

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



**For social ownership of the banks and industry**

# BANKS, BILLIONS, AND PROFITS

## Rebuild NHS! We can't afford capitalism

*See Page 2*

### **Battle against university cuts**

At least 70 universities  
are cutting courses and  
jobs

*Page 9*

### **21-25 Sep: Labour in Liverpool**

Time to rebuild the  
left in the labour  
movement

*Page 7*

### **The unions and Ukraine**

Many unions have still  
not taken a clear stand  
for solidarity

*Pages 12-13*

### **Trump and 5 November**

Reports and debate as  
we come within two  
months of US election

*Pages 15-19*



# Banks, billions, and profits



Editorial

Keir Starmer now [says](#) that with his government “things will get worse before we get better”. Thus his excuse for keeping the two-child benefit cap, curbing winter fuel payments, demanding cuts (supposedly by “efficiency”) in the civil service, and offering nothing on the escalating financial impasses in local councils and universities.

Bad enough. And the promise of “better” is notional. The main evidence Starmer cites is the government’s National Wealth Fund, a pot for investment which is mostly a repackaging of existing funds. It is promised £7.3 billion. Sounds a lot, but it is trivial. Even now total investment in the UK runs at about £400 billion a year, and total household wealth at about £12,000 billion.

The issue is multi-layered. At one level Starmer and Reeves are timid in terms of standard capitalist economics, consumed by fear that international financiers will see them as not strict enough in curbing inflation.

A new [report](#) from the New Economics Foundation shows that the government is “wasting billions in public money boosting bank profits”. “The Treasury has covered over £45 billion worth of losses at the Bank of England since 2022 and £100 billion more expected in the next five years... The banking sector is currently receiving tens of billions a year, while public services have been asked to find three billion pounds of extra cuts...”

All that is rooted in the Quantitative Easing scheme, started in 2009 to pump up the banks in the financial crisis by the Bank of England (BoE) giving them cash in return for then-difficult-to-sell government IOUs (bonds). The BoE also started paying banks interest on the reserves they hold with the BoE (they are legally required to hold at least a minimum).

Now the interest rates are higher and the BoE is selling off some of its bonds, at a lower price than it bought them



for. The Treasury makes good the BoE’s losses. In essence, the commercial banks owe much of their high profits in recent years (average £30 billion a year, 2019-23) to government subsidies.

Such people as [Gordon Brown](#), [Larry Elliott](#) of the *Guardian*, and the very conservative [Chris Giles](#) of the *Financial Times*, have proposed instead that the BoE should pay interest on only some of the reserves. Another option, taken by the US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank, is for the BoE just to sit on the losses. (Central banks can’t go bust: the BoE can never run short of its own IOUs (pounds)).

Reeves and Starmer are scared that such moderate tinkering could spoil the reputation of their “fiscal rules” to squeeze inflation.

The tinkering would easily offset the Reeves cuts. So would a move by the government towards rejoining the Single Market and the EU. They would not be enough to reverse the trend since 2008-10 for British capitalist society to become more mean-spirited, cruel, and scrappy.

at about £600 billion a year, and then big companies make vast pay-outs to top bosses not officially recorded as profits: most of the CEOs of the top 100 companies are paid [£4.2 million](#) a year or more.

The Unite union has [called for](#) a wealth tax. [Tax Justice UK](#) calculates that a small wealth tax, equalising tax rates on capital gains with those on income, and a bit more would raise £60 billion a year for public services.

Even that is a tiny dip into the £600 billion of profits, or the £12,000 billion of wealth much of which is held by the top 1% or 5%.

The rich can always soften tax rates by avoidance and flights of capital. To cut the roots of exploitation, the working class has to win social ownership and democratic control of the material productive resources now held by the profiteers, the factories, transport and communication systems, offices, IT resources, etc.

We want the “moderate” measures, the BoE changes, the taxes on wealth and capital income. We do not say “all or nothing”, or that Reeves and Starmer can claim a mandate for making “things worse before better” unless and until we win a majority in the labour movement for *Solidarity’s* masthead slogan, “social ownership of the banks and industry”.

But we must organise a strong consistent, not just halfway, left. Otherwise a mean-spirited, cruel, and scrappy society may well, as in Germany, France, and the USA, brew up a mean-spirited, cruel, and scrappy opposition among millions who see the labour movement as seeking only damage-limitation for an “insider” minority amidst general decay. □



## Activist Agenda

### Meetings

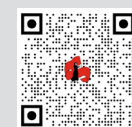
**Sat 7 Sep:** Fight the Right, abortion is healthcare: 10:00 from Home Office, Marsham St, London SW1P 3NT

### 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](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) for more.

### Template motions

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



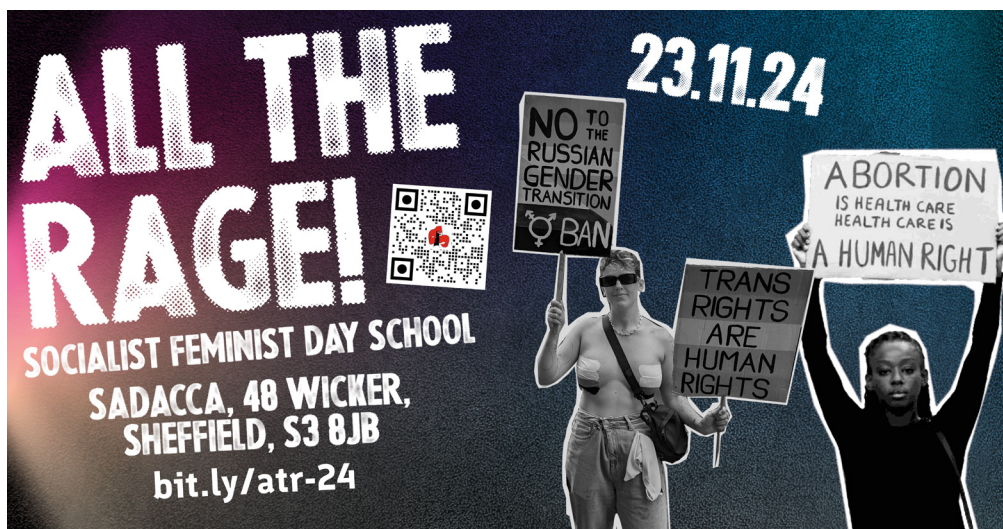
**Scan the QR code to see our events & meetings page.**

### Socialist-feminist book clubs

[workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs](https://workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs)

### 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 email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org). □



# Threat rises of wider war

By Ira Berkovic

The threat of a wider regional war remains acute around Israel-Palestine. The Iranian retaliation for the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran has been delayed but is almost inevitable. Israel will then launch counter-retaliation, maybe escalatory.

A full-scale Israeli invasion of Lebanon, to attempt to destroy another military rival, Hezbollah, also remains possible. As well as Haniyeh, Israel has also recently assassinated Hezbollah leader Fuad Shukr. On 21 August, it assassinated Khalil al-Maqdah, a leader of mainstream Palestinian nationalist party Fatah. Israel accused him of working with Iran. That may or may not be true; but for Israel to assume the “right” to assassinate leaders of Fatah – which, unlike Hamas and Hezbollah, is not ideologically committed to the destruction of Israel – represents a further escalation. It is hard to disagree with Fatah official Tawfik Tirawi’s response that these actions are “further proof that Israel wants to ignite a full-scale war in the region.”

Israel’s war on Gaza has now killed over 40,000 people, around 2% of the total population of the besieged enclave. The complete destruction of a huge amount of infrastructure, and lack of any functioning civil emergency services to carry out rescues and excavations from rubble, mean that there are likely to be many more dead yet unaccounted for.

The 40,000+ figure is tallied by Gaza’s Hamas-run Health Ministry, and does not differentiate between combatants and civilians. According to the Israeli military’s own claim for the number of Hamas fighters it has killed (17,000), a large majority of the dead are civilians. A significant proportion are children.

Short “humanitarian pauses” have been agreed so that international agencies can vaccinate children in Gaza against polio. But one child has already been paralysed by the disease. Other diseases are spreading. Gazans also face the risk of malnourishment and starvation.

In recent weeks, Israeli strikes on schools used as shelters by displaced Gazans have killed dozens. The Israeli military blames Hamas for civilian deaths, claiming the schools were being used as Hamas command centres.



It is true that Hamas embeds its military infrastructure within, and below, the civilian population of Gaza. And population centres are now even more overcrowded than pre-war, with numbers swelled by refugees from areas Israeli bombing has turned into uninhabitable wastelands. But the fact Hamas infrastructure is embedded within the civilian population does not justify the highly indiscriminate prosecution of Israel’s war. Every such strike represents a conscious decision by the Israeli military to declare dozens of innocent Palestinians acceptable collateral for the “gain” of eliminating one Hamas command centre or rocket launch site. From the start, the war has been pursued as an act of bloody nationalist vengeance, inflicting collective punishment on Gaza’s entire population.

Negotiations towards a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement continue, but with few signs of progress. The main current sticking point appears to be Israel’s insistence of maintaining military control of the Philadelphi Corridor, the area along Gaza’s border with Egypt, as well as establishing military checkpoints to screen displaced Gazans returning to their former homes, or the areas where their former homes once stood, in the north.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to resist pressure from all sides – international and domestic, including from Israel’s military establishment – to conclude a deal. His own political interests are best served by indefinite war. Netanyahu’s policy not only brings death and devastation to Palestinians, but imperils the surviving hostages.

The Prussian military theorist [Carl von Clausewitz asserted](#) that “war is merely a continuation of policy by other means”. Attitudes to wars should therefore be determined primarily by an assessment of the politics of which they are a continuation. What political outcomes would a victory for either side represent? What political aims are each side attempting to further by fighting?

A full-scale regional war in the Middle East would be a reactionary bloodbath on all sides, with all sides pursuing thoroughly reactionary political aims. On all sides, fascistic political forces with eschatological ideological commitments are hegemonic, or at least influential.

Despite attempts by some on the radical left to imbue it with progressive, anti-colonial content, the bellicosity of Iran and its paramilitary allies and proxies, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, towards Israel offers the Palestinians no path to liberation, and is inseparable from Iran’s ultra-conservative, and deeply antisemitic, Islamist ideology. Conversely, a destructive Israeli war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, with an inevitably high civilian death toll, would be a projection of regional-imperialist power by a state convinced that security for its own people requires both the permanent subjugation of the Palestinians, and an all-consuming militarism.

Both settler violence, and official Israeli military action, are increasing in the West Bank. As the left-wing Standing Together movement rightly put it: “Settler terror is not simply the behaviour of small groups of extremists. When settlers violently attack Palestinians, it forces them to flee their homes, which is exactly what Israeli policy in the occupied West Bank aims to do. Settler terror is not an unfortunate consequence of the occupation, it is an instrumental part of it.”

The activity of Standing Together represents the best hope for building a force within Israeli society that can challenge the hegemony of the settler movement and the reactionary right. They continue to constitute an explicitly anti-war, anti-occupation bloc in ongoing anti-government protests, which call on the government to conclude a ceasefire agreement but emphasise the hostage-release element rather than foregrounding solidarity with the Palestinians. In recent weeks, the movement has been holding conferences throughout the country, as part of its new “Yes, Peace” campaign. The

campaign aims to rally Israeli citizens around the demand for a peace settlement that guarantees equal rights, including an equal right to self-determination, to both peoples, Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Although it is, for now, a mainly propagandistic effort, Standing Together are right to insist not only on the cessation of the immediate war, but on the horizon of peace and equality. Articulating a vision for it is a necessary step in building a movement that can win it. Standing Together has also been working with aid agencies to carry out donation drives, especially in Palestinian towns within Israel, to collect food and other essential supplies necessary for confronting the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Here in the UK, the UK Friends of Standing Together network will hold a public meeting in London on Tuesday 17 September, addressed by Palestinian and Jewish leaders of Standing Together via Zoom, with Standing Together staffer and Palestinian journalist and peace activist Lana Ikelan speaking in person. More: [ukfost.co.uk](http://ukfost.co.uk)

Demands on our own government to increase diplomatic pressure include withdrawing all the state licences via which UK firms sell arms to Israel. On 3 Sep the government announced some licences would be stopped. Such demands must be taken up within the trade union movement, and especially via affiliated unions within the Labour Party. Given the small proportion of Israel’s military imports coming from UK firms, such measures will be only symbolic. Nevertheless, such symbolic actions can have an impact.

Another measure UK-based activists must demand from the Labour government, even more symbolic but perhaps more politically significant, is recognition of the State of Palestine. The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination is an inalienable democratic right, not something only to be considered at some never-to-be-reached point in the future when Israel decides Palestinian self-determination is compatible with its security interests. □

## Solidarity 719

Solidarity 719 will be dated 2 Oct (copy date 28-29 Sep). Then we end our summer schedule and return to our regular weekly routine. □

→ from back page

Israeli military action in the occupied West Bank. Hundreds of Palestinians – some members of paramilitary groups, but also many civilians, including children – have been

killed there since 7 October. Recent weeks have seen Israeli tanks rolling through West Bank streets, as well as further settler pogroms in Palestinian villages. The Palestinians have the right to resist Israeli occupation, arms in

hand if necessary. But no path to Palestinian freedom via overwhelming Israel by force of arms is possible.

Freedom, safety, and secure self-determination for either people can only come via a political settlement which

guarantees it to both. This means a mass social movement in Israel, demanding a new political reality in which the whole country is not held hostage by the messianic and eschatological ambitions of the settler movement, linking

with political self-assertion by Palestinians, including Palestinian citizens of Israel, demanding equality. □



# MS doesn't support its own comrades in Venezuela



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The Venezuelan election of 28 July seemed to follow a familiar pattern. The National Election Council announced a clear victory for the incumbent Nicolas Maduro, the opposition immediately alleged fraud and claimed to be the real winners, the US government announced that it would recognise the opposition as the victors and street protests by opposition supporters followed.

This might appear to be pretty much what has happened after every Venezuelan election since 2004 when the re-election of Maduro's predecessor Hugo Chavez was met with violent protests and false claims of fraud from the opposition. But this time was different.

Until last year the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), a traditional Stalinist outfit like the Communist Party of Britain which runs the *Morning Star*, supported Maduro. Now the PCV says: "We alert international public opinion that just as the government of Nicolas Maduro has stripped the Venezuelan



people of their social and economic rights, today it intends to deprive them of their democratic rights" (statement, 29 July).

There is strong, independently verified evidence of massive electoral fraud. The authorities are still refusing to publish the detailed results, with the figures broken down to voting centres and polling stations, as required by Venezuelan law.

Not just the US government and right-wing regimes are challenging the result. Governments sympathetic to Maduro, including Brazil, Mexico and Colombia, have also questioned the result and called for a breakdown of the vote count. Gabriel Boric, the centre-left leader of Chile, called the result "difficult to believe."

Human Rights Watch described the electoral process as "being severely marred by human rights violations and irregularities, including arrests of oppo-

sition members, arbitrary disqualifications of opposition candidates, arbitrary restrictions imposed on Venezuelans to vote abroad and [on] young people."

The strongest evidence that something different has been happening this time is the response on the streets: the protesters have not been the opposition's traditional middle-class supporters, but the working class in the barrios and other areas that were once bastions of the Chavez/Maduro "Chavismo" movement.

## 23 killed

The authorities have responded with (according to their own figures) 2,400 people detained and (according to UN investigators) at least 23 protesters killed as part of Maduro's promise to "pulverise" the popular movement against him. At the same time, public sector workers are being hounded out of their jobs for speaking out against Maduro. The socialist leader of the United Oil Workers of Venezuela, Jose Bodas, has issued a statement saying workers in the state-



owned oil company PDVSA "are calling us to inform us of massive layoffs being carried out... This is a political retaliation against numerous workers... who demonstrated against Maduro's government ..."

In the face of such blatant election fraud and such a vicious crackdown on working class protesters, one might expect the Communist Party (CPB) of Britain and their mouthpiece, the *Morning Star*, to condemn Maduro. But no.

Wasting no time and ignoring all available evidence, the CPB issued a statement ("USA and UK Hands Off Venezuela!") welcoming the result and stating: "The election was conducted in peaceful conditions and free of interference / irregularities as confirmed by a large body of independent international observers".

In fact, many international observers were excluded and the two most important observers, the UN and the Carter Center, have refused to recognise the result, with the latter stating the election "did not comply with international parameters and standards of electoral integrity and cannot be considered democratic".

The *Morning Star* has carried at least eleven articles and reports on the election and its aftermath, all of which regurgitated Maduro's propaganda and one of which ("US media's Venezuela coverage: a masterclass in propaganda and imperial apologia", 13 Aug) openly backed Maduro's attacks on protesters and rejected any questioning of the result on the grounds that it (supposedly) comes from "sources that brought us the Iraq war based on 'weapons of mass destruction'".

Do those "sources" include the PCV? It seems pretty extraordinary that the PCV statement doesn't even get a mention in the *Morning Star*. □

## Ukraine can still win this war



Eric Lee

For some time now, the consensus in the mainstream media in Britain and elsewhere has been that Ukraine has effectively lost the war with Russia. Slowly and methodically, Russian troops have taken village after village from the Ukrainians, at considerable cost in lives. The Ukrainians seem to be just falling back, never advancing. No major Ukrainian counter-offensive took place this year and there were no set-piece battles for the Ukrainian army to win, as they did when re-taking the city of Kherson in 2022.

As the *Morning Star* put it, "Russia's military superiority has repeatedly forced Ukrainian troops to retreat to avoid being captured or killed."

Some weeks ago, a *Guardian* columnist went so far as to defend Nigel

Farage's pro-Kremlin views. "The west's urgent task must be to get Putin off his self-impaled hook, to stop the bombing and killing. Those now mooted a settlement seem to agree that this will involve the partial division of Ukraine along a ceasefire line and some redefinition of its eastern regions," wrote Simon Jenkins. He berated some British politicians for "heaping insults on anyone who, like Farage in his other remarks, is clearly arguing for peace."

The views expressed by Jenkins and Farage only make sense if you're convinced that Ukraine cannot win this war. And by "win" I mean what the Ukrainians themselves have defined as a victory: recapturing all the territory seized by Russia in their criminal war of aggression.

When you think about it in that way, a Ukrainian victory seems more likely than a Russian one. Victory for Putin means the complete subjugation of Ukraine, the collapse of its government

and probably the occupation of the entire country up to its western borders. This is a far more challenging task militarily than what Ukraine has set for itself to do.

## Hope

And in early August, despite the defeatist rhetoric promoted by the Kremlin and its allies in the west, Ukraine gave us some cause for hope.

