive to any listener familiar with the facts, and miseducate those not yet informed.

Yet Harding responds to accurate critiques with the accusation that Dollar “seems to suggest there’s no significant political difference between Biden and Trump for anyone to be bothered about”. False: Dollar clearly identifies a key difference that makes Trump particularly dangerous: the “large and militant collection of right-wing forces” that follow him. It is as if, for Harding, merely contextualising Trumpism and critiquing the Democrats cancels out criticism of Trump as worse, amounting to unacceptable equivocation.

The degree to which Ryan leans on the US courts is also worrying. It is indeed good that the NY court was not too cowed to correctly find Trump guilty of fraud in his electoral

“hush money” trial. It is bad that he has been able to delay other cases. We want to see electoral fraud caught and dealt with. But Ryan says the problem here is that the delays deprive voters of “vital information”. It cannot be the approach of class struggle socialists to preach such reliance on the US justice system – which came to the right conclusion against Trump but which has also fitted-up so many Black and working-class militants before and will surely try again – as an authoritative source of political information.

Ryan is also outraged that the Supreme Court’s interpretation of insurrection laws prevented individual states removing Trump from the ballot. Even the liberal judges agreed that allowing individual state governments (themselves also partisan) to make such decisions could create a chaotic patchwork and not a stronger democracy. Does Ryan not at least pause to consider that a looser interpretation of these laws might also be turned against socialists, or even against any official or office-holder decent enough to refuse dangerous and anti-democratic orders issued by a future Trump/Trumpist presidency?

We must surely be able to “walk and chew gum” at the same time. Ryan and Harding’s apparent refusal to do so is perplexing. Acknowledging

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We can't evade 4 November



By Ollie Moore

Clareen Ryan's [recent articles](#) in *Solidarity* have been entirely too soft on Joe Biden. He uses the fact of Biden's appearance on a UAW picket line as if it tells us something qualitative about the Biden presidency. Why should the picket line appearance, but not the ban on the rail strike (which Ryan dismisses with a "despite"), be taken as the evidence that indicates the political character of the Biden administration, that determines whether he is a "good president"?

Biden's stumbling, inept performance in the first presidential debate, which took place after Ryan's latest article, spectacularly confirmed Ryan's judgement that Biden is "not a good candidate". But even if he were much younger, fitter, and a better public speaker, he is still the millionaire representative of a party entirely committed to, and mostly funded by, corporate capitalism.

Ryan undermines his own (correct) argument, that a vote for Biden, or a Democratic candidate that replaces him, is an electoral necessity to prevent a much worse outcome (a Trump victory), by attempting to make a "positive" case for the Biden presidency. His statement in a previous article, that Workers' Liberty should "see what the workers are doing and get in on it" (i.e., call for a Democrat vote) is near delusional and demagogic. We, as a tiny group on the other side of the Atlantic, are in no position to "get in on" what the US working class "is doing" to any

→ from page 10

Biden as a genuinely lesser evil is not a licence to downplay or recoil from reasonable critique and context concerning him and the Democrats. It does not permit presenting Trump and Trumpism ahistorically, disconnecting them from wider and pre-existing anti-democratic phenomena in bourgeois US politics. It does not require us to preach such reliance on the existing state to regulate politics.

Dollar and co. are wrong to suggest that socialists should not answer the question of what US workers should do at the polling station on 5 November. We should not resign ourselves to the idea that giving a straightforward answer to that question can only result in submerging our wider programme and disorienting ourselves and other workers. But Ryan and Harding provide a poor example. □

significant degree. But, more importantly, no evidence is presented for the implicit claim that rallying behind the Democrats is "what the workers are doing".

Our first responsibility is to assess reality and draw conclusions based on that assessment. In this case, voting for Biden/ the Democrats should be "what the workers are doing", and we should engage with our comrades, correspondents, and contacts on the US left to make that case – and to discuss how they can make the case for such a vote on the basis of independent working-class politics. The case for voting for Biden is simple; preventing a Trump presidency will preserve, for a longer period, more favourable conditions for attempting to build an alternative to both Trumpism and the Democrats.

Simon Nelson attempted, in *Solidarity* 714, to make the opposite case. He says we should not "accept the ultimatum of a Trump vs Biden vote." What exactly we should do instead, other than be "propagandists" (rather than "journalists"), is not spelled out. Making propaganda is important, but what should the propaganda actually say? "Trump vs. Biden is an abject choice"? "We need an alternative"? "Workers need our own party"? Yes, it should say all those things. But none of those statements answer the question, "who should you vote for?"

There are, it seems to me, two honest and coherent answers to that question that comrades like Nelson and [Katy Dollar](#), who believe it is wrong to call for a vote for the Democrats, could give. One is, "don't vote" (or maybe, "spoil your ballot"). That is one direct way to "reject the ultimatum of a Trump vs. Biden vote." Another way is, "vote for someone else", either Cornel West, or other left-wing candidates where they have ballot access.

Anything else is sophistry.