First of all, the Ukrainian military announced that its forces had sunk the Russian submarine Rostov-on-Don in the port of Sevastopol, in occupied Crimea. The Ukrainians claim to have now sunk a third of the Russian Black Sea fleet – and have done despite not having a navy of their own.

Then we had the news of the arrival in Ukraine of the first F-16 fighter-bombers with many more on their way. Giving such high-tech weapons to the Ukrainian air force will level the playing field in the skies. The Russians will no longer be

able to bomb Ukrainian population centres and infrastructure with impunity.

And finally, Kursk. In the first large-scale incursion by Ukrainian ground forces into Russia, it appears that they had the element of surprise and caused panic in the Kremlin. They also managed to destroy a considerable number of Russian missiles stored in a warehouse.

None of these developments mean that Ukraine has an easy road ahead of it. But it has a road.

Now is not the time for politicians in Britain and the West to adopt the defeatist line being preached by Farage and his ilk.

Ukraine can win this war, but only if its allies – and public opinion in the West – don't lose their nerve, and stand firm against Russian aggression. □

• Eric Lee writes here in a personal opinion column. He is the founder-editor of LabourStart.

# Afghan women sing against new laws



## Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Women in Afghanistan are now banned from singing or speaking outside their homes. Afghan women, refugees and some still in Afghanistan, have posted videos of themselves singing in protest against the Taliban's laws banning women's voices in public.

The brave women posted on social media using hashtags such as "#My voice is not forbidden" and "#No to Taliban".

The Taliban rulers of the country have passed a new law on "Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice," escalating the crackdown on human rights and women's rights in particular.

It expands existing discrimination such as mandatory dress codes, the requirement for women to have a male guardian (mahram), and the segregation of men and women in public spaces. The new laws also force women to wear thick clothes that completely cover their bodies and faces while in public, and bans them from looking directly at men to whom they are not related to by blood or marriage.

The law further criminalises LGBTQ+ people and restricts the rights of religious minorities, forbidding "non-Islamic" ceremonies and prohibiting association with or assistance to "non-believers".

The Taliban's morality inspectors have authority to detain and punish individuals for acts designated as moral crimes. The law authorises the inspectors to enter people's homes.

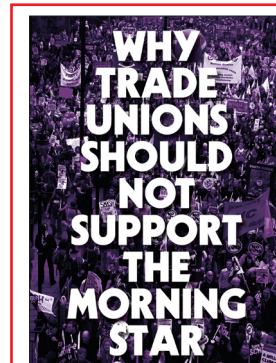
Since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, they have eroded women's rights. Women and girls cannot at-



tend secondary school, are banned from nearly all forms of paid employment, and are forbidden from parks and gyms. Earlier this year, the Taliban also announced the return of stoning women to death for adultery.

In 2001, commenting on the USA's plans to invade Afghanistan, we wrote: "War by the US and Britain on Afghani-

stan or neighbouring countries will not halt Islamic-fundamentalist militarism... It will not touch – may even comfort – many of the strong bases of fundamentalism; through its disruptions it may well generate more recruits for fundamentalism". The Taliban's return to power has been followed by a return to 1990s morality codes and repression. □



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# Drop charges against Drax camp organisers!



## Environment

By Sam Myerson

In the early hours of 8 August, before Reclaim the Power (RtP) activists were due to set up the climate protest camp near to the Drax power station in Selby, North Yorkshire, they were pre-emptively arrested by police.

22 were taken into custody and equipment was seized – safety equipment, toilets,

wheelchair accessible flooring, tents and fire safety. A further three arrests were made in the following days. The arrests stopped the camp taking place.

A statement from RtP signed by over 150 organisations has condemned the actions of the police, but made no concrete demands on what should happen next.

When the arrests were first made, Supt Ed Haywood-Noble was reported by the BBC as saying that the reason for the arrests was overstretched police resources following the far-right riots. Later, so the Guardian (26 August) reported, the police said their action was due to "legal obligations" to "ensure that people who work at Drax and members of the local community could go about their daily business".

The implication of the first statement is that RtP activists were wrongfully arrested, and should have all charges dropped. They were pre-emptively arrested to economise on policing effort when the camp went ahead, not for actually committing an offence.

But North Yorkshire police have made clear that they are

continuing investigations into "further criminality".

The Guardian (2 Sep) has reported that in December 2023 assessments the police saw the far right (what they called "cultural nationalism") as a threat – "attendance will be at low levels and disruption minimal". They were more concerned about "pro-Palestinian" and "environmentalist" protests.

RtP have said in a statement that the actions of the police demonstrate that they see environmental activism as more of a threat than the organised far right.

These arrests follow on from many arrests of Just Stop Oil activists and long sentences for some of them, and from a clampdown on environmental protests more generally. The effects of the Police Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 are playing out in front of us. If activists raise their heads to challenge the state then they can be arrested under the auspices of "conspiracy to cause a public nuisance".

Yet in Rotherham, only after the fact did South Yorkshire police deploy enough numbers to provide some protection to those in the hotel

housing asylum-seekers that violent racists were attempting to set on fire. Across the country, as could be expected, the police lost control of the streets. That was not through a lack of numbers, but by political choices signalled in the December 2023 assessment.

### Impact

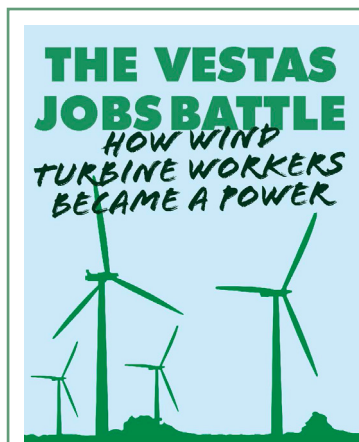
Preparations for the Drax camp gave the opportunity for climate activists to get together, discuss and debate ideas, but the shutting down of the camp, on top of the arrests of JSO people, will have long-lasting ramifications for the climate movement.

RtP did not have a backup plan. That choice largely stemmed from the thought that the climate camp would be a staging post for a planned piece of direct action, to which the camp was clearly subordinate. A camp with a public back-up plan would mean some people coming who would only wish to come if it was a "legal" setting.

But having a back-up plan is not admitting defeat. With many already planning to travel to Yorkshire, a back-up plan could have been a valuable use of activists' time.

There is a need for a working-class orientation in the climate movement. We continue to press for the climate movement to engage with workers through the unions and through campaigns to organise in the workplace for workers' climate actions. Hopefully RtP will regroup, and organise for further climate action.

They have a fundraiser to replace the equipment taken. With a goal of £60,000 it is ambitious, but they are already over £10,000. □



The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition contains new material, plus photos from the campaign and occupation. £4 (inc. post) □  
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# Flixborough and workplace safety



By Les Hearn

It was one of Britain's worst peacetime explosions, Britain's worst industrial "accident", when the Nypro plant at Flixborough exploded on Sat 1 Jun 1974, just before 5pm. Of 72 workers on site, nearly 90% were casualties – 28 dead and 36 injured. All 18 workers in the control room were killed. In the wider area, there were 53 casualties, with nearly 2000 houses damaged by the blast and windows blown out three miles away in Scunthorpe; it was heard 35 miles away. The outcome could have been much worse, however, had the explosion occurred a day earlier, when the full workforce of 550 would have been present.

At that time, safety at work had a far lower priority than it now has. The 1974 Wilson government had passed the Health and Safety at Work Act months earlier but it was only implemented with the setting up of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive six months after the disaster.

Trade unions and socialist groups had however been agitating for greater protection for some time. An influential book, *Hazards of Work: How to Fight Them*, written by Patrick Kinnersly, was published by Pluto Press in 1973, and extensively promoted to trade unionists by International Socialism activists.

The June 2024 *Chemistry World* spoke to experts and survivors about the Flixborough disaster. One, trainee plant operator Dave Roberts, 21 at the time, had asked for Sunday off to spend with his fiancée but was told that he would have to take Saturday off instead.

## Wrong

The Nypro plant manufactured caprolactam, the monomer that is used to make the form of nylon known as nylon 6 (as opposed to nylon 66; nylon 6 was devised to sidestep patents). In the Nypro plant, caprolactam was made from cyclohexanone, the precursors of which, like those of nylon 66, were made from less flammable liquids and solids. A new process, introduced in 1972, used the precursor cyclohexane, a flammable liquid that vaporises easily. This was oxidised to cyclohexanone in six reactor vessels, one of which was found two months before the explosion to be leaking cyclohexane. With no qualified engineer available to advise on safety, it was simply disconnected and the neighbouring reactors connected with a makeshift pipe made of different widths joined in a dogleg. The plan for this was just sketched in chalk on the floor.

As chemical engineer Robert Skelton



told CW, the pressure of the fluid stressed the bent pipework so that it eventually ruptured. Some 50 tonnes of cyclohexane vapour escaped and mixed with air to cause a fuel-air explosion equivalent to about 16 tonnes of TNT when ignited.

## Fires

The area was devastated and fires burnt for 10 days. A firefighter, Terry Bontoft, described to the BBC "40 acres of fire". Firefighters had to ignore the distress of survivors while they tried to quell the flames and look for more survivors.

One survivor was 24-year-old chemist Eddie Hotchin, who lost a childhood friend in the blast. He was blown across the floor and ended up under debris. He returned after sick leave but was unable to manage even a day, such was his psychological trauma.

On the previous Friday, Dave Roberts dropped off his best mate John at the plant to do the Saturday shift, arranging to pick him up for work again on Sunday morning, but that was the last time he saw John. Next day, he heard the blast but was unable to get near the plant. Dave took part in the search for his workmates' bodies with the local mine rescue team, at one point finding John's half-burnt ID card. When they found a body, the searchers were sent to have a cup of tea while it was removed: that was all the counselling they got, according to Dave. The search took a month.

## Cheaper

Speaking to *Socialist Worker* at the time, Patrick Kinnersly said "In a sane, socialist society, the Flixborough plant would never have been built. For the nylon we need...we would stick with

the ICI system [and] devote all our ingenuity and resources to making that... completely safe...rather than finding a different and more dangerous way to make nylon just to get round patents". Kinnersly later enlarged on the criminality of the Nypro set-up. Nylon 6 wasn't as good as nylon 66 but could be made more cheaply. The caprolactam precursor could be made more cheaply still by substituting volatile highly flammable cyclohexane for less flammable phenol. The cyclohexane was oxidised to cyclohexanone in high pressure, high temperature vessels, 300 tonnes at a time. Corrosion caused one vessel to leak, hence the bypass pipe; this was never checked for faulty welds; there was no automatic shutdown valve to limit loss of cyclohexane; there was no steam curtain (like sprinklers) to limit the possibility of ignition.

## Inquiry

At the time, *New Scientist* expressed the hope that the disaster would lead to a genuine improvement in industrial safety but, as SW reported, trade unions were slow to move and workers' involvement was minimised; Secretary for Employment Michael Foot met Nypro management and local mayors but not shop stewards. A court of inquiry was duly set up, concluding, as the HSE reports, "A plant modification occurred without a full assessment of the potential consequences... Those concerned with the design, construction and layout of the plant did not consider the potential for a major disaster happening instantaneously". However, the inquiry was complacent about the inherent safety of the plant, referring to "the coincidence of a number of un-

likely errors in the design and installation of a modification... very unlikely to be repeated". It attributed the disaster, not to a lack of safety consciousness among Nypro's management, but to "accident, mishap and misadventure".

Subsequently, no one was held to account for Flixborough. Since the establishment of the HSE, fines can be levied, while the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 allows for the prosecution of companies. However, this has rarely happened, and never so far for large corporations.

Workplace deaths have declined by about 80% since 1974 (but there are still a significant number). No doubt workplace practices have improved but much of the decline in deaths may be due to the destruction of manufacturing and mining industries since the time of Thatcher.

Along with the rise in safer "white-collar" jobs have come decline in TU membership, and cuts in funding and staffing of the HSE, both pre- and post-Brexit. These have led to a [reduction](#) in pressure for safety measures from workers and cuts in frequency of even [mandatory](#) HSE inspections. □



# Labour in Liverpool, 21-25 Sep

By Colin Foster

Motions submitted by local Labour Parties (CLPs) for Labour's conference (21-25 September, Liverpool) include:

- tax the millionaires and billionaires to rebuild the NHS
- decriminalise abortion
- reaffirm trans rights.

The closing date for motions is 12 September, and we expect motions for scrapping the two-child benefit cap, for a crash council-house programme, and more to be submitted by then.

Getting to the floor of conference is another matter. The old rule that motions must be "contemporary" has been restored. In some past years that has been used to rule out relatively few motions; but in others, under Ed Milib-

and, many; and it may well be like that this year.

In 2022 and 2023 the priorities ballots brought almost no sharp debates to the conference floor, because the right wing won constituency delegates to prioritise bland topics, and the unions also chose blandness for their priorities.

So far, the CLP nominations for the National Executive Committee (ballot opened 27 August) give a unfavourable picture of the mood of CLPs.

At the TUC on 8-11 September, the unions will fire several shots across the bows of Labour leaders who say that the government will make things "worse before they become better" (Starmer) and that "Keir Starmer and I decide our policy, not the trade unions" (Reeves: not the CLP members, or even the MPs or Cabinet, either?)

Whether they will remain combative at Labour conference (on two-child benefit cap, NHS, social care, public sector pay...) remains to be seen.

The *Observer* [reported](#) in June on Labour HQ plans for more "leaders decide" rule changes. By evil tradition, such rule-change ideas are usually sprung on unions only days before the conference (it happened even in the Corbyn era, in 2016) and on CLP delegates only hours before. The word is that union leaders are likely to resist, but we can't be sure.

The World Transformed, a spin-off from the Corbynite Momentum group, will this year cease its routine since 2016 of organising a political "festival" on the fringes of Labour conference. This may increase the vitality of traditional "fringe meetings", which have faded somewhat since 2016.

Labour Left Internationalists plans a meeting (23 Sep, 6:30pm), and also the Labour Campaign for Council Housing (same day, 1pm). Pride in Labour (not yet fixed), and more.

It would be foolish to expect a left breakthrough at this conference. We can hope for some beginnings of re-composing a left opposition within the labour movement which has been sketchy since the collapse of Corbynism or at least since 2021. The effort is important. International trends suggest that without it, the anger that develops against Starmerism will get channelled by the far right. □

## Nurses strike in Iran

By Dan Katz

The clerical-fascist Iranian regime is attempting to repress a widespread and growing nurses' strike. In the last week nurses in Babol, Qaem Shahr, Sabzevar, Khorramabad, Isfahan and Khomeinishahr have joined the dispute.

Workers have refused to attend shifts, staged sit-ins and demonstrated demanding pay increases, payment of unpaid wages, an end to forced overtime, retirement eligibility after 20 years of service, improved working conditions and better security inside hospitals.

On Wednesday 21 August nurses protested outside the Ministry of Health in Tehran as well as in the cities of Marivan, Ahvaz and Isfahan. In Tehran the nurses chanted, "Overtime pay of 200,000 rials (\$0.33), Shame! Shame!"

The strike wave has spread to at least 39 cities and 70 hospitals.

The nurses' action started on 5 August following the death, three days earlier, of Parvaneh Mandani, a 32-year-old nurse at a hospital in Fars province. Mandani's death has been attributed to "Karoshi syndrome" or death from overwork.

Nurses are often forced to work 16-hour shifts.

Over the past week the regime has begun to respond by summoning activists and making arrests. Firouzeh Morjrian Sharq from Ghaem hospital in Mashad has been arrested, as

have Zahra Tamadon for participating in a rally in Tehran and two nurses in Arak. 31-year-old nurse Pouria Esfandiari from Milad hospital in Tehran has also been arrested for joining a demonstration.

The strikes are being led by the Coordinating Council of Nurses' Protests which on Friday 23 August issued a statement calling on nurses to stand firm and demanding the release of their arrested colleagues.

The government has admitted that it owes nurses 75bn rials (the equivalent of \$117mn) in unpaid wages. This is a staggering amount, especially given the normal wage of an Iranian nurse is the equivalent of between \$200 and \$250 per month. The Ministry of Health has delegated nurses' wage payments to individual hospitals which are radically underfunded and often fail to pay, or underpay, nurses.

Nurses have increasingly become the victims of violence from patients and their families. Stabbings and physical attacks are becoming more common.

Consequently, and given the depth of the social and economic crisis in Iran, where the regime is bitterly hated by the majority of the population and inflation has run at over 50% for five years, many nurses are emigrating. At least 150-200 nurses leave the country each

month and the shortage of nurses is estimated at 100,000.

10,000 doctors have left Iran in the last two years.

Videos are appearing of nurses' protests. In Khorramabad nurses chanted, "Promises are not good enough, our pockets are empty!" In Khomeinishahr nurses called for unity and denounced embezzlement.

The nurses have considerable support in the general population as many remember their bravery during the Covid-19 pandemic, which was characterised by a cynical, incompetent and lying response from the Islamist government and tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths.

The Islamic regime in Iran shut down all independent labour movement organisations in the 1980s, replacing unions with state-run Islamic labour councils whose job was to police the working class. In the 1990s union activists began to establish independent union committees and organisations – the most well-known of which are the Drivers' Union of Tehran Public Transport, the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Syndicate and the Teachers' Association.

The Drivers and Truckers' union has called for solidarity with the nurses' strike action, along with the teachers and Tehran bus drivers' unions.

The state often attempts to use a combination of small

extra payments and extreme repression to derail workers' protests. In the run-up to the recent presidential election pensioners received an extra 3mn tomans (\$50), which although far short of their demands, did undermine their public protests. Teachers' protests in recent months were dealt with by mass arrests plus the payment of one month's extra salary to retiring teachers and teaching assistants.

Agitation also continues amongst the permanent and contract workers in the southern oil and gas fields. On 26 August several demonstrations took place. In Bushehr, permanent staff protested at the Fajr refinery, and also at the Parsian Gas refinery.

Contract workers seem to have agreed to protest every Tuesday.

The main demands of the oil workers are: dismissal of corrupt officials, permanent jobs for all workers, better pay and pensions and payment of backpay.

The strike of 1,000 Wagon Pars workers was also continuing as of 26 August. Wagon Pars makes rail wagons and locomotives in Arak, 200km southwest of Tehran. The workers are objecting to layoffs, the lack of permanent contracts and corrupt management and they are demanding the rehiring of dismissed workers. A video from 22 August shows a very large protest march outside the factory. □



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# What next in Bangladesh?

By Sacha Ismail

Over the summer enormous protests in Bangladesh – the world’s eighth largest country, with over 170 million people – overthrew the autocratic regime of prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

The protests were spearheaded by students and young people, revolting against a quota system for public-sector jobs that privileged supporters of Hasina’s Awami League party. Outrage against bloody repression of the protests, with hundreds killed, fuelled their escalation into a “July Revolution”. Hasina fled to India on 5 August.

This was an uprising for democracy and, in a certain sense, for social rights and social justice. The Awami League, the party that led Bangladesh’s 1971 “Liberation War” against Pakistani imperialism, has since 2008 created a sort of soft one-party state in the country. It was by any socialist or democratic standard a right-wing regime, violently repressive and pursuing radically neoliberal economic policies. The Bangladeshi people were right to revolt against it.

Unfortunately the cast of politics in Bangladesh means that other more explicitly right-wing forces may benefit from the overthrow of Hasina. The economic and political role of various imperialist powers in Bangladesh – including Russia, China, the US and particularly India – complicates things further.

Active solidarity with genuine democrats, with the democratic left and socialists, and with Bangladesh’s not insignificant organised working class, is urgent.

In June Bangladesh’s Supreme Court ruled to restore the public-sector quota system abolished in 2018 after repeated waves of protest over more than a decade. This system reserved 30% of jobs for descendants of “freedom fighters” in the 1971 national liberation struggle. In practice it functioned as a way for the Awami League regime to dispense patronage and reinforce its rule: hence the name of one of the main organisations leading this summer’s struggle – the Anti-discrimination Students Movement. The background, in addition to general dissatisfaction with Awami League repression and corruption, is the scarcity of decent and secure jobs for Bangladesh’s large young and graduate population. More than a third of graduates in Bangladesh remain unemployed two years after graduation.

Student protests about the quota began in June, accompanied in July by a university teachers’ strike over pensions. In July, as the protests ramped up and generated mass direct action



the government responded with a level of violence not seen even during the military dictatorships that ruled Bangladesh in the late 1970s and 1980s. Over the next month the army, the police and gangs connected to the Awami League, particularly its student organisation Chhatra League, were unleashed on protesters, with something in the region of five hundred mostly young people killed and thousands injured or missing.

A number of murdered student activists – including protest leader Abu Sayeed, videoed facing armed police just before they shot him, and Mir Mahfuzur Rahman or Mugdho, shot while giving out water to protesters – became iconic martyrs of the movement.

Hasina further fuelled the bitterness by denouncing the students as “Razakars” – Urdu for “volunteers”, the term used for predominantly Islamist militias that aided Pakistan’s slaughter of the Bengalis in 1971. This continued a long tradition of the Awami League accusing anyone who opposes it, from whatever angle, of betraying Bangladesh’s founding liberation struggle, but was particularly egregious.

## Wider

On 21 July the Supreme Court reversed course, cutting back the quota to 5%. But by then the student movement had developed much wider demands relating to ending the repression and curbing the government’s repressive powers. The protests surged again, on a huge scale. On 3 August leaders of the Anti-discrimination Students Movement announced that from then on their sole demand was the resignation of Sheikh Hasina.

Hasina fled on 5 August, but in the intervening time dozens more protesters were killed. It has been reported that Hasina demanded the army leadership enforce a curfew using deadly force, but they refused. (Reports also circulated earlier in the struggle of junior officers refusing to carry out orders for repression.) Soon the army chiefs were meeting with politicians including from Bangladesh’s main opposition

party, the right-wing – Islamic-conservative and, where the Awami League is “socialist”, openly neoliberal – Bangladesh National Party to form a government.

However, with students and their allies in control of the streets, the coordinators of the Anti-discrimination Students Movement insisted that an interim government should not

be led by the army and should in some sense represent the movement that had overthrown Hasina. The result is a government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, an elderly economist famous for pioneering “microcredit” schemes supposedly addressing poverty.

Yunus’ cabinet includes two leaders of the Anti-discrimination Students Movement and is in overall composition broadly liberal, including some women’s rights advocates and representatives of minority communities. However it also includes an Islamist minister for religious affairs.

Yunus and co. will pursue a variant of neoliberalism. We must support Bangladesh’s workers’ movement and left, particularly those organising for independence from the government.

Neither the Bangladesh National Party nor its far-right Islamist ally, Jamaat-e-Islami – a leading force among the actual Razakars who collaborated with Pakistan in 1971, some of whose leaders have, the deeply problematic nature of Sheikh Hasina’s justice system notwithstanding, plausibly been convicted of war crimes – are represented in the Yunus government.

It is not yet clear when elections will be held. But when they are, pre-existing organised political parties and forces may be decisive. The BNP, Jamaat and other right-wing forces are already taking this opportunity to expand their influence. There is a huge risk that Bangladesh will end up with a new right-wing government, but this time with an Islamic-sectarian and Islamist bent – in stark contradiction to the democratic ideals that motivated the student uprising.

The recent chaos has seen Islamist-led attacks on Bangladesh’s Hindu minority – which even after years of decline accounts for something like 8% of the population, about 14 million people. On the other hand student activists have organised to physically defend Hindu temples and homes.

Support for the rights of minorities in Bangladesh – Hindu communities, and others including non-Bengali indige-

nous peoples persecuted by the government (especially in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area, in the south-east) and the huge number of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar – is a crucial test for Bangladeshi democrats.

India’s far-right Hindu nationalist regime has, unsurprisingly, promoted the narrative that Hasina was overthrown by an Islamist-driven and anti-Hindu movement. There is great resentment in Bangladesh about Indian influence in the country since it intervened to aid the liberation movement of 1971, influence at its strongest when the Awami League was in power (1970s, 1990s and post-2008). This summer’s revolt was in some respects also an uprising against Indian domination. But greater alignment with Pakistan and with the US is not a good alternative.

For many years Hasina manoeuvred adeptly between Indian, Chinese, Russian and US imperialism, with the skids greased by her seemingly unassailable position and years of strong economic growth delivering great benefits for Bangladeshi and foreign capitalists – until the popular movement tripped her and sent her flying. All these great powers will now be reviewing their strategy and tactics in Bangladesh.

## Left

Bangladesh’s left has weakened over the years, and some of it is discredited by support for the Awami League, which despite the reality of its rule has never stopped trading in a sort of leftist posturing and rhetoric (it seems to now be promoting the idea that it was overthrown at the instigation of the CIA). Again, solidarity with the democratic left and socialists and with the workers’ movement is crucial.

At various points over the years Bangladesh’s workers, particularly in its huge garment sector, have organised spectacular mass struggles.

Last year major strikes and aggressive demonstrations by garment workers won a minimum wage increase of over 50% – far short of their demands, but over double what the employers proposed. The garment workers are mostly women, an important fact in the context of the growth of right-wing religious politics in Bangladesh.

Of course workers did join the recent protests. The National Garment Workers Federation reports that eleven garment workers were killed in the repression (eight of them its members), over fifty injured and a similar number imprisoned. Bangladeshi workers have not decisively made their voices heard in the upheaval. We must help comrades in Bangladesh help them do so. □

• Solidarity statement from UK trade unions and activists, initiated by No Sweat: [bit.ly/bd-ns](http://bit.ly/bd-ns)

# Stop uni cuts: run unis as a public service

By Will Roberts

Around 70 universities either are now making job cuts, or have already made cuts. These cuts will result in huge numbers of course closures and fewer contact hours for students.

Many cuts are being “achieved” through voluntary redundancy schemes. Arts and humanities subjects are the most at risk. Cuts are also being made to STEM, health education, and teacher training.

At Goldsmiths, the threat of a Marking and Assessment Boycott and an indefinite strike brought management to the negotiating table. The union branch has ensured no compulsory redundancies for this academic year, but the fight is far from over. More cuts, and closures of courses such as the Queer History MA (the only course of its kind in the country), are sure to come.

Very many post-92 universities (former polytechnics) are affected. At Sheffield Hallam University, a ballot was passed in May, meaning that unless significant changes are announced in the next few weeks, a strike will take place 23-26 September. The strike demands are: no compulsory redundancies, retaining existing employment policies, no breach of framework agreement, no work intensification. Despite over 150 leaving through a voluntary severance scheme, cuts continue. A restructuring of professional services will badly affect student welfare.

The vast majority of cuts are at less prestigious institutions, which struggle to compete by recruiting students. Many of those are in smaller cities, where universities are one of the better and more secure employers and course closures and job cuts will leave many in the local communities worse off.

Universities are claiming cuts are necessary because of falls in student recruitment. With the new academic year around the corner, many universities are still waiting for “clearing” to close, so incoming student numbers are still unclear. But a Universities UK survey of 70 different institutions found that there was a 44% decrease in international postgraduates enrolling.

It is unclear whether universities are making cuts out of actual financial necessity, or because they feel under pressure to ensure they remain competitive. Many universities making cuts are sitting on a lot of money, but are unwilling to keep jobs and courses.

At many universities local branches of the higher education unions are fighting the cuts. Formal disputes, ballots and industrial action have started at: Goldsmiths, Sheffield Hallam, Lincoln, Kent, Winchester, Hull, and the Open University.

These individual battles are important, but national unions can't leave local branches to fight individual fires without a general perspective and plan of attack. The University and College



Union (UCU) and other unions have not taken up the baton to tackle the cuts on a national level.

A campaign, “Reclaim HE”, was launched by the UCU, but it is vague, and tied to no industrial strategy. Activists in UCU must push for the union to enact policy passed at the special conference held in April. The lack of a national response lets down the workforce, and could lead to demoralisation. This is a critical moment and requires an urgent response.

The Office for Students released a report in May which argued that universities are first and foremost businesses, and shrinking and failures in the sector are to be expected, with universities forced into “difficult, but necessary, decisions about the shape and size of their institution”. These arguments have been repeated by Minister of State Jacqui Smith.

Unions need to make the argument that increasing the fees of home or international students will not solve the issue, it will simply kick it into the long grass. We must argue that a sector so dependent on fees and recruitment

is inherently precarious. It is an irresponsible way to run a public service. Increasing fees is unfair to students, who will be saddled with more debt, or in many cases, priced out of university education.

To win longer-term job security and a higher education system that serves the interests of society as a whole, an overhaul in the funding system is needed – free education for home and international students, maintenance grants for all, funded by taxing the rich.

Activists in union branches facing cuts should link up with each other, and call on national leaderships to create a strategy, one which includes working closely with other unions and with students. The basic demand should be opposition to cuts and that universities open the books on their finances.

Union branches not affected by cuts can and must play an important role by supporting those facing cuts, such as mobilising financial support for strike funds. The institutions care about their public image, and students and the community can put pressure by protesting at open days and visit days. □

## One-word grades? Ofsted needs to go too!



The changes being made for this term to Ofsted inspection have been described a “decision to get rid of one-word judgements (‘outstanding’, ‘good’, ‘requires improvement’, ‘inadequate’)... with immediate effect”.

Well, no. This is an interim measure for this academic year, until the start in September 2025 of the “report card” system promised in Labour’s manifesto.

Those words “outstanding”, “inadequate” and so on will still be in reports from Ofsted inspections throughout this

academic year, as judgements on the four areas of inspection. The actual change is tiny – that there will no longer be “overall effectiveness” judgements on Ofsted reports or the Ofsted website for inspections conducted from next week onwards.

But the fact that Ofsted won’t publish them doesn’t mean they won’t still exist – and not just because they are still published for all schools that have already been inspected (including those from last term that are waiting for their report to come out in the next few weeks). As *Schools Week* puts it, “Ofsted will still identify those schools that previously would have been rated ‘inadequate’ and tell the govern-

ment about them, but it won’t publish a headline grade for them.”

The NEU union statement welcomes this as a “step in the right direction”, but also rightly reiterates that “Ofsted needs to be abolished and replaced”, and “replaced with a system of accountability that fosters a culture of collaboration between all stakeholders”.

Just what the “report card” system actually will be remains to be seen, and will no doubt be the subject of a consultation later this year. Even ASCL has warned about the risk of this just “replacing one flawed system with another flawed system”. This is a real risk.

The SEA, Labour’s education-focused “affiliated social-

ist society” has been pushing to “Abolish Ofsted” and “set up an independent peer review process for schools”.

Educators’ Fightback wants schools to be run democratically by their staff, students and communities. The role of Ofsted, alongside the last government’s placing of more and more power in the hands of completely unaccountable MAT CEOs, has been to undermine any sort of local accountability at all, and to distort the work of every school.

Meanwhile, the advisory panel the government has just appointed to review the curriculum, for example, has further cemented the Tory approach of putting everything in the control of MATs. There

has been no sign of ending the forced academisation of schools with an (unpublished) “inadequate” outcome from inspection.

There is one sign of a small change, though. The DfE press release about ceasing to publish “overall effectiveness” judgements also announced an end to the requirement for forced academisation of “double-requires-improvement” schools. (And actually there are a lot more of those than so-called “inadequates”). But Labour members should still be fighting for an end to the academy system and to Ofsted. □

• Abridged. More: [bit.ly/o1word](https://bit.ly/o1word)

# How official Russia sees its war



## Book review

By Dale Street

Published in Moscow last year, Valentin Katasonov's *The Front and the Rear* purports to explain the economic transformation which Russia needs to carry out in order to achieve victory in its war against "the collective West" (i.e. Ukraine).

By page 50 of the book Katasonov has already explained that "the so-called Covid-19 pandemic" was a hoax, and that the Covid virus was created in "secret Pentagon-controlled American laboratories, scattered all over the world (including in Ukraine)."

"So-called global warming" is dismissed by Katasonov as another hoax, used by "the global elite" as a cover for its secret plan to rid the planet of surplus populations and productive capacities. "David Rockefeller and his accomplices" are the masterminds behind this plan.

By page 100 Katasonov has blamed Poland, albeit in the absence of an explanation, for the outbreak of the Second World War. He is therefore less than sympathetic to the last Polish government's demand for reparations from Germany.

### Plot

In any case, says Katasonov, Poland's demand is really part of an American plot to destroy European unity:

"The demand for reparations was initiated by the United States. Washington (or perhaps even the 'deep state' hidden behind the official institutions) has an interest in weakening Europe and even reducing it to chaos. Warsaw is ideal for the role of provocateur, as is demonstrated by the entire history of Poland."

What relevance any of this has to the main focus of the book is unclear. But at least it makes for entertaining reading. Unlike what follows:

Over 300 pages of Russian economic statistics, covering imports and exports, industrial output, bankruptcy rates, patterns of privatisation, under-utilised productive capacity, rates of import substitution, foreign investment

in Russia, currency fluctuations, levels of unemployment, capital outflows, changing patterns of trade, and, most important of all, Russian output of machine tools between 1900 and 1945.

That sort of thing makes for boring reading at the best of times. But especially so when there is an endless repetition of the same statistics: Katasonov's book is not a single piece of writing; it is a collection of essays which repeatedly cover the same ground.

The conclusion which Katasonov draws from his welter of statistics is that Russia is "subject to capitalist exploitation" by the more economically developed "collective West". It is a victim of "neo-colonialism". Russia today "does not enjoy full sovereignty, it has the characteristics of a colony."

According to Katasonov, this is a self-evident fact. It is so obvious that "any school-student and any housewife" can understand it.

The current war of "the collective West" against Russia (i.e. the Russian invasion of Ukraine) aims to reinforce Russia's subservient status. Economic oppression has been reinforced by "American HIMARS and shells, which kill our citizens in Ukraine." The war is part of a global strategy:

"This war was provoked by the West and aims at the destruction of our country, which remains the main obstacle to the establishment of total and unlimited power over the planet and humanity by global behind-the-scenes forces."

### "Neo-colonialism"

Russia must escape from the shackles of neo-colonialism in order to win the war. And vice versa: Russia must win the war in order to free itself from neo-colonialism. The only alternative is "the complete collapse of our country."

At some length, Katasonov describes the "total economic mobilisation" which Russia needs to carry out to win the war and achieve real independence. This includes:

- Introduction of "ruthless centralised control of the economy"; nationalisation of all strategically important industries; compulsory fulfilment of government contracts by all other industries; closure of the Moscow and Petersburg Exchanges; closure of private commercial banks.

- A ban on the export of capital from Russia; the nationalisation of all foreign companies in Russia; an immediate cessation of energy exports, and exports of all goods, to "the collective West".

- State control of prices; state monopoly of foreign trade; state control of currency exchanges; equalisation of volumes of imports and exports; mobilisation of labour, based on the policies pursued by Stalin; five-year and one-



year economic plans (based on the same source).

- Russian withdrawal from the IMF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation and all other international bodies controlled by the US and its allies; the abandonment of "the golden rule of government spending"; a cut in Russian interest rates; increased defence spending.

"You can call this economic model whatever you want," says Katasonov – "Soviet, socialist, Stalinist, or mobilisationist". The important thing is its goal: "Russia's economic autonomy, and the guarantee of its military security."

In the 1930s Stalin created "a Soviet economy of the autarkic type, the first precedent of doing so in modern history." Now Russia "can and must repeat that precedent."

To substantiate his case, Katasonov rounds off his book with a hundred pages of historical forays into earlier Russian wars and the reasons for Russia's success or failure.

### Ruthless mobilisation

Russia lost the Crimean War, the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War because it failed to carry out a full economic mobilisation, lacked economic autarky, and (very important) suffered from a dearth of machine tools.

By contrast, Russia won the Great Patriotic War thanks to a ruthless economic mobilisation, Stalin's achievement of economic autarky, and (extremely important) the mass indigenous manufacture of machine tools.

Katasonov's claims of Stalinist eco-

nomie autarky and total import substitution fit poorly with the facts of US aid for the Soviet Union during the war: \$200 billion worth of aid (in today's prices), including 14,000 airplanes, 13,000 tanks, 400,000 jeeps and trucks, and 15 million pairs of army boots.

In support of his advocacy of autarky, Katasonov also invokes a succession of late-nineteenth-century "patriotic" (i.e. conservative and monarchist) economists who argued along similar lines, especially Sergei Sharapov, Dmitri Mendeleev, Lev Tichomirov and Georgi Butmi.

Butmi was an antisemitic journalist and member of the far-right Union of the Russian People. He edited and published *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

But Katasonov uncritically quotes from his *Kabala ili Svoboda (Kabbalah or Freedom)*, in which Butmi accused "Jews and other foreigners" of fomenting economic and social unrest in Russia, so that "powerful Anglo-Jewish firms" and other "Jews and foreigners" could take over Russian companies.

At first sight Katasonov's book might appear to be a mixture of Stalinist nostalgia, Third Worldism (with Russia located in the Third World), and sixteenth-century mercantilism. Unfortunately, a reading of the book confirms that that is indeed what it is.