But Nelson, Dollar and others have made neither case, and insist that they do not advocate those options. If so, what their position amounts to is a private hope that people will vote for Biden, but a public self-censorship that insists that we, "the revolutionaries", "the socialist propagandists", mustn't be the ones to tell them to do so. This is a bizarre, frankly sectarian, conception of the role of revolutionaries, which implies that the health of revolutionary politics is maintained by a dogmatic refusal to say certain words ("vote Democrat"), even when you actually want people to do the thing the forbidden words tell them to do.

Nelson argues that, because a Democratic presidency "is not a guarantee or a safeguard against the most illiberal of policies and positioning", to call for a vote for Biden to stop Trump is

misguided. This argument only really makes sense if one sees the differences between a continued Biden administration, and a new Trump administration, as merely quantitative, with no difference in quality.

But there is a difference in quality. If Nelson, Dollar, and others aren't yet convinced that the Trump movement's new plans for power are something more than an unpleasant form of right-wing rule, perhaps more garish, but essentially within the parameters of historic US bourgeois politics and comparable to Goldwater and Reagan, then this article won't convince them.

The Trump movement has a developed plan, expressed in increasingly sharp detail via such initiatives as "Project 25: The Presidential Transition Plan", for a thoroughgoing trashing of bourgeois democracy and its replacement with a de facto dictatorship. The best Nelson can offer to offset the argument about the threat posed is the claim that Trump doesn't have the "level of stability" required for an autocrat. The several highly unstable autocracies known to history suggest this is not, perhaps, the strongest argument. But in any case, the much more serious attitude the upper echelons of the Trump movement are taking to the prospect of government indicates that there will be more "stability" this time.

Evade

It's easy to evade having to take responsibility for the choices people are faced with now through whataboutery: "If we call for a Biden vote to stop Trump, then would we call for a Tory vote to stop Farage? Would we call for a Lib Dem vote to stop the Tories? Where does it end?!" Quite what sequence of events comrades are imagining that could produce a national election where there is a two-party runoff between the Tories and Nigel Farage, I'm not sure. It is not, I suggest, good politics to determine our attitude to concrete questions, posed now, by working back from what we might therefore "have to" say in an imaginary scenario in the future.

Nelson quotes Sean Matgamna arguing that positions should not be determined "only [by] case-by-case decisions on issues as they come up." That's right, but not only making "case-by-case" judgements doesn't mean we should treat our tradition as a kind of "invariant doctrine", a ready-made toolkit of policies we can simply reach into and reapply, regardless of the concrete conditions we're faced with: "US presidential elections... ah yes, here we go... 'the Democrats and Republicans are both parties of capital, the workers need an independent voice!' That'll do."

Nelson suggests Workers' Liberty

previously had a position of "never advocating a Democratic vote." I'm not aware of us having affirmed such a policy, in those terms. We gave favourable coverage to Sanders' campaigns for the Democratic nomination in 2016 and 2020 and, as far as I'm aware, no-one dissented from the implication that, had he won, we would have supported a vote for him.

The case for a Sanders vote was "positive", that it would open up new terrain for arguments about working-class politics and socialism (despite, for Sanders, "socialism" meaning "Scandinavian social-democratic statist welfarism"). We responded to something new in the objective situation: a genuinely left-wing, albeit social-democratic, candidacy for the Democratic nomination inspiring a substantial movement. "Reading off" from "tradition" ("the Democrats are one of the two parties of capital: end of discussion") would have been hopelessly sectarian. It is still hopelessly sectarian to do that now, when there is also something new, and much worse, in the objective situation: the threat of a regime that will substantially worsen the conditions for advancing progressive, let alone socialist, politics.

Re-electing Biden won't, by itself, permanently hold off or push back the Trumpist threat to bourgeois democracy. Perpetuating the US's plutocratic duopoly by ensuring another four years of Democratic administration comes with its own threats and dangers. And even some of the elements of bourgeois democracy we would seek to defend against worse alternatives are limited, invariably class-biased (and sometimes race-biased) forms of half "democracy". But in a very immediate, electoral sense, re-electing Biden is "a safeguard" against "the most" illiberal policies, because Trump has a conscious project for instituting a dictatorship, and Biden doesn't.

The question of what the US labour movement and left should do with the time and space provided by that "safeguard", which may be limited, is ultimately more important than the electoral question. Given the likelihood of a Trump victory, questions of labour-movement and community self-defence may be very immediately posed and need to be discussed in advance, not only as a response if Trump wins. None of us in Workers' Liberty can provide fully developed answers on that; we can aim to develop some answers in dialogue with American comrades. But to self-censor entirely from answering the question of what people should do on election day promotes a version of revolutionary politics more akin to a dogmatic cult than a movement intervening in the real world. □

Roots of the conte



Debate

By Cathy Nugent

The Democratic Party is in disarray after a series of poor performances by Joe Biden, making Donald Trump the front runner to win the US Presidency. Trump will reorganise the US state along even-more authoritarian lines.