But the book is also more than that. Katasonov is not a nobody. He is a retired Professor of Economics, a former member of Advisory Council of the European Bank, and chair of the Sharapov Russian Economic Society. His book is exemplary of what passes for contemporary history and economics in Russia today:

Conspiracy theories, overtly or covertly spiced up with antisemitism; portrayal of Russia as the eternal victim of "the collective West"; inversion of the perpetrator and victim of Russia's invasion of Ukraine; glorification of Stalin as the man who made Russia great again; and a Brexit-like ultra-nationalist yearning for a restoration of the country's imperialist past. □



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# Luxembourg battles over LGBT+ in schools

By Loretta Marie Perera

"To exclude LGBT themes from the education of minors" – so goes the title of a public petition submitted 19 July 2024 in Luxembourg. A counter-petition launched two weeks later calls for the opposite: "To further develop LGBTQ+ themes in the education of minors".

While the counter-petition argues for

the well-being of students, citing Luxembourg's suicide rates, anxiety and depression among youth, the original one argues against any form of LGBTQ+-related material or discussion in school, and what it describes as concern for "early age risks disrupting the psycho-pedagogical development of children". It goes on to clarify that the petition "is in no way intended to discriminate or encourage hatred" and is "not about transphobia or homophobia" – something counter-petitioners are quick to dismiss.

"Writing 'it is not homophobic' does not make it not homophobic. 'I'm not racist, but ...' is the same logic. This petition should have been stopped there in the first instance," Nicolas Van Elsué, president of Rosa Lëtzebuerg (Luxembourg's National LGBTQ+ Association) said.

"[It is] to abuse the means of democracy in order to take other people's granted democratic rights away," said Julia Wack, an outspoken German activist and long-term resident of Luxembourg. "This is literally what we have experienced historically."

The rise of the far-right has yet to fully hit the Grand Duchy in the same intensity it has in neighbouring Germany and France. Because of this, "I thought we had time to prepare, we had time to build, to fight," said Amandine, founder of Sweet Josephine, a local feminist association. "But actually, no, it has come here very quickly, and I can't explain why."

For Julia it is an intentional encour-



agement of confusion and ignorance that runs through the far-right's agenda. "I look at the confusion that I learnt about when discussing [the original petition] with people who have signed or who defend this position, they signed because they are concerned and confused. [This makes them] not only an easy target but one easy to use and abuse – Why even sign it? Because they are misinformed, ill-informed, or not informed at all," she said.

"For me, it's been really difficult," said Amandine, who has had to lodge a police report for hate speech she has been subject to as a result of her campaigning. "I'm super angry, and I'm scared. Scared that this is just the beginning and we are in a war, and the war won't stop at the end of these two petitions."

As of 28 Aug 2024, each petition is just above or below 10,000 signatures. Under Luxembourg law both are certain to be debated in parliament (some suggest, jointly) and could ultimately lead to changes or additions to national laws. □



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# Against left antisemitism in the antifascist counterdemos

By Will Roberts

The August anti-fascist counter-demonstrations, after riots in Southport (31 July) spread a far-right threat across the country, have in some places been tarnished by bad rhetoric and lazy "anti-Zionism".

In North Finchley, a graphic was circulated for a 7 August counter-demonstration in the name of "Finchley Against Fascism" (not the original organisers of the demo) with the headline "Get fascists, racists, Nazis, Zionists and Islamophobes out of Finchley!" The demo organisers were in agreement that this was not to be a slogan of the demo.

Including "Zionists" there with no further context is deeply irresponsible. Finchley has one of the largest Jewish populations in the country. If "Zionist" here means "anyone who sees a connection with



Israel, or identifies with the Israeli state in some manner", then this graphic failed to encourage "community self-defence". In fact, it was actively opposing it.

A different form of absolute "anti-Zionism" crept into a call-out by Bristol Palestine Alliance for a rally where a headline speaker was disgraced academic David Miller,

who now peddles an overtly antisemitic worldview.

A message circulated by Bristol Anti-Racist Action called for unity to "send a powerful message to the Zionist-funded EDL that we are bigger and stronger". When asked to change the wording, the organisers refused.

This framing encourages a conspiracist understanding of Israeli "influence" that is inherently antisemitic. The "EDL" (in fact, now barely still in existence) arose out of economic and political crises within British politics.

Again, Skwawkbox wrote in a recent article that "the current campaign of terrorism across

the UK is serving to push Israel's ongoing slaughter of Palestinian civilians, predominantly women and children, out of the headlines and off UK screens and even social media". This form of all-encompassing, obsessive anti-Zionism implies that the "real" fight is not against anti-immigrant protestors outside your door: the Israeli state is the root cause of all the world's ills.

Some far right groups see Israel as the greatest enemy.

Others, like Tommy Robinson, strategically align themselves with Israel in order to leverage anti-Muslim sentiment in the white British population. But claims that Robinson is funded by "the Zionists" rest on payments made to Tommy Robinson by right-wing American think-tanks, who seem largely to agree with him on his vilification of Muslims, rather than his love of Israel.

And others, with different political priorities, have made similar exceptionalising claims about Robinson's links to Russia, for example.

In fact far right violence and anti-immigrant sentiment is not a "foreign distraction", it is an immediate attack on the life of our movement. □

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David Miller

# Ukraine in the

By Michael Baker

The union conference season 2024 is now over. This article surveys the unions on policy on the war in Ukraine and on active solidarity work being done on the basis of (or despite) policy.

## TUC

Perhaps the single biggest success in terms of labour movement solidarity occurred at the TUC general congress in 2023. A [motion](#) proposed by the GMB and ASLEF called for active solidarity and an acknowledgement of the war in Ukraine as an “illegal, aggressive invasion” by Russia. It “acknowledged” the work done by the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, and named several Ukrainian unions that had been coordinating important work both to support workers and to oppose the invasion.

The passing of this motion was a victory for Ukraine solidarity in the movement. The TUC’s central body has since been more receptive to coordinating Ukraine solidarity work – sharing USC fundraise appeals on its website, and even sending General Secretary Paul Nowak on an ETUC delegation to Ukraine.

## ASLEF

Aslef was a founding member of the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign in 2014. Its leadership has been consistent in support for Ukrainian workers, donating regularly to fundraising appeals and taking part in delegations to Ukraine. General Secretary Mick Whelan was in Ukraine just days before the war began in February 2022.

At the rank and file level, more could be done to encourage active solidarity. Activists in Aslef should look to build on the union’s strong position.

Unfortunately, the union is also affiliated to the Stop the War Coalition – a contradiction with their other positions on Ukraine. A motion to this year’s conference called for the union to disaffiliate from STWC, but fell by a small margin.

## CWU

The CWU is one of a couple of examples where, after to-ing and fro-ing, no formal policy has been passed. In 2022, a Stop the War Coalition motion was put to the conference floor, but a speech by Dave Ward against it as “insufficient”, as well as political arguments made by several activists from the floor, ensured that it did not pass. 2023 saw no CWU conference during the postal strike, and there was no conference business in 2024 either – though a successful Ukraine Solidarity fringe meeting was held.



Outside of their own conference policy, the CWU delegation was an important element in winning the vote at the TUC in 2023, after the union voted in favour of the GMB’s solidarity motion.

Activists in the CWU will almost certainly be bringing policy to next year’s conference.

## FBU

After the war began, a statement from the FBU Executive Council called for a full withdrawal of Russian troops, and to work in solidarity with Ukrainian firefighters’ unions. It also, however, denounced the war as a “proxy war”, decried NATO expansion, and suggested fraternisation between Ukrainian and Russian soldiers as an answer.

To their credit, the FBU have since followed through with some solidarity work and aid for Ukrainian firefighters. There is work to be done by the rank and file within the union to fight for a better policy, and win the political argument about Ukrainian self-determination.

## GMB

Perhaps the biggest benefit that the GMB has given Ukraine work in Britain is its motion to TUC Congress 2023, discussed above. Within the union, there has been [specific policy](#) passed affirming a similar position: a statement released after the start of the war condemning the invasion and calling for solidarity with Ukrainian unions; policy affirming the right of Ukrainians to receive arms and military aid, calling for a just reconstruction, and calling for the cancellation of Ukraine’s foreign debt; and a number of actions following through on this policy, including do-

nating vehicles and money to a military unit largely staffed by Ukrainian miners.

## NASUWT

The NASUWT has not passed formal policy, but released a statement in February 2022 calling for solidarity with Ukraine, in particular its teachers and students, and extending solidarity to VPONU, the independent Ukrainian education workers’ union.

The union’s leadership have circulated fundraisers and messages about solidarity work, but more can be done to push for active solidarity work within the union and with its Ukrainian counterparts.

## NEU

There have been three NEU conferences since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In the first two, representatives of the ruling faction, NEU Left, which includes the SWP, Stalinists and fellow-travellers, attempted to have their position accepted by conference. They failed.

After last year’s NEU conference, disgusted pro-Ukraine NEU members set up a group to press for a decent, internationalist policy. This group has been active in the last year, producing a newsletter, intervening inside NEU structures. At branch level there is also considerable campaigning.

This year, in Bournemouth, the NEU Ukraine Solidarity Network’s position was on the agenda. It would have passed by a big majority. However, the SWP and their acolytes filibustered, and the motion narrowly failed to be voted on. Their behaviour was a disgrace, wasting time at every opportunity.

## NUJ

The National Union of Journalists has focused its solidarity work on giving support to Ukrainian journalists. One month after the war began in 2022, the union called for their members to support a fundraising initiative by the IFJ, in collaboration with the Ukrainian journalists’ union, the NUJU. At their Delegates’ Meeting in 2023, this was formalised as policy, and the NEC has been instructed to continue donating to the same fund on a yearly basis. The Irish section of the NUJ mobilised for a Trade Union demonstration in solidarity with Ukraine in Dublin, but little else has happened since.

## NUM

The National Union of Mineworkers has been a consistent ally of the Ukrainian people – a connection that dates back further than perhaps any other British union, to 1984, when Donetsk miners donated to support their British comrades during the miners’ strike.

Though a much smaller union now than it was then, the NUM has had an enormous tangible impact on Ukraine solidarity work since the beginning of the war, going on numerous delegations to Ukraine and giving large amounts of money to aid fundraising and practical solidarity. Their commitment to the cause is commendable, and should be replicated.

## PCS

The PCS civil service union was one of the first, in [June 2022](#), to pass a motion overwhelmingly supporting solidarity with Ukraine, affiliating to the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, and defeating a Stop the War Coalition motion opposing arms to Ukraine. Since then, the union has been an active supporter of demonstrations and events on the topic, including calling multiple demonstrations itself.

More work can be done both at the branch level and in terms of delegations and practical solidarity work, but the PCS has been a strong example of internationalism when it comes to Ukraine, and with a new, more left-wing NEC elected, there is hope for more concrete work to be done to back up the existing policy.

## RMT

The UK’s largest transport union has a chequered past when it comes to Ukraine. In 2014, the union passed one of the worst pieces of policy possible, hailing the Russian-nationalist uprising in the Donbas as a victory for “antifascism”.

Since 2022, the union has kept very

# unions

quiet about this stance – but it has not been formally overturned by a vote at the national AGM. In the wake of the war beginning, the RMT NEC put out a statement that condemned the invasion and called for a full withdrawal of troops, as well as affirming that “we oppose war and support peace and cross border solidarity between workers.” While nothing in the statement was overtly wrong, it was clearly a middle-ground compromise statement, with little force behind it for the union to take decisive solidarity action.

The 2022 AGM passed a very positive motion in solidarity with the Belarusian rail saboteurs, who were disrupting Russian trains travelling through Belarus to deliver arms to the front in Ukraine. Some practical support for the prisoners in question was arranged at the branch level.

## UCU

As reported in *Solidarity* 711, UCU Congress 2024 passed a motion that called for solidarity with Ukraine, and affiliated the union to the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. However, an amendment was also passed removing specific mention of military aid. This was a bizarre pacifist twist to add to an otherwise good motion, made all the more confusing by not having any practical effect on the interpretable outcome of the motion.

The UCU4Ukraine solidarity network has coalesced a group of activists involved with the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, who have been instrumental in pushing support for Ukraine at the national level since the passing of a very poor Stop the War Coalition motion at 2023 congress.

## Unison

Unison conference at the end of June saw a big victory for Ukraine solidarity in the British Labour movement. The UK's biggest union by membership passed a motion by a two thirds majority, calling for solidarity with Ukraine. The NEC had previously voted to support the motion.

The motion called for active support to Ukraine's liberation struggle, an immediate withdrawal of all Russian troops, strengthened links with Ukrainian Trade Unions, and affiliation to the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. Activists in Unison will be looking to build on this success and implement some practical activity in the coming year.

## Unite

The formal policy of Unite on Ukraine came out of a confusing mess at the 2023 policy conference. Faced with a bad motion on Ukraine, and a better amendment, the union's executive put forward its own alternative statement, very similar to the anodyne one published by the leadership after the outbreak of the war in 2022. An article in *Solidarity* 684 (20/9/23) details the flaws of Unite's (lack of) policy in greater detail, but the statement does not call for arms to be sent to Ukraine (in fact, it hints at opposing them), and its resolutions were almost entirely UK-focused (calling for the UK government to increase sanctions, calling for rights for Ukrainian refugees, calling for tax loopholes against Russian oligarchs to be closed).

## Conclusion

There is not a single union in the country where there is not more to be done on the question of Ukraine. Almost two and a half years into the war, it is inevitable that some fatigue sets in to conversations around the Ukrainian working class and the Russian invasion. But there is a fight to be had across the movement: to win good policy where it doesn't yet exist, and to use it to build links with the organised Ukrainian working class where it does. The struggle will continue not just as long as the war does, but long after. We have a duty to our Ukrainian comrades to make sure solidarity remains an active process, not just tokenistic declarations. □

# Ukraine still at great risk

By Dan Katz

Ukraine's armed forces' chief, Oleksandr Syrskyi, claimed on 27 August that his forces now control 1,294 square km of Russian territory in the Kursk oblast and 100 settlements.

Syrskyi also put a figure on the number of captured Russian troops: 594, mainly conscripts, have been taken prisoner since the Ukrainian incursion began on 6 August.

On Saturday 24 August Russia and Ukraine each exchanged 115 prisoners of war. The Russian side returned 82 veterans from Mariupol, captured after the town was finally overrun by Russia in May 2022. The Russians received 115 troops taken in Kursk, mainly young conscripts. Russian President Vladimir Putin is under political pressure from the families of captured Russian conscripts to get them home.

Putin knows from past conflicts that the organised anger of soldiers' families poses a political risk.

According to Putin, commenting in June, Russia holds about 6,500 Ukrainian troops and Ukraine has 1,300 Russian soldiers.

It seems that about 3,000 more Russian troops are isolated in dense forests between Ukrainian territory, Ukrainian-occupied Kursk and the Seym river. Three bridges over the Seym have been destroyed by Ukraine trapping the Russian soldiers.

There is no reason to shift our attitude to the Ukraine war following the incursion into Kursk. Ukraine is the victim of a Russian imperialist attack which aims to annex territory and to subordinate Ukraine to Russian power. Ukraine has a right to resist and defend its freedoms and independence. Ukraine's defensive war has led it to hit military targets inside Russia, and now its troops have found it expedient to make an incursion onto Russian territory.

The stated Ukrainian goals of the Kursk offensive is to create a buffer zone to prevent Russian cross-border shelling of Ukraine's Sumy oblast; to create something to bargain with in future peace talks with Russia; to boost Ukrainian morale; to shift Russian troops from their Donbas offensive in eastern Ukraine to defend Russia.

Ukraine claims Russia has moved 30,000 troops to defend Kursk, but largely from Kherson in southern Ukraine and from inside Russia. The Russian counter-offensive in Kursk is gathering pace.

And the Russian offensive in Donbas continues to make gains, although at a terrible cost. Russia continues to lose (killed and wounded) an average of 1,100 troops each day; all the towns and villages it manages to overrun have been depopulated and destroyed.

The Ukrainian leadership estimates Russia has concentrated 50-60,000 troops to attempt to take the towns



of Pokrovsk and Toretsk and has a 1:4 advantage in personnel and munitions with complete control over the airspace. Russia might well manage to win in Donbas before the weather turns, making fighting harder, in ten weeks' time.

In addition, the Russian vassal state of Belarus, run by the dictator Alexander Lukashenko, has moved troops to the Belarus-Ukraine border. Lukashenko says he has moved one-third of the Belarus army (which would be about 16,000 troops) to the border in response to a (fictional) threat posed by Ukraine.

On Monday 26 August Russia conducted its largest attack of the war so far on Ukrainian civilian targets and energy generation infrastructure, launching 230 missiles and drones. A further 81 Iranian-made drones and 10 missiles followed the next day. Targets included a dam in Kyiv and the Kyiv Hydroelectric Power Plant.

Ukraine has been attempting to build defence walls around substations and diversify energy production using generators and solar power. Rolling powercuts are now common across the country.

Ukraine is now using some of the small number (apparently ten) modern F-16 fighter planes it received at the beginning of August to fight off Russian air assaults. Ukraine has been promised 79 F-16s from Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Belgium. As well as a shortage of planes Ukraine has an acute shortage of trained pilots.

Ukraine remains at an enormous disadvantage. Russia's population is four times larger than Ukraine's and its real GDP is ten times bigger. While Russia's military spending is 5.9% of its GDP, Ukraine spends 37%, which still means Russia has spent \$150bn more. If the EU and UK alone were to fund this imbalance it would represent only 0.48% of the collective GDP. □



# Plans, initiative, intervention, not “tailism”

## The road to Bolshevism

In *What Is To Be Done?* (1902) Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) criticised “tailism” and those who rejected “plans” – like his to make a Marxist newspaper, published from exile, the axis around which to build a party from the then-scattered Russian Marxist circles. 18th of a series around the 100th anniversary of the death of Ulyanov.

By Sean Matgamna

Ulyanov gives examples to show that debate about plans is essential, as against than “tactics as a process”, or waiting on events.

“At the time when Germany was at one of the crucial turning-points in its history – the formation of the Empire [i.e. the unification of Germany in 1871], the opening of the Reichstag [Parliament], and the granting of universal suffrage – Liebknecht had one plan for Social-Democratic politics and work in general, and Schweitzer had another.” [1]

“When the Anti-Socialist law [1879-1890] came down on the heads of the German socialists, Most and Hasselmann had one plan – they were prepared then and there to call for violence and terror; Hochberg, Schramm, and (partly) Bernstein had another – they began to preach to the Social-Democrats that they themselves had provoked the enactment of the law by being unreasonably bitter and revolutionary, and must now earn forgiveness by their exemplary conduct.