In France, Marine Le Pen's "de-demonisation" of the far-right Rassemblement National (RN) has won it the largest share of votes in the first round of parliamentary elections, and its largest share ever in a second-round contest. It has only been kept out of power by the strategic withdrawal by non-RN parties in the second-round vote. In the UK, Reform has split away many votes from the Tories.

These events bring into sharp relief a longer-term rise of a new global far right – the spectrum of populist and ultra-nationalist political parties that have won support through electoral institutions in recent years.

Some parties of the new far right (such as the RN) have shifted their pitch towards relative respectability in order to be seen to move past their fascist roots. In contrast, the US Republican Party has ramped up its populist ultra-nationalism. But both have aimed to build and consolidate a base through anti-immigrant racism.

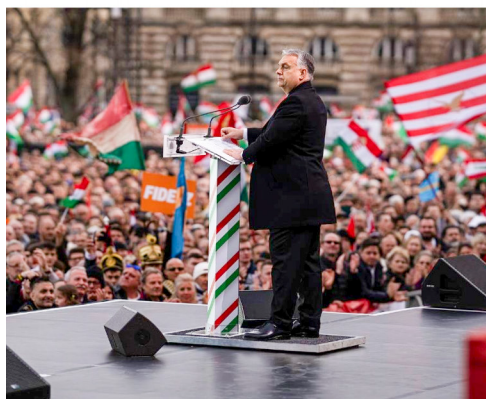
In power, in Hungary, Poland and the US, bourgeois institutions have been subverted. At the same time, these parties have pushed traditional conservatism to the right.

Is the new far right's "constitutionalism" therefore superficial? It is more than that. But how far these parties will go with their reactionary politics and authoritarian measures will be determined by the extent to which the boundaries of "normal" electoral systems can be overturned and the parties would push for that.

Academic writers on the subject have used different definitions, but many (or most) have described these groups as a non-fascist far right (NFFR) [1]. Why are these groups not fascist, what are their main characteristics and how does the renewed Trump phenomenon fit into this picture?

Fascism, a distinct form of class rule

Fascism emerged after the 1914-18 war, as European empires disintegrated and the Russian revolution triumphed. Between the wars, the fascists built on prewar ultra-nationalist forces and



responded with violent force against working-class struggles, claiming to provide a better solution to acute economic crises.

For most of this period the more dominant forces on the right were authoritarian, nationalist and traditional: regimes and parties that defended the old order of existing elites – the church, civil service, army and monarchy. The fascists, in contrast, starting with Mussolini, were revolutionary in their ultra nationalism. The fascist party was intended to form the basis of a new elite. Fascist influences spread wide; many non-fascist groups shared their ideas and sensibilities. On the other hand, the widespread diffusion of fascist political formations across the whole of Europe only came after Hitler's rise to power in 1933.

Nonetheless there were alternative highly authoritarian governments existing alongside fascism, taking the place of a parliamentary government. These examples may be more instructive for our own situation. Just as Dollfuss in Austria, Horthy in Hungary and Pilsudski in Poland inaugurated enormous social and political reaction to "save" an existing order, so too would the contemporary far right.

Fascism's nationalism has some of its origins in the virulent and reactionary European right-wing nationalisms of the late 19th century and was accompanied by renewed antisemitism. And in Germany and Italy this ultra-nationalism was based on the idea of restoring the nation after a period of decline. In the context of economic crises the fascists put great weight on the "social", to provide answers to a mass of the popu-



lation. It was a collective approach, but to an abstract dehumanised collective.

Hence violence was tolerated as a means to power. All of this was sometimes embodied in the charismatic leader, who appeared to operate on instinct and passion more than ideas.

With national unity as its aim, fascism was explicitly about suppressing class distinctions and displacing all other isms: capitalism, socialism and if women's social aspirations had been so named at the time, feminism as well. At their beginnings, the Italian fascists faced both ways – against capitalism and against the workers' movement.

Fascists believed society could be top-to-bottom reorganised – in a reactionary way. The mass organisation of committed members was central to the consolidation of fascist rule – either for forming an electoral bloc or to participate in street-fighting against external and internal enemies. Both Mussolini and Hitler were expansionist and consolidated their rule through external enemies.

The strongest templates – Italian fascism and the Nazis – were different from each other and also exceptional in many ways but they, and other examples of interwar fascism, were characterised by two distinct taxonomies. These make it quite different to the contemporary NFFR.

• Fascists reject, and are on a definite trajectory to reject, the majority-rule principle in bourgeois constitutional rule. In power, the contemporary far right, Orban's Fidesz for example, may not respect elements of this form of rule and the Trumpian think tanks want to further expand the Executive in the US

constitution, but these are authoritarian reformulations of institutions. That is not the same as the total destruction of parliamentary democracy, on which for now, the base of NFFR groups rests.

• Fascists build and consolidate a radically distinctive alternative social order based on the mass mobilisation of the population and they do this with violence. The NFFR wants something compatible with neoliberal capitalist norms. For example, RN and others favour the racist "national welfare" – social entitlements for "native" citizens. Further, on the whole, NFFR mobilises its support through bourgeois democratic practices (elections), and networks including social media in a reactionary, but less "totalitarian" way.