“There was yet a third plan, proposed by those who prepared and carried out the publication [abroad] of an illegal organ”. [2]

And in Russia: “... At a time of confusion, when [Russian] Social-Democracy [is being reduced] to the level of trade-unionism, and when the [populist] terrorists are strongly advocating the adoption of ‘tactics-as-plan’, that repeats the old mistakes; at a time... when many Russian Social-Democrats suffer from a lack of initiative and energy, from an inadequate scope of political propaganda, agitation, and organisation, from a lack of ‘plans’ for a broader organisation of revolutionary work – at such a time, to declare that ‘tactics-as-plan’ contradicts the essence of Marxism means not only to vulgarise Marxism in the realm of theory, but to drag the Party backward in practice”.

Yet the semi-economist *Rabocheye Dyelo* sermonised: “The task of the revolutionary Social-Democrat is only to accelerate objective development by his conscious work, not to obviate it or substitute his own subjective plans for this development. *Iskra* [the Marxist paper which Ulyanov and others published from exile] knows all this in theory; but the enormous importance which Marxism justly attaches to con-



scious revolutionary work causes it in practice, owing to its doctrinaire view of tactics, to belittle the significance of the objective or the spontaneous element of development”.

Ulyanov asked “our philosopher”: “How may a designer of subjective plans ‘belittle’ objective development? Obviously by losing sight of the fact that this objective development creates or strengthens, destroys or weakens certain classes, strata, or groups, certain nations or groups of nations, etc., and in this way serves to determine a given international political alignment of forces, or the position adopted by revolutionary parties, etc.

“If the designer of plans did that, his guilt would not be that he belittled the spontaneous element, but, on the contrary, that he belittled the conscious element, for he would then show that he lacked the ‘consciousness’ properly to understand objective development. Hence, the very talk of ‘estimating the relative significance’ (*Rabocheye Dyelo*’s italics) of spontaneity and consciousness itself reveals a complete lack of ‘consciousness’.

“If certain ‘spontaneous elements of development’ can be grasped at all by human understanding, then an incorrect estimation of them will be tantamount to ‘belittling the conscious element’. But if they cannot be grasped, then we do not know them, and therefore cannot speak of them.”

If the semi-Economist Krichevsky “thinks that *Iskra*’s ‘subjective plans’ are erroneous (as he in fact declares them to be), he should have shown what objective facts they ignore, and only then charged *Iskra* with lacking political consciousness for ignoring them, with ‘belittling the conscious element’, to use his own words.

“If, however, displeased with subjective plans, he can bring forward no argument other than that of ‘belittling the spontaneous element’ (!), he merely shows: (1) that, theoretically, he [mis]understands Marxism; and (2) that, practically, he is quite satisfied with the ‘spontaneous elements of development’ that have drawn our legal Marxists towards Bernsteinism and our Social-Democrats towards Economism, and that he is ‘full of wrath’ against those who have determined at all costs to divert Russian Social-Democracy from the path of ‘spontaneous’ development”.

Ulyanov finds some of Krichevsky’s polemic “positively droll”. “Just as human beings will reproduce in the old-fashioned way despite all the discoveries of natural science, so the birth of a new social order will come about, in the future too, mainly as a result of elemental outbursts, despite all the discoveries of social science and the increase in the number of conscious fighters”.

So: “Just as our grandfathers in their old-fashioned wisdom used to say, anyone can bring children into the world, so today the ‘modern socialists’... say in their wisdom, anyone can participate in the spontaneous birth of a new social order. We too hold that anyone can. All that is required for participation of that kind is to yield to Economism when Economism reigns and to terrorism when terrorism arises...”

Such drifting cuts loose from the experience and tradition of the Russian Marxist movement.

“When *Iskra* ridiculed *Rabocheye Dyelo* for declaring the question of terror [i.e. in Russian revolutionary discourse of the time, assassinating top Tsarist officials] to be new, the latter angrily accused *Iskra* of ‘having the incredible effrontery to impose upon the Party organisation solutions of tactical questions proposed by a group of emigrant writers more than fifteen years ago’.”

“Effrontery. Indeed”, responds Ulyanov, and comments sarcastically: “what an overestimation of the conscious element – first to resolve questions theoretically beforehand, and then to try to convince the organisation, the Party, and the masses of the correctness of this solution!”

“How much better it would be to repeat the elements and, without ‘imposing’ anything upon anybody, swing with every ‘turn’ – whether in the direction of Economism or in the direction of terrorism.

“*Rabocheye Dyelo* even... accuses *Iskra* and *Zarya* of ‘setting up their programme against the movement, like a spirit hovering over the formless chaos’. [3] But what else is the function of Social-Democracy if not to be a ‘spirit’ that not only hovers over the spontaneous movement, but also raises this movement to the level of ‘its programme’?”

“Surely, it is not its function to drag at the tail of the movement. At best, this would be of no service to the movement; at worst, it would be exceedingly harmful.

“*Rabocheye Dyelo* elevates ‘tactics-as-process’ to a principle, so that it would be more correct to describe its tendency not as opportunism, but as tailism (from the word tail).

“And it must be admitted that those who are determined always to follow behind the movement and be its tail are absolutely and forever guaranteed

against ‘belittling the spontaneous element of development’.”

To sum up: “... The fundamental error committed by the ‘new trend’ in Russian Social-Democracy is its bowing to spontaneity and its failure to understand that the spontaneity of the masses demands a high degree of consciousness from us Social-Democrats.

“The greater the spontaneous upsurge of the masses and the more widespread the movement, the more rapid, incomparably so, the demand for greater consciousness in the theoretical, political and organisational work of Social-Democracy.

“The spontaneous upsurge of the masses in Russia proceeded (and continues) with such rapidity that the young Social Democrats proved unprepared to meet these gigantic tasks. This unpreparedness is our common misfortune, the misfortune of all Russian Social-Democrats.

“The upsurge of the masses [in mass strikes and demonstrations] proceeded and spread with uninterrupted continuity; it not only continued in the places where it began, but spread to new localities and to new strata of the population (under the influence of the working class movement, there was a renewed ferment among the student youth, among the intellectuals generally, and even among the peasantry)”.

Ulyanov is not deprecating workers’ inadequate combativity or inadequate will to inquire and learn. He is criticising some revolutionaries because they:

“... lagged behind this upsurge, both in their ‘theories’ and in their activity; they failed to establish a constant and continuous organisation capable of leading the whole movement.” □

[1] Wilhelm Liebknecht was a founder of the German socialist movement, and father of Karl Liebknecht. He died in 1900. J B von Schweitzer was the president in 1867-71 of the sectist wing of German socialism, the ADAV founded by Ferdinand Lassalle in 1863-4. Lassalle died in 1864. Schweitzer quit activity in 1871. ADAV united with Liebknecht’s more Marxist movement to form the German Social Democratic Party at Gotha in 1875.

[2] Johann Most was a German Social Democrat who became an anarchist and emigrated to the USA. Wilhelm Hasselmann was a former ADAV (Lassallean) leader who also became an anarchist. Karl Hochberg was a wealthy SPD sympathiser living in Zürich. Eduard Bernstein went with Hochberg briefly, and later became the famous “revisionist”, but in between times he edited the “illegal organ” of the SPD referred to by Ulyanov, in a way much appreciated by Marx and Engels.

[3] This reference invokes the Jewish and Christian Bible on God creating everything out of nothing.

# Answering the questions: Labour against Trump



Debate

By Ollie Moore



Meanwhile, there is no possible electoral mechanism for asserting an independent working-class voice on any kind of politically adequate basis. Dollar and Roberts say that work to ensure one “would have to begin before the election period”. Yes, obviously. The US left should be better. Even a credible left-Democrat challenger in the primaries would have opened up possibilities. We all wish things were different. “How do I get from A to B?” “Don’t start from A.” Fine. We can say all that. None of it provides an answer to the question of what we think workers should do in the voting booth on 5 November.

One might argue that, if America is really that close to far-right dictatorship, the election is all but irrelevant, as Trump’s movement may refuse to accept defeat anyway, and may mount armed resistance to impose Trump, so workers should therefore orient to organising labour-movement and community self-defence rather than focusing on the electoral question. The US left and labour movement, along with movements of black people, migrants, LGBT+ people, and others, should urgently discuss self-defence. Had there been an adequate left candidate in this election, one could argue that the potential such a campaign would have offered to build local organisations that could provide the basis for an ongoing movement against Trumpism outweighed the risks of diverting votes away from the Democrats. But no such candidate exists. Given that, why not also, whilst orienting to the exigencies of self-defence and ongoing confrontation with Trumpism, take the one action possible on 5 November that might buy a bit more time?

There is, I suppose, a certain honour in simply proclaiming “things should be better!” when faced with an abject situation. But if we are to be of any use in politics, we have to develop strategies that connect the actions actually available to workers, now, to a perspective for changing things. Simply

counterposing the better horizon we want to see to the abject situation we find ourselves in reduces us to mere propagandists.

In this article, Dollar and Roberts come as close as any members of the minority have yet come, at least publicly, to giving a definitive answer to what they think US socialists should say about how workers should vote. Socialists should tell workers, “this is not our election, these are not our candidates.”

## Odd

This is a rather odd formulation, given that no election in a capitalist state could meaningfully be said to be “our election”. But as far as one can parse the meaning, it seems to me, fairly clearly, to be a call for abstention. But this is still not spelled out explicitly. Why not? If they want the US left to grow, to become a cohesive force intervening in the US labour movement and working-class communities to promote and develop independent working-class organisation, surely they accept that it needs clarity? “This is not our election, these are not our candidates, these do not have to be our only options” is not a clear response to the question, “how should I vote on 5 November?” I hope the comrades agree that it would be extreme sectarian aloofness to duck the question by insisting that, as “the revolutionaries”, it’s “not our job” to grubby ourselves with the trifling business of actually answering the questions workers ask us about politics. So, I ask again, as directly as I can: how should US socialists answer the question, “how should I vote on 5 November?”

Dollar and Roberts accuse the AWL of having “emblazoned our press” with “vote Biden/Macron”. Where? I have never seen any piece of AWL literature “emblazoned” with any such thing. Nor has anyone advocated that we do this. The comrades must know this statement is not accurate. They also inaccurately claim that the majority position consists “primarily” of calling for a Democrat vote, as if there were nothing

else to it. In fact, the majority position voted for by our conference affirmed the need for “[...] a political perspective emphasising the need to build a working-class political pole independent of the Democrats, and to build labour and socialist organisation and struggle to fight the policies of a [Democrat] government and organise resistance to Trumpism.”

The only “political confidence” it is necessary for workers to give the Democratic Party in this election is that, unlike the Trump-led Republicans, it will not institute that far-right dictatorship. Why do comrades seem to think it’s impossible for the US left to construct a political narrative that argues for a Democratic vote in the context of an argument foregrounding the need for the labour movement to organise independently, and assert itself politically so this abject situation is never repeated? All I’ve heard to explain this is the claim that “people won’t listen past ‘vote Democrat’”. I don’t know which interlocutors comrades have in mind, but this is not how conversation works, in my experience.

All of this is hypothetical. We have no mechanism for reaching any substantial number of workers in the US and no means for directly intervening in the election. This whole debate is, on all sides, something of an exercise in simulation, a kind of “war game”. The significance of the US to global politics justifies the exercise, but that’s largely what it is. So if we’re trading in hypotheticals, imagine this: a few left-leaning unions launch a “Labor Against Trump” campaign. It focuses mainly on promoting working-class policies, but also encourages voter registration and calls for a Democratic vote as the only way of stopping Trump at the ballot box. It says it will sponsor pro-labour candidates in Democratic primaries, and union-backed candidates standing as independents, in future elections.

This, to me, would be a very positive development. I think the logic of the majority position indicates this kind of approach, albeit in a rather abstract way, as neither us nor any of our US contacts have any means of launching such an initiative. However, I believe it represents at least an adumbration of a perspective for how the US labour movement could assert itself, in a way that both relates to the concrete choices workers are immediately faced with, whilst also aiming to break the cycle of lesser-evils. I invite the comrades of the minority to indulge me in a response to this hypothetical. □



# Biden and lesser-evil-ism



## Debate

By David Pendleton

It is tempting to say that rarely has a decision taken by Workers' Liberty suffered so badly and so quickly under the hammer blows of history than the one taken in April to advocate a vote for Joe Biden.

However, if we are to give comrades the benefit of the doubt and not act like a demagogue at a trade union conference, "read the words on the paper!", let's accept that as one contributor to a discussion recently put it, "If the Democrats stand a donkey our headline will be 'Vote donkey'". We should advocate a vote for whomever the Democrat machine decides. The machine and conse-

quently our organisation have decided to support Kamala Harris.

Nonetheless, all of this should give those comrades who support this position pause for thought. Already in this paper we have read "Joe Biden has been a good president... But he is not a good candidate". (In fairness, the second half of this is right.)

Is Harris a "good candidate"? Will she be a "good" president? Is the donkey a "good" donkey? Will they be a "good candidate"?

Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez were reportedly against Biden ending his re-election bid because they recognised that any likely alternative to Biden was politically worse. What would comrades have responded to this? It doesn't matter because the key thing is to have a better candidate?

After all lesser evil-ism is only effec-

tive if the lesser evil wins. Or that it's better to have someone with better politics who is a less electable candidate?

Before Biden stood down, the film maker Aaron Sorkin, a Democrat who was, as many were, clearly alarmed, suggesting drafting, former Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney. 'If the Democrats stand a Republican our headline will be "Vote Republican"?' Logically, why not?

With lesser-evil-ism the only political consideration is that they are less of an evil and that they get elected. All other political considerations are secondary. Those considerations have a logic of their own. They draw us towards a "realpolitik" where what is immediately electable is the key determinant of what we advocate, with the better more significant stuff obscured.

Trumpism will not be defeated by Biden (as already proven), by Romney, by Harris, or by Donkey. Indeed, the mere posing of it in these terms gives a fillip to the Trumpian movement: "we are different from run of the mill politics. Even the Marxists would vote for any machine politician (or even a donkey) against us". It places us in a bloc with all the Bushes, Romneys, Bidens, Harrises and establishment figures, making it harder to differentiate our politics.

The only way to defeat Trumpism, and I do believe this is common ground within Workers' Liberty, is to build a working class political alternative. The problem is lesser evil-ism profoundly mitigates against this, miseducates those around us, and sets us in to a "realpolitik" which will destroy that project. □

## Labour Party story is more complex



## Debate

By Luke Hardy

I read with interest John Bloxam's polemic on the Labour Party in *Solidarity* 716. John gives a brief history of the Labour Party and its relationship with the revolutionary left and the unions, from the end of the Great War till now. I think the early part is correct. However he seems to end his account by seeing a flat calm ever since 2007, with the status quo as it stood when Tony Blair quit that year.

John says of the trade union link:

"This link still exists, if significantly curtailed and now more closely resembling the relationship between donkey and cart. The big unions still have a great potential weight even in Labour's changed structures should they choose to use it. That possibility exists because trade-union money remains an important part of the Labour Party's financial support, and the docility of the trade union leadership allowed the Blairites to retain that without the fear of a political cost."

This misses the fact that the unions did assert themselves at certain key points over the last 15 years. As ever, not in a

persistent way, and often not in ways we would advocate. But they did.

In 2009 the unions overturned the changes to conference to restore their ability to put motions.

In 2010 the favoured candidate of the big three unions, Ed Miliband, became leader rather than his more Blairite brother.

In 2015 Jeremy Corbyn became leader with the support of Unite, CWU and other unions.

In 2016 the attempt to oust Corbyn was stopped partly due to union support. Unite's leadership pretty much ran Corbyn's office from then on.

High Blairism defined itself against the unions and the left. Starmer has defined himself against the left. Perhaps even more so than Tony Blair. However so far the Starmer circle have not defined themselves against the unions. In fact much of the union bureaucracy and the Labour leadership are politically very close.

Even during the election, the unions rallied behind Diane Abbott when it looked like she would have been excluded as a Labour candidate. Starmer blinked, and Abbott was not excluded.

Unions could radically transform the political situation in the Labour Party:

If they asserted themselves politically within Labour in a

consistent way in accordance with the policies passed by their members.

If the unions linked up with the left in Labour and put pressure on their sponsored MPs.

If they mobilised their members to get involved in their local Labour parties to advance these aims.

If the unions backed calls for greater and wider democracy in the party rather than just the preservation of their influence.

But "unions" in the abstract have never been the answer in Labour politics. Decisive is the quality of politics and of democracy in the unions.

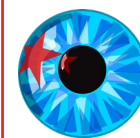
The big blockage now is the lack of rank and file democracy in our unions rather than Labour rules in the abstract or a stranglehold of Blairite ideology in Labour.

Starmer has already shown he can be pushed back when the unions do assert themselves.

Left electoral challenges to Labour should be assessed case-by-case. For now that a claim that Labour has been in dead calm since 2007 and hopes lie with local electoral efforts is off-beam. Our key tasks. This includes fighting for socialist politics and democracy in the unions, and in the CLPs, aiming to transform the Labour Party towards a party that truly represents workers. □

• Abridged. More: [bit.ly/lh-lp](http://bit.ly/lh-lp)

## SW accepts Maduro's rigged figures



## Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

*Socialist Worker* (SW) has come out for Maduro in the 28 July Venezuela election.

The election was, they claim "highly contested" (and not, as the overwhelming evidence suggests, rigged following unsuccessful state banning of opposition candidates and harassment of their election campaigning). Maduro has "won" the election (not lost and then stolen it). The rigged results are repeated by SW in the same puppy-dog style as a Stalinist repeating results in the old USSR, straight-faced and without comment.

Further, SW lauds Maduro for "helping the poor", while the opposition candidate is dismissed since they "bend their knee to Washington" (as if the views of the poor, and the increasingly poor, of Venezuela, as shown at the ballot box and the exodus of one-fifth of the country's population, is not an issue).

A cover-our-back comment admits that Maduro "doesn't

offer a way forward", but SW repeats the Maduro regime's claim that Machado's Unity Platform. Why? The right-wing called on the military to stop supporting the government (knowing that for many years now the Maduro government has survived without a democratic base only because the military are still with it).