Trotsky's definition of fascism as a combination of progressively authoritarian government and "totalitarian" practices throughout society with the latter being the most important element is still a good guide:

"When a state turns fascist, it does not mean only that the forms and methods of government are changed in accordance with the patterns set by Mussolini – the changes in this sphere ultimately play a minor role – but it means first of all for the most part that the workers' organisations are annihilated; that the proletariat is reduced to an amorphous state; and that a system of administration is created which penetrates deeply into the masses and which serves to frustrate the independent crystallisation of the proletariat. Therein precisely is the gist of fascism ..." (*What next? Vital questions for the German proletariat*, 1932, emphasis added).

It has been argued that Franco's Spain was more of an authoritarian dictatorship than a fascist regime. But as Trotsky argued, Franco's insurgency, backed by the fascist Falange, was a distinctive bourgeois reaction, pitted against not only the Republic but the revolutionary workers' movement. That was why Trotsky argued workers' defence against the fascists had to be aimed at going beyond bourgeois democracy.

Trotsky was observing fascism's drive to annihilate a much stronger class struggle than we see today. Nonetheless, his key idea – that fascism was a distinctive and innovative form of capitalist rule – is not only useful for the historical analysis and context but also for contemporary debate for three key reasons.

• Firstly, then and now, we can't assess the authoritarian regimes and groups by measuring how extreme they are or how close they are to the "spirit" of fascism; it is their trajectory

Temporary far right

which is important. We need to prepare for the worst and be alert to any shift away from the strategic embedding of the NFFR within constitutional government. We should operate on the basis that in certain circumstances *there will be such a shift*.

Secondly, context is important. The progressive main streaming of the far right over thirty years is related to the failures of neoliberalism [2]. Our socialist message has to focus on those failures: tackling poverty and inequality, forcing governments such as the Labour Party to deliver for workers.

Thirdly, designating all non-fascist far right groups as fascist in order to measure how extreme they are muddies our perspective on our ability to build a defence. Figures like Orban and Trump would make very radical inroads into bourgeois procedural democracy, but they are not there yet.

I return to these principles in a later article.

The contemporary non-fascist far right in Europe

The non-fascist far right has to be viewed in its historical development. Cas Mudde (2019) and others have identified four waves for the far right (both fascist and non-fascist) since the Second World War. The analysis is focused on Europe, but there are continuities with the experience outside Europe.

In the first wave, after the Second World War, some fascists active before and during the war continued to organise around their old ideologies. Most however assimilated into the post-war bourgeois democratic order. The die-hards were very marginalised, with the exception of the Italian Social Movement (MSI) which continued to be represented in parliament but only became officially “post-fascist” in 1995, when it was renamed the National Alliance.

In the second wave, from the mid-1950s to 1980, new far right groups not as closely aligned with fascism as the MSI, and not openly against bourgeois democracy, were established. Some had things in common with fascism – the French Poujadists for example, used violent language against the French Parliament [3]. Others were more in the conservative mould – the anti-tax and anti-immigration Danish Progress Party for example. By the mid-1950s violent neo-fascists, such as the British National Front founded in 1967, were also reviving.

The third wave from 1980 to 2000 saw the rise of non-mainstream but electorally-oriented far right parties.

The FPÖ in Austria had been transformed into a NFFR group, shedding its Nazi heritage, by its leader Jörg Haider. After the fall of Stalinism a range of far right parties developed in Eastern Europe. By the 1990s all these groups were contesting elections and gaining enough votes to establish footholds in parliamentary systems.

In the fourth wave from 2000 the same parties, and new similar parties, adapted ideologically and became even more electorally successful. Some have been or are now in power (Fidesz in Hungary), others are very small (Greek Solution with ten out of 300 parliamentary seats).

Four factors lie behind the growth of the NFFR in Europe (and elsewhere):

- The near-destruction of the post-war welfare state and growing inequality which labour movements have been unable to stop or reverse.
- The failure of mainstream liberalism in parts of the post-Stalinist world which opened up a space for populism and more far right and ultra-neoliberalism modes.
- More recently, the fallout from the 2008 financial crisis, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, hikes in the cost of living and rising inequality.
- The internet has served as a recruiting sergeant for the toxic politics of the NFFR.

Alongside the rise of the far right there have been shifts in European electoral politics: a decline in the vote for both Social Democratic and the traditional conservative, including Christian-Democratic, parties. In their place electoral choices often fall between realigned liberalism (neoliberal and socially liberal parties) and the non-fascist far right. We’ve also seen the less strong but still significant rise of a populist left such as La France Insoumise, Die Linke and Podemos. These parties are quite different.

With bourgeois democracy much more stable than it was between the wars, the orientation of the NFFR to constitutionalism is more long-term but not guaranteed. However, further success, or alternatively their temporary frustration such as that experienced by Reform and the RN, will embolden these authoritarians. In addition, although the NFFR sits within bourgeois democracy it is often populist against it.