Even Chavez was not perfect, say *Socialist Worker*, since he did not abolish capitalism and "there hadn't been a transfer of power into mass organisations", rather power is held in a state bureaucracy. But it insists "at key moments it was the mass mobilisation of workers and the poor" that created the social base for Chavez. True, Chavez, after a failed attempt at a military coup in 1992, won a genuine election to become president in 1998, and after that encouraged the growth of genuine though not-very-strong trade unions and dispensed popular social reforms from Venezuela's then-buoyant oil revenues. But what about the 11 years of Maduro's rule, during which economic life has imploded, millions have fled the country, and repression has increased? □

# Trump: speak out about what is



## Debate

By Martin Thomas

“Let’s be clear”, write Katy Dollar and Will Roberts (*Solidarity* 717), “a Trump presidency would be a threat to the tenets of democracy, to minorities of all stripes, and to class organisation”.

But they are not clear. A Sunak victory in the 2024 UK general election, or a Merz victory in the 2025 German federal election, could also be so described.

Katy and Will continue: Trump is “not a greater threat than Hitler”. More like Sunak and Merz? Or what?

Simon Nelson, a co-thinker of Katy and Will, *scorns* Ollie Moore for thinking Trump bad enough that a Harris victory is “desirable” on 5 November. [1]

In discussion leading up to our Workers’ Liberty conference in April, other co-thinkers said different – “I’m not proposing socialists stay at home on polling day”; “I would prefer Biden to win”; “I’m not against socialists voting for Biden” – only, those things should be not be said out loud, for fear of swamping other messages.

Why vote Harris? We can say everything critical of her and the Democrats, and yet her victory is a clear lesser evil than Trump’s. There is no way on 5 November to register a real positive third choice. If we tell the truth, then any straightforward listener will use their vote against Trump.

As Ferdinand Lassalle, famously cited by Rosa Luxemburg, said: “All great political action... begins with speaking out about what is. All political petty-mindedness consists of being silent... about what is”.

Trotsky *put it* as the imperative for “courage and a sense of responsibility” as against “indifference and weakness”.

The Katy-Will-Simon line is poor because it obscures “what is”. Instead, they say that a ban on voting for Democrats gives us an answer irrespective of “what is”.

They can find no direct ban in “the classics”. [3] Lassalle’s and Trotsky’s maxims are the relevant “classics”. They tell us that we, the working-class socialists, run our own candidates – we use elections to speak directly in our own voice – if we can assemble a party to make candidates more than a marginal stunt which builds little. When we haven’t yet built such a party, we have to improvise. Katy and Will use “magical thinking” to evade the issue. Their answer for 5 November is to “call for” a workers’ party in the USA. [4]

Building a workers’ party is the central task for Marxists in the USA. A “call for” someone (else) to build it is no sub-

stitute. If we mean a full workers’ party (with Marxist politics), then Marxists have to do it. If the idea is that a call for “labour party” based on the unions can produce enough to change choices on 5 November, that is equally “magical thinking”. A “call” for someone (who?) to shift the unions quickly is an empty wish for a working-class socialist candidate on 5 Nov, not a good-enough substitute for the fact of one. [5]

Among those who do not let magical thinking obscure Trumpism, there is much debate. Cathy Nugent (*Solidarity* 715) classifies Trumpism within a “Far Right” which is specifically “Non-Fascist”. In substance, however, I see no big difference with those of us who see the Trump movement as incipiently fascist, and Trump himself as a fascist.

For a while in the 1930s and 40s, “fascism” copying either Mussolini or Hitler was widespread. Nostalgia-fascism groups of that sort have continued to this day, but only as sporadic dangers on the streets. Larger-scale fascist movements today will not be copy-fascism.

Before World War One, our comrades generally saw bourgeois political competition as species of democracy versus conservative old monarchies and aristocracies. After World War One new movements mobilised plebeian masses and used social demagoguery against the old elites. It took a while for our comrades to assess this – witness the poor discussion on Italy at the Communist International’s *Fourth Congress* – but eventually we stabilised “fascism” as the word for revolutionary-looking movements using selections from nationalism, racism, sexism, religion, and social demagoguery to rally a plebeian base and to put new autocrats in power, pushing old aristocracies somewhat backstage while also squashing the workers’ movement and democratic rights.

Cathy notes that Trump – like say the AfD in Germany, or Modi in India – has a “strategic embedding... within constitutional government”. In France Jean-Marie Le Pen decided in 1972 to turn from his street-fighting past to long-haul electoral tactics. The turn paid off. [6]

The electoralist turn can tame a fascist movement over time into a routine careerist hard-right party. That seems to have happened with the MSI in Italy and its successors National Alliance and Brothers of Italy. But it is not an iron law.

As Cathy adds, “we should operate on the basis that in certain circumstances there will be... a shift” to more drastic action. And Trump already says that he is “electoral” only as long as he wins the elections, or can’t muster enough street-force to de-recognise them.



Cathy cites Dollfuss in Austria as an example of “non-fascist”. Dollfuss was the leader of the long-standing electoral-far-right Christian Social Party. In 1933-4 he merged the CSP with other far-right groups and the paramilitary Heimwehr, banned other political parties, suppressed parliament, and set up a new regime explicitly modelled on Mussolini’s Italy. Dollfuss was killed by Austrian Nazis in 1934. Until Hitler annexed Austria in 1938, his colleague Schuschnigg continued “Austro-fascism”. The Austrian workers, even under weak Social Democratic leadership, responded to Dollfuss as to fascism, with civil war in February 1934.

Maybe by calling Trump “non-fascist”, Cathy means “more like Dollfuss than Hitler”. I’d add that Trump won’t move as fast and drastically as Dollfuss.

But our comrades back then called “Austro-fascism”... *fascism*.

Many academics argue that none of the “fascist” groups in France in the 1930s were fascist, and nor were the Blueshirts in Ireland. Roger Griffin, in *The Nature of Fascism*, sees “real” fascism only in Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany.

Trotsky used the term more widely, for example seeing Pilsudski in Poland as fascist. His over-tight prediction that fascism and New-Deal reforms were the only options in 1930s capitalism, and that the differences between fascism and bourgeois democracy would disappear in World War Two, was wrong, but that does not prove the academics right.

Some of the academics on whose work Cathy draws have shifted.

Enzo Traverso *said* in 2023: “In 2016, [Trump] was a worrying and enigmatic political innovation. During his presidency, and particularly on January 6, 2021, we experienced a significant political turn that revealed a clear fascist dynamic. Today... the Republi-

can Party... is a political party in which very strong post-fascist or even neofascist tendencies have become hegemonic...” Robert O Paxton *wrote*: “Trump’s incitement of the invasion of the Capitol on January 6, 2021 removes my objection to the fascist label. His open encouragement of civic violence to overturn an election crosses a red line. The label now seems not just acceptable but necessary. It is made even more plausible by comparison with a milestone on Europe’s road to fascism – an openly fascist demonstration in Paris during the night of February 6, 1934”. [7]

The Trump movement is still disparate, possibly fragile? Not the same as the fascism of 90 or 100 years ago? Yes. Operating when the hedges and ditches of “civil society” are higher and deeper than then; when the bourgeoisie feel more leeway, and fewer of them think society ungovernable by ordinary means. But it is a pseudo-revolutionary movement of the far right.

Hardcore “MAGA Republicans” number maybe *40 million*. About 12 million say having a “strong leader” is more important than democracy. A similar number of them expect civil war in the coming years. Eight million expect to take part armed with a gun (and we can be sure almost all have guns). They have many supporters in the regular US state forces, as witness Trump’s use of the Border Police in Portland and DeSantis’s creation of the “Florida State Guard”. □

• For footnotes 1-7: [bit.ly/trump-so](https://bit.ly/trump-so)

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- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine
- The Occupation of the Cammell Laird Shipyard, Birkenhead 1984
- When workers beat the fascists
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# A political portrait of Trumpism

Rep Marjorie Taylor Greene was the third opening speaker at the Republican National Convention in July, and has been the most strident speaker for Trumpism even when Trump himself finesses, as in [claiming](#) to “know nothing” about “[Project 2025](#)” (heavily staffed by close associates). The motion of censure against Greene in Congress by Vermont Democrat Rep [Becca Ballint](#), extracted and abridged below, summarises Greene’s stances. Add in the support by Vice-Presidential candidate J D Vance and by Project 2025 for replacing unions by joint [worker-boss forums](#) and declaring unions in the public services unconstitutional, Greene’s recent [claim](#) that the FBI and Department of Justice have plotted to assassinate Trump, Project 2025’s plans to hugely increase the executive powers of the presidency, and the already-done Trumpist takeover of the [Supreme Court](#).

Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene has repeatedly fanned the flames of racism, antisemitism, LGBTQ hate speech, Islamophobia, anti-Asian hate, xenophobia, and other forms of hatred.

She has repeatedly debased the memories of thousands of victims of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, by perpetuating conspiracy theories to shift blame and responsibility for the mass murder.

She has repeatedly assaulted the foundation of our democracy by perpetuating conspiracy theories related to the January 6 attack on the Capitol which sought to halt the peaceful transfer of power.

She has repeatedly called for violence against elected representatives and their families.

She has repeatedly espoused antisemitic rhetoric and conspiracy theories, including through inflammatory evocations of the Holocaust.

On May 20, 2021, she said that the mask mandate in the House of Representatives was akin to Jews being “put in trains and taken to gas chambers in Nazi Germany”.

On May 25, 2021, she tweeted that, “Vaccinated employees get a vaccination logo just like the Nazis forced Jewish people to wear a gold star”.

On February 26, 2022, she appeared at a white nationalist event that was condemned by the Republican Jewish Coalition as “appalling and outrageous that a Member of Congress would share a platform with an individual who has actively spread antisemitic bile, mocked the Holocaust and promoted dangerous anti-Israel conspiracy theories”.

On September 1, 2022, she posted a tweet comparing President Joe Biden to Adolf Hitler that said “Joe Biden is Hitler. #NaziJoe has to go”.



On September 1, 2022, she posted another tweet of a doctored video showing President Biden speaking with audio of Hitler, swastikas in the background and a mustache akin to that of Hitler.

On July 21, 2021, she said that if she was “in charge” she would “kick out every single Chinese in this country that is loyal to the CCP. They would be gone”.

On December 19, 2021, while at a Turning Point USA conference, she referred to Asian Americans as “yellow people”, a slur that has been historically used to malign the Asian American community in the United States.

She has a history of perpetuating LGBTQ hate speech, including through her use of offensive posters in the halls of congressional office buildings beginning on February 24, 2021.

On November 22, 2022, she tweeted that an LGBTQ California State Senator was a “communist groomer”, an offensive slur that has been used to stoke fear and incite hatred of LGBTQ Americans.

On March 7, 2023, she again referred to members of the LGBTQ community as “groomers” and spouted anti-trans rhetoric on the Floor of the House of Representatives.

On June 1, 2023, the first day of Pride Month, she tweeted a photo showing an anti-trans poster that she had displayed in the hall outside of her congressional office.

## Anti-Muslim hate

On February 22, 2019, she posted a video on Facebook claiming that Muslim American Members of Congress were not “really official” because they didn’t take the oath of office on the Bible.

On June 17, 2020, Politico reported that she repeatedly engaged in Islamophobic rhetoric and suggested that Muslim Americans do not belong in the United States Government.

On May 10, 2021, she referred to fellow Muslim American Members of Congress as the “Jihad Squad”.

On November 30, 2021, she yet

again referred to fellow Muslim American Members of Congress as the “Jihad Squad”.

On June 17, 2020, Politico reported that she referred to Black Americans as “slaves to the Democratic Party” and said that they should be proud to see Confederate monuments.

On June 17, 2020, Politico further reported that she stated in a video, “I know a ton of white people that are as lazy and sorry and probably worse than Black people”.

On May 18, 2023, she compared being called a white supremacist to a person of colour being called the “N-word,” a vile racial slur.

On January 28, 2021, a video of she resurfaced in which she used a harmful and offensive slur targeting Americans with disabilities which the National Down Syndrome Society called “heart-breaking and unacceptable”.

## Conspiracy theories

On November 1, 2018, she denied the attacks on September 11 saying there was a “so-called plane that crashed into the Pentagon” and that “It’s odd there’s never any evidence shown for a plane in the Pentagon”.

On November 17, 2018, she peddled a vile antisemitic trope when she claimed that wildfires in California were caused by space lasers operated by members of the Jewish community.

On August 17, 2020, a video of her resurfaced in which she stated that the mass shooting at a country music festival in Las Vegas, Nevada, where 60 people were murdered, was perpetuated in order to pass anti-gun legislation.

On January 19, 2021, Media Matters published a screenshot of a Facebook comment from her where she emphatically agreed that the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, where 17 students and teachers were murdered, was a false flag event.

On January 21, 2021, Media Matters published a screenshot of a Facebook comment liked by her that claimed 9/11 was “done by our own Gov,” to

which she responded “That is all true”.

That same comment liked and agreed to by her further claimed that the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary where 26 people, including 20 precious children, were murdered, was staged.

On September 3, 2020, she posted an image of herself holding a gun next to images of three Members of Congress with a caption encouraging “going on offence” against them.

On January 26, 2021, CNN reported on posts, comments and likes made by her from 2018 and 2019 in which she liked several posts and comments on Facebook demonstrating her support for the execution of several Members of the Democratic Party including Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and President Barack Obama.

On January 26, 2021, CNN further reported that she liked a Facebook comment in January 2019 that stated, “a bullet to the head would be quicker” in reference to the removal of Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

On January 26, 2021, CNN also reported that deleted videos showed her calling for the execution of Speaker Nancy Pelosi and stating that she was “a traitor to our country, she’s guilty of treason” and should “suffer death or she’ll be in prison”.

She has perpetuated the “big lie” related to the 2020 Presidential election by espousing conspiracy theories and by threatening and inciting violence.

On October 26, 2021, she downplayed the actions of those who participated in the January 6 attack on the Capitol and said “if you think about what our Declaration of Independence says, it says to overthrow tyrants”.

On November 4, 2021, she went to visit those incarcerated related to the January 6 attack on the Capitol in what she referred to as “the patriot wing” of the D.C. Jail.

On November 10, 2021, she referred to those who participated in the January 6 attack on the Capitol as “political prisoners of war”.

On December 10, 2022, she said that if she had organised the January 6 attack on the Capitol, “we would have won. Not to mention, it would’ve been armed”.

On July 19, 2023, she displayed graphic pornographic images during an official committee hearing that she claimed depicted a member of President Biden’s family.

On July 19, 2023, she sent an official press release and posted to her official congressional website public hearing commentary featuring graphic pornographic images she claimed depicted a member of President Biden’s family. □

# Trump in the Bunker

By Tom Harrison

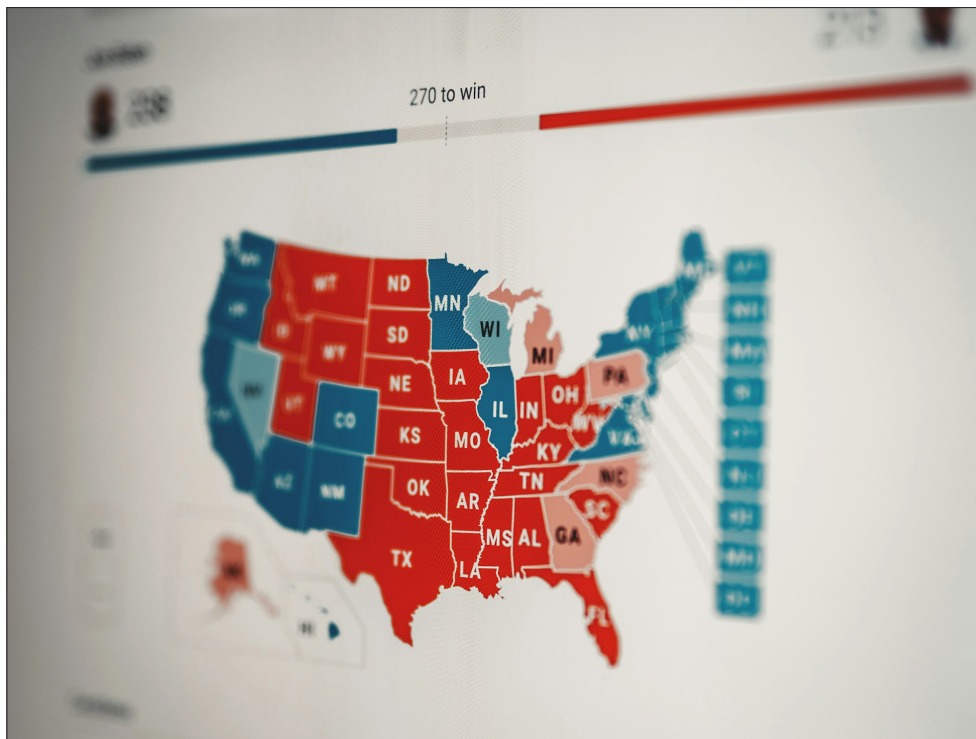
“He has a gruff, overbearing demeanour, largely defined by his bigotry towards a diverse group of individuals. Blacks, ‘Comms’, women, and Asians are frequent targets of his barbs”.

Sounds familiar? This could well be a description of the current Republican candidate for the US presidency. It could also apply to several million white American males, mostly of the older generation, who will doubtless vote for him on 5 November. It is, however, a description of Archie Bunker, popular lead character from 1970s US sitcom *All in the Family*.

To a large extent that show was a remake of the BBC sitcom *Till Death Us Do Part*, created by leftist scriptwriter Johnny Speight. Bunker’s bigoted English counterpart was a character called Alf Garnett, a “working-class Tory” portrayed as a figure of fun. In both the Bunker and Garnett cases, the satire was lost on some viewers who actually identified with them! The intention of both series was anti racist, but the blatant racist language used then precludes their re-showing on conventional TV today.

Trump is pretty much in the bunker these days too, being wrong footed by the Democrats’ decision to replace Biden with Harris as his election opponent. If the election were held at one of his golf courses he could always get out of the bunker and win as he always does when he plays top professional golfers there! But at Bedminster and Mar-a-Lago the game is fixed. Shame it can’t be done for Presidential elections, or maybe it can?

Trump didn’t like the bunker at the



White House either, when he had to cower during the protests over the murder of George Floyd. Oh, how he wishes those “losers” and “suckers” who joined the military would come and take out the protestors.

The Archie Bunker character was supposedly born in the New York borough of Queens, which just happens to be the real birthplace of one Donald J Trump, also idolised by “angry white males” although a much much less endearing character. Yet Bunker was a blue-collar worker. Trump’s racism is that of a rich man and to a large extent he knows how to use it to appeal to the real life Archie Bunkers who are still out there.

Race has always been an obvious factor in US presidential elections and now that the Democrat candidate is a woman of black and Asian heritage makes it even more so. Trump has a considerable track record as regards racism. The family business was notorious for refusing to rent to black people. Woody Guthrie wrote a song about it! Then we have the notorious case of the Central Park Five, black teenagers wrongly accused of rape. Trump called for their execution and continues to maintain they are guilty even though their innocence was proved beyond a doubt.

Propagation of the birther conspiracy – the claim Barack Obama was not really born in the US – was another piece of racist bile. That sort of thing is now being levelled at Harris with Trump’s talk of her “turning black”. Additionally, there have been insults about her intelligence and her only being in her post thanks to diversity programmes rather than ability. The racist dog whistling will certainly increase in the coming weeks

with a large dose of misogyny thrown.

Trump is ahead of Harris by nine points among male voters, but she beats him by twelve points among females. Abortion is a major factor in this, added to his adjudication as a rapist following the E Jean Carroll case, the sleazy Access Hollywood episode and countless other examples of his contempt for women.

That millions of American voters are prepared to overlook all this – including the ever so righteous evangelicals – boggles the mind in most of the rest of the world. Apart from the racial aspect, Trump’s considerable support is also down to his years as a “reality TV star” presiding over the *Apprentice* with his frequent use of his catchphrase “you’re fired”. The power of celebrity status to launch a political career has not been lost on other far right figures in Argentina, France and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, it now seems the majority of those likely to go out and vote this time round are becoming bored with the same old schtick Trump is coming out with. The age issue has now been turned against him and his speeches have become increasingly bizarre and rambling. He never has won the presidency on the popular vote. His path to victory now is to do what he has always (without evidence) accused his opponents of doing and cheat.

Election Denial has always been part of the Trump canon, ever more so since his loss in 2020. Never held to account for his attempt to overthrow that result with the attempted 6 January coup, he’s encouraged his minions to become election officials in the swing states that will determine the outcome of the Electoral College. Their presence has been particularly prominent

in Georgia, where he actually praised three of them at his most recent rally there. On election night they won’t be impartial adjudicators. They will instead try to delay the counting and challenge or throw out votes they deem aren’t going his way.

The days and weeks after the election will see turmoil. A convincing Harris win could mitigate that, but a closer result won’t. Trump has predicted (promised?) a bloodbath if he loses and he actually hopes that will be the case. It’s a rare occasion where we can actually take his word for it!

The prospect of a Trump victory is another matter. Were that to happen, the forces of coercion would be employed to a much greater degree against civil society. Project 2025 is already out there with its plans to turn the presidency into something closely resembling a dictatorship. Trump claims he doesn’t know anything about it or anyone involved with it, but Project 2025 is full of his close associates.

His fondness for invoking the Insurrection Act should there be protests against his assuming office again would mean large scale military intervention against urban centres of protest. Sending the army into cities like Chicago and Detroit is at the top of the Trumpian wish list.

Should the Democrats prevail on 5 November, the problem of Trumpism and its causes is not going to go away. A Harris presidency will not resolve the fundamental problems of massive inequality in American society. To do that, a socialist movement needs to be built. The best chance to do that is under conditions where democratic norms, however limited, prevail, rather than any kind of dystopian dictatorship. □

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# How the left looked to me

The author, "Veiled Rose", is an activist of Bangladeshi origin living in Britain

**Navigating Left-Wing Activism as an Ex-Muslim and LGBTQ Advocate:** Someone recently asked me if my activism was solely focused on ex-Muslim and LGBTQ issues or if I was involved in broader leftist causes. This question struck a chord, as it made me reflect on my extensive history in left-wing activism and the complex dynamics that have shaped my journey.

**My Left-Wing Roots:** From the age of 17 until my late 30s, I was deeply entrenched in left-wing politics. My days were filled with behind-the-scenes campaigning, attending protests, rallies, and picket lines, participating in meetings, leafleting, and raising funds. I was so committed that I even spent my first Valentine's Day with my girlfriend at a socialist conference. Thankfully, she loves me enough to have stuck around despite my intense dedication to the cause.

Rain or shine, snow, or sleet, I was

out there rallying support. My intellectual journey included devouring the works of Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky, Friedrich Engels, and Alexandra Kollontai. I was inspired by the gains of the Russian Revolution, particularly in workers' rights, secular rights, the establishment of the welfare state, and comprehensive education. While I now hold some criticisms of these ideologies, I still appreciate their contributions to social progress.

**The Shift in My Activism:** Despite my longstanding commitment, when asked if I still engage in leftist activism, my answer was no. The reason is that I no longer feel safe in these circles. My time in socialist organisations and the broader leftist movement often felt cult-like – a topic I'll delve into another time.

As an ex-Muslim, my experience within left-wing organisations has been fraught with challenges. A poignant example occurred in a left-wing Facebook group where a Muslim member expressed feelings of vulnerability and

victimhood following the Samuel Paty attack. While I acknowledged that Muslims do face unacceptable hate, I also pointed out the brutality faced by many due to apostasy and blasphemy rules. Rather than condemning the heinous murder of Paty, the focus remained on self-victimisation.

This culminated in a disturbing message from an admin suggesting that apostates like me should have their tongues ripped out. Such sentiments are not uncommon among Muslim apologists in left-wing groups in the UK. In another instance, I was openly threatened in a public forum and warned not to show my face at local rallies and protests. The silence from other socialists in response to these threats was deafening.

**The Incompatibility of Left-Wing Spaces and Ex-Muslim Advocacy:** These experiences are far from isolated. They underscore a significant issue: as an ex-Muslim, I do not feel safe in left-wing circles. Despite holding many left-wing values and passion-

ately advocating for them, the cult-like attitudes and reluctance to confront religious fundamentalism have hindered progress.

The left has historically been slow to embrace movements for women's rights and LGBTQ rights, often requiring a push to advance. This resistance to change continues to present obstacles, particularly for those of us who challenge religious dogmas from within.

**Looking Ahead:** Moving forward, I hope to share more of my experiences and insights. My journey matters, and there are valuable lessons to be learned from it. By shedding light on these issues, I aim to foster a more inclusive and understanding environment within left-wing activism.

In conclusion, while my activism now focuses on ex-Muslim and LGBTQ issues, it is rooted in a broader leftist tradition. However, the safety and acceptance I once found in these circles have diminished, compelling me to navigate new paths in my advocacy. □



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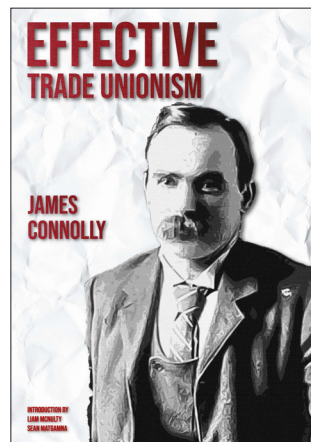
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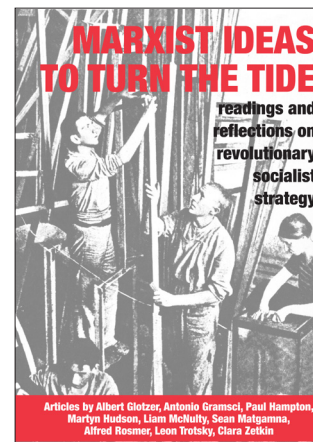
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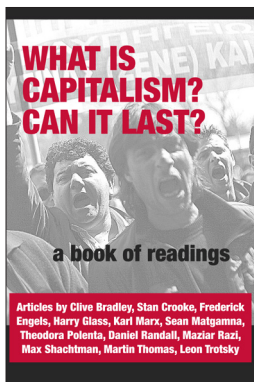
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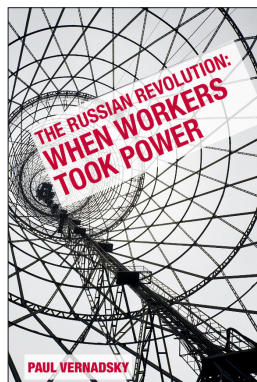
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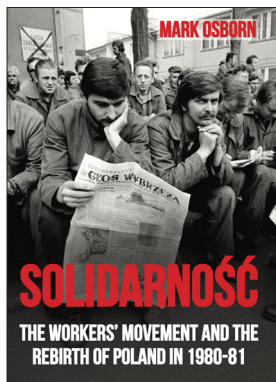
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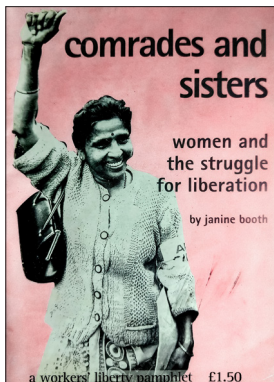
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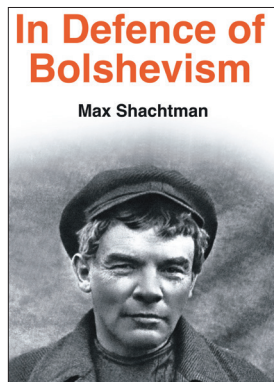
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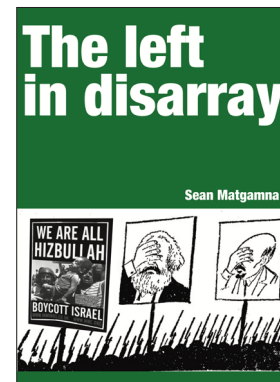
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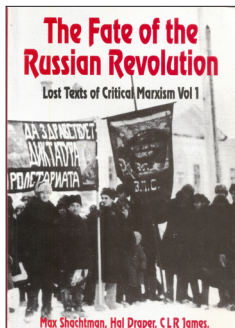
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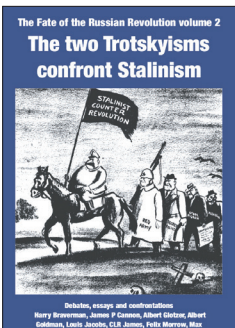
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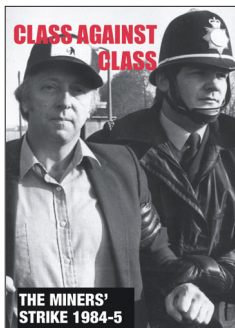
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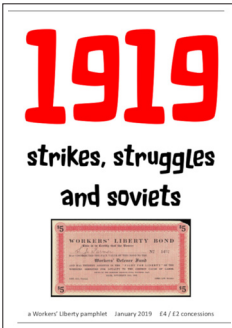
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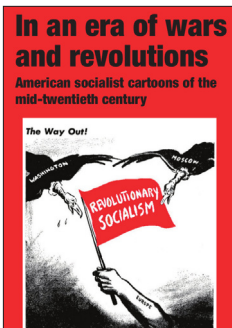
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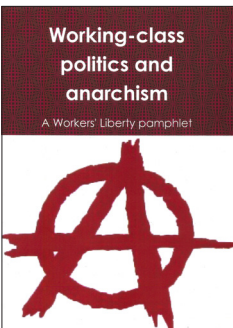
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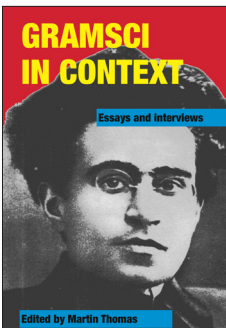
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# Disconnected criticisms and Connolly



By Micheál MacEoin

In his review (*Solidarity* 717) of Sean Matgamna's *The Easter Rising in History: an attempt at a Marxist account*, John McNulty faults Sean three times for providing insufficient "context" but then provides little or none himself. Indeed, from the rather disconnected series of criticisms, it is very difficult to draw out the underlying political differences, which in most cases are only implied.

Some of the criticisms seem plain wrong, on a point of fact. John charges that there is "no reference to the Irish Famine," whereas a quick search reveals six mentions of the Famine of 1845-49, with another reference to the semi-famine in Mayo in 1879.

Other criticism appear, to me, to be similarly off-beam. John writes, first off, that "there is no attempt to present alternative accounts, no real context for the behaviour of the actors and, surprisingly, the outline of the class forces at play or the economic substructure underlining them are weakly presented."

On one level, this seems odd. Sean's pamphlet begins, in the present tense, in the thick of the action of Easter Monday 1916. It then, in its second section, explains that the Rising "was a product of hundreds of years of English oppression of Ireland and of Catholics", before laying out a background account in its subsequent five sections. This includes, inter alia, the ancient Greeks and Romans, the 9th century invasion of the Danes, the 1014 Battle of Clontarf, the 12th century Norman invasion, the English bourgeois revolution of the 1640s, Cromwell, the penal laws, the United Irishmen, the Fenians and the growth of the constitutional nationalist tradi-

tion and the various attempts to win Home Rule. If anything, perhaps too much context!

If John means more proximate context, the concluding paragraphs of section six, to my mind, locate Connolly and the IRB accurately within the heightened passions of late 1914. Sean writes: "By 1914, then, Ireland faced high communal mobilisation. The Protestants in the north-east had armed against Home Rule. Catholics in the south had taken up arms to defend Home Rule. The legal, evolutionary path to Home Rule seemed, not definitively blocked, but doubtful."

John specifically complains, again, that "there is much criticism of Connolly, but there is a lack of context. The international workers' movement had moved from a determination to prevent war to voting war credits... In Dublin the workers had suffered a major defeat in the 1913 lockout."

Sean relates, however, that the "labour movement was depleted after the great Dublin Labour War of 1913-14; and it lacked a working-class or democratic policy to address the impasses



of the competing communal mobilisations." The subsequent section then lays out the argument that Connolly saw action by an armed minority as a potential "detonator" of nationalist Ireland, relating this to the contemporary calculations of the IRB.

Another, rather terse, criticism is raised regarding Kautsky and the theory of ultra-imperialism. John writes that, in response to Sean's argument that the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland was both the actions of a "genocidal butcher" and part of the English bourgeois revolution which paved the way for modern bourgeois and capitalist society, on whose achievements socialism is made possible.

John writes that "Sean Matgamna has said too little. His argument seems close to the ultra-imperialism theory of Karl Kautsky and would need massive explanation in its suggestion that Marxists would not always oppose imperialism."

Without speaking for Sean, I am not sure that this is the point that was being made, which seemed more about the two-sided and contradictory nature of historical "progress", as famously outlined by Marx in the Communist Manifesto.

Nevertheless, Kautsky, who is not mentioned at all in Sean's pamphlet, it seems, is being cited as a bit of a bogeyman. The point about Kautsky and his theory during World War One of a peaceful "ultra-imperialism" wasn't that Kautsky speculated about the future, in some ways accurately as it turned out. It was that this speculation was substituted for the main task at the time, which was, of course, to oppose the imperialist war.

John detects in Sean, however, "a suggestion that Marxists would not always oppose imperialism." Again, "context" is everything. Was it not Lenin who wrote, in *A Caricature of Marxism*

and Imperialist Economism, that: "No Marxist will forget, however, that capitalism is progressive compared with feudalism, and that imperialism is progressive compared with pre-monopoly capitalism. Hence, it is not every struggle against imperialism that we should support. We will not support a struggle of the reactionary classes against imperialism; we will not support an uprising of the reactionary classes against imperialism and capitalism".

Finally, the main political differences, it seems to me, relate to Connolly and this is where John directs most of his ire. Again, "context" is said to be missing. Sean's pamphlet should, of course, be read in the "context" of Workers' Liberty's wider output on Connolly.

John's comments on this matter would more productively be addressed to [our pull-outs on Connolly](#) and in a more systematic manner than is allowed for in a short review. □

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# The bourgeois economists learn. And us?



By Martin Thomas

In *Solidarity* 717 we cited Trotsky's [articles](#) of 1929-30 on *The Third Period of the Comintern's Errors*, where he called on revolutionaries not to "close one's eyes to the actual development and to repeat... incantations: 'contradictions sharpen', 'the working masses are turning to the

Left'... Our tactics, which serve this strategy, proceed from the realistic evaluation of each period, each stage, each moment, which may be characterised by a temporary softening of contradictions, a rightward turn of the masses, a change in the correlation of forces in favor of the bourgeoisie, etc....

"Only a hopeless ignoramus can imagine that due to the miraculous power of the 'Third Period', the working class as a whole will turn away from the social democracy, driving the whole reformist bureaucracy into the camp of Fascism. No,

the process will develop by more complicated and contradictory roads".

In *The Communist* #12, Adam Booth tries to justify a caricature version of the Stalinist Communist Parties' tactics of 1929-30 by an insistence that the capitalist class is in an absolute impasse.

Since 1975, he writes, "The ideas of Keynesianism have been completely discredited. At the same time, the monetarist wing of the bourgeoisie has no solutions... The system is at an impasse".

In fact, "monetarism" was

abandoned by the Tories over 40 years ago, only two years into the Thatcher government. Bourgeois economists never discarded Keynes's theories (as distinct from some adaptations briefly popular in the 1960s), though "new Keynesians" and "post-Keynesians" are now numerous. The turn by governments to "industrial policy" (long said to be a futile attempt to second-guess the markets) will probably not work well. It shows, however, that, as Trotsky [put it](#), "the bourgeoisie is not a stone dropping into an abyss but a

living historical force which struggles, manoeuvres, advances now on its right flank, now on its left".

The bourgeois economists have the good sense not to discard what they learned from Keynes. We should learn from Marx, Trotsky, and other writers to shun called "revolutionary radicalism, which [ignores] the dialectic of living forces in economics and politics alike and by construct[s] its prognosis by means of a pencil and a ruler". □

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

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- 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! □

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# Is retiring a “bad idea”?



**Diary of a Tube driver**

By Jay Dawkey

“They [London Underground management] get you to list the pro and cons of retiring”. I ask N what the cons are meant to be. “Well, nothing really, but what they’ll ‘remind’ you of is the potential loss of structure to your day, seeing your colleagues, staying active. They treat it as if you live for the job, and if you retire you’d just sit at home doing nothing”.

“They want you to work as long as possible. If you do 30 years here and then live for 30 years on your pension, that isn’t good economics for them. Anyone who wants to be at their most active in retirement and could afford to do so would go in their 60s. Your health is best then, and you can travel more, help family, and undertake other unpaid or paid work more reliably the younger you are.

“I don’t know, though. This seminar felt like they wanted you to think retirement was a bad thing to do!”

“But the most significant advantage is not coming to work. Not working shifts, not going up and down a bloody tunnel all day”, N says.