Wilders talks about a designated “pure people” against a corrupt elite, a political establishment. It is a dishonest appeal; none of these groups are anti-elitist.

The key message of the NFFR is ultranationalism characterised by xenophobia, identitarianism (e.g. Pan-Nordic

ideology), nativism and sometimes populist racism. Many draw on reactionary local legacies. The racism of the NFFR is variously antisemitic, anti-Roma but especially anti-Muslim. Some parties are welfare-racist – welfare is for whites. Anti-immigration policies are lined to various cultural grievances and ideas such as ethnopluralism – the idea that ethnic groups are “equal but different” but should not therefore be “mixing”.

Another aspect of ultranationalism is an “anti-globalist” stance and the institutions associated with “globalism”: the EU, the UN, the WHO etc – the claim here is to restore sovereignty on the basis of the people. There are right wing think tanks, groupings and media which straddle the non-fascist and fascist far right. The NFFR has many connections with conspiracy theory networks. Some further far right groupings became more prominent in Europe in recent years. Pegida (high point 2014-6), had links with RN. However overall, none of these groups in their current iteration are revolutionary reactionaries in the same way as fascists.

The fact that NFFR is now mainstream presents us with very particular challenges. They are succeeding in normalising racist and xenophobic ideas. They can normalise and spread contempt for the rule of law and rational political discourse. The conservative right (for example, the Tory Party in the UK) is deliberately championing what were once the far right’s policies and approach.

Trump

Trump both follows and is an exception to the general pattern. He is an authoritarian on a par with Orban who from 2002, linked up with football ultras and the then far right Jobbik, to help get Fidesz in power; in power Orban instituted illiberal bourgeois democracy. The Trump phenomenon is similar to Europe in its reactionary populism: Trump styles himself to be outside the party system in order to amplify an accumulation of inchoate political grievances taken to a new pitch.

But Trump is significantly more defined by the political eco-system (and money-making machine) around the Republican Party than the eco-system of US fascism or even the conspiracy theorists. Indeed Trump is building an alliance based on a longer US tradition of reactionary politics.

One part of Trump’s alliance is mainstream ultra-conservative Republicans who want to win the next election and institute baked-in gerrymandering of elections. Another part is Trump’s own infrastructure which has captured the GOP. He also has the support of the

highly diffuse, not very diverse, Republican-affiliated MAGA movement. The neo-Nazi fringe which has lent him support is not a factor in his success. The Republican Party is not a fascist party, it is a formerly conservative party which has been transformed into a far-right authoritarian constitutionalist party.

The Tea Party – a Republican-supporters-plus mass movement dating back to 2008 – was instrumental in that transformation. In 2015 the Tea Party’s congressional group enjoyed a second wind with the Freedom Caucus. Its 40-odd members have been solid allies for Trump in Congress. Trump inherited and developed the ideologies of the Tea Party period which are in turn rooted in US society, radically unequal on class and race lines, as well as the traditional libertarian themes of a reduced role for (central) federal government etc.

What turbo-charged the Tea Party was hatred and opposition to Barack Obama who symbolised, if not embodied, a changing demographic and social order. It was of a piece with the “paranoid” style in US politics, rooted in the Cold War. The Tea Party was highly focused on anti-immigration policies and new iterations of anti-black racism based on stereotypes about African-Americans not having so-called “American values” of hard work, honesty etc.

In any other US election, it would be right for socialists to take no position on the choice between Democrat and Republican in order to boost decent third party candidates and/or amplify our propaganda for independent working-class political representation. In the second part of this article I discuss why socialists cannot afford to stand aside and take no position in the 2024 US election, and what more we can do about the far-right threat. □

[1] There is a debate about the degree to which the NFFR differs from fascism. Enzo Traverso (2019) calls the contemporary phenomenon “post-fascism” in order to highlight a degree of historical continuity with interwar fascism.

[2] The AWL discussed the far right spectrum and its context in early 2020. At that point no one was calling Trump, or any of the other examples of the electoralist far right, fascist with the exception of the RN, rather that they were ideologically simpatico and informally associated with a broader spectrum of far right groups, networks, conspiracy theorist platforms etc.

[3] Very arguably fascist.

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 quiet couple of weeks have seen a donation from Ed bring our total up to £13,170. As we head into the final weeks before Ideas for Freedom, can you help us

beat our target? □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/fund

GMB ballots at Amazon BHX4

By Satya Pine

A union recognition ballot of 3,000 workers at the Amazon fulfilment centre in Coventry started on 8 July (to 15 July). In the run-up, workers turned up the pressure on Amazon and for "getting out the vote", with protests at eight Amazon sites, including Coventry and at the London headquarters calling out the bosses' disgraceful union-busting.

In early July, digital posters also went up at bus stops and billboards around

Coventry city centre, calling on Amazon workers to join the GMB union and vote yes to recognition.

The campaign inside is going well, too. Many workers are confident they'll meet the threshold. One onlooker in the GMB scholarship program said "came back from my little vaping prison just as there was loud applause" following a workers' session, adding that "the look on the faces of the three managers will sustain me in dark moments for years to come".

But managers are keeping up an intense pressure, too. Whether their union busting will work, or rebound on them by strengthening workers' resolve, we will know soon.

You can help by leafleting at the gates, 6:30am-7:45am and 5:30pm-6:45pm every day in the week starting 8 July, or by phone-banking at Chylesmore Community Centre 8am-8pm (excluding leafleting times). Or donate to the fighting fund, bit.ly/amz-f, or sign the petition, bit.ly/amz-pe. □

SOAS student co-president faces expulsion threat

By Sam Myerson

Abel Harvie-Clark, elected as co-president Democracy and Education at SOAS university in London, faces expulsion from the university, with a hearing on 11 July, because of his part in the SOAS Gaza protest camp. Support Abel at bit.ly/abel-s

Abel had already been suspended, and now the university has raised the odds. SOAS Director Adam Habib has been attempting to intimidate students into leaving the Gaza camp, which is outside the university's security system. A video circulating online shows Adam Habib squaring up to a student to shout in their face.

Generally, over the last month, as term has ended, exams have finished, and graduations have started in earnest, many student Gaza protest camps have been issued with notices to quit by University managements.

There were around 36 camps after May Day, when many were launched. Now around 12 remain with a core of activists willing to stay on in the face of



legal challenges.

In Nottingham, Bristol, and Birmingham students in the camps have been taken to court over the encampments. In Bristol, the county court has recently declined to give the University a possession order, thus refusing to allow the university to call in the bailiffs to clear the site. The High Court will rule on the Birmingham and Nottingham camps this coming week.

In Sheffield students were issued with a notice to quit by the university weeks ago, and access to facilities and power was cut off the next morning.

So far, no court order has been issued, and the camps remain.

Across London, a number of camps remain, but they are much smaller, and are hard to access, mostly situated behind campus security gates.

The violent repression of the camps in the US has not been repeated here. There have been exceptions where police and campus security have roughly handled protestors. In Oxford, university authorities brought in

heavy equipment to remove a garden that had been erected.

The politics of the camps continues to degenerate. In Sheffield the RCP (Socialist Appeal, as was) has been banned from the encampment for breaking an instruction to not organise openly or sell their paper. We disagree with that decision.

For the camps to be effective, and for self-organisation of students to develop, we require both the right to organise and democratic spaces to be established where debate can flourish, not be shut down. □

Reclaim the Power organises for Drax climate camp



Environment

By Sam Myerson

The last "gathering", or organising meeting of Reclaim the Power was in Sheffield on 29-30 June. It was a well-attended event with a lively atmosphere looking forward to the climate camp at the Drax wood-fuelled power station on 8-13 August.

We focused on finalising arrange-

ments for the schedule of events. An interesting and diverse set of programmes has been curated for the 5 day camp. Sessions on orientation towards the workers' movement have been a priority pushed by Workers' Liberty activists, along with those in Reclaim the Power who share that orientation.

Other sessions will cover liberation, borders, the relation of the movement to race and class, and the need for internationalist perspectives in the fight for determining our environmental future.

With the increase in state repression of climate activists in the last month that saw the arrest of dozens of Just Stop Oil activists of 28 June, there is some trepidation about what that means for the rest of the movement. Reclaim the Power have been clear that they organise differently from the Roger Hallam approach of self-sacrifice, which meant throwing people unnecessarily, in fact deliberately, into the hands of the police, with the promise that beyond a certain number of arrests the system would not be able to cope and would have to make concessions. □

New money for the junior doctors!

By Sacha Ismail

As *Solidarity* went to press on 9 July, negotiations began between doctors' union the British Medical Association (BMA) and new health secretary Wes Streeting, with a view to resolving junior doctors' 14-month pay dispute.

That Streeting, on the most conservative wing of a very conservative Labour leadership, moved so fast to meet the BMA is testament to junior doctors' persistence and militancy.

In general industrial disputes went quiet as the general election approached. In contrast the junior doctors organised five days of strikes right on the eve of the election (27 June to 2 July), taking them to 44 days since their campaign began last year.

The existing offer the BMA dragged out of the Tories works out at about 9% – better than most public sector workers, and than what most NHS unions pushed their members into accepting, but not good in the context of sharp real-terms pay cuts for junior doctors, probably more than 25%, over a decade and a half.

The BMA is looking for a significant boost to the offer and for the government to make a longer-term commitment to "pay restoration" – restoration of real-terms pay to its 2008 level and above – as has been done in Scotland and Wales. Some say that Streeting plans to follow the approach of funding any increase through moving money within the NHS budget, i.e. cuts to services.

The labour movement must demand any pay increase is funded by new money from central government. We should actively seek to disrupt the Labour leadership's reluctance to commit significant new money to public services.

And, as the negotiations begin, we need to make more, not less noise in support of the junior doctors. Invite a speaker to your union branch, and find ways to make solidarity publicly.

If junior doctors feel the need to return to the picket lines, they should be supported and encouraged.