You get to attend two of these pen-



sion seminars in your time at London Underground. They are strict that they can’t give you advice, but you are meant to be able to ask questions relevant to your pension and retirement. There are significant disparities between people when they plan to retire. Some have it pretty firm they want out before they are 60. Get 25 or 30 years in; if you have paid some additional contributions, have no mortgage, or have a minimal amount of costs, you will live pretty comfortably by the time you retire. But plenty of drivers are getting nearer 70 who just keep going, sometimes with no end in sight, sometimes with a particular figure they are looking to take before lifting the handle for the final time.

After a slightly faltering battle with TfL management, the Mayor, and the Department for Transport, we have pushed back any detrimental changes to our pension, and there is some hope the Labour government will just scrap plans for reform. But if they don’t, we

have kicked a big problem down the line to 2026 and allowed some momentum over the fight to fall away.

The pension is one of the benefits that keep people on the job, and the only place I have worked where people talk in quite some detail about their retirement plans – whether it is moving abroad, being on an almost permanent holiday, spending time with the grand kids, or doing some relatively niche (often train-related) hobby. Shift work has been found to take up to 15 years off your life, and everyone has stories of people who retired, particularly men, who died pretty soon afterwards.

For all their attempts to get you to stay, you are better off out of this kind of work earlier. □

## Do the Right Thing



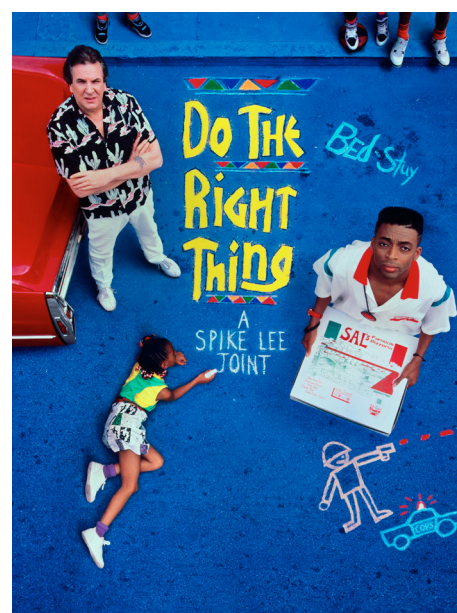
**Kino Eye**

By John Cunningham

Set in Brooklyn on a sweltering hot day, Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (1989) is a complex, multi-layered film which centres on the pizzeria run by Italian-American Sal (Danny Aiello) in a Black neighbourhood.

Mookie (Spike Lee) delivers pizzas for Sal. One wall of the pizzeria is decorated with pictures of famous Italian-Americans. This irks Raheem, a friend of Mookie’s, who tells Sal that, given the location of his premises, he should also include some Black Americans. Sal refuses. From this basic premise a set of escalating confrontations ensue, culminating in a major altercation and the death of Raheem at the hands of the police. Mookie throws a bin through the pizzeria window and Sal’s premises are destroyed.

The racial tensions underlying the film are set out in a collage of direct-to-camera addresses where a member of each ethnic minority slags off another using

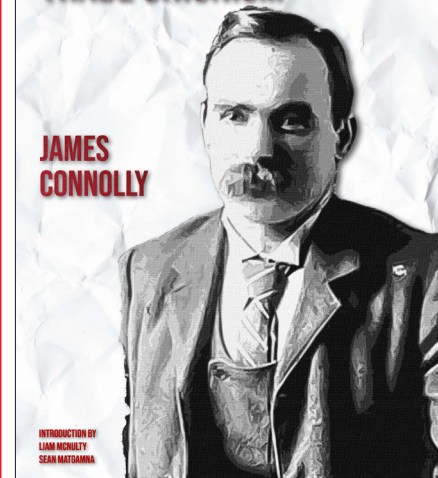


the worst possible racial stereotypes. Towards the end of the film Mookie and Sal achieve some kind of reconciliation. In conclusion, the film quotes Malcolm X (advocating self-defence) and Martin Luther King (advocating non-violence), then shows the two men shaking hands. A film which made a great impact on its release, it is one of Spike Lee’s best. □

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JAMES CONNOLLY



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# PCS democracy under attack

By a PCS member

The democracy of civil service union PCS is under sustained attack from a cabal of senior employed and senior lay representatives from the long-dominant Left Unity (LU) faction.

The attacks are a response to the Coalition for Change (CfC) winning a majority on the National Executive (NEC) on the back of membership dissatisfaction with collapsing real pay and endemic poverty pay.

The LU cabal has chosen, amongst other things, to:

- Wreck the ability of the NEC majority to make decisions
- Elevate the LU General Secretary into a monarchical position
- Build a top-heavy bureaucratic base within PCS HQ as a buffer against membership democracy

- Sideline the Assistant General Secretary (AGS), John Moloney.

The LU President of the NEC has repeatedly ruled out of order CfC motions. If challenged, he makes a ruling that requires two thirds of the NEC to overturn it. CfC does not have two thirds of the NEC and so loses each time. LU then blame CfC for the lack of national progress on the major issues facing PCS members, including pay.

At the same time, the LU General Secretary, Fran Heathcote, claims to have legal advice that she alone has the power to make decisions regarding the staffing structure of PCS, including the grading structure, hiring, promotion, and deployment of PCS staff. Fran Heathcote's position is that she alone will determine whether PCS staff are deployed to implement ADC and NEC decisions, effectively giving her veto power.

With the backing of the LU president, Fran Heathcote has refused to show the NEC her claimed legal advice, paid for by PCS. The rules of PCS clearly subject the GS to the authority of the NEC but the secret advice apparently says otherwise.

## Band 6A

Acting on this advice, Fran Heathcote has unilaterally created a new top level PCS grade, Band 6A, and new Band 6 senior posts, and committed PCS to at



least £170,000-200,000 per annum in additional staffing costs. She has blatantly breached the 2021 conference decision that staff costs should be restricted to 33% of subscription income. She has done all this without informing the NEC, let alone seeking its permission. Similarly, she has filled posts without any reference to the NEC via an apparent process that appears open to factional abuse.

The two new band 6A posts have been filled, without other applicants, by the senior official who lost the 2019 AGS election and the senior official who decisively lost the 2023 AGS election, both to John Moloney of the PCS Independent Left. Both those officials

now have greatly more powers and responsibility than the elected AGS.

Every serious, democratic, PCS activist must now alert members to these outrages and mobilise them to defeat LU, including placing the GS firmly under democratic control. □

## Lewisham Unison ballots over union-busting



By Katy Dollar

A strike ballot is underway at Lewisham Council over its "cynical and petty union-busting agenda".

The Labour-run council in south-East London has moved to sack several workers, including both of its Unison union branch secretaries, after announcing £25 million of cuts in June.

Joint branch secretary Jay Kidd-Morton is facing dismissal alongside the rest of her overwhelmingly black and Asian team in the legal services department, despite no allegation of wrongdoing.

The union has said that the council has also moved to delete the substantive post in recruitment for fostering of the other joint branch secretary, Justine Canady, while she is on full-time release for union activities, insisting that this must result in her being removed as branch secretary as well. The ballot runs from 27 August to 24 September. If the ballot is successful, strikes will begin from mid-October.

Unison Local Government Service Group Executive and National Executive Committee have both pledged the national union's full support. It is hard to believe that assertive action from the union's Labour Link couldn't push Lewisham back from dismissing both union branch secretaries. □

## Progress but still a pay cut



### Off The Rails

On 14 August the train drivers' union Aslef announced to its members the proposed settlement of its two-year-long dispute with Train Operating Companies (and with the Rail Delivery Group, and the Department for Transport, and the Tory government). The offer made spans three years – the two years that the dispute concerns (2022/3 and 2023/4) and the current pay year, 2024/5. The offer is 5% for year one, 4.75% for year two and 4.5% for year three.

There are no "strings" to this offer, that is to say that the union has not negotiated away any of its members' terms and conditions of employment in return for the pay settlement. If accepted, it will be fully back-paid, with the back-pay compounded, and pensionable, although pension contributions will not be deducted from the back pay.

There is no doubt that this offer is a real improvement on the last offer received from the Tory government, which was 4% for each of the two years

covered by the dispute, in return for a bonfire of key terms and conditions.

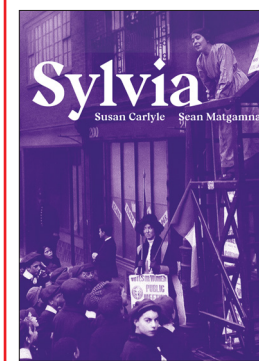
There is also no doubt about the fact that this settlement is substantially better than deals secured by a number of other unions in the post-pandemic strike wave.

Despite the improved percentage pay rises, this offer is still a pay cut when measured against the inflation figures for the period it covers.

This is why we're calling for a no vote in the referendum on the offer. We believe that turning down this pay cut and calling further action could win more.

We understand many drivers will vote to accept the offer, seeing it as an improvement (which we agree it is) and perhaps not wanting to "gamble" on pursuing further action. But even if the vote to reject turns out to be a small minority, that minority can organise itself to be a radicalising element in the 2025-6 pay campaign and beyond, to push for a more assertive strategy (i.e., more sustained strikes, rather than sporadic action), and a clear, concrete demand for a no-strings, above-inflation increase. □

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# Fight the far right with socialist policies

By Dan Katz

The far-right-led riots which spread across British towns following the awful murders of three young girls attending a dance class in Southport, on 29 July, are over.

However, unless the left shifts the labour movement, we will revisit the problem.

Almost certainly far-right actions will now continue in less high-profile ways, with an increase in street harassment of Muslim-Asian people, violent assaults and arson attacks. Far-right organisations will grow.

The BBC (23 August) surveyed 470 people charged with offences across 39 cities and towns in England and Wales following the riots of 29 July-early August. The most common charge is “violent disorder”. Of those charged 200 have already been sentenced, and 177 have gone to jail with an average term of two years. 92% are male, with an average age of 32. The youngest person charged is only 11, the oldest is 81.

At least 49 people under the age of 18 have been charged so far, some with riot.

Those responsible for the attacks against refugee hotels or the Southport Mosque, the men who surrounded and terrorised three Romanian men trapped in a car in Hull, and those responsible for smashing the front windows and destroying the cars in a street in Middlesbrough in which most of the residents are black and Asian families, will not get sympathy from us. The central people in these riots were thought-out racists.

The protesters also included people who are petty criminals, opportunistic looters, people who simply hate the police and were happy to throw rocks at them, marginalised and confused people who looked pitiful when confronted with their actions in court. Perhaps some of these people are a danger to others and should be locked up, but for most a jail sentence will solve nothing.

In particular, locking up teenage kids in young offenders’ institutions is wrong. No child should be jailed. Alternative ways are needed, based in the community and dealing with some underlying problems they may face, such as living in poverty and being excluded from education.

More than that, a small number of those jailed in these riots were jailed for their actions on anti-fascist counterprotests. There is no equivalence between such people and those taking part in racist riots, and all such people should be released.

Sameer Ali and Adnan Ghafoor were jailed after a scuffle with racists in Leeds. Amer Walid got 20 months for throwing cans at racists who

had thrown alcohol at him in Plymouth. These men should be freed.

The Muslim men who organised themselves to defend a street where they lived in Middlesbrough from a racist mob were right to do so. We are not pacifists, and violence for self-defence is not an offence. We defend such actions and oppose those who say: “wait for the police”. The police are not our anti-racist allies. They are part of the problem and, minimally, will let us down.

The precedent created by jailing large numbers of people, very quickly, detained following these racist protests, and some for comparatively minor offences (kicking a window, shouting at the police etc) is that such charges as violent disorder and riot will be used more against loud, radical and left-wing demonstrations.

## Two tier policing?

One common complaint of the Tommy Robinson-style street thug is that white communities are the victims of “two tier policing” and treated more harshly than Muslim and black people. That’s ridiculous: non-white youth are much more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than white youth; black and Asian people are heavily overrepresented in the prison populations.

However, there are some obvious examples of “two-tier justice”. For example: a man in the Southport riot got two years in prison for a deranged attack on a police van using a slab of concrete; another racist got a similar sentence for punching a cop in the face. Compare that to the climate change activists from Just Stop Oil who have been jailed for five years for participating in a Zoom call to discuss direct action. That really is “two-tier justice”, with the left treated much more harshly than the far right.

## Origins of the riots

Why did the riots start at the end of July? What must the left do?

The ground for these right-wing street actions has been set by years of viciously anti-migrant rhetoric and legislation from the Tory Party, the xenophobic idiocy of Brexit, Tory denunciations of “lefty” immigration lawyers and so on.

Austerity and cuts have run down the NHS and public services leaving many in poverty and marginalised and without hope.

Reform won 14% of the vote in the recent general election. There are a significant number of white working-class people in the UK who are open to racist ideas and who are willing to vote for a rich loudmouth like Nigel Farage.

It is no coincidence that the riots happened a few weeks into a new, Labour government and two days after a large and alarming far-right rally in London. On 27 July Tommy Robinson (former fascist BNP member and founder of the violent street movement, the English Defence League) filled Trafalgar Square with 25,000 people motivated by hostility to immigrants and Muslim people, anti-vax nonsense and other conspiracy theories.

Robinson had hundreds of thousands following his livestream of the event. Many of the rioters referenced Robinson, chanting his name during the riots. Robinson encouraged the riots by agitating his 700,000 followers on X (Twitter).

Scotland escaped these racist riots. While there’s no reason to suppose that people in Scotland are any less racist than people in England, Scottish people are hardly likely to be mobilised by one of the defining features of these riots: Robinson-style, English, flag-waving nationalism.

## Counter-protests

On the same day as the Robinson protest, the Stand Up To Racism (SUTR) counter-protest was tiny.

In fact the riots ended after tens of thousands of anti-fascist protesters took to the streets on the evening of Wednesday 7 August to oppose the threat of far-right attacks on immigration lawyers, mosques and black and Asian communities.

This was show of strength, an outpouring of hostility to the far-right, in solidarity with Muslim people and others under threat. But it was largely spontaneous in areas where there are large numbers of leftists. It was not the product of SUTR organisation.

In many areas the far-right had vastly outnumbered the left and been able to torch hotels housing refugees and attack anti-racists and Asian residents.

We need to build long-term grassroots anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigns in every town, and in each section of our larger cities. These campaigns must be open and democratic, drawing widely from local communities and be willing to confront the racists on the streets. The committees should elect spokespeople and organisers and hold meetings where policies and proposals are voted on by those present. They should not be dominated by one group, or individual.

The labour movement – centrally the trade unions – must step-up and lead the fightback. The trade union movement is millions strong and potentially very powerful. However, our unions

have effectively “contracted out” campaigning to Stand Up to Racism (SUTR), which was completely outpaced by the far-right upsurge.

One of the problems with the SUTR model of anti-fascism is its unwillingness to steward its own protests, leaving them vulnerable to attacks by the far-right. The implicit assumption is, normally, that the police will protect our protests.

We need to steward our own events and be willing to defend them if necessary. The unions should call members out onto the streets against the far right, and steward their own delegations. Groups of workers attending protests should nominate their own stewards with the aim of ensuring that our protests are protected.

Similarly calls from anti-fascists for bans on far-right groups and marches miss the point. It is our job to stop the racists. The police and courts are not reliable allies. Police powers to ban will be used against us.

## Socialist policies

If Labour in government fails to act for the working-class majority, improve workers’ living standards, attack the gross inequality in our society and rebuild public services, it will prepare a right-wing backlash. Labour has sought to triangulate with the right on issues such as immigration and trans rights. This will embolden, not dampen, a far-right upsurge. Labour must stand up unapologetically for migrant rights and trans equality.

We have had a glimpse of what a right-wing backlash might look like.

And what does Starmer promise? That things will get worse. Jail works. Cuts and more deportations. Draped in the Union Jack, he seems to have understood nothing.

Part of an anti-racist program is to build Black, Asian and white working-class unity by advocating socialist answers to the social crisis we all face:

- Cut the working week to 32 hours and provide useful jobs on union-negotiated rates of pay for all workers. Raise the minimum wage to £15 per hour
- Rebuild the NHS and welfare state
- Free secular state education from nursery to university
- Affordable, high-quality housing for all
- Nationalise rail, energy, water. Workers’ plans for green transition
- Pay for these reforms by taxing the rich and the capitalist corporations. Nationalise the banks and financial institutions. Cut arms spending. □



# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**

## General strike in Israel demands ceasefire deal

By Ira Berkovic

A renewed wave of protests demanding the government agrees a hostage-release agreement is spreading across Israel, after the bodies of six more hostages were found in Gaza.

Tens of thousands of people demonstrated across Israel on the evening of Sunday 1 September. The Histadrut union federation, roughly equivalent to Britain's TUC, called a general strike for Monday 2 September. Some employers also joined the strike, meaning businesses closed down for the day. Although the strike was only one day, and in some workplaces only for a few hours, it was big.

Such a strike, for a "political" demand, rather than an industrial dispute between a union and an employer, would be illegal under Britain's anti-strike laws.

Histadrut's demands, and the official demands of the protests, focus on the hostages. Histadrut's leaders, in the immediate aftermath of 7 October, supported Israel's war, and they have generally supported previous Israeli assaults on Gaza. Histadrut leader Arnon Bar-David said the strike aimed to stop "Jews dying in the tunnels of Gaza", without mentioning the tens of thousands of Palestinian dead.

But the renewed protests, and general strike, represent a significant increase in pressure on Netanyahu's government to conclude a deal. Such a deal would save Palestinian lives, even if many of those in Israel pushing for the deal are doing so for nationalist reasons.

That opposition to a war should be framed in nationalist terms is not a speciality of Israel. Much agitation in the USA against the Vietnam war focused on "bringing our boys home", rather than solidarity with the Vietnamese people.

The desire to see the hostages safely returned is a legitimate and just demand on its own terms;



Standing Together activists

it is not merely an expression of Israeli national particularism. Whilst the hostages' Hamas captors, and killers, bear direct responsibility for their deaths, the mass movement in Israel is insisting, rightly, that the Israeli government must also be held to account for its insistence on unrestrained revenge which razes Gaza and does not help the hostages.

The left-wing, anti-occupation [Standing Together](#) movement has intervened, combining the demand for the release of hostages with a broader perspective for peace and equality between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs.

There must be no going back to the pre-7 October status quo, of permanent subjugation for the Palestinians, punctuated by cyclical wars. That status quo oppressed the Palestinians, but also trapped Israeli Jews in a state of permanent insecurity. The movement now resurgent across Israel must become a movement for a transformed political reality.

The desperate need for such a transformation is highlighted by the recent intensification of Is-

*continued on page 3 →*