How much the BMA can extract from the government and how it is funded could have significant implications for how the Starmer government relates to trade union demands and to the fate

of the NHS and public services in the coming years.

Merseyside Fire Brigades Union has initiated a labour movement appeal in support of the junior doctors: bit.ly/fbu-m □

Suspended for solidarity

The Unite union is [balloting](https://bit.ly/cam-l) workers at Cammell Laird shipyard, Birkenhead, from 8 July to August, for strikes to defend five workers suspended after the workforce refused to cross RMT picket lines at the yard on 25 June. More online: bit.ly/cam-l □

PCS faces difficult fight on pay restoration

By a PCS member

On 12 June the PCS union published [online](https://bit.ly/PCSCharter) "The PCS Charter – Our demands to a future government" (most members do not peruse the PCS website). It [issued it](https://bit.ly/PCSCharter) to members shortly before the general election. The first of the Charter demands is three-pronged, for "A return to national collective bargaining for civil service pay, pay restoration and an inflation proof pay rise." Two large obstacles confront that demand.

First, the Labour Government's plans for dealing with the perilous condition of public services are woefully inadequate and do not include restoring the purchasing power of civil service pay after 16 years of pay freezes and below-inflation pay awards.

Labour may or may not be willing to permit "inflation proof" rises for 2024, but without serious pressure it is highly unlikely concede to a process of "pay restoration" involving 2024 pay increases significantly above the rate of inflation. It will certainly resist any "return to national collective bargaining" – after nearly thirty years of a divide and rule system of delegated pay arrangements – if that involves, as it should, a return to cross civil service unified pay rates. Second, PCS failed

to obtain legal strike mandates – leverage for this year's pay round – in most areas of the civil service in the disaggregated strike ballots held between February and May: only 62 bargaining units (BU) covering 19,160 members secured both majority Yes votes for action and the legally required 50% turnout, while 109 BU, covering 127,800 members, failed to do so. The [responsibility](https://bit.ly/PCSCharter) for this situation rests with the previously dominant Left Unity Group (LU).

Since the strike ballots, only now is the union's National Executive (NEC) being told of discussions with BU that got over the 50% threshold. This delay

is due to the LU group, now reduced to a minority on the NEC but controlling the union officialdom and the national President post, obstructing the proper running of PCS by the [new NEC majority](https://bit.ly/PCSCharter), the Coalition for Change. The pay situation facing the NEC majority is now exceptionally challenging, but the NEC majority must insist that PCS seriously engages the Government in pay talks while planning for a possible unacceptable response to our pay demands and needs – planning strike action in those areas where mandates have been secured, and members are still willing to strike, and preparing for a new civil service wide ballot. □

Justine campaign scores a win

By Katy Dollar

The victimisation of Justine Canady, branch secretary of Lewisham Unison, has been pushed back by local and national campaigning.

Justine was facing immediate redundancy by Lewisham's Labour council as part of a restructure only affecting her post.

Justine is chair of the union Greater London Young Members' forum. She had replaced a previous branch secretary who had been in post for decades. The change of branch leadership had led to increased turnout in national consultations, a net increase in membership for the first time, recruitment of new reps and activists, and a new branch focus on equalities work with a Black Members' Officer, an LGBT Officer, a Women's Officer, a Disabled Members' Officer, and an Equalities Officer recruited.

Following the threat of notice of dismissal within weeks, activists across Unison and the Lewisham labour move-

ment mobilised a defence campaign. It got a commitment from Unison to mobilise the entire union in defence of her.

Under pressure from the public campaigning, Lewisham council has announced that they will delay any notice of redundancy until March 2025, giving Justine time to secure another job within the council. This is a partial victory, but it would not have been possible without the campaigning.

Facility time

Under Tory and Tory-led governments since 2010 there has been increasing pressure on local government union reps. In 2011 local government minister Eric Pickles slammed paid facility time as a "non-job" and pledged to clamp down on them. He told the Conservative Party Conference: "They cost the public sector – that's taxpayers to you and me – a quarter of a billion pounds a year. That's money taken away from frontline services."

There have been attacks on facility time across local government ever

since. In order to protect themselves, some full-time reps have wrongly sought more "partnership working" to buy favour with employers, making militant trade unionists like Justine stand out more.

All trade unionists and all our trade unions should be fighting for the interests of workers against bosses. Our protection is collective organising and solidarity. □



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A good moment, but a fraught future

By Martin Thomas

"To see the dejection of the leaders of the Rassemblement National was a good moment for all those who did not want to 'try out' the far right in government", declared France's Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (Révolutionnaires) (NPA(R)) after the second round of France's legislative elections, on 7 July. "The strategy of 'Republican withdrawal' adopted by parties present in the second round worked". All candidates winning more than 12.5% of the electorate can go into the second round, but the left – NFP, New Popular Front – and the pro-Macron coalition Ensemble agreed, with some glitches, to withdraw in favour of the best-placed where the RN was in the second round.

The NFP has 182 seats (plus 13 "various left"); Ensemble 168 (plus 6 "various centre"); Les Républicains 45 (plus 15 "various right"); and the RN 126 (plus 17 "Ciotti Républicains" allied to them).

The strategy "worked" in its own terms. But it has helped the RN push its claim to be the only alternative to an unprincipled blob of "established politics". The RN is willing to wait until the next elections, probably in 2027, to reap the gains.

Prime minister Attal remains in office for now. Greens leader Marine Tondelier is pushing the idea of a centre-left coalition government. Macron may try for a minority or "technocratic" government (the prime minister does not have to be a member of parliament). Parliament has no way of removing the president, the president has scant capacities of rule by decree short of using Article 16 of the constitution (previously used only during the failed 1961 military coup), and the president cannot constitutionally call another legislative election for a year yet. It is hard to imagine Macron resigning, since his chosen successor would be sure to lose. Impasse.

The idea of local "committees of action" regrouping anti-RN and labour-movement activists has been taken up by the French socialist web-

site [APlutSoc](#). The other splinter of the NPA, the NPA(A), talks of "NFP collectives".

Macron and his prime minister Gabriel Attal hurried to fill many top bureaucratic and military jobs in the few days before 7 July, and other top officials pledged to disobey an RN government. The 7 July vote showed the alarm is wider. That may indicate a base for continuing organisation and activity.

Whatever government formula emerges in the next weeks, it will not stop the long drift of the discontented towards the RN and the drift of French big business towards accepting the RN as an option. The big cities still largely vote left, but the RN's solid voter base is now wide.

The Démocratie Révolutionnaire current in the NPA(R), although welcoming the RN 7 July setback, [denounces](#) as "demagogic alarmism" any idea that the RN has aims beyond "getting in on the parliamentary game in order to pursue the same policies as Macron, only worse".

The RN has, progressively since 1972, put much effort into "sanitising" its image. In the run-up to 7 July its leader Jordan Bardella promised stability and suggested that almost all its policies apart from a cut of the VAT rate on electricity, gas, and fuels to 5.5% were subject to postponement. Yet it has a decades-old core of strongly far-right activists. As the French writer Ugo Palheta puts it, we should [worry](#) about the RN's possible "fascist future" as well as its "fascist past".

The RN claims that around the election its membership has grown to 100,000. Not huge: but then the Socialist Party and the Communist Party are only around 40,000, the biggest union confederations 600,000 each, and the left SUD-Solidaires confederation 100,000. Our comrades of the revolutionary left got 1.15% on 30 June, though they got over 10% in the presidential election of 2002.

There is no way out other than via on-the-ground revitalisation, reorganisation, regroupment and growth of the French workers' movement and a fight for a workers' government. □

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Gaza: ceasefire still urgent

By Ira Berkovic

Much coverage now says that Israel's war in Gaza is shifting to a less "intense" phase. But for the people of Gaza that means more of trying to stay alive in bomb-site ruins, with scrappy and unreliable food supplies, increasing malnutrition and disease, and meagre healthcare.

Inside Israel, over 5,000 activists gathered in Tel Aviv on 1 July for an anti-war, anti-occupation conference (see p.3). International activism must combine three strands: demands for diplomatic pressure on the Israeli state, material support for the besieged Palestinian people, including fundraising efforts for humanitarian initiatives such as Medical Aid for Palestinians, and political solidarity with anti-war, anti-occupation forces inside Israeli society. The urgency is not diminishing.

Meanwhile things get worse with Israel's occupation of the West Bank. The army has carried out house demolitions in the village of Umm al-Khair, and has allowed settlers to cut off the village's water supply.

Part of Israel's motivation for scaling down, but not withdrawing, its military presence in Gaza is the intensifying conflict with Hezbollah on the Israel-Lebanon border. Forces withdrawn from Gaza can be redeployed there.

Although Israel is, for now, holding back from a full-scale invasion of Lebanon, the risk of a bigger

war there remains acute. On 4 July, media outlets were reporting that negotiations over a ceasefire and hostage-exchange agreement were due to resume, and even that Hamas had softened its position. If so, that may be a response to growing domestic discontent.

According to a recent report by the BBC, increasing numbers of Gazans blaming them for failing to put any protections for the civilian population in place, despite knowing their 7 October attacks would be met with brutal retaliation. The report also quotes Gazans criticising Hamas for embedding themselves, and their Israeli hostages, within civilian infrastructure. There are also allegations of Hamas fighters interfering with aid distribution.

Anyone speaking out against Hamas inside Gaza deserves praise for their courage. The conditions of life imposed in Gaza by Israel's war make it extremely difficult for organised political alternatives to Hamas to emerge. Israel began its war claiming it was going to "destroy" the Islamist paramilitary party; in fact, it has guaranteed its reproduction.

An immediate ceasefire and hostage-release agreement remains the best way to halt the ongoing slaughter, save the lives of the surviving hostages, and open the way to aid and reconstruction of civil life. □





Solidarity

For a workers' government

SUPREME COURT SAYS TRUMP CAN BE KING



**Right-wing judges
license Trump coups**

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